

SIGNALS – an Exhibition of the Snowden Files in Art, Media and Archives

curated by Magdalena Taube and Krystian Woznicki

12/09-01/11/2017 | DIAMONDPAPER Studio | Köpenicker Straße 96 | Berlin

SIGNALS is the first project to critically engage with artists responding to the NSA-files leaked by whistleblower Edward Snowden. Considering the most relevant contexts in which the files have 'surfaced' (including media and archives), it reflects on how artists are deploying the files as raw material.

Artists include **Zeljko Blace, Andrew Clement, Colnate Group, Naomi Colvin, Simon Denny, Corinna Haas, Christoph Hochhäusler, Evan Light, Geert Lovink, M.C. McGrath, Henrik Moltke, Deborah Natsios, Julian Oliver, Trevor Paglen, Laura Poitras, Norman Posselt, SAZAE bot, Stefan Tiron, University of the Phoenix, Andi Weiland, Maria Xynou and John Young.**

Objectives

The SIGNALS exhibition looks at the various civil society actors who have been appropriating the historic leak and orders their responses according to contexts in which the Snowden documents have been published: media, art and archives. The different approaches share the common goal of rendering the documents accessible – to both present and future audiences. Reaching out to the general public, they have also tasked themselves with reflecting on the complex political, social and technological realities that the Snowden documents have helped to uncover.

The title of the project takes its cue from the special language used by intelligence agencies: they refer to any communication that takes place within society as a 'signal', and they collect and analyze these 'signals' on a massive scale. The exhibition translates this special language into the language of culture, where the world is coded and decoded in the form of 'signals' shaped by political and economic contexts.

Background

The Snowden disclosures have triggered debates on democracy, civil rights, the internet and intelligence agencies all around the world. These debates have led to a number of political changes, including negative ones: e.g., consolidating the delusion of cyber-security. Meanwhile, the documents that triggered the debates remain arcane for the general public, as well as for many experts. And it is not ensured that the documents will be preserved for posterity or for those writing our history.

The SIGNALS project takes this problem as its starting point and situates the historic leak in the context of civic appropriation. Foregrounded are artists who test the files as material and, by creating works, transform them into commons.

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Idea of the exhibition

The SIGNALS exhibition is partitioned into two sections: **frontend** and **backend**. These terms designate on the one hand computerized user interfaces, on the other data bases which reside behind the interfaces. The latter, the backend, structures the possibilities of the frontend, e.g. by monitoring all interactions and by using that data to optimize and predict future uses. All of this remains inaccessible and opaque to users. The exhibition turns the tables on these conditions and complicates them.

Frontend

The frontend of the SIGNALS exhibition presents a representative spectrum of appropriations of the Snowden documents in the fields of art, media and archives. In this way the frontend provides insights into processes and infrastructure that usually remain black-boxed: e.g., the cooperations between security services and commercial web services, the web of undersea cables that actually constitutes the celestial cloud, the discursive construction of quantified citizens, etc.

The disclosures of NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden are not simply documented at the exhibition's frontend; instead they appear transformed through various forms of appropriation: as works of art, as material of archives, as dubious media sources.

Backend

The backend of the exhibition has the look and feel of an open participation platform. The exhibition appears unfinished and confronts the visitors with the question of how they can contribute to the show and expand the actual body of work.

The backend presents options for working with the Snowden documents. In this way it places the potential of the precarious documents up for discussion. Material, tools, workshops and artistic contributions such as Evan Light's "Snowden Archive in a Box" and Julian Oliver's "The Snowden Templates" offer possibilities to transform the documents and their 'secret knowledge' into means of political communication.

Meanwhile, additional materials such as news clippings or quotes from movies are calling forth doubt – last but not least about the socio-political consequences of any work that has been done with Snowden files so far.

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Events + Books

The exhibition program is complemented with talks, performances and workshops as well as two books that extend the dialectical frontend/backend narrative of the exhibition. **A Field Guide to the Snowden Files. Media, Art, Archives. 2013-2017**, edited by the exhibition curators Magdalena Taube and Krystian Woznicki, gathers for the first time a representative selection of artists working with the Snowden files and places them in context with appropriations by media folks and archivists.

Fugitive Belonging is a monographic publication by Krystian Woznicki. Containing an extensive essay and more than 100 photographs, it reflects the broader socio-political context behind the Snowden disclosures. Conceiving of the interconnection between the post-sovereign state and global networks as the contemporary framework for citizenship, it asks profound questions about what it means to be political today. Both books will be published in English by DIAMONDPAPER (DP).

*Dates **

September 11, 2017 | 7 p.m. | Launch of "A Field Guide to the Snowden Files"

A book published in conjunction with the SIGNALS project

feat. filmmaker Christoph Hochhäusler (GER) & other contributors

Buchhandlung Walther König an der Museumsinsel, Burgstraße 27, 10178 Berlin

September 12, 2017 | 6 p.m. | SIGNALS Exhibition opening

feat. artists Zeljko Blace (CRO), Stefan Tiron (ROU) & other artists of the exhibition

September 13, 2017 | 6 p.m. | Workshop

feat. activist Naomi Colvin (GBR) & artist/researcher Evan Light (CAN)

September 25, 2017 | 6 p.m. | Talk

feat. social critic Max Haiven (CAN) & culture theoretician Joseph Vogl (GER)

September 26, 2017 | 6 p.m. | Finissage

feat. performance by Sazae Bot (JPN)

talk by archivist Andrew Clement (CAN) & artist Simon Denny (NZL)

November 1, 2017 | 6 p.m. | Special closing performance

feat. the art collective University of the Phoenix (CAN)

* all events – except the book launch on Sept. 11 – will take place at DIAMONDPAPER Studio. Free entry.

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Curatorial Team

Magdalena Taube holds a doctorate in literature and is the managing editor of the Berliner Gazette. Together with Berliner Gazette, she has curated numerous cultural projects, including the temporary project space "BQV – Büro für Qualifikation und Vermögen" ("Office for Qualifications and Wealth/Ability").

Krystian Woznicki is a cultural critic and the founder of the Berliner Gazette. In addition to writing, editing and curating, he is active as a photographer. He has curated numerous cultural projects, for instance at the alternative museum X'Teresa in Mexico City, at the Antwerp Film Museum and at the Volksbühne Berlin.

Project organisers

The **Berliner Gazette** (BG) has worked on the Snowden disclosures from the very beginning. It has launched several critical interventions under the motto *Snowden Commons* that are intended to explore and expand the democratic potential of the disclosures. As a nonprofit and nonpartisan team of journalists, researchers, artists and coders, the BG analyzes and tests emerging cultural and political practices. Since 1999 the BG has been publishing berlinergazette.de under a Creative Commons license – with more than 900 contributors from all over the world – as well as organizing symposia, exhibitions and editing books. Mail suggestions to: info(at)berlinergazette.de > URL > <http://berlinergazette.de>

Publishing house + exhibition venue

DIAMONDPAPER (DP) is a Berlin publisher founded by artist Thomas Scheibitz, designer Karsten Heller and manager Volker Ludwig in the early 2000s. The publishing house aims to create a common space in which to bring together important artistic positions and critical thought. The following artists and writers have been published, amongst others: Maria Loboda, Johannes Kahrs, Katja Strunz, Michael Schmidt, Dirk Bell and Simon Dybbroe Møller. > URL > <http://diamondpaper.de>

DP has managed an exhibition space at the address Köpenicker Strasse 96 in Berlin since the fall of 2015. The venue, which is accessible to the public and open on the side facing the street, is situated on the boundary between Mitte and Kreuzberg and is meant to function as a showcase for the 'book works' that are designed and partly also produced in the rear section of the building.

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Address

DIAMONDPAPER Studio
Köpenicker Straße 96
D-10115 Berlin-Kreuzberg

Opening hours + admission

September 12-26, 2017 | Tues.-Sat. 12-6 p.m. | The admission is free.

The exhibition will be open in October by appointment only. Groups and school classes can contact us under [mt\(at\)berlinergazette.de](mailto:mt(at)berlinergazette.de) – at least a week in advance.

Special closing event

The exhibition will hold its special closing event on November 1 at 7 p.m.: a final exhibition tour followed by a performance by University of the Phoenix (please register by Oct. 25 under [mt\(at\)berlinergazette.de](mailto:mt(at)berlinergazette.de)). The event will take place in conjunction with the BG annual conference – **FRIENDLY FIRE. Failed Citizens or Failed States?** – which is taking place on November 2-4, 2017 at ZK/U.

Publishing house + bookshop

The books of the SIGNALS project will be available via the DIAMONDPAPER website (<http://diamondpaper.de>) and in specialized bookshops.

Contact person

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