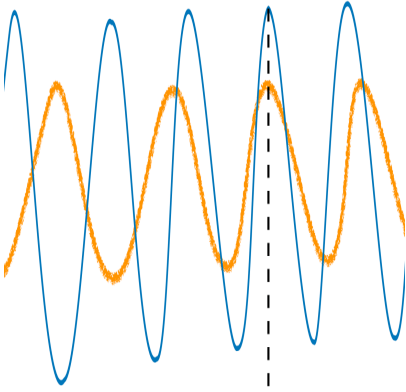




## Executive secrets

### Description

Who doesn't want some unstructured time, especially at work! The gaps in the US President's daily schedule surfaced again this week. 60% of his time is labelled 'Executive Time'. Like many others, I'm content to attribute his work patterns to sloth, contrarianism, disorganisation, and tv addiction. (See [Axios article](#).)



The main defence from his PR staff is that 'there is more time to allow for a creative environment that has helped make him the most productive' etc as if schedules hamper creativity. It's a time-worn, romantic conception about creativity: to think out of the box you need time out of the schedule, the routine, the humdrum world of administration.

Another defence from his PR staff is that Trump is subject to other more detailed schedules not leaked to the public, and known only to his close confidants. The scheduling gaps promoted [Vox.com](#) journalist Liz Plank to [remark](#) it's also the secrecy. It's strange that your own staff don't know what you're doing 60% of the time.

This puts me in mind of schedules and secrecy. Last Wednesday, an interdisciplinary network [seminar](#) on the theme of repetition, and called 'Re', organised by Clare Foster at the Cambridge Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH), provided me with an opportunity to explore secrets and repetition. See the [re-blog site](#). I'll recount some of my musing here.

### Habituation

An online [Psychology Today](#) self-help feature explains that to keep a secret is a “habit of mind,” and it’s mostly a bad habit – something to break out of. But to investigate secrets doesn’t require us to make such a judgement. An academic article on “family secrets” by Mark Karpel refers to the “loyalty dynamics in the creation, maintenance, and eventual facing of secrets in families” (2). Secrets require maintenance – repeatedly.

It’s obvious: not only are some secret acts performed in repetitive cycles, but secrets of any consequence encounter repeated onslaughts from exposure, require repeated evasion and denial, and yet more elaborate and repeated cover ups and obfuscations.

We’ve seen in public forums that secrets are often in the company of lies, and lies are rarely singular, but get repeated, amplified, and woven wickedly into sticky webs (to rephrase the famous spider metaphor). In describing Trump’s lies, commentator [Joe Scarborough said](#): “when it comes to lying, the man is nonstop” (an apparent reference to the rap musical *Hamilton*). So my first point is that secrets are habitual, i.e. exercises in repetition.

## Asynchrony

I take it for granted that events repeat or fit into a cycle of repetitions. Whether or not they are made explicit as schedules our everyday lives are permeated with events that occur *every day*, or every *other* day, or weekly, annually, hourly, by the lunar calendar, the seasons, tides, breaths or other cycles, and cycles within cycles.

Agents of such occurrences may wish to expose events to different constituencies, or hide them altogether, as for the regular Facebook user who specifies which group, subgroup or individuals are to see any particular post, or it is to be private for the author’s eyes only.

How do you maintain secrets so they are invisible to others on a cyclical timeline? One method is to resist other people’s cycles, simply by operating acyclically or asynchronously. If you’ve shared a home with someone who goes out in the evening and is back in bed just as you are getting up, then you’ll know the relationship between cycles and secrecy.

As I’ve seen in heist and prison escape dramas, those working in secret operate counter to regular patrols, the sweep of the surveillance camera or spotlight, opening hours, night porter duties, and the usual daily cycle. Habitual criminality weaponises the counter-schedule. Seasoned criminals work to different cycles.

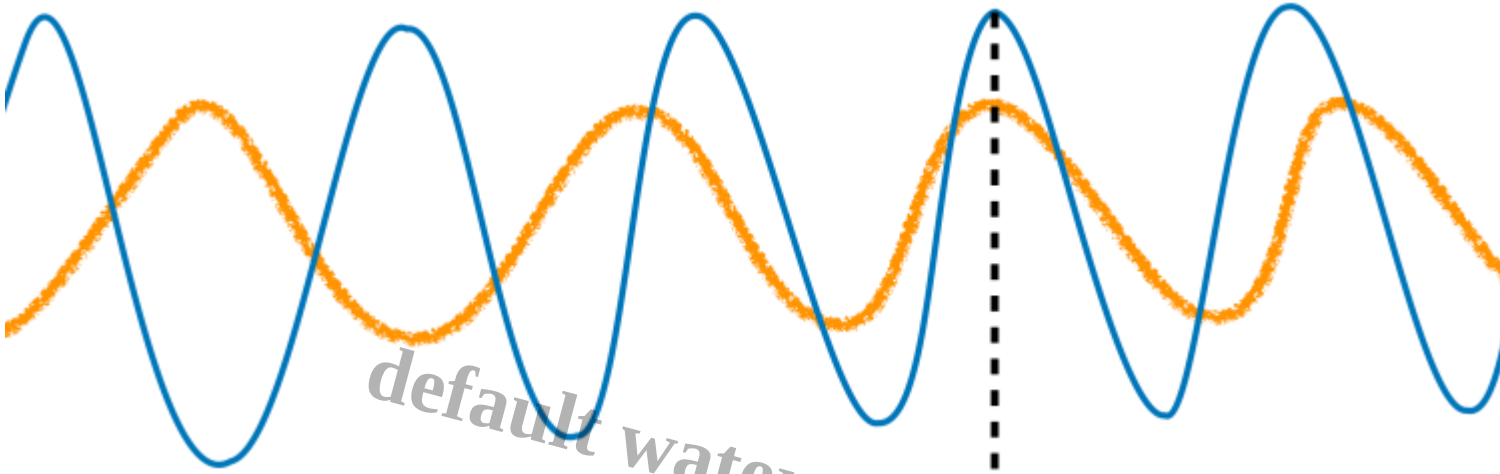
## Coincidence

One of the challenges in detecting crime, and the same applies to uncovering secrets, is to know if the events you observe are part of a concerted plan or merely coincidences. I think of a coincidence as the meeting of two or more cycles at a particular moment. A recent [article in the Financial Times](#) raised the prospect of coincidence:

“But now the US special counsel, Robert Mueller, appears to be at the last stages of an investigation to determine whether Mr Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign colluded with Russia in its effort to undermine Hillary Clinton’s bid for the White House or whether its many contacts

â?? and their sometimes suspicious timings â?? **were merely a matter of coincidence.**â??

Secret deeds give themselves away through coincidence. Thatâ??s also how you catch someone at it â?? aligning the patrol with the cycles of the criminal, even in retrospect. Hereâ??s one way to think about that. The dashed lined shows where one cycle aligns with another â?? a moment of revelation, or vulnerability.



Also see [Kompromat 101](#), [Secret listening: Private, personal, portable podcasts](#), [The secret life of games](#), and [Families and crime: Kompromat 102](#).

## References

- Holzhey, Christoph F.E., and Arnd Wedemeyer (eds). 2019. *Re- An Errant Glossary*. Berlin: ICI
- Karpel, Mark A. 1980. Family Secrets:I. Conceptual and Ethical Issues in the Relational ContextII. Ethical and Practical Considerations in Therapeutic Management. *Family Process*, (19)295-306.

## Category

1. Ethics

## Tags

1. ciphercity
2. lies
3. repetition
4. secrets
5. trump

## Date Created

February 9, 2019

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