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EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

#4 MEDIA AND MIGRATION

We are witnessing an acceleration of the deployment of digital technologies in border regimes as well as in migratory practices. This does not necessarily make borders 'smarter', but it points to spiraling dynamics between border and migration practices to which digital technologies prove central. Technologies deployed by European countries to manage the so-called "refugee crisis" – from fences to the Eurosur drone system – have their reverse side. While digital networks facilitate surveillance systems, they also foster mobility and challenge border regimes at the same time. Persisting migration in defiance of ever more sophisticated border technologies demonstrate the possible detour of control systems. In our fourth issue of *spheres*, we investigate the significance of digital technologies for migration and the relation between migratory regimes and practices on the one hand, and digital cultures and infrastructures on the other.

In which ways do systems of big data and border regimes interact? What kind of devices and actors cooperate to guarantee the functioning of the complex socio-technical networks of surveillance and control? And what kinds of processes of orchestration, translation and coordination do they necessitate? Helle Stenum looks at how a global biometric system of border control and surveillance is developed in close cooperation between IT and security industries, academic engineering and social scientists, and governments around the world. She discusses both recent technological developments in EU migration management, as well as the historical context of biometric technology to explore the apparent biometric divide between citizens and migrants. Brigitta Kuster's contribution illustrates that biometric applications are part of ongoing research into smart border solutions in Europe. Her ethnographic approach to the The Research Projects Conference of the European Association for Biometrics, sheds light on a whole arrangement of contexts, which can be identified as information and

control continuums, in relation to the techno-social formations of the European Border.

Still, this increasingly digitalized and securitized border regime does not prevent migration – it does not prevent people from migrating. And migrants also use technologies to encounter and subvert this regime. How do refugees and migrants use and appropriate technologies of mobility, such as smart phones, maps and Facebook, and develop strategies of counter-surveillance to cross borders? To what extent do migrant individuals and communities participate in the production and transformation of transnational digital networks? Maria Ullrich's contribution explores new forms of media use by migrants and refugees focusing on the so-called Balkan route, during and after the "summer of migration" in 2015. As Sandro Mezzadra points out in his comment on Ullrich's article, there is already some research on the "connected migrant"[1], on how migrants use digital technologies to create and sustain transnational networks and spaces, to counter isolation in the diaspora and in detention centres. Ullrich's article concentrates on the passage of migration itself and highlights the contested process of the formation of "mobile commons" and "migrant digitalities"[2] that support and facilitate border crossings and geographical mobility. In his comment to her article, Mezzadra situates the growing digitalisation of border regimes as well as of migratory practices in processes of "logistification". This logistification refers to the reorganisation of global supply chains or of urban spaces, with a "mobility paradigm" as the main feature of capitalist globalisation.

Manuela Bojadžijev and Moritz Altenried also address processes that organise, capture and control the movement of goods, capital and people, like shipping software, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, Global Positioning System (GPS), Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), and other digital technologies. But unlike the other articles in this issue, they focus on the notion of "virtual migration" and relate it to forms of digital labour. They discuss the so-called "gold farmers", Chinese gaming workers as a particular form of labour in the gaming industry, also evoking questions concerning the implicit processes of racialisation in such forms of mobile digital labour that legitimise new forms of exploitation. Implicit processes of racialisation are also at the heart of a border regime that treats humans that migrate as if they were goods supposed to be transported and organised through 'hotspots', 'corridors', 'platforms', and 'hubs'. This relates to the question of how

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1 Dana Diminescu, "Digital Methods for the Exploration, Analysis, and Mapping of e-Diasporas", *Social Science Information*, 51 (4), 2012, pp. 451-458.

2 Dimitris Parsanoglou, Nicos Trimikliniotis and Vassilis Tsianos, *Mobile Commons. Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

border regimes are interconnected with specific representations of migrants in mainstream media that saturate the discussion around migration, framing refugees as symbols of extreme suffering or threat.

The filmmaker Morteza Jafari addresses this question in his work and especially in his film, *Dreaming of Life*. Jafari himself came to Greece as a refugee from Iran and in his contribution he explains how, with his film, he tried to create a more realistic representation of what migrants experience at the border of Europe. As Donya Alinejad analyses in her comment on Jafari's film, by focusing on the spaces inside Europe's formal borders as the open-ended continuation of a punishing passage, *Dreaming of Life* lays bare the reality of the harsh habitability of contemporary Europe, itself. In his own explanations of his work, Jafari stresses the fact that migrants and refugees can nowadays represent themselves with greater ease through digital media, for example by uploading their filmed experiences directly to YouTube. He refers to the idea that the experiences, histories and everyday practices of migrants moving between geographical areas and digital spaces reproduce and challenge cultural forms and identities in their environments at home, in their host country and in-between.

But to what extent do digital technologies that allow migrants to document their experiences really foster forms of empowerment? Donya Alinejad picks up on this but points to the complex ways in which online content circulates and produces audiences in the process. Not everyone with access to a digital video device and an internet connection has access to the same audiences. Referring to her own ethnographic research on Iranian migrants' use of digital media for self-representation and expression in Los Angeles, she raises the issue of how self-representational (media) style matters. She specifically considers whether Jafari's particular mode of inhabiting the migrant-filmmaker identity portends the film's politics and its consequent claim to realism.

Beyond all the different actors that produce and sustain border regimes on the one hand, and migrants that challenge them on the other, there is a third group of people using digital technologies to try to support the struggles and the movements of migrants. In their contribution, Maurice Stierl, Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani discuss the work of *Watch the Med* as a permanent fight to give the impersonal masses of migrants unique faces and voices as to subvert the European border regime by using the same technologies. Thus, they show how their practice of critical observations and counter-mapping practices of the sea are situated in a topological continuum of visibility and invisibility. Claiming and enacting the right to look at the hidden violence of the border, like *Watch the Med* does, and to listen to it, like *AlarmPhone* does,

is like "turning surveillance against itself", as Maribel Casas Cortes writes in her comment.

Current political developments call for those acts of disobedience in order to ensure movement and access.