

UN|COMMONS

How do we want to live together? Commons under discussion
Meet Ups | International Conference | Online-Debate | Book

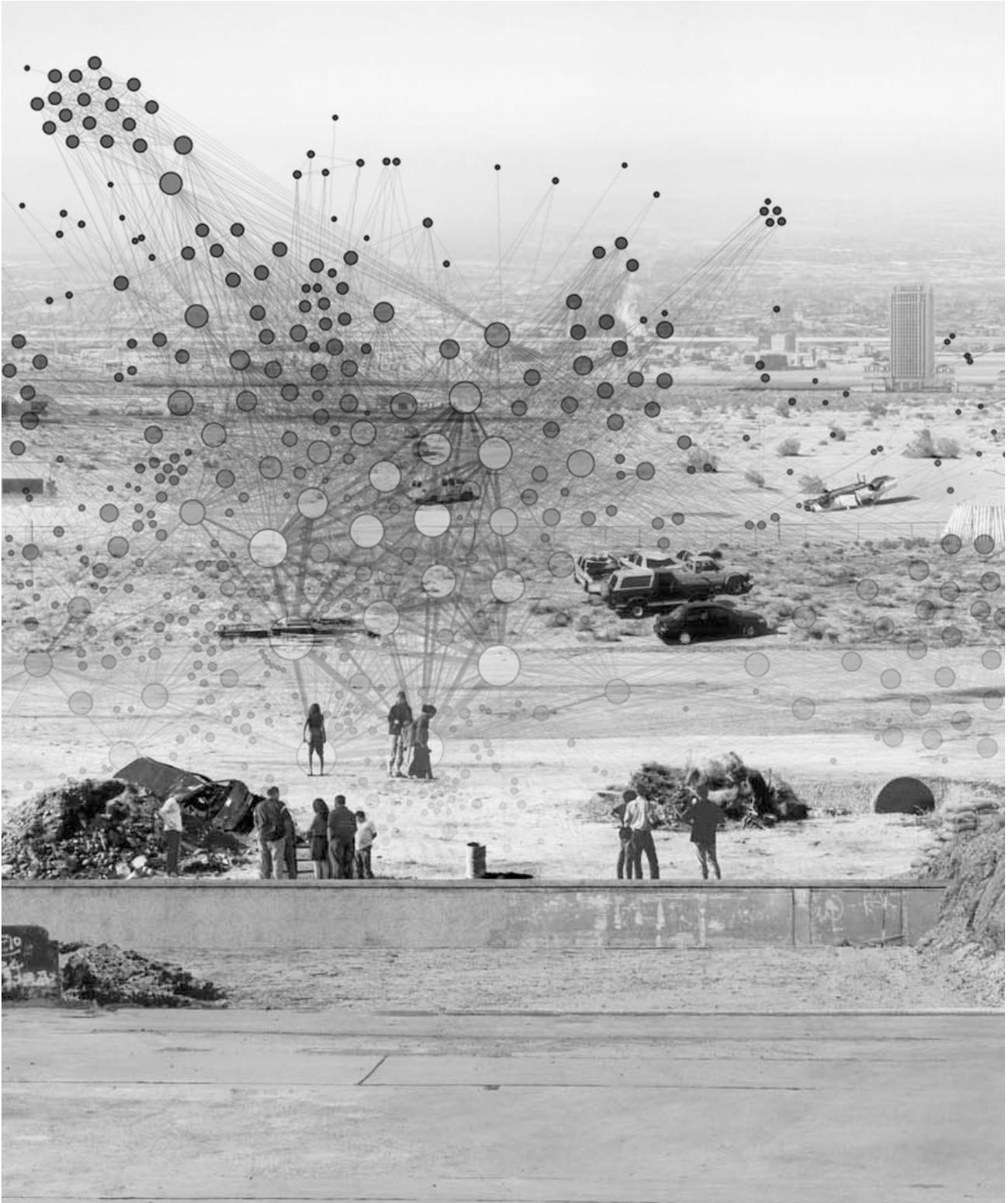


Bild: Remix eines Beate Gütschow-Motivs by Martin Taube



CULTURES AND POLITICS AFTER THE NET | SINCE 1999

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Did you ever see Snow White and Anonymous get together? Or did you ever discuss new forms of journalism while next to you some ninja-cyborgs were signing autographs? That's what we experience a week ago! With a delegation of guests from Japan, Rumania and Germany the Berliner Gazette joined the Otaku Festival in Bucharest [1], running workshops and panels on Whistleblowers, Hackers and Parcourists. Now you might think: "What the hell are they talking about?"

Well, let us look at some basics. The word Otaku [2] represents a specific culture of people and practises that emerged in Japan by taking the notion of fandom into a new realm: Otaku draw their own comics (manga), design and wear their own costumes, write their own stories. We are talking about a big movement here.

Perhaps the West needed to read an outright Otaku philosophy in order to understand that all of those creative practises are more than just illegal acts of copy cats. Big thinkers like Jean Beaudrillard, Peter Sloterdijk and Walter Benjamin are lending their voices in a best selling Otaku book [3], that elaborates an Otaku theory.

It is a theory, that affirms the much debated "restructuring of the brain". This is not to make legitimate the dominance of machines over human beings. Instead the Otaku theory suggests that human beings are entering a new stage in which they are able to embark upon emancipation by appropriating technology and diving into oceans of information. Are our societies eventually able to learn something from Otaku culture?

Driven by curiosity the Berliner Gazette delegation met more than 5000 Otakus at the Otaku Festival in Bucharest [4]: Dressed up in costumes, wearing heavy make up, battling in competitions and participating in workshops. One of our favourites: "Design your own Kimono".

This vibrant forum, that gathered putative outsiders on their common ground, was the perfect setting for exploring the Berliner Gazette's annual focal point UN|COMMONS. [5] After all, in this project the Berliner Gazette proposes to rediscover the meaning of the commons by examining those forms of knowlegde, technology and life that operate today under privatised conditions, but which we might transform into commons in the future. Hence we wish to explore our not-yet-commons, that today are our estranged, our neglected or our uncommon commons. In short: Our UN|COMMONS.

The Otaku culture can be understood as a playing and battle field of the UN|COMMONS: While the majority of Otaku culture is based on leaks of proprietary products (this holds true for Romania in particular), the playful remixing of materials, traits and identities creates a global community (or: communities) that strives on "commons based peer-production" (Yochai Benkler). In some countries like Japan this highly innovative bottom-up industry challenges in quantity and quality the official industry represented by major corporations and their stars.



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More over it also sets new standards for storytelling. The contemporary Otaku culture no longer privileges coherent stories and characters. Instead, it foregrounds elements, which can be used freely to create narratives and identities. In that sense the question of information overload never arises as a fundamental dilemma. Otakus can never get enough information. They love abundance, since informational vastness, richness and plurality are key to the endless possibilities of remixing.

Against this backdrop the practises of Otaku culture can serve as a source of inspiration when we try to get an idea of our UN|COMMONS – be it in terms of how they are endangered or how they can become resources to change the state of affairs. And yes...: They can bring together Anonymous and Snow White – coming to terms with their common experiences in the grey zone of present legal, economic and political affairs.

For those various reasons the Berliner Gazette will continue the dialogue with Otakus and Otaku culture at its annual conference in autumn. At our UN|COMMONS-conference taking place October 22-24th in collaboration with/at Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxembourg Platz, Berlin, one workshop (out of five) will be dedicated to those issues. Stay tuned!

Background Data

The Berliner Gazette organised at Otaku Festival 2015 the panel discussion "Culture of Parkour" [6] (with media theoretician Mitsuhiro Takemura and Digital Native expert Magdalena Taube) and the workshop "Culture of Leaks" [7] (with investigative journalist Adrian Mogos, legal advisor Valentina Pavel and programmer Michael Prinzinger). All contributions were moderated by Berliner Gazette founder Krystian Woznicki, who is familiar with the culture since the 1990s [8].

The talks and workshops took place May 9-10 at Universitatea Romano-Americana, Bulevardul Expozitiei Nr. 1B, Bucharest, Romania, as a project by Berliner Gazette, Takemura Juku and The Sponge in cooperation with Otaku Festival, within the framework of "Aesthetic Education Expanded", curated by berlinergazette.de, booksa, Kuda.org, Kontrapunkt, Multimedia Institute, made possible by funding from the European Commission.

Impressions from our project at Otaku Festival in Bucharest, which the Berliner Gazette editor Andi Weiland captured with his camera, are available at a flickr album [9].

This report is also available as PDF download [10].

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Links

1. <http://otakufestival.com/2015/news/berliner-gazette-is-coming-to-otaku-festival/>
2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otaku>
3. <http://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/otaku>
4. <http://otakufestival.com/2015>
5. <http://berlingazette.de/feuilleton/jahresthemen/2015-uncommons/>
6. <http://otakufestival.com/2015/presentations/culture-of-parkour/>
7. <http://otakufestival.com/2015/workshops/culture-of-leaks/>
8. <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9802/msg00101.html>
9. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/berlingazette/sets/72157652155640150/with/17493845712/>
10. http://berlingazette.de/wp-content/uploads/UNCOMMONS-in-Bucharest_Report_May-2015.pdf

More on Otaku in Berliner Gazette (in German)

<http://berlingazette.de/otaku-in-japan/>

<http://berlingazette.de/fankultur-vermarktung-content-industrie/>

<http://berlingazette.de/hatsune-miku-komplizenschaft/>

<http://berlingazette.de/lernen-die-informationsfluten-zu-lieben/>