

TACIT FUTURES

Towards the Democratic Control of Movement

BG Annual Conference 2016 | October 27-29 | Volksbühne at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz | Berlin

People, data, goods, money – everything is in motion. But this traffic will not continue without control. Borders and infrastructure are the central sites for this control of movement, and therefore also crucial sites for the production of the future. How is it possible to achieve democratic oversight of borders and infrastructure? What imperatives are required to rebuild these sites accordingly?

In the near future, an estimated 700 million people will have to flee their homes on account of economic crises, climate change and wars. Many of them will flee to the Global North. Here we are already facing pressing challenges because of this development. In Europe for instance, democratic countries are increasingly having difficulties in fulfilling their main tasks: to ensure access to essential resources and to make sure that elementary rights are respected. This not only affects the great number of people fleeing or immigrating to Europe, but also everyone who already lives here.

The clandestine TTIP negotiations are a sign of the times: The movement of goods, money, data and people is being organized in increasingly intransparent ways. This is a great threat to the international community. After all, our communal spirit and our shared structures arise from how we connect and communicate, how we work and make politics, and also how we flee and start anew. All this is made possible by movement that takes place within a network of interdependencies. Such movement depends on *sites of logistical control*, which in turn are a prerequisite for preventing this network from breaking down. While societies cannot manage without this vital ingredient – let us provisionally call it *the control of movement* –, one may rightly suspect that whoever now exerts this type of control will also program our common future. That is why it is high time to ask whether decisions about the control of movement should be made intransparently. Shouldn't societies claim democratic oversight of sites of movement control instead? And if so, what should be the imperatives to reimagine these sites accordingly?

In order to address these issues, under the title TACIT FUTURES the Berliner Gazette (BG) will focus on two sites of movement control: *borders* and *infrastructure*. Both are already receiving a lot of attention. Now the BG project attempts to add new dimensions. Firstly, by placing those sites of movement control within the broader context of future production – a context that enables a bird's-eye view of *overarching* power issues as nurtured by the global economy, and, less obviously perhaps, by the “war on terror” with its 15-year history of transforming the planet into a new type of battlefield. Secondly, the project wishes to contribute to the conversation about borders and infrastructure by trying to uncover an *underlying* matrix in the political debates on migration and digitalization – a matrix in which the movement of people and the movement of data appear inseparably linked. In doing so, the BG project invites civil society actors to revitalize claims regarding borders and infrastructure as parts of one and the same struggle: the democratic control of movement – of and by people and data alike. Moreover the project invites you to reimagine these sites of movement control as sites of dormant (or better: *tacit*) futures, in whose articulation anyone can take part.

The production of future and the control of movement

Nowadays, “security has top priority”. It is under this slogan that real as well as imagined risks, such as the movements of refugees, are being administered. And these administrative activities seek to manage everything with the aid of prediction and preemption; in effect, our future is to be shaped by algorithms. Is there still enough space for democratic participation in the control of movement and in the production of the future? How can people reclaim the sites of movement control?

Europe's so-called “refugee crisis” is being overshadowed by the incidents in Paris, Cologne and Brussels. Politicians, senior media people and “worried citizens” are engaging in populism that feeds on fear. They are exploiting the seemingly excessive movement of refugees, and are suggesting that Europe is experiencing not a crisis of democracy, which is what it is in reality, but rather an identity and security crisis. They also suggest that we should not be calling for more humane behavior or more human rights.

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The demagogues of fear suggest that European states should instead be calling for “total control of movement” and therefore for “closed borders”. They also suggest that we should commit ourselves to the form of power that was unleashed by the “war on terror” and which we associate with security firms, IT companies, intelligence services and military special forces. The representatives of these organizations believe that everything can be computed, and therefore they are grabbing more and more data. They are also preparing forecasts which, though their predictions may never become reality, nevertheless lead them to arm themselves against all the threats that will supposedly appear in the future. They are also implementing a project of algorithmic logistics based on the movement of people and of data; and they are demanding sovereignty over all essential infrastructure in order to carry out this project.

In this scenario, the control of movement and the production of the future seem like two sides of a coin that are increasingly being minted with the aid of predictions based on big-data technologies. To put it another way: the data-driven prediction industry is changing our horizon and the space for what is possible, both in designing and producing the future and in managing movements. The future of movement and the movement of our future are both *meant to reach a state of completion through computation and pre-emption even before having started to be debated within society*.



Instead of glorifying this state of affairs, let us at last start questioning and challenging it. To begin with, let us try to become aware that these forms of movement control and future production have been part of our daily lives for some time now. Are societies not becoming increasingly dependent on big-data-driven prediction, for example in finance and logistics, consumption and health care, or geopolitics and climate policy? Are tech users not actually becoming its accomplices, e.g. when calming their nerves with the belief that they are carrying a guarantee against confusion *and* exclusion in their pockets, because their smartphones can receive GPS signals? Are more and more people not increasingly falling for the belief that these predictive tools are the ultimate early-warning system for general security?

It is time to acknowledge that, because of this mood, “an apocalyptic petty bourgeois worldview” – a term coined by trend analysts – is becoming more and more widespread. People who subscribe to this worldview are becoming immune to a future which they feel is uncertain and crowded by groups that are stigmatized as posing a threat, especially if their movements seem uncontrollable. But citizens participating in the public debates should ask themselves: do the greatest threats really come from the outside, and are they really personified by migrants and their seemingly inscrutable movements?

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Are contemporary processes such as the “war on terror” – echoing colonial movements of conquest – not the actual threats as they undermine liberal democracy? How can people build a democracy that fulfills the needs of this desperately mobile age? Could this perhaps be a “democracy in motion”? How can borders and infrastructure be reimagined as the key sites for the production of post-colonial futures? How can the freedom of movement be put into practice on a planetary scale?

Either way, the time has come to acknowledge that, due to the growing number of refugees in Europe, civil societies are already in the midst of a process of renegotiating the foundations of social justice and human togetherness in general. The question is if and how a new “we” will be created. Moreover, the question is if and how “we” will be able to cooperate in building a common future. Against this background, the TACIT FUTURES project seeks to look at how the industries of prediction monopolize the control of movement and the production of the future. Taking this as a starting point, the project initiates a search for alternatives.

Let us think of the control of movement not only from the perspective of a future that has already been finalized, as the industries of prediction would have us do. Let us instead think of the control of movement from the perspective of an open future, or even from the perspective of as yet concealed (or *tacit*) futures, in whose articulation and production anyone can still take part. But how can civil society actors reclaim the sites of movement control as sites of tacit futures? To begin with, how can we establish democratic oversight of borders and infrastructure?

Borders and the control of movement

The “war on terror” is also changing borders. National borders are turning into cybernetic defense shields. At the same time, they are mutating into internal borders. Where does the border begin, and where does it stop having an impact on movements? How can societies control the increasing flexibility of borders in a democratic manner?

Following a celebratory age of “no borders”, a more ambiguous age is dawning: “no borders for goods and money, but more borders for people” is its motto. However, it is a myth that goods (material and immaterial ones) are able to move freely while people are not. It is in evidence, after all, that certain goods, e.g. those produced by powerful corporations, are able to move freely across national borders, while others, e.g. those produced by companies too weak to compete, are held back by them. Moreover, *nation states as gated communities*, always keen on cheap labor, never completely close their borders to lower-class migrants and refugees. Instead, they are currently transforming border management into a high-tech industry, a trend that can be detected at the border between the USA and Mexico, in the Palestinian territories and also in Europe.

The TACIT FUTURES project wants to look at the transformation of the border by taking Frontex as a starting point, a border management agency that trains, manages and coordinates the border guards of almost 30 European countries. Using data-driven methods, this organization tries to be at the place where the next refugee movement will reach the border before the refugees actually get there, and so to be able to take a life-or-death decision and to decide on whether to let someone pass or perform a “push back” within seconds. Predictions based on an extensive analysis of big data help the guards do their job. The European Border Surveillance System (Eurosir), which was specially set up for this task, provides the “information exchange framework” required for the analysis.

Eurosir bundles data received from surveillance airships, drone boats, radar facilities, movement sensors and offshore sensors with information gleaned from risk analyses, satellite images and archives of migrant profiles. In addition to national border agencies, the European Maritime Safety Agency and the European Union Satellite Centre are among the partners in the surveillance network, which promotes the merger of public and corporate databases.

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This military-information complex advances the bureaucratization of refugee registration, which is being jointly developed and implemented by the European security IT-systems agency EU-LISA, the European asylum fingerprint database Eurodac and agencies like the Berlin State Office of Labor and Social Affairs (LaGeSo). In the slipstream of “datarization”, the control of movement is changing. Democratic procedure is often hard to distinguish from despotism. National borders are being reactivated at will. They are also being moved along the refugee infrastructure *to the interior*, e.g. to the city center of Berlin, where countless refugees wait their turn outside the initial registration office, just as they would at the country's frontier.



One of the main reasons for this situation is the European Union's poorly conceived refugee and migration policy. This policy, for instance, only theoretically allows people to apply for asylum at the external borders of the EU; and the countries from which most of the refugees originate are on a so-called “visa blacklist”, which inevitably means that such people will enter the EU in an illegal and unregulated manner with the aid of the people-trafficking industry's infrastructure.

The illegal options available also inevitably pose a high risk to the lives of the refugees. This produces “ugly images” and excess, and makes it impossible to control the situation. Countries along the Balkan route are citing these special circumstances as the reason why they are no longer applying the Dublin III Regulation. There are no provisions in the law covering the current situation. The coordinates of asylum law are beginning to break down.

At the same time, the Schengen Agreement is being hollowed out, because countries like Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Malta and France are reintroducing more or less arbitrary border controls. The human right to freedom of movement is being eroded by this new border regime and also by the act of implementing a “mandatory residence area” for each refugee, which means he or she is not allowed to leave a specifically assigned “area of residence”, and by the practice of distributing a predefined number of so-called “quota refugees” to each German federal state in order to force the states to take their fair share.

Against this background, the TACIT FUTURES project seeks to consider the possibilities of implementing a transparent border management policy. Moreover, it intends to discuss the tasks that Europe would have to perform in order to fulfill its role as a coordinated collective of states that provides its citizens and non-citizens with order and legal certainty. In doing so, the project explores how to reimagine national borders as sites of tacit futures whose realization could become the next big democratic undertaking.

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Infrastructure and the control of movement

Movements of people and data today depend on forms of infrastructure that are becoming more and more opaque in the course of the “war on terror”. It is unclear, for instance, how these forms of infrastructure are constructed, how they regulate traffic and how their ownership influences movement. How can transparency help to make movement control more equitable?

Today, the various trends in movement control are being called into question in a most dramatic way by the treks of refugees moving along the route from Assos and Lesbos, Idomeni and Opatovac, to Budapest and Berlin. With regard to the opaque infrastructure used by refugee traffic, any democratic movement control that may have hitherto existed is very visibly tipping over into unregulated and arbitrary territory. In the process, human rights are being eroded.

On the horizon of Europe's crisis, which in the foreseeable future will remain, among other things, a “refugee crisis”, looms the major challenge of designing the correlation of infrastructure and movement control. This challenge is most importantly about the question whether and how the democratic control of movements can make a contribution towards developing our infrastructure in a ground-breaking manner. One can glimpse the potential along the refugee routes: here, on the fringes of our systems, where states and markets are handing people absolute responsibility for their own affairs, refugees and so-called “welcoming citizens” are revitalizing the democratic project.

They are surprising everyone by collectively developing survival strategies and by coming up with new forms of economic and political participation. These self-organizing and cooperative activities are taking place in the context of peer-to-peer movement control, i.e. their movements are not being managed from above or from the outside, but by the actors themselves. They endeavor to speak to each other on an equal footing and they are building networks, in the areas e.g. of care, traffic and education, that are motivated by solidarity. In this way, new infrastructure may come into being, thereby creating a basis for a common future.

In order to explore the potential and the difficulties of this issue, the TACIT FUTURES project initially seeks to take a closer look at the deficient infrastructure currently being used by the refugee movements. This infrastructure consists of the networks organized by human traffickers and smugglers, of rubber boats, border posts, hotspots, camps, registration offices, emergency accommodation, shelters for asylum seekers, deportation detention centers and deportation flights. Whether people reach their destination or not, whether they have to wait for a short while or indefinitely, whether or not they are given “recognized” status, whether they are allowed to proceed or are sent back: at present, the movements of people fleeing and of those taking refuge are controlled in a way that is not transparent. And this also holds true for the movement of data.

The data infrastructure that is seldom viewed in this context consists of smartphones, social network accounts, service providers, fiber optic cables, nodes, one-stop shops, data centers and databases. Whether data packets reach their destination quickly, slowly or not at all, whether they are closely inspected, whether they are collected and analyzed or go unnoticed, whether they are stored for a short or long time, passed on or prioritized via recommendation algorithms – all these decisions are taken in the dark.

This hermetic black-box policy with regard to data infrastructure not only regulates the digital traffic of data in a way that is not transparent, but also performs a regulatory function for the act of achieving communication and even of successfully establishing social relationships. After all, any social relationship today, especially within the social space that precarious or marginalized people and smartphone-equipped refugees inhabit, cannot exist without the internet. The black-box policy therefore controls something that is vital to today's societies – a state of affairs that remains unaffected by Edward Snowden's revelations about the data politics of the “war on terror”. However, it has become clearer than ever what is at stake for us.

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Civil society actors are now able to understand, better than ever before, why the nexus of geo location and mobility is of constantly increasing importance. The algorithmic analysis of information on the basis of associated location data is making rapid progress. Industries are being established that create movement profiles of our increasingly mobile populations with the aid of meta data. Are meta data covered by data protection laws? Ostensibly they are not, because they are not supposed to be relevant to the sphere of personal privacy. Snowden's revelations demonstrate the contrary. But a democratic procedure that could be used for this special type of movement control is not in sight. How could infrastructure be managed transparently and in the course of this become a site of tacit futures? What general framework is required to enable a democratic control of movement? How can human rights be protected and asserted?

Implementation

Let's put the politics of movement control up for discussion, and any democratic method for movement control to the test. Let's explore how we, as political actors, can take action.



The TACIT FUTURES project will use the BG annual conference as a platform for exploring democratic forms of movement control. In this way, the Berliner Gazette project will act as the follow-up to the [UN|COMMONS](#) project, and will also focus on material and immaterial resources that are managed as an alternative to state or corporate monopolies and by means of grassroots democracy. In doing so, the conference seeks to explore a wide variety of civil society approaches to reclaiming as well as reimagining borders and infrastructure, and it sees their initiators as both its discussion partners and its target audience: human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, programmers, researchers, artists, net activists, philosophers, "welcoming citizens", social entrepreneurs, educators, cultural workers and many more.

The BG annual conference invites practitioners and theoreticians of initiatives that address the opaque administrative authorities of border management (data journalism projects like "The Migrant Files" are an example), initiatives that bring together "welcoming citizens" and social movements focusing on commons and infrastructure, initiatives that fuse net neutrality and human rights advocacy in their political approach, and not least initiatives run by refugees that cultivate collective self-organization, political emancipation and peer-to-peer cooperation in the invisible spaces of the survival economy. But the Berliner Gazette would also like to include initiatives that, like Blockupy, challenge the European border regime by organizing the European March for Refugees Rights.

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The BG annual conference seeks to find out whether the participating civil society actors have joint objectives and what these objectives might be. The conference also aims to bring these actors closer together for networking purposes, thereby making the emerging infrastructure of a more democratic society visible. It will work towards this goal with the aid of workshops, performances, talks and audience discussions on October 27-29 at the Volksbühne at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz.

The BG annual conference will be realized as a cooperation between Berliner Gazette e.V. and Volksbühne at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. It will be funded by the German Federal Agency for Civic Education/bpb, the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union, etc. It will be supported by: Avec Lab, Exberliner (tbc), Knight-Mozilla OpenNews, Mediapart.fr (tbc), Supermarkt, tab ticketbroker, Takemura Juku, transmediale and Webmagazin (tbc). And it will be organized in collaboration with the “Aesthetic Education Expanded” initiative and curated by berlinergazette.de, Kontrapunkt, Kuda.org, Kulturtreger, and Multimedia Institute.

Milestones

The BG's annual project TACIT FUTURES initiates discussions at various events and in an online newspaper. Moreover, it provides a platform for collaboration.

The project was launched in cooperation with transmediale with the program “Diving into Snowden Archives” at House of World Cultures, February 4 and 5, 2016. 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. 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 project will culminate in the international Berliner Gazette conference scheduled for October 27 to 29, 2016 in Berlin.

TACIT FUTURES: [Online-Newspaper](#) | Essays, Interviews + Protocols (in German) by Corinna Haas, Alexander Karschnia, Julia Molin, Eiji Oguma, Joseph Vogl, Krystian Woznicki.

TACIT FUTURES: [Diving into Snowden Archives](#) | Panel + Workshops
transmediale, Berlin, February 4 to 5, 2016

TACIT FUTURES: [Japan after Japan](#) | Film Screening + Talk
Supermarkt, Berlin, March 19, 2016

TACIT FUTURES: [Re-Imagination](#) | Lecture + Talk
Volksbühne at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin, May 3, 2016

TACIT FUTURES: Social Media Abyss (Im Bann der Plattformen) | Lecture + Talk
Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Berlin, October 6, 2016

TACIT FUTURES: Berliner Gazette Annual Conference | Workshops, Performances + Talks
Volksbühne at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin, October 27 to 29, 2016

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