

THEME: Debordering and Rebordering in Cyberspace: Technological, Legal and Political Aspects

PROJECT: Algorithmic Ethics and 'Pattern-of-Life' Analysis: The Automation of Everyday Life

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Primary Location: Mitchell Institute

Much has been written about how security technologies and algorithms govern by gathering information about the isolated characteristics of people's lives (gender, age, citizenship, religion, purchase history etc.) so as to better understand the characteristics of a whole population. This project engages with more recent arguments about how algorithms and security technologies observe distinct 'patterns-of-life' (POL) behaviours and habits which are then used as the basis for new techniques of governance and intervention. POL analysis is a form of surveillance that constructs a pattern of statistically normal behaviours against which instances of statistical deviance can be identified, tracked, and acted upon. Central to this production of norm / deviance is a pre-emptive frame: the future is made *actionable* so that (a) populations can be encouraged to avoid pre-determined deviant behaviour; and (b) suspect individuals can be identified by their 'pattern-of-life' behaviour and marked as risky *before* they have committed a crime. This project contributes to critical accounts of how the norm/deviant logics underscoring POL analysis map onto more familiar social cleavages to do with race, gender, sexuality, socio-economic position, citizenship status and difference.

This PhD project focuses on two areas:

From the Battlefield to Everyday life: Much critical work on POL analysis examines its use in drone warfare: how data points from drone footage produce generalized norms of behaviour against which deviations can be identified. However, the way 'foreign' individuals and populations become suspect through POL analysis is not neutral, but instead maps norm/deviance logics onto prevailing geopolitical asymmetries. In other words, patterns of 'normal' behaviour assume particular Western liberal subjectivities, behaviours and habits, whereas deviations from that norm are attached to bodies that are culturally, ethnically and racially 'different' (Franz, 2017; Pöttsch, 2015; Shaw, 2016). Drawing on those insights, this project explores how POL analysis is now being used to shape, manage and intervene in the everyday lives of subjects, citizens and non-citizens. Certainly law enforcement agencies have been early adopters of predictive systems that can help them mobilize, direct and focus their resources to pre-emptively identified 'hotspots' of crime, and retailers have long used POL analysis to predict consumer demand, behaviour and habits (Bell, 2013; Wall, 2016). This project analyses how POL analysis is being rolled out into the sectors of society that govern our everyday lives such as education, public health and transport, and asks how its central norm /

deviant logics are making themselves felt differently in different populations (e.g. citizens, non-citizens).

The Automation of Judgement: The central selling point of POL analysis is its supposed 'neutrality': by allowing algorithms to trawl the data and produce statistically proven norms, governing authorities can avoid charges of discrimination (e.g. 'We are not racist! The data told us to arrest this individual!') In this sense, POL analysis has to be understood as part of a broader shift into algorithmic governance. However, what remains unclear in the expansion of POL analysis is the transformation in who is enacting political judgement and making decisions. Drawing on recent work in critical security studies, this project puts debates about pre-emption and POL analysis into productive conversation with debates over the ethics of automation and algorithmic governance (Amoore & Piotukh, 2016; Hall, 2018; Lisle & Bourne, 2018). Of particular concern here is the way automation claims to be objective, neutral and impartial while it simultaneously disaggregates populations through familiar categories of race, difference, gender, class and sexuality. This project emerges from our ESRC grant 'Treating People as Objects' (2014-2016) and helps to develop our current thinking about automation, ethics, materialism and politics. The student selected for this project will become part of our reading group on 'Materiality, Objects, Politics and Space'.

Primary Academic Discipline: International Relations (Critical Security Studies / Critical Border Studies)