



SMART PRISONS

Tracking, Monitoring & Control

disruptionlab.org/smart-prisons

Friday March 24, 2023

16:30 · Doors open

17:00 – 17:15 · OPENING &
INTRODUCTION

Tatiana Bazzichelli (Artistic Director, Disruption Network Lab, IT/DE).

17:15 – 18:45 · KENOTE

Investigating the Vernon C. Bain Center: Constellations of Offshore Detention

Sean Vegezzi (Artist and Researcher, US).
Respondent: **Adnan Softić** (Artist, BA/DE).

The Vernon C. Bain Center (VCBC) is an 800-bed, 191-meter floating detention facility moored in the East River within the Hunts Point neighborhood of the South Bronx. It functions as an auxiliary of the Rikers Island jail complex and is the primary facility for the criminal court intake in the Bronx. Worldwide, VCBC is the only floating structure ever purpose-built as a detention site. It has been estimated that by its planned closure in 2027, "it will have held upwards of 500,000 prisoners, making it one of the busiest penal institutions in history." (Jarvis, Robert. "Prison Ships." *British Journal of American Legal Studies* Volume 10, issue 2, Fall 2021: 333).

By centering original research on Avondale Shipyards (the now-defunct Louisiana-based shipbuilder contracted to build the facility) and its network of former employees and contractors, Vegezzi located documentation of the facility, as well as financial records and correspondences that have never been assembled nor made public. These materials give form to the facility's undefined nature and create unprecedented accountability for its existence, which has historically been deliberately obscured. This is true of VCBC's geographical location, as well as in the many elisions, distortions, and linguistic errors

that have emerged from its literal wake throughout various waterways – spaces which at once function in service of, and in opposition to, empires, their colonial projects, and conceptions of security and law (Astrida, Neimanis. *Water as a Planetary Archive of Feeling: Queer Ecologies and Reparative Readings for the Anthropocene*, 2016).

Vegezzi's presentation will showcase a corrected history of VCBC through a curated selection of archival materials and a commissioned video work featuring the only known surviving video documentation of the vessel's christening ceremony in 1991. Vegezzi will then engage in dialogue with artist Adnan Softić, who lived in a floating "accommodation barge" – the Bibby Challenge, a cross between a cruise ship and container ship – set up by German authorities on the river Elbe in Hamburg to accommodate refugees fleeing the Bosnian War. Both artists will reveal a direct link between the facilities they have studied and examine the logistics behind rendering humans stateless in exterritorial spaces and maritime geographies.

Vegezzi and Softić's research-based works are influenced by a broader notion of technology, which is not merely attached to technical devices and/or AI. They consider these facilities as a specific technological application of systemic knowledge, and as a contemporary technique of border demarcation, surveillance, and control of society.

Vegezzi originally intended to present an investigation on the security technologies utilized within the facility and reveal how detainees are actively monitored throughout the space. However, the New York City Department of Correction has stalled Vegezzi's legal inquiries into these surveillance practices. At the Disruption Network Lab, Vegezzi has pursued alternative investigative pathways to provide the public with more information on VCBC's global histories and stakeholders. He plans to investigate the security technologies further as soon as, and if their inquiries are adequately answered.

19:10 – 19:30 · VIDEO ESSAY

Traces

Fiamma Montezemolo, *Critical Times*, 2018

In her experimental twenty-minute video-essay, the artist and anthropologist Fiamma Montezemolo combines fieldwork-based research and art to create a meditation on border life between the United States and Mexico. Based

on years of ethnographic work in Tijuana and an ascetic shooting schedule of twenty-four hours, *Traces* records Montezemolo's experiences in the region in a textured living portrait, a sort of biography, of the wall that separates Tijuana and San Diego. Images of a rusty wall, unruly topography, decaying surveillance structures, furtive moments of undocumented migrant crossings, and dystopian landscapes are interwoven with a mournful voice-over enunciated from a different time and place. The fate of the wall is sealed: its remains are to be collected like forensic evidence by a visitor, perhaps another anthropologist and artist, perhaps another undocumented migrant, from the future.

19:30 – 21:30 · PANEL

Are Algorithms and Borders the New Jailers?

Srishti Jaswal (Journalist, IN), **Sanjana Varghese** (Investigator at Airwars, Journalist, UK), **Petra Molnar** (Associate Director, Refugee Law Lab / Co-creator, Migration and Technology Monitor, CA/US), **Fiamma Montezemolo** (Artist and Anthropologist, IT/US). Moderated by **Sonja Peteranderl** (Journalist, DE).

This panel focuses on systems of tracking and monitoring towards marginalised communities, connecting four different points of analysis. From one side, it will analyse how minorities and migrants are monitored via automated technologies in prisons and in border detention centres; from the other side, it reflects on the conceptual meaning of borders and prisons, bringing to light stories of technological surveillance and oppression, as well as imagining how the experience of dividing barriers could be a starting point for new forms of resistance.

Srishti Jaswal, award-winning journalist based in India, talks about her own experience of being trapped in what she calls a virtual prison after being trolled to an extent by Hindu Far-Right that she had to abandon her identity to survive. Eventually as she started investigating the Hindu Far right- trolls and troll farms in India, she was forced to live in hiding for nearly three months apprehending arrest from the Indian police. Her investigation throws light on how trolls are recruited and trained in India and unleashed on journalists, activists, lawyers from marginalized communities to force them into a virtual prison. Now her investigation is the subject of her book: *Post at Your Own Risk*, commissioned by Pan

Macmillan (forthcoming 2024). The book goes beyond her own experience and studies how political trolling in India has now become an indispensable tool.

Sanjana Varghese, investigator at Airwars, addresses the extension of the borders and prison systems through technology and new forms of monitoring and surveillance; focusing closely on the relationship between carcerality, temporality and data infrastructures that are used by the UK government to monitor populations it deems suspect; notably migrants and people of color. She also connects these ongoing shifts to increasing privatization and automation within state services.

Petra Molnar focuses on carceral technologies of immigration detention. Practices of border violence increasingly rely on high-risk technological experiments, including carceral technologies used in immigration detention. Voice—printing, phone surveillance, and electronic ankle shackles are just some of the more recent tools that states use to detain people on the move. Certain places like refugee camps and detention centres serve as testing grounds for new technologies, because regulation and oversight are limited and an 'anything goes' frontier attitude supports a growing and lucrative multi-billion euro border industrial complex. Based on comparative work in Europe, East Africa, US-Mexico, and Palestine, this talk foregrounds the lived experiences of people on the move as they interact with the sharpest edges of experimental border technologies and blends ethnographic methodology with international human rights law analysis.

Fiamma Montezemolo introduces her experience on the border in relation to the video she made on the life of the wall that divides and regulates the interaction between the United States and Mexico. The video traces 24 hours of a typical day of border life determined by the separation between two nations built around the plates used by the USA as aircraft carriers in the first Gulf War and subsequently transported to the Americas to be used as a dividing barrier.

Saturday March 25

16:00 · Doors open

16:30 – 18:30 · PANEL

Revisiting the Genoa G8 2001: Another World is Possible, and it Needs Another Kind of Computing

Carlo A. Bachschmidt (Film Director, IT), **MF** (Social Worker, IT/DE), **Dan McQuillan** (Lecturer in Creative and Social Computing, UK). Moderated by **Tatiana Bazzichelli** (Artistic Director, Disruption Network Lab, IT/DE).

What links the brutal raid on the Diaz school in Genoa in 2001 to the abstractions of AI? What could possibly connect the sci-fi antics of ChatGPT and generative AI to the darkness of fascist police, boots and truncheons? How can a metadata forensic investigation using "old-school" technologies such as videotapes, land telephones, and cameras, be developed to support activists during trials? The 1990s and early 2000s were a time of great experimentation, joy and multiple struggles, involving a wide range of actors. A multiform, international movement took shape and connected through the streets of Seattle, Prague, Goteborg, and Genoa to launch an attack to capitalism and its representants. This panel brings together three direct experiences of the Genoa G8 summit in 2001, when the summit of leaders of the most powerful countries in the world became a strategic trap in which activists were repressed and tortured, but also a starting point to rethink oppositional strategies, media tactics, and resistance.

Carlo A. Bachschmidt, a technical consultant in criminal trials and a documentarist, presents his militant and professional experience that began with his participation in the Genoa Social Forum (GSF), the coordination of organizations that contested the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa, then continued with the Genoa Legal Forum (GLF), the coordination of lawyers involved in the defense of protesters. The Legal Secretariat, an informal group of militants, all appointed as technical consultants, was established to assist lawyers in trials. The main activity was the archiving of audiovisual documents (80,000 photos - 1350 hours of video - 18,000 radio communications from the Carabinieri and Police) and paper documents (260 folders of court documents - 6275 newspaper articles). In addition to the archival work, the Legal Secretariat produced

several briefs and technical consulting on the reconstruction of the facts related to the torture of protesters at Diaz and Bolzaneto, the killing of Carlo Giuliani, and other incidents during the street demonstrations. The peculiarity of the photographic video consultations lies mainly in reconstructing the temporal extent of different footage through metadata analysis, and synchronizing them so that they can be viewed simultaneously in a single multi-quadrant video montage (some of the technical consulting produced at trial can be viewed [here](#)).

MF, an Italian social worker now based in Berlin, is one of the injured parties at the infamous Diaz School raid by the Italian police. In his talk, he traces his activist experience before, during and after the G8 in Genoa. The protests of Seattle, Prague, Goteborg, and Genoa witnessed a variety of joyful local experiences which networked with each other and defied national borders. But they also culminated in the building and unleashing of a wide plethora of mechanisms of repression and securitarian strategies that outlined the direction taken in the world after September 11. Quoting MF, he "enjoyed his personal 15 minutes of Warholian glory when hitting the news and the cameras while being dragged out the Diaz School and brought badly injured to the hospital. That raid was the tip of the securitarian architecture built to discourage a further widening and radicalisation of that movement. But, no matter how intrusive and brutal repression and its agents might get, people will always find their own ways to keep the fighting going". MF will share his own experience, as somebody who chose to further indulge in seeking that sense of solidarity and mutual aid deepened in the streets of Genoa, that no repression has been able to shake.

Dan McQuillan these days is a university lecturer in Computing, but he was there that night in the Diaz. He was badly beaten, then later dragged to Bolzaneto camp to be tortured. As an academic who studies [the social impacts of AI](#), he sees the rise of kinds of computation that amplify the preconditions for social division and ethnocentric resentment. In this talk he highlights the way real world operations of deep learning will not only reproduce the kinds of boundaries, borders and exclusions that global neoliberalism has always depended on, but will intensify them in dangerous ways. While AI is busy making smart prisons possible, effective resistance to these algorithmic states of exception requires the same solidarity and mutual aid that animated the alter-global movements. Although he experienced horror in Genoa, his deeper memories are of mutual care and of the indomitable spirit of resistance on the streets.

19:00 – 20:15 · PANEL

Targeted by Surveillance: Julian Assange, WikiLeaks & Networked Repression

Stella Assange (Julian Assange's wife, Lawyer, UK), **Kevin Gosztola** (Journalist, Dissenter Newsletter Editor, US). Introduced and moderated by **Stefania Maurizi** (Investigative journalist, IT).

Speaking the Truth is Not a Crime –
Edward Snowden, 2013.

As an introduction to the film *Ithaka*, this panel describes the pervasive surveillance, monitoring and personal control that has oppressed Julian Assange and WikiLeaks for more than ten years, and discusses the conditions around Assange's incarceration at the Belmarsh high-security prison in the United Kingdom, where he has been imprisoned for four years, and faces indefinite detention, while the United States seeks his extradition to face a 175-year prison sentence. He is accused of receiving and publishing documents from Chelsea Manning which documented war crimes, extrajudicial killings and civilian casualties during the US occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The panel starts with a talk by **Stella Assange**, a human rights lawyer born in South Africa and one of the protagonists of the film *Ithaka*. In March 2022, she married Julian Assange with whom she has two children, born in 2017 and 2019. She joined Assange's legal team in 2011. During the latter stages of Assange's political asylum in the Ecuadorean embassy, Julian Assange, Stella, their infant child and WikiLeaks lawyers were targeted by illegal surveillance. The embassy has been described as 'the most surveilled embassy in the world' and a 'type of prison'. Since his arrest in April 2019, Julian Assange has been kept under administrative detention in the UK's harshest, most surveilled prison, Belmarsh prison, also known as Britain's Guantanamo Bay. All this while not having been convicted of any crime.

In his talk, **Kevin Gosztola**, journalist and Dissenter Newsletter editor, accounts for the role of U.S. national security agencies in targeting Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. He describes what is known about the CIA and the FBI's roles in the prosecution. Through several examples, he shows the extensive lengths that those in the shadow government have gone to instil paranoia and fear among those in Assange's inner circle, who represent him publicly and legally, and those who campaign for his freedom.

The panel is opened and moderated by investigative journalist **Stefania Maurizi**. In light of her work on the WikiLeaks secret files since 2009, she reconstructs how Julian Assange and the WikiLeaks journalists unleashed a revolution not only in journalism, but also in the people's right to know. Based on her 8-year-long trench warfare to unearth the truth on the Julian Assange and WikiLeaks case through FOIA litigation in UK, US, Australia and Sweden, she provides and dissects forensic evidence of the persecution of Assange and the WikiLeaks journalists.

20:15 – 22:00 · SCREENING

Ithaka

Documentary, 2021 (AU/UK) · 1h 46m

Director: Ben Lawrence, Producers: Gabriel Barber Shipton, Adrian Devant, Music composed by: Brian Eno, Cinematography: Niels Ladefoged, Editor: Karen Johnson. With: John Shipton, Stella Assange, Vivienne Westwood, Ai Weiwei, John Pilger.

A moving and intimate portrayal of one father's fight to save his son, *Ithaka* exposes the brutal realities of the campaign to free Julian Assange. The world's most famous political prisoner, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, has become an emblem of an international arm wrestle over freedom of journalism, government corruption and unpunished war crimes.

Now with Julian facing a 175-year sentence if extradited to the US, his family members are confronting the prospect of losing Julian forever to the abyss of the US justice system. This David-and-Goliath struggle is personal – and, with Julian's health declining in a British maximum-security prison, the clock is ticking. It's up to Julian's father, John Shipton, and fiancé Stella Moris, to join forces to advocate for Julian on this international odyssey. As they rally a world-wide network of supporters and politicians, they cautiously step into the media's glare – and are forced to confront the events that made Julian a global flashpoint.

Sunday March 26

11:30 – 13:30 · WORKSHOP

ISIS Prison Break: Deploying Open Source and Visual Methods for Investigations

With: **Imogen Piper** (Motion Graphic Reporter, formerly Airwars, now Washington Post, UK) and **Sanjana Varghese** (Investigator at Airwars, Journalist, UK),

In January 2022, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria launched one of their most daring prison breaks in years – carrying out a raid on the notorious Ghweiran detention facility in Hasakah, north-east Syria. Using open-source investigative methods, visual storytelling and old-fashioned reporting methodologies, the Airwars Investigations Unit worked with VICE News and Showtime to produce a documentary detailing how this raid happened – and how we were able to identify the failures that led up to it.

Imogen Piper and **Sanjana Varghese** will show you how they carried out this investigation, what their initial challenges were, and how to effectively use technology, social media and visual methodologies to understand a rapidly evolving story. They will also demonstrate how they used shoe-leather reporting and traditional reporting methods to bolster their investigation – and change it from an account of an event to a rigorous interrogation of the role of the US in Syria and the fragile balance of power in the region.

As part of their workshop, they will offer a hands-on practical exercise (please bring a computer / something to work with, as well as investigations you may be working on) – to walk people through the practical elements of working with open source and visual material, as well as how these methodologies can be used to call for justice, accountability and transparency.

14:30 – 17:30 · WORKSHOP

G8 Genoa 2001: A Grassroots Media Forensics Toolbox

Carlo A. Bachschmidt (Film Director, IT) and **Manolo Luppichini** (Filmmaker & Author, IT).

In 2001 there were no social media or smartphones, yet during the demonstrations against the G8 in Genoa, the presence of hundreds of small cameras contributed to create a grassroots narrative of the events that was very different from the one peddled by institutions and mainstream media.

The meticulous operation of collecting, attributing, archiving and synchronizing the video and photographic materials shaped one of the most effective experiences of technical support for the legal team engaged in the posthumous trials of that event, now considered to be of historical relevance not only in Italy.

Film director Carlo A. Bachschmidt was a technical consultant in the G8 trials and the coordinator of the Genoa Legal Forum, an informal group of lawyers involved in the defense of the protesters. The images shot by filmmaker and media activist Manolo Luppichini helped tell the story of the events from an 'independent' perspective.

The workshop "G8 Genoa 2001: A Grassroots Media Forensics Toolbox" will present the analyzing method of the photographic/video material which allowed to reconstruct the events during the trials. Its goal is to develop new tools capable of protecting the freedom to demonstrate increasingly endangered by the security apparatuses of governments and transnational institutions.