On the politics of disappearance: the body scanner setting

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Structure

- How we did end up here?

- The concept of setting

- Three paradoxes

- The politics of disappearance

- Conclusions

How did we end up here?

the imbroglios are apparently fading away, disentangled and solved in the disappearance of bodies from the screens

-> the adoption of the 2011 Commission Implementing Regulation allowing for the use of *security scanners* in EU airports

=> wider deployment of scanners for passengers' screening

the very possible closure of controversies triggers our research interest in this specific series of vanishing operations

The concept of the *setting* : a definition

A machine can no more be studied than a human, because what the analyst is faced with are assemblies of human and nonhuman actants where the competences and performances are distributed; the object of analysis is called a setting or a setup (in French a "dispositif")

(Akrich and Latour, 1992:259)

Our stylistic ploy: *bodies-scanners setting*

- a loose notion of setting, which is structurally open to regard as actants all present material and immaterial elements, but also all apparently invisible and absent (spectral) elements

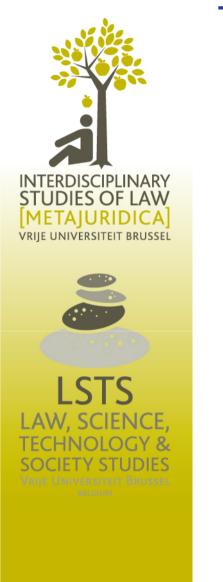- [how to study a (security) dispositif?]

Three paradoxes

Paradox 1:

Anonymous bodies vs. identified passengers

Paradox 2:

Visibility of the machines vs. invisibility of the bodies

Paradox 3:

Re-moving the bodies

The politics of disappearance

Processes > politics of disappearance

Politics of disappearance: the productiveness of voids which (de)stabilizes the setting

- Georges Perec and *La disparition*

- Jacques Derrida and the specter as the "*visibility of the invisible*"

Conclusions

- Dissonances in security practices can emerge: disappeared elements haunt the stabilization of the setting

- A continuous work of mustering of heterogeneous elements

- The closure of the political landscape is not pre-determined, but actants have to be taken seriously (and involved in ≠ configurations)

- [On dispositifs]

Thank you!

For further information on the activities of the
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http://www.vub.ac.be/LSTS/

http://vublsts.wordpress.com/

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