



ISM SEMINAR

Spring Term 2015-16

Speaker: Professor Theo Vurdubakis, Lancaster University Management School

Title: Economies of Appearances: Data Practices, Visibility Regimes and Environmental Law Enforcement in the Brazilian Amazon

Date: Wednesday 16 March 2016

Venue: 1.015, WBS

Time: 14:00

Abstract: The paper draws upon an on-going study of the technologically mediated management of Amazonian deforestation. It focuses on the satellite and GIS enabled Environmental Rural Registry (*Cadastro Ambiental Rural* or **CAR**) currently being implemented in Brazil which is meant to facilitate the “control, monitoring, environmental and economic planning and the fight against deforestation” (Art.29, Lei 12651/12; *Decreto*7830/2012). It seeks to do so by producing an authoritative geo-referenced cadastral map of all rural land holdings, which will in turn enable satellite monitoring of the economic activities (and their environmental impacts) taking place on these properties.

It is by now commonplace, that Atlantic Modernity routinely seeks solutions for problems of social order and organization in practices and technologies of visibility. There is an already large, and growing, body of work that seeks to understand how various such technologies of ‘visibility’ (whether this is glossed as “transparency” or its evil twin “surveillance”) emerge as self-evident solutions to problems of manage-ability. The satellite en-visioning of Amazonia is instructive in this respect. In many ways the ‘jungle’ appears to stand, literally as well as metaphorically, as the Other of Order and Organization. It can be rendered manage-able only insofar as its opacity is penetrated and is made transparent in particular ways. At the same time, there is a need to focus on how envisioning technologies function in practice rather than merely on how they are supposed to function. That is to say, to study institutional visibility and transparency in terms of situated performances; as products of specific, potentially unstable, sociomaterial configurations of instruments, practices and counter-practices. Particular ‘visibility regimes’ (including CAR) typically make their objects visible in some ways but not in others. Anthropologists have used the term “*unknowledge*” (Mathews, 2011) to describe such present absences: specific forms of intimate local and organizational knowledge which must as it were, be kept out of sight in order to ensure the success of particular organizing projects and systematizations.

Biography: Theo Vurdubakis is Professor and Head of the Department of Organization, Work and Technology at Lancaster University, UK. A graduate of Athens University he completed his MSc and PhD at the University of Manchester. His current research focuses on the role of technological practices and devices in processes of social organization.

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