

# (In)security data as matters of care

Rocco Bellanova

University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

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Digital data matter for (in)security practice. And yet they remain ‘neglected things’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011) in critical studies on security. Certainly, critical security studies regularly enquires into the deployment of data-driven systems and the power rationalities that they foster (Amoore, 2013; Bigo, 2014; De Goede, 2018). In its diversity, this literature contributes to questioning the all-too-common assumption at the core of security projects, namely, that data offer the ultimate foundations for meaningful sovereign decisions and actions. However, critical security studies remains primarily concerned with the diverse techniques for governing through data. Too attentive to the politics of algorithms and data circulation, critical security studies scholars fail to explore the politics underpinning the becoming of data as (in)security things. In particular, we should further explore how data are objectified as (in)security data, and how this affects our own subjectification.

Critical security studies should approach these ‘neglected things’ as ‘matters of care’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011). Latour (2004) famously suggested thinking things in terms of ‘matters of concern’ rather than ‘matters of fact’. While this approach permits us to cater for the (often tense) work put into the construction of a given reality, it risks overlooking less obvious practices of (in)security. Borrowing from feminist scholarship and science and technology studies, Puig de la Bellacasa’s notion of ‘matters of care’ reignites the critical purchase of ‘thinkpolitics’ and ‘thingpolitics’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011: 88). As she puts it, ‘care connotes attention and worry for those who can be harmed by an assemblage but whose voices are less valued, as are their concerns and need for care’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011: 92). Attention to matters of care would supplement existing critical security studies approaches. For example, our research would be less concerned with denaturalizing the role of the digital than about approaching data as deeply entangled with human beings. That is, studying how data – and not only humans – are governed and made to act, and how some of their – and our data subjects’ – ‘voices’, ‘concerns’ and ‘need[s]’ are attended to and others disregarded.

For critical security studies, exploring techniques to govern data means caring for the socio-material practices through which digital data come to matter as (in)security data. Forget – for one second – algorithms. Think about data structures. Consider governmental initiatives around the world. Many are about creating data lakes and decentralized systems, capturing commercial datasets in real time, or ensuring interoperability among legacy databases. Data have to be generated, formatted, curated, integrated and protected for any system to become and remain operational. This unglamorous work keeps busy many actors – security agencies, private companies, IT infrastructures, privacy legislation, etc. Engaging (in)security data as matters of care invites us to unpack the tensions, negotiations and ruses in the socio-material and cognitive becoming of digital data. It is about asking how they are turned into valuable (in)security data and how they are demoted, erased or recycled. Ultimately, it is about asking who cares about what – and thus what critical security studies cares about – in our data worlds.

## References

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