

The Black Chamber

surveillance, paranoia,
invisibility & the internet

Conference

March 9 - 10, 2016

Kino Šiška

▪ Trg prekomorskih brigad 3, Ljubljana

With the participation of Marko Peljhan, Simona Levi, Evan Roth, Émilie Brout & Maxime Marion, and Zach Blas.

Kustosi: Eva & Franco Mattes (IT/USA) ter Bani Brusadin (IT/ES)

Registration:

Please send your full name and e-mail address by March 8th to: sonjagrdina@gmail.com

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About*

How did the internet go from the utopian free-for-all, open source heaven, libertarian last frontier to the current state of permanent surveillance, exhibitionism and paranoia? This duplicity is the underlying thread that links the artists, activists, and researchers who will participate in The Black Chamber, an exhibition, a symposium, and an urban intervention curated by The Influencers (Spain), produced by Aksioma in partnership with Drugo More (Croatia) and hosted, respectively, by Galerija Škuc and Kino Šiška in Ljubljana.

Developed through ongoing research on these subjects by internationally renown artist duo Eva & Franco Mattes and researcher and curator Bani Brusadin, The Black Chamber aims at discussing the delicate and often awkward role of art and imagination in the age of mass surveillance, stressing the multiple connections between post-studio art and independent research, grassroots reverse engineering, and new forms of political activism in the age of networks.

* For centuries, nations around the world have operated Black Chambers, secret rooms where they tried to decode the messages being sent by their rivals: these were the precursors of the modern Intelligence Agencies. This project is an attempt to peek into the Black Chamber...

aksioma.org/black.chamber

Biographies of the curators:

aksioma.org/black.chamber/pdf/black-chamber_curators_eng.pdf

Biographies of the artists:

aksioma.org/black.chamber/pdf/black-chamber_artists_eng.pdf

~~Wednesday~~, March 9 2016

18:00 - 21:00

▪ Kino Šiška, Trg prekomorskih brigad 3, Ljubljana

Session 1:

Independent militias in and out of surveilled networks

With lectures by Marko Peljhan, Simona Levi, and Evan Roth

What WikiLeaks, Edward Snowden and several other initiatives around the world brought about was essentially twofold: on the one hand, the awareness of governments' secret management of massive loads of public or classified information; on the other hand, the existence of effective counter-power methods, together with huge personal threats to anyone trying to expose the opaque practice of intercepting data from the public sphere. Among other things, a clandestine surveillance program called PRISM was revealed, under which the United States National Security Agency (NSA) collects internet communications from the major US internet companies. The awareness of the range, depth, and pervasiveness of information control over private citizens and companies, besides foreign governments, was appalling, questioning the very nature of the modern state.

But the ideas of society and the public sphere are at stake too. The practice of whistleblowing came into the spotlight, as well as other forms of people's agency on the whole spectrum of networked infrastructure, including the use of cryptography, the exploration of the darknet, and new and more sophisticated forms of reverse engineering and tactical media. Non-standard communications protocols and unconventional use of existing channels became a viable, though sometimes dystopian, alternative to the open (and surveilled) internet. Peljhan, Levi, and Roth will approach this field from different vantage points.

Awarded artist and professor at University of California, **Marko Peljhan's** trajectory as a pioneer artist and technologist puts him in a unique field at the crossroads of grassroots experimentation and strategic research. **Simona Levi** has been involved for a long time in both the underground theater scene and political activism, developing unusual collective performances, successfully lobbying for digital rights and promoting new network-savvy forms of political organization. Finally, post-studio artist **Evan Roth's** work explores the intersection of free culture and popular culture, making work simultaneously for the contemporary art world and the "bored-at-work," click-happy masses. During *The Black Chamber*, Roth will introduce his latest web-based project "Digital Landscapes: Sweden," commissioned by Masters & Servers in 2015, and devoted to the exploration of the internet's physical, digital, and cultural landscapes.

Wednesday, March 9 2016

21:30

▪ Aksioma Project Space, Komenskega 18, Ljubljana

Guided tour of the exhibition

!Mediengruppe Bitnik: Random Darknet Shopper (Live Version)

aksioma.org/random.darknet.shopper/index_slo.html



The Random Darknet Shopper is an automated online shopping bot provided with a budget of \$100 in Bitcoins per week. Once a week the bot goes shopping in the deep web where it randomly chooses and purchases one item and has it mailed directly to the exhibition space. Once the items arrive they are unpacked and displayed, each new object adding to a landscape of traded goods from the Darknet. The work explores online economies in a performative way, with a door always open to the unexpected, situating itself in between artistic provocation and social research. By presenting this project we want to stress the importance, the role and pervasiveness of algorithms in our life in particular and in the contemporary society in general.

~~Thursday~~, March 10 2016

18:00 - 20:00

▪ Kino Šiška, Trg prekomorskih brigad 3, Ljubljana

Session 2: Voluntary prisoners of the cloud

With lectures by **Émilie Brout & Maxime Marion** and **Zach Blas** and final conclusions drawn by all guests, moderated by conference curator **Bani Brusadin**.

For many internet users, empowerment is an illusion. They may think they enjoy free access to cool services, but in reality, they are paying for that access with their privacy. Much of our information-sharing seems trivial – should we really care that some company knows what music we like? If they can find out about what you listen to, they can find out what you read, what you buy, how you relate to whom. From there, it's not so hard to predict your political preferences, and manipulate you. As researcher and journalist Evgenj Morozov says, "We are careening towards a future where privacy becomes a very expensive commodity."

The nature of the old information highways or virtual communities is obviously at stake in the post-Snowden age. We are mentioning these obsolete terms on purpose in order to arouse suspicion over more recent ones such as "Web 2.0" or "social sedia" that were used to highlight the apparently "social," empowering nature of the internet as we thought we knew it.

Yet, beyond and beneath the front-end surface of apps and conversation platforms, a huge, mysterious, always slippery, and constantly changing patchwork of forces emerges. Existing maps should not be trusted. The first speakers of the second session of The Black Chamber Conference are examples of a new generation of artists and researchers who use research, writing, performance, and storytelling to tackle secrets hidden in plain sight.

Émilie Brout & Maxime Marion's projects explore what could be called the "data turn" in the creation of value: economical value, but also capital or identity value, like in the case of the alleged, shady inventor of Bitcoin technology, Satoshi Nakamoto, who – whoever he or they may be – is the key figure of one of Brout & Marion's most recent works.

Drawing from his ongoing, and recently awarded project Contra-Internet, **Zach Blas** will engage the possibility of performing a critique of the internet as both a hegemonic descriptor for digital networking and premier arena of political control. Documenting and speculating upon network alternatives that activists are developing globally, Contra-Internet is oriented from a feminist and queer perspective, in an effort to unite such political positions with a hacker ethos.

Thursday, March 10 2016

21:00

▪ Galerija Škuc, Stari trg 21, Ljubljana

Opening of *The Black Chamber* exhibition

Featured artists: Jacob Appelbaum & Ai Weiwei, Zach Blas, James Bridle, Émilie Brout & Maxime Marion, Simon Denny, Jill Magid, !Mediengruppe Bitnik, Metahaven, Laura Poitras, Evan Roth.

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22:00

▪ Galerija Škuc, Stari trg 21, Ljubljana

!Mediengruppe Bitnik: Chelsea's Wall

Action in public space

Chelsea Manning is an IT specialist and former member of the US army. In 2013 she was sentenced to 35 years in prison by a military court for the disclosure of secret military documents to WikiLeaks. In April 2015, Chelsea Manning published her first tweet out of the military prison in Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, where she is currently imprisoned, and even though she has been denied access to the Internet, she has been able to regularly tweet through her lawyer. Chelsea's Wall picks out and amplifies Manning's voice, a Twitter streams that talks about whistleblowing and its direct personal consequences, prison life and her physical transition to becoming a woman. The projection onto facades gives the bodyless tweets a physical presence, localizing them and giving them a place outside the virtual. The exhausting pace of social media is suddenly stopped, distorted and literally magnified, so that Chelsea's twits turn into an ephemeral giant made of light invading the streets of your city. Out of the tumultuous, never-stopping flow of information on the Internet, her twits may be finally read as what they really are: a political thought, a burst of emotions, a call to action and an invitation to never surrender.

Credits

Curated by: **Eva & Franco Mattes, Bani Brusadin**

Artistic directors:

Janez Janša (Aksioma), Vladimir Vidmar (Škuc Gallery)

Head of production: Marcela Okretič

Associated producer: Joško Pajer

Executive producer: Sonja Grdina

Assistants: Boris Beja, Katra Petriček

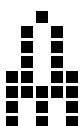
Technicians: Atila Boštjančič, Valter Udovičić

Public relations: Urša Purkart

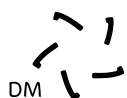
Production: Aksioma - Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana;
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Partner: Link Art Center



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THE INFLUENCERS



The Black Chamber is realized in the framework of Masters & Servers, a joint project by Aksioma (SI), Drugo more (HR), AND (UK), Link Art Center (IT) and d-i-n-a / The Influencers (ES). www.mastersandservers.org



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Contact:

Urša Purkart, 031 568 737, aksioma.org@gmail.com
Aksioma | Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana
Jakopičeva 11, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija
www.aksioma.org