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## **Secrets About Secrecy: An Introduction**

The concept of “secrecy” is bound up in a variety of aspects of information ethics, sometimes in conflicting ways: respecting personal privacy and opposing undue surveillance ensures a certain level of secrecy in one’s personal life and activities; the rapid development of ICTs, in particular both security technologies and surveillance mechanisms, boosted the implementation of new security measures but also heavily inflated the challenges combined therewith.

Notwithstanding the potential benefits of such systems, it has to be taken into account that the latter leave much room for challenges: traditional safeguards of secrecy are rendered obsolete and the traditional understanding of concealment is deprived of its buttress as function and even mission creep are facilitated. If information can be gathered more easily, there is no guarantee that it is only used for justified and accepted purposes and not stored, transmitted or even sold, thus, setting up a huge data-warehouses full of information that easily dwarf the Google Street View picture-collection to the significance of a small downtown public library. Moreover, sophisticated information gathering is no longer reserved to cost-intensive intelligence agencies, nor does such collection still only scratch the surface of information that is considered private or secret; it goes far beyond that. It also includes the collection of other types of information, such as e.g. biometric data, which adds a new dimension to databases and the quest to find a balanced way to address the concealment and revelation of data.

On the other hand, secrecy is often also seen as an antagonist to transparency and equality. To ensure security and public safety, government secrecy may often be justifiable; open records laws and whistleblower protections are meant to limit government secrecy and promote transparency; corporate trade secrets remain secret to protect investments and economic growth; Still – as Wikileaks prominently showed – there is a shift in public understanding of the issue on what should be kept secret, by whom and from whom. Transparency, neutrality and equal – or even universal - access to information became buzzwords of the information age. This is all the more true as the secrecy of our personal lives is increasingly shattered – and commodified – through social media.

Does the concept of secrecy need to be redefined? Is it an outdated concept of deliberate shortage of information, a last bastion of concealment against transparency and neutrality or rather a fluid context-related process within the daily interplay of individuals and organizations in a shared world?

This special issue ventures to explore the ethics of secrecy from different perspectives, frameworks, and cultures. It ranges from a basic consideration of the concept against the backdrop of Simmel's works over an elaboration of the relationship between secrecy, language and memory as well as challenges and changes of self-presentation and automated decision making within information society, to a deeper exploration of current issues and ideas such as dealing with Wikileaks and the right to be forgotten.