

Call for Papers

The Night as a Private Space:

Darkness, Secrecy, and Shadows in the Early Modern Period and Today

*An interdisciplinary conference at the Centre for Privacy Studies, University of Copenhagen
organized in collaboration with Institut für Dänisch, Europa-Universität Flensburg*

11-12 December 2025

How does the night impact privacy? Which activities and creative potentials become available and/or acceptable under the cover of nocturnal darkness? Is the night more private than the day? How have these dynamics changed from the early modern period until today? In this two-day international conference, we invite scholars from all historical fields and all career levels to engage with the early modern night from the interdisciplinary perspective of historical privacy studies. Our aim is to reconsider the night in contemporary late capitalist society, where the 24/7 lifeworld is, arguably, steadily undermining the distinctions between night and day, between light and darkness, between rest and action.

Obscure, opaque, and occult, the early modern night comes across as a privileged space of privacy and solitude. Perceived at once as a threat and a value, the night transforms social space into a mirror world of shadows populated by twilight beings such as demons and angels, genies and ancestors. If, since antiquity, the night has born death and sleep as her children, the tomb-like stillness of the shadowy embrace is deceptive. In the densely populated urban areas of the early modern world, privacy was hard to come by for the vast majority. As prohibitions that obtain during normal day-time activity are lifted, night-time leaves room for alternative sensory experiences, social relations, and mental projections that are often accorded no existence during daytime.

Is this still the case today? Society is in the midst of a fundamental recalibration of the night, with nocturnal privacy under pressure from various economic, technological, and political sectors. Through the last 40 years, the night has been subjected to a progressive colonization by human activities, including not least the spread of artificial light, which has abolished the boundaries between night and day and led to a so-called “diurnalization” of the night’s domain. The 24/7 lifeworld evokes a “time without time”; there are no longer moments when one cannot shop, consume, or utilize network resources. The night, as a time for both regeneration, metaphysical apprehension, and cultural transgression, has been subjected to ever-increasing pressure from the perpetual demands for adaptation, identification with and investment in the movements of capital and the products of technology.

With the aim of reconsidering the night as a private space in contemporary 24/7 society, we encourage papers that probe the porosity between night- and daytime, and privacy and publicity from an

interdisciplinary historical perspective. We look to explore all privacy-related aspects of the night past and present. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Aesthetic representations and conceptual definitions of the night and related privacy phenomena such as the occult, darkness, obscurity, secrecy, and shadows in e.g. art, literature, theology, philosophy, architectural drawings, urban planning, history of science, and law.
- The materiality and spatial organization of the night as it can be discerned through objects, artefacts, and infrastructural systems that either facilitate or curb privacy, e.g. buildings, candles, gas lights, streetlamps, corridors, windows, curtains, shutters, doors, walls, streets, gardens, and rural areas.
- The lived experience and symbolic dimension of privacy as seen through the nocturnal activities, emotional engagements, and experiences of early modern subjects, e.g. sexual encounters, devotional and esoteric practices, aesthetic creation, secrecy, clandestinity, illegality, violence, dissent, sleep, and social transgression.

Disciplinary cross-fertilization is one of the main goals with the workshop, and we therefore encourage contributions that examine intersections between the above aspects, and between the past and present perspectives. The early modern night is a generator of privacy as it is lived through intimacy, secrecy, clandestinity, dissent, violence, repression, freedom, literary and artistic expression, religious dreams and revelations, and a myriad of other hidden dynamics that shape social interactions. Investigating the early modern night as a private space, we hope to generate reflections about late capitalist society, where technological developments have entailed a fundamental reconfiguration of privacy and the night.

Output

The workshop will lead to a collected volume targeted to De Gruyter publishing house and is the result of a collaboration between the Centre for Privacy Studies, University of Copenhagen and Institut für Dänisch, Europa-Universität Flensburg. It takes place in the darkness of the Scandinavian winter on 11-12 December 2025 at the University of Copenhagen. Performative artists will be invited to interpret the conference theme in the 18th-century Christian's Church. Conference participants will be invited to take part in a guided city-tour of the historical neighborhood of Christianshavn.

Submission guidelines

Abstracts should be no more than 300 words, accompanied by a short bio (max 150 words) and submitted by 15 July 2025 to conference organizers Dr. Bastian Felter Vaucanson (bva@teol.ku.dk) and Dr. Markus Floris Christensen (markus.christensen@uni-flensburg.de). Accepted papers will be notified by 1 September 2025. We look forward to reading your proposals!