

3rd Workshop on Obfuscation

4 & 7 May 2021
Online

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Welcome

May 4 & 7, 2021

3rd Workshop on obfuscation

Welcome! The 3rd Workshop on Obfuscation is taking place online on May 7, 2021, a full day of online talks and gatherings.

The aim of the workshop is to convene participants around the concept and practice of obfuscation in digital societies. We welcome researchers, scientists, policy makers, public-interest developers and coders, journalists, activists, artists and other interested parties to discuss obfuscation in environments and conditions of asymmetrical power and information. The workshop will open with a vernissage on May 4, 2021, where we will welcome all participants and release artworks and media from invited speakers.

Everyone is welcome to participate in the workshop, with or without submission. You can register for the event here:

<https://3rd.obfuscationworkshop.org/reception/register>.

The 3rd Workshop on Obfuscation was originally planned to take place in the Spring of 2020 in Delft, the Netherlands. When the pandemic happened, we reconsidered whether it would remain relevant to do a Workshop on Obfuscation, and, if so, how we should go about it. We were aware that there was no such thing as “simply moving the event online”.

We were especially concerned about how such a seamless translation would impact the many questions at stake in organizing a workshop on forms of resistance towards ever powerful technology companies and infrastructures. Hence, we took the time and budget we had to explore ways to create an engaging and productive online gathering. Among other efforts, we aimed to organize all gatherings associated with the workshop to take place using free and open source tools provided by TU Delft and platframe developed by Hackers & Designers.

About

In the Spring of 2020, as we were in full force preparing the 3rd Workshop on Obfuscation, COVID-19 was recognized by the World Health Organization as a pandemic. In waves that hit all parts of the world with varying degrees of severity, the pandemic continues to rip across most of the globe. With lockdowns, people's and governments' dependency on digital technologies have been intensified. Platforms of all kinds have become the site of small pleasures of a socially distanced life as statistics (numbers of deaths, new infections, R-rates) have become an essential part of people's daily orientation. Facemasks have entered the space of facial covers, a space that was contentious long before the trajectories of droplets became common knowledge. Governments, pressed by the urgency of the moment, turned to tech companies with their already rolled out global tracking infrastructures for scaling up public health services like contact tracing. In the process, false dichotomies were presented as the only real choices, options between lockdown or surveillance, economy or the social.

Obfuscation strategies represent creative ways to evade surveillance, protect privacy, improve security; as well as protest, contest, resist and sabotage technology. Obfuscation methods render data more ambiguous, difficult to exploit and interpret, less useful. They rely on the addition of gibberish, meaningless data; they pollute, add noise, randomize. Obfuscation invokes an intuitive form of protection: it distorts that which is visible to render it less (or in)visible. It hides the trees among the forest.

An online workshop on obfuscation

The aim of the Workshop on Obfuscation is to foster interaction among diverse communities of research, concern and practice interested in obfuscation.

In previous editions, the Workshop on Obfuscation focused on the art and science of privacy protection through obfuscation in contexts where actions are monitored and analyzed by humans, organizations or information technologies. Yet as the digital expands into the physical, to govern the human and the more-than-human, we find obfuscation also in decision-making, moral choices, coalition-making and novel forms of resistance to the increasing use of optimization in managing our everyday lives. Recent events have further entrenched and intensified our dependency on and vulnerability to technologies that seem increasingly inescapable technologies.

With these overwhelming yet intriguing developments in the back of our minds, we reconsidered whether to do a Workshop on Obfuscation, and, if so, how we would do it. The first of these questions was rapidly and decisively answered: yes, the need remains. Indeed, recent events have amplified the need to understand how obfuscation strategies work, and how they can be put to work, taking into account subtle yet powerful changes in social, workplace, political and health spheres and the rise in centrality of technical systems for citizens, corporations, and governments. In a society thus transformed, we wanted to ask not only how the strategies can and might be put to work, but also whether they should; whether we need to generate a new ethics of obfuscation for this moment.

Answering the second question of how to conduct the workshop took more time. Facilitating the emergence of a community, fostering interaction, thinking together, exchanging perspectives and encouraging discussion are goals that we have traditionally pursued through in-person workshops, symposiums and other types of formats in shared physical spaces. We were all keenly aware that ‘simply’ moving the originally planned face-to-face event online would not work, and could even create its very own obfuscation-related challenges. Moreover, we did not wish to succumb to the ease and convenience of dominant private platforms and solutions that have in the last few months positioned themselves as inescapable intermediaries of our online everyday interactions. Aware of the challenges, but also opportunities, that these circumstances represent, we have set ourselves to explore ways to create both a viable and exciting new workshop on obfuscation.

The workshop features a full day of online talks and gatherings on May 7 2021, preceded by a vernissage on May 4 2021, where we will exhibit artworks and media from invited speakers.

Lastly, [A Catalog of Formats for Digital Discomfort](#), compiled by researcher and cultural mediator Jara Rocha, provides insights into the vectors of thinking that went into organizing the 3rd Workshop on Obfuscation. It is based on years of practice from artists, activists and research communities who have been studying and experimenting with the use of experimental gathering methods, creative open and free software and critical transdisciplinarity for communities of practice, care and concern. It includes a collection of online events that we studied and inspired us.

Code of Conduct

The 3rd Workshop on Obfuscation is committed to building and maintaining a safe space that facilitates the emergence of an extended community around the concept and practice of obfuscation. In this space, we are aware that the conditions of possibility, care, generosity, fairness and accountability can be negatively impacted in many different ways.

In order to provide ourselves, participants, speakers, users and bypassers on the Workshop on Obfuscation's platform and BBB, as well as in all event-related communications with a safe space, we mutually commit to:

- Respecting the dignity, experiences, and perspectives of other participants and communities.
- Refusing sexism, racism, queer- and transphobia, ableism, ageism, speciesism and other kinds of oppression.
- Leaving physical, emotional and conceptual room for other people.
- Avoiding to speak for others.
- Asking questions and requesting clarification.
- Addressing people with their preferred names and pronouns and using gender-neutral language when uncertain.
- Abstaining from apologizing for topics or terms you don't know about.
- Taking time to listen, read, and watch with potentially transformative attention. It is easy to be pulled by email and devices and social networks. Please use the breaks as time to check and catch up.
- Focusing on the issue and not the individual during discussions, especially when these pertain to matters of oppression or marginalization. Note that it is easy to feel accused if your identity aligns with that of the presumed oppressor or dominant group.
- Being respectful in citations: underlining the context and sources of the thoughts shared.
- Accepting differences. Appreciating divergence in pace, points of view, backgrounds, references, needs and limits.
- Being thoughtful and taking care of oneself. If you feel overwhelmed from the situation, feel free to step back or take a pause or ask for support. If you are not sure how to speak about a related topic or group, feel free to ask for help. (And if you have suggestions, please offer them!)
- Caring for language gaps and idiomatic expressions. Although English is the lingua franca in this event, this is a multi-lingual environment!

Technical, convivial and organisational commitments include:

- Open Source: Using Free, Libre and Open Source software whenever possible.
- Consent: Asking for explicit consent before sharing screenshots, photographs or recordings on proprietary social networks.
- Cameras: Leaving webcam as an option, both for speakers and for other participants.
- Punctuality: start and stop on time. Respecting time is a form of respecting one another.
- Licences: We will aim to use “open” license for all tools, materials, recordings, and to use the CC4R license for our final documentation. (<https://gitlab.constantvzw.org/unbound/cc4r>)
- Reminder: Knowing that taking all of the above into account is sometimes easier said than done.

This is the protocol to activate if a participant breaks their commitment to all those points; possible ways to go:

If you feel harrassed or personally experienced any sort of misconduct, or you see people in violation of this Code of Conduct (#3CoCOW) you can get in touch the following participants, please contact any of the moderators on the platframe’s list of active participants (identified by a discontinued lines surrounding their names). Alternatively, please send us an e-mail to obfuscation@cornell.edu

If you violate the #3CoCOW in the public chat or BBB instances of the workshop, you will be immediately blocked from the platframe by a moderator. Harmful language on the platframe will also be subject to removal.

If you find online or offline misuse of this Workshop’s contents, then please contact the Organizers.

Source note: This #3CoCOW is recycled and remixed from [Constant’s Collaboration Guidelines](#) and the commitments list of the [Lorentz Workshop on Intersectionality and Algorithmic Discrimination](#)

Contact

For any questions, comments or requests, you can reach us at obfuscation@cornell.edu.

The Study Group

In response to our call, a small team of researchers, artists, activists and other interested parties have joined our study group to accompany the 3rd Workshop on Obfuscation. In addition to actively participating in the workshop itself, the study group will meet twice before and once afterwards. Our goal is to provide an arena for deeper reflection and engagement with obfuscation, a more tight-knit and longer breathed space for collaboration for those interested in this topic. Study group participants will be mentored by leading researchers on obfuscation Finn Brunton and Helen Nissenbaum, as well as independent artists and researchers Femke Snelting, Reni Hoffmüller, Khadijah Abdurahman. They will work with Manetta Berends and Cristina Cochior for the post-script.

We hope the study group will provide the basis to engage in obfuscation collectively beyond the ephemeral and rectangled formats of online events.

The work of the study group is organized as follows:

The study group will come together twice before the workshop to present and discuss the work of each participant and the pre-recorded videos and other materials produced for the obfuscation workshop. Together we will explore open problems and challenges around the topic of obfuscation, create connections and identify collaboration opportunities across communities. We will steer, guide and provide support to the study group, working in smaller groups to enable closer, informal interactions. You will also be invited to join and actively participate at the vernissage.

During the workshop, participants will actively steer and contribute to the discussions, document and keep track of the highlights and main contention points for the purpose of synthesis and documentation. On the other hand, participants will also be invited to showcase their work at a dedicated region for posters.

After the workshop participants will reflect on the talks and discussions at the workshop. Together we will prepare a postscript of the event that captures the views and perspectives of the different communities working on obfuscation.

The postscript will document open problems and promising avenues of research and collaboration. The post-script will be uploaded to the workshop's website and participants will be credited as co-authors.

Privacy Policy

As a participant to the 3rd Workshop on Obfuscation, and in relation to the personal data you provide to us by registering and participating in this workshop, we would like to inform you of the following:

Data Controllers

The data controllers are TU Delft and Cornell Tech. You may reach them at:

TU Delft
Postbus 5
2600 AA Delft
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0)15 27 89111

Cornell Tech
Office of External Relations
2 West Loop Rd, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10044
ExternalRelations@tech.cornell.edu

Contact details data protection officer:

TU Delft:
TU Delft Data Protection Officer Erik van Leeuwen can be contacted at:
University Service - Dept. Legal Affairs
Stevinweg 1 Postbus 2 2600AA Delft
j.vanleeuwen@tudelft.nl

Cornell Tech:
Contact the University Privacy Office at 607-255-2800 or email
privacy@cornell.edu.

If you wish to exercise your rights or have other questions or concerns related to your rights under the GDPR, contact InternationalPrivacyRequests@cornell.edu or call (607) 255-5500

Purposes of the processing:

All of the data we collect about you through the registration page or this website is used solely for the express purpose of enabling your participation in the workshop and all related communication and announcements.

Recipients of personal data:

- Every visitor to this website will be able to observe publicly available information about you, which includes public chats and the livestream instance (where sessions are publicly streamed).
- Because data is jointly controlled by TU Delft and Cornell Tech, data will be transferred to the US for archival purposes under the premises of Cornell Tech. To obtain a copy please e-mail us at obfuscation@cornell.edu.
- Public chats will remain publicly available on the site according to the period that each participant is able to set through the controls provided on this site. All pre-recorded videos, digital materials, and recorded sessions that contain data subjects' data will be stored on our own servers. We plan to remove and archive the videos within 12 months of the event, unless data subjects that appear in the videos request an earlier removal.
- All BBB sessions take place on the BBB instance at TU Delft. You can find the privacy policy of the TU Delft BBB instance here: <https://bbb.tbm.tudelft.nl/b/terms>
- When you register, we need to collect information about your name, e-mail address and payment information to process your registration and be able to communicate with you and send you any relevant announcements before, during and (if applicable) after the workshop. Registration information is collected through Aanmelder.nl and is ****not**** transferred to the US. You may consult [aanmelder.nl](https://www.aanmelder.nl/en/privacy)'s privacy policy here: <https://www.aanmelder.nl/en/privacy>.
- When you send us emails it will be stored on our email servers at TU Delft in the Netherlands and at Cornell Tech servers in the USA. As a result, emails are susceptible to lawful access under Dutch and US jurisdiction, respectively.

Your Rights

- You have the right to request access to, rectification or erasure of any personal data provided to us or restriction of processing concerning your data, or to object to processing as well as the right to data portability.
- You have the right to lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority. For example, you may lodge a complaint with the Dutch data protection authority: <https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/en>

WO 2017

International Workshop on Obfuscation: Science, Technology, and Theory

April 7-8, 2017

New York University

Obfuscation strategies offer creative ways to evade surveillance, protect privacy, and improve security by adding, rather than concealing, data to make it more ambiguous and difficult to exploit. This interdisciplinary workshop convenes researchers, scientists, developers, and artists to discuss a broad range of technical, theoretical, and policy approaches to obfuscation, from tools that anonymize users' social media data to new methods for writing code itself.

Workshop Report

We're pleased to release the Workshop Report from the International Workshop on Obfuscation, now available to view as individual articles on our website as well as in a printer-friendly PDF:

<https://www.obfuscationworkshop.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/obfuscation-workshop-report.pdf>.

Whether you were able to attend or couldn't make it, we hope this report will provide further resources towards developing obfuscation both as a theory and praxis.

We have asked our panelists to each provide a brief essay summarizing their project, concept, application—with an emphasis on the questions, challenges, and discussions raised during the weekend. As with the workshop itself, this report is a starting point rather than an end point.

The Platframe

The Platframe is not designed to mimic a physical conference but instead aims to facilitate the temporalities and collectivities of an online workshop. The README on the platframe is an attempt to make legible the many tools, softwares, services, frameworks and legacies this technical object converges and builds further on.

The platframe is made up of a large canvas, which extends in all directions and is navigable similar to a map. It contains regions, such as the reception, study room and exhibition space, each with their own respective content.

One of the most distinctive functions of this website is the ‘spatially’ distributed chat. Participants are invited to leave messages anywhere on the canvas and navigate either through the map or the list. As a result, the platform is a ‘living’ space: all participants emit their presence through the visibility of their cursors and messages. We often referred to the process of designing the platform as a choreography due to its spatial and dynamic characteristics.

This platframe might challenge participants more than the by now habitual experience of meeting on Zoom, Teams or Google Hangout. As the conference on obfuscation raises questions about inner workings, the ethics, and the socio-technological entanglements of technology, this platframe too, aims to trouble our expectations towards platforms. At times, the platframe will therefore ask a bit more patience and endurance from you than you may be used to.

Cursors

This platform displays participants through the positions of their cursors in real time. As a participant, you are invited to use your cursor to drop messages on the platform. Messages each have a lifetime before they are automatically deleted. You can specify your messages’ lifetime in the “options” dialogue box.

Your cursor, user name and color are visible to anyone. In the “participants” dialogue box, you’ll find a list of all connected participants. Moderators are marked with a dashed border. Clicking on a participant’s name will take you to their current location. If you’d like to identify a cursor on your screen, hover over it with your own cursor and its owner’s name will become visible.

For the best experience we recommend to use a desktop computer and the Firefox browser. If you are visiting on a mobile device, you will be able to find all crucial information and see messages left on the canvas; however, you will not be able to participate by writing messages.

Schedule – UTC-time

- Study group
- Vernissage
- Workshop

Study group

Friday, April 30th

18:00-21:00 UTC-time

[Session #1: Introduction
study group participants](#) →

Thursday, May 6th

19:30-22:30 UTC-time

[Session #2: Preparation
for workshop](#) →

Wednesday, May 19th

18:00-21:00 UTC-time

[Session #3: Recap, discussion
and preparation of post-script](#) →

Vernissage

Tuesday, May 4th

16:00-18:00 – UTC-time

16:00 [Opening](#) →

16:30 [Watch, talk, ask and explore](#) →

17:30 [Closing](#) →

Workshop

Friday, May 7th

12:00-22:00 – UTC-time

Password for all plenary sessions (all non-parallel sessions): 494996

12:00 [Warm-up coffee](#) →

12:30 [Opening](#) →

13:00 [Ad Nauseam past, present and future](#) →

14:00 Break

14:30 [Parallel sessions #1](#) →

14:30-16:00 [Public interest technologies for the ML age](#) (370228) →

14:45-15:45 [Rendering the human \(il\)legible](#) (020390) →

15:00-16:00 [Human/Machine behaviour and intent](#)
(893659) →

15:15-16:15 [Protecting the source](#) (088107) →

16:00 Break

16:30 [Friction](#) →

17:30 Break

18:00 [Face-veillance](#) →

19:00 Break

19:30 [Parallel sessions #2](#) →

19:30-20:30 [Obfuscation as the Elusive Obvious](#) (703223) →

19:45-20:45 [Bots as Digital Infrapunctures](#) (917116) →

20:00-21:00 [Obfuscation is dead? Long live obfuscation!](#)
(396663) →

20:15-21:15 [Counteroptimizing the networked social](#)
(403712) →

21:15 Break

21:30 [Closing](#) →

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Organizing committee

Ero Balsa (Cornell Tech)
Seda Gürses (TU Delft)
Helen Nissenbaum (Cornell Tech)
Jara Rocha (Independent researcher)

