

## Abstracts:

Mette Simonsen Abildgaard, AAU

### Rethinking the breakdown – Greenland, Denmark and their shared digital infrastructure

The heavy reliance on digital services in Nordic societies heightens their vulnerability to cyberattacks, outages, and cable cuts, particularly amid increased threats following the Ukraine invasion. While the present time is ripe for studies of how to mitigate breakdown risks, it is also a timely moment to study the local experience and handling of breakdowns in themselves. While often portrayed as isolated events of disruption, breakdowns rarely appear suddenly, nor as surprises. In this talk, I present the Carlsberg research project DigiBreak, where we study ubiquitous breakdowns as sites of infrastructural care (Jackson 2014, Mol 2010) through ethnographic studies of two cases at the edges of the linked Greenlandic-Danish digital infrastructure: During continuous cyberattacks in small and medium-sized Danish companies and in unsteady communication lines in isolated Tasiilaq and Qaanaaq. In both cases, breakdowns are not extreme events contained to a specific time and place but routine parts of everyday life that are handled in collective practices, relying on improvisation and tinkering rather than expert knowledge. By foregrounding the mundanity of breakdowns, we emphasize practices of living with risks that are neither predictable nor avoidable and evade easy appointment of responsibility (Anand et al. 2018, Pink et al. 2018).

### Key references:

Anand, N., Gupta, A., & Appel, H. (Eds.). (2018). *The Promise of Infrastructure*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002031>

Mol, A., Moser, I., & Pols, J. (Eds.). (2010). *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms*. transcript Verlag.

Jackson, S. J. (2014). "Rethinking Repair" in Gillespie, Boczkowski and Foot (eds.): *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, MIT Press: pp. 221-239

Pink, S., Ruckenstein, M., Willim, R., & Duque, M. (2018). Broken data: Conceptualising data in an emerging world. *Big Data & Society*, 5(1).

Johan Lau Munksholm, SDU

## **Geopolitics and the Unfurling Politics of Digital Infrastructures**

In later years the importance and ubiquity of digital infrastructures has raised questions as to the implications of the concentration of private power yielded by a handful of platform corporations located in the US. It has been suggested that corporate private power may conflict with the interests of state power and open a novel political terrain in which private power open to new viable political horizons beyond the status quo. Seen through corrective the lens of the geopolitics of intensifying great power competition the divergence between the interests of private and state power may have been overestimated. Indeed, the interests of Silicon Valley and the US State Department strategically converge on a range of issue that provide both with incentives to collaborate rather than quarrel. In this talk, I will discuss the correspondence of interests between private infrastructural power and state power and what possible consequences this has for wider media politics.

Ane Grum-Schwensen, SDU

“The Great Sea Serpent (1871). H.C. Andersen on telegraphy, oceanography, and the ambivalence of information technology”

It is well known that Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) had a keen interest in science and often wrote enthusiastically about contemporary technological advances and their potential. This paper will shed light on the poet's work with the fairy tale about the Atlantic cable and the sources of inspiration for it, with a few references to recent literature on the first underwater cables (e.g. Müller 2016, Asseraf 2019). Along the way, examples of the nuanced views of humanity and technology in "The Great Sea Serpent" will be included, views which might be relevant to current discussions about the use of information technology for better or worse.

Erik Granly Jensen, SDU

## **“Materialities. Submarine cables, Gutta-percha rubber and Geopolitics around 1870”**

In 1866, after a series of extremely costly failed attempts, The Transatlantic Cable Company finally succeeded in connecting North America and Europe through a stable telegraphic submarine cable; and less than a decade later, by the mid-1870s, all inhabited continents were inter-connected through telegraphic cable. This infrastructural development not only heralded an entirely new perception of time and space and foregrounding a sense of a planetary imaginary that would

become immensely important to both philosophy and the arts (Bergson, J. Verne); but it paved the way for intensified imperial violence and dominance as well. The materiality of the telegraphic cable itself – tens of thousands of kilometers of cable laid on the seabed of the world's oceans during this period – plays a central role in this imperial intensification. Crucial for the new communication infrastructure to operate was the use of gutta-percha rubber to insulate the cable. This rubber could only be found in two places - in the then British colony of Malaysia and in Australia. The paper presentation will map several of the imperial conflicts that were linked to the gutta-percha production and analyze how these conflicts were shaping the development of the global communication infrastructure in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, this mapping is not only of techno-historical or imperial historical relevance. Rather, as I will argue in the paper presentation, the conflicts related to the materiality of the telegraphic cable, offer an analytical prism to critically engage with the materiality of similar communications infrastructures, e.g. the fiber optic submarine cables that connect the global stock markets and the military security systems of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.