

Seminar March 19, 2019

Tracking by Default – Infrastructures and Atmospheres of Surveillance

Venue: Department of Information Studies, University of Copenhagen South Campus, build. 4, Njalsgade 76, 2300 Copenhagen S. Room 4A-0-56

Organized by the [Surveillance, Information Ethics and Privacy Research group](#) at the Department of Information Studies, University of Copenhagen.

Today the spaces we move in are extended by digital infrastructures that tracks us by default. Surveillance has become ordinary. Conducted by not only state actors, but also commercial actors and embedded in the digital and physical architecture and atmospheres of our everyday lives. This seminar sets out to explore the atmospheres and infrastructures of surveillance: How do spaces of surveillance evolve? What kind of atmospheres are generated by infrastructures of surveillance? How do they shape our everyday experiences? What are the cultural and social implications? What are the political implications? What is the role of technologists, artist, and designers?

Registration is open for all, but please [sign up here](#) by March 16

Program

Tuesday, March 19th:

- 9:30 - 9:45 Welcome by Karen Louise Grova Sølten and Gry Hasselbalch
- 9:45 - 12:00 **MORNING SESSION**
- Mikkel Bille (RUC) & Siri Schwabe (RUC): “Aestheticizing Surveillance: Urban Lighting and Ambient Power”
- COFFEE BREAK
- Artist Talk with Hanne Nielsen & Birgit Johnsen: “From an individual perspective”
- 12:00 - 13:00 LUNCH
- 13:00 - 15:30 **AFTERNOON SESSION**
- Helene Gad Ratner (AU): “Infrastructural experiments with education governance: open government data as partial connection”
- Rikke Frank Jørgensen (The Danish Institute for Human Rights): “The evolving landscape of ‘social media’ surveillance, and its human rights implications”
- COFFEE BREAK
- Closing Panel with Laura Skouvig (KU), Sille Obelitz Søe (KU), and Kristin Veel (KU)
- The seminar is moderated by Karen Louise Grova Sølten and Gry Hasselbalch, Department of Information Studies, KU.

About the Research Group:

The research group [Surveillance, Information Ethics and Privacy](#) is preoccupied with questions that arise from the conception of a present-day surveillance society. We are concerned with historical, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, cultural, and con/textual dimensions of information, information and communication technology, digital media, and information and cultural institutions. We conduct critical analyses and empirical investigations of the political, ethical, and conceptual ramifications generated by the digital information society. In short, we are interested in surveillance as a socio-cultural phenomenon that emerges and takes shape within a distinct historical context.

Abstracts:

Mikkel Bille and Siri Schwabe

”Aestheticizing Surveillance: Urban Lighting and Ambient Power”

This presentation discusses the role of lighting in choreographing urban spaces. The artificial lighting has developed dramatically in recent decades, making new experiences of the urban night possible. New LED technologies have introduced seemingly endless possibilities to orchestrate how spaces feel, leading to artistic uses of colour and positions to illuminate streets, squares, and buildings. These new technologies allow lighting professionals to focus their attention on the particular spatial or architectural features they wish to highlight or tone down in the dark hours, beyond simply lighting them up for the sake of visibility. Amidst these new possibilities for shaping atmospheric spaces, however, the concern with the relationship between lighting and security has not diminished. Based on ethnographic studies in Copenhagen and Stockholm, we show how urban lighting has entered a new phase following a shift from the traditional techniques of making spaces and their users visible to surveillance to more subtle aestheticizations of ambient power.

Bio

Mikkel Bille, Associate Professor at Roskilde University, is leading the Velux funded project *Living with Nordic Lighting*, exploring how urban spaces are felt and produced through lighting technologies. He has published widely within material culture studies, and particularly on atmosphere and lighting. His publications include a special issue on Staging Atmospheres (*Emotion, Space and Society*, 2015), and the monograph *Homely atmospheres and Lighting technologies in Denmark* (Bloomsbury 2019).

Siri Schwabe is an Assistant Professor in the Department of People and Technology, Roskilde University. As part of the project *Living with Nordic Lighting*, she is currently investigating the relationships between urban development, industrial heritage, light and atmosphere. She holds a PhD in Social Anthropology from Stockholm University and was previously Early Career Researcher with the Marie Curie Initial Training Network ‘Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging’ (CoHaB).

Hanne Nielsen & Birgit Johnsen

“From an individual perspective”

The artists Hanne Nielsen & Birgit Johnsen will introduce their recent video installations focusing on the relation between the individual and a global political context. That involves among other things the use of surveillance cameras, media news transmissions, and social media that becomes a part of our reality. Often the works juxtapose elements of fiction, documentary and media-discourse in a visual context installed in space.

Bio

Birgit Johnsen & Hanne Nielsen are educated from the Art Academy of Jutland from 1991 and 1990. They have worked together with video, documentary and installations since 1993, and have a long range of exhibitions both internationally and in Denmark. Recent exhibitions include *REVISIT* at Overgaden Institut for samtidskunst 2018, *Protect/Release* at Røda Sten Kunsthall 2017, and *Inclusion / Exclusion* ARoS 2014. In 2016 /17 they received Carl Nielsen and Anne Marie Carl-Nielsens honorary award and Eckersberg Medal, The Royal Academy of Fine Arts.

Helene Gad Ratner

“Infrastructural experiments with education governance: open government data as partial connection”

In 2014, the Danish Ministry of Education launched ‘The Data Warehouse’, a publically accessible online platform that enables users to access and query education performance data for Danish primary and secondary schools. This presentation looks into how performance data becomes a matter of concern in different ways as it travels to different sites and suggests that data generates ‘partial connections’ (cf. Strathern, 1999) between these sites, resulting in multiple ‘experiments’ in making sense of data, rather than a totalizing and all-encompassing logic of surveillance.

Bio

Helene Ratner (Ph.D.) is Associate Professor at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. She has a background in anthropology, science and technology studies and public administration. She has just finished her research project ‘Datafication of Danish Education’ where she explored the development of open data initiatives that publish educational institutions’ performance (“datavarehuset”) in a governance perspective.

Rikke Frank Jørgensen

“The evolving landscape of ‘social media’ surveillance, and its human rights implication”

Social media platforms are increasingly spoken of as “societal infrastructures”, yet the policy ramifications of such an understanding are still blurry –not least due to the public private nature of the platforms. The presentation will argue that social media platforms represent a largely uncontested “new expression of power” (Zuboff 2015) and that their surveillance economy has severe impacts on human rights and on democracy more broadly.

Bio

Rikke Frank Jørgensen is a Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for Human Rights in Copenhagen. Her research focuses on the interface between human rights and technology, the role of private actors in the online domain, social media platforms, and governance (gaps). Besides her scholarly activities, she has served as an adviser to the Danish Government, participated in Council of Europe’s Committee on Human Rights for Internet Users, and been closely involved in civil society networks such as European Digital Rights. Her most recent book, *Framing the Net: The Internet and Human Rights* (2013), examines how internet-related metaphors construct policy. She holds a PhD in Communication and Information Technology from Roskilde University and a master’s degree from Aarhus University.

Closing panel by Laura Skouvig, Sille Obelitz Søe and Kristin Veel

Bio

Laura Skouvig is Associate Professor at the Department of Information Studies at the University of Copenhagen. She is interested in information as a historical phenomenon and aims at exploring how information has been created in specific settings with specific purposes and how this information has reflected underlying cultures of information. On the general level, she works with theoretical inspiration from Michel Foucault in order to understand how information as a concept has come to a certain prominence in 21st century discourse. Presently, she works with conceptual discussions within information history and with concrete empirical studies focused on understandings of information in late absolutist government.

Sille Obelitz Søe, PhD., is a postdoctoral researcher in philosophy of information at Department of Information Studies, University of Copenhagen. Sille investigates the interconnections between algorithmic profiles, personal information, and informational privacy – proposing a reconceptualization of personal information. She challenges the presupposition that personal information is an objective commodity by arguing that what people do (their footprints) are determined by intentions, meaning, context, motives, and the like – all concepts which need to be reflected within a notion of personal information.

Kristin Veel is Associate Professor at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen. Her research is concerned with critical cultural studies of data and surveillance. Her work has focused on the impact of surveillance and datafication technologies on the contemporary cultural imagination, with a particular interest in film, art, literature as well as architecture. She has co-hosted the international network *Negotiating (In)visibilities* (2011-2014) and is currently principal investigator of the critical big data project *Uncertain Archives* at the University of Copenhagen (2015-2019), which has transitioned into a vibrant research collective that brings together scholars from across the world working on related projects.