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Research without dead time On epistemological solidarity and academic counterespionage

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Inaugural lecture: Technologies in Practice, ITU, March 28th, 2025

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Research without dead time

On epistemological solidarity and academic counterespionage

Vasilis Galis
Inaugural lecture, March 28, 2025

Intro

The title of my talk is inspired by the slogan “Live without dead time”. The slogan was daubed on a wall of the Sorbonne in Paris sometime in May 1968 when all of France seemed to be taken over by revolutionary enthusiasm. The slogan criticized the fact that life has become completely colonized by the current economic system. To the extent that even human relationships were defined by and reflected through the prism of the market and consumerist choices. The slogan recognizes capitalism as an ontological system of a variety of relations that perform temporalities! Morbid temporalities! Universities and academic research are part of this ontological system too. On the other hand, to live without dead time means to embody a great *refusal*, to find pleasure in resistance and critique, to transform every moment of existence into a rejection of the market, and into an affirmation of social change. The way forward is through this kind of radical play. Academic life and research are also an integral part of this play. And this is something that has marked my motivation to conduct research. Research without dead time then...



I started my academic journey in 1996 in Greece, at the university of Athens, at the department of economics. This is the actual building that I studied for 4,5 years. This picture is from 1973 and shows the old building which was occupied by students in February 1973. That occupation was the first serious political act against the military dictatorship in Greece, and it was organized by students. I am not here today to demonstrate some kind of activist fetishism, but I consider it important to explain where I come from. In terms of infrastructural politics, the spirit of the 1973 uprising haunted the walls of the building and created a heavy legacy that co-existed with any learning process taking place there! Now the building is renovated, and it looks like any modern western campus.

Early days

From the onset of my academic journey, politics and knowledge-making were clearly intertwined even in terms of materiality! Studying economics was a period of intellectual experimentation for me. The complicated Greek educational system then did not involve any flexibility in the selection of study programs, and I got stuck with a bachelor program in economics. Let us say that I was not thrilled with my study choice. Nevertheless I did develop a special interest in the Economics of

Technological Change and the Philosophy of Economics. Indicatively, in a cohort of 500 students, it was me and 30 more who took the elective course in Philosophy of Science. There was an echoing disinterest in the methodological aspects of economics and philosophy of science in general. It was the second half of the 1990s, the Greek stock market was booming, growth rates were skyrocketing in anticipation of the upcoming Olympic Games in Athens, and the Dot-com bubble kept ballooning. Few cared about the epistemological myths of economics!

During my time at Athens university, I chose to take an exchange semester at the university of Linköping in Sweden through the Erasmus program. I landed in Scandinavia on January 16, 1999. I left Athens on a sunny winter day, and I reached snowy frozen Stockholm. It was dark, -5 degrees Celsius, and only 14.30 in the afternoon.

Linköping... Syndrome

Despite the profound lack of focus on epistemological issues as well as philosophy of science at Greek universities, my first exposure to a Nordic academic institution fueled my interest in the great mysteries of knowledge production and epistemology and injected in my head the idea of pursuing a PhD. I completed my studies at the university of Athens, and I returned to Sweden. In September 2001, I was enrolled as a PhD candidate at the Department of Thematic Studies - Technology and Social Change at the University of Linköping. If someone is interested, I can tell you afterwards during the reception the story of how I was enrolled! How I experienced the Swedish dream working as a waiter in a restaurant ending up in a university office watching on an old computer screen the collapse of the twin towers in NY on my first week at the job!!! I had a kind of dramatic kick-off in my academic trajectory, don't you think?

The research group that I was enrolled in was called Systems of Innovation Research Program and focused on the economics of innovation. Pretty logical development one would say. But I was already contaminated by the virus of epistemological disobedience. This

was also because one of the first PhD courses that I attended was an introduction to Science and Technology Studies (STS), taught by my later supervisor Jane Summerton. The damage was already done...

STS for dummies

“While Callon and Latour might be philosophically correct about the constructed nature of the science-society dichotomy (who represents nonhumans versus who represents humans), the consequences of that construction are important ... I want to examine the practices, activities, concerns and trajectories of all the different participants - including nonhumans - in scientific work. In contrast to Latour, I am still sociologically interested in understanding why and how some human perspectives win over others in the construction of technologies and truths, why and how some human actors will go along with the will of other actors, and why and how some human actors resist being enrolled... I want to take sides, to take stands”¹.

I will not go into a quick STS lecture for beginners now, but this initial contact with the sociology of technoscientific knowledge sparked the usual reactions and ‘aha’ moments to me also. STS introduced me to a set of methodological tools and conceptualizations to perceive the natural or technologized world not through technological determinism. Through the years we came much further than simply acknowledging that both scientific tools and reality out there are socially constructed or co-shaped, but we also acknowledge that reality is performed by the scientific tools-instruments meant to analyze it.

1 Fujimura, J. H. (2024). On methods, ontologies, and representation in the sociology of science: Where do we stand? in *Social organization and social process* (pp. 207-248). Routledge.

What really haunted me and changed everything for me was these highlighted statements in Joan Fujimura's text "on methods..." which was quoted in Susan Leigh Star's legendary article *On being allergic to onions*. Fujimura did not only raise the issue of power and politics in the making of technoscience (why and how some human perspectives win over others), but she also constituted epistemology and technosciences as part of the sociopolitical realm. We can also take sides! There is nothing new or innovative about that. After all, innovation is a new combination of old things, according to the father of innovation studies, Joseph Schumpeter. Social analysts have never been isolated from the public and their politics, as they have always engaged with diverse groups when conducting research and have returned these findings to these groups, claimed the leading proponent of public sociology and newly deceased Michael Burawoy.

We can intervene! That thought totally messed with my understanding of what the role of science is (mind you I was 23 years old) but also opened for a variety of options and choices to be made. No, I did not have to write a PhD thesis about innovation in the exploding telecommunications market at the start of 2000s anymore. The question was what to write about. How could I conduct research on technical innovation at the same time as I could practice solidarity with society (whatever that is)? How could I take sides and stands without compromising on the academic standards? The answer was: **by conducting research without dead time!**

Riding the Athens metro

While all these thoughts haunted me, reality hit me when I was walking towards the new Athens metro (inaugurated in 2000 and built for the Olympics in 2004) with my old classmate Nikos. Nikos is an author and a user of wheelchairs due to cerebral palsy (CP). CP is a group of conditions that affect movement and posture.

While heading to one of the metro stations he explained to me his enthusiasm about the new infrastructure and its impact on his identity as a subject that lives and moves in a huge, inaccessible, chaotic metropolis like Athens. The metro constituted an accessible island in a cement ocean of inaccessibility.

"The metro constitutes a miniature of society. A crossroad of different characters and cultures. All of us compose this polyphony. The metro has its own communication codes mainly consisting of glances that people exchange, cars, elevators, etc. Even when I want to reprove somebody for using the elevator without a reason, I get the chance to communicate and to make myself visible, as a user of a wheelchair who represents all wheelchair users. I gain confidence by learning the destinations. I feel as if I am the master of the metro. I love to give instructions to other users. Then I become useful, and my wheelchair disappears..." (Nikos Perdikaris, author)

In that very moment, I conceived my PhD topic idea. How Athens' metro became accessible to people with disabilities involved several of the issues addressed by STS: the importance of materiality in the constitution of human subjects, how social movements and their lay expertise challenge expert knowledge, that disability is not solely a corporal condition but a simultaneous biological, material and semiotic phenomenon. By combining STS and Disability Studies, I managed to change the focus of the analysis from merely defining disability as an impairment, handicap, or a social construction to how disability is experienced and enacted in everyday practices, in policymaking, in the body, and in the built environment.

But my interaction with a social movement such as the disability movement matched with my thirst to intervene. To take sides, to take stands!²

“Imagine what would happen if we were to design and construct urban environments only for wheelchair users, write books mostly in the Braille language, or communicate in sign language. Who would be disabled in those cases? What is ability and what constitutes disability? In this respect, disability and accessibility are two conditions that are realized or enacted through the interactions between different entities such as human bodies and technological artifacts”³

Instead of merely telling the story of a technical system, my research raised issues of representation of lay people. How is disability represented? How are disabled people involved in the policy-making sphere and in technoscientific debates? Who speaks in the name of whom? Who represents whom and what?

In the case of the Athens metro, integrating accessibility provisions in the metro design implied disputes on budget, architecture, and usability of the system. Who had the epistemic prerogative to decide as well as design and implement! The metro was also a site of epistemic antagonism!

2 Galis, V. (2006). *From shrieks to technical reports: Technology, disability and political processes in building Athens metro*. Linköpings universitet. Studies in Arts and Science, no. 374.

3 Galis, V. (2011). Enacting disability: how can science and technology studies inform disability studies?. *Disability & society*, 26(7), 825-838.

Being an ignorant social researcher or the reproduction of epistemic injustice

Talking about representation, epistemic antagonism, and a hierarchy of credibility within and among sciences, this was one of my first fieldwork encounters in Athens. I will never forget that Monday afternoon that I entered the office of the older architect:

So, you are doing your PhD in Sweden?” “Yes”, I answered in a rather relaxed manner. “Architecture?” he asked again, winking at me. I froze and did not know what I should answer. Finally, I answered no and attempted to explain what my background was, what interdisciplinary research implies, and what the aim of my study was.

Immediately his facial expression changed, and the initial sense of common understanding left the room forever. I had been degraded in the scientific hierarchy irreversibly within some seconds. “Ok then, ask me what you need to know and please do it quickly because I have many things to do”, he told me impatiently. Suddenly, I became an ignorant social researcher who just stole his time with not very “scientific” questions. The second and final shock came when I asked him if I was allowed to tape our discussion. He looked very confused and suspicious. No, I do not do stuff like that”, he answered. “I do not understand why you are doing this. These questions are not important; people with disabilities did not contribute much to the application of accessibility. It was we, the engineers and architects who contributed to the realization of accessibility in the system. (Interview with an architect)

In other words, taking a stand can happen also by proxy.

Taking sides – epistemology of partiality

Obviously, nothing is created in a vacuum. Therefore, it was imperative for me to ask. How did my work on Athens' metro influence my epistemological perspective? How did an indifferent metro passenger and stranger to disability issues to start with become interested in these issues? My disabled friend who was active member of the disability movement contaminated me with partiality towards people with disabilities and their political agenda. My solidarity with the disability movement was translated into overt scholarly partisanship. I took an ideological standpoint regarding social sciences and disability; I wanted to perform social research that contributes to emancipation and reconfiguration of disability issues in Greece. That was my way to cancel epistemic injustice and advocate for critical participation in the processes that contribute to the configuration of the built environment and more initiatives for reducing disabilities.

Zooming out, how convincing would my argument be if I was to accept/pretend that the asymmetrical effects of much scientific research are not a methodological choice? Where would the credibility of my arguments stand if I was to deny my suspicion towards power hierarchies in the construction of a Large Technical System, my friendship with a disabled individual, the partiality that I inherited from this relationship, my solidarity to the disability movement, the obstacles that I faced during my fieldwork?

I recently saw a slogan on a protest picket saying: life has value even if it does not produce it. That reminded me that research has politics regardless of if it obviously produces political value or not! In a transparent or non-transparent way. Value is either objective or political for both sides of a controversy. In that sense, being neutral or not does not mean lack of valid data or reduced analytical reflexivity, but conscious epistemological choices against epistemic injustice. Arguing against the myth of the neutral researcher, either both sides of a controversy are scientific, or both are politically engaged. Research acquires (political) value even if it does not produce it! Rather than

seeking banal value-free research and scientific objectivity, we should ask: who controls, manipulates, claims, and establishes decisions, facts, and knowledge regarding technological development? In my epistemological realm, one way to go, one version of research without dead time is by reconstructing technoscience-society relationships, promoting lay-expert interactions, democratizing technoscientific practices, and giving voice to critical diversity⁴.

Which Side Are You On?

My engagement with Disability Studies and STS showed me also that an extrovert STS approach that mainstreamed and analytically instrumentalized concepts inspired by science and technology studies could have an important effect on empirical domains that were dominated by sacred truths and the monopoly of orthodox knowledge. It was obvious to me that looking outwards rather than contributing to the self-referential need of parts of the STS community to become a discipline was far more important and constructive. By combining STS with, for example, the emancipatory research paradigm for disability which suggested that disability researchers must enlist their knowledge and skills at the disposal of disabled people, enabled me to form an idea about epistemological solidarity and its implementation.

This kind of action research euphoria that took over me after combining STS and disability research begged to be applied in other domains and timely sociotechnical controversies. That was back in 2014. Career-wise, I had completed a 13-year academic presence in Swedish academic institutions, and I was ready to embark on a new intellectual adventure in Denmark and the IT University of Copenhagen where I found myself becoming part of another strong Nordic STS environment, the Technologies in Practice research group. The catch and the challenge at the same time for me was that I had to apply an STS inspired epistemological solidarity in a domain, what reductively

⁴ Galis, V., & Hansson, A. (2012). Partisan scholarship in technoscientific controversies: Reflections on research experience. *Science as Culture*, 21(3), 335-364.

we can call Information Technology – IT, that was entirely new to me. Or was it?

Nordström and Robben claim that “the questions and issues raised by a narrator are constricted by the historical context in which they are made”⁵. Everything is about context! My arrival at ITU coincided with a very turbulent period globally as well as locally. We are talking about the post-financial crisis period and the period after several local insurrections with global impact. The so-called Arab Spring that began to blow in 2011 spread from Tunisia and Egypt to the whole North Africa and Middle East. The emancipatory experience was contagious, inspiring people all over the world: activists in Madrid, Athens, London and New York, whether calling themselves the Occupy Movement or the Indignados, were all proud to ‘walk like an Egyptian’. These mobilizations during this period represented the most recorded protests in the history of civil action due to activists’ use of corporate social and alternative media. This constituted for me an opportunity to practice a situated epistemological choice to provide analysis to social movements alongside which I struggle and share political solidarity. At the same time, it enabled me to conduct research relevant and compatible with the academic context and thematic of my new academic institution (ITU) and research group (Technologies in Practice). This was my entry to the study of the digital and digitalization by applying research without dead time approach.

Détournement/Culture jamming

Once again, I was not to reinvent the wheel. I got interested in the old tactics of *détournement*. *Détournement*, which refers to “turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself”⁶, derives from the work of the Situationists International and

5 Nordstrom, C., & Robben, A. C. (Eds.). (1995). *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and culture*. Univ of California Press.

6 Holt, D., & Cameron, D. (2010). *Cultural strategy: Using innovative ideologies to build breakthrough brands*. Oxford University Press.

describes the process of turning something aside from its normal course or purpose. This is a process of reverse appropriation. Activists have a long tradition of appropriating media technologies, divorcing them from their originators, and reinventing media’s uses in ways not intended by their designer. They make intensive use of media technologies to mobilize civil society across the political spectrum, organize protests, enable counter-information, and communicate a cause.

In that sense, I embarked on an inquiry into the creative and inventive appropriation of corporate social media in combination with alternative social media to enforce the struggle against authorities in some of the mobilizations I mentioned before.

My focus⁷ was among elsewhere on Greece. Greece had been in the eye of the global financial storm since 2010 and had become a site of violent protest events and solidarity actions. The financial crisis challenged the foundations of the sociopolitical system, pushed the country into one of the deepest post-war recessions, and ignited widespread street protests. The crisis also marked an intense digital-material struggle on both alternative and corporate social media as well as the launching of novel forms of political action: recording police action, spreading tactical information, and calling for international solidarity through corporate social media. Scholars claim that the appropriation of corporate social media by activists during Greece’s anti-austerity protests in 2010–2012 shaped a new era of social movements’ political communication and influenced mobilizations for subversive social change across Europe.

A number of corporate social media, such as Facebook groups, Twitter accounts and hashtags, alternative blogs and media collectives and the official website of the Syntagma Square occupation combined to form a hybrid digital-material landscape that performed subversive politics, spread resistance through police movement warning systems, coordinated actions, and spread information, images of struggle, and calls for international solidarity, what activists call *counter-information*.

7 Galis, V., & Neumayer, C. (2016). Laying claim to social media by activists: a cyber-material *détournement*. *Social media+ society*, 2(3), 2056305116664360.

Counter-Information

Counter-information is

"[T]he diffusion of information on social struggles and solidarity from below that serves the needs of the movement that is competitive and hostile toward authority and by extension, it stands in competition with mainstream media since the latter serves the interests of authority"⁸.

Counter-information practices became important mediators of information in times of crisis and reconfigured the urban web in terms of unsurveilled mobility in the city⁹, police atrocities, and politics in general. Sadly, as we found out later, this kind of appropriation would violently stop when commercial social media through algorithmic management, or simply by being purchased by totalitarian tycoons, became terra hostili or hostile territory for social movements. At that time, though, after the financial crisis and before the large influx of migrants to Europe in 2015, counter-information through digital media was alive and impactful. Following up on the trajectory of research without dead time and the historical context that this research aspired to take place, it somehow became a natural continuation to look upon and establish a research project about migrants' and solidarians' digital navigation practices as they enter in Europe. The point of departure was the long summer of migration in 2015 in combination with intensified securitization of border controls in Europe, restrictive migration policies and the consequent racialization of space.

8 Dalakoglou, D., & Vradis, A. (2011). *Revolt and crisis in Greece: Between a present yet to pass and a future still to come*. AK press.

9 Makrygianni, V. & Galis, V. (2022) Migration and counter-information practices, in: V. Galis, M.B. Jørgensen, and M. Sandberg (Eds) *The Migration Mobile: Border Dissidence, Sociotechnical Resistance, and the Construction of Irregularized Migrants*, pp. 213–234 (Rowman & Littlefield).

The DIGINAUTS project

We embarked on a project, funded by the Velux foundation, The DIGINAUTS project, that investigated migrants' digital practices in the European border regime. We examined how migrants' digital practices remake migration and potentially create networks of solidarity as migrants navigate through European borders. Our empirical material was ethnographically selected in three sites 1) the Greek borderland with a focus on the islands of Lesbos and Chios on the border with Turkey, but also Athens, 2) the larger German Danish border region and 3) the Oresund region encompassing the transnational borderland between Denmark and Sweden.

The project showed in what ways smartphones are "migrant essential" technologies during journeys in several publications¹⁰. What was insightful for me during this project was some kind of reality shock: practicing a situated epistemological choice to provide analysis to a social movement alongside which I struggle and share political solidarity with was to me a self-evident way to conduct research. I dubbed my lecture today 'research without dead time'. I have motivated and argued for my case. At the same time, I made an account of my academic trajectory in line with what I call partisan scholarship and epistemological solidarity. Obviously, this is not an unproblematic and flawless choice. What this way of working academically, and what those research projects have in common is a strong sense of solidarity with the subjects of the study due to my own political and epistemological commitments. And this creates several questions, concerns, and consequent limitations:

What is this research about and to whom is it relevant? What is it like to conduct academic research on a phenomenon that is polluted by vested political interests, personal tragedies, ideological loyalties,

10 Galis, V., Jørgensen, M. B., & Sandberg, M. (Eds.). (2022). *The Migration Mobile: Border Dissidence, Sociotechnical Resistance, and the Construction of Irregularized Migrants*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.

Galis, V., & Makrygianni, V. (2022). Analog flows in digital worlds: 'Migration multiples' and digital heterotopias in Greek territory. *Political Geography*, 95.

propaganda, and hazards for the subject of research or on a subject of research in danger? How is this kind of fieldwork compatible with my ideological integrity? Is it possible to do research that contributes to social struggles? Do I do action research, or do I just build my career? Can I conduct action research, or is my fieldwork redundant? Who am I, with my white academic privileges, to approach entrapped migrants in the trench of Fortress Europe and talk to them about their use of digital applications? How can I motivate, first to myself, politically and even academically, the fact that I was asking questions about mundane and trivial experiences while people were literally freezing to death in tents?

The above are real questions, reflections, but also emotions that I have personally experienced and been exposed to. These are real questions that we, as social scientists, are confronted with every single moment we are out there collecting material; in every conference we travel to and meet familiar faces, every time that we conceive a research application for a research council who assess our contribution to the state of the art, or our added value to society (whatever society is).

Shame on me

As a reaction to these thoughts, I decided to write a chapter¹¹ for a volume edited in the framework of the DIGINAUTS project. In the chapter, I described my thoughts and reflections prior, during and after my fieldwork on the islands of Chios and Lesbos in Greece in 2019. I went to the islands by making the reverse journey from what several migrants envisioned to do, in the most convenient and less time-consuming way. I was travelling from the Greek mainland, a European capital and one of the first urban stops for migrants, to the northeastern islands on the border with Turkey. There was I with my European mobility and class privileges travelling safe, fast, and comfortable to one of the epicenters of modern migratory drama,

11 Galis, V. (2022). The Redundant researcher: Fieldwork, solidarity, and migration. In *Research Methodologies and Ethical Challenges in Digital Migration Studies: Caring For (Big) Data?*, Springer Nature, pp. 167-194.

where thousands of people were literally entrapped in camps, detention centers, and hotspots under horrible conditions in terms of hygiene, weather, and freedom of mobility.

From the onset my presence on Chios was impregnated by a strong skepticism and shame for myself, reflecting on the asymmetries between my subject position and the migrants that I was about to meet. These emotions reflect my standpoint on solidarity, or how I am apprehending migration issues in general, not merely as a researcher or a political active subject, but as a whole. Through my emotions, I reacted to the contradictions I faced upon my arrival to the islands. This was not a martyr act of self-flagellation, but rather a realization of how 'I' or 'we, the 'research community' are shaped by our contact with the ontologies of the subjects that we study. In that sense, these kinds of emotions also involve politics, since they constitute reactions to how power relations enact our fieldwork ontologies and bring epistemological attention to how we as researchers become invested in specific issues. But is this enough? Sharing these reflections and emotions in another academic paper accessible to a specific readership and using sophisticated literature does it make any difference, and to whom?

On top of that, I recently came across this publication (unfortunately only in Greek for the time being) with the title: *Academic espionage: mainstream research and social movements as its subject*. This is a critical intervention by activists on the involvement of other activists with academic research that focuses on social movements. One of the main critiques of the book is that this kind of research does not constitute a process of academic freedom or emancipation through academic work, what we call action research, but rather an assimilation process. What the Situationists would call recuperation¹². The book investigates the history of the university as an institution serving the interests of those in power, the production of scientific experts, the pedagogies that students are exposed to, to become compatible with the demands of the industry and the market, the notion of academic freedom, as well

12 :/a process whereby a radical social or political movement or idea is assimilated into mainstream culture, thus diminishing its subversive force.

as the compliance of social sciences with counterinsurgency¹³. The book claims that academics publish their work, build their careers, and consciously or not reveal to the authorities' practices and ways that social movements utilize. The author calls these practices academic espionage. Reading this book constituted a major alarm clock and a reason to seriously reflect on what I was doing, how I did it and with what consequences for everyone involved.

Diffraction

I had two choices here. Either to sink into this bottomless academic/existential fatalism that scorns my research and academic research in general, or to choose to move the research agenda beyond academic espionage and beyond an internal academic self-confirming. This implies the development of a research agenda that takes responsibility for social interests in the production of knowledge and puts under critical scrutiny powerful actors such as the state, the law, the border, and orthodox approaches to research. On the other hand, this agenda must openly resonate with the grassroots research subject and how the research subject ought to participate in the configuration of the research work and its implications. We need to return to our informants, in whatever form possible, the information and cognitive capital that they generously offer us. I am arguing for methods and research epistemology that reconstitute social relations between the researcher and the researched, the subject and the object.

As said before, this does not constitute a methodological invention by any means. My aspiration here is to go beyond the recognition of my own situatedness. I am interested in systematizing the ways that method can actively engage with the research outcome. I want to explore the potential of methods to “contribute to the framing of change”.

To do that and instead of focusing on social movements alongside

¹³ :/military or political action taken against the activities of revolutionaries.

which I struggle and share political solidarity with (to avoid all the pitfalls mentioned before), I turned the analytical focus towards the source of technoscientific and political authority and power. I became interested in technologies that enforce the law, maintain welfare, and secure sovereignty. I moved my focus to what we call *technologies of social order*!

Technologies of social order

Given an alleged paradigm shift in governance by western states into “new public analytics”, namely the growing reliance on data-driven systems and algorithmic processing, the implementation of digital technologies plays an important role in the transformation of, for example, welfare provisions, law enforcement, and bordering. Governments generously offer big promises about how ‘agile digitalization’ will transform the bureaucratic and inefficient welfare state, the intuitive police, and the porous border into efficient and effective enterprises.¹⁴

Beyond this surface of techno-solutionism, governments consciously attempt to make digitalization appear as technical and neutral as possible. There is a tendency for ‘prevailing mystification’ by the state for digital infrastructures. Accordingly, there is a profound need for critical inquiry that is capable of unpacking said technologies.

The digitalization of the state is also an ideological project. The concept of ideology here moves beyond a moralizing discourse, and I adopt it as a frame of meaning that is intertwined with and embedded in actual sociotechnical practices, such as digital practices. I argue that digital technologies of social order constitute ideological manifestations of specific modes of governance. The new turn of my research explores, among other things, what happens to governance when digitalization is integrated into the state and rhetorically adopted by policy makers and elected politicians, how digital border¹⁵ technologies manifest

¹⁴ Galis, V. & Vlassis V. eds, (2025). *Digitalization, Data and Welfare: Sociotechnical Approaches to Service Delivery*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

¹⁵ Galis, V., & Amelung, N. (2023). Border control technologies: introduction. *Science*

hegemonic border-control regimes, and how the state monopoly on violence is being introduced to algorithmic predictive systems¹⁶ and digital platforms. Again, the historical context in which these kinds of research choices have been made is crucial. And this historical context is that of multiple and co-existing crises.

(Predictive) Policing/(poly)crisis

Indeed, ours is an era of polycrisis. Europe's polycrisis has specifically seen the convergence of crises in economics, politics, geopolitics, the natural environment, health. The list is not exhaustive. Policing has historically risen to the task when the state can no longer rule by consent, resorting to ruling by force instead. This proliferation of crises means policing in the continent has become a long-term method of population governance in and across these simultaneous crises. Policing has historically acted as an escalating or de-escalating force. In the polycrisis era, the role of policing within our democratic structures became both pertinent and ubiquitous.

Talking about policing today can no longer be about the narrow field of maintaining law and order: we now inhabit a world of abstract policing that extends to domains including workplace surveillance, pre-emptive¹⁷ techniques and digital borders for migration control, welfare fraud, legislative interventions against climate activism and prognostic models of climate change, or public space restriction orders as we saw during the pandemic or the managing of gang criminality and poor integration. It is important then to posit policing on par with crises, an understanding of crisis as an inherent part of the everyday governance and control of populations exemplified in policing strategies. The solution offered by governments and markets is what we call

as Culture.

16 Galis, V., Gundhus, H.O. and Vradis, A. eds., (2025). *Critical Perspectives on Predictive Policing: Anticipating Proof?*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

17 Galis, V., Gundhus, H. O., & Vradis, A. (2025). The discreet charm of predictive policing. In *Critical Perspectives on Predictive Policing* (pp. 1-20). Edward Elgar Publishing.

prediction¹⁸. Once exclusive to medicine and seismology, prediction is now everywhere: from policing and labor to public space, it encroaches upon every key aspect of human activity, as the Covid pandemic vividly showed us.

Due to these ontological and epistemological changes, affecting not only policing but also how we make sense of crises, reactions to crises have become more dependent on digital systems, AI and legislative interventions. Growing reliance on AI systems and algorithmic processing, the implementation of digital technologies plays an important role in the transformation of crisis management. The shift toward 'new public analytics' has made AI and predictive tools pivotal in virtually all organized human activity. And this did not happen without consequences¹⁹.

Silicon Valley comes to town...

State agencies are increasingly relying on private vendors, developers and platforms for their everyday functions of statehood. But digital technologies and their developers are not encoded with democratic values or other modernist sensibilities. They pragmatically integrate, analyze, and visualize data to develop maps, to assist analogue policy work, to unify disparate data sources and systems, enabling collaboration and dependent workflows and many other tasks. Pragmatically, not agnostically. Digital technologies are formatted, framed, and encoded with prostheses: through their prism they refract sociotechnical imaginaries, and ideologies about e.g., crisis, social order and organization which help them perform calculations, visualizations, and analysis. This is not a neutral, unbiased or a rational act. These are not necessarily real as a historical reality. Data in, data out. The output of digital technologies

18 Kilis, E., Gundhus, H. O. I., & Galis, V. (2025). Prediction. In *De Gruyter Handbook of Digital Criminology* (pp. 371-379). De Gruyter.

19 Karlsson, B., & Galis, V. (2025). What constitutes predictive policing? The case of POL-INTEL in Denmark. In *Critical Perspectives on Predictive Policing* (pp. 130-150). Edward Elgar Publishing.

becomes real in a process of configuration between the data collected, the architecture of the technology, the engineers who develop it, and the analysts and policy makers that use it. We are not talking about software technologies that merely classify, define, and correlate data but a semantic system of interpretation that “transforms the very thing it interprets”. These technologies are so important because they cause things to happen²⁰.

On the contrary, we perceive algorithmic and predictive welfare technologies as sociotechnical phenomena, that is, the state is mutually constructed by welfare practices and digital technologies, an outcome of organizational reconfiguration, political-economic environment, visions, and socio-technical imaginaries, rather than merely a technical process. Embedded in these reconfigurations are concepts like flexibility²¹, as a desire for time-optimization and efficiency at the same time, as well as feedback loops that reproduce social bias and ideological takes. As I said... morbid temporalities! In this type of research, I approach digital technologies as processes that are embedded within a set of complex relations of human and nonhuman actors. In other words, digital technologies are shaped not only by e.g., the data fed into an algorithm, but also by policies, visions, and bias outside said algorithm. They are not just problem solvers or problem makers, but the product of social, economic, cultural, and political processes. Therefore, I argue that the digitalization of the welfare state is an ideological project.

Others go as far as to claim that digital technologies of social order are impregnated by the Silicon Valley ideology, that is, a combination of free market fundamentalism and technocratic populism, supported by promises of universal connectivity. Perhaps this becomes more concrete now that a Silicon Valley offspring has taken the task to “rationalize” the US public sector. My take on approaching the digitalization of the

20 Galis, V., & Karlsson, B. (2024). A world of Palantir—ontological politics in the Danish police’s POL-INTEL. *Information, Communication & Society*, 27(13), 2438-2456.

21 Floros, K., & Galis, V. (2024). Platform labour as a stepping stone? Challenging the dominant narrative for Danish housecleaning platforms. *Critical Sociology*, 08969205241303998.

welfare state as an ideological project also implies critical investigation of the conditions that have enabled these digital technologies for welfare provision to emerge and to enter contemporary governance. I am interested in tracing ideological aspects of how (private) actors, carriers of specific ideological ethos (such as the Silicon Valley ideology), have impacted statehood. But how do we break the academic walls? How do we create research without dead time?

Critical engagement

By establishing critical engagement with other parts of society. An example of this is this publication that I am particularly proud of. My colleagues from PROSA Bjarke Friberg, Ole Tange, and Nikolai Scharling did excellent work in collecting material, editing, and distributing the ideas catalogue²². A pure moment of research without dead time that popularized the findings of an academic project and made them accessible to wider social groups. According to the catalogue:

- Research is needed to understand how transparent and accountable state institutions and governance innovations come into being in practice.
- We aspire to conduct research that will hold state power accountable for the justice of their actions and credibility of their analyses.
- We ally with social scientific research on innovation and critical studies in order to shed light on the social dimensions of policing, bordering, and justice-making in the age of big data and AI.

22 PROSA (2025). An Ideas Catalogue - A Critical Look at the Digital Transformation of Law Enforcement.

- We question to which extent data analytics and AI are a rationalizing force with potential to reduce bias, increase efficiency, and improve prediction accuracy or rather the opposite, reifying bias and deepening existing patterns of inequality.
- We ask how public participation, transparency, human and fundamental freedom rights are ensured in the procurement, implementation and use of digital infrastructures when public and private actors are collaborating at these digital infrastructures.

Another example of this kind of research is the *EnJustice: transformative environmental justice* project that I recently embarked upon. We addressed a call on democratic inclusion in the so-called Nordic green transition. Instead of taking a colonial approach that simply attempts to assimilate marginalized groups in the predetermined, white, Nordic green transition, we put in the center of our project Indigenous and grassroots populations in the Arctic cycle (including Greenland and Sapmi) and Lithuania as the point of departure for how they understand environmental justice, whatever green transition means, and how to address the environmental crisis and digitalization as a component of that. The project investigates forms of democratic engagement with the explicit aim of balancing the unequal distribution of power between Indigenous and grassroots communities and powerful stakeholders in formulating key policies toward fossil-free energy production in the region. To do so, we explicitly wish to avoid using marginalized communities to legitimize a green transition, otherwise led by (supra) state authorities.

Doing conspiracy

In a period of global and local transformation and volatility, when liberties, ideas, and things taken for granted are being violently challenged, prosecuted, and overthrown, conducting research without dead time is more relevant than ever. Unfortunately, the situationist slogan

life without dead time ended up becoming the historical epigraph "inscribed above a gateway" through which our society passed into the domination of the market economy.

Today the task which the economic system assigns individuals is no longer only that of producing and consuming things, but above all "changing what you do, how you think, who you are" to quote the philosopher Jaron Lanier from the Netflix documentary the Social Dilemma.

Research without dead time reminds us of the importance of authentic human activity, believing that it is by acknowledging and responding to our own desires that we remind ourselves that we have inner worlds that are capable of reflection and critique. But this is not an easy task. We have been told that by avoiding politics and speaking the dominant language of academic neutrality and scientific objectivity, one can achieve any and all recognition. Because the language of scientific rationalism is "the source of the only discourse which society allows itself to hear". It becomes our academic duty then to cause cracks in the fortress of rationality and neutrality's monopoly. We need to become conspirators. After all, every questioning of authority, every opening of a black box implies and requires a conspiracy. *Et komplot* as you say in Danish! A conspiracy against the established order. Every paradigm shift is enabled by a conspiracy against the dominant design, the hegemonic theory, the winning model... Every innovation constitutes a conspiracy against the current!

"Let's search a possible for its possiblens"

Regardless of the fatalism of the time being, we ought to remain calm and positive, we ought to act! We ought to "search a possible for its possiblens" to quote Wallace Stevens' poem. It is worth trying because, as Guy Debord once said: "Our slogans are already in everybody's head."

Thank you!

Bio

Vasilis Galis is Professor of Science and Technology Studies (STS) at the IT University of Copenhagen. Galis was the Principal Investigator for the Velux funded project Welfare after Digitalization, and the Nordforsk-funded project Critical Understanding of Predictive Policing. Galis has an established international profile with organizational and research experience from Denmark, Greece, and Sweden. He is also a member of the Research Center for Digital Welfare, and he has launched the Technologies of Social Order research group at the ITU. Galis' research has focused on the digitalization of the welfare state and law enforcement, participating in academic and public debates regarding the datafication of security, the border, and the judicial system. He has contributed to STS with methods from disability and migration/ border studies, and to digitalization studies with an STS focus on how culture and society fundamentally shape welfare technologies.