

Policing Matter(s)

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Policing Matter(s)

Towards a sedimentology of suspicion in technologically mediated surveillance

Vlad Niculescu-Dincă

Propositions

1. Policing matters – such as what is ‘a suspicious group’, ‘a dubious activity’ or ‘a fishy behaviour’ – are partly shaped by what the screens in front of policing practitioners enact as such.
2. If we want fundamental human rights and values to be persistently upheld in our high-tech information societies, it matters how technologically mediated policing is performed.
3. The spread of technologically mediated practices in policing needs to be accompanied by a much broader uptake of a Value Sensitive Design approach to the design and management of policing technologies.
4. Bringing in notions from geology to understand technological infrastructures becomes very relevant in a context in which many policing organizations increasingly engage in practices of *data mining* – yet another metaphor closely related to the enterprise of understanding and exploring sediments.
5. Unlike archaeology, which concentrates on studying human activities in the past, a sedimentological approach can be a more adequate metaphor for understanding infrastructures – being more open to account for a whole set of processes (e.g. erosions, depositions, sedimentations, explosions) that may or may not be traceable to an initial human activity.
6. Failing to engage in a sedimentological approach allows the formation of potentially explosive ‘pockets of prejudice’ in the (software) layers of our infrastructures.
7. If to billions of people, technology feels like an unpredictable, external fate falling on their heads, the effort made within STS and philosophy of technology offers a set of empirical investigations and concepts with which we can understand the choices that were made in its development.
8. Avoiding some of the problematic outcomes of technologically mediated policing requires a shift in police education from determinist and instrumentalist accounts of technology towards more constructivist and performative accounts.
9. “Geology is the study of pressure and time. That's all it takes really, pressure, and time.”
Narration by Red (Morgan Freeman) in the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) by Frank Darabont, from the short story by Stephen King, Rita Hayworth and *Shawshank Redemption*.