



Translating STS to Security Sites

Haarlem Central Library

Gasthuisstraat 32, Haarlem

25 June 2018



Workshop Objectives

An increasing number of scholars in Critical Security Studies is taking up concepts, themes and methods broadly associated with Science-and-Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). These approaches help us grasp the socio-material fabric of international politics. They have increasingly proved inspirational for research focusing on security practices. This includes vibrant analyses of – for example – the political controversies surrounding security operations;¹ the material-becoming of weaponry deemed to be legally acceptable²; and the space of the border as a site of socio-technical experimentation.³ These and other works are inspired by the ways in which STS-type approaches “[attend] to multiplicity” and offer new “conceptualizations of what it might be to *hold together*”⁴ (Law and Mol 2002: 10). They explore power as continuously in the making.

STS approaches ask, as Nisha Shah has put it, ‘how matter comes to matter’ in relation to practices of warfare, weaponry, violence and securing.⁵ They appropriate, deploy and develop concepts like, controversies, chains of reference, symmetry, translation, mediation and classification, to new ends. They offer novel approaches to thinking security *politics*, for example by analyzing how human and nonhuman actors are enrolled and associated to normalize or to contest particular political projects or security technologies,⁶ and how publics re constituted around security practices.⁷

This fruitful redeployment of STS concepts and tools to sites of security, however, also raises considerable questions. How do we *translate* STS to be useful in new domains? What are the stakes and challenges when we bring insights drawn from STS to bear on the study of security sites? How can we retrace continuities *and* discontinuities between security and other practices, thus fostering

¹ Schouten P. (2014) Security as Controversy: Reassembling security at Amsterdam Airport. *Security Dialogue* 45(1): 23-42.

² Shah N. (2017) Gunning for War: Infantry rifles and the calibration of lethal force. *Critical Studies on Security* 5(1): 81-104.

³ Bourne M, Johnson H and Lisle D. (2015) Laboratizing the Border: The production, translation and anticipation of security technologies. *Security Dialogue* 46(4): 307-325.

⁴ Law, J. & Mol. A (2002). *Complexities: Social studies of knowledge practices*. Duke University Press, p. 10.

⁵ Shah *op. cit.*: p. 3. Aradau C. (2010) Security That Matters: Critical infrastructure and objects of protection. *Security Dialogue* 41(5): 491-514.

⁶ Bellanova R and González Fuster G. (2013) Politics of Disappearance: Scanners and (unobserved) bodies as mediators o

⁷ Bellanova R and González Fuster G. (2013) Politics of Disappearance: Scanners and (unobserved) bodies as mediators of security practices. *International Political Sociology* 7(2): 188-209; Jeandesboz J. (2016) Smartening Border Security in the European Union: An associational inquiry. *Security Dialogue* 47(4): 292-309.

⁸ Walters W. (2014) Drone Strikes, Dingpolitik and Beyond. *Security Dialogue* 45(2): 101-18.

and broadening the conversation with STS? How can we redefine and rethink the conceptual terminologies of STS to make them attuned to researching controversies in de-bounded, secretive, and profoundly political environments?⁸

In short, what gets lost, added and altered when – so to speak – we take ‘Latour far from a Laboratory,’ ‘Mol out of the Hospital,’ ‘Stengers away from Science’ or ‘Haraway without her Kindred Critters’? In this context, at least three sets of questions are relevant:

- **First, the profound unboundedness of security sites and security controversies** seems to be at odds with the seemingly bounded nature of knowledge controversies and scientific laboratories. Though ANT-inspired research focuses on socio-technical uncertainties that are often complex and have far-reaching effects, controversies are handled as explorations of relatively bounded practices, where researchers can eventually identify a script, or the encounter between programs and anti-programs, and make it the object of a material-semiotic analysis. This approach is powerful in analytical terms, but has limitations for the study of everyday society and political situations.⁹ When it comes to security, the very identification of what is becoming a site, an object or a controversy, proves challenging. As Jef Huysmans has argued, (in)security is by nature *unbound*; it is always already entangled with other practices, and difficult to delimit.¹⁰ There are no privileged sites to access, no pre-defined list of devices to unpack, and controversies may be lurking under the lack of public or institutional debate. How can we better equip our study of scattered (in)security practices, whose makings can be either too visible or far from sight, either violently evident or ineffable and inconsequential?
- **Second, security practice is not science, nor does it (mostly) pretend to be.** The production of scientific facts is tightly regulated and disciplined through methodologies of measuring and producing objectivity. Of course, we know from a lively literature in the history of sciences that scientific conventions and the production of objectivity are far from universal. They are dependent on historical contingencies and the situated histories of scientists and their patrons. Nevertheless, the contemporary production of scientific objectivity is tightly regulated and institutionally policed.¹¹ The production of security knowledge, on the other hand, is much more *speculative*.¹² Expertise in the domain of terrorism and counter-terrorism is profoundly contested.¹³ Routines for the production of security knowledge are not settled. Moreover, the objective of security practices is not strictly the production of universal *facts*, but instead, the generation of judgements, strategic interventions and/or material evidence. Conversely, we might ask how the methods of the laboratory and experimentation are put to work in unbounded

⁸ The discussion on this has started in i.a.: Best J and Walters W. (2013) “Actor-Network Theory” and International Relationality: Lost (and found) in translation. Introduction. *International Political Sociology* 7(3): 332-334; and Barry A. (2013) The Translation Zone: Between Actor-Network Theory and International Relations. *Millennium* 41(3): 413-429; Salter MB. (ed.) (2015) *Making Things International 1*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; and Walters W and Salter MB (2016) Bruno Latour Encounters International Relations: An Interview. *Millennium* 44(3): 524-546.

⁹ Jasanoff S. (2012) Genealogies of STS. *Social Studies of Science* 42(3): 435-441.

¹⁰ Huysmans J. (2014) *Security Unbound. Enacting democratic limits*, London: Routledge: p. 7.

¹¹ Daston L and Galison P. (2010) *Objectivity*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

¹² de Goede M. (2012) *Speculative Security. The politics of pursuing terrorist monies*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

¹³ Stampnitzky L. (2013) *Disciplining Terror. How experts invented ‘terrorism’*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



security settings – for example when mobile populations are transformed into experimental-like objects for surveillance. In short, following security experts as they generate knowledge about the world, encounters different types of uncertainties, challenges and secrets that must be grappled with when redeploying STS to security sites.

- **Third, the temporal rhythm of security – broadly speaking – differs profoundly from that of science or law.** Latour has suggested that the temporalities of science and law are quite different. In science, the production of facts is followed by continuous processes of contestation and verification, in a “tribunal of history.” By comparison, law is marked by slow, endless reiteration or rewriting: “the incessant reworking of documents ... precedents retrieved from the dust of the past,” followed by a moment of definitive judgement.¹⁴ Security, we might say, has a different temporality again: one which is often marked by preemptive intervention, pressing action, and ‘ticking bomb’ scenarios.¹⁵ How does the urgency and speed of security judgments and interventions invite the rethinking of STS conceptual terminologies, that were (partly) devised in relation to the particular and slow rhythms of science and law?

The workshop has a dual objective:

First, to assess, discuss and analyse the specific challenges in STS-inspired security research. What happens to the tools and concepts of STS when they are translated from the laboratory to the sensitive and secretive security field? How can symmetrical approaches be deployed when access to (in)security sites and actors may be restrained? What are the political stakes and which kind of critique can STS-inspired security research bring forward?

Second, to exchange best-practice examples and foster a dialogue on research practice. What specific methodological questions are central in STS-driven security research? What methodological choices and dilemmas might we encounter when translating STS to security research, and how can we deal with them? The workshop will invite senior researchers to share examples and best- or worst-practice experiences from their own previous research.



Translating STS to Security Sites is organized by Tasniem Anwar (MSc/LLM), Dr Rocco Bellanova and Prof. Marieke de Goede, as part of ERC Consolidator Grant project FOLLOW: Following the Money from Transaction to Trial (CoG—682317). For more information, see www.projectfollow.org

¹⁴ Latour B. (2010) *The Making of Law. An ethnography of the Conseil d'Etat*, Cambridge: Polity: p. 222, 68.

¹⁵ Opitz, S and Tellmann U. (2015) Future Emergencies: Temporal politics in law and economy. *Theory, Culture & Society* 32(2): 107-129.



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Workshop Program

Monday June 25 | Haarlem, Central Library | Doelenzaal

Please note that speaking slots & discussion topics may still change

09.30-10.00: *Coffee & Welcome*

10.00-11.00: **The Meaning of Death: In Search of the Militarily Acceptable Wound** [lecture 1]
Nisha Shah (University of Ottawa). Moderator: **Esmé Bosma** (University of Amsterdam)

11.00-12.30: **The Universal and the Particular** [panel 1]
Kai Koddenbrock (University of Duisburg-Essen), **Anna Leander** (Copenhagen Business School), **Jef Huysmans** (Queen Mary University). Moderator: **Marieke de Goede** (University of Amsterdam)

12.30-13.30: *Lunch*

13.30-14.30: **The Art of Paying Attention** [lecture 2]
Amade M'Charek (University of Amsterdam). Moderator: **Victor Toom** (Goethe University)

14.30-15.00: *Coffee break*

15.00-16.30: **Becoming (of) Data** [panel 2]
Louise Amoore (Durham University), **Ute Tellmann** (Universität Erfurt). Moderator: **Rocco Bellanova** (University of Amsterdam)

16.30-17.30: **Snowden in London: The Affair Form as Method** [lecture 3]
William Walters (Carleton University). Moderator: **Huub Dijstelbloem** (University of Amsterdam)

17.30 – 19.00 *Drinks and Snacks at Library*