Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue on:

Speaking truth to power? The ethico-politics of whistleblowing in contemporary mass-mediated economy

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Ever since the NSA affair in 2013, the WikiLeaks-disclosures or the publication of the Panama Papers in 2015, hardly a day goes by without the media reporting on whistleblowing, leaks, hacks, and uncovered truths. In contemporary global knowledge economy, organizations have become 'leaky containers'. The conjunction of openness and closure, visibility and invisibility, and transparency and secrecy of information is increasingly precarious (Curtis and Weir, 2016). Public perceptions of whistleblowers are rife with ambivalence. For some they represent traitorous violators of a code of fidelity to their organization, suspicious figures who betray secrets and reject their obligations of loyalty to the employer. Others view whistleblowers as heroic truth-tellers: martyrs to the cause of transparency and openness and veritable 'saints' of today's secular culture (Grant, 2002). In light of the increasing attention that whistleblowers and acts of whistleblowing attract, this special issue of *ephemera* is interested in exploring whistleblowing as a phenomenon that is socially mediated and shaped, with the principal aim of gaining better insights into the political and the ethical questions that accompany practices of whistleblowing. We notice that organizational research into this area tends to be somewhat a-political, evaluating whistleblowing in terms of whether predefined rules or

ethical codes have been followed (Hoffman and Schwartz, 2015). Many studies in the field focus on predicting the likelihood of whistleblowing occurring in a given organizational setting (Bjørkelo et al., 2010; Miceli, 2004) or on creating typologies of motivations for why people speak up. Others concentrate on examining the kinds of retaliations and personal impacts that organizational whistleblowers suffer (Alford, 2001; Glazer and Glazer, 1989). Such approaches are valuable for enhancing our understanding of whistleblowing as an experience, but where the focus is exclusively upon micro-level issues such as retaliation, motivation and personal impacts, there is a tendency to ignore the wider political, cultural and institutional contexts in which they occur.

A few studies have addressed contextual issues by exploring, for instance, the relation between whistleblowing and power, seeing the former as a type of organizational resistance (Martin, 1999; Vinten, 1994; Rothschild and Miethe, 1999). Whistleblowing has further been conceptualised as an institutionally shaped and culturally mediated social practice (Perry, 1998), or as a modern form of courageous truth-telling (*parrhesia*) (Foucault, 2001), in which the whistleblower risks all in the process of 'speaking truth to power' (Contu, 2014; Munro, 2017; Weiskopf and Willmott, 2013; Weiskopf and Tobias-Miersch, 2016; Wildavsky, 1979).

Today, the truth-telling of the whistleblower is *mediated in multiple ways*: by new media and digital technologies of communication, by a plethora of legal, institutional and organizational regulations and whistleblowing-policies, or by intermediary organizations that seek to support, amplify, channel and also capitalise on the truth-telling of whistleblowers in the name of increased transparency, democracy or justice. We see, for example, a new form of investigative journalism that seeks to amplify the truth-telling of whistleblowers (e.g. *CIJ* and the Panama Papers), organizations that provide an infrastructure for leaking (e.g. *Wikileaks*), or governmental and non-governmental organizations that mobilise truth-telling in the 'fight against corruption' (e.g. *Transparency International*). They might represent sources of support for whistleblowers, but might also lead to their enmeshment in dynamics of power and domination even beyond the context of the organization in which they have blown the whistle (i.e. media pressure, party politics, and so on). The increasingly networked character of information and the decentralized infrastructures of hybrid 'online-offline worlds' reshape the space for whistleblowers and truth-speaking (Nayar, 2010), with digital, anonymous forms of whistleblowing and, specifically, networks like the 'hydracollective Anonymous' (Coleman, 2014) indicating most clearly that concepts such as the public sphere, political activism, and individual and collective responsibility are in transformation (see also Bachmann et al., 2017; Munro, 2017).

Against this backdrop, this special issue situates the experience of whistleblowing in the context of contemporary discourses and practices, such as security, transparency and accountability, and is thereby particularly interested in the exploration of the ethical and political dimensions and implications of practices of whistleblowing. It raises the question of who is considered to be qualified to blow the whistle, under which conditions, about what, in what forms, with what consequences, and with what relation to power (Foucault, 2001). How is the figure of the whistleblower socially and

discursively constructed and is there, for example, a specific relation to gender, race and class implied? How and at what cost do whistleblowers as political actors constitute themselves as ethical subjects, capable of taking risks and posing a challenge, capable of governing themselves and of governing others? Moreover, why are we suddenly faced with a boom of whistleblowing and an intensified 'problematisation' of the phenomenon in so-called digital cultures? Or, from another perspective, for which social, political, legal and also technical difficulties is whistleblowing the answer?

For this issue of *ephemera,* we would thus like to invite contributions that extend our understanding of whistleblowing as a socially mediated practice and put emphasis on the ethico-politics of whistleblowing and practices of 'speaking truth to power'. Possible *contributions* might seek to address, but are not limited to the following issues:

- Conditions, possibilities and limitations of whistleblowing and truth-telling in mass-mediated societies
- Discursive constructions of whistleblowers in contemporary media
- Whistleblowing in the context of digital cultures
- The possibilities and limitations of truth-telling in an age of big data and algorithmic governance
- The regulation of whistleblowing and its ethical and political implications
- Ethical and political implications of mobilising whistleblowers in the context of corporate malpractices and scandals
- Spectacles of truth-telling and the societies of spectacle
- Truth-telling in relation to societal discourses of transparency, secrecy and accountability
- The role of intermediary organizations in promoting and shaping whistleblowing
- Subjectivity-formation through socially mediated practices of truth-telling
- Ways of conceptualising whistleblowing in relation to power, resistance and critique in different organizational and professional contexts

Deadline for submissions: 31 March 2018

All contributions should be submitted to one of the issue editors: Randi Heinrichs (randi.heinrichs@leuphana.de), Bernadette Loacker (b.loacker@lancaster.ac.uk), Richard Weiskopf (richard.weiskopf@uibk.ac.at). Please note that three categories of contributions are invited for the special issue: articles, notes, and reviews. Information about these types of contributions can be found at: http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit. The submissions will undergo a double-blind review process. All submissions should follow *ephemera*'s submission guidelines, which are available at: http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit (see the 'Abc of formatting' guide in particular). For further information, please contact one of the special issue editors.

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