



Abstract: *With the advancement in technology over the past few decades, there has been a rapid increase in state of the art surveillance tools and techniques. Surveillance is becoming a global issue in the digital age. The world is compelled to understand the dynamics of surveillance in the contemporary world. Surveillance has changed from being physical and spatial to being networked and it relies heavily on modern technology. So, it is indispensable to recognise the ever-changing forms of surveillance. The capacity of surveillance has dramatically increased with new digital technology. It has become an important issue in surveillance studies and we need to understand its intangible risks and complexities in the digital age. The revisitation of the ideas of Jeremy Bentham, Michel Foucault, Karl Marx as well as those of contemporary social theorists like David Lyon, Zygmunt Bauman, Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze and others plays a vital role in the development and understanding of new theoretical approaches in surveillance studies. With the rise in surveillance tools and techniques there has also been a change in power dynamics in the society. So, surveillance studies not only provide a helping hand to understand the complexities of new and different forms of surveillance but also help to understand the changing power dynamics in the society. Living in a ‘Surveillance Society’ has led to new, different and extreme forms of power and control. The misuse of surveillance technologies leads to exploitation of the masses, discloses their intimate lives as well as becomes a threat to privacy and freedom of expression and liberty. The world should be made conscious of the repercussions associated with surveillance in the digital world.*

Key Words: Foucault, Surveillance, Bauman, Panopticon, Digital Age, Technology

Introduction

This paper discusses how modern surveillance is a growing concern in the digital age. It has led to new and a major paradigm shift in surveillance studies. With the development of information technology and digitization of information, surveillance is becoming a relevant issue in the contemporary world. It is becoming more and more important to understand the dynamics of surveillance. Through digital technology, the information is provided to state and other institutions of power consequently for surveillance and control. (Best, 2010) While discussing surveillance, one can not possibly ignore the influential work of Michel Foucault. The concept of ‘Panopticon’ was introduced in his work published as *Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison* (1975), also known as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. This concept, used extensively in Foucault’s work in the study of surveillance, has been borrowed from English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. (Yalçin, 2018).

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Contemporary and emerging scholars interested in surveillance studies have used this metaphor of panopticon to analyze, interpret and understand modern surveillance. The digitalisation of the world has increased the ability of modern ‘watchers’ including the state, business firms and organizations to have more power and control over the ones being watched. (Manokha, 2018) So the growth in surveillance tools and techniques has also led to a change in the power dynamics of the society. Modern technologies are enabling different and new forms of surveillance. Surveillance theories provide a way for us to be conscious of the repercussions associated with modern and virtual surveillance technologies. David Lyon, Zygmunt Bauman, Deleuze, Guattari and other contemporary theorists have helped to analyse post-panoptic approaches in relation to surveillance and power in the current era.

Panopticon in the Writings of Bentham and Foucault

Bentham’s idea of Panopticon was based on a circular shaped prison with an investigation room in the centre so that “a functionary standing or sitting on the central point, had it in his power to commence and conclude a survey of the whole establishment in the twinkling of an eye” (Bentham, quoted in Couch et al 2020) According to Bentham: ‘The two basic elements of the panoptic building are its central surveillance system and the invisibility of the eye. That the eye may observe without being seen-that is the most cunning thing about the Panopticon’ (Miller, 2016) Panopticon can be defined as:

‘A hypothetical prison proposed by Jeremy Bentham, so arranged that all parts of the interior are visible from a single point’(American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Collins English Dictionary)

‘The omnipresence of the inspector’ is an important characteristic of the Panopticon. The inspector can examine and scrutinise all the inmates present inside but he is invisible to all of them. In the classical analysis and translation of Bentham’s idea of Panopticon by Jacques-Alain Miller, it is mentioned that ‘Panopticon is a machine that creates the semblance of God’ Miller has argued that just like God, the inspector has powers. He can spy, he can watch, he can study the habits of the inmates, and learn about their weaknesses. He is all-seeing. (Miller) The Panopticon draws in two sides of power. First, the power of the inspector who is all-seeing and can observe every inmate. He has power over them and can discipline them by punishing them if they violate any rule. The other side of power is the power of individuals over themselves. The inmates know that they are constantly being watched so they exercise self-discipline to conform to the rules. (Manokha, 2018)

The Foucauldian notion of Panopticon was introduced in Foucault’s *Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison* (1975), also known as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault used the term ‘Panopticism’ while analysing the history of modern penal systems to understand the dimensions of power in the context of punishment as a form of social control. He used Bentham’s prison design in his analysis. This design was first used in the study of prisons but later on applied to other parts of society to understand power relations. It served as a model of power that extends beyond the prison arrangement to other segments and institutions of society just like schools, factory, and hospitals. (Galič et al, 2016) Foucault (1997) argues that ‘the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power’ (p. 201) So, according to Foucault, the permanence of being watched does not matter for the exertion and functioning of power. What matters is the fact that the inmates do not know when they are being watched. This leads to the *internalisation of the watchtower’s gaze*. This creates such a situation in which power is being exercised automatically by the individual upon himself in the form of self-discipline because he subconsciously thinks that he is being watched all the time. (Caluya, 2010)

This system of power sometimes remains concealed and is overlooked but it most definitely has become a major part of our everyday lives. It has incorporated into the actions, attitudes, and even in everyday learning processes of individuals. This is where Foucault coins the term '*Disciplinary society*' Under different institutions i.e, schools, hospitals, factory, military, our daily life activities have constantly been under surveillance. Because of constantly being monitored, individuals become docile and compliant because they have internalised control and surveillance as a mechanism of everyday life. Hence, they will no longer resist. Discipline leads to the process of '*Normation*' Foucault argues that an ideal and standard form of conduct or behaviour is formed through this disciplinising power. Any individual who deviates from the 'normal' behaviour will be showing abnormality in behaviour. An abnormal individual is seen as inferior and inadequate as compared to the normal individual. So being disciplined means being subjected to normation and it is done through punishment and control. ([Galič et al, 2016](#))

Bentham and Foucault provide structural and architectural theories of surveillance. Their ideas can be replicated in the context of today's technological era (For example, the way CCTV operates and monitors individuals and similarly other forms of electronic surveillance) To understand surveillance in the digital era we need to discuss Post-Panoptic theories of surveillance because the idea of surveillance has radically changed in this particular era from being physical and spatial to being networked and it relies highly on digital technology which does not include the presence of a physical space. ([Galič et al, 2016](#))

The Post Panoptic Approach to Surveillance

Post-Panoptic theories provide a new theoretical framework in surveillance studies. The works of Lyon, Bauman, Deleuze and Guattari bring forth a fresh lens to understand modern surveillance in the age of Information Technology. Haggerty and Ericson argue that 'rapid technological developments, particularly the rise of computerized databases, require us to rethink the panoptic metaphor' (2000, p. 607).

We can also replicate Bentham and Foucault idea to understand surveillance in today's digital era. The basic idea is that the inspector can see the inmates where as the inmates can't see the inspector. This is an accurate representation of social media because: One can not see how and by whom the data is being collected on social media websites. One can also not see the data collection done by the government. And one can not see where and how the data is being collected and used, i.e the Data Mining process. Even though social media users are unaware of the data mining process, yet they voluntarily chose to be part of a networked group where they have a digital presence and are visible to others. Given that, each social media user is just like the inmate inside the panoptic prison because his/her information is visible and can be accessed at any moment without them being aware. Similarly, it's an individuals own choice whether they want to be part of an on-line community/space or not. Since it is individual's own choice, they are subjected to being more conscious of their permanent visibility on digital spaces. The idea of self-discipline can also be applied in the case of social media usage. Users know the regulations, the rules, the norms of social media. So, they tend to follow those principles (in most cases) and choose what to share and what not to share. ([Stein, 2016](#))

With the development of computers and digital systems, information can be stored, searched and accessed more easily than ever before. Digital systems can cross-check data with the help of database systems and also profile and sort individuals. With the development of biometric facial recognition techniques and tools, it has become more and more easier to control and monitor individuals.

Furthermore, with the rise of social media usage, the amount of data has exponentially increased. Information under the control of governments, social media websites owners and other institutions is now gigantic and enormous. (Manokha, 2018) Bauman has coined the term 'Liquid Surveillance' which is very much relevant in the context of this digital age. According to this, surveillance has changed from one form to other forms. The lines between various kinds of 'watchers' have become distorted and blurred. As Lyon (2010) states that 'The concept of liquid surveillance captures the reduction of the body to data and the creation of data-doubles on which life-chances and choices hang more significantly than on our real lives and the stories we tell about them.' (p. 325) Lyon states that we live in a surveillance society. Which means that modern surveillance has seeped into our everyday lives ubiquitously. A huge part of what we do on-line as well as in real life gets monitored and recorded. Data flows more freely and due to this, the notion 'liquid surveillance' seeks to explain the fragility and inconsistency of social bonds because trust can be corroded any-time. The spread of vulnerability and suspicion in this era has led to surveillance being a major part of our everyday lives which is in turn because of the gigantic amount of information present in world today. The concept of Liquid Surveillance helps us understand how the dynamic landscape of technology has its own repercussions.

Deleuze and Guattari have also provided a new perspective in the field of surveillance studies. Haggerty and Ericson (2000) have analysed the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari. It has served to explain how previously distinct and separate systems of surveillance have now assembled and converged all together. According to them, 'The resultant 'surveillant assemblage' operates by abstracting human bodies from their territorial settings and separating them into a series of discrete flows. These flows are then reassembled in different locations as discrete and virtual 'data doubles' (pg. 605) For example, the police have a different system and database. Similarly, the FBI Forensics have different ones. With the convergence of these two database systems, the Police can link with the FBI to obtain fingerprints and DNA in their investigation.

'Phone conversations, reports, tip-offs, hunches, consumer and social security databases, crime data, phone bugging, audio, video and pictures, and data communications are inputted into a seamless GIS' [geo-graphic information systems] (Norris and Armstrong (1997) quoted in Haggerty and Ericson. (pg. 610)

Deleuze and Guattari have also coined this term of 'Rhizomatic Surveillance' Rhizomes are basically the underground roots and stems of the plants and through them new roots and shoots develop. They grow exponentially. This concept can be used to understand modern surveillance which is ever-increasing and growing day by day. Rhizome metaphor is used to understand two basic characteristics of surveillance today. First, it also grows tremendously and secondly, it also has several different branches which explain how different surveillance systems have been converged. (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000)

Another recent and new approach in surveillance studies is the addition of the concept of 'Surveillance Capitalism' Surveillance and Capitalism have had a very deep connection and it can still be seen in capitalist societies. Even Marx thought that surveillance was a fundamental aspect of this capitalist society. So surveillance has very broad understandings and can also be seen as an economic as well as a political concept. Surveillance is not only a method of controlling and regulating workers but it also serves to dominate people. This term was first coined by Bellamy and McChesney (2014) but more comprehensively developed by Zuboff (2015, 2016) (Galič et al, 2016)

Conclusion

Theoretical approaches in surveillance studies help us to analyse how modern surveillance has become a global concern. It has led to a change in power dynamics of the society which has resulted in extreme power and control over the masses by government and other institutions of power. Surveillance abuse has led to exploitation of the masses by invading their intimate and personal space and hence has become a threat to privacy. Surveillance at workplace is another form of capitalist exploitation. Surveillance has seeped into our everyday lives but the ethical and social concerns related to surveillance need to be addressed properly.

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