

## ON PROTECTING DIGITAL IDENTITY

Varuna Jael with Ludger Hovestadt

**Varuna Jael: Ludger, you were professor of Digital Architectonics at the ETH from 2000 to 2030, doing extensive research on the right to digital data privacy. Tell us about that time.**

Ludger Hovestadt: Back then, there was a big misunderstanding with regards to digital identity in that we mistakenly thought we could fight for data privacy. Data got more and more transparent but that wasn't the problem. The problem was that we lost control over our data. We weren't able to control whether other people or organizations manipulated our personal track record, our personal identity, digital identity, or digital persona(s).

Subsequently, we developed a setup allowing us to track our own data, our physical data, our geolocation, which all function as the fingerprint of a person. In Blockchain we now can share this data with hundreds of digital witnesses and, if needed, use it as proof. This turned out to work so well that it was further developed towards digital citizenship. Now states such as Switzerland, for example, took over our policy to protect the personal rights of their citizens in the digital realm.

**In the early 2020s, the digital plenty seemed overwhelming to us. It was clear that we needed a Copernican turn.**

In the past 20 years, we learned how to deal with the digital plenty. It seemed threatening to us because everything could be fake, digital trash, and it became increasingly complicated to differentiate and stay focused. Yet, the digital plenty was only threatening when flooding flat land. Now, think of our world as being located within a planetary system, where everything is always circulating anyway. Then, as a digital persona, you can stand in the center of the maelstrom and your intellect is able to let the digital plenty circle around you.

You are removed from the speed, or the constitution of whatever is circulating around you. You can talk about the world in your own words. You get a clear view of it, enjoying free speech, knowing of the complexities of the world, its beauty and its ugliness. It is no longer part of the flooding imaginary of the world we lived in 20 years ago. We have left the digital Renaissance, and currently are entering the era of the digital Baroque.

**In the 2020s, we continued celebrating the urbanization of our planet. But all this came with huge challenges.**

The 2020s were a mess. Nobody was safe. It turned out that through urbanization, people and things got connected to the beauty and as well as the horror of the world. Everybody could be associated with anything, be it something good, something beautiful, or an act of crime or terrorism. With two or three simple steps you were connected to the world and you lost control over your identity. I would say that it was virtually impossible to improve the situation, which is a crazy constellation for architects. Today, architecture gives power a face. It establishes a new kind of democracy in cities marked by generic urbanism. As it turns out, this is the original architectural gesture. It manifested itself in the ancient Greek Polis, in the Renaissance, and we see it today in our globalized world. We have established a new democracy.