

## Public Lecture – Prof. Noortje Marres

Autumn semester 2020 - Thursday, 3 December 2020, 4:15pm, online (Zoom)

### “Testing society: Why we need social studies of testing in an age of computational innovation”

In an age defined by computational innovation, testing has become ubiquitous, as tests are routinely deployed as a form of governance, a marketing device, an instrument for political intervention, and an everyday practice to evaluate the self. Elaborating on the arguments presented in Marres and Stark (2020), this talk will explore their implications for the “laboratization thesis”. This thesis, advanced by actor-network theory in the 1980s, states that experiments present powerful instruments for transforming society, insofar as they reproduce the controlled conditions of the laboratory in social environments (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1988). However, the tests that proliferate across society today - in the form of living labs (Engels et al., 2019), pilots in crime control (Gromme, 2019) and test drives in intelligent vehicles (Marres, 2020) – arguably present a different type of phenomenon. Here, tests are introduced into distinctively social spaces - the city square, a shopping street, the road – and in such a way that the social attributes of these spaces - open-endedness, complexity, stranger relationality – are preserved. Furthermore, these tests do not operate on society indirectly, through the manipulation of object-relations, as ANT would have it, but rather enable science and engineering to extend engineering logics into distinctively social phenomena – trust, collective behaviour, identity. The challenge that a new sociology of testing must address is that the very relation between science, engineering and sociology is changing: engineering is today in the very stuff of where society happens. It is not that the tests of 21st Century engineering occur within a social context: the very fabric of the social is being put to the test.

It is our great pleasure to invite you to the online Public Lecture of Prof. Noortje Marres, Guest professor for interdisciplinary methodology and technology studies at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities (SHSS).

Professor **Noortje Marres** is Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, University of Warwick. Her work investigates issues at the intersection of innovation, everyday environments and public life: the role of mundane objects and devices in environmental engagement, intelligent technology testing in society, and changing relations between social life and social science in a computational age. She also contributes to methodology development, in the area of issue mapping, and more recently, situational analytics. Noortje studied sociology and philosophy of science and technology at the University of Amsterdam and is a Visiting Professor in the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) at the University of Leiden and at the University of St Gallen. She published *Material Participation* (2012) and *Digital Sociology* (2017) and with Michael Guggenheim and Alex Wilkie edited *Inventing the Social* (2018). More info at [www.noortjemarres.net](http://www.noortjemarres.net)



Section from the book cover of «Material Participation» by Noortje Marres

To join the lecture, please use this Link: <https://unisg.zoom.us/j/88570589735?pwd=cU5aVlJvYnROSVRwbllzd0t0MWROdz09>  
Meeting-ID: 885 7058 9735 / Code: 312902

#### Contact

Dr. Yves B. Partschefeld, Executive Director SHSS  
[yves.partschefeld@unisg.ch](mailto:yves.partschefeld@unisg.ch) / +41 71 224 27 66

