

Surveillance and Society

Spring 2026

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Course Description:

This course offers a broad introduction to the various manifestations of surveillance culture in our past and present society, along with how they impact our understanding of contemporary public and private spheres. The class dialogue will be focused on the analysis of historical rhetoric about surveillance and the wide range of tools used to gain social control and that of its individual members. We will focus on the comparative analysis of different methods of surveillance employed by select former communist states (mainly Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany) during communism and after its fall. As the communist state surveillance organs, namely the StB in Czechoslovakia, the Stasi in East Germany, and the SB in Poland, ceased to exist with the fall of the totalitarian system, new mechanisms of social control began to emerge, but this time with no visible borders from which one could easily escape. The case of post-communist surveillance will be discussed from a more inclusive perspective, touching upon the global resonance of 9/11, when surveillance has been legitimized as a tool of social order and has also been openly questioned by individuals such as Edward Snowden. Moreover, surveillance today and the invasion of one's privacy face threats from many "little brothers" rather than just the state itself. In this respect, this course will investigate several issues emerging from the relationship between various technologies (including AI) and societies to determine how they shape the postmodern culture of social control, fear, and empowerment.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this course, the study materials, both readings and visual content, will be curated from a diverse array of fields including sociology, psychology, history, architecture, visual culture, and popular media. Every class session will be multifaceted, incorporating a lecture, an interactive discussion, screenings of excerpts from relevant films, as well as enriching field trips to museums and the National Archives as specified in the weekly schedule.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

This course examines the topic of surveillance in our society from cultural, historical, and sociological perspectives. Students will be introduced to the topic through interdisciplinary analysis of contemporary scholarship, as well as its historical roots which will serve as a theoretical point of

departure to better understand the shaping process of the various forms of control manifested in our daily life under surveillance.

Upon completion of this course students should be able to understand the following:

- Define the role of surveillance in both the historical context of Central and Eastern Europe during the communist regime and its contemporary manifestations;
- Describe the core problems confronting our reality with increasing expansion of new surveillance methods;
- Define and initiate the application of key concepts and theories pertaining to the subject of surveillance;
- Understand the changing notion of the public and the private in our society and culture;
- Be familiar with the ideas of major thinkers in surveillance studies;
- Ability to apply critical analysis to current events.

Course Requirements:

Students are required to submit all assignments and take a mid-term exam. Failure to complete any mandatory assignment as outlined in the grading policy will result in an incomplete grade for the course. Late assignments, submitted without a valid excuse, will result in a one full-grade deduction. All course readings are accessible through the program's Moodle platform and should be completed before each scheduled class session.

Formative assessment of learning will be provided through the following:

1. **Examinations:** Mid-term examination will be on the material covered in the course (readings, lectures, class discussion, videos etc.) and will be given in the middle of semester as indicated by the instructor.
2. **Final Research Paper:** The final research paper will have the character of a research project based on a selected topic by each student and will require to implement readings used/discussed in our class. The final paper must comprise a minimum of minimum 1,500 words (around 6 pages, double-spaced), exclusive of the bibliography. All papers must contain appropriate citations in APA or your chosen format (an example sheet will be provided). It is important to include a critical discussion (not just a quote!) of **at least three readings covered in our class!**

LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED! All papers must be handed in no later than during the final class meeting. Plagiarized papers will receive a grade "F" with no exceptions.

3. **Critical Analysis Assignments:** This assignment requires a written reflection on a surveillance-related topic assigned by the instructor. The analysis must be at least two full pages in length (double-spaced). The paper should present a clear argument and engage with the work of **at least one author discussed in class**. Papers that do not meet the minimum length requirement or are submitted late will receive grade penalties. The due date for this assignment is indicated in the course syllabus.
4. **Topic Presentation:** each student will be asked to perform a short presentation (less than 10 slides) on the selected in-class topic. Each presentation should conclude with a set of discussion questions for the class. Topics will be selected at the very beginning of the course.
5. **Creative Media Project: Surveillance in Culture.** In this assignment, students will critically analyze how surveillance is represented in a selected cultural context, such as a film, television series, novel, art exhibition, or individual work of art. Students should examine how the chosen work depicts surveillance practices, technologies, and power relations, and evaluate how these representations shape public understandings of privacy, control, resistance, and everyday life under surveillance. The analysis should be grounded in course concepts and readings, connecting cultural narratives to broader social, political, and ethical debates about surveillance. Students will present their findings in a concise in-class presentation of no more than 10 slides and submit an accompanying 2-page (double-spaced) written analysis elaborating on their argument and theoretical framework (the analysis should be written individually by each student in a group).
6. **Class Assessment and Participation:** This part of the evaluation includes participation and discussions/debates. Active, constructive participation is required, and suggested readings will be a required and an important part of the course.
7. **Absences:** Students must attend all classes. Excused medical absences require a written document the day of return to class. UPCES program allows only one unexcused absence. Tardiness of more than 20 minutes without a reasonable excuse will be regarded as an absence.

The summative evaluation, in the form of a letter grade, will be based on the formative assessment, class participation, the research paper, and the results of the examinations. In regard to the latter, the students will be responsible for all the topics covered in class as well as the assigned readings and class presentations.

Please be aware that the use of laptops and mobile phones during class sessions is strictly prohibited! This includes message texting!

Grading Policy:

The evaluation will be based on a final grade scale of 100% in the following as they relate to the course's objectives and outcomes:

In-class Topic Presentation (on a selected class topic)	10%
Critical Analysis	15%
Creative Media Project: Surveillance in Culture	15%
Mid-term Exam	20%
Final Research Paper	30%
<u>Class participation</u>	<u>10%</u>
	100%

Mandatory Completion Policy

Note that all mandatory assignments and exams must be completed to the best of your ability in order for your final grade to be issued. Failure to complete a mandatory assignment or exam may result in a failing grade.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description
A+	97-100	Excellent Work
A	93-97	Outstanding Work
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good work
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Acceptable Work
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	Work that is significantly below average
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course

AEP Academic Integrity Policy

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not tolerated. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the development of knowledge and learning is encouraged at many stages of the learning process. While we value technology for educational purposes, we also value originality and the retainment of knowledge, and thus using AI for assignments and examinations, even if rephrased, is strictly prohibited and considered an academic integrity violation, unless the instructor explicitly allows for it in the context of evaluated work

AEP Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy

The AEP program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

AEP Diversity Policy

AEP is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community that values diversity in all its forms. We believe that one of the most meaningful lessons of studying abroad is learning to navigate and appreciate differences with curiosity and an open mind. While engaging across differences can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable, these moments are essential for growth and learning. We recognize that every member of our community, even with the best intentions, may occasionally make missteps. Our commitment is to provide a supportive environment where respectful and honest dialogue helps us learn from these experiences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and broaden their perspective.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

CEE Introductory Lecture Series

AEP Introductory Lecture Series

Week 2: Introduction.

Class Topic 1: Course introduction. (February 17th)

Class Topic 2: Introduction to Surveillance Studies: The Faces of Surveillance: Historical Trace of the Discipline; Current Topics in Surveillance Studies. (February 19th)

Required readings:

- Lyon, David (2002): "Editorial. Surveillance Studies: Understanding visibility, mobility and the phenetic fix."
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Week 3: Architecture of Surveillance: Between Private and Public Space.

Class Topic 1: The concept of Panopticism and Synopticon. (February 24th)

Required readings:

- Foucault, Michel (1977): "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison"
- Mathiesen, Thomas (1997): "The Viewer Society"

Class Topic 2: Architecture and Surveillance in Postmodernity. IoT Devices in Domestic Space.
(February 26th)

Required readings:

- Colomina, Beatriz (2008): "X-ray Architecture: Illness as Metaphor"
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Week 4: Surveillance and Photography: The eye of the camera - looking through the lenses. CCTV and Drones.

Class Topic 1: Historical modes of voyeuristic photography: from street photography, the sexually explicit (or implicit), celebrity stalking, photographs of death and violence, to pictures as evidence. (March 3rd)

Required readings:

- Sontag, Susan (2001): "On Photography"
- Barthes, Roland (1982): "Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography"

Class Topic 2: CCTV and Drones. (March 5th)

- Selected films
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Week 5: Surveillance in Art.

Class Topic 1: Surveillance in Art. (March 10th)

Required readings:

- Monahan, Torin. (2017): "Ways of being seen: surveillance art and the interpellation of viewing subject"
- Lee, Pamela M. (2011): "Open Secret"
- Selected films

Class Topic 2: Museum Visit (March 12th)

Critical Analysis is due!!!

Week 6: Cinematic Apparatus: Movies and Reality TV

Class Topic 1: Surveillance and cinema. (March 17th)

Required readings:

- Mulvey, Laura (1975): "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Class Topic 2: Reality TV: Surveying the lives of others (March 19th)

Required readings:

- Andrejevic, Mark (2002): "The Kinder, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother – Reality TV in the Era of Digital Capitalism."
- Selected excerpts of local Reality TV shows

Week 7: Surveillance and Literature.

Class Topic 1: Mid-term exam (movie screening) (March 24th)

Class Topic 2: Big Brother is Watching You. (March 26th)

Required readings:

- Orwell, George (1949): "Nineteen Eighty-Four" - excerpt
- Kafka, Franz (1926): "The Castle" - excerpt

Week 8: State Surveillance and Totalitarianism.

Class Topic 1: The methods of state surveillance under Communism and in the Post-communist decade. (March 31st)

Required readings:

- Darnton, Robert: "The Stasi Files"
- Films (excerpts):
- The Lives of Others (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006)
- Ucho/ The Ear (Karel Kachyna, 1970)

Class Topic 2: Cold War Museum at the Jalta Hotel Visit (April 2nd)

Required readings:

- USTRC, Prague through the Lens of the Secret Police (excerpt)

Spring Break (April 6th - 10th) 🐝

Week 9: The Internet and Social Media: Privacy Under Surveillance.

Class Topic 1: The Internet and Social Media. (April 14th)

Required readings:

- Morozov, Evgeny (2011): "The Dark Side of Internet Freedom: The Net Delusion" (selected excerpt)

Class Topic 2: The case of Edward Snowden. Privacy and Surveillance in Metaverse. (April 16th)

Required readings:

- Uberti, David (2022): "Come the Metaverse, Can Privacy Exist?"
 - Selected films
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Week 10: Surveillance, Education, and Data Body: from Classification to Discrimination

Class Topic 1: Surveillance and Education. (April 21st)

Required readings:

<https://privacyinternational.org/long-read/5463/studying-under-surveillance-secritisation-learning>

Class Topic 2: Biometrics. Data Collection and Discrimination Issues. Social Sorting and the case of China. (April 23rd)

Required readings:

- Crawford, Kate (2021): "Atlas of AI" (chapter on Classification)
 - Selected films
 - Film: Social Credit: China's Digital Dystopia in the Making
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Week 11: New Visibilities and Invisibilities: Self-tracking devices and wearables.

Class Topic 1: [Visit to the Secret Security Services Archive](#) (April 28th)

Class Topic 2: Self-tracking devices and wearables. (April 30th)

Required readings:

- Deborah Lupton: "Self-tracking, health and medicine"
 - Selected films
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Week 12: Economics of Surveillance: Corporate Surveillance, AI

Class Topic 1: Surveillance capitalism, surveillance as a service (May 5th)

Required readings:

- Zuboff, Shoshana (2015): “Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization”
- Selected films

Class Topic 2: AI and Humanoid Robots (May 7th)

Required readings:

- Crawford, Kate (2021): “Atlas of AI” (selected excerpt)

Week 13: Final Exam Week. Final paper is due on Thursday!!!

Class Topic 1: Group Presentations. (May 12th)

Class Topic 2: Movie Screening. Final papers are due!!!. (May 14th)