Cultures of Surveillance
Privacy and Compliant Exchange

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The range of questions associated with surveillance is broad: it implies a serious security issue of military character. It is a technological function that is used by corporations in order to generate surplus value. It can be seen as a playful aspect of personal relationships. As the level of digital media penetration in everyday life continues to increase, we witness the emergence of new, subtle, forms of monitoring and surveillance. In an era of media abundance and visibility, both private and social-professional domains are ripe with value for data brokers. A survey of 2000 people in the UK indicates that close to 80 per cent of those surveyed feel their friendship connections would be lost if they do not remain linked via social media. Over 70 per cent opine online connectivity strengthened their friendship ties (Gayle 2016). Public surveys and academic research also show that many users are not aware of the extent to which online and mobile platforms share personal data and/or allow for pervasive monitoring (Christensen 2014; Christensen & Jansson 2015). Services that are commonly used for networking and communication do not necessarily give their users much choice about how their information is used. Younger users are particularly vulnerable to privacy violations since terms and conditions of use on mediated platforms are not always readily accessible.

To date, much has been written about privacy, in sociology, legal studies, media studies and political science. The significance of privacy in relation to digital surveillance is apparent: mass, indiscriminate surveillance and collation of personal data constitutes a threat to civil rights and liberties. It is a major concern particularly in relation to new and recently adopted ICTs and applications (cf. Lyon 2003; 2007; 2014). Despite the sizeable volume of research produced on privacy, it remains an elusive concept which is difficult to pin down in our continuously changing techno-ecologies. Privacy has been invoked in overtly individualized rhetoric in studies overemphasizing the role of choice and self-determination in the digital environment. Other studies relying on political economic approaches underscore the corporate and exploitative dynamics in play. Andrejevic (2012, 2014), for one, discusses the relationship between corporate entities and consumers via social media as "exploitative capital labor" and as "gift economy":

> New media technologies may help level the playing field in some respects by
> widening access to the means of creating and distributing a range of cultural and
> informational products, but they also create new asymmetries. Google may know
> a lot about users' patterns of browsing, emailing and eventually mobility, but us-
> ers know very little about what information is collected about them and how it is
> being put to use. (Andrejevic 2012: 76)

As Andrejevic observes, a great deal is expected from consumers without compensation. This asymmetry also largely applies to commercial benefits generated with the use of location-based services, store cards and mobile apps.

How can we conceive of privacy in today's ever-changing digital worlds and vis-à-vis increased surveillance? Is privacy simply a common social good? A key power-node in the tension field between network capitalism that relies on mediatized surveillance to generate profits and consumers and citizenry? A highly valuable social asset which is multiply re-interpreted? Solove (2008) refers to privacy as a "family" of related issues. The complex architecture of digital communications today and its social significance means that sense of identity and the evolving notions of privacy are concerns for a variety of social actors and factions from innovators to industry to policymakers and politicians to educators to parents. The technologies and applications themselves as well as the social contexts and geographies/places in which they are adopted and used have key bearings here. Cumulatively, these factors point to the importance of conducting socially situated, empirical studies to generate up-to-date data in our efforts to arrive at nuanced understandings of privacy and practices of surveillance.

In this essay, I invoke *surveillance* and questions of *privacy* in relation to current modes of everyday communications and the ensuing dynamics of interconnection and flexibility/freedom on the one hand, and encapsulation and control/monitoring on the other. In a mediatized, highly networked environment, everyday uses of technology come with ethical and social concerns and consequences, with privacy clearly scoring high on the list for all stakeholders involved. I suggest there are two primary, interlinked, lines of critical inquiry that we should take on board when thinking about such questions and the social-historical contingencies these might entail.

Market-media-state and a (new) geopolitics of fear

The first line of inquiry concerns the sociopolitical context/s within which to regard the scope and scale of everyday surveillance we encounter and related questions of power. Market forces, the media, and corporate and state powers are to be considered in conjunction with each other. An increased dependence on the media; commodification of communications; and a pervasive *geopolitics of fear*, elevated due to frequent incidents of violence as well as migratory flows, lead to formations of social space where we are no longer positioned vis-à-vis surveillance but are situated *in* it (see Christensen 2011; 2014; Jansson & Christensen 2014).

In trying to grasp the factors that define the current environment, a historical emphasis on the emergence and evolution of surveillance as a social practice remains essential. Surveillance and collation of data are key definers of modernity and part and parcel of the nation-state apparatus. "Old" media such as the telephone, the phonograph and

photography (cf. Lauer 2011) as well as newer forms of evidence-producing tech-nologies each constituted turning points in redrawing the borders of privacy. It goes without saying that digitality has been one such big game changer. From Google maps to Facebook and Twitter, surveillance today cannot be thought of without reference to personal technologies. Yet, technology itself cannot be divorced from the sociopoliti-cal and cultural contexts which shape attitudes toward it and prevalent patterns of use. Popular culture, film in particular, has been rife with examples of various forms and modes of surveillance throughout the decades leading up to the media abundance of the twenty-first century. Reflexive films from the 1980s such as *Brazil* and *1984* portray schizoid bureaucracies. Examples such as *Ed TV*, *Truman Show* and *Sliver* turn a critical eye to the phenomenon of reality TV and entertaining voyeurism of the 1990s. *Eagle Eye*, *Echelon Conspiracy* and *Bourne Identity* underline the increasing pervasiveness and personalization of surveillant technologies and relational dimensions between the institutional and the individual.

The past century has been abundant with historic moments of widespread panic and long decades where a geopolitics of fear reigned supreme: two world wars, the Cold War, conflicts in the Middle East, 9/11 and the war on terror, to name but few. While fear was very much existent and came in many faces and scopes in the decades preceding 9/11, this mediatized, visually haunting, attack on American soil and the following – so-called – "War on Terror" marked the start of a deeper sense of coercion and control through fear. For example, the bulk of the data collected by the US National Security Agency (NSA) is metadata, meaning not only the content of communication, but the address (e.g. phone number dialed), time and location of contact are also recorded. Similar practices are legalized and adopted in other countries. There are also counterhegemonic uses of technologies of surveillance. Information revealed by WikiLeaks in 2011 was ground-breaking in many ways. Documents leaked by Edward Snowden, an ex-CIA employee, about the surveillance practices of the US government made a massive global impact.

In sum, power today, as we know it, exists in global space and across offline and online territories. Surveillance power is used by government departments, by police and military and by private corporations. One main line of inquiry then most obvi-ously concerns surveillance capacities and power across scales with the specificities of space-time remaining as key. People's opportunities, chances in life and personal and professional choices may be improved or constrained through surveillance power in areas ranging from medical care to travel and mobility to personal, banal uses of social media. Surveillance, privacy and power are to be considered in the context of political economies and institutions that utilize personal data and insert control, and geopolitical power hierarchies that shape the directionality and extent of information flows.

Cultures of Compliant Exchange

In the geopolitically shaped and globally linked milieus of fear where media cultures abide, digitized monitoring becomes further integrated in everyday life and habitual realms as a normalized ordinary, often invisible, practice. *Everyday* is the site where affect and emotions and geopolitics and macro power meet each other. In a multitude of ways, digital integration enhances the sense of ontological security (Giddens 1991), making us *compliant subjects* of our own surveillance. Conversely, it adds to fears of

exposure and vulnerable visibility in the porous technological environments we find ourselves in. This brings us to our second inquiry: namely, surveillance, social practice and complicity (Christensen 2014). It involves questions related to the entertainment dimension, everyday practicalities, monitoring through popular media and technologies such as smart television and mobile apps where each piece of data is stored. While globalization, mobility and macro power dynamics constitute vital components in understanding surveillance and privacy, sociological considerations of place and human–technology relationships are equally necessary.

The exponentially increasing scale of surveillance is simply intimidating. There are around 1.5 billion Facebook users, 6 billion emails per hour and over 7 billion mobile phones around the globe (Pfleeger 2014). We create data trails not only by engaging in point-to-point personal communications, but also by way of our use of personalized apps such as Fitbit, SleepCycle and MyFitnessPal. New forms of mediation yield *cultures of compliant exchange* which it is essential to scrutunize in order to grasp social surveillance in its entirety.

To understand today's surveillance cultures at the everyday level, then, one needs to account for the variety of mediatized practices and relationships that are available (both at institutional and collective and individual levels) and how such personal phenomena play into power across scales. Mediatization here refers to a historical meta-process, similar to the meta-processes of globalization and commercialization. Forms, contents, technologies and institutions of media integrate with all aspects of life from intimate relations to politics (cf. Krotz 2001, 2008; Schulz 2004; Christensen & Jansson 2015, 2015a), Through mediatization, society becomes increasingly dependent on individually and collectively-mediated *capabilities* of communication technologies to generate value (see also Schulz 2004; Couldry 2008; Hepp 2010).

Our fieldwork, the results of which have appeared in various publications (cf. Christensen et al. 2011; Christensen 2014; Jansson & Christensen 2014; Christensen & Jansson 2015), consists of an ethnographic approach and qualitative interviews and observations conducted between 2008 and 2011 primarily in Sweden. In order to discern how individuals and communities are positioned socially (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, class, geography, professional field), we drew upon Bourdieu's (1979/1984; 1980/1990) theories of habitus and social field as well as the phenomenology of technology (Ihde 1990) and social phenomenology (Schutz & Luckman 1973). Bourdieu provides an intermediary analytical tool between the macro realm of political economic considerations and everyday subjective dimensions. Phenomenology allows for a closer, "inside", view of the lifeworlds and human–technology interrelations.

Our qualitative interviews from various locations in Sweden (e.g. rural areas, inner-city areas and suburban migrant neighbourhoods) are illustrative of the significance and persistence of both locational elements and social-familial dynamics in shaping everyday mediations and interpretations of privacy. While some results, such as increasing media dependence, are overarching, others, such as levels of trust or technology preference, can be context, time/place, gender or age specific. One such result worth noting here is how some individuals, younger people in particular, regarded mobile phones as "internal technologies" and were more reluctant to see them as top-down surveillance or invasive devices. In contrast, CCTV cameras were regarded as "external" objects and more problematic in relation to personal privacy.

Digital media and personalized technologies may enable geographically extended experiences and deepened senses of social community, security and fun. They also tie the individual to systems that enable tracking and monitoring of their consumption habits, mobility and private interests. In seeking to establish a framework within which to explore the interlinkages of surveillance and mediatization, Giddens' (1990, 1991) notion of "abstract systems" (such as air travel or banking) has relevance here. Abstract systems entail that ontological security and everyday mediations are increasingly dependent upon trust in technological systems. In other words, just as we get on a vehicle in order to have mobility (and without necessarily knowing much about how that technology functions or its safety features), we tend to adopt ICTs and various apps more easily especially when these become common or normal within our social networks. Privacy may be diminished or, as our studies showed, redefined as "personal data modulation" in such contexts even though we may not immediately grasp the extent or consequences of data visibility. On the whole, current forms of surveillance increasingly depend on the compliant exchange of information and services through personalized media use, giving surveillance a *complicit* character.

Complicit surveillance provides a critical and rounded framework within which to consider social practices and human–technology interactions, economic structures and accompanying power hierarchies that produce particular forms of social relations. Accounting for the dynamics shaping complicity in everyday surveillance should not, however, deceptively mean that we can shift the focus away from corporate and state responsibility and place it in the user/consumer domain. What the complicity in question here entails is that surveillance, in its liquidified forms, seeps into every aspect of life and we are positioned in its midst. And it is not only users who are made complicit in surveillance. Architecture of the technologies themselves, spaces of living, working and travelling, are increasingly designed to allow for monitoring and data collection. Sensor-based technologies that are pinned on clothing or worn on body parts and linked to smartphones to monitor and measure eating habits or social interactions add to this level of complexity.

Final remarks

As discussed in this essay, mediatization, commercialization and globalization are defining characteristics of our late-modern societies and surveillance is integral to life in highly complex ways. It is not only social and professional fields that are saturated with media and communication technologies, but also our most private domains from sleep-time to parenthood and child rearing to food consumption to intimate relations. Narratives that focus on the implications of commodified communications and forces of network capitalism need to be considered in conjunction with sociological accounts detailing how technology is absorbed into everyday contexts. Struggles over both sending and receiving information and cultural and political struggles for self-determination remain enmeshed with dynamics of mediation and surveillance.

In mediatized geographies of visibility, where the fabric of life is rearranged around technology use, the lines between public and private, and use and abuse of data, become easily blurred. While practical considerations and personal needs to remain connected on the part of the users might outweigh ethical concerns, responsibility cannot be

placed on the individual. In rethinking surveillance and privacy, and opportunities and threats that come with technology, several tropes need to be considered in relation to each other: global network capitalism (i.e. the market); penetration and habituation of technology (i.e. the media and users); and, institutional, state dimensions of power (i.e. sociopolitical contexts).

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