Public Lives: What Eroding Privacy Means for Democracy

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Lecture theatre, room B101
UFV Abbotsford campus

The blurring and sometimes outright inversion of what we have traditionally understood as 'private' vs. 'public' has vast implications for citizens' relationship to the state. Securitization and surveillance are increasingly making governmental actions secret and citizens' lives transparent.

Commentators, both pro-privacy and pro-sharing, are calling for privacy to be redefined and reconceptualized to keep pace with an increasingly technologically driven and globalized world. Not only is "personal information the new 'oil' of the Internet," the vast daily data capture of citizens' lives due to the use of digital media is set to expand further with the advent of the Internet of Things and 'smart' systems of all varieties.

Exactly how much of this information does or could a government (our government, the government of some other country) access and for what purposes? The technology, practices, and relevant law are evolving rapidly. The virtually secret "perimeter security" agreement that expands Canada's data sharing with the United States is occurring at the same time that the US reboots its Total Information Awareness program and the National Security Agency builds a data centre designed to "intercept, decipher, analyze, and store vast swaths of the world's communications". The Wellcome Trust in the UK is promoting a plan to have the genome of everyone in the UK sequenced and stored on their electronic health record, while Wikileaks discloses secret cables in which Hilary Clinton directed embassy staff to surreptitiously collect DNA samples from foreign heads of state and senior UN officials (and wasn't that an episode from The X-Files...).

This talk will discuss some of the key arenas in which citizens' privacy rights are being eroded, as well as the resistance to that erosion.