Secrecy and Methods in Security Research

Teylers Museum, Gehoorzaal

Spaarne 16, 2011 SC, Haarlem

October 19 – 20, 2017
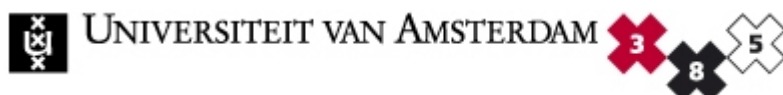
Workshop Objectives

Recently, there has been a welcome turn to methodology in critical security studies (Salter and Mutlu 2010; Aradau et al 2015). This methodological turn shows that long-term, fieldwork-based ethnographic work is increasingly undertaken in the realm of security research. In particular, studies at the intersection between security studies and Science-and-Technology Studies (STS) (e.g. Bourne et al 2015), redeploy reflexive, ethnographic methods, including participant observation, to new ends. As Mark Salter has put it, security researchers need to immerse themselves into daily expert practice, "learning the daily language, plotting the struggles,... understanding the deep well of common sense beliefs" (Salter 2013: 105).

However, redeploying STS methodologies to the security domain encounters the key challenge of *secrecy* and *confidentiality*. More so than perhaps laboratory life, the security field is conditioned and partitioned through classification, restriction, obfuscation and confidentiality. Operational information is classified; private institutions such as banks carefully shield their practices and protocols; the workings of algorithms is most often proprietary. As William Walters has asked: "How do we 'follow the actors' when they operate under cover of national security? How do we study political controversies when public disclosure is the exception and secrecy the norm?" (2014: 105). Secrecy is not always related to formal classification, but can also take the form of bureaucratic obfuscation, silences and delays in replying to research requests (Belcher and Martin 2013).

A multi-pronged strategy can be deployed when navigating secrecy in security research. This includes, first, a 'forensics' approach to research, collecting and collating information from multiple sources including social media and legal documents (eg. Schuppli 2014). Second, research projects are often required to conclude detailed agreements of research ethics, including stipulations on confidentiality and anonymity with the security institutions where they become embedded. Such agreements, at the same time, need to protect the freedom of academic research and thus need to balance a fine line. Third, documenting practices of secrecy and confidentiality *itself* can become a research objective: especially if we understand secrecy not purely as hidden information, but more broadly as a practice that structures professional dynamics and regulates information sharing (eg. Gusterson 1996).

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This two-day workshop has a dual objective:

First, to assess, discuss and analyse the challenges of secrecy in STS-inspired security research. This involves questions of access, confidentiality and visibility. How, in practice, can the researcher approach security professionals and gain access for longer-term fieldwork? How to build a research design that involves security actors not only as informants, but also as respondents? Where does the balance lie between critical analysis on the one hand, and respondents' interests on the other? This theme also involves a discussion on the conceptual terminology of STS and ANT-inspired work. What happens to the tools and concepts of STS when they are translated from the laboratory to the sensitive and secretive security field?

Second, to exchange best-practice examples on ethically appropriate ways of navigating secrecy in security research. The workshop will incorporate an element of training by asking experienced researchers to share examples and best- or worst-practice experiences from their own previous research with PhD candidates. Moreover, the participation of select practitioners will provide participants with precious hands-on tips on how to maximize the possibilities of gaining fieldwork access. We seek to communally debate and develop practical research tools that balance professional demands for confidentiality with academic freedom and integrity.

Secrecy and Methods in Security Research is organized by Esmé Bosma (MSc), Pieter Lagerwaard (MSc) 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

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PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

Under construction- times & speaking slots may still change

Thursday October 19

09.00	Welcome & coffee
09.15	Introduction, **Marieke de Goede**, University of Amsterdam
9.30 – 10.30	**Mark Salter**, University of Ottawa, "Front Stage and Backstage: Qualitative Immersion in Professional Security Environments."
10.30 – 11.30	**Lauren Martin**, Durham University, "Request Pending: Access, Deferral, Denial and the Politics of Knowledge."
11.30 – 11.45	Coffee
11.45 – 12.45	**Liat Shetret**, Global Center on Cooperative Security, "Effective engagement of political, diplomatic and operational stakeholders in combating illicit financial flows networks." **Chair**: Mara Wesseling, University of Amsterdam
12.45 – 14.15	Lunch & Mini Museum Tour
14.15 – 15.15	Interview Session 1: **Secrecy, Visibility, Access** **Can Mutlu**, Acadia University; **Lieke Wissink**, University of Amsterdam Moderated by Beste Işleyen, University of Amsterdam.
15.15 – 15.45	Tea
15.45 – 16.45	Interview Session 2: **Ethical Dilemmas** **Anthony Amicelle**, Université de Montreal; **Jana Krause**, University of Amsterdam Moderated by Rocco Bellanova, University of Amsterdam.
17.00	Drinks, followed by Dinner

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Friday October 20

9.00 – 10.00   **Till Straube**, Frankfurt University, "Upon Encountering the Black Box and Leaving it Closed." **Chair**: Marijn Hoijtink, VU Amsterdam

10.00 – 11.00   **Sarah Hughes**, Durham University & **Philip Garnett**, York University, "Obfuscated Democracy? Chelsea Manning and the Politics of Knowledge Curation." **Chair**: Pieter Lagerwaard, University of Amsterdam

11.00 – 11.30   Coffee

11.30 – 13.00   **Rivke Jaffe, Erella Grassiani**, University of Amsterdam, "Secrecy in Formally Democratic Contexts" & **Marlies Glasius, Marcus Michaelsen**, University of Amsterdam, "In the Authoritarian Field" (SECURCIT & AUTHOGLOB). **Chair**: Francesco Ragazzi. Leiden University

13.00 – 14.00   Lunch

14.00 – 15.00   **Breakout sessions** on (1) *Gaining Access*; (2) *Secrecy, Delay, Obfuscation*; (3) *Reflexive Methodology*; (4) *Ethnographies of Technologies* (small themed groups where PhD candidates have an opportunity to discuss questions and concerns with guest scholars).

15.00 – 15.15   Tea

15.15 – 16.45   Panel Discussion and Conclusions: **STS from the Laboratory into the Security Field** With **Annalisa Pelizza,** Twente University, **Huub Dijstelbloem**, University of Amsterdam, **Polly Pallister-Wilkins**, University of Amsterdam. **Chair**: Esmé Bosma, University of Amsterdam

17.00   Goodbye drinks