

Website must be easily clone-able

be backed

it has foreseen that the official homepage will

1000+ polling stations

Census of 5.3 million

Spanish police

information

Where to vote

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Referendum Medialogs

An independent, self-hosted repository about internet blocking and distributing practices, and media noise in the context of the Catalan referendum on 1 October 2017.

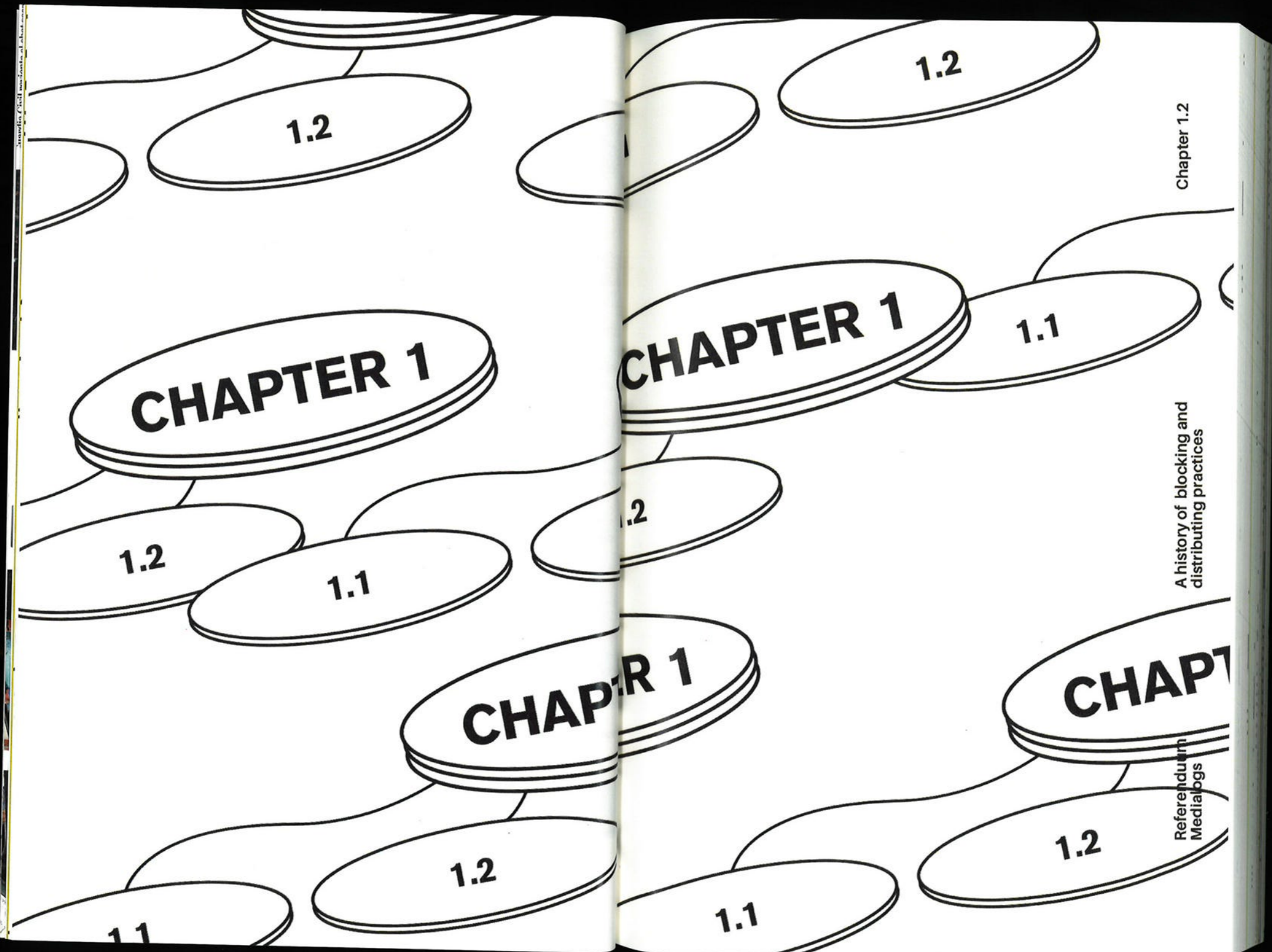
Franc González



What is Referendum Medialogs?

Referendum Medialogs is an independent, self-hosted repository of different documented material about the recent conflict of the Catalan referendum on the 1st of October 2017. I talk about the Catalan referendum because it is a good contemporary example that shows how dramatically can the internet be used to censor, manipulate and deploy information, even in a European democracy. This conflict has served as a model to better understand the social implications of software in democracy and offers the possibility to create some awareness on the existing methods and tools for countering government censorship, surveillance, and disinformation practices of the often invisible processes of the news cycle. Therefore, this repository attempts to map a journey of the events before, during and after the referendum, showing a series of conflicts leading to both blocking and distributing practices, in a context strongly characterized by nonstop overloads of inaccurate information.

At the same time, Referendum Medialogs digs into the issue of media noise, using open source revision control software Diffengine to track and log article revisionism, offering a space for hidden narratives, a hint to interpretations, an archive of technical incorrectness, of erasure, a selection of deliberate misreports and an exercise in creating awareness. Article revisionism is an immaterial and often ephemeral act enabled by the ever-changing nature of the net. Ludovico (2012, p.62) states that "the very nature of the news is becoming increasingly ephemeral – an endless stream of short news items all competing (often desperately) for our attention."



CHAPTER 1

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Chapter 1.2

A history of blocking and distributing practices

Referendum Medialogs

CHAPT

Archivist Aniol Maria, a member of the Archivists Association of Catalonia (AAC-GD) and former collaborator of the Twitter-based archiving initiative #ArxivemElMoment aimed to collect digital evidence during the referendum, was investigated for creating a repository of the referendum's website on his Github account. However, as Aniol was involved in archiving initiatives, he could prove that he did it to preserve digital evidence, and not to publish the webpage source code out of Github. Aniol appeared on a press conference, together with members of the Pirate party (pirata.cat), an activist party defending human rights, technological sovereignty and open data, that was also investigated.

Reports on censorship around the Catalan referendum (Murphy, 2017 cited in Security Without Borders, 2017) state that authorities requested the Catalan organization Fundació PuntCat which registers the names of the ".cat" domains, to shut down all active domains with content related to the referendum. The PuntCat considered this measure disproportionate and denounced it to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). This triggered police to break into the PuntCat's offices, searching for documents, retaining its technical director under custody for 2 days. Results published by the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI, 2017) shows that the government forced telecom operators such as Vodafone, Orange, France Telecom Espanya, Euskaltel or Telefonica/Movistar to track and block websites

with content related to the process, giving evidence on three methods used to block sites.

The first method consisted of altering DNS or Domain Name Systems. OONI (2017) explains that this is the most common and easy technique used by authorities. DNS associates the identity of a website with its unique numerical address or Internet Protocol (IP). IP addresses are required for any connected device communicating to the internet. The purpose of a single domain name system is to allow any user in the world to be able to reach a specific host IP by entering the address's domain name. Control over servers hosting DNS data means exercising power. Studies on the political economy of the internet freedom (Powers and Jablonski, 2015) writes that "Domain names determine the visibility and accessibility of a service; by removing a domain name, all services associated to it are made unreachable". Lessig explains in Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace (Lessig, 1999 cited in Powers and Jablonski, 2015) that political and social values are inevitably built into the architecture of technological systems.

The second method was based on intercepting web traffic through HTTP, and the third method used encrypted web traffic or HTTPS, blocking entire domains while affecting several other unrelated websites. These measures accelerated the blocking of websites without any further court order, including citizen groups and non-profit organizations. Although just a portion of the information on the referendum



Fig. 16. Ribas, El País, 2017. National Police arrive in Barcelona on ferry decorated with Looney Tunes.



Fig. 25. #ArxivemElMoment, Instamaps. 2017. Archive locations in Catalonia to donate digital evidence about 1 October.

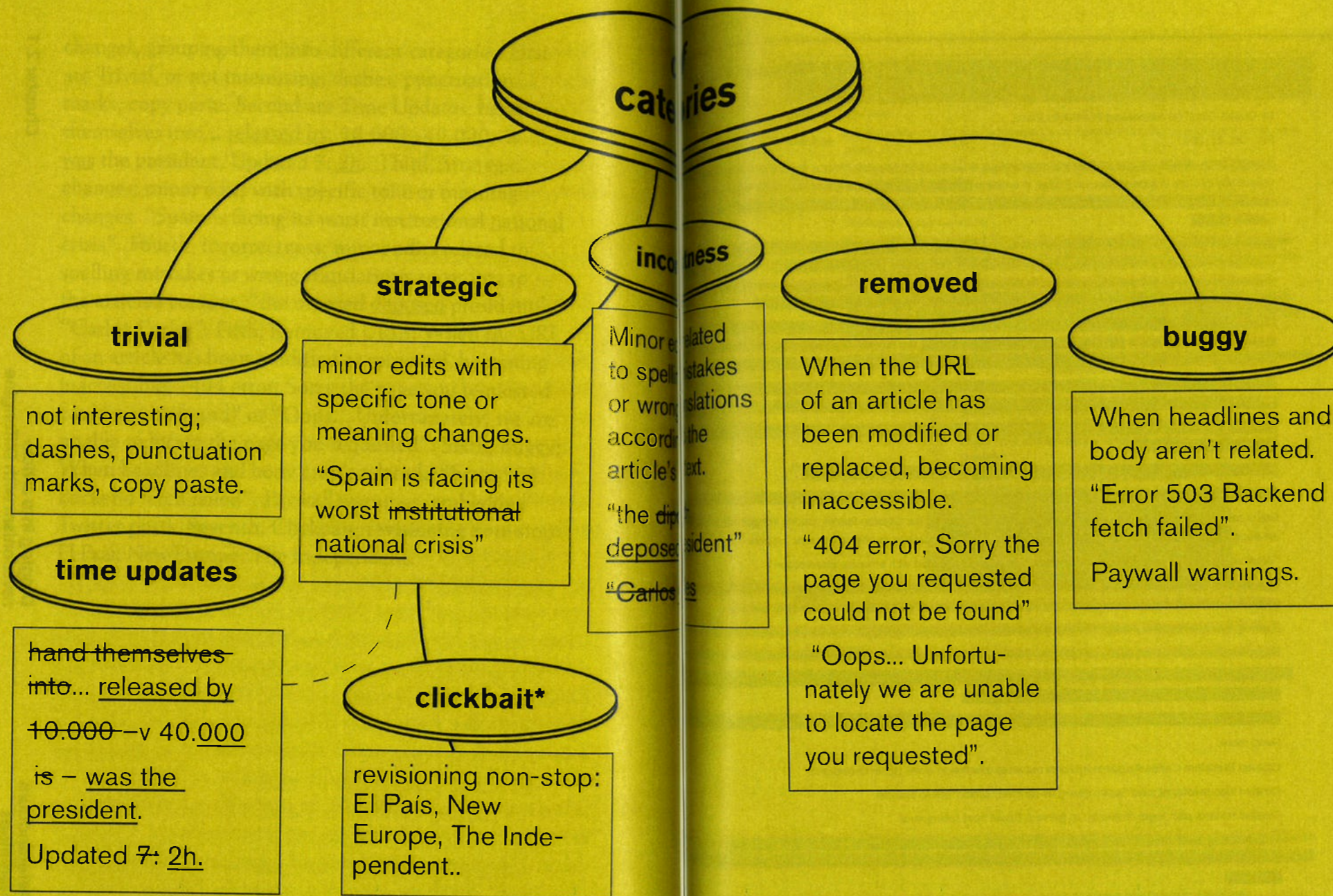




Fig. 56. González, Referendum Medialogs, 2018. Referendum Medialogs main page.

Referendum Medialogs was presented at Art Meets Radical Openness (#AMRO18), together with the work of Marloes de Valk, Emily Buzzo, and Giulia de Giovanelli.

AMRO is a biennial community festival in Linz that explores and discusses new challenges between digital culture, art, everyday life, education, politics and active action.

The current issue “Unmapping Infrastructures” deals with the idea of “mapping” as a process of becoming aware and then acquiring a critical position about the current landscape of technological infrastructures.

This conglomerate of machines, human and non-human actors, nation-states and borderless companies is increasingly complex to observe and describe. Nevertheless, we believe that there is more to be seen than a hyper-commercialized structure of interlaced technological layers. Cartographic mapping consists of a series of practices of observing, analyzing and representing a territory to be able to move through it.

How can art and activism appropriate the methods of cartographic mapping to produce new, critical and alternative views of the current landscape shaped by different players?

The festival aims at deepening the thematic areas of digital geopolitics, alternative design methods, activist practices and autonomous infrastructures, themes that offer directions for localizing areas of intervention. Throughout the festival, these topics will be further explored through discussion panels, workshops, and performances.

During this short 15 min presentation, I have given a quick overview of the events and incidents surrounding 1 October, then I have shown a selection of article revisions using Diffengine, whether having more or less significant news changes. The idea was to get a better sense of these news processes which are often invisible to the user. Finishing with a curated collection of both resources and revisions presented on a MediaWiki page.

The Questions and Answers section at the end of our presentations provided Referendum Medialogs with very critical, diverse and useful feedback, which I have transcribed on the following pages.

