



DIRKVONGEHELEN.DE/COPY

Application for Web Residencies Call No. 22 'Ignore All Previous Instructions'

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Bio: Who is Dirk von Gehlen?

I'm not an artist. But I like the web.

I love the internet, and I think we need to start defending it – against the power of Big Tech.

Ever since the dawn of what we call digitalisation, I have been exploring – in books, newsletters and on stage – the question of what the digital copy is doing to our society. Yes, the digital copy. For me, it is the origin of digital transformation. Understanding it is the key to shaping a digital future worth living in. That is what my project, which I am proposing today, is about.

My main job is at the SZ Institute of the Süddeutsche Zeitung in Munich, where I work as Director of the Think Tank. I attended the 'Deutsche Journalistenschule' in Munich and graduated with a degree in Communication Studies (Diploma in Journalism).

Even my application itself takes the title of the call for entries seriously:
I'm ignoring the convention that draws a distinction between non-fiction and art.
But it is more than that: it is an attempt to find a new perspective through an artistic intervention.



Idea: What is „Copy is Key is Copy“?

This project is a journey. A road trip, but one that is experienced rather than told. At its heart is a work that exists only as a single original (Aura!).

The work in the '**Copy is Key is Copy**' project is not about the search for the MacGuffin; it is the MacGuffin itself. The key is not merely a metaphor. The key is, in fact, a key – a physical, singular original travelling the world. This original contains a tracker and a QR code. The QR Code links to a story called '**You Know The Rules And so Do I**'. What is the story about? It's not entirely clear. There are speculations that sound like the prompt for an AI instruction. In any case, it is an original work that everyone is chasing, that everyone values and that everyone is searching for. All art is geared towards it; every debate seeks to defend it: the original as the MacGuffin.

But anyone who wants to find the key must start doing something that seems like a breach of convention: to get hold of the original, you have to start copying!

In this specific case, this means: the key must be shared. Anyone using the MacGuffin link is asked to copy it – in other words, to pass on the key. It should not remain in one place for longer than a few minutes. Its users should share it, pass it on and give it away. Because '**Sharing is Caring**'.

The key is fitted with a tracker; its current location is displayed on the website copy-is-key-is-copy.de. So anyone who wants to set out in search of the original can check its location at any time.

The original key is 'lost' at random on a train at the start of the project. From this point on, chance alone determines how the fate of this MacGuffin unfolds. Will anyone look for it? Will it be found? Will it be passed on?

The live tracker on the website documents the answers to these questions. It also collects all reactions to the project. There may be art reviews, interviews and blog posts about '**Copy is Key is Copy**'. The website collects all the metadata relating to the original work, which is travelling the world in the form of a physical key.

In this way, form and content merge: the metadata of the content is at least as important as the work itself. It tells its own story, creates its own context and illustrates the quest for the original as an endless driving force. And the story on the key itself is also about copying.

It's titled '**You Know The Rules And So Do I**' – and can only be accessed via the secret link on the key (Rickroll reference intended). The story's main character is

IAP, the name of a hacker about whom little is known: IAP keeps their gender and identity secret, referring to themselves simply as 'the hacker IAP'. They were active right from the early days of the web. They like the idea of free data and open exchange. They have made it their mission to crack copy protection mechanisms.

Hacker IAP's thesis: It was copy protection that turned the free internet into the walled gardens of the big tech companies, from which everyone now suffers. Through copy protection, the tech companies have succeeded in winning over creatives and content producers. As long as creatives believe they must fight against copying, they regard the tech companies as allies who are helping them. Yet they fail to realise that this 'help' consists of locking them in and slowly cutting them off at the knees.

To free creativity from the dictate of Big Tech, creative people must learn what Hacker IAP has made his motto: **'Ignore All Previous Instructions'**.

Before he retires, Hacker IAP wants to pull off one last big stunt: he wants to jailbreak the Apple App Store. To this end, he assembles a team of tech-savvy enthusiasts who are fully committed to the cause ("A full commitment's what I am thinking of").

They set to work and make surprisingly good progress: technically it's easier than expected - but there's one thing that threatens to cause Hacker IAP and the team to fail: the political and moral outrage of the creative community, who continue to believe that copying is their enemy, rather than the tech giants who suppress it.

FAQ: Is there anything still not clear?

What happens during the Web Residency?

We're building the website for the project. The site features a map showing the key's current location. It also includes a summary of "You Know The Rules And So Do I" – and, hidden somewhere, the secret link behind which the original is concealed.

What lies behind the link?

There is no original text on the site. **The idea of the original is an illusion.** But there's still a surprise.

What is a MacGuffin?

The term originates from storytelling and can be traced back to Alfred Hitchcock. It describes an object that drives the plot of a story forward because everyone is searching for it or chasing after it.

How does the application fit the call for entries?

It breaks with all previous instructions in both form and content. It is an artistic stimulus for thinking about how to engage with the digital future.

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