

Call for Papers

Unblinking: New Perspectives on Visual Privacy in the 21st Century

A Cross-Disciplinary Symposium

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Submissions due: 15 May 2006

Deirdre Mulligan (Law) and Ken Goldberg (Engineering), Co-Chairs

Worldwide demand for security cameras has expanded greatly since 9/11/2001 and the London transport bombings. Over the same period, consumer demand for high resolution digital and cell-phone cameras has increased markedly. Video applications are being incorporated into learning, healthcare, family and work environments. Engineers are responding with new generations of highly sophisticated chips, lenses, robotic platforms, and systems.

In a rapidly evolving environment of unblinking eyes, technologically perfected recollections, and permanent visual records, what will it mean to have privacy? How will the introduction of unblinking eyes alter how we experience and behave in public and private spaces?

Privacy is a complex and often abstract topic: this symposium will address "visual privacy," a subset of the much broader topic of data privacy, and bring together experts from a range of perspectives: art, law, engineering, public policy, psychology, architecture, urban planning, sociology, human rights and others.

Camera and video technology are changing who we watch, what we watch, when we are watched, and redefining the purposes for which we watch. From crime and terrorism focused networks of security cameras, to human rights workers and demonstration observers armed with video cameras, to the proliferation of camera and video phones used to capture and some times share the mundane and extraordinary images presented by daily life, to real-time video connections between family, employers and colleagues, technologies of watching are generating complex questions about both our rights to document and enhance our lived experiences and our rights to enjoy some aspects of privacy in public places. Video and still footage of events such as the NYC protests during the republican convention, the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, images of the war remind us of the powerful tonic visual images can be – providing checks on the abuse and misuse of authority, forcing us to reckon with the consequences of monumental decisions and policy choices, and providing alternative versions of the “truth.” But for some the use of visual imaging technology by individuals in public places evokes a different set of images—the “up-skirt photographer,” the publication of intimate moments occurring in public places, the paparazzi—and concerns—privacy, exploitation, and voyeurism. State use of advanced camera networks to constantly monitor public space counterpoises our deep desire for safety and our commitment to a free and open society that demands some limits on state access to information about citizens’ activities. Monitoring aging family members and domestic workers, and connecting educational and work environments raise

complicated questions about the privacy of all those who pass through these visually wired environments. Across each dimension visual imaging technology is outpacing law and public policy, destabilizing norms and expectations of personal privacy, and redefining public spaces.

Surveillance and sousveillance (watching from underneath) are becoming ubiquitous: we are watched by the government, corporations, institutions, and private individuals. Individuals use cameras to record events, document experiences, and capture "the moment." Governments are deploying them as both a counter-terrorism and crime-fighting tool. Businesses both use and prohibit them -- finding them useful to protect property, but a threat to intellectual property. The increasingly powerful pan, scan and zoom features, infrared /night vision and video capabilities as well as new developments in miniaturization and the embedding of cameras in small multi-use consumer electronic devices, enable camera users to capture intimate moments and communication details. The potential to meld biometric and datamining technology with vast networks of video cameras conjures simultaneous fears of constant supervision, secret or public judgment and hopes that such information can be used to make us safer, better informed, and more connected to each other. As we willingly or unwillingly submit to these invasions, we turn cameras back at our watchers, and we sometimes actively choose to display our images: publicizing our private lives through web cameras, photo blogs and other technologies. Video technology will join voice communication and email as a means of maintaining connection between families, communities, and workplaces. In this constantly changing environment of unblinking eyes, technologically perfected recollections, and permanent records, what will it mean to have privacy? And how we will experience and behave in public spaces? What degree of visual scrutiny are we willing to undergo in public spaces? What degree of privacy – absence from watching, fading of memory, anonymity – does a civil society require? What barriers does the law erect to surveillance and sousveillance in public places? What is the effect of pervasive watching on speech, conflict, and relations between the governed and the government? How does pervasive watching entrench or alter experiences based on gender, class and race? Can pervasively watched spaces fulfill their role as “public spaces?” How are current developments in and uses of technology challenging our norms and laws and how have policymakers responded?

The Unblinking Symposium will explore these issues in a single track format. To ground the discussions, each submitted paper should be paired with at least one specific image selected from our web site or of the authors choosing. Presenting authors will initiate each presentation in the context of this image, and the images will appear with each article in a published volume. Images can be drawn from a wide range of contexts: Rodney King news photographs, Hitchcock's Rear Window, video, webcams, paintings, Bentham's diagrams, Cinema Verite reality television, home security, etc. Each presenter will be responsible for securing copyright permission for the image(s) they choose, other than those provided at the web site. Participants are expected to attend the full day and a half symposium.

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