



Tracking. Targeting. Predicting. Epistemological, Ontological and Biopolitical Dimensions of Technosecurity. Jutta Weber, Media, Culture and Society, Department of Media Studies, University of Paderborn, 20.06.2013-22.06.2013.

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Tracking. Targeting. Predicting. Epistemological, Ontological and Biopolitical Dimensions of Technosecurity

The international conference 'Tracking. Targeting. Predicting. Epistemological, Ontological and Biopolitical Dimensions of Technosecurity' brought together scholars from different disciplines such as science and technology studies (STS), sociology, history, geography, visual studies, surveillance studies, gender studies, and political science. The presentations focused on the military influence on society and the growing entanglement of the military with the civil sphere. A dominant aspect covered dual use developments, such as unmanned flight systems or GPS and their repercussions for government strategies and changes in concepts of security, risk analysis and monitoring.

In her introduction, conference organizer JUTTA WEBER (Paderborn) pointed out that we are experiencing a digital revolution in military affairs as well as civil security. It seems that this cumulates in a pre-emptive logic of control, a wish for perfect control which materializes into a maximum security strategy. The idea for the conference is to analyse the intimate technology-security nexus which relies on technoscientific, military but also risk management methods, concepts and strategies and is deeply embedded in contemporary culture and everyday life. The conference seeks to investigate the epistemological, ontological and biopolitical reconfigurations of techno-security in heterogeneous and complex processes comprised of meanings, standards, values, and norms: a cultural studies perspective that includes human and non-human actors alike.

The first session "Vision / Visibility" started with REBECCA ADELMAN's (College Park) presentation on the

expensive failure of the 'Universal Camouflage Pattern' (UCP) combat uniforms that were rolled out on a large scale by the US Army in 2004. Adelman turned our attention to the paradoxes of visibility of "this interface between the state and the senses". To assume that pixelated design would be more deceptive to the eye than traditional camouflage patterns proved to be wrong in the environmental landscapes of 21st century warfare. Thus, Adelman argues, the UCP marked the limits of technologized approaches to military security. Camouflage, she reminded us, has never solely been about concealment, but also a showcase of dominance.

FRANK THOMAS MEYER (Dortmund), in his talk "Biometrics and Detection: The Messy Certainty of the face", spoke about how the face signifies humans and about the assumption present in Face Recognition Technologies (FRT) that machines can see. But to treat the face as an index of identity is to blur the cultural work of seeing. Meyer showed that the myth of neutrality of cameras goes back to early concepts of movies. Further, FRT disembodies the face, separates it from communicative contexts and place, and finally feeds face data into a networked database. Stable identity, the goal of FRT, must be seen as a construction. The history of media, then, is a history of attempts to stabilize identity he closed.

The first day's keynote was held by CAREN KAPLAN (UC Davis), entitled "Sensing Distance: the Visual Practice of Drone Warfare". Drones as the "ultimate action at a distance" are highly mediated, Kaplan argued. But targets of drone killings are not part of the "dronorama" on TV. Kaplan argued that the drone

discourse we are subjected to troubles binaries such as near/far, here/there, home/away, proximity/remoteness. As “the ultimate power without vulnerability” drone operators, as first reports indicate, rather than objectifying, are seeing more, feeling closer by the visual mediation, but due to the high level of mediation they see people die without being able to build a meaningful understanding in what they see. Referencing the history of monitoring and air policing of borders, Kaplan pointed out that “the land of the free produces other places where death comes from the sky”. Drones always seem to be somewhere else. But the binary of near and far obscure the way in which drones make us all targets, she pointed out. Drones thereby produce a flexible biopolitical zone traversing the globe.

The second day’s first session “Techno-Rationalities” started with ANTOINE BOUSQUET’s (London) talk “Enframing the Battlespace – the Logistics of Military Operations”, where he discussed the historical emergences of the rationalities which provide the logistics inherent in military perception operations. He recounted the history of identification techniques, starting from the telescope to electromagnetic signatures. To “own the night”, he pointed out, has been the primary effort of the military: night vision, infrared, heat detection. Following a perspective of long durée, Bousquet argues that predicting has been a common operation since the military is shooting at moving targets. Stealth techniques to distract as a counter strategy, he concluded, then are the counterpart of perceptions.

HELGE PETERS (Lüneburg) discussed the epistemological and biopolitical foundations of the global systems science project FuturICT in his talk on “Biopolitical Simulations: Governing Life in FuturICT”. He showed how this agent-based large scale simulation of global sociality adheres to the image of life as non-linear forms of emergent organisation and thus includes transpositions of recent key biological concept into the social sphere. This is a technological naturalization strategy of social and political issues, which has been criticized most prominently by Donna Haraway as “the god trick of seeing from nowhere”. The ideology of omniscient vision and transgression of biological and computational concepts into the social “runs risk of stabilizing a given normative reality”, he concluded.

Information studies scholar ANDREW CLEMENT (Toronto) presented his research project “IXMaps” which demonstrates how internet traffic in Canada is most likely always routed via the US, and is thus being col-

lected by the NSA. Not least in the light of the recent NSA wiretapping scandal, this demands a collective approach to bringing the internet under democratic control again, he argued.

TORIN MONAHAN (Chapel Hill) gave a presentation of his ongoing qualitative research on the Department of Homeland Security’s Fusion Centers, which aims at understanding new configurations of police, national security and private actors in the US. The monitoring present here, he argued, can be understood as “discrimination by abstraction” since social context and embodiment is stripped away from the monitored. At the Fusion Centers all agencies sit and work together collectively. This “one stop shot for data under one roof”, he continued, operates as a stream without retaining data. Thus, freedom of information requests cannot enlighten these operations. From his interviews with employees at Fusion Centers he concluded that a cultural bias shapes surveillance practices, afforded by masculinist abstractions and the high level of data abstractions leading to problems of accountabilities. His closing remarks targeted the growing discrepancy between increasingly transparent populations and increasingly opaque surveillance institutions.

In his keynote “How ideas travel: Security Strategies in RMA, Homeland, and Civil Security”, STEFAN KAUFMANN (Freiburg) described the transpositions of three concepts from the military into the civil sphere. First, an epistemological turn to complexity theory as a reaction to the problem of vulnerability of ‘the homeland’, which promoted the transformation of institutions via risk analysis programs, e.g. policies that work with worst case scenario to manage the future. Second, control has been reconfigured in terms of networks and distributed security. This entails, he argued, flat, flexible, modular management concepts integrating private and security sectors. One result is an urban resilience program focusing on robustness. Third, Kaufmann analyzed emerging subject formations which are (to be) made ‘resilient’ via permanent preparedness, and the citizen’s activation to ensure the monitoring of their surroundings. While in the 1990s, the resilient soldier was redefined as somebody with a flexible mindset and primarily endowed with communication and cognitions skills, this definition is now transported into the civil realm via governmental civil security programs.

The session “Civil – Military” was opened by REBECCA HESTER (Austin) with her talk “We are the Borg! Human assimilation into cellular society”. Hester focused on recent developments in implantable micro chip-

ping strategies. She tracked one strand to the history of mind reading approaches by the US government. Reading bodies via bio sensors updates the conduct of conducts to new levels, since abnormalities in body function can be mapped in the same way as the promotion of violence in social media. Digital records, either social media data or data delivered by body sensors, connect individuals to a globalized system, she argued, and can be understood as a reading of the brain without much privacy left, she warned.

PAUL CERUZZI (Washington) presented the history of the Global Positioning System (GPS) mainly developed by the US military. He traced it back to navigation systems like the light house and more recently the Loran radio system which was operated along the coastlines. By giving many examples from the history of navigation, he foregrounded the close relation of the military and the civil sphere in respect to navigation technologies. Ceruzzi concluded that in the case of GPS humanity now depends on it though Europe and China are underway to building their own systems.

The last day's session "Biopolitics" started with a double presentation by ANNE I. HARRINGTON (Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey) and BRENDA CARTIER (US Air Force Special Operations Command) entitled "Zone Warfare", shedding light on the theoretical as well as operational perspective on contemporary warfare. They argued that GPS had opened the arial perspective to ground personnel in real time, transforming the battlefield to a battle space, which can be organized bottom-up. It is thought of as a 5 dimensional cone: 3D space, time and information. The turn away from the 70's ideas of ground missions towards flexible and short term "get in, get out" operations was made possible by the networking of war fare where instant feeds of information and intelligence support small groups of soldier missions on the ground, which coordinate their missions in real time with a US Aircraft (Joint Terminal Air Controller). As a scheme, this is conceived as a kill chain, explained by the presenters as a synergetic operation highly interdependent on all involved forces. In concluding, they remarked that intelligence gathering nowadays is a long term operation, whereas the killings themselves are carried out super fast. This presentation was exceptional since it came from a soldier. The rapporteur calls for a cautious and critical reception.

HENNING FÜLLER (Erlangen-Nürnberg) analysed the idea of preemption and the catastrophic integrated into concepts of public health. Füller explained that

biosecurity can be understood as an indicator of a changing rationality of security / life saving. In his case study ESSENCE, Füller found no coherent rationality in the field, since heterogeneous sources of data are used to flag abnormalities. The search for the "unknown unknown" redraws the threshold of catastrophes, leading to a post-political situation aiming at sustaining a system. Füller sees this as a symptomatic example of how present government programs try to cope with the openness of the future in present biopolitics.

In her talk on targeted killings, SUSANNE KRASMAN (Hamburg) discussed the increasing number of drone killings under the Obama administration. First, she remarked that weapons never differentiate between terrorist and civilians per se and the choice for drone killings are driven by economic reasons. The rhetorics around drones, such as surgical operations, should be understood as embedded in a larger dispositif that involves practice, technologies and knowledge. Further, she argued, a shift in sovereignty concurs with the promise of precision. She proposed that the collateral is reconfigured as incidental rather than accidental, because the governing logic of the possible finds its dialectical counterpart in the constant rematerialization of the threat under a new signature. Krassman pointed out that as possible future harm legitimizes present killings, normalization practices and the modes of future governance confuses common registers of sovereignty, leading to the new register of non-war, not war or no war.

The closing keynote for the conference was given by LUCY SUCHMAN (Lancaster University), titled "Situational Awareness and the 'Imminent' Threat: Technocultures of Imagining". Suchman presented a work in progress with empirical material from 'Flat World', a simulation produced in the Californian media industrial military entertainment complex, which presented a theater of war, particularly military ground operations, hoping to develop virtual reality as immersive reality equipped with synthetic agents. Suchman analyzed large amounts of archive data to come to an understanding of how identification and intelligibility produce the other or the enemy as an effect of a regulatory ideal which has to be reiterated constantly to remain stable. Suchman concluded that for her it remains an open question how to conceptualize the relation between simulations and military action, what is immersed and what not, and how these leaky boundaries work.

The conference convincingly showed that present regimes of technocultures have a salient say in the way

institutions, programs, and subjectivities are configured. The reoccurring theme of complex systems theory as a media to anticipate the future, but effectively inhibiting its unfolding, is one conclusion that can be drawn from the conference. The continued blurring of military and the civil sphere in epistemological and ontological concepts was another key outcome. The conference showed how important empirical research continues to track contemporary developments in the spheres of critical security studies, although the obstacles to pursue them in these fields, in particular, can be exceptionally high.

Conference Overview:

Session One: Vision / Visibility (chair: Lucy Suchman)

Rebecca A. Adelman (University of Maryland): Paradoxes of Visibility: The State, the Senses, and the Failure of the Universal Camouflage Pattern

Frank Thomas Meyer (Dortmund): Biometrics and Detection: The Messy Certainty of the Face

Keynote: Caren Kaplan (UC Davis): Sensing Distance: The Visual Practices of Drone Warfare

Session Two: Techno-Rationalities (chair: Caren Kaplan)

Antoine Bousquet (University of London): Enframing the Battlespace: The Logistics of Military Perception

Helge Peters (Leuphana University of Lüneburg): Biopolitical Simulations: Governing Life in FuturICT

Andrew Clement (University of Toronto): Techno-security Network Imaginaries: Probing NSA Warrantless Wiretapping through internet Traffic Mapping

Torin Monahan (University of North Carolina): Categorizing Suspicion: Gendered Rationalities and the Pursuit of Disinterested Security at DHS Fusion Centers

Keynote: Stefan Kaufmann (Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg): How Ideas Travel: Security Strategies in RMA, Homeland and Civil Security

Session Three: Civil – Military (chair: Jutta Weber)

Rebecca Hester (University of Texas): We are the Borg! Human assimilation into cellular society

Paul Ceruzzi (Smithsonian Museum Washington): The Global Positioning System (GPS): Military Origins, Civilian Applications, and the Culture of Precise Positioning

Session Four: Biopolitics (chair: Andrew Clement)

Anne I. Harrington (Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey) / Brenda Cartier (US Air Force Special Operations Command): No Borders, No Boundaries: Special Operations and National Military Power

Henning Füller (Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg): The Promise of Predicting Public Health Emergencies. ESSENCE and the Changing Rationalities of Catastrophe

Susanne Krasmann (University of Hamburg): Targeted Killing. On Precision, Epistemic Orders and the Irregular

Keynote – Lucy Suchman (Lancaster University): Situational Awareness and the ‘Imminent Threat’: Technocultures of Imaging

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