

Sensor Publics: A Workshop on the Politics of Sensing and Data Infrastructures

Organizers: Laurie Waller and Nina Witjes, Munich Center for Technology in Society (MCTS), Technical University Munich.

Location: TUM / Vorhoelzer Forum, Munich

Dates: 5-7 April, 2017

Deadline for abstracts (250 words): 15 January 2017 to sensorpublics@gmail.com

Keynote speakers: Geoffrey Bowker (UC, Irvine) and Jennifer Gabrys (Goldsmiths)

What happens when sensing and data infrastructures, from satellites to self-tracking devices, become objects of public concern? This 2-day workshop seeks to bring together scholars from across science and technology studies (STS), sociology, international relations and critical security studies to investigate what we are calling "sensor publics". We invite contributions that attend to sensing and data infrastructures as they are publicly (con)tested and demonstrated, used and lived with, hidden, governed, maintained, repurposed and hacked.

Overview

From the geopolitics of remote sensing satellites, to the political-economy of urban sensor networks, the domestic economy of home sensing devices or the democratic promise of participatory citizen-sensing, we are interested in how sensing and data infrastructures become publicly controversial and invested with political and moral capacities. How do sensor publics unsettle relations between political actors and their environments? In what ways do they problematise the governance of big data or the regulation of real-time surveillance? And, can sensor publics provide occasions for democratizing relations between politicians, experts, activists and citizens?

We invite contributions of original research that address the following (non-exhaustive) topics:

Sensors and global politics:

How are sensors - such as those from satellites and drones - shaped by and shaping global politics whether conceived as geo-politics, international relations or political ecology? How can we understand the entanglement of technological innovation, processes of securitization, visions of transparency and privacy, global economic interests, trans-national activism and governmental and civilian surveillance?

Data practices and governance:

Sensors often produce lively data that unsettle formats and methods of governance. How do publics engage with the challenges of the regulation and administration of big data, also in terms of responsible research and innovation?

Infrastructures and activism:

Sensing infrastructures are the target of political activists concerned with issues as diverse as surveillance, ecology and social justice. How does infrastructure (h)activism unsettle relations between the methods and material settings of political action?

Visibility/invisibility of sensors:

The relations between sensors and publics has often been studied in terms of the making visible or invisible of devices. What roles do problems of (in)visibility play in ordering the political life of sensors?

Engagements with the politics of sensing:

Do we want to contribute as engaged scholars to the formation of sensor publics? In what ways do practical, theoretical, cross-disciplinary and experimental engagements with the politics of sensing amplify some issues while marginalising others?

Who should apply?

We invite contributions from a wide range of approaches to researching sensing and data infrastructures. The workshop particularly encourages interdisciplinary research approaches and scholars pursuing engaged collaborations and experiments, and we invite creative demonstrations as well as paper presentations. In addition, we hope to stimulate the creation of new formal and informal networks and to explore coalitions for further collaboration, the writing of grant proposals and the search for funding. A possible outcome of the workshop is a proposal for a special issue or an edited volume.

Abstracts of 250 words and brief academic biography to sensorpublics@gmail.com

The event is organised and funded by the post/doc lab “Engineering Responsibility” at the Munich Centre for Technology in Society. Catering will be provided throughout the duration of the workshop but travel and accommodation costs are expected to be borne by participants.

Inquiries about the workshop can be addressed to l.waller@tum.de or nina.witjes@tum.de