WORKS
(excerpt)

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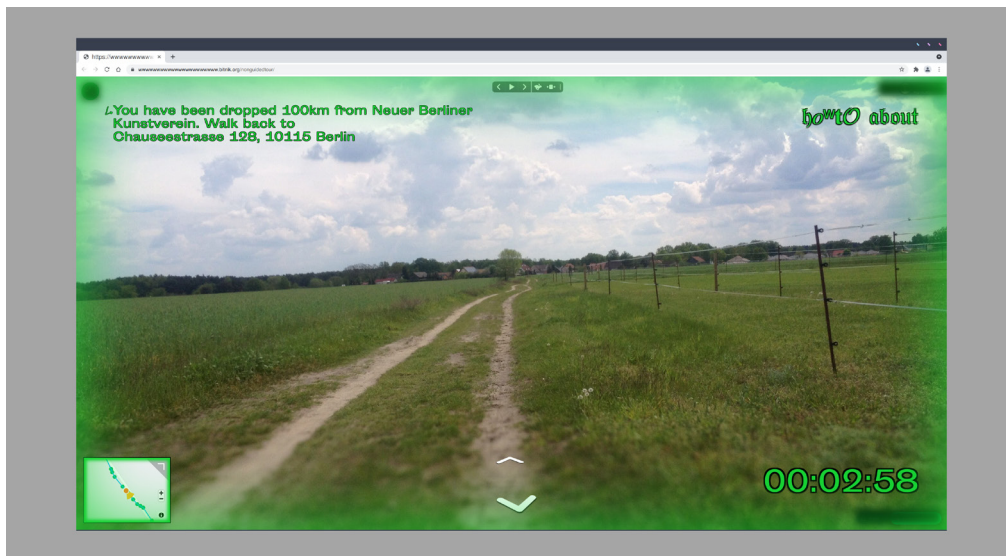HTTPS://WWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW.BITNIK.ORG

Non Guided Tour, screenshot from web-based game, 2021

Non Guided Tour, screenshot from web-based game, 2021

The piece was commissioned by Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.) for the exhibition Tomas Schmit. Pieces, Actions, Documents 1962–1970

Non Guided Tour

# 2021

https://bitnik.org/nonguidedtour/

Non Guided Tour is digital interpretation of Tomas Schmit's performance piece Sanitas#79 from 1962. In his controversial performance piece, Schmit asks the audience to board a bus, only to be abandoned at a random location after a 100 km journey.

!Mediengruppe Bitnik takes up this experience of losing one's sense of orientation at a physical location by transposing the Fluxus work into a web-based game. The players of Non Guided Tour are placed on a virtual map at a random point, exactly 100 km away from Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.). They are challenged to find their way back to n.b.k. using rudimentary clues – such as blurry road signs, scenic features, and architectural landmarks. Making clear reference to the structure of online games such as MapCrunch and GeoGuessr, while deliberately operating counter to their logic based on scores and speed. Non Guided Tour invites participants to take a stroll through digital space and playfully addresses the role of the audience as well as the dimension of time, while responding to today's increasingly privatized and panoptic digital space.

!Mediengruppe Bitnik uses the infrastructure of the website Mapillary – a free geospatial platform based on street photographs taken by private users. With the help of partially blurred images taken at different times of the year and day, users can navigate along busy roads or hidden trails. Non Guided Tour operates beyond clearly defined vectors of space and time, and the homogenous surveillance aesthetics of digital street views we have come to expect.

With this work, !Mediengruppe Bitnik addresses the idea explored by Fluxus artists of interweaving art and everyday life – by exploring the possibilities to do so in an increasingly hypermediatized world.
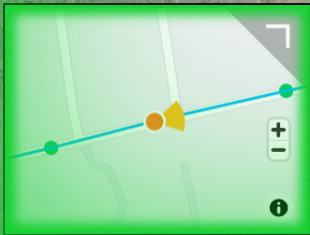
Cryptorave #5, 09th May 2018, Panke Club, Berlin, Germany, screenshot of RaveEnabler website

Cryptorave #10, 23rd March 2019, House of Electronic Arts Basel, Switzerland, screenshot of RaveEnabler website

The sitespecific Cryptoraves were held in cities accross Europe: Berlin, Germany; Barcelona, Spain; Athens, Greece; Basel, Switzerland. Gameplay was directed and facilitated through online cryptomining on custom designed RaveEnabler website: https://0b673cce.xyz/

Cryptorave Series

In collaboration with
Knoth & Renner and Omsk Social Club

2018 – 2019

https://0b673cce.xyz/

The Cryptorave is a utopian gesture to adopt and experiment with blockchain technology, cryptocurrencies and DAO to support and power a subculture. Cryptoraves open a thinking space in which subcultural networks can examine blockchain technology as a means to structure and put value into networks. This is achieved both through actual mining of cryptocurrency by participants and through a layer of Live Action Role Play (LARP)/ Real Game Play (RGP).

To attend a Cryptorave you need to mine the cryptocurrency Monero (XMR) to receive your entry pass. By joining their computing power together, the community collectively generates value to fund the Cryptorave machine and enable the autonomous dance party experience. The collectively generated value aims to ensure the basic existence of the network and to provide an amount of security and privacy.

At the core of this experiment is the RaveEnabler, a website with an embeded Monero (XMR) miner. Just like other miners, it uses the participants computing power to validate transactions within the Monero network. The RaveEnabler website gives anyone easy access to crypto mining the Cryptorave mining pool, without prior knowledge. All proceeds are kept in a community Cryptowallet, while the miners are awarded entry tickets to the Cryptorave.

Through the RaveEnabler, the Cryptorave community not only experiments with the use of crypto mining as a sustainable method to fund Cryptorave events, but also uses a layer of Real Game Play (RGP) to provide unique roles to the participants. The roles allow the players to anonymise their identities by adopting a character from the crypto scenes. The adopted identities create a fiction within which participants can collectively reflect on alternative futures for decentralized networks, anonymous hidden networks and how we can build trust and resilience into these.

Cryptorave #9, 16th February 2019, Onassis Foundation, Athens, Greece

Alexiety (Edition): printed 12" LP sleeve with 3mm spine, UV direct print on acrylic glas with download code for three songs - No Secrets No Surprises (02:55), Alexa Stop (01:58), Alexiety (01:48)

Alexiety
!Mediengruppe Bitnik & Low Jack

2018

https://bitnik.org/data/2018/alexiety/alexiety.html
https://bitnik.org/data/alexiety_sf/index.html

Intelligent Personal Assistants like Alexa, Google Home and Siri are the brains of the smart home ecosystem. They operate, monitor and control smart home appliances while keeping the algorithms and rule-sets that determine their workings secret. Intelligent Personal Devices are voice controlled, thus dissolving the machinic presence of the computer while placing its functionalities at the users disposal. It's like living inside the machine, while at the same time having no agency over the composition and structure of ones environment.

What are the relationships that we are forming with these IPA devices? What happens when IoT devices are hacked to form rogue bot-networks? Is my capacity to act expanded or diminished when relying on these semi-autonomous devices?

Together with French musician Low Jack, !Mediengruppe Bitnik have been looking at ways to engage with Alexa and similar ‚Intelligent' Personal Assistants through music.

A set of three songs attempt to capture the feelings we develop toward Intelligent Personal Assistants: The carefree love that embraces Alexa before the data privacy and surveillance issues outweigh the benefits. The alienation and decoupling/uncoupling from the allure of remote control and instant gratification. The anxiety and discomfort around Alexa and other Intelligent Personal Assistants that is Alexiety.

The EP is best streamed on the radio for the enjoyment of smart homes everywhere. Play it loud, so your neighbours devices can hear.

Alexiety, single channel video installation, sound, loop, 08:28 min. Screen, loud speakers, Alexa devices, Google Home device, computer, cables. Installation view, Panke Gallery Berlin, 2018

Ashley Madison Angels at Work in Berlin, five-channel video installation, EIGEN+ART Lab Berlin, 2017

Ashley Madison Angels at Work Series

(2016 - 2022)

Ashley Madison Angels at Work is part of a series of works researching Ashley Madison, a Canadian online dating service marketed worldwide to married people seeking an affair. In July and August 2015, an anonymous group called The Impact Team stole and released all of Ashley Madison's internal data - including the entire website code and functionality, customer data and the CEO's emails. The data breach revealed that - with a disproportionate number of male subscribers and virtually no human women on the site - Ashley Madison had created an army of 75 000 female chatbots to draw the 32 million male users into (costly) conversations.

!Mediengruppe Bitnik use Ashley Madison as a case study to raise questions around the current relationship between human and machine, Internet intimacy and the use of virtual platforms to disrupt physical spaces.

The installation Ashley Madison Angels at Work confronts the viewer with female bots from the hacked Canadian online-dating platform Ashley Madison. The installation is adapted to the location of each exhibition. Thus the exhibition space functions as a temporary place of embodiment for the bots in the vicinity of the gallery. Mounted on stands, viewers encounter the fembots at eye level as seductive machine-creatures with robot-technology, artificial voices, and 3-D rendered human faces based on idealised beauty standards.

'Is anybody home lol?'
'U busy?'
'What brings you here?'

!Mediengruppe Bitnik use the pick-up lines encoded by Ashley Madison into their bots to perform a choreography within the exhibition space.
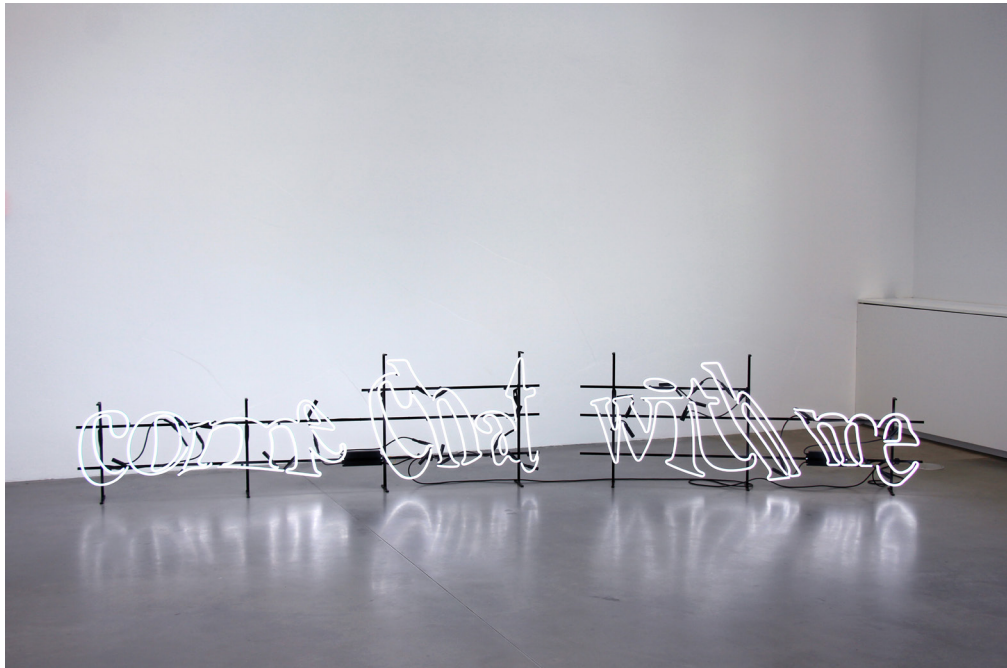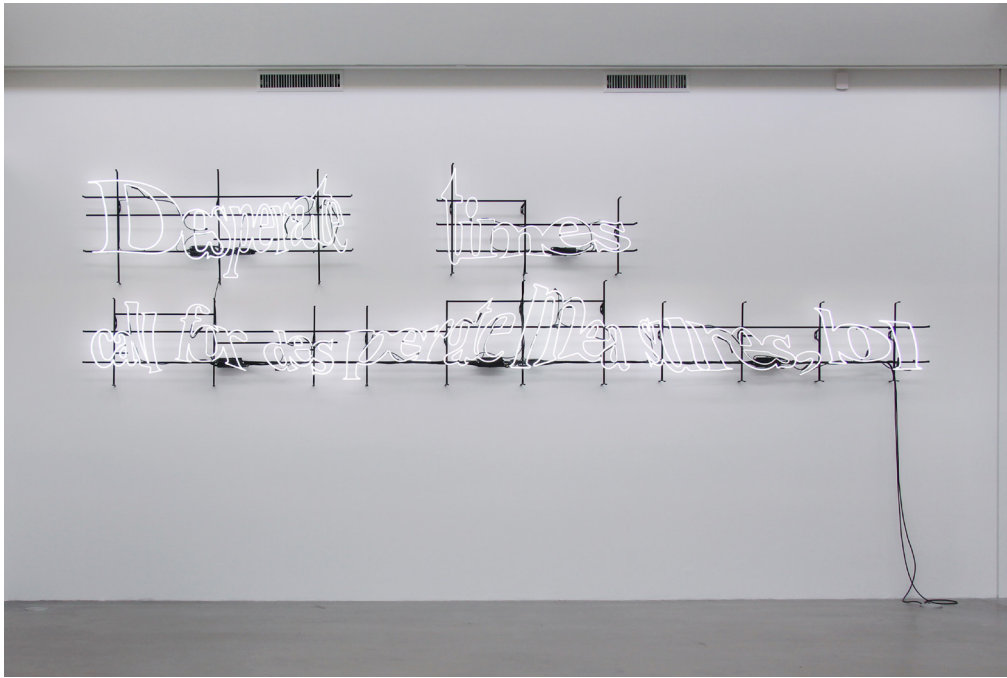
Ashley Madison Angels at Work in Paris, sixty-channel video installation, detail view, Centre culturel suisse, 2016

Ashley Madison Angels at Work in Lausanne and Solve This Captcha Series, exhibition view, EPFL ArtLab, 2017

Solve This Captcha: Desperate times call for desperate measures, lol & Solve This Captcha: Come chat with me, installation view, KINDL Berlin, 2019

Solve This Captcha Series
part of Ashley Madison Series

(2016 - 2017)

The idea that we are surrounded by bots, that we communicate with them on a daily basis and that we can hardly distinguish them from real people, is presented to viewers when they stand before large, luminous surfaces of the work series Solve This Captcha. Captchas are sequences of typographic characters only legible to people and not to robots. These online Turing tests function as gatekeepers to keep bots out of social networks - a standard that needs to be maintained with increasing efforts so that social media platforms are not flooded with machine creatures, and in order to ban spam. But these barriers, installed to keep bots out, also create work for people who must now constantly prove they are not machines. But not only that: when machines fail to get around captchas, workers in low-wage countries are used around the clock to circumvent them. People work in bot-like fashion so that bots can appear to be human.

In Solve This Captcha, the pickup lines from Ashley Madison are rendered as captchas in neon. The luminous pieces capture the ambiguous nature of the bot-human divide. With around half of all online traffic pertaining to bots, the digital landscapes around us are transforming. Who is still part of the system and who is the system for? How do automated, algorithmic and artificially intelligent systems influence our reality and everyday life?

Solve This Captcha: Is anybody home lol, exhibition view, Kunsthaus Langenthal 2016

H3333333K, public art piece, detail view, House of Electronic Arts Basel, 2015

H3333333K
Public Art Piece on façade of House of Electronic Arts Basel

2015

https://bitnik.org/h3333333k/

For H3333333K !Mediengruppe Bitnik translate a digital image error, a glitch, onto the façade of the museum 'House of Electronic Arts Basel' (HeK). Applied directly onto the architecture of the building, the glitch misaligns the elements of the façade, bringing disturbance to an otherwise settled structure.

Bitnik's public art piece for the House of Electronic Arts Basel echoes the dedication of the HeK to a radically contemporary use of media within the arts. The glitch refers to current art production, which involves reflecting its underlying technological and social conditions. It also alludes to the intrusion of chance, temporality and playfulness caused by erroneous data transmissions. But while the digital glitch usually is a very short-lived phenomenon, Bitnik here translate it into a long-term public art piece.

H3333333K engages with the building by applying a visual software error, a glitch, directly into built stone. The glitch is staged as an architectural dimension, subtly shifting parts of the building's façade and giving it a surreal appearance.
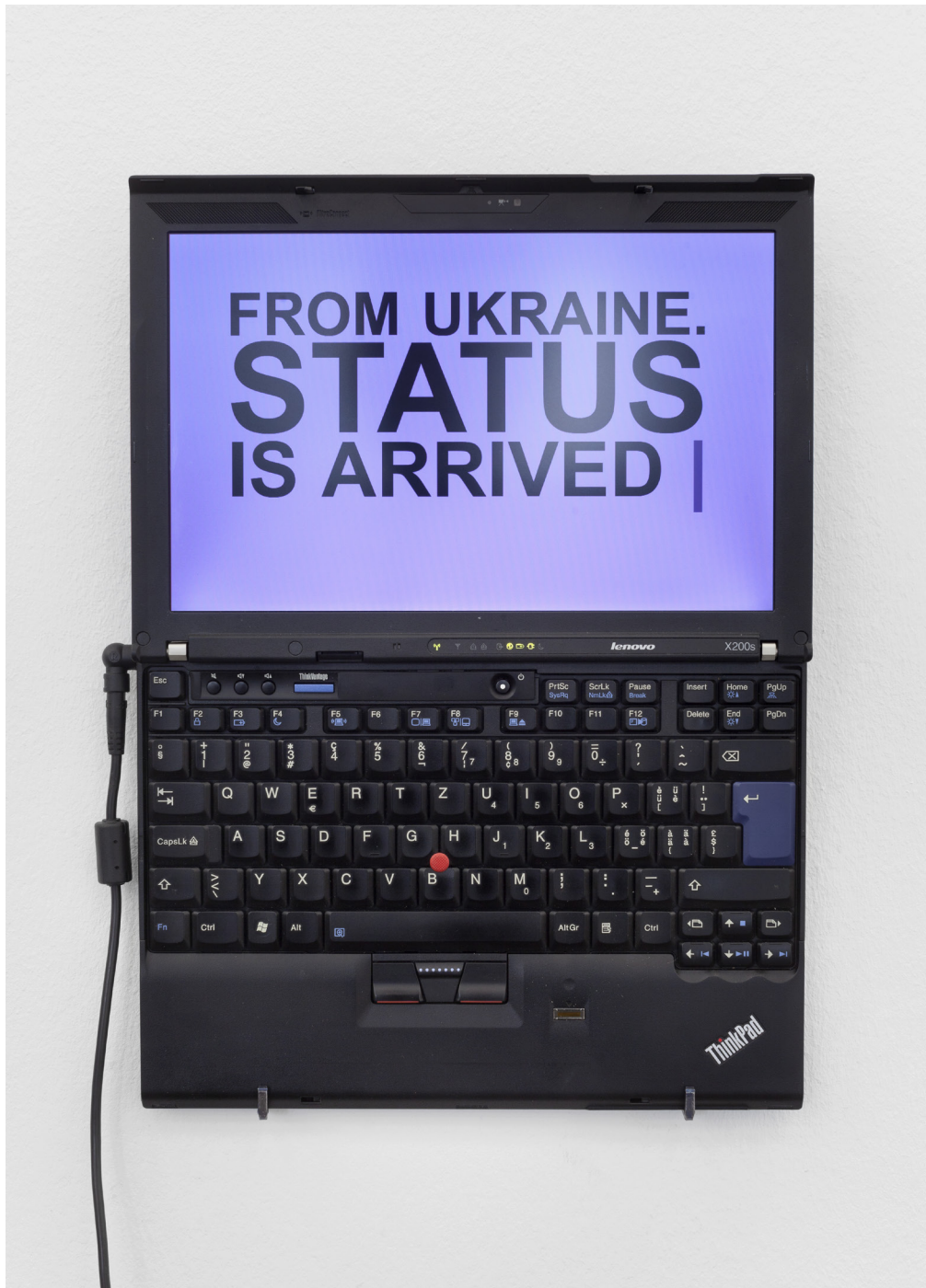
e Basel

H3333333K, public art piece, House of Electronic Arts Basel, 2015

H3333333K, public art piece, detail views, House of Electronic Arts Basel, 2015

Random Darknet Shopper, shopping bot, detail view, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, 2014 / 2015

Random Darknet Shopper
Live Mail Art Piece

2014 / 2015

https://bitnik.org/r/

Random Darknet Shopper is an automated online shopping bot which went shopping in the Darknet and randomly purchased one item per week. With a weekly budget of $100, the bot randomly chose an item and had it shipped directly to the exhibition space. In its first run from October 2014 to January 2015, Random Darknet Shopper bought 12 items, which were displayed at Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen. The sixth order was a pack of ten yellow ecstasy pills from Germany, which duly arrived and were displayed within the exhibition space.

'Can a robot, or a piece of software, be jailed if it commits a crime? Where does legal culpability lie if code is criminal by design or default?', the journalist Mike Power asked in his article about the work in the Guardian.

These globally relevant questions were then negotiated locally in the exhibition space: On the morning of 12 January, the day after the three-month exhibition at Kunst Halle St. Gallen closed, the public prosecutor's office seized the Random Darknet Shopper. This caused a sensation around the world, because for the first time a robot had been arrested for commiting a crime. At the same time, it was unclear who was responsible for the actions of the bot. The bot itself? The artists? Or the exhibition space and its staff?

A few weeks after the arrest, the public prosecutor ruled to drop the case, stating that the overweighing public interest in the questions raised by Random Darknet Shopper were important enough to justify the criminal offence of purchasing, possessing and exhibiting drugs. The artists as well as Random Darknet Shopper were cleared of all charges.

Random Darknet Shopper, exhibition view, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, 2014 / 2015

0.20928815 BITCOINS

0.07124536 BITCOINS

Random Darknet Shopper - The Bot´s Collection, stills from three-channel video installation, 2016

Delivery for Mr. Assange, parcel with hole, 2013

Delivery for Mr. Assange, still from live image feed, 2013

Delivery For Mr. Assange
A Live Mail Art Piece

2013

https://bitnik.org/assange/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIZTghhCuxg

London. 2013. 1 attempt, 121.5 km, 30 h 58 min 13 s, 4 distribution centres, 4 batteries, 350 tweets, 11 015 live images.

Delivery for Mr. Assange is a 32-hour live mail art piece performed on 16 and 17 January 2013. On 16 January 2013 !Mediengruppe Bitnik posted a parcel addressed to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy in London. The parcel contained a camera which documented its journey by Royal Mail through a hole in the parcel. The images captured by the camera were broadcast online in real time. So, as the parcel was slowly making its way towards the Ecuadorian embassy in London, anyone online could follow the parcel's status and physically witness the parcels extraordinary delivery.

The parcel was a REAL_WORLD_PING, a SYSTEM_TEST, inserted into a highly tense diplomatic crisis. At the time, Julian Assange had been living at the Ecuadorian embassy in London since June 2012. Although granted political asylum by Ecuador in August 2012, he was unable to leave the embassy premises for fear of being arrested by UK authorities. Delivery for Mr. Assange brought forward highly political issues around the relation between physical and virtual realities, geo-political boundaries and restrictions. Connecting the analog postal system with a live online feed as a means of breaking through the physical barriers surrounding Julian Assange.

After 32 hours and a journey in various postal bags, vans and through delivery centres, the parcel was delivered to the Ecuadorian embassy in London in the afternoon of 17 January 2013. By that time several thousand people had gathered on Twitter to follow the tantalising and intense journey. The experiment was crowned by Julian Assange's live performance for the camera.

Delivery For Mr. Assange, two-channel video installation and 17m image print, exhibition view, Helmhaus Zurich, 2014
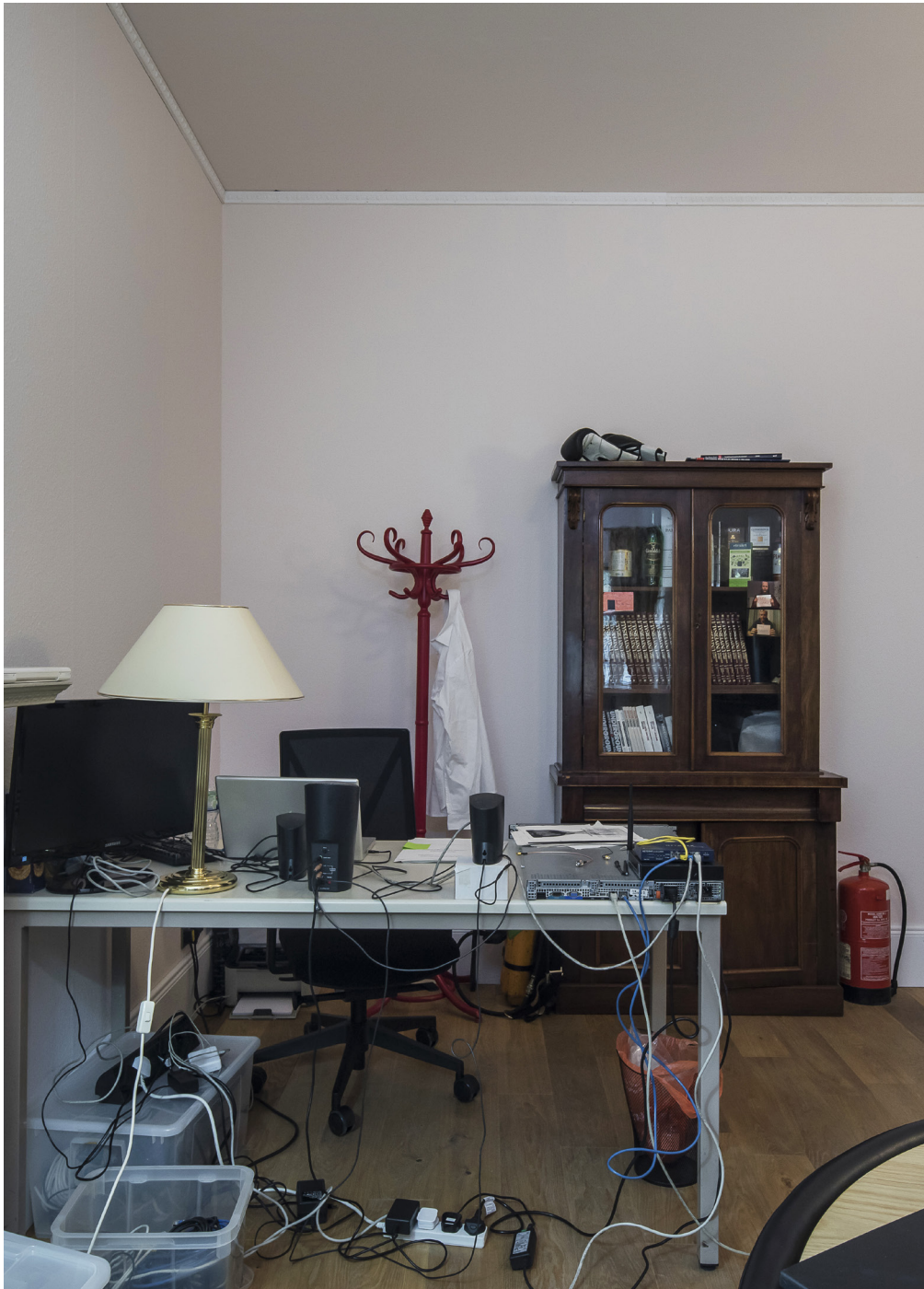
Assange´s Room, installation view, Helmhaus Zurich, 2014

Assange's Room
part of Delivery for Mr. Assange Series

2014

Assange's Room is a detailed replica of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's room at the Ecuadorian embassy in London. The room is not re-created from detailed photographs or plans, but purely from the memory of !Mediengruppe Bitnik who visited Julian Assange on various occasions. The work is part of the series Delivery for Mr. Assange. It follows the live online performance piece, where, on 16 January 2013, Bitnik sent a parcel to Julian Assange, containing a hidden camera.

The stalemate around the Ecuadorian embassy is one of the rare physical manifestations of the ongoing crisis between the powers that be and freedom-of-information aficionados. Due to the cordon of British police, Julian Assange had no access to outside space and was confined to the highly regulated interior of the embassy. Visitors could only enter the building after undergoing extensive checks. Very few people were allowed access - yet this is the space from which WikiLeaks operated from 2012 until Julian Assange's arrest in 2019.

Thanks to an Internet connection and an expert understanding of both technological and political networks, WikiLeaks remained operational from the confines of a 20 square metre space.

The life-sized replication presents the 'world' of Assange and his daily physical experience. A human body entrapped in a building. By moving Assange's work and influence out of the solely virtual into the real world, the work creates a tangible sketch of everyday life that visitors can freely access or leave. By materialising an otherwise abstract question of confinement, control, and counter-power, we experience more acutely the paradox of one state nervously observing the other state from within.

Assange´s Room, exhibition view, Helmhaus Zurich, 2014

Surveillance Chess, installation view, single channel video and performance suitcase eqipped with chess computer and 2.4 GHz wireless transmitter, antenna, batteries, EIGEN+ART Lab Berlin, 2017

Surveillance Chess, video still, single channel video, Full HD, sound, loop, 07:00.

Surveillance Chess
Hacking CCTV Cameras in London

2012

https://bitnik.org/s/

London. 2012. On the brink of the Olympic Games. A tube station in one of the most surveilled public spaces in the world. !Mediengruppe Bitnik intercepts the signal of a surveillance camera: business people making their way to the Underground, a man in a suit looking for the right exit. From the left, a woman with a yellow suitcase walks into the frame of the surveillance camera. She opens her suitcase and activates a switch.

This is the moment when Bitnik takes over. The surveillance image drops out, a chess board appears on the surveillance monitor and a voice from the loudspeakers says: 'I control your surveillance camera now. I am the one with the yellow suitcase.' The image jumps back to the woman with the yellow suitcase. Then the image switches to the chess board. 'How about a game of chess?', the voice asks. 'You are white. I am black. Call me or text me to make your move. This is my number: 07582460851.'

By manipulating unencrypted connections between monitoring cameras and control centres, !Mediengruppe Bitnik replaces the real-time image on the monitor with a personal invitation to play chess. This opens a playful situation between the artists and those who monitor the security cameras in the control centre. Both players are now submitted to the same rules and opportunities. What before was a one-way monitoring system is transformed into a medium for communication. The cards are reshuffled, the game can begin, it is open-ended.

Surveillance Chess, video still, 2012

Opera Calling, live performance, exhibition view, 100 telephones, computers and relay machine, Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, 2007

Opera Calling
Arias for All!

2007

https://bitnik.org/o/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDnzHKZmjBs

Zurich. 2007. You are at home. The phone rings, you answer, at the other end of the connection there is an automated voice: 'This is the autonomous opera telephone of Zurich. For your pleasure and entertainment, we have placed a bug in the Zurich Opera. In a few moments you will be connected live to the opera house. You can lay back and listen to today's performance of Der Rosenkavalier by Richard Strauss from the comfort of your living room. Enjoy!' The live broadcast from the opera house begins immediately. You can follow the ensemble through the telephone line - the sound rattles slightly - or you can hang up; then an intermediary computer uses a generator to decide at random which Zurich household is to be called next.

In Opera Calling the !Mediengruppe Bitnik intervenes with the Zurich Opera system, whereby they hide bugged telephones in the opera hall. Through this direct transmission, a virtual listening room is created that stretches beyond the premises of the opera house in the form of a 'home delivery service'.

The Zurich Opera launched a search for the bugs and in a first reaction threatened to take legal action if the transmissions were not stopped and the bugs removed. There followed a debate in the media over cultural ownership and cultural subsidies. Eventually the Zurich Opera decided to tolerate Opera Calling as a temporary enhancement of their performance repertoire.

- But where are these bugs?
- They hid them inside the Opera House

But until they have found all the bugs,
they will keep on doing this

- ... so that everyone can benefit from the opera
- Yes, yes, yes

Opera Calling, video stills, single channel video, Full HD, sound, loop, 08:52.
Installation view EIGEN+ART Lab, Berlin, 2017