

Manifesto for the digital persona and Digital Habeas Corpus

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Five thousand years ago human beings begin for the first time to build their own world. They moved into cities and people would live all of their lives amidst structures both social and physical that were built by human beings. Today we are taking the first step in five thousand years that's really analogist; we are moving our society into computer mediated telecommunication channels. So the decisions we make today are going to affect how society works for a very long time into the future. (Whitfield Diffie – Security expert – contribution to Article 12 the movie)

Today we witness the expansion of the digital world – that digital arena that decades ago seemed to be nothing more than an ambitious speculation. Nowadays, this is the space where numerous social, economic, and cultural activities take place. We migrate from the physical world to the digital one; we transfer our books, our libraries, our thoughts, our relations and we interact in this virtual space sometimes more than in the physical one. The core of our day to day life - the economical system - has shifted almost completely; gold is still moving between banks, but Wall Street, for example, is completely digitalised and changes quickly and is mainly recordable and traceable in the digital world; inside the cloud – this digital reality – that no human in history has dared experimenting with before except for the last few decades. This is a world that seems congruous to the insides of our minds, to our imagination; it lies at the border between reality and dream. Today we are exploring and expanding this digital world, we have moved ourselves to this new place where the rules have not been established yet and where individuals, companies, and governments fight for survival. In order to enter and interact in this digital dimension we have duplicated our selves, we have created a new persona capable of fulfilling roles and exerting agency. The question then arises: Who monitors and protects the rights of the digital personas in this era where constant calculation and sorting is going on through huge amounts of data

processing in the background where software is increasingly the agent that brings everyday life into being? This has huge implications because everything and everybody now creates a *digital self* that can be used for monitoring, tracking, and control at many scales around the world, jumping between jurisdictions and beyond democratic scrutiny.

If we're living in a global surveillance society, a global information society, how do you control the global flow of information about you? At the moment, under data protection laws, this is just seen as information about you. So you have some rights over it, you have some ability to intervene, to make sure it's accurate and to make sure it isn't shared unnecessarily. But I think things need to go further than that. We do have to start thinking about this information as actually being in some ways similar to the real physical body, to be part of a thing that makes up you or me as a person. (Dr. David Murakami Wood - contribution to Article 12 the movie)

In this rapid transfer to the “digital world” even the less innocuous battles have shifted - Digital wars and Cyberwars – but what happens to our rights? They seem to be completely disregarded in favour of more powerful goals and purposes. And if information wants to be free what about the digital persona?

As David Murakami Wood suggested,

there is a need to think about these data subjects in terms of citizenship, in terms of rights, in terms of, you know, a relationship to the state that isn't just about them holding information on you, or a relationship indeed to companies that isn't about them just holding information on you. So in some ways, what I'm arguing is we need to free our data bodies, to give a kind of Digital Habeas Corpus, to have rights for data bodies, along with our own physical bodies. (Dr. David Murakami Wood - contribution to Article 12 the movie)

But to be free we also need to think about certain boundaries, rules and regulations. The digital persona nowadays is a big commodity. Just take the example of Google or Facebook whose rapid expansion reinforces the idea that “Information is power” and a tradable asset and this is even more pertinent for the current hyper-connected technological world.

This is a transition moment when the creation of the Digital Habeas Corpus cannot be delayed, as it allows a rearranging and redistribution of the already existing notions and ideas about human rights, as well as it provides an invitation to exploration and investigation which is imperative in the realm of revolutionary thinking and achieving progress. The existence of our digital personas is a fact; they are mirrored representations of the physical personas to which they should have a direct and singular connection. Existing laws regulating our digital movement and our digital personas have not been established properly yet. What is valid however is that, in most cases, they have direct impact over our physical lives. Companies and governments decide whether we are eligible for mortgages, loans and life and health insurances by accessing data about our digital personas. Other people are discriminated against based on the same criterion. Persons have become pure exchange tools on the power market. The first step is to take ownership of our data – our representation in the digital world – irrespective of race, social status, or religion. Consequently, this asks for the creation of a regulatory body – the Digital Habeas Corpus.

By Constitution, we have been granted freedom, the right to freely express ourselves and have control over our personas, and the same should apply to our digital selves. A new man – the digital man - has arisen and its emancipation depends on us. Writers, artists, philosophers, and many specialists in this field are talking about this transition and the powerful transformation we are facing. The way of being in this parallel world requires that we embrace technology and aspire for the better, but not without protecting our human rights and human dignity, both for our physical and digital personas.

This manifesto is firstly meant to raise awareness about the topic, secondly, it is an invitation to take action and, finally, it is meant to be the first step towards the creation of the Digital Habeas Corpus.

OWN YOUR DIGITAL PERSONA!

