

INTRODUCTION: GOVERNMENT SECRECY

Derived from Georg Simmel's work on secrecy, Lawrence Hazelrigg (1969) writes the secret "is the ultimate sociological form for the regulation of the flow and distribution of information." This view is the foundation for volume 19 *Research in Social Problems and Public Policy (RSPPP)*, which focuses on a particular sociological form: the government secret. Building on a previous work I edited with Jan Goldman, *Government Secrecy: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (2009), an anthology that offered a broad view of the problem of government secrecy, volume 19 spans the realms of social science and policy in theorizing censorship and the relationship of secrecy with conspiracy theory, knowledge production, information policy, privacy, national security, scientific openness, political and civil rights, and ultimately as an integral element of human relationships.

In part, this volume is influenced by cultural anthropologist Stanton K. Tefft's (1980) important anthology *Secrecy, a Cross-Cultural Perspective* that presented secrecy, or the intentional concealment of information, "in different historical, cultural, community, political, and organizational contexts" (Tefft, 1980, p. 13). The collection of papers included in volume 19 continues the dialogue on secrecy, and in doing so suggests questions that reflect Tefft's (1980, p. 8, 13) still-relevant concerns: Are the dangers to personal privacy growing? Is secrecy an inherent part of private and governmental bureaucracy in both democratic and totalitarian systems? Are there different forms of secrecy and do they have different social and political functions? What are the dangers of disclosure? What are secrets and how do we classify different types of secrecy?

WHY GOVERNMENT SECRECY?

Government secrecy is often portrayed as antithetical to transparency¹ as well as an affront to the general right to know, citizen participation, administrative oversight, and democracy itself.² Furthermore, government secrecy is connected to "much broader questions regarding the structure and

performance of democratic systems” (Galnoor, 1977, p. 278), and in instances, is “more dangerous to democracy than the practices they conceal” (Fulbright, 1971).³ This condition has led to what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1987) describes as a secrecy state, which

has extended the secrecy system far beyond its legitimate bounds. In doing so, the target is far less to prevent the disclosure of information to enemy governments than to prevent the disclosure of information to the American Congress, press and people. For governments have discovered that secrecy is a source of power and an efficient way of covering up the embarrassments, blunders, follies and crimes of the ruling regime. (p. 5)

Not an abstract philosophical problem without association with personal and public life, government secrecy – depending on the form – plays out in concrete ways on a variety of stages. For example, the [National Environmental Policy Act of 1969](#), Pub. L. 91-190 (NEPA) mandates a “systematic, interdisciplinary approach” to federal agency examination of a potential environmental impact. Yet the practice of classifying environmental impact statements by the U.S. military potentially challenges NEPA’s interdisciplinary approach but also congressional intent for federal agencies to act as “trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.”⁴ NEPA was envisioned by its crafters as

a national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment; to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man; to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation. (“Purpose”, Sec. 2 42 USC § 4321)

Further, the practice of secrecy may give rise to environmental problems.⁵ To support this idea, Jim Werner offers the example of presidential authority to grant exemptions to military facilities from disclosure under two environmental laws: the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, P.L. 96-510 (CERCLA) and the Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act, P.L. 99-499 (EPCRA). Again, both laws reflect a congressional intent to provide for public involvement and account for risk from harmful substances.⁶ Werner (1993, p. 351) believes that varying differences of disclosure and public scrutiny, coupled with the “distinctiveness” of military culture and complexity of waste streams, have actually *caused* environmental harm.

In addition to curtailing public oversight, secrecy also influences scholarly critique of government policies and actions, thus reducing additional avenues for institutional reflection that might lead to policy reform. As

Jennifer Earl (2009, p. 59)⁷ observes ongoing police-intelligence secrecy during the 2004 Republican National Convention (RNC),

Secrecy in this setting precludes the public from providing any oversight through informed pressure on their elected officials. It also ensures that researchers in general, and scholars examining repression in particular, will not have access to data on these activities until long after research would be most useful. Indeed, if, for instance, Cunningham's research could have been conducted during the COINTELPRO program, or my own research on the policing of the RNC could be completed before the next major event to be held in NYC, the products of this research could have more usefully informed public debates over police programs and policies.⁸

Perhaps the most profound consequence of government secrecy is its encroachment on public trust of information, which in turn potentially undermines confidence in government. Secrecy, accompanied by varying degrees of governmental transparency and openness, may contribute to the rise of conspiracy theory (Olmsted, this volume). As one JFK assassination researcher⁹ observed in response to government secrecy:

You know what would be the antidote to infiltration,¹⁰ actually a just a better argument – the truth. ... if they ever said here's what happened, and here's why we're acting in this manner, then people would go along with it.¹¹ I mean people are eager to understand the truth and even if it's uncomfortable, say ok well, if we have to go to war, we have to go to war, or whatever. (Osanic, 2010)

WE KNOW IT WHEN WE SEE IT

While descriptions of government secrecy abound in the scholarly and popular literature, no universally accepted definitions of *government secrecy* exist, although the concept of *secrecy* is generally understood as the intentional concealment of information by individuals and groups (Simmel, 1906; Bok, 1989). Secrecy is related to the larger concept of information control, which Tefft (1992, p. 39) considers a “social-science label which describes the process whereby secrets, private information, and the like are shared with some, but not with others ... in no society do individuals treat all others with complete candor.” Moreover, secrecy itself

might better be defined as the mandatory or voluntary, but calculated, concealment of information, activities, or relationships. From the community's perspective the secrets may involve activities, plans, or relationships that are legal, illegal, or ethically neutral. (Tefft, 1980, p. 320)

Sociologist Edward Shils and political scientist Carl J. Friedrich, who both addressed government secrecy through contrasting historical cases and

comparative work, never fully differentiated government secrecy as a form of secrecy with its own sphere of influence. For example, Shils (1956), writing under the shadow of atomic espionage and McCarthyism, regarded secrecy as the “compulsory withholding of knowledge, reinforced by the prospects of sanctions for disclosure,”¹² and Friedrich (1972, p. 176) likened secrecy to a “tampering of communications.” Friedrich (1972, pp. 175, 179), picking up where sociologist Georg Simmel (1950, p. 331) left off in his discussion on the secret as “the sociological expression of moral badness,” addressed the “dysfunctional excesses” of secrecy, comparing it to a political pathology in discussing questionable activities conducted by government. In any case, secrecy – government secrecy in particular – suggests power; as Anthony Jones (2010, p. 105) notes:

It is the relationship between depth and surface that is crucial here; it is the act of rupturing or sacrificing, thereby revealing that which is concealed which brings the relation between surface and depth into dramatic locus. These kinds of activities less reveal hidden secrets that reveal the social significance of secrecy. These acts, Taussig argues, reveal the importance of the public secret – that which is generally known, but which can rarely be articulated. These practices are a web of activities that help articulate the relationship between depth and surface and aid the negotiation of the relationship between public secrets (knowing what not to know) and public knowledge. The possession of the knowledge of public secrets, as much as public knowledge, is a route to social power.

Government secrecy¹³ as a particular form of secrecy is most famously described by the *Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy*, or *Moynihan Commission* (1997), in the following way:

With the exception of the procedures for classifying “nuclear-related information” under the Atomic Energy Act and protecting intelligence “sources and methods” under the National Security Act, the mechanics for protecting national security information have evolved through a series of executive orders. Over the past half century, the Congress has played only a limited role in any consideration of how the system should function, limiting itself to occasional oversight hearings. The Executive Branch has assumed the authority both for structuring the classification system and for deciding the grounds upon which secrets should be created and maintained. Thus, what commonly is referred to as “government secrecy” more properly could be termed “administrative secrecy” or “secrecy by regulation.”

Secrecy is a form of government regulation. There are many such forms, but a general division can be made between regulations dealing with domestic affairs, and those dealing with foreign affairs. In the first category, it is generally the case that government prescribes what the citizen may do; in the second category, it is generally the case that government prescribes what the citizen may know.

In addition to assigning secrecy as a form of government regulation, the Moynihan Commission also suggested that government secrecy is the “ultimate mode of regulation” and a “parallel regulatory regime with a far greater potential for damage if it malfunctions” (Commission, Foreword, 1997). This parallel regime – suggestive of Simmel’s notion that secrecy makes possible “a second world” – is best described as composed of certain techniques,¹⁴ or institutionalized practices that actively conceal information while also creating access. Secrecy as a mode of government regulation in fact coexists with institutionalized mechanisms that *encourage* transparency and public knowledge of certain government operations and policy making (Maret, 2009).

While the depiction of government secrecy as form of regulation and parallel government is useful in understanding significant portions of the secrecy infrastructure and its policies – such as the intelligence community – perhaps even comparatively, as a solid definition of government secrecy, it is lacking. There is no doubt the quantitative work of secrecy illuminates the range of government secrecy; statistics, numerical accounts, and documentation of administrations and agencies are important in profiling how much information is secreted and restricted.¹⁵ This work is valuable in doing comparative work, in developing indicators, benchmarks, and measuring progress toward government transparency. However, these essential activities fall short in chronicling the whole of government secrecy.

Research into government secrecy has unfortunately fallen by the way of Justice Potter Stewart’s much-quoted phrase: *We know it when we see it*.¹⁶ This condition of information has led to not only a failure in imagination in terms of developing fresh ways of portraying government secrecy but also in terms of, generally, formulating new research methods that probe secrecy in interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary ways in complex systems. Philosophical problems of definition, coupled with a paucity of theoretical advances in understanding the problem of secrecy across the human-built environment and natural world, and in connecting secrecy with other forms of information restriction, have left the study of secrecy – especially government secrecy – as a somewhat isolated field of inquiry dispersed among the disciplines and studiously reported by public watchdogs.¹⁷ Brian Martin (1998, p. 172) notes:

In order to bring about a more just and equal society, struggles need to be waged over information ... politicians and government bureaucrats have restricted access in various ways, including charging fees that make a mockery of the name “freedom of information.” Even if FOI worked perfectly, it is a very limited freedom, since it does nothing about corporate secrecy, defamation law, surveillance and ownership of information.

More than the sum of its parts, government secrecy not only encompasses “intelligence as a mode of governance” (Donner, 1980) but interrelated information states, discourse, and narratives that concern access to information, unintentional concealment¹⁸ of information, intellectual property,¹⁹ forms of censorship such as redaction, coercion, deception, and lying;²⁰ government secrecy is also connected with privacy, “knowledge shields” such as confidentiality,²¹ historical delay, leaks, surveillance, propaganda, “public diplomacy,”²² secret law,²³ and information and psychological warfare, across agency cultures, the “invisible government” (Wise & Ross, 1964), branches of the public government, international relations, “opaque networks” (Roberts, 2006), and the shadow world of government contractors.

A WAY TO SECRECY AND GOVERNMENT SECRECY: A PROPOSAL FOR SECRECY STUDIES

Writing in 1927, philosopher John Dewey (1991, p. 171) observed the

backwardness of social knowledge is marked in its division into independent and insulated branches of learning. Anthropology, history, sociology, morals, economics, political science, go their own ways without constant and systematized fruitful interaction.

As proposed here, secrecy studies is a new field of inquiry that addresses Dewey’s concerns in integrating the existing, unconnected body of literature on secrecy and secret keeping – including government secrecy – throughout disciplines and fields of study. As such, secrecy studies joins other fields of inquiry in the “studies” arena: Asian studies, area studies, critical information studies, environmental studies, gender studies, government studies, legal studies, religious studies, and women’s studies. In her reflection on building women’s studies as its own field of inquiry, Elizabeth Minnich (1990, p. 25) posed: “were any of the standing disciplines adequate to the study of women?” Minnich answers:

It seemed clear we would have to create a new field, not a pastiche of old ones, in order to be free to locate and when necessary create theoretical frameworks, the methods and techniques of research and teaching, that we might need to illuminate our complex subject.

Following Minnich, secrecy studies as anticipated here is a means to explore the enduring “charm of secrecy” (Simmel, 1906, p. 465), as well as negotiate forms²⁴ and practices of secrecy across disciplinary boundaries; moreover, secrecy studies recognizes that not only have disciplinary boundaries broken down but also have proved inadequate to take up interdisciplinary,²⁵ multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary work. Tasked with

taking on richer explorations of secrecy through such activities as investigating popular accounts of conspiracy theory and liberating the hidden archive, secrecy studies encompasses work in the humanities, including literature and religious studies, commerce, law, policy, social sciences, and sciences to include ethological research investigating secrecy among primates and, in general, the natural world.

Perhaps the most important charge of secrecy studies is in carving out new territory through the shaping of theory and definitions. Secrecy studies embraces investigations into proposals that “secrecy is a property of information” (Schepppe, 1988, p. 12), as well the “professional secret, confessional secret, military secret/political secret, the secret police, the secret in novels, etc., all the semantics of the secret” (Derrida & Ferraris, 2001, p. 75). A treasure trove awaits those researchers who seek to look at forms of secrecy across systems (Table 1).

While it stands alone in its quest in exploring secrecy in a variety of contexts and settings, as proposed here secrecy studies is only marginally separate from inquiries into transparency and freedom of information. Visualizing secrecy studies as a sort of Venn Diagram, as a set of intersecting relations, is useful in capturing the cross-fertilization of investigations.

The development of bold speculative theory and reinvigoration of qualitative research methods would serve secrecy studies in illuminating relationships,²⁶ construct alternative histories, acknowledge everyday stories and experiences, deconstruct semiotical regimes, and expose subtle dynamics, which among other matters, give rise to ruptures of information and communication such as asymmetry, conspiracy theories,²⁷ disinformation, propaganda, and the leak.

Secrecy studies also peers into the “secrecy process,” described by Tefft (1980, p. 37) as the “tensions and/or conflicts between the secret holder (holders) and outsiders that necessitate concealment.” As secrecy conceals potentially embarrassing disclosures, forbidden acts, illegality, inefficiency, evasion of responsibility, and corruption (Simmel, 1950), the secrecy process is of potential value in examining practices and rituals of secret societies (Tefft, 1992, p. 181), groups, and organizations, including those that rely on the secrecy worker.²⁸

A dedicated field of inquiry characterized as “secrecy studies” might follow in the tradition of the interdisciplinary Macy Conferences (1942, 1946–1953) that brought together researchers from seemingly disparate areas of inquiry (information theory, mathematics, engineering, psychiatry, neurology, and across the social sciences) to discuss and share research on cybernetics.²⁹ The Macy Conferences, known for their collaboration, lively

Table 1. Selected Forms of Secrecy and Enabling Factors.

Selected Forms of Secrecy ^a	Theorists Enabling Factors
Bank secrecy, financial secrecy, Federal Reserve secrecy, secrecy jurisdictions	Birkenfeld, 2009; Global Witness, 2009; Lewis, 1991; Tax Justice Network, 2009; Bank Secrecy Act of 1970; Title III, USA PATRIOT Act
Bureaucratic secrecy	Simmel, 1906; Weber, 1946; Tefft, 1979
Characterological secrecy	Young-Bruehl, 2010
Contract secrecy	Shattuck, 1984
Contractor secrecy	Corpwatch, 2009; Shorrock, 2008; SEC “material events” exemption
Direct, serial, and collective secrets	Scheppele, 1988
Deep secrecy	Pozen (2010)
Dirty secrets	Secrets about “real or potential wrong-doing, hence the adjective <i>dirty</i> . It is common knowledge that firms have trade secrets that they will protect; it is not common knowledge that firms have dirty secrets that they conceal. There are various types of dirty secrets, “some may be criminal acts,” related to “false and deceitful business practices” (Messick, 1999, p.72–73)
Environmental secrecy	Categorical exclusion; industry self-audit; labeling regulations/exclusions; classified environmental impact statements
Executive secrecy, presidential secrecy, and vice presidential secrecy	U.S. Constitution, Article II, section I; Corwin, 1948; Dean, 2010; Schlesinger, 1973; Yoo et al., 2005; Committee on the Judiciary, 2006
Extra-group and intra-group secrecy	Tefft, 1980
Intelligence secrecy, necessary secrecy	Numerous Executive Orders; CIPA (Classified Information Procedures Act); Freedom of Information Act exemptions
Intimate secrecy (privacy as a form of secrecy)	Tefft, 1992, p. 36
Invention secrecy/patent secrecy ^b (tied to military secrecy)	Freedom of Information Act exemptions
Manifest and Latent Secrecy	Tefft, 1980
Military secrecy	Coser, 1963; Freedom of Information Act exemptions

Table 1. (Continued)

Selected Forms of Secrecy ^a	Theorists Enabling Factors
National security secrecy, Genuine national security secrecy	Aftergood, 2000; Freedom of Information Act exemptions; National Security Act and exemptions
Nuclear secrecy	Maret, 2010; Freedom of Information Act exemptions
Open secrets	Gladwell, 2007
Police secrecy	Donner, 1980, 1990 ^c ; Theoharis, 1978
Political secrecy	Aftergood, 2000
Secondary secrecy	A working definition: use of redaction in declassified materials; information held by private companies and contractors not available through a Freedom of Information Act request (Maret)
State secrets	Courts; Department of Justice, 2009; Fisher, 2006
Secret law	Office of Legal Counsel Memoranda; see Kutz, 2009; Leonard, 2008
Toxics secrecy (a form of chemical secrecy)	Andrews, 2009; Toxic Substances Control Act, P.L. 94-469 ^d ; Freedom of Information Act exemptions
Trade secrecy	NAFTA, Chapter 11
Scientific secrecy (also see military and invention/patent secrecy)	Nondisclosure agreements; Freedom of Information Act exemptions; patent law
Weapons secrecy ^e (also see military and invention/patent secrecy)	Atomic Energy Act of 1946; Nondisclosure agreements; Freedom of Information Act exemptions

^aFor additional list of secrecy types, see Maret (2009). As I pointed out on my blog, each category of secrecy has its own dynamics and “flavor.” There is much work to be done in fleshing out categories in order to better understand secrecy in human systems. See “Types of secrecy,” January 17, 2009, available at <https://bkofsecrets.wordpress.com/2009/01/17/68/>

^bSee Marks (2010); *Secrecy Report Card* 2010, <http://openthegovernment.org>

^cAnd Jennifer Earl (2009) regarding protest policing of the Republican National Convention in 2004; other examples are the relationship of LEIUs (Law Enforcement Intelligence Units), JTTFs (Joint Terrorism Task Forces), domestic intelligence, and national security.

^dSee Furlow (2010), “Claims of confidentiality of certain chemical identities contained in health and safety studies and data from health and safety studies submitted under the Toxic Substances Control Act,” available at: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-12646.pdf>

^eSuch as the Biological Sciences Experts Group “consisting of scientists from industry and academia to advise the intelligence community on the threat of biological weapons proliferation and related matters. But not a single fact concerning the Group’s actions or accomplishments can be publicly disclosed ...” See *Secrecy News*, “ODNI Advisors on Bio Sciences Keep Low Profile,” August 16, 2010, www.fas.org/blog/secrecy/2010/08/bseg_foia.html

discussions, and investigations into complex systems, “constituted a kind of community with a shared idiom” (Heims, 1991, p. 11).³⁰ Secrecy studies could do no better than to emulate the Macy Conferences as an avenue to understand secrecy across human domains and in the natural world.

Above all, I see secrecy studies as a call to researchers to become “their own methodologist and theorist, which means also an intellectual craftsman” (Mills, 2000, p. 121). Secrecy studies is born of Mills’ sociological imagination, and is extended by Hector Raul Solis-Gadea’s (2005) new sociological imagination:

If anything, the new sociological imagination uses theory, history, empirical facts, logical formalization, systematic analysis, creativity, local knowledge, moral judgment and inspiration. Any element that can be useful to explain and make sense of a historical situation is part of its tools kit. What distinctively constitutes its elements is not just the search for correlations between abstract variables, but the search for pertinent relationships among facts, moral problems, structural conditions, historical concerns, personal worries and ethical values of contemporary societies. (pp. 117–118)

THE SAGE OF SECRECY STUDIES, GEORG SIMMEL³¹

Preferring to study the “atoms of society” (Simmel, 1950, p. 11), one of Georg Simmel’s projects was a pioneering exploration of the power of secrecy in interaction across relationships. Simmel’s masterful 1906 essay “The secret and the secret society,” scattered lectures, and essays³² with their “freedom from the confines of a single age and with its lack of dependence on a particular school” (Wolff, 1959, p. xiii) offers researchers a substantial template for creating a field of inquiry called secrecy studies.

Simmel’s “impact on American sociology has been recurrent, variegated, and erratic” (Levine, Carter, & Gorman, 1976b, p. 1127); writing of the lack of attention to his work by the scholarly community, Lawrence Hazelrigg (1969, p. 323) writes of Simmel’s work:

Whatever the reason, the oversight is unfortunate, since the essay contains numerous insights into, among other phenomena, the role of secrecy as a means for the manipulation and control of a central variable in social organization: information.

These observations lay the foundation for secrecy studies in that it also includes insights – spanning the social sciences, sciences, humanities, and policy – about control of information: the lie (Simmel, 1950, pp. 312–316), discretion (Simmel, 1950, pp. 320–324), silence, reserve, knowledge, and

ignorance (Simmel, 1950, pp. 349–351), the secret and the ritual (Simmel, 1950, pp. 358–360), and the secret as an adorning possession (Simmel, 1950, p. 337).

As an “eidetic social scientist,” (Backhaus, 1998), Simmel left a wealth of ideas related to secrecy, including:

- Every relationship between persons causes a picture of each to take form in the mind of the other, and this picture evidently is in reciprocal relationship with that personal relationship (1906, p. 443).³³
- The flight into secrecy as a sort of transitional stage between being and not being (1950, p. 347).
- The hiding of realities by negative or positive means is one of man’s greatest achievements (1950, p. 330).
- Secrets do not remain guarded forever is the weakness of the secret society (1950, p. 346).
- Secrecy comes to resemble the mere protection that is gained by resisting disturbances (1950, p. 346).
- Secrecy modifies relationships (1950, p. 330).
- Secrecy sets a barrier between men, but at the same time offers a seductive temptation to break through the barriers by gossip or confession (1906, p. 466).
- Secrecy ... throws a shadow over all that is deep and significant, grows the logically fallacious, but typical, error, that everything secret is something essential and significant (1906, p. 465).
- The strongly accentuated exclusion of all not within the circle of secrecy results in a correspondingly accentuated feeling of personal possession (1906, p. 464).

In addition to his insights on secrecy in relationships, Simmel perceived society as an “intricate web of multiple relations between individuals who are in constant interaction with another” (Coser, 1977, p. 178), an idea that suggests the Venn Diagram of secrecy mentioned earlier. Further, Donald N. Levine (1989) believes that Simmel “created the first major body of argumentation ever produced to support a viewpoint of methodological pluralism in the social sciences.” Methodological pluralism, or the belief that two or more divergent positions may be entirely acceptable, “rest not only on different value-interests which animate inquiry but also on differences of cognitive criteria which accompany different modes of intellectual work”³⁴ (Levine, 1989).

Trailblazing ideas put forth by Simmel make possible secrecy studies as a means to unify research, but also volume 19 on the subject of government

secrecy. In this way – studying secrecy through multiple perspectives – we set on the path to “democratize democracy.”³⁵

VOLUME 19: GOVERNMENT SECRECY

By way of Tefft’s questions mentioned earlier, volume 19 represents the first steps toward actualizing a field of inquiry termed secrecy studies. In addition to thinking out loud in terms of creating new definitions, breaking down disciplinary boundaries, and examining “ruptures of information,” such as censorship and conspiracy theory, several volume 19 papers have Simmel’s stamp either through direct use of his ideas on secrecy or through use of theorists who took Simmel’s ideas and applied them in innovative ways.³⁶ Contributors to volume 19 are former federal employees, from public interest groups, and wide variety of academic fields.

Volume 19 is arranged to situate secrecy in specific contexts: the first section, “Musings on Secrecy, Privacy, Censorship, and Conspiracy”, explores the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud and is linked to a new way of thinking about government secrecy (David N. Gibbs), offers theoretical perspectives on privacy as applied to the BP/Deepwater Horizon Gulf oil disaster (Michael R. Edelstein), definitions of historical censorship (Antoon de Baets), and the rise of conspiracy theory and its relationship to government secrecy (Thomas C. Ellington; Kathryn S. Olmsted).

“Government Secrecy and National Security” focuses on the theme of government secrecy and national security. Papers include an examination of a particular type of censorship in Israel, *military censorship* (Hillel Nossek and Yehiel Limor), the United Kingdom’s D-Notice System, role of the media in reporting “sensitive” national security information, and public access to information (Nicholas Wilkinson), the Project Censored model of fact-checking mainstream media reporting (Peter Phillips and Mickey Huff), and continuing Cold War government secrecy regarding Operation Pedro Pan (Susan Maret and Lea Aschenkas).

“Government Secrecy: Current Policy,” offers an array of views of government secrecy policies and freedom of information around the world: government information policy under the Obama Administration (Patrice McDermott), censorship of climate data by the former Bush Administration and its Council on Environmental Quality (Rick Piltz), Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative created under the post-9/11 Information Sharing Environment and its chilling effect on privacy rights (Kenneth Farrall), cases that involve types of secrecy that might be

categorized as *technological secrecy* (Jonathan Felbinger and Judith Reppy) and *weapons secrecy* (Brian Rappert, Richard Moyes, and A.N. Other), and a tour of freedom of information around the world that also assesses corruption and bureaucratic response to freedom of information laws (Africa, Jeannine E. Relly; Mexico, Jonathan Fox and Libby Haight).

Ethical tensions, the last section of Volume 19, provide reflections on the ethics of open source information (Hamilton Bean), and use of the administrative evil model to investigate particular bureaucratic responses to open secrets and their influence on decision-making and bureaucratic ethics (Guy B. Adams and Danny L. Balfour). Volume 19 closes with a discussion on the use of government secrecy in national security decisions, specifically in the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 (J. William Leonard).

Taken as a whole, volume 19 contributes to the nascent field of secrecy studies, and in doing so, illustrate that “in such a world like ours, to practice social science is, first of all, to practice the politics of truth” (Mills, 2000, p. 178).

NOTES

1. Ball (2009) suggests that transparency consists of three metaphors: (1) “Transparency as a public value embraced by society to counter corruption,” (2) “Transparency synonymous with open decision-making by governments and nonprofits,” and (3) “Transparency as a complex tool of good governance in programs, policies, organizations, and nations.”

2. Using Dahl’s (1998) five criteria of democracy that identify elements of a working democratic system (effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, exercising final control of the agenda, and inclusion of adults); it’s a stone’s throw to see how secrecy potentially impinges on the democratic process.

3. Government secrecy is also thought of as necessary under certain conditions (see Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Aftergood, 1999; Roberts, 2006; Bass & Podesta, 2007; Maret & Goldman, 2009; Schoenfeld, 2010).

4. Brings to mind William R. Freudenburg and Robert Gramling’s (1994, p. 222) concept of “bureaucratic slippage,” or the “tendency for broad policies to be altered through successive reinterpretation, such that the ultimate implementation may bear little resemblance to legislated or other broad statements of policy intent. The net result, we suggest, can resemble the childhood game in which a ‘secret’ is whispered to one person, who then whispers it to the next ...”

5. Werner writes of his experience in obtaining information from the Department of Energy regarding leaky pipes at Rocky Flats: “Several years ago, I tried to get some information to ascertain whether leaks in the pipelines between the buildings were contaminating the groundwater. I asked only for the blueprints of the underground appurtenances so that I could examine how the pipelines were built and

if they were related to the contamination. DOE refused to give me the blueprints for the underground pipelines, claiming that terrorists could sneak through the pipes and blow up the facility. This explanation was not even technically reasonable since the pipelines were four inch steel lines with valve vaults and pumps along the line. In the end, NRDC acquired the blueprints from a contractor. On examination of the blueprints, we discovered that the real reason DOE refused to disclose the blueprints appeared to be because they revealed Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) violations.”

6. 42 U.S.C. 9601-9675, and 42 U.S.C. 9620 (j) (1).

7. It is interesting to note that Tefft included Patricia E. Erickson and James Flynn’s (pp. 251–269) essay in his anthology “Secrecy as an organizational control strategy: police planning for a national political convention,” which examined police-law enforcement intelligence (LEIU) secrecy at the 1976 RNC meeting in Kansas City.

8. COINTELPRO, or Counter Intelligence Program, was a covert program conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to infiltrate and disrupt “dissident” political groups in the United States (see [Cunningham, 2004](#)).

9. In this same podcast, researcher Jim DiEugenio discusses the quality of public information and the dispelling of “disinformation by misinformation” reported by both the mainstream and alternative media. DiEugenio proposes that to empower people “with information – while it’s not perfect – that is at least largely correct.”

10. By infiltration, perhaps Mr. Osanic is referring to [Cass Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule’s \(2009\) cognitive infiltration of extremist groups](#), “designed to introduce informational diversity into such groups and to expose indefensible conspiracy theories as such.” The authors (p. 227) write that governments can “minimize” conspiracy theories by “rebutting more rather than fewer theories, by enlisting independent groups to supply rebuttals, and by cognitive infiltration designed to break up the crippled epistemology of conspiracy-minded groups and informationally isolated social networks.”

11. In part the view of [Thompson \(1999\)](#).

12. As in leaking classified information or industrial espionage?

13. Political scientist [Frances E. Rourke \(1957, 1960\)](#), for example, refers to government secrecy as “administrative secrecy” following Max Weber’s work on the bureaucracy.

14. Perhaps the secrecy system is reflective of *technique*, defined by Jacques Ellul (1964, xxv) as “the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity.” See *The Technological Society*, Trans. John Wilkinson, New York, Alfred Knopf.

15. Such as the Information Security Oversight Office annual report, Department of Justice annual FOIA report, Department of Energy’s *Inadvertent Releases of Restricted Data and Formerly Restricted Data*, and agency statistical publications.

16. From *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 US 184 (1964), where Justice Stewart echoed previous courts attempts to define pornography as the “task of trying to define what may be indefinable.” Stewart wrote “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that.” See <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=us&vol=378&invol=184>

17. Project on Government Secrecy, OMBWatch, Electronic Privacy Information Center, National Security Archives, Article 19, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Open the Government, and others.

18. Such as poor display and design of information (see Edward Tufte and Richard Saul Wurman's work), overclassification, prepublication review, "postpublication harassment," arcane information organization filing practices, and both large numbers and bias of classifiers (Weinberg, 1992). We must also consider inattention to the gray literature.

19. One example is secrecy involving current negotiations of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA); see http://www.euractiv.com/en/infosociety/us-told-eu-hide-acta-public-news-497373?utm_source=EurActiv+Newsletter&utm_campaign=c3ef859146-my_google_analytics_key&utm_medium=email

20. Sissela Bok (1984, pp. 13–14) describes a lie as "any intentionally deceptive message which is *stated* ... deception then, is a larger category, and lying forms part of it." The latter "can more or less be affected by self-deception" (p. 15). Also see Martin Jay (2010).

21. Those "procedures, processes, or structures that prevent information about organizational secrets from being possessed by persons outside the organization (or unauthorized persons within the organization)" (Messick, 1999, p. 75).

22. Defined as "those overt international public information activities of the United States Government designed to promote United States foreign policy objectives by seeking to understand, inform, and influence foreign audiences and opinion makers, and by broadening the dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad." See Department of Defense, *DoD of Military and Associated Terms*, JP 1-02, as amended through October 19, 2009, available at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/; also see Reagan NSDD 77, January 14, 1983, <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/23-1966t.gif>

23. Christopher Kutz (2009, p. 197) writes that secret law "as such, is inconsistent with this fundamental claim of the law to orient us in moral and political space, and undermines the claim to legitimacy of the state's rulers."

24. Coser (1977, p. 181) writes of Simmel's use of form, that it is not a "happy choice since it is freighted with a great deal of philosophical ballast." To Simmel, Coser notes, "the forms found in social reality are never pure; every social phenomenon contains a multiplicity of formal elements. Cooperation, conflict, subordination and superordination, intimacy and distance all may be operative in a martial relationship or in a bureaucratic structure." Much the same situation applies in my discussion.

25. Much of what is claimed to be interdisciplinary is multidisciplinary, in the sense that writers refer to economic and social "factors" operating more or less independently in a given situation, but fail to show the linkages among them that in abstracting one aspect of what it deals with it projects the real-world round phenomenon onto a flat screen (International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, 1992, p. 5).

26. As in Simmel's (1906) study of secrecy in friendship, marriage, and the "third person."

27. Which Bratich (2008, p. 6) suggests is a "bridge term" that links "subjugating conceptual strategies (paranoid style, political paranoia, conspiracism) to narratives that investigate conspiracies (conspiratology, conspiracy research, conspiracy accounts)."

28. Such as the cryptocustodian, an “individual designated by proper authority to be responsible for the custody, handling, and safeguarding and destruction of cryptomaterial,” see *Dictionary of United States Army Terms*, 1983, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/ar310-25.pdf>; further studies to supplement Rob Johnston’s (2005), *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, available at: <http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps64831/CIA%20192966713.pdf>) would shed light on little studied secret communities.

29. One definition of cybernetics is the study of information flow and communications in systems; see ASC, www.asc-cybernetics.org/foundations/definitions.htm.

30. A more contemporary model for a secrecy studies is the Information Ecology Group, Department of Anthropology, University of Georgia, which held annual meetings and published their work interdisciplinary work on information in the *Georgia Journal of Ecological Anthropology*. See <http://shell.cas.usf.edu/jea/Pages/issues-of-jea.html> (Stepp, 1999).

31. I have deliberately stayed away from discussion of Simmel’s thoughts on “formal sociology” as I see his work as transcending disciplinary boundaries.

32. Robert A. Nisbet (1959, p. 481) compares Simmel to Montaigne in terms of his skill as an essayist.

33. See Levine on Simmel’s influence, cited this work; not mentioned by Levine is Walter Lippmann’s 1922 *Public Opinion* that I believe was influenced by Simmel in his paper “The world outside and the pictures in our heads” (New York, Harcourt).

34. Simmel’s work is “informed by a dialectical approach,” which offers analysis into “dynamic interconnectedness and conflicts” (Coser, 1977, pp. 183, 184; Tefft, 1992).

35. The context of this quote concerns Beck’s (2002) view of representative liberal democracy as a “zombie category,” perhaps falling into social categories such as class, family, neighborhood, which according Beck are “dead but still alive.”

36. Such as Michael R. Edelstein’s mention of Kurt Lewin, Gustav Ichheiser, and Erving Goffman; these theorists were influenced by Simmel’s work (Levine, Carter, & Gorman, 1976a, 1976b).

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