

## Climbing the (St)Age of Participation

Ars Electronica Futurelab and Klaus Obermaier are performing research to develop interaction technology for innovative stage productions

(Linz, December 10, 2010) The Ars Electronica Futurelab is the only non-university R&D facility to be granted funding this year by the FWF–Austrian Science Fund’s PEEK arts development program. Beginning in 2011, the Futurelab will collaborate with renowned media artist, choreographer and composer Klaus Obermaier (AT) on a three-year project that aims to develop interactive dramatic performances.

### (St)Age of Participation: Audience Involvement in Stage-Based Media Art

The name of the project is “(St)Age of Participation,” an allusion to social media and the contemporary culture of collaboration as well as a reference to interdisciplinary research and development of innovative participation scenarios. This investigation will focus on the question of how audience members at a play, concert or performance might someday be able to employ new technologies/tracking systems, laser scans or personal 3D avatars as a means of influencing events transpiring on stage. How can those in attendance intervene in the configuration of sounds, visuals or other content? User-friendly interfaces designed to accomplish this will be developed at the Futurelab over the next three years. There are also plans to conduct field tests in conjunction with upcoming Ars Electronica Festivals.

The project is headed by artist Klaus Obermaier and Christopher Lindinger, director of research and innovation at the Ars Electronica Futurelab. According to Lindinger, the successful completion of this R&D effort will have a major impact on the international media art scene: “We already have a great deal of experience developing individual interactive installations. But here, we’re blazing new trails in the area of stage-based media performances. With the exception of ‘Telesymphony,’ US artist Golan Levin’s 2001 work that created a composition live using the ringing of audience members’ cell phones, and Klaus Obermaier’s experiments in generating sounds with laser beams, there are practically no–successful–models in this genre.” For Klaus Obermaier, one of the primary challenges is staging a performance that achieves a high level of aesthetic, emotional and intellectual quality despite–or, actually, due precisely to–the audience’s unforeseeable real-time interventions. “Multimedia stage-based art of the future radically differs from passively partaking of a work. And this is exactly why we also need completely new conceptions of a dynamic interaction dramaturgy. After all, audience members have to feel comfortable dealing with the technological interaction tools and be able to intuitively perceive the cause-and-effect of their own actions; if that’s the case, then there’s tremendous potential to heighten their emotional and social involvement in the artistic experience.”

### From Oedipus to Stravinsky – Klaus Obermaier and the Ars Electronica Futurelab

Klaus Obermaier is one of Austria’s most renowned media artists. He already has several Linzer Klangwolke productions to his credit, and he teaches choreography and new media at

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universities abroad. He has collaborated with Futurelab staffers on a whole series of successful projects that have continuously expanded the repertoire of computer-supported means of expression in stage-based art. His 2006 adaptation of Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" enhanced the work's narrative structure with a 3D space linked to musical impulses. In "Oedipus Reloaded" (2004), a production developed for the Ruhrtriennale, the protagonist was thrust into a projected network of shimmering digital data. And there was his very well received dance and media performance "Apparition" (2004) that used sensor & tracking technology to enable real-time interaction between a dancer and his visual and musical environment.

### PEEK – Program for Arts-based Research

PEEK is a subsidy program conducted under the aegis of the FWF–Austrian Science Fund. Annually since 2009, PEEK awards grants to foster interdisciplinary R&D. This year, a total of €1.5 million was available for funding purposes. An international jury evaluated 46 proposals, seven of which were selected as grant recipients. Christopher Lindinger's delighted reaction: "The fact that the Futurelab as a non-university research facility has repeatedly held its own against institutions of higher learning in competition for increasingly scarce funding underscores the high quality of the R&D work we're doing."

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Klaus Obermaier: [www.exile.at](http://www.exile.at)

PEEK: <http://www.fwf.ac.at/en/projects/peek.html>

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