

TACIT FUTURES

State of Insecurity, Post-Migration Society and the Coming Democracy
Berliner Gazette 2016



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In the near future an estimated number of 700 million people will lose their homes due to climate change and wars. Many of them will escape to the Global North. Already today this mechanism poses pressing challenges. The democratic states in Europe for instance display ever bigger problems with preserving access to existential resources and human rights – not only for those, who now escape or migrate to Europe in great numbers, but also for those, who are already here. Can we contain the spreading precariousness with the help of democracies? The collective action and self-organisation by refugees and citizens of a new "Willkommenskultur" are signs of hope.

Yet, such seminal developments are overshadowed by the incidents in Paris and Cologne. Irrational reflexes are the consequence – further enhanced by the unprecedented excess of migration flows. A rising populism of anxiety suggests, that what's spreading in Europe today is neither a humanitarian crisis nor a crisis of democracy, but actually a security crisis. And that we should not call for humanity and democracy, but instead for "more police" and "total control". In fact, that we should invest more into the new form of power, which has been unleashed by the War on Terror. A power, that confronts potential threats and projects futures, which may never occur, but nonetheless militarizes what is yet to happen. Ultimately a power, that renders democracy into a matter of algorithmic logistics. However, rather than buying into this power, it's high time to question and challenge it.

To begin with, we should acknowledge, that this new form of power is already becoming an integral part of our everyday lives: Aren't we more and more depending on big-data driven predictions? – in finance and epidemiology, labor and climate policy, (geo-)politics and advertising. And aren't we increasingly believing, that those technologies of prediction are the perfect early-warning system for general security?

In the course of this "apocalyptic babbitt" is spreading, as trend researchers diagnose – a culture of immunization against uncertain futures and also against population groups, that are singled out as threats. But do we really need technocratic debates or is it enough to sense, that the biggest threats are neither outside nor embodied by strangers, but inside the architecture of our democracies? Moreover, that we need to differentiate between insecurity produced by growing precariousness on the one hand and security threats caused by terror on the other? And that we need to investigate, how precarious conditions are causing terror? What does it take for us to imagine and build a democracy, that our wannabe-post-colonial and desperately mobile times deserve? – a "democracy without borders" or a "democracy in movement". Or can democracy dedicate itself to universal equality, while still being confined by national borders? In any case, we should realize, that we have already started to renegotiate the very basics of social justice and sociality in general, when facing the growing number of refugees in Europe. And the big question is, whether and how we will manage to eventually collaborate on a common future.

After UN|COMMONS (berlinergazette.de/uncommons) the Berliner Gazette continues its work on the commons in 2016 under the title TACIT FUTURES. We launch this annual project at the transmediale with the program "Diving into the Snowden Archives".

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Tacit Futures: Diving Into Snowden Archives

A cooperation between Berliner Gazette and transmediale > <http://2016.transmediale.de>
Panel + workshops | Haus der Kulturen der Welt, February 4 and 5, 2016

The Snowden archives encompass documents leaked by former NSA subcontractor Edward Snowden and then published in part by major newspapers including the Guardian, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Der Spiegel. These revelations initiated a global debate about the role of secret services in democracies, citizen rights in the age of digital networks, and big data and the industries of prediction.

By disclosing the inner workings of a clandestine data-industry-state-surveillance-complex, the Snowden archives represent a kind of collective subconscious: something that society was never meant to learn about itself, its past, present, and future. In that sense the Snowden files can be seen as a message from "children from an era that is yet to be received," as Kim Ki-Duk has said. Yet the interpretations of even the published documents remain unfinished, due to their cryptic language and specialized information. And only a small percentage have been published. We can expect more revelations to emerge in the future, though it may take decades before they all enter the public domain.

In this sense, the Snowden archives not only represent a repressed awareness of the design of our social and political present, they also represent an awareness yet to come, provided we can develop the tools and capacities to decode and share them. How can we render this awareness and knowledge common and incorporate it as a vital part of our common history and common future?

Guests include Andrew Clement (The Snowden Digital Surveillance Archive), Naomi Colvin (Courage Foundation), Evan Light (Snowden Archive-in-a-Box), Geert Lovink (Institute for Network Cultures), M. C. McGrath (The Snowden Document Search), Frauke Mahrt-Thomsen (Kritische Bibliothek), Deborah Natsios (Cryptome.org), Pit Schultz (nettime.org), André Rebentisch (meshcon), Maria Xynou (Surveillance without Borders), John Young (Cryptome.org).

What we also plan to do

The Berliner Gazette is now working on a special section in its online newspaper. Around 40 reports, essays and interviews will be published throughout the year. Creative types of all sorts will get a chance to speak about the key questions relating to TACIT FUTURES. All texts will be contributed on a voluntary basis and published under a Creative Commons license. In parallel, the Berliner Gazette will organize more than 20 meet-ups, serving as the project's cooperative platforms for dialogue about ideas and projects. Moreover, the Berliner Gazette plans to organize various partner-events. The TACIT FUTURES project will culminate in the international Berliner Gazette conference scheduled for October/November 2016 in Berlin.

Please spread the word about! We truly hope, that there will be a way to wire our ambitions and to embark upon a fruitful exchange.