Introduction

The complex web of everyday surveillance

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ABSTRACT

The possibilities to surveil people have increased and been further refined with the implementation of digital communication over the last couple of decades, and with the ongoing process of digital transformation, surveillance can now go in any direction, leaving a label such as "surveillance state" somewhat outdated. Corporations and governmental organisations may surveil people, people may surveil each other, and surveillance may take place in subtle ways that are difficult for the surveilled to detect. In David Lyon's terms, we are living in a "culture of surveillance", a culture that surrounds and affects our everyday life. Today, it is of utmost relevance to study people's attitudes, motives, and behaviours in relation to the fact that we live in a culture of surveillance. This includes the need for cultural and ethical perspectives to understand and nuance contemporary discussions on surveillance, not least in the highly digitalised context of the Nordic countries. The chapters in this anthology address these issues from a variety of disciplinary and theoretical frameworks.

KEYWORDS: surveillance, surveillance culture, digitalisation, data-driven, digital transformation

Introduction

Surveillance is a multifaceted concept, usually connected to issues such as power and control, directed from societal authorities in order to control citizens. Historical discussions have usually drawn upon the Benthamian concept of the panopticon, which was adapted and further developed in Michel Foucault's (1979) seminal work *Discipline and Punish* (original title, *Surveiller et punir*, published in 1975). Foucault claimed that in modern society (18th century onwards), citizens have internalised the eye of the state (a theme also popularised in and through George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). Today, the possibilities to surveil people have been further refined with the implementation of digital communication, and the discussion has evolved from a unilateral focus on top-down surveillance to a broader understanding, where surveillance occurs between different actors and in different spheres of society – a development supported and enhanced by technological developments.

In a contemporary common-sense understanding, surveillance is a "close watch kept over someone or something" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) or the "monitoring of behavior, many activities, or information for the purpose of information gathering, influencing, managing or directing" (Wikipedia, n.d.). This common-sense understanding of surveillance is something this book adheres to, but we aim to develop it further. In this book, we focus on one rather specific form of surveillance: surveillance related to the data-saturated society we all live in and must relate to. Hence, a concept central to the book is *online* surveillance, which – in line with our understanding of surveillance – is understood broadly: any collection of any kind of information online about persons may count as online surveillance (Leckner, 2018; compare with Fuchs, 2017; Lyon, 2014). This form of surveillance saturates modern life for most people and may go in any direction – companies and governmental organisations may surveil people, people may surveil each other, and surveillance may take place in subtle ways that are difficult for the surveilled to detect. In David Lyon's (2017, 2018) terms, we are living in a "culture of surveillance", a culture that surrounds and affects our everyday life. By studying everyday life in the culture of surveillance, this book contributes to the understanding of the time we live in. While the book is not restricted to investigations in the Nordic countries, they provide its central focus.

The aim of this book is to study people's attitudes, motives, and behaviours in relation to the fact that we live in a culture of surveillance, where personal data is gathered and analysed on a daily basis. We thus want to emphasise the need for cultural and ethical perspectives to understand and nuance contemporary discussions on surveillance, here manifested through compiling an anthology with contributions by scholars from a variety of disciplines, such as philosophy, media and communication studies, sociology and digital humanities, among others.

This anthology is an outcome of a research project "iAccept: Soft Surveillance – Between Acceptance and Resistance", the aim of which was to investigate the ways individuals and collectives working with data in Sweden (laypeople, researchers, and communication officers at political parties) approach, understand, and negotiate the impact of surveillance in their everyday lives. Such questions are represented in the contributions, but we have also broadened the scope to include more societal and cultural perspectives in a larger geographical (primarily Nordic) context, thus using the concept of surveillance culture as a point of departure.

Contextual framework

The concept of and the practices regarding a culture of surveillance have emerged due to different circumstances during the last decades. More specifically, the current situation has emerged since approximately 2000, following the distribution and implementation of the Internet as a high-speed communication system on a large scale; the so-called war on terror following the 11 September terrorist attacks in 2001; the technological development of smartphones, social media, and wearables; and the ever-growing capacity to generate, store, coordinate, and analyse data. While surveillance practices were previously done by, and associated with, discernible actors, often "from above" and directed toward potential threats (individuals or smaller collectives) to protect the state or specific interests, surveillance is today ubiquitous and performed by a variety of actors – ranging from state authorities, commercial interests, welfare institutions, to our fellow friends – with different purposes. We return to this development below, when elaborating the emergence of a culture of surveillance.

Today, data – information – is both a curse and a blessing. Data is all around us, and we continuously use and generate data through our use of social media platforms, electronic devices, banking services, and welfare systems. On the one hand, the abundance of data gives the opportunity to discern patterns, to see how different data relate, and thus to analyse and predict current and future behaviour to coordinate and optimise resources and competences for the greater good. On the other hand, the very same data can be used to surveil us and to monitor our behaviours: same data, same phenomenon, but with different purposes and outcomes, depending on who is doing the act of surveillance and with what intention. What can be seen as legitimate and motivated by a benevolent purpose can also be seen as intrusive and violating personal integrity – depending on personal outlook and the intentions behind the surveillance. This is something we can all relate to.

Let us begin by giving a contemporary example where surveillance has surfaced as a pressing and relevant issue and which highlights the tension between perceived possibilities and threats on both individual and societal levels. As we write this introduction (October 2022), we hope to put the

Covid-19 pandemic behind us, but we all remember the different restrictions and the discussions on how to stop the spread of the virus (which varied from country to country). One suggestion, implemented in some countries, was to keep track of all contaminated people through a database and a smartphone app that gave a warning if a contaminated person was in contact with a non-contaminated person. Your smartphone could also be used as a device to track your own movement and ensure that you did not leave your designated personal quarantine. Health data and place data, in this way, can be used to protect people from Covid-19, but at the possible expense of personal integrity. For some, this is considered a price worth paying to stop the pandemic, but it can also be seen as too high a price to pay in terms of integrity. This issue was discussed (quite heatedly, from time to time) through various media outlets – in traditional media and in the so-called alternative media, often on and through social media platforms (see, e.g., Andersson Schwarz et al., 2020; Westerberg, 2020).

To add another layer to this controversy, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and also Google, began moderating and checking posted content related to Covid-19, which, on the one hand, was seen as relevant and necessary in order to prevent the spreading of misinformation, but on the other, could be seen as intrusive and biased – again, all depending on individual beliefs and opinions. Proponents of restrictions were confronted by those against restrictions, and vice versa, where the tech companies – through the data we share – could monitor and steer the discussion through its algorithms. Whether this is good or bad is not our current question, but we note how the use of data can both mobilise and polarise discussions and people – against each other, and in relation to a public debate. Here, people are surveilled but are also surveillers, through a web of intertwining relations between authorities, media, tech companies, and fellow citizens, affecting both the public and personal spheres, and affecting behaviour and intellectual discourse. This is only one example; the chapters in this volume elaborate on additional examples of this phenomenon, adding complexity and concretisation to the culture of surveillance.

The process toward increasing surveillance is present, and the possibilities of increased access to data are often praised by, for example, the United Nations, OPEC, the European Union, and national governments, under the term of digital transformation. Digital transformation is deemed beneficial for health research, resource optimisation, democratisation, and more. On an everyday micro level, people are affected by this process and must relate to it, mentally and practically.

Toward a culture of surveillance

The ubiquitous and everyday aspect of surveillance calls for cultural and ethical perspectives on surveillance, in order to understand the complexity of being a

human in the culture of surveillance. By referring to a culture of surveillance, we here adhere to and draw on what Torin Monahan (2011: 495) referred to as "surveillance as cultural practice", a practice that involves the study of social practices in different cultural contexts, "likely to try to comprehend people's engagement with surveillance on their own terms" (Monahan, 2011: 495).

However, even though this ubiquitous surveillance situation is noticeable – and currently changing how we all live our lives – it has been difficult to empirically study everyday life in a digitally permeated society, as discussed by Ball, Haggerty, and Lyon (2012), and further developed by, for example, Green and Zurawski (2015), and Eley and Rampton (2020), who started to take more of an anthropological or ethnographic approach to surveillance. Also, Bucher (2017: 31) noted the lack of empirical studies of the realities of a digital everyday life: "there is not much existing research on the ways in which people experience and perceive algorithms as part of their everyday life". Hence, this book aims to study people's attitudes, motives, and behaviours and will allow us to capture and interpret practices and ideas in relation to the culture of surveillance.

Our point of departure is David Lyon's concept "culture of surveillance" (2018), or "surveillance culture" (2017), which he uses to describe and understand how surveillance affects us all:

> [Surveillance] is no longer merely something external that impinges on our lives. It is something that everyday citizens comply with – willingly and wittingly, or not – negotiate, resist, engage with, and, in novel ways, even initiate and desire. From being an institutional aspect of modernity or a technologically enhanced mode of social discipline or control, it is now internalized and forms part of everyday reflections on how things are and of the repertoire of everyday practices. (Lyon, 2017: 825).

If surveillance is intertwined into all our lives, creating the culture in which we live, as Lyon (and Monahan, 2011) claims, then this calls for research from humanist and cultural perspectives, meaning that scholars from fields such as cultural studies, philosophy, history, language studies, and so on are urged to bring their perspectives and interpretations when trying to understand "the culture of surveillance". What does it mean for people to live in, and have to deal with, a surveillance culture? How do people handle this situation – in terms of compliance, resistance, or ignorance? How has this changed through time? What implications does surveillance have on personal integrity and human rights? These are questions that scholars from aforementioned fields are well apt to discuss and provide answers to.

From surveillance state to surveillance culture

The development towards a data-saturated society during the last couple of decades has meant that a label such as "surveillance state" (Balkin, 2008)

seems somewhat outdated. Balkin brings forward important cautions regarding the increasing government use of surveillance and data mining in the US. Although he points out how private corporations are more involved in surveillance, for example, regarding tastes and preferences among customers, Balkin's focus is on top-down surveillance by different government agencies. When Balkin observes the development towards intertwined public and private surveillance, he tends to view the latter as a dangerous supplement of the former. Instead, we need to understand how the traditional notion of surveillance as something carried out by government agencies against the citizens needs to be amended to accommodate a more pervasive form of surveillance. The possibilities to use data to surveil individuals by government agencies, for example, through policing and the provision of social services, have been refined together with the implementation of digital communication.

Instead of the Orwellian dystopia, in which the individual is monitored by the state, surveillance today permeates everyday life. Haggarty and Ericsson (2000: 606) use the concept of "surveillant assemblage" to describe how human bodies are abstracted from their spatial settings and separated into a multitude of data flows. Information about individuals is then collected from these flows and reassembled as "data doubles", which in turn are scrutinised and used by a range of actors. This development was observed as early as the 1980s by Clarke (1988), when he introduced the concept of "dataveillance". He defined it as "the systematic use of personal data systems in the investigation or monitoring of the actions or communications of one or more persons" (Clarke, 1988: 499). According to van Dijck (2014), this dataveillance differs from traditional surveillance, because surveillance is used for a specific purpose, while dataveillance is the continuous tracking of data *without* clear purposes. With the ever-growing possibilities of data collection and data analyses, dataveillance penetrates every aspect of our culture and everyday life.

For Zuboff (2015), Big Data is the central component of a new logic of accumulation that she calls "surveillance capitalism". The new global data collection has created new monetisation opportunities due to the ways large corporations, especially tech firms such as Google, can predict and modify human behaviour. Zuboff stresses how the use of Big Data by corporations and other organisations – in other words, dataveillance – should be seen not as an inevitable technology effect but as the intentional creation of the industry (see Zuboff, 2019).

The development towards ever increasing collection of data and surveillance by corporations and government agencies has also contributed to the spread of counter-surveillance among marginalised groups and social justice activists. An important part of this work has constituted "sousveillance", the use of the new surveillance technologies to surveil those in power and hold them accountable (Mann et al., 2003). Not least has this taken the form of monitoring police

interventions using video, audio. and even specific smartphone apps (Bärbel, 2020). Borradaile and Reeves (2020), though, highlighted how even these protest movements become incorporated in surveillance capitalism, due to the ways they rely on major tech and communications firms for both hardware and software.

The concept of a culture of surveillance reveals how surveillance is something we nowadays live in, and which we all, on a daily basis and more or less continuously, must negotiate with. This concept is developed from Lyon's earlier concept of surveillance society (where surveillance still has discernible actors and a top-down perspective), broadening the scope to include non-discernible actors and the all-encompassing nature of surveillance in contemporary society:

> Once thought of mainly as the world of private investigators, police and security agencies, the means of surveillance now also flow freely through many media into the hands of the general public. This has helped to create an emerging surveillance culture – the everyday webs of social relations, including shared assumptions and behaviours, existing among all actors and agencies associated with surveillance. (Lyon, 2018: 30)

This culture is significant for our present day and has grown out of technical achievements (social media, Internet access, and portable Internet-connected devices), the digital transformation of society and businesses, and events such as 9/11, the following war on terror (which grew out of security concerns), the Cambridge Analytica affair, and so on. Lyon himself defines culture in line with Raymond Williams (1958) as a "whole way of life", that is, a complex web of practicalities, norms, and ideas that we all are embedded in.

In order to understand and study how people relate to, and negotiate, the culture of surveillance, Lyon (2018) divides the culture into the related concepts of surveillance imaginaries (what people think about and are influenced by) and surveillance practices (what people *do* in relation to their imaginaries concerning surveillance). Our imaginaries are formulated by public debate, science, law, popular culture, and so on, and constitute a framework – a discourse – to which we respond in different ways.

The Nordic region as a context

While surveillance has a global impact and affects societies all around the world, this anthology focuses on surveillance in the Nordics. In many ways, the Nordics are an exception in the world, well-illustrated by the Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map (World Values Survey, 2022), where the Nordic countries are shown to favour self-expression and non-traditional and secular values.

In the 2021 report from The Swedish Internet Foundation (2021: para. 1–3), Sweden is described as,

a society that is largely digitised and where online life for most people is a natural part of work, school, and spare time. Of the entire population in Sweden, 9 out of 10 use the internet every day [and] 9 out of 10 use various public e-services provided by, for example, The Swedish Tax Agency, The Swedish Social Insurance Agency, healthcare or the library.

This high degree of connectivity and extensive use of the Internet and digital services is similar in the other Nordic countries, where the development of digital infrastructures is a process that has been going on for decades. The Nordics were early adopters of the Internet and digital technologies, and several social projects supported the implementation of computers and connectivity at home and in work life. It is important to note that Internet and social media use are not confined to young and middle-aged people. In Sweden, for example, approximately 80 per cent of 60–80-year-olds use social media platforms at least once a week (The Swedish Internet Foundation, 2021). This implies that we do not only find a high degree of connectivity with high-speed Internet, but also a high level of digital literacy in the Nordic societies. Therefore, this anthology presents a digital reality that might illustrate a near future for other countries of Europe and in the world.

Another aspect specific to the Nordic countries that we find key to understanding the advancement and digitalisation of our societies – and, consequently, core to understanding the surveillance culture – is the fact that Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark are all high-trust nations, something that is confirmed by the results of, for example, European Value Surveys and the World Happiness Report, among others (see, e.g., Martela et al., 2020). Previous research about attitudes to surveillance (e.g., Denemark, 2012; Svenonius & Björklund, 2018) indicates that social and institutional trust plays a key role in the acceptance of surveillance. But also, research shows the key role of privacy concerns, and not least how cultural origin must be taken into account in order to understand attitudes to surveillance (Svenonius & Björklund, 2018).

Content of the book

In addition to this introduction and a concluding chapter, this volume consists of nine contributions that together cover a wide range of themes and content, ranging from general theoretical issues pertaining to life in a culture of surveillance, to investigations of particular surveillance aspects and contexts, including studies focusing on the Nordic countries.

The first four chapters centre around different digital practices deeply intertwined with everyday life – practices which all involve a relation to data collection, data analysis, and ultimately, to surveillance.

In Chapter 1, "Being played in everyday life: Massive data collection on mobile games as part of ludocapitalist surveillance dispositif", Maude

Bonenfant, Alexandra Dumont, and Laura Iseut Lafrance St-Martin discuss and problematise everyday surveillance in mobile gaming, drawing attention to associated ethical considerations and examining how gamers are involved in the trivialisation of this surveillance practice. The authors thoroughly explain the mechanisms and purposes of data collection, thus providing a useful background to the subsequent chapters.

The ethical dimension of data collection is further elaborated in Chapter 2, "To be a face in the crowd: Surveillance, facial recognition, and a right to obscurity", where Shawn Kaplan scrutinises the ethics of video surveillance, particularly the need to reconsider our guiding principles in this area considering the emergence of facial recognition technology. Kaplan reveals the multifaceted ethical dimension of video surveillance (and surveillance in general), discussing the practical need to articulate a novel right to obscurity, in addition to the commonly acknowledged right to privacy, in order to protect the interests pertinent to liberal democracies.

In Chapter 3, "To see and be seen: Gynaeopticism and platform surveillance in influencer marketing", Johanna Arnesson and Eric Carlsson deal with surveillance practices in the digital marketing industry by exploring what types of surveillance are present in the influencer industry. Based on empirical examples from Sweden, with special focus on a group of successful influencers in the lifestyle and fashion genre, Arnesson and Carlsson discuss how different dimensions of surveillance – self, peer, and top-down – are manifested, exploited, and contested.

Chapter 4, "Tracking (in)fertile bodies: Intimate data in the culture of surveillance", centres around the practice of fertility self-tracking, through which women, with the help of digital tracking devices and mobile apps, track symptoms and signs relating to their menstrual cycle. Based on interviews with eleven women (ten Swedish and one Finnish) who engage in fertility self-tracking, Kristina Stenström investigates the participants' motives for engaging in fertility self-tracking and their understandings of the intimate surveillance involved.

Although the Nordic context is apparent in the latter two chapters, the following four chapters turn attention to the conditions in the Nordics more directly. Three of them focus on how young people perceive, relate to, and think about privacy and online surveillance in different contexts, looking at Sweden, Finland, and Norway, respectively, whereas one is more general regarding age, and discusses online surveillance in a Danish context.

In Chapter 5, "It all depends on context: Danes' attitudes towards surveillance", Rikke Frank Jørgensen proceeds from the Danish Values Survey in her analysis of Danish citizens' views on three categories of state surveillance – CCTV surveillance in public places; monitoring of information exchanged on the Internet; and the collection of information about citizens without their

knowledge – and she explores how and why their attitudes to these types of surveillance differ.

In Chapter 6, "Accepting or rejecting online surveillance: The case of Swedish students", Lars Samuelsson draws on a survey of approximately 1,000 Swedish students to discuss how young Swedes think about the justifiability of online surveillance. He considers three conditions that might increase the acceptance of such surveillance – that surveillance results in personal benefits; that it has been consented to; and that society can benefit from it – and discusses to what extent they seem to affect the students' acceptance of being surveilled.

Chapter 7, "Smartphone privacy: Finnish young people's perceptions of privacy regarding data collected when using their mobile devices", turns attention to Finnish teenagers' experiences of privacy in relation to their use of smartphones. Adopting a mixed-methods approach combining concept mapping, Q-sorting, and in-depth interviews, Liisa A. Mäkinen and Johanna Junnila examine what kinds of factors are meaningful for young people when considering phone-related privacy, and how their desires for privacy vary in terms of different audiences.

Chapter 8, "Omnipresent publicness: Social media natives and protective strategies of non-participation in online surveillance", focuses on the question of how young people in Norway, accustomed to online spaces as part of social life, evaluate and use social media as private and public spaces. Drawing on eleven in-depth interviews with Norwegian young adults, Luise Salte investigates experiences and strategies concerning privacy and online surveillance of social media natives in relation to their use of social media platforms.

In the final contribution to the book, Chapter 9, "Kant's ethics in the age of online surveillance: An appeal to autonomy", we return to general theoretical aspects of surveillance. Here, Casey Rentmeester puts surveillance in a philosophical context, analysing the contemporary paradigm of online surveillance by unpacking the power dynamics involved in online surveillance. Utilising Immanuel Kant's ethics and political philosophy, Rentmeester argues that respect for personal autonomy must be at the forefront of the ethics of online surveillance. In addition to this argument, Rentmeester also introduces various philosophical aspects of surveillance, drawing attention to the importance of attending to such theoretical aspects of the issue.

Conclusion

These nine chapters together illustrate and emphasise multiple aspects of everyday surveillance – this culture of surveillance that charaterises contemporary societies. In this anthology, researchers from a variety of disciplines shed light on the complex web of surveillance culture, and perspectives from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden are complemented

with perspectives on more general, and in some cases pressing, issues in relation to contemporary surveillance. In addition, these contributions point at the need for further research within and beyond the context of our Nordic societies, as discussed in the Afterword.

With this anthology, we hope to contribute to updating and broadening the field of surveillance studies by providing approaches from the humanities and social sciences. Together, the different contributions in this anthology highlight the need to critically discuss technological, social, political, and economical developments coming with the ongoing process toward the digital transformation of society that builds upon the collection, coordination, and interpretation of data. The concept of surveillance has indeed had negative connotations throughout history due to its top-down character, where the intention has been to control and domesticise people. The emergent culture of surveillance implies a need to nuance the picture. Sweeping ethical judgements about surveillance no longer come out as plausible given the multi-directedness of contemporary surveillance. The line between the surveiller and the surveilled is blurred, and we are all both objects and subjects of surveillance: We all both benefit from and are victimised by surveillance processes. This anthology is a contribution to the necessary conversation regarding our future in a data-driven society.

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