

DATA

DECODED

A Guide to
Data Activist Guidebooks

prepared by the Data
Justice Hub, April 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

PART I:

Surveillance, Policing, and Social Control: Keeping Track of How We are Monitored

(A1) Coveillance - The People's Field Guide to Spotting Surveillance Infrastructure... p. 6

(A2) No Tech for ICE - Take Back Tech: How to Expose and Fight Surveillance Tech in your City... p 8

(A3) Our Data Bodies - Digital Defense Playbook: Community Power Tools for Reclaiming Data... p. 10

(A4) Our Data Our Selves / Tactical Tech - The Organiser's Activity Book... p. 12

(A5) Tactical Tech - Data Detox Kit... p. 15

(A6) Tactical Tech - Zen and the Art of Making Tech Work for You... p. 18

(A7) Stop LAPD Spying Coalition - Automating Banishment: The Surveillance and Policing of Stolen Land... p. 21

(A8) Right2Know – People's Tech for People's Power: A Guide to Digital Self-Empowerment.. p.. 25

(A9) Right2Know - Stop the Surveillance: Activist Guide to RICA & State Surveillance in South Africa... p. 28

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART II:

Economic and Housing Justice: Making Sense of How we Mobilize Data

(B1) Open Data for Tax Justice - What Do They Pay? Towards a Public Database to Account for the Economic Activities and Tax Contributions of Multinational Corporations... p. 31

(B2) LittleSis - Map the Power... p. 33

(B3) Tactical Tech - Exposing the Invisible: The Kit... p. 35

(B4) Anti-Eviction Mapping Project - AEMP Handbook by The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP)... p.37

(B5) Public Data Lab - Composing Collective Inquiry with Digital Methods and Data...p. 39

(B6) kollektiv orangotango - How to become an occasional cartographer... p.41

Conclusion

Other Works and Additional Resources

INTRODUCTION

In a context of increasing digitization and computerization of most aspects of life and work, it is necessary to engage with new forms of data collection and computational methods in the pursuit of social justice.

Monopolistic organizations own and control our data and manipulate our digital lives. In recent years, we have seen a corresponding flurry of critical scholarship dedicated to documenting the logics underlying these new algorithmic assemblages. Learning about the ways in which our identities, behaviours and opinions are continually and mundanely monitored, categorized, aggregated and repurposed without our knowledge or consent, one can hardly help but feel overwhelmed, and disheartened.

And yet, while there is an abundance of critical research documenting the various ways in which technologies are used against us, there is still little work published that instead contributes to a more empowering look at the digital realm. More critical work is evidently still needed, and beyond urgent, in today's context. In building upon this work, we wanted to contribute to something more inclined toward hope and the various spaces of agency, freedom and struggle that are still flourishing in both our offline and online lives. To a large degree, this is what motivated our engagement with data activism and the methodological innovations activists are proliferating to both unveil and protect ourselves against the mechanisms behind current forms of digital surveillance and control.

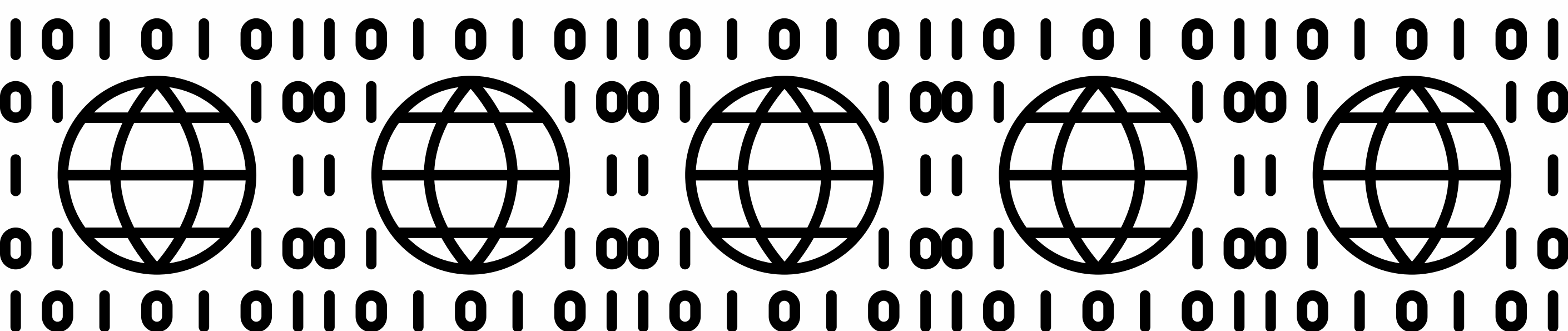
Social movements have a lot to teach us. While critical scholars have been documenting the monopolization and control of data from above, social activists have been negotiating these complex data infrastructures on the ground, piecing together research techniques that allow them to answer their questions and investigate both organizations and infrastructures of control. Through collective organization, they have developed new methods of learning and confronting emergent data infrastructures. Moreover, they have set out to document and share much of this work via their websites and through social media. For some time now, several social movement groups have published guidebooks on data activism techniques or related investigative techniques.

These guidebooks are crucial for a few reasons:

- They document the techniques of these movement groups and their history as they have been tried and tested ‘in the wild’ – in social struggles and campaigns for social justice.
- They allow the techniques developed by social movement groups to be learned, shared and transferred to other people struggling for justice, sometimes far across the globe, including not just social activists but also investigative journalists, critical researchers, and community organizations.
- These guidebooks are themselves vehicles for collective mobilization that can be used to galvanize people and generate momentum. Guidebooks give social movement groups a way to communicate, framing their activities and refining their tactics. They can also be taken up by others to build their own movements.

While guidebooks are proliferating online, it can be difficult for those new to data activism to find them or get a sense of the range of materials available. We’re calling this a Guidebook on Data Activism Guidebooks. Our objective is to create a public archive where those interested in data activism can get a sense of the methods that are being taken up by activists in their struggle for justice and how we might learn from them.

We want to highlight the skills communicated and shared by these activists and social movement groups. We think that these are important accomplishments that should be shared widely. So that’s what we’re doing. We have read these guidebooks and we have learned a lot from them. Now, we want other readers to engage with them.



OUR METHOD

The aim of this Guidebook on Guidebooks is, first of all, to get a sense of what is out there. What kinds of strategies and tactics are being developed? By whom? For what purposes? With what effects?

We also hope to provide people with a starting place where they can learn about different methods that are being taken up in social struggles.

Along these lines, we searched for data activism guidebooks in English, Spanish and French. Given the proliferation of these materials online, this is by no means a complete sample. There are many guidebooks that we have missed along the way. We then reviewed the guidebooks as a group and wrote summaries of their practices with the aim of making them easily accessible and searchable. Of course, we cannot replicate the level of detail found in these guidebooks. If you are interested in a particular method, we encourage you to visit the group's website to get a sense of how these methods can be applied in more depth.



WHAT WE SAW

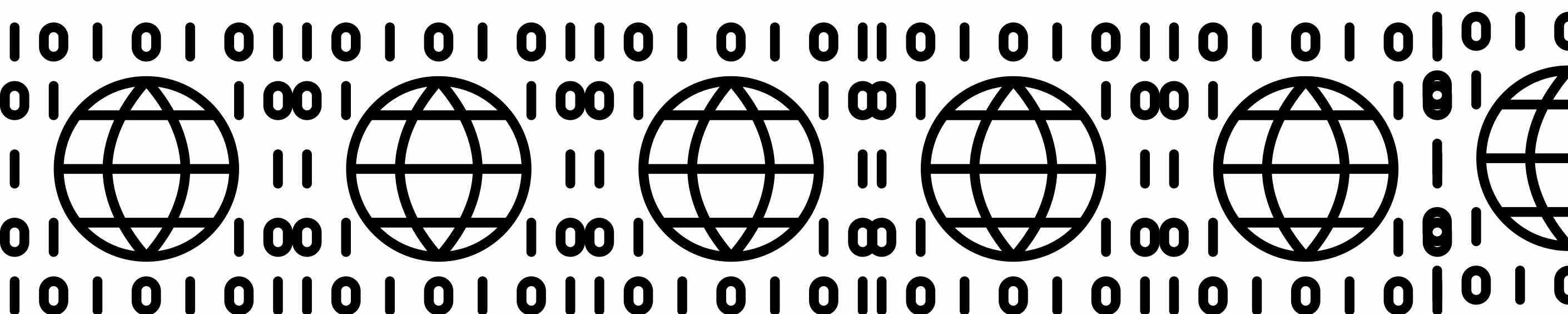
Notwithstanding the high degree of heterogeneity one can find in the approaches and subject matters these guidebooks are engaging with, we believe one common principle shared by most of these contributions has been this idea of a reversal of the asymmetries of information the general population is currently confronted by, with some populations evidently more concerned by these logics of control than others. The guidebooks we reviewed can be mapped-out on a three-phases progression:

First, they explain how we are monitored by public or private organizations, and how we can act to prevent, as much as we can, the effects of these infrastructures of surveillance.

Then, they reverse the emphasis and teach us how to know more about these, and any, powerful organizations.

Finally, they show us the best ways to make sure that the information we have collected on powerful actors are circulated in a way that will produce maximum impact upon the larger public.

Thus, hopefully: a reversal.





PART I: Surveillance, Policing, and Social Control: **Keeping Track of How We Are Monitored**

This first section in this guidebook looks at data activism guidebooks centered on unveiling logics and infrastructures of policing and surveillance.

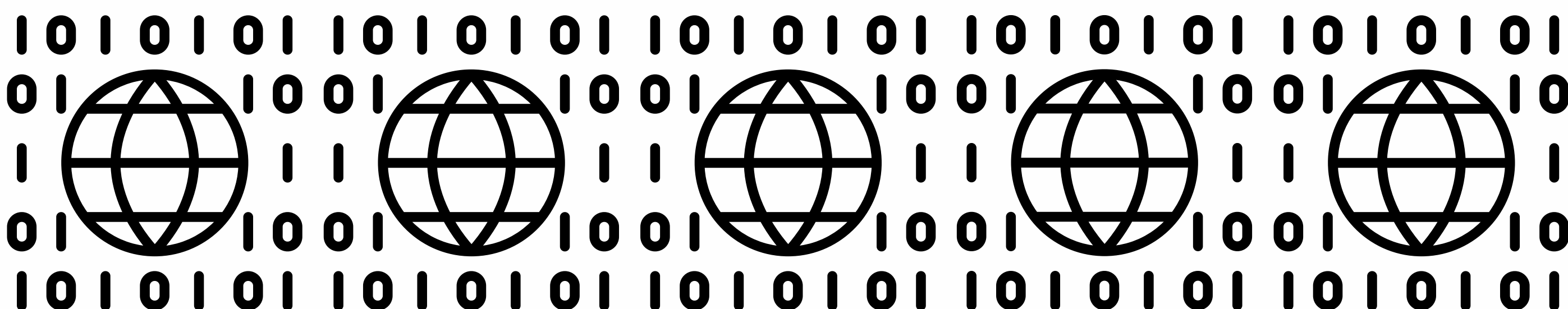
These guidebooks examine forms of state and corporate power, information gathering and, most importantly, how to study this surveillance and to defend ourselves from it.

While the broader population is commonly confronted with forms of corporate monitoring that impact their rights to privacy, marginalized groups of multiple horizons have seen a renewal in the forms of state violence and coercion intended at them.

Increasingly, forms of offline and online policing and surveillance have been combined by public authorities in order to identify, pursue, and prosecute these groups, with data brokers and other sorts of private, third-party entities now playing a key role in this security complex.

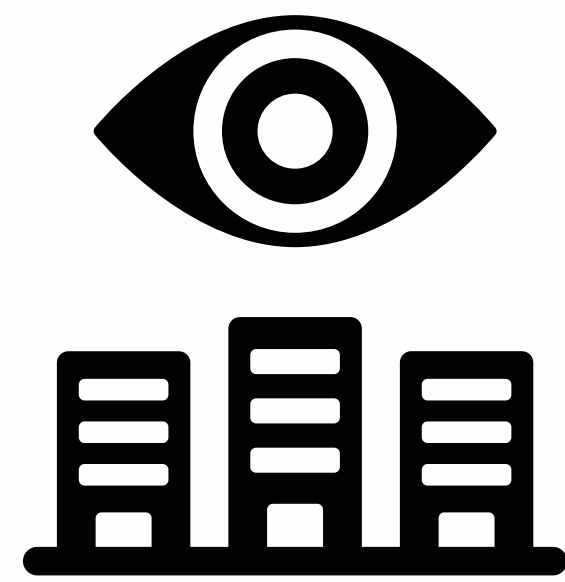
Data activists examining policing and surveillance apparatuses have also been confronted with increasing levels of criminalization from state agencies, making it all the more necessary to adjust both their practices of communication and of research.

In response, activists have developed new methods of tracking and confronting policing and surveillance infrastructures.





COVEILLANCE



Name of Guidebook: The People's Field Guide to Spotting Surveillance Infrastructure

Location: Seattle

Year: 2022

Link: <https://coveillance.org/the-peoples-field-guide-to-spotting-surveillance-infrastructure/>

Keywords: Surveillance

Types of activist practice: Anti-surveillance

Areas of activism: Policing / Surveillance

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

The field guide is concerned with helping us spot “the tools and techniques that ‘watchers’ use to surveil our actions, behaviors, and purchases in digital and physical space.” It problematizes surveillance as a means of regulating, governing, or affecting our behavior, which it argues has become ubiquitous under surveillance capitalism.

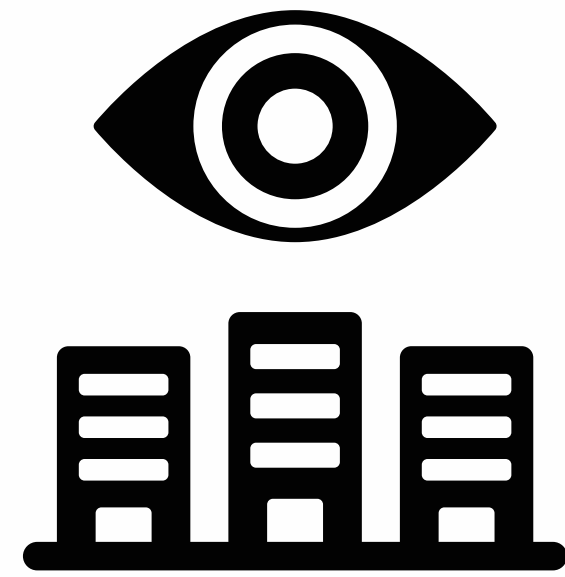
Surveillance capitalism entails “[t]he unilateral claiming of private human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. These data are then computed and packaged as prediction products and sold into behavioral futures markets—business customers with a commercial interest in knowing what we will do now, soon, and later” (Zuboff, 2019).

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

Coveillance describe themselves as “a collective of technologists, organizers, and designers who employ arts-based approaches to build communal counterpower” (p. 1). They are based out of Seattle, Washington.



COVEILLANCE



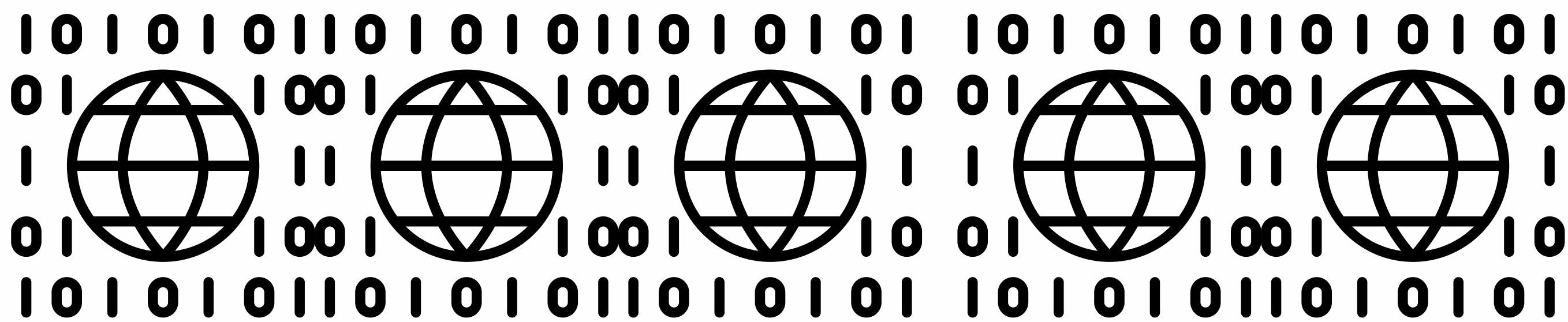
What principles is the guidebook guided by?

The guidebook is shaped by the principles of:

Anonymity – The ability to do something without the action being tied to your personal identity.

Privacy – “The right to be left alone. Both individually and as a collective human right” (p. 1).

Data privacy – “The ability to control the collection and spread of digital information about yourself” (p. 1).



NO TECH FOR ICE

Name of Guidebook: Take Back Tech: How to Expose and Fight Surveillance Tech in your City

Year: 2019

Link: <https://communityresourcehub.org/resources/take-back-tech-how-to-expose-and-fight-surveillance-tech-in-your-city/>

Keywords: surveillance; immigration; USA; ICE; cities

Types of activist practice: Anti-surveillance; Strategy; Counter-Archiving

Areas of activism: Policing / Surveillance

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

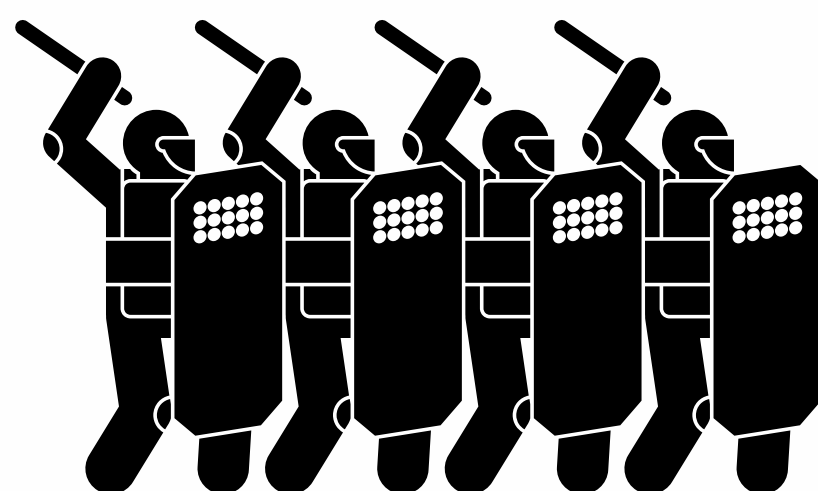
The guidebook is concerned with how new surveillance technologies are being used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the United States to track and deport immigrants. This involves practices of “correctional control” that have been enabled through the application of new technologies. It calls attention to how “[p]hysical jail cells are being replaced with digital prisons through the expansion of electronic monitoring.” It aims to build community-based movements against these forms of surveillance in cities across the United States.

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

Mijente is a digital and grassroots hub for Latinx and Chicanx movement-building and organization. No Tech for ICE is one of their campaigns. However, they are also leading social justice campaigns in a range of other areas.

What challenges does the guidebook identify?

A central challenge is the extent to which ‘correctional control’ has expanded through the development of new technologies.

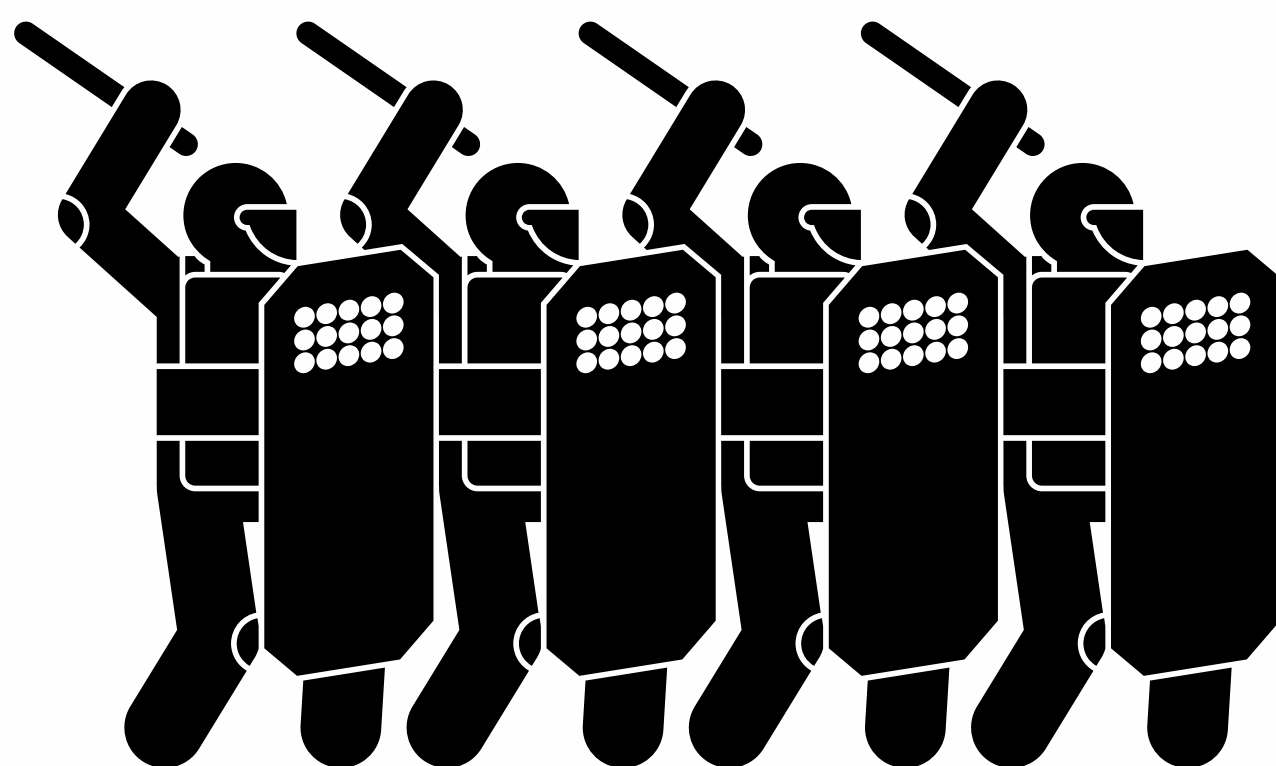


NO TECH FOR ICE

What strategies/tactics does the guidebook offer?

The Guidebook provides organizers with steps that they can take to build a campaign against ICE in their community. This includes:

Doing research, focusing on: a) the technologies and their impacts; b) the public agencies purchasing surveillance technologies in your city; and c) the private companies aiding and abetting this work. Along these lines, the guidebook provides tips on filing freedom of Information requests across different levels of government, building coalitions with organizations working on policing and surveillance issues to support a campaign against the monitoring and deportation of immigrants, and advocating for policy changes and the adoption of anti-surveillance resolutions.





OUR DATA BODIES

Name of Guidebook: Digital Defense Playbook: Community Power Tools for Reclaiming Data

Location: Charlotte, North Carolina; Detroit, Michigan; and Los Angeles California

Year: 2018

Link: <https://cdn.fourwaves.com/static/media/formdata/c4f89ac9-e4bb-4c8d-a701-2157dcbbeef7/930eef70-5133-483a-99d7-4241c258331a.pdf>

Keywords: Data Bodies; Marginalized adults; Privacy; Stalker State

Types of activist practice: Anti-surveillance

Areas of activism: Policing / Surveillance

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

This guidebook provides marginalized communities with tools to understand and confront the ways in which data-based technologies are being integrated into their everyday lives and impacting their ability to self-determine and thrive. To do so, the authors suggest that we must first understand how our communities are impacted by data-based technologies. In this guidebook, they provide ideas on how get people to understand their data bodies and the options they have.

DATA BODY: “Discrete parts of our whole selves that are collected, stored in databases, the cloud, and other spaces of digitally networked flows, and used to make decisions or determinations about us. They are a manifestation of our relationships with our communities and institutions, including institutions of privilege, oppression, and domination” (p. 41).

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

Our Data Bodies is a collaborative, participatory research and organizing effort based out of marginalized neighborhoods in Charlotte, North Carolina, Detroit, Michigan, and Los Angeles, California. The project combines community-based organizing, capacity-building, and rigorous academic research.



OUR DATA BODIES

What principles is the guidebook guided by?

Privacy is a key principle underpinning this work. They describe privacy as a human right that respects the right of people, including their data, to be left alone or kept to themselves. Privacy is also considered to be culturally and historically defined, meaning that data sharing practices might be considered perfectly OK for one group but not at all appropriate for another.

What strategies/tactics does the guidebook offer?

The Guidebook provides an outline for a workshop on data privacy to be undertaken with marginalized community. The format includes:

Story Sharing: The guidebook proposes that sharing stories in relation to surveillance is part of recognizing our collective experiences and strategies.

Data Body Check-Ups: The guidebook proposes check-ups which invite participants to explore the role of digital data collection and data-driven systems in their everyday lives.

Power Not Paranoia: The activities in this section are designed to build community knowledge, defense, health and wellness, and collective organizing strategies for anti-surveillance, digital privacy, and safe and connected communities.

Community Defense Toolkit: The guidebook provides a toolkit that marginalized groups can use to develop collective methods of protecting themselves, including campaigns, tip sheets, media making, artistic work, so that participants can connect to different action steps.

OUR DATA OUR SELVES/ TACTICAL TECH

Name of Guidebook: The Organiser's Activity Book

Location: Berlin.

Year: Unknown, maybe 2017 when other parts of the project were completed, but global health crisis and pandemic are mentioned, so has been updated post 2020.

Link: <https://ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/the-organisers-activity-book/>

Keywords: Organising, events, data, personal data, privacy, security, policy, data policy, interactive workbook, risk management and mitigation, logistics and methods

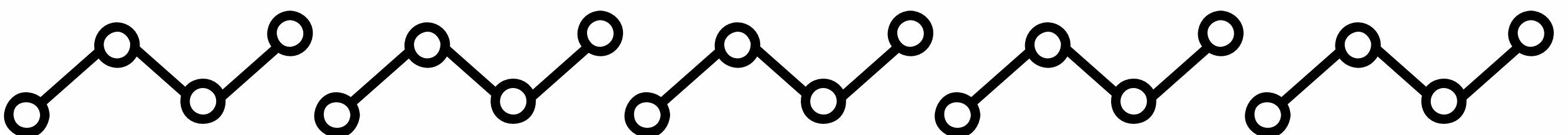
Types of activist practice: Anti-surveillance

Areas of activism: Policing / Surveillance

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

"The Organiser's Activity Book is a series of activities to help you (an event organiser) explore when, where and how personal information is created and shared, what alternatives there are and how to balance the benefits and risks for you and the people you work with" (p. 4)

It is particularly interested in how this data is collected and managed by organisers when organising events that may have guests and speakers visiting in person. It is concerned with how data may be used by nefarious actors in targeting civil society organizations and human rights activists. In this context, it is concerned with how the organisers of events can create spaces and practices that ensure activists' data is protected from any unforeseen harms.



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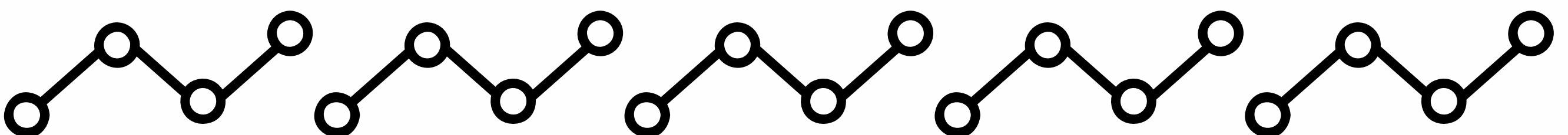
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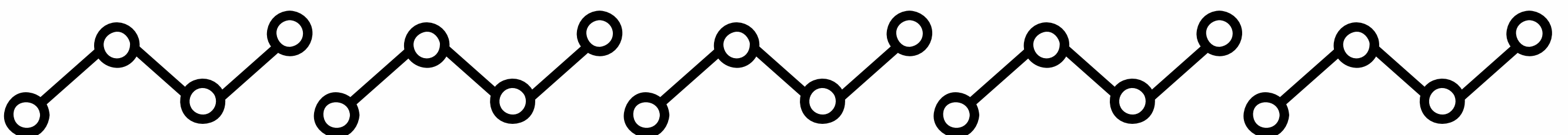
How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

Tactical Tech is a Berlin-based international NGO that engages with citizens and civil-society organisations to explore the impacts of technology on society. This particular guidebook is a collaboration from Amber Macintyre, Ida Flik, Leil Zahra, Tactical Tech and their partner organisations. This guidebook is also available in Portuguese.

What principles is the guidebook guided by?

This guidebook is guided by the principles of security, privacy of personal data about travel, movements, and activism. This guidebook is also particularly concerned with risk management and mitigation and best-practice event organising.

This guidebook is also guided by play. The guidebook is set out as a playful activity book full of games which give examples of situations to avoid and information on how to avoid sharing too much data when organising an event.



TACTICAL TECH

Name of Guidebook: Data Detox Kit (by Tactical Tech)

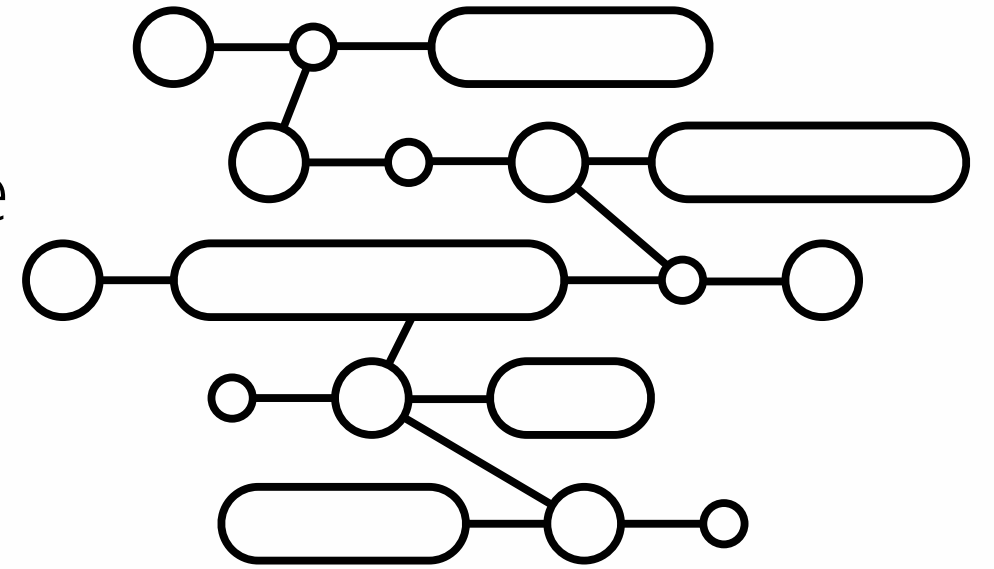
Location: web-based

Year: Ongoing, most pages timestamped as last updated in November 2021

Link: <https://datadetoxkit.org/en/home/>

Types of activist practice: Anti-surveillance

Areas of activism: Policing / Surveillance



What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

This guidebook is concerned with showing users the 'Everyday steps you can take to control your digital privacy, security, and wellbeing in ways that feel right to you.'

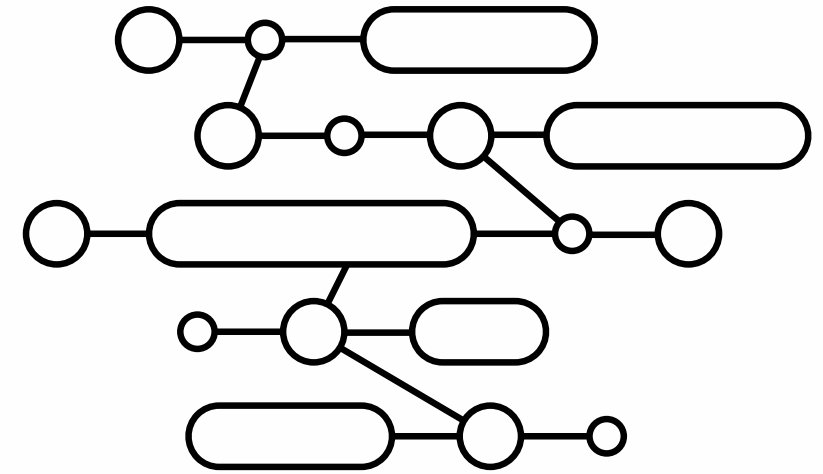
Each underlined section above links to a different webpage. Some webpages have also been designed into printable pdf's that fold into booklets. Those, along with the referenced additional resources provided as webpages, have been reviewed together as one 'guidebook' here.

The first, privacy, links to information on how to control your smartphone data in 5 steps (also available as a pdf), plus additional information on the following topics (on webpages):

- Alexa – a users guide
- Fortify your browser to reduce your traces
- Deooglese your life
- Renovate your social media profile
- Give your device a fresh start
- Declutter your phone with an app cleanse
- Who's the third wheel in your dating life?
- A fistful of privacy tips – how technology shapes your activism
- Refresh and renew – curate your online identity and accounts
- A voters guide – 7 tips to detox your data

TACTICAL TECH

The second, security, links to information on how to 'shift your settings to secure your data in 5 steps' (also available as a pdf), plus additional information on the following topics (on webpages) that help you 'learn how to care for your devices and accounts as you would your house key and wallet with these security detoxes':



- Data breaches
- Cultivate your new phone with care
- Strengthen your screen locks
- Virtual valuables – protect what you're storing online
- Lock your digital door – care for your account security
- Let the right one in – make your passwords stronger
- To click or not to click? - don't fall for tricky URL's

The third, wellbeing, links to information on how to 'escape the defaults: easy techniques to enhance your digital wellbeing' in 5 steps (also available as a pdf), plus additional information on the following topics (on webpages):

- The internet made me do it – find clarity amidst confusing designs
- Hide and seek on your feed – how algorithms influence your information
- Smartphones call for smart habits
- How many trees does it take to power the internet?
- Stay in the moment (even with your phone)

A fourth guide on misinformation is also available. It provides information on how to 'steer clear of misinformation online' (also available as a pdf), plus additional information on the following topics (on webpages):

- Turn on the light – find the truth on the internet
- Health vs. Hoax – immunize yourself against health misinformation online
- Bot or not? - recognise inauthentic activity online
- Is what you see really what you get? - explore visual misinformation
- Verify a photo's origins – use reverse image search

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

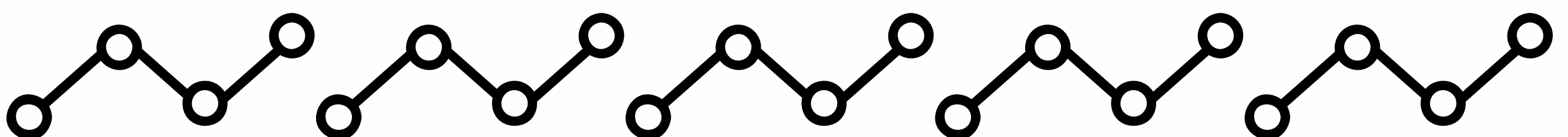
Tactical Tech is a non-governmental organization based in Germany (Tactical Tech) with links and funding from various government organizations (SIDA, EU). At the bottom of the homepage, there are links to Tactical Tech's other projects, namely Exposing the Invisible, Our Data Our Selves, and The Glass Room (art installation). Otherwise, authorship of the guidebooks/website is not explicitly stated.

What principles is the guidebook guided by?

This guidebook is guided by the principles of open information and education and of the right to privacy and security of digital belongings and identity. It is also guided by the principle of education as a way to avoid misinformation spreading online. It is based on a DIY-ethic, and has many links to real apps and actionable, up-to-date links.

What strategies/tactics does the guidebook offer?

This guidebook offers specific strategies on how to mitigate and eliminate the extra data that is collected on every person when they use the internet. The guidebook goes after the major culprits, and provides examples of better alternatives to use. Some examples of their advice and instructions include why and how to clear data history, limit cookies and tracking devices, and advice on which VPN's and other anti-surveillance tools to use, depending on the situation. This guidebook explains why people should go through a 'Data Detox', and gives instruction through games and vignettes on identifying and protecting yourself from misinformation online.



TACTICAL TECH

Name of Guidebook: Zen and the Art of Making Tech Work for You (by Tactical Tech)

Author: Tactical Tech's Gender and Technology Project

Location: Germany

Year: 2015

Link: https://gendersec.tacticaltech.org/wiki/index.php/Complete_manual

Keywords: gender, digital traces, doxing, feminist hacker spaces, liberating technologies

Types of activist practice: Anti-surveillance

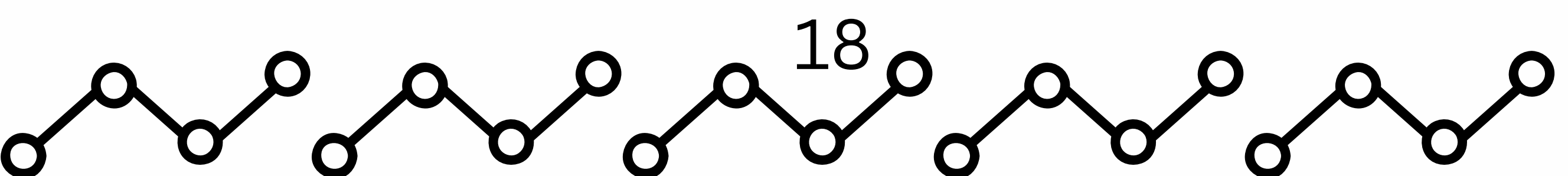
Topics of activism: Policing / Surveillance

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

This guidebook grew out of the 2014 Gender and Technology Institute, organised by Tactical Technology Collective and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). The Institute brought together almost 80 participants and facilitators to focus on issues faced daily by women and trans* persons online and offline, to share strategies and tools for better protecting our digital privacy, as well as show we can spread this knowledge within our communities.

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

Every day, women face the consequences of online harassment and hate speech as a result of their gender identity and their environment. Tactical Tech's Gender and Tech project has worked toward giving women, specifically in Latin America, the technical skills and practical know-how to teach one another and create their own networks. A significant part of this project was the Gender and Technology Institutes, a series of events orientated towards women human rights defenders to address the risks, attacks and contexts faced by activist women in these regions and help them build capacity in their local communities.



TACTICAL TECH

What principles is the guidebook guided by?

The main focus is internet rights as human rights. This involves broadening the focus of policy discussions from girls' and women's access to and use of technology to include technology-related violence as part of the continuum of gender-based violence. Cyber-stalking, hate speech and blackmail violate women and trans persons rights to privacy, work, public participation, freedom from violence and freedom of expression and opinion are common. It also causes women and trans* persons to censor themselves or refrain from speaking up. This ultimately hinders momentum in the various movements and communities women and trans persons are part of.

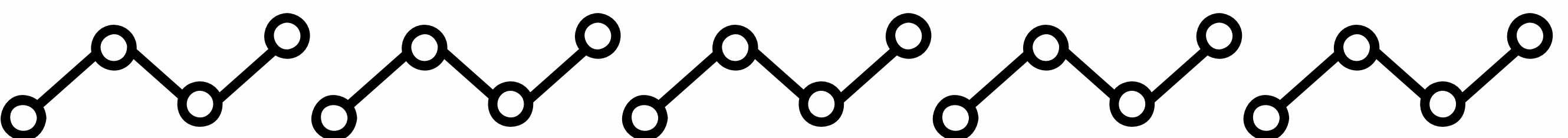
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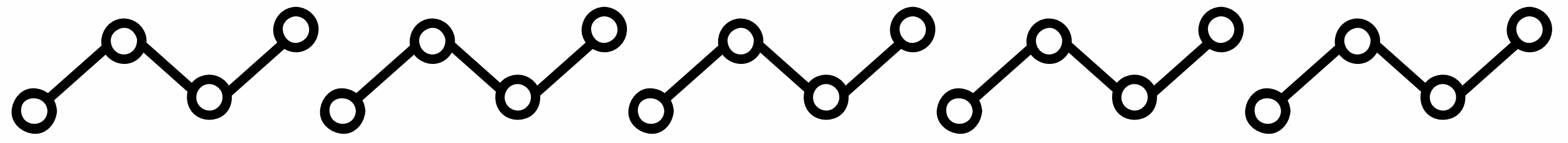
Acknowledging that gender gaps, discrimination and gender-based violence are structural and discursive in the way they are embedded in language, narratives, definitions, social structures and laws. These influence the conditions of women and trans* persons in relation to their access to and experience with technology and the Internet...

Understanding how women and trans* persons in different conditions find ways of accessing technologies, and how they can protect themselves and others in the process.

Sharing skills and knowledge on the ground so that women and trans persons can strengthen their freedom of opinion and expression.

Remembering it is important to make women and trans* experiences in the management and development of technologies visible (not just the digital ones, but also appropriated ones like health technologies for instance).





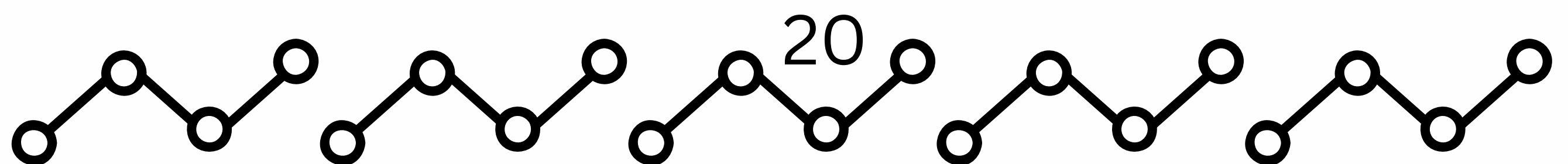
Working to enable a greater participation of women and trans* persons in institutions which contribute to the governance of internet, as well as inside companies and organisations delivering services which support our networking and online identity.

Imagining liberating technologies that enables the full realisation of human rights, and that are inclusive of diversity, is the responsibility of anybody involved in creating an inclusive, decentralised and neutral internet, not just women and trans* persons.

The authors argue we must design technology for liberation.

Liberating technologies can be defined as those that are designed mindfully, fairly produced and distributed, are rooted in free and open-source software principles, are not designed for 'planned obsolescence', and are built to be secure by design. In the same spirit the technologies, systems, and digital services we choose are not designed for or are resistant for use in gender-based violence and surveillance.

"The first most important thing to remember when using this manual, is that we have used the concept of "zen" in the title to highlight the importance of embracing technology with the calm understanding that it won't always work perfectly. Sometimes you might need to spend time pondering technology and the significance of it in your life, in your community and in the world. And other times you might need to take a break and come back to it."



STOP LAPD SPYING



Name of Guidebook:

Automating Banishment: The Surveiliancing and Policing of Stolen Land

Author: Stop LAPD Spying Coalition

Location: Los Angeles, USA

Year: 2021

Link: <https://automatingbanishment.org/>

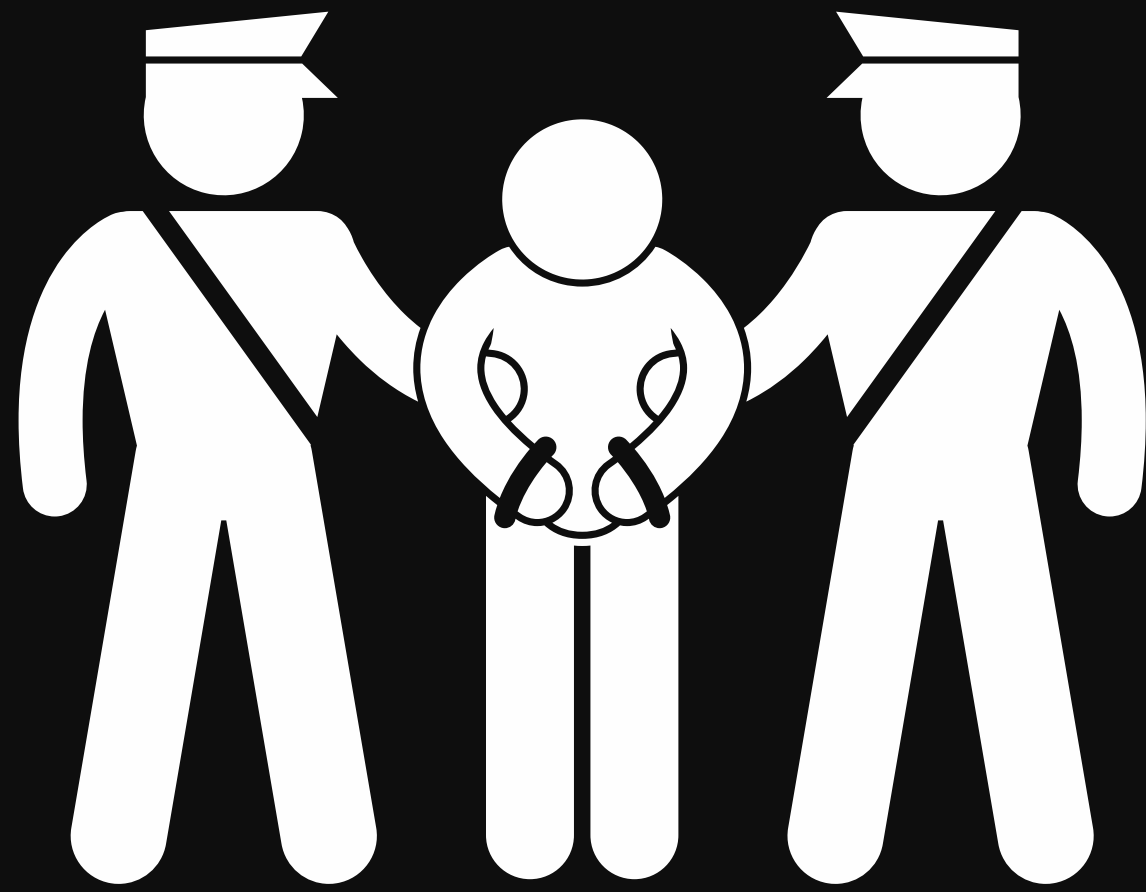
Keywords: Genealogy of surveillance; Data-driven policing; Capitalism; Gentrification; Displacement; Reformism in policing

Types of activist practice: Anti-surveillance; Counter-Archiving; Data Visualization

Areas of activism: Policing / Surveillance



The main issue that the guidebook addresses is how LAPD engages in surveillance and how this enacts spatialized social control of racialized and marginalized people in the Los Angeles area. The audience for the guidebook is residents of LA and also persons who critique police power. The principles underpinning the guidebook are that the work should be accessible but also visual and illuminating using some data techniques. The strategies and tactics offered include visualization, access to information, and agitation. The guidebook is really a useful examination of the situation with LAPD surveillance in Los Angeles. But it also serves as a template for examining similar issues in other cities.



The theoretical ideas underpinning this work draw from critical data studies but also critical race studies. The authors see a link between settler colonialism and White supremacy in the way that the LAPD works with data including data cleaning, crime analysis, and training for police. The authors also show that LAPD works with private and corporate interests on these datafied policing practices notably Palantir which creates policing databases and platforms. The authors bring this all together with a very innovative concept: algorithmic ecology. Algorithmic ecology refers to the way multiple institutions and organizations are connected by digital and computational means in a web of surveillance and security practices.

The report uses a large number of graphs and tables that draw from data in various ways to show the spatialized nature of LAPD social control and surveillance. Some of these data were collected using freedom of information request in a very strategic and impressive way. The visualizations in the report also make it accessible and show, in a material way, exactly what the argument is as it regards LAPD territorial attempts to criminalize and sanitize the city. For example, the authors are able to show how particular neighborhoods are targeted and how particular single-room-occupancy hotels are targeted by LAPD. And through some very interesting data and tables, they're able to trace out where this happens over time. The visualization of the data that the authors provide is impressive.



Another element of the analysis is the political nature of the policing that LAPD engage in. For instance, they show how the hip hop artist, Nipsey Hussle – who was very much in favour of community empowerment and was very much against the criminal justice apparatus – was under investigation and surveillance as part of these broader territorial operations of the LAPD. This work is more of a report. But it functions as a guidebook to the extent that it shows how to perform these analyses. In a sense, the research design put forward in this work could be replicated in any city or place in the world. The report ends with a number of demands including ending the LAPD's data-driven policing, a purge of all the data that they have in their system, disarming and the defunding of LAPD, and abolishing of many parts of the LAPD. The abolitionist politics of the group are clear in their conclusions and demands.



RIGHT2KNOW

Name of Guidebook: People's Tech for People's Power: A Guide to Digital Self-Empowerment

Author: Right2Know

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

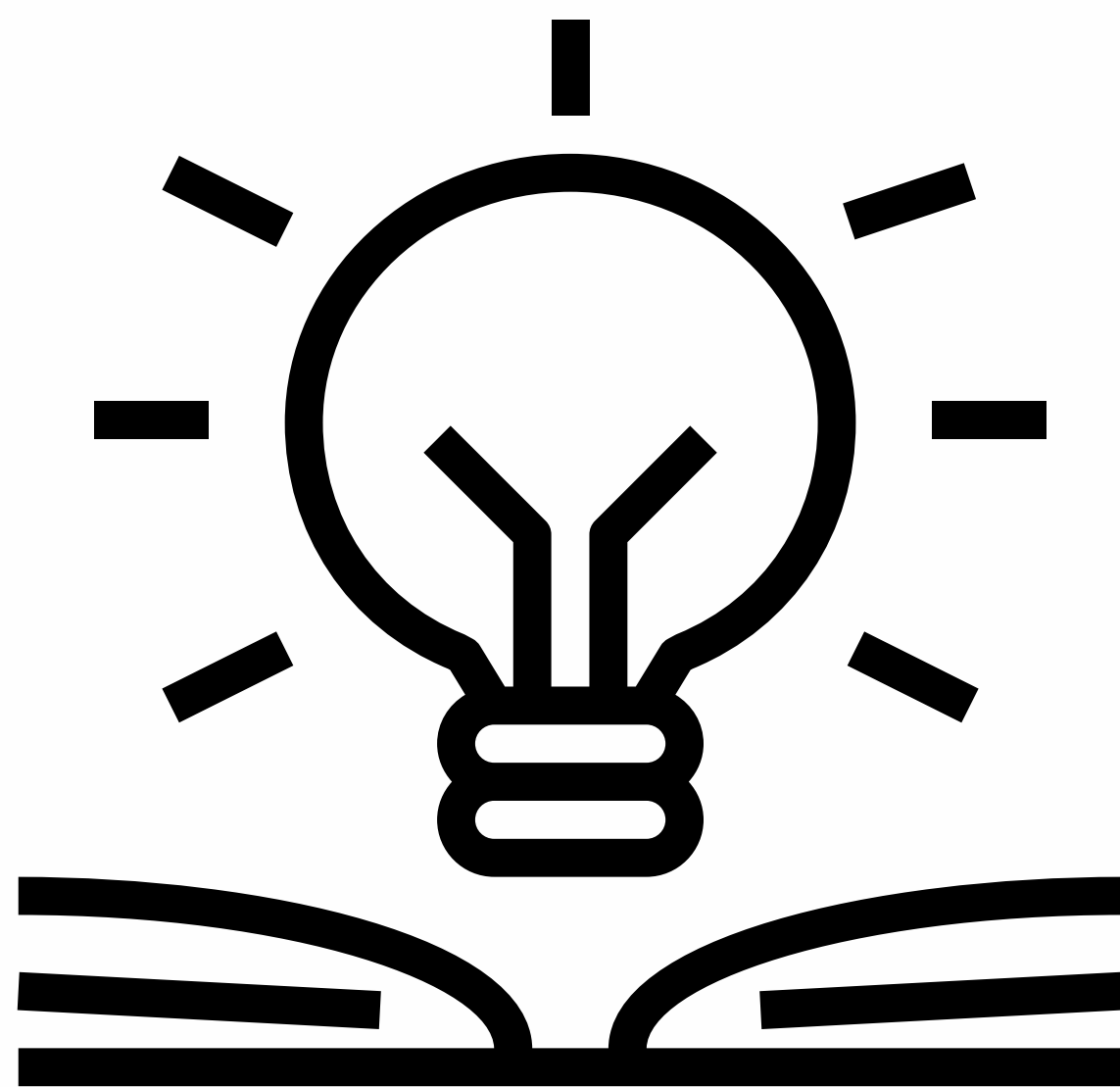
Year: 2020

Link: https://www.r2k.org.za/wp-content/uploads/Peoples-Tech_August-2020.pdf

Keywords: Online surveillance; Social movements; Digital colonialism; Digital socialism

Types of activist practice: Anti-surveillance

Areas of activism: Policing / Surveillance



RIGHT2KNOW

"The state-corporate domination of the digital ecosystem poses an emergency. If we are to have a free and humane society, we need to push back against digital colonialism, surveillance capitalism, and the state-corporate ruling class elites driving it forward..." (pg. 7).

The guide covers a number of topics from the basics of using mobile and smartphones, the basics of web browsing and searching the web, two issues such as email encryption and ways of protecting one's information when using new media. The idea of people's tech for people's power shows that the authors are not against technology per se. Rather, they would like to see the power of technology harnessed for the public good and the public interest. This is why in the guide, they argue for what they call digital socialism an antidote to digital colonialism.



RIGHT2KNOW

What strategies/tactics does the guidebook offer?

The guide begins with a number of definitions of more technical terms and situating of the guide as a response to a fight for democracy and freedom in our new digital society. Throughout the report, there are a number of interactive inserts and text boxes that provide more details and real-life stories for readers. There are also scannable QR codes that send the reader to other tabs and links that provide further information.

The report then goes into some basic aspects of computer coding and how power is ensconced in computer codes in online spaces including how one can access these codes and perhaps work on them to promote the public good. The authors argue one needs to protect their own data and manage their own data and mitigate incursions on their own data. However, they argue, it's important to go further and to organize collectively to push against these mass surveillance institutions. Their argument for digital socialism and kind of recapturing of the power of new media technology is an important political intervention overlaying the technical advice and instructions found in the guide. The argument against mass surveillance is incredible inspiring and insightful.

"A new world is possible, and it will have to include technologies that feature freedom by design. This world will not be gifted by policymakers or enlightened corporations. It will be built by a movement" (pg. 68).



RIGHT2KNOW

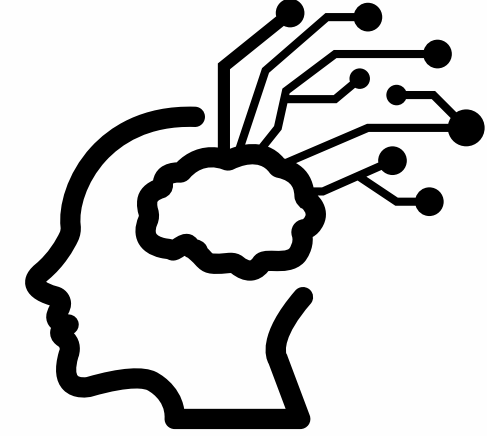
Name of Guidebook: Stop the Surveillance: Activist Guide to RICA & State Surveillance in South Africa

Author: Right2Know

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Year: 2019

Link: <https://www.r2k.org.za/2017/04/20/download-r2ks-activist-guide-to-rica-state-surveillance-in-sa/>



Keywords: State surveillance; Information protection; Communication surveillance; Judiciary power (lack thereof)

Types of activist practice: Anti-surveillance

Areas of activism: Policing / Surveillance

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

This is another guidebook from the Right2Know Campaign, the amazing activist group from South Africa that has done so much work on surveillance, privacy, data, and political organizing lately. They have a number of other guidebooks on their website too, so please take a look at their website (<https://www.r2k.org.za/>). The purpose of Stop the Surveillance is to alert citizens about state surveillance, to advise people to protect their information, and to take action against this kind of surveillance and security intelligence.

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

The Right2Know Campaign is a South African non-profit advocacy organization established in 2010 to reduce state secrecy, increase access to information, and protect freedom of expression especially on the internet. The politics of the group are based on dismantling state power and distributing political and economic power to the people. Stop the Surveillance begins by laying out all of the agencies involved in state surveillance in South Africa and showing how they are connected.

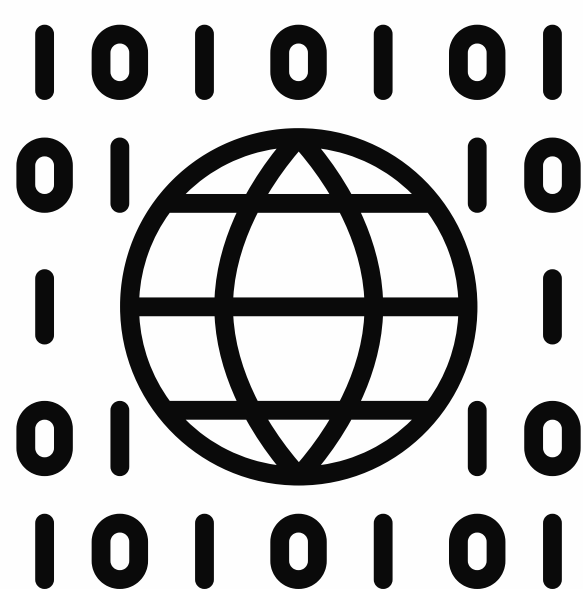
What principles is the guidebook guided by?

Stop the Surveillance makes a passionate argument against mass surveillance and for what the authors call digital socialism. The authors want everyday people to reclaim power and the means of production and communication, and they want to diminish if not dismantle state and corporate power. It is also key to note that the Right2Know Campaign is doing this work and publishing these guidebooks in a context of intense political repression.

"Across the world, communication surveillance is a common tool of repression. Those with power and wealth are afraid of ordinary people, especially when the people are struggling for political freedom and socio-economic justice" (p. 1).

What strategies/tactics does the guidebook offer?

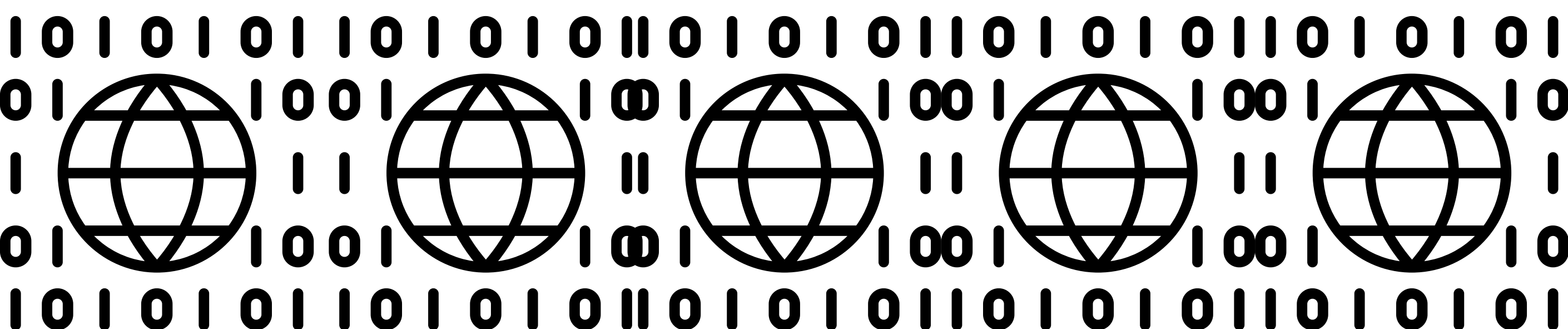
There are a number of pictures showing mobilizations against these forms of surveillance. There are cartoons showing these forms of surveillance so that the guidebook is accessible. There is a listing of laws that enable these kinds of mass surveillance in South Africa as well. Then the authors provide a number of vignettes or stories about mass surveillance including journalists being bugged and their information being picked up by communication surveillance. The authors argue that the watchdog bodies that exist such as Standing Committees on Intelligence and so on have very little oversight. Again, judges in South Africa have little oversight over communication surveillance. The authors argue that collective action is the only way to prevent mass surveillance from happening.





PART II: **Economic and Housing Justice: Making Sense of How We Mobilize Data**

Capitalism and corporate power continue to create crisis and suffering in our world. This section examines guidebooks that investigate corporate power and socio-economic issues and are thus engaged in reversing the current asymmetries of information in order to empower collective action. Contesting corporate power and capitalist greed today requires mapping global networks and using data to assess the flows of information that comprise surveillance capitalism. We also include here an analysis of guidebooks on housing justice and activism. Austerity regimes are making living and finding shelter increasingly daunting tasks. Data activists in the realm of housing and shelter justice are making incredible advances in studying networks of government and local elites that make life less affordable and housing more complicated to access. In both the realms of economic and housing justice, we see attempts to reverse hierarchies of information through sleuthing and sousveillance, using data to make the power of corporations and governments visible.



OPEN DATA FOR TAX JUSTICE

Name of Guidebook: What Do They Pay?

Towards a Public Database to Account for the Economic Activities and Tax Contributions of Multinational Corporations

Location: London

Year: 2017

Link: <https://datafortaxjustice.net/what-do-they-pay/>

Keywords: Corporate research

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

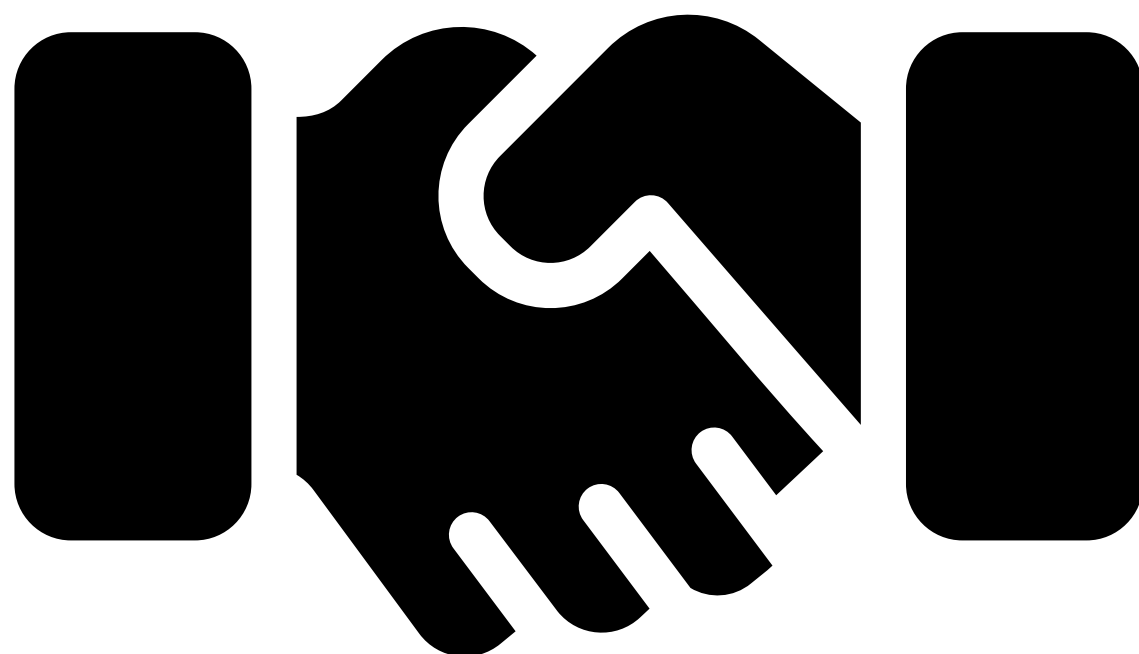
The guidebook is concerned with the lack of transparency in the reporting of economic activities and tax contributions by large corporations, which enables them to avoid paying taxes.

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

Open Data for Tax Justice is “a global network of people and organisations using open data to improve advocacy, journalism and public policy around tax justice.” It is made up of 30 member organizations (see the website for details).

What principles is the guidebook guided by?

The guidebook is guided by the principles of transparency, open data, experimentation and democratic deliberation.



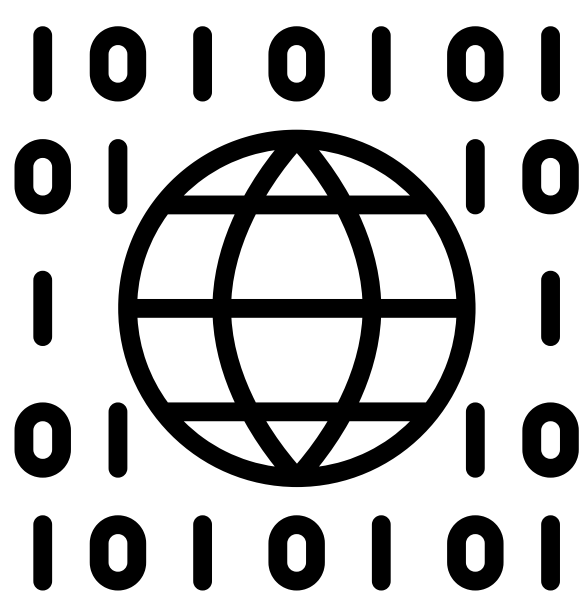
What strategies/tactics does the guidebook offer?

In resolving this problem, they advocate for the adoption of Country-by-Country Reporting (CBCR), which is “intended to show for the first time exactly where companies do business, and the extent to which this is aligned – or misaligned – with where they declare profits.” This would be “a smoking gun to establish that a specific tax avoidance structure has been at play; but it could be a powerful instrument to help a variety of different actors to know where to investigate further, and what the scale of the problem may be” (p. 1).

Though the EU, the US and the OECD have taken steps towards establishing CBCR, there is currently no database where this information is publicly accessible. The guidebook sets out the blueprint, documenting what a global public database could look like, and taking tentative steps towards establishing it.

Beyond working to establish a public database, the guidebook envisions how public databases can be used “in assembling and facilitating collaboration between different ‘data publics.’”

“Such a database might thus open up space for new kinds of democratic deliberation and public engagement around how the global economy is organised – and how some of the largest most powerful economic actors on the planet - both multinationals and jurisdictions including major tax havens - can be understood, managed and held to account” (p. 1).



LITTLESIS



Name of Guidebook: Map the power

Location:

Year: 2021

Link: <https://littlesis.org/toolkit> ; also at <https://www.corporatemapping.ca/>

Keywords: Social network analysis, mapping, corporate power

Types of activist practice: Counter-Archiving

Areas of activism: Corporate power

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

The guidebook is concerned with the problem of the illicit “influence of big money and corporate power in our democracy.” It seeks to bring transparency to these activities by mapping the networks through which corporate power influences governments.

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

The Public Accountability Initiative (PAI) is a nonprofit watchdog research organization focused on corporate and government accountability. “We conduct and facilitate “power research” public interest research on how power relationships shape policy in the United States. Our research brings transparency to the influence of big money and corporate power in our democracy. We frequently work in partnership with organizers and journalists to support challenges to this influence, and we also work to make power research more participatory, through trainings and workshops.”

“PAI also oversees LittleSis.org, a wiki database and platform for power research. LittleSis is like the opposite of Big Brother - instead of surveilling the people, we track the people and organizations in the power structure, from CEOs and major investors to politicians and lobbyists. Data on LittleSis is drawn from a diverse array of online sources, and maintained through a combination of automated scripts and user edits. Activists, journalists, and researchers use the site to conduct research, analyze data, and create visual network maps with Oligrapher, the LittleSis power mapping tool”.

LITTLE SIS

What principles is the guidebook guided by?

This toolkit has been designed to provide people with the tools to conduct power research and develop a research pod, or crew of folks, that have the skills to investigate local corporate bodies and organize against them. “You can use this toolkit as a starting point for organizing around a common target with your neighbors and friends, or to strengthen the work of your organization!”



TACTICAL TECH

Name of Guidebook: Exposing the Invisible: The Kit

Year: 2020

Link: <https://kit.exposingtheinvisible.org/en/> ;

<https://cdn.ttc.io/src/kit.exposingtheinvisible.org/pdf/The-Kit-booklet-web.pdf>

Types of activist practice: Counter-Archiving

Areas of activism: Corporate power

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

This guidebook is concerned with educating anyone and everyone who is interested in conducting an online investigation, especially those who have no prior experience with activism...

What principles is the guidebook guided by?

This guidebook is guided by the principles of sharing information on: safety, verification, knowledge and power for anyone to become an investigator, aka a data activist.

The guidebook notes in the introduction and first section that “The Kit is a collaborative, self-learning resource that makes investigative techniques and tools used by experienced investigators more accessible to people and communities who feel motivated to start their own investigations, collect and verify information, build evidence and create a better understanding of issues without losing sight of ethical or safety considerations. The aim is to help people develop the ability to question information that they suspect is false, find information when it is scarce and filter information when it becomes overwhelming” (p. 3).

What challenges does the guidebook identify?

This guidebook highlights many challenges, especially safety and security concerns, limitations of digital and physical investigations, of sources and of accuracy in verification of information. The guidebook links to other websites and guidebooks for further information on protecting yourself and your investigation from falling into the ‘wrong hands’.

What strategies/tactics does the guidebook offer?

This guidebook offers many strategies and tactics to investigate any topic online and using digital methods. It offers a thorough, step-by-step breakdown of how to use the following techniques and their limitations:

- Dorking, a way of searching for information across various search engines to uncover public data that was otherwise unavailable using keywords.
- Retrieving and archiving information from websites, often using the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, Archive.today and visual site monitors.
- Seeing what's behind a website, including hidden data, webpages administrators don't want tracked, and domain ownership.
- Use maps and satellite imagery to find and visualize information in a physical location. Many detailed descriptions of specific mapping apps and services are explained, as well as DIY options.
- Field investigations, planning running and evaluating a safe and effective in-person investigation. For academic researchers, some of this information may be familiar, as it touches on basics and more in-depth research techniques.
- Interview techniques, skills and good practices to safely identify, communicate and maintain contact with people who can provide evidence to support investigations. Also information that may be familiar to academics, explained for non-academics.
- Build contacts and learn how to develop, interact with and maintain sources in a friendly and productive way. Very 'saying the quiet things out loud' information about working with others, like maintaining boundaries and building trust
- Supply chain investigation techniques, highlighting elements like verification, traceability and information available from barcodes and HS codes.
- Safety, online and in the field, including VPN's, browsers, and communication channels. Much more found in their in-depth guide to safety, not in this guidebook.

Each section above has a corresponding in-depth guide on the Exposing the Invisible website. This guidebook is thorough, offering a step-by-step breakdown of how to investigate each of these types of issues and concerns.

ANTI-EVICTION MAPPING PROJECT

Name of Guidebook: AEMP Handbook by The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP)

Location: San Francisco

Year: 2018

Link: <https://antievictionmap.com/writing-new>

Keywords: Evictions, housing, mapping, gentrification

Types of activist practice: Data Visualization; Cultivating communities and self-care

Areas of activism: Housing

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

The Anti-Eviction Handbook is concerned with “documenting the dispossession and resistance of San Francisco Bay Area residents facing gentrifying landscapes.” By documenting dispossession, it is argued that residents will be better able to resist it.

It provides a useful guide in adopting map-making practices in social justice struggles, while at the same time discussing the limits of these practices, acknowledging “the dangers of reducing complex social and political worlds to simple dots.” Ultimately, it provides a layered approach to generating knowledge about evictions that includes a diversity of methods.

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

“The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP) is a data visualization, data analysis, and oral history collective documenting the dispossession and resistance of San Francisco Bay Area residents facing gentrifying landscapes.” They frame themselves as a horizontally structured, “fluid collective” ; “as much a platform for regional activists to collaborate and learn from each other, as it is a content-generating research effort.” They started in 2011, “when the Bay Area began experiencing a dramatic increase in eviction rates.”

ANTI-EVICTION MAPPING PROJECT

What challenges does the guidebook identify?

This guidebook highlights many challenges, especially safety and security concerns, limitations of digital and physical investigations, of sources and of accuracy in verification of information. The guidebook links to other websites and guidebooks for further information on protecting yourself and your investigation from falling into the 'wrong hands'.



PUBLIC DATA LAB

Name of Guidebook: Composing Collective Inquiry with Digital Methods and Data

Location: UK

Year: 2022

Link:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cf15af7a259990001706378/t/62c70c143ba433449bfefd3e/1657211951633/Gray_etal_2022.pdf;

<https://publicdatalab.org/>

Keywords: Social movement learning

Types of activist practice: Teaching

Areas of activism: Empowerment; Cultivating communities and care

What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

The guidebook is a more formal exploration of methods of combining digital research and teaching informed by the experiences of the guidebook's authors as well as by constructivist and pragmatist approaches to learning and collective inquiry. They are looking to develop pedagogical spaces facilitating the emergence of inventive and critically engaged projects, where educators avoid taking for granted the questions, formats, interests, data, methods, materials, and means of research.

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

The guidebook's authors are educators and researchers based in multiple institutions and members of the Public Data Lab, an interdisciplinary network exploring "what difference the digital makes in attending to public problems". As they mentioned in their website, their approach is focused on:

-Intervention around social, political, economic and ecological issues; (attending to how these are materialised and manifested)

-Participation through involving different publics in the co-design of our work; (attending to the means through which involvement is organised)

What principles is the guidebook guided by?

-Combining 'the doing,' 'researching' and 'making' of social life in new ways: Methods as "in and of the world, invested with particular purposes, sponsors and resources, and 'actively engaged in doing the social'"

-Inquiry based learning: "reconceptualising students and instructors as compatriots in the search for knowledge". Aims to involve learning for all and shifts in perspective about the role of digital methods and data in the composition of problems and addressing questions.

What strategies/tactics does the guidebook offer?

The guidebook covers different kinds of projects conducted by its co-authors, which can offer interesting avenues for our own future endeavors;

Issue mapping – attending to the socio-technical organisation of issues online, including, for example through the analysis of hyperlinking patterns to study 'issue networks'

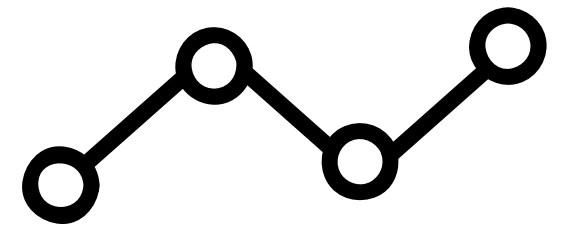
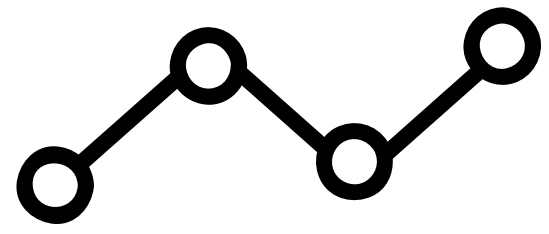
Electronic Maps to Assist Public Science (EMAPS) - using controversy mapping in a participatory manner, including through collective inquiry with and for various actors involved in or affected by the controversies being mapped

Data sprints – working with both students and external collaborators in focused five-day workshops organised into hour and a half sessions interwoven with breaks

The guidebook also offers insights regarding the different phases or dimensions of a participatory research project. The authors focus, for instance, on the way to bring students together in formulating the project's initial orientation. The orientation can emerge for instance via deliberate discussion with experts, whom they interrogated on the most pressing areas of inquiry of their respective fields, or instead through the students' own day-to-day experiences and interrogations.

They also discuss the different ways to articulate the various roles and functions that will need to be fulfilled through the inquiry, i.e. "the negotiation of overlapping, rotating and shifting roles, as well as [the] setup which will assemble and hold a collective of inquiry together" (p. 64). They focus on the practices of collective documentation these kinds of collaborative digital projects.

Finally, they discuss what kind of considerations should determine the format and direction of the project's output. Throughout, they give multiple illustrations of their own research projects and how these different aspects were negotiated within their respective collectives.



Name of Guidebook: How to become an occasional cartographer: Insights into various mapping guides as a starting point for your practice

Location: -

Year: 2018

Link: https://notanatlas.org/atlas/this_is_not_an_atlas_manual.pdf

Keywords: Democratization; Empowerment; Critical cartography; Reflexivity; Solidarity

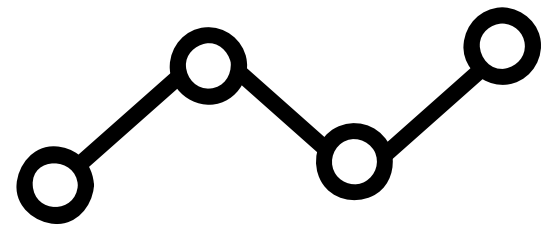
Types of activist practice: Data Visualization

Areas of activism: Empowerment ; Cultivating communities and care

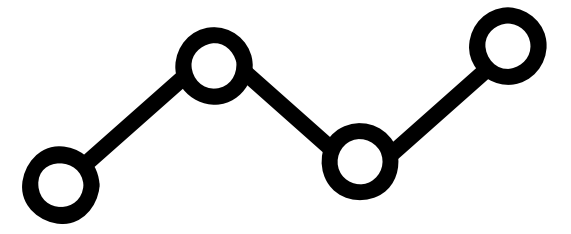
What problem is the guidebook concerned with?

How to become an occasional cartographer is concerned with introducing newcomers to the essentials of activist or community mapping. In order to do so, it refers to three other mapping guidebooks. Making Maps: A Visual Guide to Map Design for GIS (John Krygier & Denis Wood) emphasizes the basic questions the occasional cartographer should consider before even starting the mapping process: What are you actually trying to accomplish through the mapping? What data are you going to use? What's the relation of this data to the phenomenon you want to document - i.e. is it proxy data? Do you actually need this map? Etc.

Manual of Collective Mapping: Critical Cartographic Resources for Territorial Processes of Collaborative Creation (the Iconoclastas) delves into the more strategic aspects of critical cartographic practices. It highlights the way cartography has always been an hegemonic practice - an "ideological representation" that modelizes and simplifies the complexity of a territory to achieve specific goals, with most cartographic efforts having been oriented toward the consolidation of state endeavors. And yet, the Iconoclastas call for a reappropriation of cartographic practice through collective mapping as an instrument of struggle and community building.



KOLEKTIV ORANGOTANGO



Finally, *A Guideline for Solidary Mapping* (Anna Hirschmann, Raphael Kiczka & Florian Ledermann) considers the ethical and organizational challenges activists must consider precisely when they engage in these forms of collective or participatory cartographic endeavours.

(...) The critique of the ideological or reality-constructing character of a hegemonic map also holds true for any alternative mapping! It is exactly this character, that can turn an alternative map into a powerful, subversive and thought-provoking irritation. ...

Solidary mappings can generate a collective value of knowledge and dispute, if the first idea of mapping with all the represented individuals is opened for collective reflection and further developed. If the mapped "subjects" are at the same time involved in the production, this may lead to the mapping being more of a self-portrayal than an unwanted portrayal ... (p. 206)

How do the authors of the guidebook frame themselves?

How to become an occasional cartographer is a chapter within *This is not an atlas: A global collection of counter cartographies*, by kollektiv orangotango, which is described as "a collective of critical geographers, friends and activists who deal with questions regarding space, power and resistance. With our geographical activism, we seek to support processes and oppositional actors who instigate social change by prefiguring social alternatives. We conduct emancipatory educational work as well as concrete political and artistic interventions."

What principles is the guidebook guided by?

How to become an occasional cartographer is driven by the will to democratize cartographic practices to the broader public. Yet we can also see, within the three publications it chooses to highlight, a clear focus for responsible engagement toward the communities we want to engage with. Additionally, Iconoclastas propose eleven theses for occasional cartographers (Occasional cartographer, 201-203), among which we want to highlight:

#1 The map is a technology (besides being a trend) allowing something which is not divided by perceptions to be displayed or to appear through sight (as well as other senses), however, the map is built through them, through each one of those perceptions. In this way it resembles language: it does not preexist but as potential before the act of putting it into practice. In consequence, instead of speaking of maps, to speak of mapping is more adequate, mapping as an activity. Carrying no maps makes us weaker. The activity of mapping is an activity building senses, in its three meanings: it leaves a mark on sensitivity, it directs, and it fosters understanding.

#5 (...) Agribusiness, mega-extractivism, drug trade, all of these impose growing levels of violence as a method to subordinate the common to capitalist valuation. The use of armed gangs by businessmen, the complicity of the various police institutions, and the participation of judges and district attorneys as well as that of sectors of the political branch in this business web, these are all an everyday occurrence. Which kind of mapping is necessary to account for these new kinds of violence? How to understand the forms territorial dispute undertakes which run at new speeds?

#11 The dilemma between interpreting and transforming should be no longer an antithesis. Here and now, by way of the practice of mapping, a process of interpretation/knowledge of the world is developed in concrete territories. This is carried out by combining everyday and popular knowledge (not specialized or expert knowledge) to create strategic tools aimed at transforming our realities. In this way, mapping-interpreting-transforming becomes a simultaneous task that is constantly in motion.

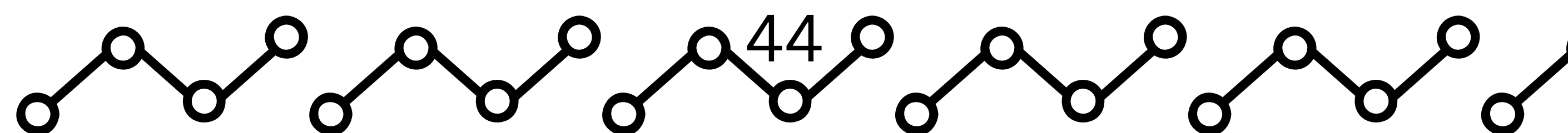
CONCLUSION

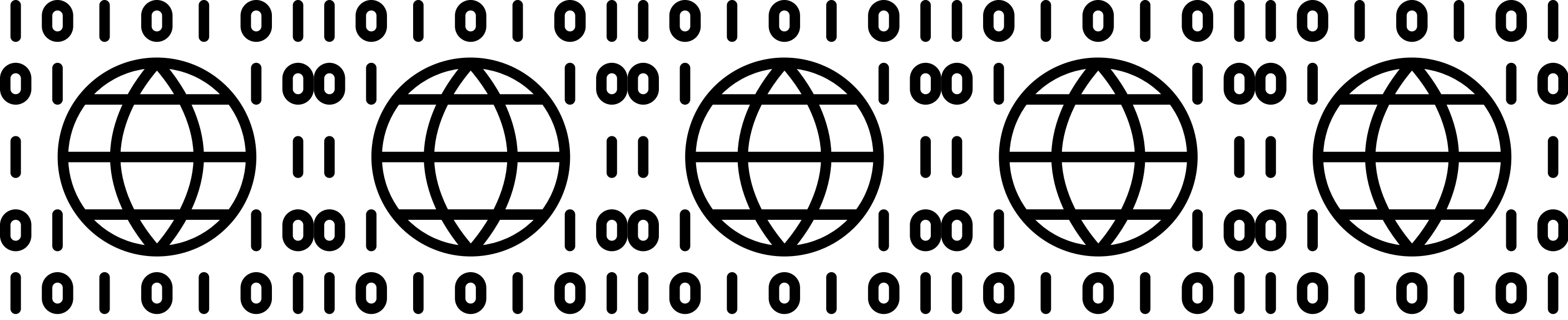
This *Guidebook on Guidebooks* is just a starting place. We have presented just a few of the guidebooks being produced by social activists around the world. We regret not having the space to cover more of the amazing work that is out there. A lot more work is necessary to make sense of the work that is being done by social activists.

While this is by no means a comprehensive handbook on data activism, these guidebooks are important resources. Rooted in specific social struggles, they are practical in orientation and offer many useful tips. By creating a toolkit that compiles some of the methods that are out there, we hope that we can contribute to the circulation of ideas and the development of new strategies and tactics. Moreover, we hope to foster connections and conversations between different social movement groups.

We are excited to continue to learn from data activists and social movement groups. We are enthused that more and more people are interested in data activism every day. We know that if human beings are going to survive into the future, and if we're going to live in a peaceful, equitable world, things need to change in a big way. Data activism and the techniques we've encountered here are part of pushing for that better world. Thank you to the activists and social movement groups for doing the work every day. Thank you to the reader for reading this short guidebook on guidebooks.

Please look for more reports, podcasts, zines and other stuff from the Data Justice Hub coming soon.....





Other Works and Additional Resources

CorpNet: <https://corpnet.uva.nl/about/> corpnet

Corporate Mapping Project: <https://www.corporatemapping.ca/>

LittleSis: <https://littlesis.org/>

Not-an-Atlas OA Book: <https://notanatlas.org/book/>

Manual: https://notanatlas.org/atlas/this_is_not_an_atlas_manual.pdf

Videos: <https://notanatlas.org/videos/> kollektiv orangotango

Mapping Materials:

<https://orangotango.info/category/critical-mapping/materials/>

Critical Mapping: <https://orangotango.info/critical-mapping/>

Iconoclasistas (in Spanish) Icons, Manuals:

<https://iconoclasistas.net/recursos/>

Our website: <https://datajusticehub.ca>

