

Call for Papers

**Privacy and Slavery, Past and Present:
Academic and Artistic Perspectives on an Urgent Issue**

*Organised by Danish National Research Foundation Centre for Privacy Studies (PRIVACY)
in collaboration with Novo Nordisk Foundation Centre for Practice-based Art Studies (PASS)*

21-23 October 2026, University of Copenhagen



Cornelia Parker, *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, (1991). Installation view, Chisenhale Gallery, 1991. Commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London. Tate Collectino, London. Photo Copyright Hugo Glendinning. Courtesy of the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London.

Throughout all its manifestations, the structure of enslavement is designed to maintain control over people through the privation of rights. As such, privacy may seem a distant concept to enslaved people both past and present. What is private in a setting of constant surveillance? Can a kinship bond be private whilst commodified? And how is it possible to raise questions about the privacies of those who leave very few records of their own and live much of their lives under the control of others? In this conference, we invite artists and academics to engage with these and similar questions by convening in a spirit of open-minded curiosity and creative approaches to knowledge production. We hope to produce new ways of thinking about slavery that may generate awareness about this ancient and sadly also contemporary phenomenon in ways that could alter its future.

Studies within the emerging field of historical privacy studies have shown that, historically, both privacy and privacy-related phenomena such as intimacy, secrecy, family, and domesticity existed and mattered in surprising contexts and ways. Is this also the case today? Although conventional ideas of privacy might seem almost intuitively opposed to life under enslavement and other forms of subjugation, this does not mean that enslaved people simply submit to doing without it. Across history, privacy is perceived as both a quality and risk: too little may threaten the individual while too much may ruin society. In this conference, we wish to examine how notions and practices of privacy shape relations between individuals and communities when the exploitation of enslaved labour, in its historical and contemporary forms, is part of the social *status quo*.

By using historical privacy studies as a lens on practices of enslavement, we begin to understand the intersection of societal macro- and microstructures. We can study the ways enslaved people manage to carve out pockets of privacy, what occurs when that privacy is breached, and how privacy-curbing and -enforcing methods are used and perceived by authorities as means to enforce social hierarchies.

The privacy perspective raises an array of urgent questions: When does privacy curb the freedom of individuals, and when does it protect it? Should privacy under slavery be seen as a form of resistance, or are private spaces controlled and defined by the oppressors? Under what circumstances does privacy contribute to practices of enslavement and the privation of rights? When does domestic spaces, for instance, enable bonds of servitude such as trafficking, forced marriage, and debt bondage? Do the privacy rights of companies and states contribute to industrial slavery? What do the private spaces of enslaved people look like? How are they produced? What is their agency? How can we study them? And how can artistic and academic practices inform each other in producing knowledge about these and similar questions?

In this three-day conference we invite artists and academics dealing with slavery past and present to convene around the topic of privacy. We wish to generate new knowledge about practices of enslavement and the ways in which privacy has been, and continues to be, used as a means of social resistance and control.

We aim for a global perspective spanning all time periods and welcome papers from a wide range of fields to foster cross- and interdisciplinary approaches to the topic. We are interested in aesthetic engagements and representations, conceptual definitions, and practices of slavery/enslavement and privacy/the private that are represented and interpreted through artistic performances, artworks and research. Themes of interest include (but are not limited to):

- The materiality and spatial organization of enslaved peoples' privacy
- Symbolic dimensions of privacy within contexts of slavery and enslavement
- The lived experience of enslaved peoples' privacy
- Privacy as resistance against practices and structures of enslavement
- Privacy within the infrastructures of slavery and vice versa
- Religious and spiritual dimensions of privacy and slavery as justification, resistance and practice

- Privacy as a threat or as a quality in relation to practices of enslavement and notions of slavery
- Archival, ethical, and methodological issues relating to the study of privacy and slavery

Before the conference, on 14-15 September 2026, we will arrange an online workshop where participants will be invited to share early drafts of papers, presentations, and project ideas, as well as giving and receiving peer feedback. This pre-event is very much a matter of presenting works-in-progress in a spirit of open-minded curiosity. Participants may simply present empirical material, initial research questions or methodological questions. The aim of the workshop is twofold: on the one hand, we wish to encourage crosspollination and thematic resonance between the individual contributions to the final conference; on the other hand, we wish to explore the productive tensions arising in the encounter between academic and artistic approaches to knowledge production.

The event takes place on 21-23 October 2026 at the Centre for Privacy Studies, University of Copenhagen and is organized by Assistant Professors Bastian Felter Vaucanson (PRIVACY), Francis Ethelbert Kwabena Benyah (PRIVACY), Felicia J. Fricke (PRIVACY), and PhD Student Hannah Katharina Hjorth (PRIVACY), as well as curator and postdoc Anne Julie Arnfred (PASS) and Professor Mikkel Bogh (PASS).

For more information about PRIVACY and PASS please visit: <https://teol.ku.dk/privacy/> and <https://pass.ku.dk/>.

Submission guidelines

Abstracts should be no more than 300 words, accompanied by a short bio (max 150 words) and submitted by 1 April 2026 to Bastian Felter Vaucanson (bva@teol.ku.dk) and Anne Julie Arnfred (aja@hum.ku.dk). Accepted papers will be notified by 1 June 2026. We look forward to reading your proposals!

Travel bursaries for non-funded artists and PhD students may be offered, pending the results of our funding applications. Those interested in applying for a bursary should indicate this when submitting their abstract and specify the location from which they will be traveling. To ensure as diverse and globally representative an event as possible, priority will be given to applicants traveling from non-Western countries.