

## Right2Remove.us VS MugShots.com with the *Aesthetics of Information Ethics*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New York City, October 22, 2017.

With the project ***Obscurity***, artist Paolo Cirio challenges legal threats, organizes a new privacy policy in U.S., and presents it in seven prominent art institutions this fall.

<https://paolocirio.net/work/obscurity>

<https://obscurity.online>

Since April 2016, Cirio has been obfuscating millions of online criminal records and mug-shots published in the United States. The *Obscurity* project cloned major mug-shot websites and scrambled their data to obfuscate the arrestees' records:

[https://youtube.com/watch?list=PLJHWosFmMRqofm03UvU8\\_0tLKopTXKOra&v=im4bqkGbEkl](https://youtube.com/watch?list=PLJHWosFmMRqofm03UvU8_0tLKopTXKOra&v=im4bqkGbEkl)

The project **generated responses from hundreds of individuals** personally affected by public criminal records. They ask the artist for help and tell their stories of stigmatization, extortion, and harassment caused by unregulated mug-shot websites. Here is a selection of messages illustrating the performance's reactions:

[https://paolocirio.net/work/obscurity/Obscurity-selection-messages\\_web.pdf](https://paolocirio.net/work/obscurity/Obscurity-selection-messages_web.pdf)

Meanwhile, MugShots.com sent an **aggressive legal threat to Paolo Cirio** requesting an immediate cease and desist of the project, causing the shut down of the artist's website:

<https://paolocirio.net/work/obscurity/Obscurity-Mugshots.com-VS-Cirio.pdf>

MugShots.com monetizes by exposing embarrassing booking photos on search engines and asking excessive fees for their removal, even if arrestees are cleared of charges. Finally, a few weeks ago, **a class-action was initiated against MugShots.com**

Paolo Cirio responds by pushing forward the ***Right to Remove Internet privacy policy to adapt and improve the Right To Be Forgotten in the United States***: <https://Right2Remove.us>

As a form of socially engaged Internet art, the project offers services aimed to build empathy and community by providing practical tools for the affected individuals and organizing for change.

Moreover, Paolo Cirio takes **the risk of republishing the websites Mug-Shots.us and BustedMugShots.us**, which were the subjects of legal threats. His renewed attack against the mug-shot sites will continue for a few weeks to reinforce the need of more effective instruments against them.

With the ***Obscurity*** and ***Right to Remove*** projects, Paolo Cirio recently received **a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts** through the art institution ISCP. **Art installations of the *Obscurity* artwork are both on display at MIT Museum in Boston from October 19 and ISCP in NYC from October 24**, along with ongoing and future international exhibitions.

This ultimate project inspired Paolo Cirio to reflect on the ***Aesthetics of Information Ethics*** with an essay that condenses his practice with broader ethical issues that society faces today:

<https://paolocirio.net/press/texts/aesthetics-information-ethics.php>

Cirio will address the ***Aesthetics of Information Ethics*** with a solo lecture at the **Berkeley Art Museum for UC Berkeley** on October 23 and at **MozFest with a workshop commissioned by the learning departments of both Victoria & Albert and Tate museums in London** on October 27. A public discussion with Julia Powles, renowned expert on Right To Be Forgotten, will be at ISCP in NYC on December 19.

### The timeline of the dispute:

On March 29, 2017, MugShots.com sent a **legal notice** of potential lawsuits both in UK and US against the artist Paolo Cirio, accusing him of false advertising and infringement of intellectual property. The law firm signing the letter represents the unnamed owner of MugShots.com, a company in the offshore jurisdiction of Nevis in the Caribbean.

On September 26, 2017, a federal judge in Chicago ruled on a lawsuit by several arrestees suing MugShots.com and **a novel class-action against it was approved**. Two recent articles about MugShots.com on the Chicago Tribune and the New York Times reported the filing of this lawsuit:

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-mug-shot-websites-0312-biz-20170310-story.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/03/opinion/sunday/innocent-until-your-mug-shot-is-on-the-internet.html>

Although the compelling articles address the personal consequences of the mug-shot publishing industry, they both fail to mention the accountability of search engines, and how the issue won't be resolved till broader Internet privacy rights become available to American citizens.

MugShots.com remains up and running, despite having licenses revoked in Florida, Wyoming, and a lack of good standing in Delaware. Currently, there are only a few states that have passed measures to restrict for-profit publishing of arrest photos. For instance, in Arizona and Texas - two states with the highest rate of incarceration in the world - the charging for removal of online mug-shots is still legal. Nevertheless, the mug-shot websites are still multiplying (see a list the artist compiled) and propagating on social media; posting mug-shots on Facebook is not considered a violation of its community standard.

On October 20th, 2017, Paolo Cirio republish the website Mug-Shots.us for a few weeks to oppose the legal threats he received and to push forward his campaign Right2Remove.us

In January 2018 Paolo Cirio will terminate all of his obfuscated mug-shot websites and will focus on the campaign Right2Remove.us

### **The locations of the dispute:**

MugShots.com's purported operator is registered in Belize and has a business allegedly based in Nevis, in the West Indies; however, it operates out of Florida as a foreign business without legal authorization.

Paolo Cirio is an Italian citizen based in New York City operating as business registered in the City of London in UK. The dataset with over 15 millions criminal records is hosted on an undisclosed server and the disputed domain names are registered in Netherlands on Greenhost.nl, an ISP committed to supporting Internet activists.

*Google.com*, *Yahoo.com*, *Bing.com* are American companies with main headquarters in California. They are the gatekeepers to public information on the Internet in the United States. Their claims of being committed to users' privacy are deceptive and unfair.

The Federal Trade Commission is a governmental agency in Washington DC which should be in charge of regulating search engines companies nation-wide.

### **The locations and history of presentations of the *Obscurity* artwork:**

*Concrete Truth*, exhibition at International Studio & Curatorial Program, 2017, NYC - U.S.  
*Mirror Mirror*, exhibition at Robeson Galleries, Rutgers University, 2018, Newark - U.S.  
*Aesthetics of Information Ethics*, lecture at UC Berkeley, 2017, Berkeley - U.S.  
*Socially Engaged Internet Art*, lecture at Gallery 400 for UIC, Chicago - U.S.  
*Obfuscation workshop*, lecture at NYU School of Law, 2017, NYC - U.S.  
*Right to Re-*, exhibition at UC Santa Cruz, 2017, Santa Cruz - U.S.  
*Big Bang Data*, exhibition at MIT Museum, 2017, Boston - U.S.  
*Big Bang Data*, exhibition at DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, 2017, Prague - Czech Republic  
*Month of Photography*, exhibition at Museum National d'Histoire et d'Art, 2017, Luxembourg  
*FaceTunes*, exhibition at Bielefelder Kunstverein, 2017, Bielefeld - Germany  
*Mozilla Festival*, exhibition at Ravensbourne College, 2017, London - UK  
*Out of Control*, exhibition at Ars Electronica Center Museum, 2016, Linz - Austria  
*Big Brother Award*, exhibition at Stadsschouwburg, 2016, Amsterdam - Netherlands  
*Private and Public*, exhibition at NOME gallery at 515, 2016, Turin - Italy  
*Private*, exhibition at NOME gallery at 208 Bowery, 2016, NYC - U.S.  
*Traffic Cam meets Art Basel*, lecture at NYU for Art Law Society, 2016, NYC - U.S.

Thank you for your attention.  
Paolo Cirio Studio.