

ACTIVATION:

Collective Strategies to Expose Injustice

30 November 2019

Press Coverage



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Spiegel.de – 20.11.2019, *Nutzerdaten als Kunst
Der Code hinter einer Amazon-Bestellung*

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Press

“Das Geschäftsmodell von Amazon bestehe darin, Verhalten und die Aktivitäten seiner Kunden kontinuierlich zu verfolgen, die Kunden zu mehr Käufen zu animieren und so letztlich den Umsatz von Amazon zu steigern, kritisiert Moll. “Jede einzelne Aktivität eines Nutzers am Bildschirm wird von Amazon nicht nur getrackt und monetarisiert”, so die spanische Künstlerin. “Dazu wird auch noch ein Teil des Stromverbrauchs an den Nutzer abgewälzt - es ist sozusagen eine doppelte Ausbeutung.”

**Spiegel.de – 20.11.2019,
Nutzerdaten als Kunst Der Code hinter
einer Amazon-Bestellung
by Sonja Peteranderl**

“Can you protect yourself and use these companies' services? The answer is: not really. Either you get tracked or you can't participate..”

**Exberliner – 02.12.2019,
Disruption Network Lab's Joana Moll on
online data exploitation
by John Mark Shorak**

“I feel my work tries to reveal very complex and hard to grasp techno-social arrangements in a very simple way. To allow people to understand the infrastructures and processes that govern their day to day lives without feeling smashed about their complexities it's a central concern in my practice. I think my work fits in the exhibition in many ways, but I believe that this need to urgently discuss critical implications of our technologies with broader communities is one of the most relevant..”

**Furtherfield – 27.11.2019,
Children of Prometheus:
Interview with artist Joana Moll
by Marc Garrett**

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Nutzerdaten als Kunst

Der Code hinter einer Amazon-Bestellung

Die Künstlerin Joana Moll dokumentiert, was während einer Amazon-Bestellung im Hintergrund passiert. Einer ihrer Kritikpunkte ist der Ihrer Ansicht nach unnötig hohe Energieverbrauch im E-Commerce.

Von *Sonja Peteranderl*



Shop with 100% Confidence on Amazon

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0.04 kcal

Joana Moll

Für ihr Projekt "The Hidden Life of an Amazon User" hat Joana Moll eine Onlinebestellung dokumentiert.

Umgerechnet knapp 9000 A4-Seiten voller Codezeilen waren notwendig, damit Joana Moll sich bei [Amazon](#) das Buch "The Life, Lessons & Rules for Success" von Amazon-Gründer [Jeff Bezos](#) bestellen konnte. Für ihr Projekt "The Hidden Life of an Amazon User" hat die Künstlerin die technischen Aktivitäten im Hintergrund visualisiert, die während eines Bestellvorgangs ablaufen.

Auf ihrer an diesem Mittwoch gelauchten [Projekt-Website](#) kann man sich durch eine nachgebaute Amazon-Seite und zahlreiche Code-Kolonnen scrollen. Was normalerweise unauffällig im Hintergrund geschieht, hat die Künstlerin sichtbar gemacht. "Man sieht den ganzen Code, der auf meinem Computer geladen wurde", sagt Moll dem SPIEGEL. "Es sind insgesamt 8724 A4-Seiten Code und etwa 87.33 Megabyte für nur zwölf verschiedene Aufrufe."

ANZEIGE



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Während Amazon-Kunden sich durch die Benutzeroberfläche navigieren, werden unablässig Kommandos und Inhalte des Konzerns im [Browser](#) und auf dem Computer der Nutzer nachgeladen - sie sorgen etwa dafür, dass die Website korrekt dargestellt wird, ermöglichen Interaktionen und zeichnen die Aktivitäten des Nutzers auf. "Es bräuchte Entwickler, um den Code zu entschlüsseln und wirklich zu verstehen, was er tut", sagt Moll. "Ein großer Teil der Skripte sind jedoch Javascript-Dateien, die theoretisch Informationen sammeln können."

Das Geschäftsmodell von Amazon bestehe darin, Verhalten und die Aktivitäten seiner Kunden kontinuierlich zu verfolgen, die Kunden zu mehr Käufen zu animieren und so letztlich den Umsatz von Amazon zu steigern, kritisiert Moll. "Jede einzelne Aktivität eines Nutzers am Bildschirm wird von Amazon nicht nur getrackt und monetarisiert", so die spanische Künstlerin. "Dazu wird auch noch ein Teil des Stromverbrauchs an den Nutzer abgewälzt - es ist sozusagen eine doppelte Ausbeutung."



Joana Moll: Gesellschaftskritik mit digitalen Mitteln

Jan Slawik, DOK

Auf Molls Webseite zeigt ein Tracker Werte an, die sie mit einem Messgerät erfasst hat. Der Energieverbrauch hänge von den benutzten Geräten und auch Interaktionen ab, Scrollen bedeute etwa zusätzlichen Stromverbrauch, schränkt Moll ein. Für ihr Projekt habe sie ganz gezielt nur die notwendigsten Schritte für eine Bestellung dokumentiert - wer vorher nach einem Produkt suchen müsse oder sich nicht entscheiden könne, komme leicht auf fünf- oder zehnmal so viel Aufwand.

Amazon ist natürlich nicht der einzige Techkonzern, dessen Onlineprozesse Energie verschlingen. Forschern zufolge hat YouTube eine ähnliche CO2-Bilanz [☞ wie eine Stadt in der Größe von Glasgow](#) (rund 600.000 Einwohner) - sie schlugen vor, diese etwa mit einem schlankeren, energieeffizienteren Webdesign zu mindern. Für ihr früheres Projekt [☞ "CO2GLE"](#) hat Moll den CO2-Ausstoß von Google ausgerechnet. "Amazon ist für mich ein Symbol für den Energieverbrauch", sagt sie. Zudem agiere der Konzern unter den großen Techfirmen in Bezug auf Nachhaltigkeit am intransparentesten.

Dass Unternehmen wie Amazon und Google sich als Gegner des Klimawandels und [☞ Pioniere erneuerbarer Technologien](#) inszenieren, hält die Künstlerin für einen "zynischen Diskurs". "Die großen Techkonzerne sind Teil des Problems", findet sie. Zwar investieren die Konzerne in [☞ erneuerbare Energien](#) und wollen klimaneutral operieren. Gleichzeitig arbeitet zum Beispiel Amazon weiter mit Firmen aus der Ölbranche zusammen, [☞ wie Shell, BP und Halliburton](#).

Ihr neues Projekt wird die Künstlerin auf der [☞ Disruption Network Lab-Konferenz](#) "Collective Strategies to expose Injustice" am 30. November in Berlin vorstellen. Die 37-Jährige aus Barcelona betreibt mit ihrer Arbeit Gesellschaftskritik an der digitalen Welt und hat auch in ihren früheren Werken Abgründe wie Überwachung und Datenhandel freigelegt - mithilfe digitaler Mittel wie Livestreams aus Überwachungskameras, Open-Source-Software oder Daten von Datenbrokern.

Datingprofile als Massenware

In ihrem letzten Projekt "[☞ Dating Brokers](#)" hatte Moll entlarvt, wie Unternehmen mit den Daten von Nutzern umgehen, genauer: mit sensiblen Daten von Flirt-Plattformen. Für gerade einmal 136 Euro hatte sie sich eine Million Dating-Profile von der Firma USDate bestellt, ausgewertet und anonymisiert in einer Onlinedatenbank präsentiert.

Die unseriös wirkende Plattform USDate handelt nach eigenen Angaben derzeit mit 29 Millionen "echten" Flirt-Profilen, die man nach Herkunft kategorisieren kann. Namen, Fotos, E-Mailadressen, Angaben zu Bericht, Vorlieben, Geschlecht sowie persönliche Beschreibungen zählen zu den Daten, die geliefert werden.

Die von Moll erworbenen Daten stammten ihren Recherchen zufolge von der populären Dating-Plattform Plenty of Fish, deren Mutterfirma Match Group wiederum Dutzende andere Marken wie Cupid und [Tinder](#) besitzt. "Der Austausch und Kauf von Online-Dating-Profilen ist in der Online-Dating-Branche üblich", so das Fazit von Moll. "Die Methode wird häufig verwendet, um neue Online-Dating-Websites zu füllen, wenn sie launchen. Aber auch etablierte Dating-Websites handeln kontinuierlich mit Profilen - um neue Gesichter in ihre Dienste zu bekommen und damit die Wahrscheinlichkeit des Matchmaking unter ihren Nutzern zu erhöhen und neue zahlende Abonnenten zu gewinnen." Den Nutzern ist nicht bewusst, dass ihre intimen Profile und Angaben so von Firma zu Firma gereicht werden.

"Ich hoffe, dass ich Menschen zum Denken anregen kann, damit sich vielleicht etwas ändert", sagt Moll über das Ziel ihrer digitalen Kunst. "Aber ich weiß auch, dass ein Projekt allein das nicht schaffen kann."

FURTHERFIELD



Activation: Collective Strategies to Expose Injustice

29/01/2020

Lorin Decarli

For its closing community gathering of the year, the Disruption Network Lab organised a conference to extend and connect its 2019 programme 'The Art of Exposing Injustice' – with social and cultural initiatives, fostering direct participation and enhancing engagement around the topics discussed throughout the year. Transparency International Deutschland, Syrian Archive, and Radical Networks are some of the organisations and communities that have taken part on DNL activities and were directly involved in this conference on November the 30th, entitled 'Activation: Collective Strategies to Expose Injustice' on anti-corruption, algorithmic discrimination, systems of power, and injustice – a culmination of the meet-up programme that ran parallel to the three conferences of 2019.

The day opened with the talk 'Untangling Complexity: Working on Anti-Corruption from the International to the Local Level,' a conversation with Max Heywood, global outreach and advocacy coordinator for Transparency International, and Stephan Ohme, lawyer and financial expert from Transparency International Deutschland.



Tatiana Bazzichelli, Nada Bakr, and Lieke Ploeger welcoming participants at the conference *Activation: Collective Strategies to Expose Injustice*

In the conference 'Dark Havens: Confronting Hidden Money & Power' (April 2019) – DNL focused its work on offshore financial systems and global networks of international corruption involving not only secretive tax havens, but also financial institutions, systems of law, governments and corporations. On the occasion, DNL hosted discussions about the Panama Papers and other relevant leaks that exposed hundreds of cases involving tax evasion, through offshore regimes. With the contribution of whistleblowers and people involved in investigations, the panels unearthed how EU institutions turn a blind eye to billions of Euros worth of wealth that disappears, not always out of sight of local tax authorities, and on how – despite, the global outrage caused by investigations and leaks – the practice of billionaires and corporations stashing their cash in tax havens is still very common.

Introducing the talk 'Untangling Complexity,' Disruption Network community director Lieke Ploeger asked the two members of Transparency International and its local chapter Transparency International Deutschland to touch base after a year-long cooperation with the Lab, in which they have been substantiating how, in order to expose and defeat corruption, it is necessary to make complexity transparent and simple. With chapters in more than 100 countries and an international secretariat in Berlin, Transparency International works on anti-corruption at an international and local level through a participated global activity, which is the only effective way to untangle the complexity of the hidden mechanisms of international tax evasion and corruption.

Such crimes are very difficult to detect and, as Heywood explained, transparency is too often interpreted as simple availability of documents and information. It requires instead a higher degree of participation since documents and information must be made comprehensible, singularly and in their connections. In many cases, corruption and illegal financial activities are shielded behind technicalities and solid legal bases that make them hard to be uncovered. Within complicated administrative structures, among millions of documents and terabytes of files, an investigator is asked to find evidence of wrongdoings, corruption, or tax evasion. Most of the work is about the capability to put dots together, managing to combine data and metadata to define a hidden structure of power and corruption. Like in a big puzzle, all pieces are connected. But those pieces are often so many, that just a collective effort can allow scrutiny. That is why a law that allows transparency in Berlin, on estate properties and private funds, for example, might be able to help in a case of corruption somewhere else in the world. Exactly like in the financial systems, also in anti-corruption, nothing is just local and the cooperation of more actors is essential to achieve results.



Lieke Ploeger, Max Heywood, and Stephan Ohme of Transparency International at the talk UNTANGLING COMPLEXITY

The recent case of the Country-by-Country Reporting shows the situation in Europe. It was an initiative proposed in the '[Action Plan for Fair and Efficient Corporate Taxation](#)' by the European Commission in 2015. It aimed at amending the existing legislation to require multinational companies to publicly disclose their income tax in each EU member state they work in. Not many details are supposed to be disclosed and the proposal is limited only to companies with a turnover of at least €750 million, to know how much profit they generate and how much tax they pay in each of the 28 countries. However, many are still reluctant to agree, especially those favouring the profit-shifting within the EU. Some, including Germany, worry that revealing companies' tax and profit information publicly will give a competitive advantage to companies outside Europe that don't have to report such information. Twelve countries voted against the new rules, all member states with low-tax environments helping to shelter the profits of the world's biggest companies. Luxembourg is one of them. According to the International Monetary Fund – through its 600,000 citizens – the country hosts as much foreign direct investment as the USA, raising the suspicion that most of this flow goes to “empty corporate shells” designed to reduce tax liabilities in other EU countries.

Moreover, in every EU country, there are voices from the industrial establishment against this proposal. In Germany, the Foundation of Family Businesses, which despite its name guarantees the interests of big companies, as Ohme remarked, claims that enterprises are already subject to increasingly stronger social control through the continuously growing number of disclosure requirements. It complains about what is considered the negative consequences of public Country-by-Country Reporting for their businesses, stating that member states should deny their consent as it would considerably damage companies' competitiveness, and turn the EU into a nanny state. But, apart from the expectations and the lobbying activities of the industrial élite, European citizens want multinational corporations to pay fair taxes on EU soil where the money is generated. The current fiscal regimes increase disparities, allow profit-shifting and bank secrecy. The result is that most of the fiscal burden push against less mobile tax-payers, retirees, employees, and consumers, whilst corporations and billionaires get away with their misconducts.

Transparency International encourages citizens all over the globe to carry on asking for accountability and improvements in their financial and fiscal systems without giving up. In 1997, the German government made bribes paid to foreign officials by German companies tax-deductible, and until February 1999 German companies were allowed to bribe in order to do business across the border, which was common practice, particularly in Asia and Latin America since at least the early 70s. But things have changed. Ohme is aware of the many daily scandals related to corruption and tax evasion: for this reason he considers the work of Transparency International necessary. However, he invited his audience not to describe it as a radical organisation, but as an independent one that operates on the basis of research and objective investigations.

In the last months of 2019 in Germany, the so-called [Cum-Ex scandal](#) caught the attention of international news outlets as investigators discovered a trading scheme exploiting a tax loophole on dividend payments within the German tax code. Authorities allege bankers helped investors reap billions of euros in illegitimate tax refunds, as Cum-Ex deals involved a trader borrowing a block of shares to bet against them, and then selling them on to another investor. In the end, parties on both sides of the trade could claim a refund of withholding taxes paid on the dividend, even though prosecutors contend that only a single rebate was actually due. The loophole was closed in 2012, but investigators think that in the meantime companies like Freshfields advised many banks and other participants in the financial markets to illegally profit from it.

As both Heywood and Ohme stressed, we need measures that guarantee open access to relevant information, such as the beneficial owners of assets which are held by entities, and arrangements like shell companies and trusts – that is to say, the info about individuals who ultimately control or profit from a company or estate. Experts indicate that registers of beneficial owners help authorities prosecute criminals, recover stolen assets, and deter new ones; they make it harder to hide connections to illicit flows of capital out of a national budget.

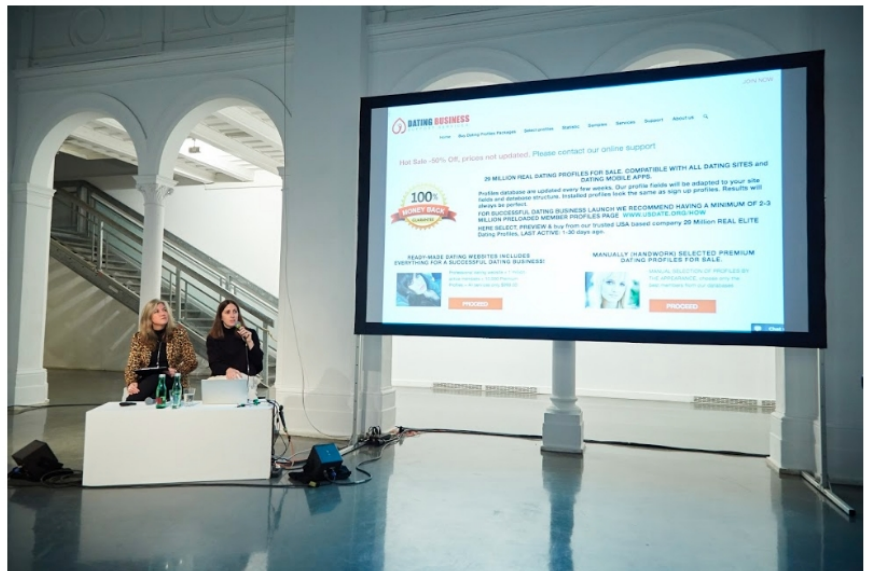
Referring to the case of the last package of measures regarding money laundering and financial transparency, under approval by the German parliament, Ohme showed a shy appreciation for the improvements, as real estate agents, gold merchants, and auction houses will be subject to tighter regulations in the future. Lawmakers complained that the US embassy and Apple tried to quash part of these new rules and that during the parliamentary debate they sought to intervene with the Chancellery to prevent a section of the law from being adopted. The attempt was related to a regulation which forces digital platforms to open their interfaces for payment services and apps, such as the payment platform ApplePay, but it did not land. Apple's behaviour is a sign of the continuous interferences of the interests at stake when these topics are discussed.

At the end of the first talk, DNL hosted a screening of the documentary '[Pink Hair Whistleblower](#)' by Marc Silver. It is an interview with Christopher Wylie, who worked for the British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica, who revealed how it was built as a system that could profile individual US voters in 2014, to target them with personalised political advertisements and influence the results of the elections. At the time, the company was owned by the hedge fund billionaire Robert Mercer and headed by Donald Trump's key advisor, and architect of a far-right network of political influence, Steve Bannon.



Screening of "Pink Hair Whistleblower" documentary. Director – Marc Silver, 25 mins, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXdYSO6nu-M>

The DNL discussed this subject widely within the conference *'Hate News: Manipulators, Trolls & Influencers'* (May 2018), trying to define the ways of pervasive, hyper-individualized, corporate-based, and illegal harvesting of personal data – at times developed in partnership with governments – through smartphones, computers, virtual assistants, social media, and online platforms, which could inform almost every aspect of social and political interactions.



Joana Moll in conversation with Tatiana Bazzichelli during the talk AN AUTOPSY OF ONLINE LOVE, LABOUR, SURVEILLANCE AND ELECTRICITY/ENERGY

With the overall theme *'AI Traps: Automating Discrimination'* (June 2019), DNL sought to define how artificial intelligence and algorithms reinforce prejudices and biases in society. These same issues were raised in the Activation conference, in the talk *'An Autopsy of Online Love, Labour, Surveillance and Electricity/Energy.'* Joana Moll, artist and researcher, in conversation with DNL founder Tatiana Bazzichelli, presented her latest projects *'The Dating Brokers'* and *'The Hidden Life of an Amazon User'*, on the hidden side of IT-interface and data harvesting.

The artist's work moves from the challenges of the so-called networked society to a critique of social and economic practices of exploitation, which focuses on what stands behind the interface of technology and IT services, giving a visual representation of what is hidden. The fact that users do not see what happens behind the online services they use has weakened the ability that individuals and collectives have to define and protect their privacy and self-determination, getting stuck in traps built to get the best out of their conscious or unconscious contribution. Moll explains that, although most people's daily transactions are carried out through electronic devices, we know very little of the activities that come with and beyond the interface we see and interact with. We do not know how the machine is built, and we are mostly not in control of its activities.

Her project *'The Dating Brokers'* focuses on the current practices in the global online dating ecosystem, which are crucial to its business model but mostly opaque to its users. In 2017, Moll purchased 1 million online dating profiles from the website USDate, a US company that buys and sells profiles from all over the world. For €136, she obtained almost 5 million pictures, usernames, email addresses, details about gender, age, nationality, and personal information such as sexual orientation, private interests, profession, physical characteristics, and personality. Analysing few profiles and looking for matches online, the artist was able to define a vast network of companies and dating platforms capitalising on private information without the consent of their users. The project is a warning about the dangers of placing blind faith in big companies and raises alarming ethical and legal questions which urgently need to be addressed, as dating profiles contain intimate information on users and the exploitation and misuse of this data can have dramatic effects on their lives.

With the ongoing project 'The Hidden Life of an Amazon User,' Moll attempts to define the hidden side of interfaces. The artist documented what happens in the background during a simple order on the platform Amazon. Purchasing the book 'The Life, Lessons & Rules for Success' by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos her computer was loaded with so many scripts and requests, that she could trace almost 9,000 pages of lines of code as a result of the order and more than 87 megabytes of data running in the background of the interface. A large part of the scripts are JavaScript files, that can theoretically be employed to collect information, but it is not possible to have any idea of what each of these commands meant.



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The Hidden Life of an Amazon User. A project by Joana Moll.
<https://www.janavirgin.com/AMZ/>

With this project, Moll describes the hidden aspects of a business model built on the monitoring and profiling of customers that encourages them to share more details, spend more time online, and make more purchases. Amazon and many other companies aggressively exploit their users as a core part of their marketing activity. Whilst buying something, users provide clicks and data for free and guarantee free labour, whose energy costs are not on the companies' bills. Customers navigate through the user interface, as content and windows constantly load into the browser to enable interactions and record user's activities. Every single click is tracked and monetized by Amazon, and the company can freely exploit external free resources, making a profit out of them.

The artist warns that these hidden activities of surveillance and profiling are constantly contributing to the release of CO₂. This due to fact that a massive amount of energy is required to load the scripts on the users' machine. Moll followed just the basic steps necessary to get to the end of the online order and buy the book. More clicks could obviously generate much more background activity. A further environmental cost that customers of these platforms cannot decide to stop. This aspect shall be considered for its broader and long term implications too. Scientists predict that by 2025 the information and communications technology sector might use 20 per cent of all the world's electricity, and consequently cause up to 5.5 per cent of global carbon emissions.

Moll concluded by saying we can hope that more and more individuals will decide to avoid certain online services and live in a more sustainable way. But, trends show how a vast majority of people using these platforms and online services, are harmful, because of their hidden mechanisms, affecting people's lives, causing environmental and socio-economic consequences. Moll suggested that these topics should be approached at the community level to find political solutions and countermeasures.



Nada Bakr and Lieke Ploeger introducing the panel for ARCHIVES OF EVIDENCE

The 17th conference of the Disruption Network Lab, '*Citizens of Evidence*' (September 2019), was meant to explore the investigative impact of grassroots communities and citizens engaged to expose injustice, corruption, and power asymmetries. Citizen investigations use publicly available data and sources to autonomously verify facts. More and more often ordinary people and journalists work together to provide a counter-narrative to the deliberate disinformation spread by news outlets of political influence, corporations, and dark money think-tanks. In this Activation conference, in a talk moderated by Nada Bakr, the DNL project and community manager, Hadi Al Khatib, founder and Director of 'The Syrian Archive', and artist and filmmaker Jasmina Metwaly, altogether focused on the role of open archives in the collaborative production of social justice.

The Panel 'Archives of Evidence: Archives as Collective Memory and Source of Evidence' opened with Jasmina Metwaly, member of Mosireen, a media activist collective that came together to document and spread images of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. During and after the revolution, the group produced and published over 250 videos online, focusing on street politics, state violence, and labour rights; reaching millions of viewers on YouTube and other platforms. Mosireen, who in Arabic recalls a pun of the words "Egypt" and "Determination" which could be translated as "we are determined," has been working since its birth on collective strategies to allow participation and channel the energies and pulses of the 2011 protesters into a constructive discourse necessary to keep on fighting. The Mosireen activists organised street screenings, educational workshops, production facilities, and campaigns to raise awareness on the importance of archives in the collaborative production of social justice.

In January 2011, the wind of the Tunisian Revolution reached Egyptians, who gathered in the streets to overthrow the dictatorial system. In the central Tahrir Square in Cairo, for more than three weeks, people had been occupying public spaces in a determined and peaceful protest to get social and political change in the sense of democracy and human rights enhancement.

For 5 years, since 2013, the collective has put together the platform '858: An Archive of Resistance' – an archive containing 858 hours of video material from 2011, where footage is collected, annotated, and cross-indexed to be consulted. It was released on 16th January 2018, seven years after the Egyptian protests began. The material is time-stamped and published without linear narrative, and it is hosted on Pandora, an open-source tool accessible to everybody.

The documentation gives a vivid representation of the events. There are historical moments recorded at the same time from different perspectives by dozens of different cameras; there are videos of people expressing their hopes and dreams whilst occupying the square or demonstrating; there is footage of human rights violations and video sequences of military attacks on demonstrators.

In the last six years, the narrative about the 2011 Egyptian revolution has been polluted by revisionisms, mostly propaganda for the government and other parties for the purposes of appropriation. In the meantime, Mosireen was working on the original videos from the revolution, conscious of the increasing urgency of such a task. Memory is subversive and can become a tool of resistance, as the archive preserves the voices of those who were on the streets animating those historical days.

Thousands of different points of views united compose a collection of visual evidence that can play a role in preserving a memory of events. The archive is studied inside universities and several videos have been used for research on the types of weapons used by the military and the police. But what is important is that people who took part in the revolution are thankful for its existence. The archive appears as one of the available strategies to preserve people's own narratives of the revolution and its memories, making it impermeable to manipulations. In those days and in the following months, Egypt's public spaces were places of political ferment, cultural vitality, and action for citizens and activists. The masses were filled with creativity and rebellion. But that identity is at risk to disappear. That kind of participation and of filming is not possible anymore; public spaces are besieged. The archive cannot be just about preserving and inspiring. The collective is now looking for more videos and is determined to carry on its work of providing a counter-narrative on Egyptian domestic and international affairs, despite tightened surveillance, censorship, and hundreds of websites blocked by the government.



Hadi Al Khatib, Jasmina Metwaly, and Nada Bakr during the panel on ARCHIVES AS COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND SOURCE OF EVIDENCE

There are many initiatives aiming to resist forgetting facts and silencing independent voices. In 2019, the Disruption Network Lab worked on this with Hadi Al Khatib, founder and director of 'The Syrian Archive,' who intervened in this panel within the Activation conference. Since 2011, Al Khatib has been working on collecting, verifying, and investigating citizen-generated data as evidence of human rights violations committed by all sides in the Syrian conflict. The Syrian Archive is an open-source platform that collects, curates, and verifies visual documentation of human rights violations in Syria – preserving data as a digital memory. The archive is a means to establish a verified database of facts and represents a tool to collect evidence and objective information to put an order within the ecosystem of misinformation and the injustices of the Syrian conflict. It also includes a database of metadata information to contextualise videos, audios, pictures, and documents.

Such a project can play a central role in defining responsibilities, violations, and misconducts, and could contribute to eventual post-conflict juridical processes since the archive's structure and methodology is supposed to meet international standards. The Syrian conflict is a bloody reality involving international actors and interests which is far from being over. International reports in 2019 indicate at least 871 attacks on vital civilian facilities with the deaths of 3,364 civilians, where one in four were children.

The platform makes sure that journalists and lawyers are able to use the verified data for their investigations and criminal case building. The work on the videos is based on meticulous attention to details, and comparisons with official sources and publicly available materials such as photos, footage, and press releases disseminated online.

The Syrian activist and archivist explained that a lot of important documents could be found on external platforms, like YouTube, that censor and erase content using AI under pressures to remove "extremist content," purging vital human rights evidence. Social media has been recently criticized for acting too slowly when killers live-stream mass shootings, or when they allow extremist propaganda within their platforms.

DNL already focused on the consequences of automated removal, which in 2017 deleted 10 per cent of the archives documenting violence in Syria, as artificial intelligence detects and removes content – but an automated filter can't tell the difference between ISIS propaganda and a video documenting government atrocities. The Google-owned company has already erased 200,000 videos with documental and historical relevance. In countries at war, the evidence captured on smartphones can provide a path to justice, but AI systems often mark them as inadequate violent content which consequently erases them.

Al Khatib launched a campaign to warn platforms to fix and improve their content moderation systems used to police extremist content, and to consider when they define their measures to fight misinformation and crimes, aspects like the preservation of the common memory on relevant events. Twitter, for example, has just announced a plan to remove accounts which have been inactive for six months or longer. As Al Khatib explains, this could result in a significant loss to the memory of the Syrian conflict and of other war zones, and cause the loss of evidence that could be used in justice and accountability processes. There are users who have died, are detained, or have lost access to their accounts on which they used to share relevant documents and testimonies.

In the last year, the Syrian Archive platform was replicated for [Yemen](#) and [Sudan](#) to support human rights advocates and citizen journalists in their efforts to document human rights violations, developing new tools to increase the quality of political activism, future prosecutions, human rights reporting and research. In addition to this, the Syrian Archive often organises workshops to present its research and analyses, such as the one in October within the [Disruption Network Lab community programme](#).

The DNL often focuses on how new technologies can advance or restrict human rights, sometimes offering both possibilities at once. For example, free open technologies can significantly enhance freedom of expression by opening up communication options; they can assist vulnerable groups by enabling new ways of documenting and communicating human rights abuses. At the same time, hate speech can be more readily disseminated, technologies for surveillance purposes are employed without appropriate safeguards and impinge unreasonably on the privacy of individuals; infrastructures and online platforms can be controlled to chase and discredit minorities and free speakers. The last panel discussion closing the conference was entitled 'Algorithmic Bias: AI Traps and Possible Escapes', moderated by Ruth Catlow, who took the floor to introduce the two speakers and asked them to debate effective ways to define this issue and discuss possible solutions.

Ruth Catlow is co-founder and co-artistic director of [Furtherfield](#), an art gallery in London's Finsbury Park – home for artworks, labs, and debates based on playful collaborative art research experiences, always across distances and differences. Furtherfield diversifies the people involved in shaping emerging technologies through an arts-led approach, always looking at ways to disrupt network power of technology and culture, to engage with the urgent debates of our time and make these debates accessible, open, and participated. One of its latest projects focused on algorithmic food justice, environmental degradation, and species decline. Exploring how new algorithmic technologies could be used to create a fairer and more sustainable food system, Furtherfield worked on solutions in which culture comes before structures, and human organisation and human needs – or the needs of other living beings and living systems – are at the heart of design for technological systems.

As Catlow recalled, in the conference '[AI Traps: Automating Discrimination](#)' (June 2019), the Disruption Network Lab focused on the possible countermeasures to the AI-informed decision-making potential for racial bias and reinforced through AI decision-making tools. It was an inspiring and stimulating event on inclusion, education, and diversity in tech, highlighting how algorithms are not neutral and unbiased. On the contrary, they often reflect, reinforce, and automate the current and historical biases and inequalities of society, such as social, racial, and gender prejudices. The panel within the Activation conference framed these issues in the context of the work by the speakers, Caroline Sindera and Sarah Grant.



Furtherfield co-founder Ruth Catlow in conversation with Sarah Grant and Caroline Sindera during the panel ALGORITHMIC BIAS: AI TRAPS AND POSSIBLE ESCAPES

Sindera is a machine learning design researcher and artist. In her work, she focuses on the intersections of natural language processing, artificial intelligence, abuse, online harassment, and politics in digital and conversational spaces. She presented her last study on the Intersectional Feminist AI, focusing on labour and automated computer operations.

Quoting Hyman (2017), Sindera argued that the world is going through what some are calling a Second Machine Age, in which the re-organisation of people matters as much as, if not more than, the new machines. Employees receiving a regular wage or salary have begun to disappear, replaced by independent contractors and freelancers; remuneration is calculated on the basis of time worked, output, or piecework, and paid to employees for hours worked. Labour and social rights conquered with hard, bloody fights in the last two centuries seem to be irrelevant. More and more tasks are operated through AI, which plays a big role in the revenues of big corporations. But still, machine abilities are possible just with the fundamental contribution of human work.

Sindera begins her analyses considering that human labour has become hidden inside of automation, but is still integral to that. The training of machines is a process in which human hands touch almost every part of the pipeline, making decisions. However, people who train data models are underpaid and unseen inside of this process. As Thomas Thwaites' toaster project, a critical design project in which the artist built a commercial toaster from scratch – melting iron and building circuits and creating a new plastic shell – Sindera analyses the Artificial Intelligence economy under the lens of feminist, intersectionalism, to define how and to which extent it is possible to create an AI that respects in all its steps the principles of non-exploitation, non-bias, and non-discrimination.

Her research considers the 'Mechanical Turks' model, in which machines masquerade as a fully automated robot but are operated by a human. Mechanical Turk is actually a platform run by Amazon, where people execute computer-like tasks for a few cents, synonymous with low-paid digital piecework. A recent research analysed nearly 4 million tasks on Mechanical Turk performed by almost 3,000 workers found that those workers earned a median wage of about \$2 an hour, whilst only 4% of workers on Mechanical Turk earned more than \$7,25 an hour. Since 2005 this platform has flourished. Mechanical Turks are used to train AI systems online. Even though it is mostly systematised factory jobs, this labour falls under the gig economy, so that people employed as Mechanical Turks are considered gig workers, who have no paid breaks, holidays, and guaranteed minimum wage.

Sindera concluded that an ethical, equitable, and feminist environment is not achievable within a process based on the competition among slave labourers that discourages unions, pays a few cents per repetitive task and creates nameless and hidden labour. Such a process shall be thoughtful and critical in order to guarantee the basis for equity; it must be open to feedback and interpretation, created for communities and as a reflection of those communities. To create a feminist AI, it is necessary to define labour, data collection, and data training systems, not just by asking how the algorithm was made, but investigating and questioning them from an ethical standpoint, for all steps of the pipeline.



Ruth Catlow, Sarah Grant, and Caroline Sindors at the *Activation* conference

In her talk Grant, founder of [Radical Networks](#), a community event and art festival for critical investigations and creative experiments around networking technology, described the three main planes online users interact with, where injustices and disenfranchisement can occur.

The first one is the control plane, which refers to internet protocols. It is the plumbing, the infrastructure. The protocol is basically a set of rules which governs how two devices communicate with each other. It is not just a technical aspect, because a protocol is a political action which basically involves exerting control over a group of people. It can also mean making decisions for the benefit of a specific group of people, so the question is our protocols but our protocols political.

The [Internet Engineering Task Force](#) (IETF) is an open standards organisation, which develops and promotes voluntary Internet standards, in particular, the standards that comprise the Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP). It has no formal membership roster and all participants and managers are volunteers, though their activity within the organisation is often funded by their employers or sponsors. The IETF was initially supported by the US government, and since 1993 has been operating as a standards-development function under the international membership-based non-profit organisation Internet Society. The IETF is controlled by the Internet and Engineering Steering Group (IESG), a body that provides final technical review of the Internet standards and manages the day-to-day activity of the IETF, setting the standards and best practices for how to develop protocols. It receives appeals of the decisions of the working groups and makes the decision to progress documents in the standards track. As Grant explained, many of its members are currently employed for major corporations such as Google, Nokia, Cisco, Mozilla. Though they serve as individuals, this issues a conflict of interests and mines independence and autonomy. The founder of Radical Networks is pessimistic about the capability of for-profit companies to be trusted on these aspects.

The second plane is the user plane, where we find the users' experience and the interface. Here two aspects come into play: the UX design (user experience design), and the UI (user interface design). UX is the presumed interaction model which defines the process a person will experience when using a product or a website, while the UI is the actual interface, the buttons, and different fields we see online. UX and UI are supposed to serve the end-user, but it is often not like this. The interface is actually optimized for getting users to act online in ways which are not in their best interest; the internet is full of so-called dark patterns designed to mislead or trick users to do things that they might not want.

These dark patterns are part of the weaponised design dominating the web, which wilfully allows for harm of users and is implemented by designers who are not aware of or concerned about the politics of digital infrastructure, often considering their work to be apolitical and just technical. In this sense, they think they can keep design for designers only, shutting out all the other components that constitute society and this is itself a political choice. Moreover, when we consider the relation between technology and aspects like privacy, self-determination, and freedom of expression we need to think of the international human rights framework, which was built to ensure that – as society changes – the fundamental dignity of individuals remain essential. In time, the framework has demonstrated to be plastically adaptable to changing external events and we are now asked to apply the existing standards to address the technological challenges that confront us. However, it is up to individual developers to decide how to implement protocols and software, for example, considering human rights standards by design, and such choices have a political connotation.

The third level is the access plane which is what controls how users actually get online. Here, Grant used Project loon as an example to describe the importance of owning the infrastructure. Project loon by Google is an activity of the Loon LLC, an Alphabet subsidiary working on providing Internet access to rural and remote areas, bringing connectivity and coverage after natural disasters with internet-beaming balloons. As the panellist explained, it is an altruistic gesture for vulnerable populations, but companies like Google and Facebook respond to the logic of profit and we know that controlling the connectivity of large groups of populations provide power and opportunities to make a profit. Corporations with data and profilisation at the core of their business models have come to dominate the markets; many see with suspicion the desire of big companies to provide Internet to those four billions of people that at the moment are not online.

As Catlow warned, we are running the risk that the Internet becomes equal to Facebook and Google. Whilst we need communities able to develop new skills and build infrastructures that are autonomous, like the wireless mesh networks that are designed so that small devices called 'nodes' – commonly placed on top of buildings or in windows – can send and receive data and a WIFI signal to one another without an Internet connection. The largest and oldest wireless mesh network is the Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network, or [A.W.M.N.](#), in Greece, but we also have other successful examples in Barcelona ([Guifi.net](#)) and Berlin ([Freifunk Berlin](#)). The goal is not just counterbalancing superpowers of telecommunications and corporations, but building consciousness, participation, and tools of resistance too.



Tatiana Bazzichelli and Lieke Ploeger close the day and thank participants at the 18th conference hosted by the Disruption Network Lab

The Activation conference gathered in the Berliner Künstlerhaus Bethanien, the community around the Disruption Network Lab, to share collective approaches and tools for activating social, political, and cultural change. It was a moment to meet collectives and individuals working on alternative ways of intervening in the social dynamics and discover ways to connect networks and activities to disrupt systems of control and injustice. Curated by Lieke Ploeger and Nada Bakr, this conference developed a shared vision grounded firmly in the belief that by embracing participation and supporting the independent work of open platforms as a tool to foster participation, social, economic, cultural, and environmental transparency, citizens around the world have enormous potential to implement justice and political change, to ensure inclusive, more sustainable and equitable societies, and more opportunities for all. To achieve this, it is necessary to strengthen the many existing initiatives within international networks, enlarging the cooperation of collectives and realities engaged on these challenges, to share experiences and good practices.

Information about the 18th Disruption Network Lab Conference, its speakers, and topics are available online:

<https://www.disruptionlab.org/activation>

To follow the Disruption Network Lab, sign up for its [newsletter](#) and get information about conferences, ongoing research, and latest projects. The next event is planned for [March 2020](#).

The Disruption Network Lab is also on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

All images courtesy of Disruption Network Lab

Lorin Decarli is a Berlin-based jurist. He works for an international law firm and he is external assistant at the Humboldt University (Course on Italian Law). He is human rights advocate for the Ngo EMERGENCY in Germany.

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EXBERLINER



WHAT'S ON

FEATURES

IN PRINT

Disruption Network Lab's Joana Moll on online data exploitation

BY JOHN MARK SHORACK DECEMBER 2, 2019

RSS PRINT



Photo by Jan Slavik, DOX. Joana Moll's presented her latest artwork *The Secret Life of an Amazon User* at Disruption Network Lab conference in Berlin.

Berlin and Barcelona-based research artist Joana Moll is a dedicated voice calling out the “exploitative” activities of internet companies. Building on her previous artworks, which dealt with how online dating companies generate profit from selling users’ data, her new project *The Secret Life of an Amazon User* explores the practice in the context of free labour and environmental impact. Fresh off the stage from her Disruption Network Lab talk this weekend, we caught up with Moll to find out more about what online companies really know about their users and whether it’s possible to keep your data secret.

How would you describe your latest project *The Secret Life of an Amazon User*?

The project talks about the double exploitation of the user going on in any online business. The user’s labour is being monetised, activities are being recorded and this information creates profit. It’s a very simple way to put it. But also part of the energy needed to perform this exploitation falls on the user because all these data collection processes happen on the user’s computer. It’s about this double exploitation: free labour plus being forced to assume part of the environmental impact of it, the energy consumption.

It links up very well with your 2018 art called *The Dating Brokers*, looking at the data being sold from online dating companies. Can you share more about this project?

I bought one million profiles from a data broker selling dating profiles. A million profiles with five million pictures and very detailed descriptions of every user for €136. It sounds very cheap when you see the amount, but then you can't really tell if that's cheap or not. We don't have a measure to quantify the volume of data. All the data that's being extracted from us, it's being exploited by third parties and we don't know what they are doing with it or all the benefit that this generates for them.

The main company that was exploiting these profiles was called Match Group, which is the biggest online dating company in the world. At least for 2019. It owns plans like Tinder, OkCupid, Match and Meetic.

What was the reaction you received when you presented your artistic research?

Every time I give this talk people are very frustrated, very scared and very angry at the same time. A lot of people use Tinder and OkCupid, but also, they feel so helpless. It's really impossible to fight these companies on an individual level.

Match Group got angry. This project was commissioned by Tactical Tech and Match Group contacted them; it was very weird because they just asked us to change some things they said they weren't true. But they didn't confirm that they weren't true, they couldn't. The whole thing stayed in a threat, but they couldn't do anything about it because we weren't defaming them.

I know there is an open letter to Match Group, which is grassroots by users. They didn't mention the project, but I have the feeling that it has something to do with it.

Your project *The Dating Brokers* is presented as an ad. How did you come up with the visual representation?

It took me a while to understand how I wanted to present this, but then I just thought this is so grotesque: I could just buy all this data. Let's do a grotesque thing. Because this is what it really is. Let's do something spam-ish that really exemplifies how these companies are actually doing their business, like an auction market. In the end it's the same thing.

Is there a way for users to track what websites are doing with their data and see what's happening?

Not completely. You can sort of see the scripts that are being called from your computer and then you can try to read the code. If you are an experienced developer you might be able to understand a part of it, but not all of it. It's very hard to make sense of it, it's very opaque. There should be a law that they have to explain to everybody what this code is performing, what it's exactly doing.

With the Amazon project I measured the amount of interfaces that Amazon made me go through to buy a book. It was 12 interfaces. I managed to track almost 9000 pages of written code. Good luck reading that and trying to make sense of what it is.

Do you have recommendations for how to block the data from being gathered?

It's very hard to tell. I'm not a privacy expert. The most efficient is using NoScript, but then a lot of websites are not working. Either you get tracked or you can't participate. It's very hard to tell whether you can protect yourself and take part in these companies, the answer is not really.

It's best to stay away from big companies...

Yes, but then again, I tried to quit WhatsApp for so long... I can't. Most of my friends use WhatsApp and it's just habit. Any privacy effort can't be done on an individual level; it has to be a community level. Otherwise you are super isolated, and you're not supposed to solve all these problems by yourself. Then it just replicates its neoliberal tendency that the individual has to do everything, solve everything. It doesn't work like that.

What led you into these different art projects, looking at what's behind the interface?

I've been working on this topic since 2009. I always wanted to understand how things really worked, to unveil complexity, to reveal it. A lot of times we forget to do this, and it's harder and harder because most of the technology and infrastructure that we use are totally hidden from our eyes. But they are a critical part of our lives, making us operate the way we do.

What is the impact of these activities on a global scale?

It's massive. In 2015 the internet information technology accounted for almost five percent of the global electricity use and by 2025 it's expected to take 20 percent. That is what it really means, and that's super critical to address. There's a huge lack of accountability in society, both corporate and political.

Why did you decide to take part in Disruption Network Lab?

Tatiana [Bazzichelli] invited me to Disruption Network Lab in 2016 and it's a great project. For me it's one of the reference projects in terms of art and activism in the world, let alone Europe. I really respect it.

FURTHERFIELD



Children of Prometheus: Interview with artist Joana Moll

27/11/2019

Marc Garrett

Introduction

Marc Garrett, curator of the current incarnation of the Children of Prometheus exhibition at the NeMe gallery, interviews artist Joana Moll about the artwork, [The Virtual Watchers](#), developed in collaboration with french anthropologist Cédric Parizot.

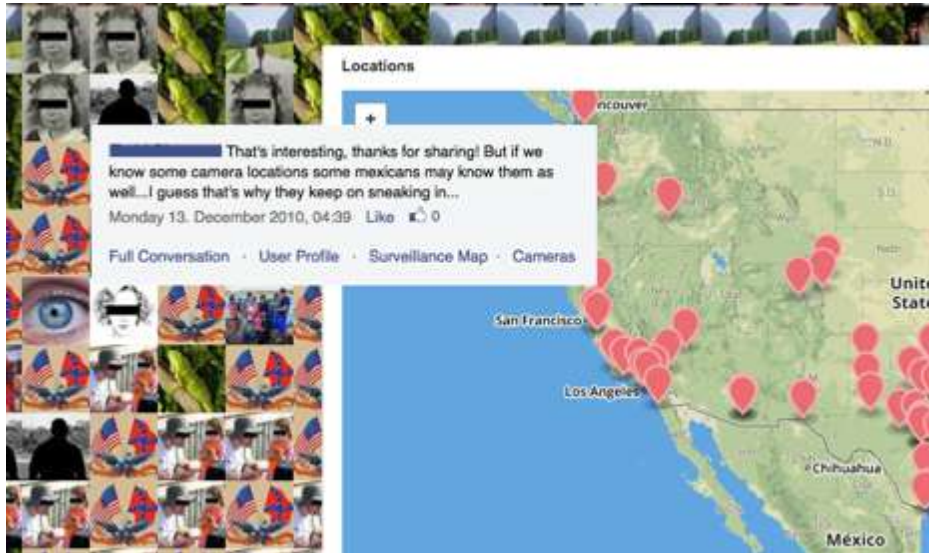
This project began in 2010, and looks critically at an online platform group, consisting of 203,633 volunteers surveilling the US-Mexico border, through a social media platform, such as Facebook. The community of *The Virtual Watchers* existed well before, and briefly, during, President Donald

Trump's signature promise in 2016 to build a wall at the US southern border, to stop more migrants crossing over onto US soil. The project also touches upon the wider online culture of attacks by bots and trolls from clandestine right-wing groups. The interview also explores Joana Moll's interpretation of the [Children of Prometheus](#) exhibition, and briefly discusses other projects such as [CO2GLE](#), which is an attempt to visualize how much carbon dioxide the company is emitting per second.

Interview

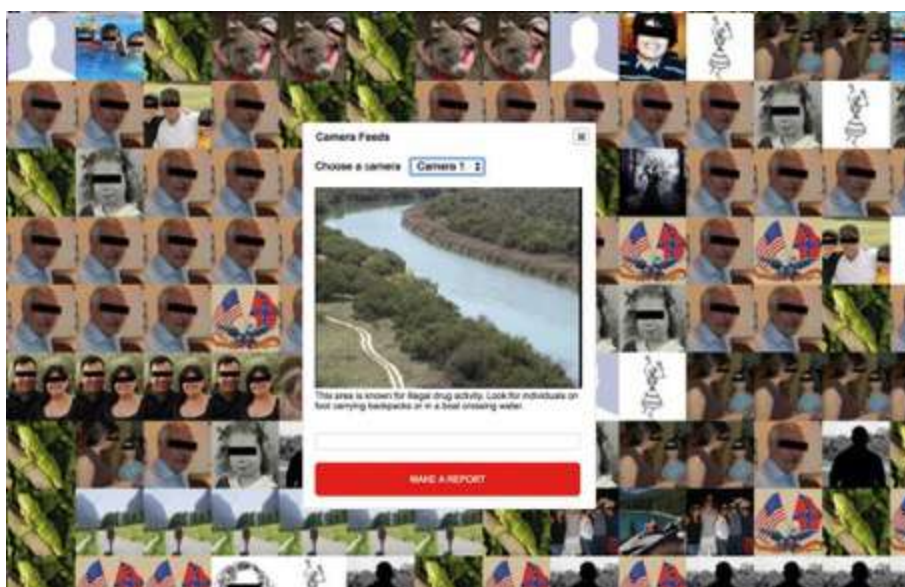
Marc Garrett: I remember when I first came across *The Virtual Watchers*, it left a deeply, unnerving impression on me. It reminded me of how threatening people can be towards others through the Internet. The project illustrates how participatory platforms which have come about, due to the rise of Web 2.0 culture; has not only paved the way for positive forms of mass communications for small groups and individuals to connect with each other, and with families and friends, but, there is also a darker side that people around the world have only in the last few years become aware of. Out of the many scenarios you have witnessed when studying this virtual surveillance group, what has grabbed your attention the most, or feels most significant to you?

Joana Moll: The platform that gathered this group of people was specifically created to crowdsource national security by allowing citizens to monitor and report illegal activity in the us/mexico border. Ultimately the project shows how citizens can easily, and silently, be militarized by means of free labour, by translating a physical territory into social media, in this case, a border. Personally, what surprised me the most was the fact that most of the users we investigated, were either retired, unemployed or sick and couldn't leave home.



Joana Moll & Cedric Parizot. *The Virtual Watchers*, 2016, interactive web page.

The platform was a stage which allowed them to socialize and feel useful. A couple of users even claimed that the platform saved their lives, that their days became meaningful again. This use of the platform also revealed something important: according to the authorities, and this was that it was quite ineffective when it came to stop illegal activity around the border. Actually, some Sheriffs claimed that the amount of reports that they received on a daily basis were useless and difficult to process. However, the platform worked quite well in terms of keeping a large number of users monitoring the border. It had more than 200.000 registered users which spent more than 1 million hours securing the border for free.



Joana Moll & Cedric Parizot. *The Virtual Watchers*, 2016, interactive web page.

Marc Garrett: This project and or artwork, has been around for nine years now. Yet, its subject matter was ahead of its time, and looking at it now it feels even more relevant. For example, across the world, the general public is only now coming to terms with the political and social, aspects and consequences behind the varied forms of virtual surveillance, dominating online interaction.

This is also true in regard to climate collapse, which brings me to your essay [Deep Carbon \(2018\)](#), where you say, the “amount of users and network connections has increased at a whooping pace ever since. In 2015, the Internet registered 966 Exabytes of IP traffic (1.037.234.601.984 GB) and is expected to reach 1579,2 Exabytes by 20182.”

And, then you say, “despite the growing number of Internet users and information flows, the material representation of the Internet and surveillance economy behind it remains blurred in the social imagination.”

What do you think will help to resolve the difficult issue in respect of material representation, in your terms?

Joana Moll: This is quite a difficult question to answer, indeed! I think there has to be a radical change in the way we produce and consume data, but most importantly, in the way our interfaces and interactions are designed. Even though our internet ecosystem is expansive we only interact with it through interfaces, and I really believe interfaces hold the key to start solving the problem. The energy consumption of most of our interactions in the digital realm are very opaque, we have no idea about all the processes that are taking place beyond the interface (i.e. a website, an app) and where all our data is going. I’m about to launch a project called The Hidden Life of an Amazon User which tries to bring to light all the amount of processes that are triggered by doing a simple purchase in Amazon. The amount of information that is involuntarily being loaded in the user’s browser is massive, let alone its energy consumption and environmental impact.

Since 2015, within the Critical Interface Politics group I founded at [HANGAR](#) (Barcelona), we’ve been developing experimental workshops that focus on developing sustainable interfaces. We usually work with a limited energy budget, which means that the interfaces we design can just

use a certain amount of energy. It is really amazing how this seemingly small shift radically changes the way we think and design online interactions. If this would be a standard process when it comes to design our online experiences (which it should), would possibly have tremendous collateral positive consequences for the entire internet ecosystem, specially in terms of preventing to collect massive amounts of user data, which consume vast amount of resources. In this sense sustainable websites would be privacy friendly.

Marc Garrett: In what way do you think your own work fits into the context of the exhibition?

Joana Moll: It's always hard to talk about my own work beyond my own work, but I'll do my best! I feel my work tries to reveal very complex and hard to grasp techno-social arrangements in a very simple way. To allow people to understand the infrastructures and processes that govern their day to day lives without feeling smashed about their complexities it's a central concern in my practice. I think my work fits in the exhibition in many ways, but I believe that this need to urgently discuss critical implications of our technologies with broader communities is one of the most relevant.



Selection of images courtesy of NeMe Arts Centre, Limassol, Cyprus. Taken by Helene Black. The Virtual Watchers, far -top left. Children of Prometheus exhibition Oct 11 – Dec 20th 2019.

Marc Garrett: The postmodernist, feminist and theorist, Donna Haraway has recently re-emphasized the importance of re-evaluating certain contemporary contexts, especially those involving the patriarchy, politics,

and climate change, in the age of the Anthropocene. I consider yourself, and myself, have been exploring our practices in parallel to Haraway's critical ambitions, in respect that, we share similar values, but express them differently.

Thus, we need to re-examine our relationship with the world in the midst of spiraling ecological devastation, and find new ways to reconfigure our approach and connection to the earth and all its inhabitants.

Could you give us an example of your current works that you feel could be materializing Haraway's writings, but as part of your own artistic production and or intention, and what the links and differences are?

Joana Moll: I agree, our work involves many of Haraway's concerns, indeed. As for my practice, I believe politics, patriarchy, climate change and technology are continuously meeting and being questioned, in the sense that I always approach this contexts from different angles, which also talks a lot about my own process of understanding complex contemporary arrangements and how they affect and modify each other. For example, in my latest projects: [The Dating Brokers](#) and [The Hidden Life of an Amazon User](#) (HLAU), I examine how user activity, or in other words free labour, is heavily monetized by third parties. However in HLAU I also examine the energy costs that such exploitation is involuntarily assumed by the user. Graham Harman said it is very important no to assume that everything is connected, but to continuously trace the connections between things, which is something that I try to remember when I do a new project and I believe that Haraway's body of work heavily points in that direction. However, I believe that techno-colonialism is a central issue to tackle while re-evaluating technology, politics, environment and most importantly, the way it affects and informs our ability to think and imagine. Together with my colleague Jara Rocha we've been recently collaborating in a series of projects and workshops that aim to reveal tangible outcomes of techno-colonialism in our daily lives.

Marc Garrett: The *Children of Prometheus* exhibition was mainly inspired by Mary Shelley. What elements in the exhibition's: themes, ideas, and contexts, do you relate to personally?

Joana Moll: I relate to all of them, they are all so relevant and urgent! As for my work, I especially connect with the way invisible processes triggered by human-centered technologies affect our natural habitats. I believe that the exhibition opens highly relevant and urgent discussions about how society has been “Frankensteined” at large. The way our technologies are designed, produced and used are seriously damaging not just our life-giving habitats but also our relationship to them, our ability to imagine habitable ways to inhabit this planet.

Conclusion

When I first began the *Children of Prometheus* exhibition project, it was called [*Monsters of the Machine: Frankenstein in the 21s Century*](#). Both titles fit the same curation function, and that is, to examine critically with other the artists in this touring show, Mary Shelley’s questions, that were asked in 1818, today, looking through her eyes.

I can’t imagine what she would think of Trump and all the other extreme right-wing, racist, groups and politicians, and dodgy corporations, exploiting people’s data, whilst adding to the destruction of the planet. However, in the spirit of Shelley, we have individuals such as Joana Moll who can play that role, with other artists doing what Shelley did so well then, but today. Our world is dying and those in power are part of non-friendly systems designed to kill it further, while the poor and oppressed take the brunt of it all. Moll, and the other Artists the exhibition, are presenting us with serious questions. But, accompanying these necessary and urgent concerns, are also answers at the same time. But there’s not much time.

Joana Moll is part of the touring exhibition, [*Children of Prometheus currently*](#) at the NeMe Arts Centre, Limassol, Cyprus 11 Oct – 20 Dec, 2019. This exhibition was originally produced in partnership with LABoral, in Gijon, and is an extension of the [*Monsters of the Machine: Frankenstein in the 21st Century*](#), 18 Nov 2016 – 21 May 2017. We are currently negotiating other venues, in different countries across the world. Please contact if you’re interested in the exhibition.

Joana Moll will also be leading a workshop, **THE INTERFACE, DECONSTRUCTED**, and participating in a conversation with Tatiana Bazzichelli, founder of Disruption Network Lab as part of [ACTIVATION: Collective Strategies to Expose Injustice](#), Saturday, 30 November 2019.

Artist Bio

Joana Moll is a Barcelona / Berlin based artist and researcher. Her work critically explores the way post-capitalist narratives affect the alphabetization of machines, humans and ecosystems. Her main research topics include Internet materiality, surveillance, social profiling and interfaces. She has lectured, performed and exhibited her work in different museums, art centers, universities, festivals and publications around the world. Furthermore she is the co-founder of the [Critical Interface Politics Research Group](#) at HANGAR [Barcelona] and co-founder of [The Institute for the Advancement of Popular Automatisms](#). She is currently a visiting lecturer at Universität Potsdam and Escola Superior d'Art de Vic [Barcelona].

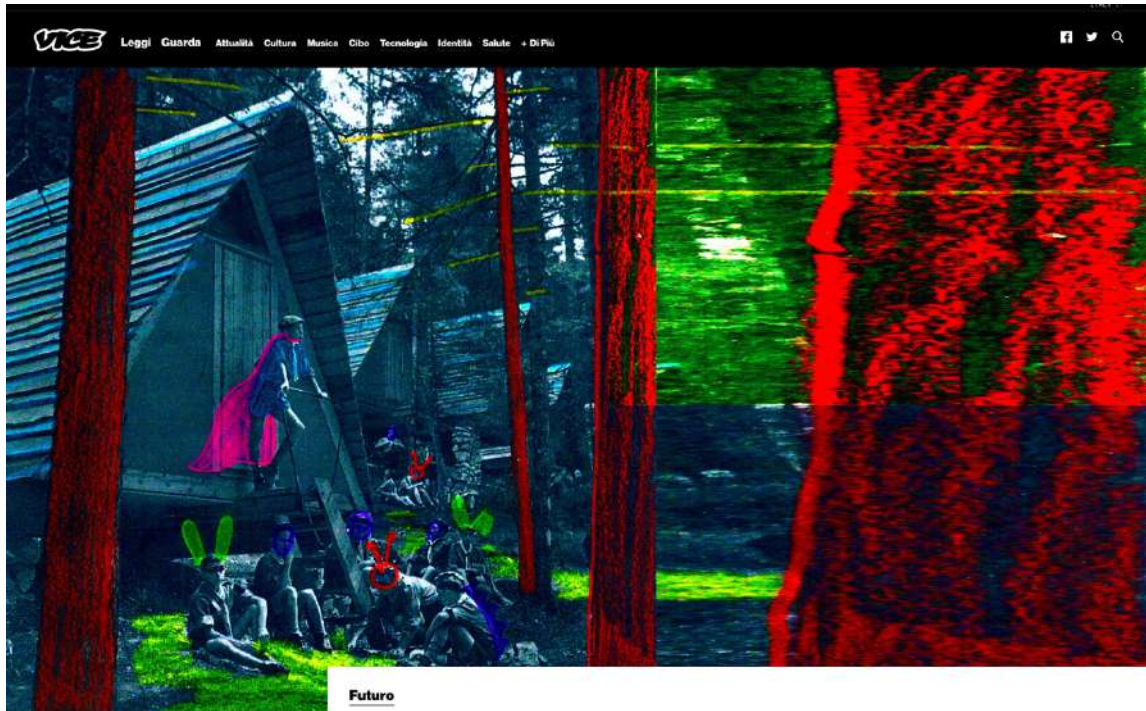
Dissemination:

Other articles mentioning
Disruption Network Lab in 2019:

Vice.it – 28.06.2019, *Sulle Dolomiti, un gruppo di persone sta organizzando un'utopia reale*

The Art of the Working Class – Autumn Edition,
None Collective Simposio, "Utopia Reale" July 4-7, Borgo di Cadore, Italy

critic.de – 05.11.2019, *Symposium, die Lust am Draufhauen*



Futuro

Sulle Dolomiti, un gruppo di persone sta organizzando un'utopia reale

'Simposio' è una tre giorni a Borca di Cadore, in un ex villaggio Eni, con poca corrente elettrica e tante ipotesi sul futuro che ci aspetta.

Di Antonella Di Biase

26 giugno 2019, 10:20am [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Snap](#)

Il **Villaggio Eni di Borca di Cadore** nasce sulle Dolomiti negli anni Cinquanta del Novecento, un periodo storico in cui la parola utopia non suscitava terrore ma stimolava l'ingegno. È un villaggio di 100.000 mq edificati, voluto da Enrico Mattei e progettato da **Edoardo Gellner** per ospitare i dipendenti dell'Eni per le vacanze. Durante il periodo di attività, le oltre 200 villette monofamiliari venivano assegnate tramite sorteggio, e non c'era alcuna distinzione tra operai e dirigenti. Il villaggio di Borca è uno dei rari casi italiani in cui progettualità, società e utopia hanno dato luogo a una complessa e raffinata infrastruttura architettonica.



Con il passare degli anni, però, quella che doveva essere la sede di un'utopia sociale ha sfiorato il degrado—in una bella metafora dei tempi che sono trascorsi e stiamo ancora vivendo. Ma a partire dal 2002 l'intero villaggio viene acquisito da **Minoter** che lo riqualifica insieme allo stesso Gellner. Nel 2014 Minoter incontra **Dolomiti Contemporanee** dando vita a un progetto che prevede, tra le altre cose, residenze artistiche. È in questo contesto di architetture industriali incastrate tra alberi e rocce da 250 milioni di anni che dal 4 al 7 luglio avrà luogo **Simposio**: una tre giorni di talk, workshop e performance artistiche organizzata dal collettivo romano **NONE**.

L'idea di un **simposio** nasce nel 2017 dal bisogno di un progetto sociale e culturale e allo stesso tempo libero da mediazioni e committenze. "Non abbiamo fatto altro che riprendere un format millenario, il Simposio appunto. Siamo partiti coinvolgendo amici e creando affinità per sviluppare un progetto senza scopo di lucro. Abbiamo anche cercato partner e istituzioni che sostenessero l'iniziativa, senza molto successo: la cultura, l'arte e l'intelletto non sono il primo punto dell' *Agenda Italia*," mi ha detto Gregorio De Luca Comandini, portavoce di NONE. "Conoscevamo il lavoro di valorizzazione svolto dal **Progetto Borca**, abbiamo proposto l'idea di una comune simposiana, è piaciuta ed eccoci qua."



Nel corso del soggiorno ci saranno degli speech tenuti da attivisti e ricercatori. Tra gli altri, Tatiana Bazzichelli di **Distruption Lab** e Andrea Natella, ex membro di **Luther Blisset**. Inoltre, terranno dei laboratori **MACAO**, **Kabul Magazine**, **La Scuola Open Source**, **Clusterduck** e Francesco Nucci, Presidente della **Fondazione Volume!**. Ci saranno poi performance di **Marco Donnarumma** e dei **Luminous Bees**, e opere di **fuse***, **dotdotdot**, **Quiet Ensemble**, **Donato Piccolo**, **Kamilia Kard**, NONE collective, **Cristian Rizzuti**. Proiezioni—tra cui quella di **Apocalypse WOW!**, un cortometraggio con protagonista Franco "Bifo" Berardi—e infine i live musicali di Tullia Benedicta, Teiuq, Cosimo Damiano, Marco Ubik Bonini, Arssalendo, Hubble, Mai Mai Mai



"Nel 2019 parole come *assemblea* e *collettivo* rimandano a un mondo vecchio, *kefiah* ed *eskimo*, che suona sfigato. Eppure ci sono persone, gruppi, progetti che provengono da quell'estrazione ma che non corrispondono più allo stereotipo, che si sono calate nell'attivismo e nello sviluppo di modelli artistici, culturali ed economici alternativi," ha continuato De Luca Comandini. "L'utopia reale di Simposio significa lavorare insieme per lo sviluppo di progetti indipendenti strutturati. Oggi siamo talmente immersi nel tecnocapitalismo che abbiamo la sensazione di non poterne più prescindere, ma è necessario uscirne, proporre un'alternativa."

Ogni giorno a Simposio si terrà un'assemblea plenaria di tre ore in cui si farà il punto su speech e laboratori, nonché su una serie di temi generali proposti dai partecipanti **all'interno di un Google Doc**. Le domande—che per ora vanno dalle questioni ambientali passando per l'intelligenza artificiale, il suffragio universale, la genetica e la cooperazione—verranno estratte a sorte e sottoposte a tutti.





“Le partecipazioni sono avvenute abbastanza spontaneamente: la rete di contatti e collaborazioni si è allargata anche a persone e contenuti che non conoscevamo ma che hanno mostrato interesse. L'intenzione principale è stata quella di diversificare i contributi individuando lavori e ricerche di diversa natura, accostando figure di diverse competenze, diversi punti di vista. Noi non siamo dei curatori, non abbiamo intenzione di rappresentare un quadro esaustivo della scena contemporanea, non abbiamo aspirazioni di ricerca scientifica. Deve esserci per forza un obiettivo preciso? Noi non lo crediamo,” ha concluso De Luca Comandini.



Se vi siete incuriositi e volete partecipare a Simposio, i biglietti giornalieri sono prenotabili [qui](#).

N° 8 / BEYOND THE METAPHYSICS OF THE WEST

ARTS OF THE WORKING CLASS

工人階級的藝術 - Artes de la clase obrera - İşçi Sınıfının Sanatları - فنون الطبقة العاملة - אַרְטֵי הַסּוּפֵי הַמְּעוֹלָם - Sztuka klasy robotniczej
 Künste der Arbeiterklasse - Umění dělnické třídy - Искусство рабочего класса - കർമ്മ മേഖല ആർട്ട് വർക്ക് - Arti della classe lavoratrice
 Arti tal-Klassi tax-Xoghol - தொழிலாளர் வர்க்க கலை - Arbetsklassens konst - Τέχνες της εργατικής τάξης - कर्मिक क्लास की कला
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*If you are in a house and every window faces south,
The question is not
'What color bear
are you looking at?'
But, 'Where the hell are you?'*

Also inside! Poster by
JONAS STAAL
Images by Miriam Cahn /
Saddiq Abubakar

The wrong Amazon is burning



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WORLDS OF HOMELESSNESS
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LIEN HEIDENREICH-SELEME

#utopias #NONEcollective #manifesto

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NONE COLLECTIVE

Simposio, "Utopia reale", July 4-7 2019,
Borca di Cadore, Italy.

A Report by ELISABETH OTTO

From July 4th to 7th 2019 NONE collective organized the second edition of Simposio a three day conference at ENI Village, Borca di Cadore (BL), Italy, bringing together artistic practice and practical analysis on the topic of "Utopia Reale".

The Roman artist collective invited visual and performance artists, critics, scholars and thinkers from different disciplines to share ideas and thoughts on new models of society, starting from the village. ENI Village, the conference venue, in itself a post-war utopian project initiated by the Italian Oil company's late CEO Enrico Mattei during the late 1950s and 1960s already set the tone with its vision of a social city planning in the heart of the Italian Alps. Reactivating the village spaces through shared activities Simposio borrowed from the utopian quality of the place and used it as a *dispositif* for developing new utopian realities.

Thereby the different modes of engaging with utopian ideas reflected the nature of the locations sought out in the partly abandoned settlement. Single Cabins served as exhibition spaces for interactive installations, as for example by the collective *dotdotdot*, using artificial intelligence to raise awareness of personal carbon footprint, as movie theatres (for the screening of e.g. "My name is Janez Jansa" by Janez Jansa), or as venues for late night concerts (by Hubble, Teiuq and others). The abandoned dormitory and refectory of the colony were used as locations for artistic interventions (e.g. by *ultravioletto* or *Davide Quayola*) and made up for uncanny exhibition spaces (e.g. *fuse**) that made tangible how the ruins of former utopian ideas make up our present reality. Taken as a metaphor for the ways neoliberal societies are failing more and more of their members, new alternative modes of thinking and living are needed more than ever. And what better way to test those alternative ways of world-making than in an experimental set up of 'the village' where the community of willful utopian realists is witnessing together live performances of poetic force and disturbing beauty (most impressive, *Marco Donnarumma's Corpus Nil* and *Tullia Benedicta* with visuals by *Bianca Peruzzi*) like visceral echoes of the intellectual reflections discussed elsewhere during the conference.

Thereby Simposio always encouraged an active participation instead of passive consumption of ideas: Through workshops, talks, and town hall discussions that made up the programme the organizers aimed to create "a real community by stimulating perception,

critical faculty and deep thought to try to create new models for understanding the contemporary world and to formulate new worlds"(NONE). Unlike academic conferences, Simposio held spaces for unexpected outcomes, associative learning and playful manifestations. At the participants' choice, one could either attend one of the many workshops (e.g. organized by *Clusterduck*, *Kabul Magazine*, *MACAO*, *SOS Scuola Open Source* and many more) or a series of conferences in the auditorium installed in the former *Aula Magna* of ENI village on topics as disparate as *Fiction Design and propaganda* (*Andrea Natella*) or on the impact of current means of production and dissemination of art and the syntactical and semantical responses to technological shifts (*Domenico Quaranta*).

The most attention was drawn to all topics concerned with artificial intelligence and how it will affect our personal lives and collective living in the future. Questions on how the knowledge about AI – today in the hand of the happy few (programmers and co-

"The only thing one can do is to create strong, small minorities of pains-in-the-ass with a project in their minds."

GOFFREDO FOFI

operations) – can be made accessible to everyone. Or better: How can we make it all to the future? *Alessia Zarazani's* talk on the *Montréal Declaration for Responsible Development of Artificial Intelligence*, which is providing a set of ethical guidelines for the development of artificial intelligence showcased how AI needs to be shaped and developed by citizens together with experts, public policymakers and industry stakeholders, civil society organizations, and professionals with the well-being, respect for autonomy, diversity inclusion and other shared values in mind. Transparency was also at the center of *Tatiana Bazzichelli's* talk where she emphasized the need of leaking the 'black box' AI and uncovering the mechanisms behind algorithms, and that not only in order to educate the public, but also to encourage the citizens to take part in shaping future realities. She and her team from *Disruption Network Lab* (Berlin) seek to create a social permaculture (online and offline) in which as many different visions about the future as possible are formulated and included. Also *Clara Ciccioni* emphasized in her talk on *Xenofeminism and Post-Gender Theory* that technologies are not and never have been gender neutral, but are as inclusive as the society that creates them. Also here

imagination is key in envisioning an alternative future with the abolition of gender as only one goal.

In the self-managed workshops everyone was invited to propose contents and activities defining new rules for society. The results of the workshops – e.g. a performed party program of a new utopian party or a manifesto of an utopian society with a basic income, new forms of governance, counter-propaganda et al. – were received by the audience at the same time with amusement and resistance, sparking lively discussions on the opportunities and limits of utopian thinking. "Like humor and satire, utopias throw open the windows of the mind" as *Rutger Bregman*, Europe's utopian sensation, is reminding us, also the workshops at Simposio showcased the unruly side of utopian as well as dystopian thinking and emphasized the beauty and even necessity of conflicting utopian ideas that make up democracy.

At the end of every conference day, there was time to rebound on the talks heard in the morning or the results of the laboratories and to ask general questions that had been generated by the participants beforehand in plenary discussions. In the manner of townhall meetings – contrary to academic conferences or corporate summits –, the discussion was neither moderated nor facilitated by a chair in order to control or censor the outcome. Resisting the reflex for ready-made, quick-fix answers, but focussing on asking the right questions proved to be the biggest challenge, but also brought out the genuine spirit of "Utopia Reale."

1 www.progettoborca.net

2 How can we make it all to the future? A guide to offline community building in art & science, *Spektrum Community Programs*, Berlin, 2018.

3 *Rutger Bregman, Utopia for Realists and how we can get there*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018.

NONE COLLECTIVE is based in Rome. It is an artistic collective founded by *Gregorio De Luca Comandini*, *Maiuro Pace*, and *Saverio Viorio*, a physical and conceptual space that develops transmedial projects that reflect and interpret the contemporary condition of being in the digital society. NONE uses technology, architecture and narrative to engage people in immersive experiences that interpret the eternal dilemmas of humanity, stories that face the uncertainty of unanswered questions, the confusion of degrading authenticity and fiction. NONE explores the boundaries of identity, awareness and perception by producing experiences that investigate the relationship between numbers and nature, artificial and human, memory and imagination, autonomy and thought.

ELISABETH OTTO has been collaborating with AWC before as an associate editor of *The Americas* issue. She is an art historian and independent curator based in Montreal, where she teaches at the department of Art History and Museum Studies at *Université de Montréal*. In her PhD project she is interested in deconstructing modernist national art histories from a trans-national and decolonial perspective. As curator she has been working with international contemporary artists in Montreal.

operations) – can be made accessible to everyone. Or better: How can we make it all to the future? Alesia Zarazani’s talk on the Montréal Declaration for Responsible Development of Artificial Intelligence, which is providing a set of ethical guidelines for the development of artificial intelligence showcased how AI needs to be shaped and developed by citizens together with experts, public policymakers and industry stakeholders, civil society organizations, and professionals with the well-being, respect for autonomy, diversity inclusion and other shared values in mind. Transparency was also at the center of Tatiana Bazzichelli’s talk where she emphasized the need of leaking the ‘black box’ AI and uncovering the mechanisms behind algorithms, and that not only in order to educate the public, but also to encourage the citizens to take part in shaping future realities. She and her team from Disruption Network Lab (Berlin) seek to create a social permaculture (online and offline) in which as many different visions about the future as possible are formulated and included. Also Clara Ciccioni emphasized in her talk on Xenofeminism and Post-Gender Theory that technologies are not and never have been gender neutral, but are as inclusive as the society that creates them. Also here

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Symposium: Die Lust am Draufhauen

Der Hauptpreis für einen Film über rechte YouTuber sorgte beim letzten DOK Leipzig für einen Skandal. Beobachtungen zum Symposium „Wem gehört die Wahrheit?“, das 2019 aus diesem Anlass stattfand.



„Wem gehört die Wahrheit?“ ist, wenn man sie wörtlich nimmt, eine ziemlich alberne Frage. Denn natürlich gehört sie keiner Person, kann sie auch gar nicht, weil es nie die eine Wahrheit gibt. Das weiß auch das DOK Leipzig selbst, das bei seiner diesjährigen Ausgabe ein Symposium unter jener Fragestellung veranstaltet hat. Grund dafür ist Pablo Ben-Yakovs Film *Lord of the*

Toys, der auf dem Festival 2018 als Gewinner des Deutschen Wettbewerbs ausgezeichnet wurde. Der Film handelt von einer Gruppe Dresdener YouTuber, die Ben-Yakov und Kameramann André Krummel in ihrem Alltag begleiten. Draufhalten ist dabei Inszenierungsstrategie. Die antisemitischen, rassistischen und homophoben Äußerungen der Protagonisten bleiben für sich stehen, weshalb *Lord of the Toys* vielfach vorgeworfen wurde,



Bettgeflüster ohne Wärme – Kurzkritiken vom DOK Leipzig 2019
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Das Kino startet zurück – DOK Leipzig 2019
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Dokumentarisches Zeugnis und visuelle Poesie – Kurzkritiken vom DOK Leipzig 2019
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Systemwechsel am Imbissstand – Kurzkritiken vom DOK Leipzig 2019
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dass er sich filmisch nicht dazu verhalte und keine Haltung einnehme – während andere im Verzicht auf jeden Kommentar gerade eine Stärke des Films sahen. In seinem Cargo-Beitrag *Die wollen doch nur spielen* hat Matthias Dell, stellvertretend für die kritische Seite, Ben-Yakovs und Krummels ausführlich auseinandergenommen, auch unter Anbindung an das Q&A nach der damaligen Premiere, das es laut ihm nicht leistete, die Kritik am gezeigten Film in eine produktive Diskussion über Festivalkuration, Inszenierungsmittel und Erwartungshaltungen an den zeitgenössischen Dokumentarfilm umzuwandeln. Und es ist eben die eine Entscheidung, diesen Film auf einem internationalen Filmfestival zu zeigen. Eine andere, ihn in einem Wettbewerb zu platzieren, wo er Preise gewinnen kann.

Nun also ein Symposium. „Vertrauen Sie denen, die nach der Wahrheit suchen, und misstrauen Sie denen, die sie gefunden haben“: Dieses Zitat des französischen Schriftstellers André Gide dient dem Festivalkurator und Symposiumsbeauftragten Ralph Eue als Ausgangspunkt für die mächtige Überschrift, unter der das zweitägige Reflektieren läuft. Doch scheint die Frage nach der Wahrheit dem Symposium im Weg zu stehen; sie stört in den einzelnen Veranstaltungen. „Truth is not the question“, sagt Kurator Federico Rossin einmal; keine der eingeladenen Personen hat so recht Lust, über Wahrheiten und ihre Besitzverhältnisse zu sprechen – zumindest nicht gemäß dem Symposiumstitel, auf dem viele Publikumsfragen aber seltsam beharren. Viel produktiver erscheint da der Untertitel „Der politische Gegner im Visier der Kamera“. Denn hier lässt sich tatsächlich über etwas Greifbareres sprechen: Was sind künstlerische Strategien im Umgang mit Personen, die nur bedingt die Wertvorstellungen der Menschen hinter der Kamera teilen? Warum überhaupt die Beschäftigung mit ihnen? Und was genau hat es auf sich mit diesem Interesse am „Anderen“, das oft für denkwürdige Konstruktionen von „wir“ und „die“ genutzt wird?



„Rollenbilder und Standpunkte“ (Federico Rossin und Barbara Wurm)



Am ersten Symposiumstag machen Federico Rossin und Barbara Wurm eine kleine Sehschule in Sachen Propagandafilm – oder fragen vielmehr, von wem sich die Aufnahmen eigentlich als Propagandafilme begreifen lassen. Auffällig wird, dass sich die Sichtungsbeispiele an öffentlichem, politischem Personal und klaren Zielscheiben abarbeiten: Johnson, Nixon, Adenauer, Strauß. Während *L. B. J.* (Santiago

Álvarez, Kuba 1968) wie *Ici et ailleurs* (Jean-Luc Godard, Frankreich 1976) noch einmal die Macht der Montage in ihrem Kommentar- und Konfrontationspotential unterstreichen, greifen *Millhouse: A White Comedy* (Emile de Antonio, USA 1971) und *Der Kandidat* (Volker Schlöndorff / Alexander Kluge / Stefan Aust / Ernst Alexander von Eschwege, BRD 1980) rhetorisch an. Sie führen vor, wie systematisch demokratische Kampfbegriffe und Argumente übernommen werden, um sie zu schwächen. In *Millhouse: A White Comedy* ist beispielweise Nixon auf einer Rede vor seiner Wahl zum US-Präsidenten zu beobachten. Im Sprechen idealisiert Nixon das Land und die politische Situation, benutzt immer wieder den von Martin Luther King 1963 beschworenen Traum als Metapher für die eigene Politik. Filmemacher de Antonio macht dieses taktische Manöver, wie es sich noch bei Trump bemerken ließe, sichtbar und hörbar, legt Kings Worte von damals über den Sprechenden Nixon. Er aktualisiert dadurch den damaligen Traum und misst ihn an einer Wirklichkeit, die er über drastische Aufnahmen von rassistischer Polizeigewalt der USA der 1960er Jahre dazuschaltet.

„You have to attack the language“, konstatiert Rossin im Gespräch mit Wurm und betont damit, dass jede Form des (politischen) Filmemachens immer auch ein besonderes Nachdenken über Filmsprachen und Zeichenapparate verlangt – weil alle Bilder, die uns umgeben, durch Machtstrukturen hervorgebracht sind. Sie sind nicht einfach da. Wer produziert also einen Diskurs, und wie lässt sich diese Bildproduktion dekonstruieren? Interessant ist die Nähe von Propaganda und Werbung: In *L. B. J.* funktioniert Santiago Álvarez amerikanische Presse- und Werbebilder um, collagiert und rahmt sie mit Musik von Carl Orff bis Nina Simone, um Lyndon B. Johnson als Bild für die USA anzugreifen. Aufgrund der ökonomischen Situation in Kuba musste Álvarez die Fotografien des Feindes benutzen, so Rossin, um sie zu subvertieren. Jene *aesthetic of poverty and rage*, die sich in vielen der Sichtungsbeispiele festmachen lässt, stellt sich in eine spezifische dokumentarische, aufklärerische Tradition, die manchmal Allegorie, manchmal aber auch nur Punch ist. Was kann von diesem Gestus der Wut und Vereinfachung gelernt werden?

Obwohl die Filme stark an konkretes Zeitwissen gebunden sind und eine heutige Rezeption damit lückenhaft sein mag, bleiben sie dennoch über den Modus der Emotionalisierung verständlich, haben sie ein überzeitliches und internationales Potenzial. Wurm und Rossin stellen heraus, dass Propaganda-, Essay-, Pamphletfilme als Kunstwerke institutionalisiert worden seien, aber nicht in ihrer revolutionären Kraft, die sie erst zu solchen gemacht hätte. Über ein heutiges



Filmesehen resümieren beide: „We must think and not just enjoy it“; und zur Frage nach der Wahrheit, die aus dem Publikum gestellt wird: „Truth, it's not done for us by the filmmaker“. Schauen ist aktive (Denk-)Bewegung, in der erst etwas passiert und entsteht mit den Bildern. Ihr revolutionäres Gehalt konstituiert sich in der Wahrnehmung und der Arbeit an geformten Sehgewohnheiten – und bei Wurm und Rossin, so muss hinzugefügt werden, in der Auseinandersetzung mit einem männlichen filmgeschichtlichen Kanon, der nicht weiter befragt wird. Propaganda scheint Männersache oder bedient sich zumindest Modi von Männlichkeit: mit der Kamera bewaffnet, alleine gegen das System. Filmgeschichte lässt sich ja auch aktiv anders schreiben.

„Frontlinien und Streiträume“ (Thomas Heise, Matthias Dell, Pablo Ben-Yakov, André Krummel, Helene Hegemann, Stefanie Diekmann)



Die beiden bisher beschriebenen Veranstaltungen des Symposiums – es gab noch einige weitere – leisteten diskursive Vorarbeit für seinen Höhepunkt, bei dem auch der Teilnahmepeak erreicht wird. Der Kupfersaal ist voll, als Heises *STAU – Jetzt geht's los* von 1992 gezeigt wird. Sein Porträt einer Clique Jugendlicher aus Halle-Neustadt, die in ihrer Verlorenheit in der

Nachwendezeit einen Halt in rechten Ideologien suchen, soll Vergleichsgröße sein, um ein Sprechen über *Lord of the Toys* möglich zu machen. Tatsächlich ergeben sich bei der Sichtung interessante Parallelen, erzählen die zwei Filme in ähnlichen Räumen wie nebenbei Geschichten über das Erwachsenwerden. Doch in Bildgestaltung und Auflösung unterscheiden sich beide Filme sehr. Während *Lord of the Toys* nahezu vollständig auf Interviewsituationen verzichtet, sucht Heise in *STAU* genau diese teils ziemlich konfrontativen Momente, um die jungen Männer aus der klumpigen, sicheren Masse der Gruppe zu isolieren, „Kontrolle zu haben“, wie er selbst einmal in der Diskussion sagt.

Medienwissenschaftlerin Stefanie Diekmann, die das Gespräch moderiert, steigt mit einer ungewöhnlichen Beobachtung ein: Sie möchte über die Sitzgruppen in *STAU* sprechen, die immer wieder in den elterlichen Wohnzimmern zu sehen sind. Heise watscht das ab, die seien halt einfach da gewesen in der DDR, ganz standardisiert. Dabei macht Diekmann damit einen wichtigen Punkt: Es gibt erst mal eine Anordnung, in die sich Filmemachende hineinbegeben können, eine Art Grund-Setting, das Nähe- und Distanzverhältnisse schafft. Wichtig ist das im Vergleich zu *Lord of the Toys*: Da gibt es keinen Tisch mehr, an den es sich gemeinsam setzen ließe, und keinen Familienverbund. Da sind eben nur noch die Menschen mit den Geräten und den 300.000 Followern auf YouTube. Die Smartphone-Kameras sind immer schon an. Ben-Yakov hebt hervor, wie gängig das gegenseitige Filmen als Alltagspraxis der Protagonisten in *Lord of the Toys* gewesen sei. Krummels Kamera fiel da gar nicht weiter auf. Es sei für die Jugendlichen eher die Frage gewesen, was dann dabei im Vergleich am Ende rauskommen solle, was die beschränkte Öffentlichkeit eines Festivals für Dokumentar- und Animationsfilme im Gegensatz zum Channel auf YouTube zu bieten habe.

„Kennen wir die nicht schon ganz gut, ohne dass Sie die Kamera einschalten?“, fragt Diekmann deswegen ironisch. Und nein, natürlich nicht, will ich im Kupfersaal rufen und mitreden: Mir waren die Protagonisten, nicht aber ihre Szene zuvor unbekannt. In ihrer Begründung zur Auszeichnung von *Lord of the Toys* leitete die Festivaljury 2018 daraus ein Qualitätsmerkmal ab, weil der Film „den Anspruch erfüllt, den man an einen guten



Dokumentarfilm haben muss: Er hilft Leuten, zu kapiern, was woanders los ist“. Am „Woanders“ der Jugendlichen, ihrer Lebenswelt und rechter Ideologie offenbart sich im Gespräch über *Lord of the Toys* eine ordentliche Portion Faszination – bei der die Frage ist, ob der Film ihr nicht schlicht erliegt. „Man hatte ja auch wahnsinnig gute Möglichkeiten zu schauen, wie die leben“, sagt Ben-Yakov, als hätte er eigentlich Pantoffeltierchen und nicht Nazis gefilmt. Kameramann Krummel unterstreicht dennoch, dass als Publikum von *Lord of the Toys* die YouTube-Crowd adressiert werden sollte. Dass Protagonist Max „Adlersson“ Herzberg für seine Fans eine Ikone sei, hätten Ben-Yakov und Krummel ernst genommen und dies mit Mitteln der Überspitzung und Überhöhung entlarven wollen. Interviews seien bewusst nicht geführt worden, um keine unnötige Plattform zu bieten. Diese Dekonstruktionsstrategie schien mir, als ich damals die heterogen besetzte Premiere besuchte, allerdings nicht ganz aufzugehen, wenn der häufige „Ich vergas euch alle!“-Ausruf der pubertären Protagonisten ein paar Sitze vor mir mit Lachen und Klatschen quittiert wurde oder nach der Aufführung eifrig Fotos mit Herzberg und Co. am Saalausgang gemacht und Autogramme gegeben wurden.

Immer wieder betonen die beiden Filmemachenden, was für ein neuartiges Phänomen das alles sei, und auch Helene Hegemann als Repräsentantin der letztjährigen Jury steigt in diesem Duktus ein, was schließlich in der Aussage gipfelt, dass es damals in den 1990ern, als *STAU* rauskam, noch nicht so krass gewesen sei wie heute mit den Rechten. Heise und Dell argumentieren schnell und faktenbasiert gegen diese Geschichtslosigkeit, die beispielhaft für einen aktuellen deutschen Diskurs ist. Dell verweist darauf, wie viel mediale Aufmerksamkeit die AfD bekommt, eben weil niemand so recht wisse, wie sich mit dem Interesse an dieser Partei umgehen ließe. Und das scheint eben auch das Problem von *Lord of the Toys* und seiner Auszeichnung zu sein, wo mit der Faszination nicht gehaushaltet, diese selbst nicht befragt wird.



War das jetzt eine thematische oder eine filmästhetische Entscheidung? Mehrmals konfrontiert Dell Hegemann mit Textpassagen aus dem damaligen Urteil der Jury, um die Auszeichnung von *Lord of the Toys* im Vergleich zu anderen Wettbewerbsbeiträgen nachvollziehen zu können. Das, was an Ben-Yakovs Film „einfach gut gemacht“ sei, kann sie trotz Nachfragen nicht ausführen. Weil konkrete Antworten oder Beobachtungen, über die sich ja diskutieren ließe,

ausbleiben, benennt Dell manche Aussagen als „Behauptung“ – ein Schlagwort, das in den interessantesten Teil des Gesprächs führt, nämlich in einen kurzen Dialog über Filmkritik per se. Ben-Yakov fragt, ob Behauptungen nicht ein prinzipielles Problem von Filmkritik seien, das sich, so fügt er spitz hinzu, doch auch in Dells Texten festmachen ließe. In der Diskussion allerdings bemühte sich Dell, seine Position fundiert zu begründen und ein fruchtbares Gespräch über Sichtungseindrücke zu führen. Dennoch sagt dann Kameramann Krummel irgendwann zu Dell den formschönen Satz: „Sie können uns doch nicht sagen, wie wir unsere Filme zu machen haben!“ Und damit bekommt die überzeitliche Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Kunstschaffenden, ihren Werken und dem gemeinsamen Sprechen darüber einen Touch von „Das wird man ja wohl noch sagen dürfen“. Beziehungsweise: „Das wird man ja wohl noch drehen dürfen.“

Worüber wird hier nochmal gesprochen? Ach ja, Wahrheit, erinnert das Publikum. „Wahrheit, das ist dann das, was ich da rausbekommen hab“, antwortet Heise pragmatisch, „und manche Dinge halten, und manche eben nicht.“ Schöner wie schwammiger zugleich ließe sich das, was nach dem Symposium an Erkenntnisgewinn bleibt, nicht beschreiben. Es ist gewissermaßen ein Problem des Streitgesprächs, dass Heise so sympathisch ist. Sein Understatement zu *Stau* („Wir haben halt die gefilmt, die da waren“) und ebenso sein Film, der schnell als Positivbeispiel gelesen, angenommen und nicht weiter diskutiert wird, stehen irgendwann einer eigentlichen Diskussion (worüber nochmal?) im Weg. Heise zeigt ein ehrliches Interesse daran, seinen Protagonisten begegnen zu wollen, spricht davon, dass er sich selbst ein Stück weit schutzlos gemacht habe, als er mit den Jugendlichen gedreht habe. Zu Beginn der „Zusammenarbeit“, wie Heise betont, habe er ihnen einen Film von sich gezeigt, damit klar sei, wo er politisch stehe. „Die Sprüche könnt ihr alle sein lassen. Schneide ich alles raus. Das interessiert mich nicht. Mich interessiert, wer ihr seid“, diese Ansage habe er den Protagonisten in *Stau* gemacht. Mit Rechten reden, so geht das bei Heise. Väterlich sagt er schließlich zu Ben-Yakov und Krummel mit Blick auf die Protagonisten in *Lord of the Toys*: „Man hat das Gefühl, die Jungs führen euch mehr, als dass ihr sie führt.“ Und in der Prägnanz der Sätze, die Heise in dieser Diskussion spricht, ist das eine ganz schöne Wahrheit am Ende. Vielleicht.