Beyond Privacy
New Perspectives on the Public and Private Domains

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Privacy is a defensive right that protects a person's private life. However, the 'right to be left alone' is not just a legal but also a political and social construction. Therefore, this is a concept that, although established by law, can be experienced and observed differently by individuals and groups, depending upon their position in society and the desires and interests attendant upon that. For instance, privacy can be an urgent topic for civil rights movements, whereas citizens apparently are less bothered about it. And so more and more government measures can be taken and new technologies applied that conflict with the right of privacy but which are used in a relatively unconcerned way or submitted to with hardly a whisper of protest.

Whether this be an endangered basic right, an obsolete concept of the enlightenment, a lost cause or an activists' obsession, the traditional notion of privacy has largely been undermined in today's security and information society. This certainly is the result of a preventive government policy that is out to control the comings and goings of citizens, and a commercial sector that, off-line and online, tries to get more and more of a handle on the individual desires and consumption patterns of customers through its clever registration devices. But there is more going on: people are having less and less qualms about voluntarily revealing personal information in the media and on the Internet. The protection of privacy seems to be subordinate to people's desire to manifest themselves publically in society. In the globalized network cultures, visibility, transparency, accessibility and connectivity are what count. These values are at odds with the idea of privacy as 'secluded from the rest'. Does this imply that 'everyone belongs to everyone else' to an increasing extent, as in Huxley's dystopic *Brave New World* (1932)? Or, these many years after *The Fall of Public Man* (Richard Sennett, 1974) are we experiencing 'the fall of private man' – from which we could then conclude that the public-private antithesis has lost its force as a signifier of meaning? Are alternative subjectivities and rights emerging that are considered more important in the twenty-first century? Are new strategies and tactics being mobilized to safeguard personal autonomy and to escape forms of institutional biopower?

In *Open* 19, the concept of privacy is examined and reconsidered from different perspectives: legal, sociological, media theoretical and activist. Rather than deploring the loss of privacy, the main focus is on the attempt, starting from our present position of 'post-privacy', to gain an idea of what is on the horizon in terms of new subjectivities and power constructions. Naturally, this cannot be investigated without paying attention to the sociopolitical and technological violations of privacy that are going on at present.

Daniel Solove, law professor, proposes that privacy be considered as a pluralistic concept with a social significance. A theory on privacy should be directed at the very problems that create a need for privacy, according to Solove. Maurizio Lazzarato, taking Foucault's concept of 'pastoral power' as an example, analyses how the state wields power techniques to control the users of social services, and how it intervenes in the lives of individuals in

doing so. Sociologist Rudi Laermans goes into the implications of the ideal of transparent communication for secrecy and personal privacy.

In search of effective strategies against the surveillance regime, Armin Medosch, media artist and researcher, has developed a model in which he couples the historical function of privacy in a free democracy with the overall technopolitical dynamics. Felix Stalder examines today's 'post-privacy' situation, in which a change is taking place in how people achieve autonomy, and how institutions and corporations exercise control over them.

In the column, Joris van Hoboken, member of the board at Bits of Freedom, challengingly states: 'Privacy is dead. Get over it.' Oliver Leistert uses a post-Fordian framework in criticizing the German protest movement AK-Vorrat, which focuses on issues concerning data retention and privacy from a liberal democratic standpoint. Martijn de Waal considers the concrete possibilities of using locational data from cellular networks for civil society projects and the questions on privacy that this raises. In the light of contemporary computer paradigms like the Internet of Things, Rob van Kranenburg argues in favour of making concepts of privacy operational from the bottom up in the infrastructure of technologies and networks that connect us with one another in our environment.

Mark Shepard has made a contribution on 'The Sentient City Survival Kit', his research project in the area of design, which proposes playful and ironic technosocial artefacts that investigate the consequences that the observing, evermore efficiently and excessively coded city has for privacy and autonomy. Matthijs Bouw, architect and director of One Architecture, investigates privatization and privacy in the context of the Internet platform 'New Map of Tbilisi'. With photos by Gio Sumbadze and Lucas Zoutendijk, he shows how the 'wild capitalism' of the new Georgia has led to a reduction of privacy in Tbilisi.

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Tags

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