

Call for Abstracts (Deadline: September 15, 2024)

En/Countering Tracking. Resisting spatiotemporal media operations in computational culture

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Tracking takes place ubiquitously and at different scales – from satellite-based wildlife tracking (Benson 2010) to automated monitoring of supply chain workers through radio-frequency identification (RFID) (Hayles 2009; Kanngieser 2013) and to ubiquitous self-surveillance through self-tracking apps (Lupton 2021). With the expansion of sensor-based geomedias as well as embodied computing, tracking also becomes a key media operation for environmental sensing or virtual reality experiences (Egliston and Carter 2022; Gabrys 2019).

Tracking as a spacetime-critical media operation is engendered by complex media infrastructures, which automatically capture objects or processes, sustain software-based data collection and storage, and provide different kinds of interfaces of (non-)human interaction (Friedrich 2021). Tracking is deeply related to critical issues of today's computational culture, such as automation, (non-)human agency and capitalist politics. Software studies approaches have provided important cues for critically analyzing the computational logics of tracking, especially in regard to the socio-material impacts on the co-constitutions of software and the work it performs in relation to (non-)human actors in time and space (Kitchin and Dodge 2011). Critiquing tracking is strongly connected to different scholarly discourses on software studies. These approaches have also provided important critical impulses in regard to the capitalization (Rossiter 2016), more-than-human interactions (Gabrys 2012) and racializing dynamics (Chun 2018) of spatiotemporal software technologies and tracking (Chun 2018; Sansone Ruiz 2023).

The computational logics of tracking result in new aesthetic and operational regimes that diminish sensory perception and privilege logics of calculation, which in turn co-constitute mobile forms of (non-)human action and tactical interventions (Crandall 2010; Hansen 2015). Countering tracking has become a key form of resisting the logics of computational culture. Subversive encounters have emerged in recent years as counterpoints to the hegemonic logics of web infrastructures (Christl and Spiekermann 2016), platform labor (Heiland 2021) and racial capitalism (Russell and De Souza 2023). These attempts to counter tracking take forms that range from investigative visualizations (Fuller and Weizman 2021) or provoking glitches in tracking infrastructures (Leszczynski and Elwood 2022) to uncovering web-based tracking (Sharelab 2015), building counter-infrastructures for labor resistance (Qadri and D'Ignazio 2022), or using sensors and satellite images for critical investigations (Ballinger 2023; Boyd et al. 2018). Countering tracking becomes a resistant media operation itself, disentangling hegemonic spatiotemporal regimes and their socio-political forces. These forms of countering tracking challenge existing theoretical approaches to the critical analysis of tracking and open up new perspectives on subversion and resistance in computational culture.

We invite critical encounters through and of tracking, which enable new perspectives on computational infrastructures, software, (non-)human aesthetics and operative interactions by means of theoretical reflections, critical making or activism.

We aim at gathering submissions that 1) render existing tracking operations perceivable; 2) disrupt tracking infrastructures; or 3) operationalize tracking itself for resistance:

1) Countering tracking renders existing tracking operations perceivable: Critical approaches of countering tracking aim at making existing tracking processes visible or establishing alternative visualities of locative media (Brown 2018; Fuller and Weizman 2021). Tactical media operations of countering tracking aim at reversing the aesthetic regimes of tracking through image operations, investigative aesthetics, diagrammatics, counter-cartographies or synesthetic approaches. In doing so, some approaches towards countering tracking (re)produce narratives of "objective" imagery and locative truth, while some approaches are explicitly developed to counter these narratives (Forensic Architecture 2014).

2) Countering tracking disrupts tracking infrastructures: Resistant media operations of countering tracking disrupt or interrupt socio-material tracking infrastructures. Localizability through tracking infrastructures is accompanied by planned and random interruptions, such as "glitches" (Leszczynski and Elwood 2022). Interruptions of tracking infrastructures provoke resistant epistemologies of tracking and support resistances, which are negotiated both informally and collectively (Qadri and D'Ignazio 2022). Strategies of countering tracking can act both critically, e.g. as a conscious disruption of hegemonic tracking infrastructures, and affirmatively, e.g. as forms of repair towards existing tracking infrastructures (Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior 2023). In this process, countering tracking establishes alternative epistemologies and practices of spatiotemporal infrastructures (Qadri 2021).

3) Countering tracking operationalizes tracking itself for resistance: Tactical approaches to countering tracking operationalize existing tracking media, such as sensor technologies, apps, web algorithms or satellites (Boyd et al. 2018; Brown 2018; ElonJet 2023; Peeters 2021). Employing existing tracking media offers new perspectives on the negotiation of counter-surveillance (Monahan 2006), tactical media and subversive media operations through (software) infrastructures. Here the critical analysis of strategies that use tracking itself to counter tracking expands discourses on countersurveillance, tactical media and subversive media operations by focusing on different spatiotemporal regimes and their involvement of human and non-human actors. In particular, this raises questions of how tracking itself can be employed as a media operation of resistance.

The special issue invites theoretical, conceptual and performative approaches from fields such as media studies, visual studies, artistic research, sociology and critical geography, to address the question of how tracking becomes a repressive, subversive or activist media operation. How is countering tracking by means of tracking possible in different contexts and in relation to software, infrastructures and aesthetics?

Topics and projects might include:

- Inventive methods that repurpose tracking infrastructures, sensors, software and data to research computational culture

- Detailed empirical and critical studies exploring the relations of en/countering tracking in computational culture
- En/countering tracking in labor resistance and platform capitalisms
- Critical theoretical conceptualization of tracking or countering for the study of computational culture
- Critical explorations of the chronopolitics, timescapes and spatiotemporal regimes of tracking
- Activist media, counter-surveillance, tactical media, decolonial, (glitch) feminist and resistant epistemologies of tracking
- En/countering relations between political economy, racialized capitalism and tracking
- Visual cultures, (in-)visualities and aesthetics of en/countering tracking
- En/countering tracking in media art and artistic activism

Schedule

750-word abstracts should be emailed to en_countering_tracking@uni-bonn.de by September 15, 2024. Abstracts will be reviewed by the special issue editors and the *Computational Culture* editorial board.

Authors of selected abstracts will be notified by October 30, 2024 and invited to submit full manuscripts by March 1, 2025. These manuscripts are subject to full blind peer review according to *Computational Culture's* policies. Possible costs for proofreading incurred by the authors are not covered by the editors or the journal. There are no open access or processing charges for this special issue.

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Any queries can be addressed to the special issue editors at: en_countering_tracking@uni-bonn.de

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