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# Toward a Critique of Surveillance in the Age of the Internet: A Reflection on the "Internet and Surveillance" Volume Edited by Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund, and Sandoval *

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**There seems** to be an undisputed consensus amongst scholars and the wider public that the rise and normalization of the Internet and overall digitalization brought an enormous change to people's lives and social life as such. Since the 1990's, this led to a vast proliferation of Internet studies. While some of the authors retained a critical approach with historical awareness, most of them failed to do so and retained an implicit technologically-determinist view of the world. It ought to be noted from the outset that seeing the Internet (or any other technology) as the one bringing changes to society should be regarded as a highly problematic notion, even if social relations are going through enormous changes (like they did throughout the history, main difference being a vast acceleration of these changes). Positing technological changes as being separated and isolated from other processes in society, as bearers and harbingers of social change, without looking at complex social relations that influence construction and development of the technology, is doomed to failure because of its historical blindness. Analyzing these complex social relations and their historical intertwining can be seen as one of the tasks posited by dialectics, through which technology can never be seen in isolation and could never simply produce social changes for itself – such a view on the nature of social change should be regarded as being inherently deterministic, even if it was proclaiming otherwise. Technology *could*, however, at least partially help to *reveal* why certain social changes occurred. This kind of a historically-materialist approach was demonstrated by Raymond Williams (2003/1975, 7, 12, 13), according to whom such an interpretation differs from technological determinism in that:

*"It would restore intention to the process of research and development. The technology would be seen, that is to say, as being looked for and developed with certain purposes and practices already in mind. At the same time the interpretation would differ from symptomatic technology in that these purposes and practises would be seen as direct: as known social needs, purposes and practices to which the technology is not marginal but central. [...] It is never quite true to say that in modern societies, when a social need has been demonstrated, its appropriate technology will be found. This is partly because some real needs, in any particular period, are beyond the scope of existing or foreseeable scientific and technical knowledge. It is even more because the key question, about technological response to a need, is less a question about the need itself than about its place in an existing social formation. [...] But there were other social and political relationships and needs emerging from this complex of change."*

Social surveillance, which will be the main issue discussed in this review, should, therefore, not be seen as some inherent quality brought upon the multitude by digital technologies, but something that is embedded in them and (ab)used because of wider political, economic, and social pressures, influences and expectations. While digitalization may coincide with increasingly invasive surveillance techniques and continuous commodification of social life - and can in several cases even be seen as a necessary precondition for making such detailed and continuous surveillance possible - neither of these processes happened *because of* technology and its (supposedly neutral) development in the last decades.

## 1.   Towards a Critique of Social Surveillance

The volume *Internet and Surveillance: The Challenges of Web 2.0 and Social Media*, edited by Christian Fuchs, Kees Boersma, Anders Albrechtslund and Marisol Sandoval, can in large part be seen as an effort of connecting technological changes and new techniques of surveillance to wider processes in society and social relations, which is similar to approach mentioned earlier. It provides several answers of why surveillance is still gaining importance (and becoming even more invasive) in postmodern capitalist societies. In his text on location sharing and online social networking (entitled Socializing the City), Albrechtslund, for example, points at a very important, but quickly forgotten fact, which too often seems too transparent to even take notice today, but can indeed be very useful in helping to clarify these issues. According to him, the "alleged gap between offline and online world has been bridged. [...] These two supposedly separate worlds have been woven together; this is especially obvious in connection with our social interactions, which take place in the mixed spaces." (189) Surveillance on the Internet is, therefore, very much a *social* surveillance – it is spreading throughout society and people's lives with the help of Internet's everyday and omnipresent use. Digitalized surveillance has developed through the online-offline dialectic, where the 'virtual' is – especially with sedimentation of technology in everyday lives – merely an extension of the 'real' (separating virtual from the real is, therefore, a false dichotomy; Castells (2010, ch. 5) termed this 'real virtuality', because virtuality is a fundamental dimension of reality). There should be little left of immaterial idealism that spoke of the glorious potentials of the Web as a harbinger of freedom, democratization of the world, and other wonders connected to the new media technologies, without embedding them in power struggles and relations of the material world (see Breen 2011). Technology is not an autonomous *actor*; its practical application and reasons for such an application are connected to complex material contradictions and power-relations. As seen in several reports on the 'Arab Spring' uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, technological determinism is still remarkably present in popular media and even in serious scholarly discourse.

The collection of texts on Internet and surveillance, published in 2012 and covering a wide range of diverging topics, is one of the first attempts to systematically analyze surveillance on (and through) the Internet from a variety of possible perspectives. Texts in the volume are divided into two parts: five texts in the first part are focusing on theoretical foundations of the Internet surveillance studies, while eight texts in the second part deal with case studies and empirical perspectives (with a preface by Thomas Mathiesen and a postface by Kees Boersma). The majority of the authors agree that surveillance in general should be used in negative and critical terms, before-mentioned Anders Albrechtslund perhaps being the most obvious exception. He is presenting an alternative concept of participatory surveillance, which emphasizes "social, playful, and potentially empowering aspects of surveillance practices" (190). The notion of participatory surveillance is seen as more democratic than other types of surveillance; people take part in it voluntarily, and in most cases, it can even be seen as desirable by them. According to Albrechtslund, social interactions empower people (at least in comparison to governmental mapping of citizens) to shape how they appear to others, even if it is quite difficult to imagine where exactly the empowering part lies here, presupposing we are using empowerment as a concept emerging from political theory. Trottier and Lyon in their chapter on key features of social media surveillance also partially draw on the notion of participatory surveillance. According to them, surveillance has become liquid (conceptualization derived from Zygmunt Bauman's writings, see Bauman 2000) and older institutions of control have become much more malleable and adaptive. Or, as they put it in Deleuze's terms, they *modulate*. Nevertheless, Trottier and Lyon very much retain the critical notion of surveillance, because even though surveillance facilitates online sociality, according to them, it simultaneously enables data commodification and other exploitative practices, which are at least as important.

Drawing on the arguments made by Andrejevic (75), Fuchs (52), or Allmer (133), we can see that the main reason for mostly critical conceptualizations of surveillance is derived from the simple fact that it is in most, if not all cases, a form of domination. There are vast asymmetries in power relations when it comes to surveillance, amongst them being control over data, capacities for carrying out surveillance, or of owning the necessary (new) means of production (in this case Web 2.0 companies, which are, as Fuchs accentuates, far from being participatory when it comes to their political economic part - their ownership as such is entirely non-participatory). Coercion therefore stays embedded in social relations, so to speak the structure, and because capitalist societies are always based on inequalities, free choices are merely appearing to be free. Inability or lack of access to the means of production leaves little to no freedom of choice – it is after all corporations that own the data of the users, while users do not own shares of corporations (Fuchs, 52) – while at the same time effective control over those who perform both economic and political surveillance is becoming more and more evasive. If in modern societies this role had historically been performed

by the serious press when it came to political (counter)surveillance, and trade unions, when it came to economic (counter)surveillance, it seems media have very much been in a permanent crisis for decades now, while labour-power has been crushed by the neo-liberal "revolution" (see David Harvey's writings, e.g. Harvey 2010) and their own inability to cope with changing "technical composition of labour" (see Negri and Hardt 2009), which nowadays demands a different democracy and wider political involvement. Neutral conceptualizations of surveillance therefore tend to overlook these enormous power asymmetries and tend to present individuals as being as powerful as corporations or state institutions, which seems quite illusory (see Allmer, 133).

## 2.   A Typology of Surveillance

Definitions of surveillance are usually based on a separation between panoptic (Foucauldian) and non-panoptic concepts of surveillance (as argued in the chapter by Thomas Allmer). One can possibly add the notion of synoptic surveillance (where, as pointed out by Thomas Mathiesen, see Mathiesen 2004, many watch the selected *something*, constituting a "viewer society" – crucially, there is a double process of people being silently silenced through Synopticon and Panopticon). It is, however, furthermore possible to delineate between different possible types of surveillance in contemporary complex societies, especially between political and economic surveillance (as argued by the editors in the introduction), political being the most extensively researched and in fact severely scrutinized. There are reasons for a sustained scrutiny of political surveillance:, liberal thought, which has been predominant in the past couple of centuries, has traditionally seen liberty in terms of "negative" liberty: liberty *from* the political authority or/and system. This liberal-individualist account of freedom was most famously argued for by Isiah Berlin in his essay "Two Concepts of Liberty", where he separated "negative" liberty from "positive" liberty. He quite stringently warned against positive liberty, because it could become an engine of oppression by falsely assuming what is the essence of human condition (in liberal thought, this is, of course, masked in possessive, egoistic individual that takes care of his own interests in the private sphere; this naturalized notion leads directly to the need of the "minimal state"). There is no need to go into further details in this seriously flawed dichotomous division of liberty, which is perfect (only) for capitalist societies, because it was long ago remarkably dissected and criticized by C. B. Macpherson (see 1973, ch. 5). What is more important is to point at the other type of surveillance, namely economic surveillance, and its necessity in capitalist societies.

Economic surveillance was thus far within "Surveillance Studies", which has a rather liberal bias, only sporadically identified as being as controversial as political, while a substantiated critique of its workings and techniques of control on an everyday level was even rarer. This is in large part compensated by the mentioned collection of texts on surveillance and the Internet, which is (amongst other topics) focusing on what kind of techniques capital is using to accumulate surplus value (and/or rent) through the Internet. Historically economic surveillance was without any doubts most obvious, tenacious, and crude in the production process. On the invitation of Marx (1990/1867, 279-280)s, we should leave the "noisy sphere [of circulation], where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice 'No admittance except on business'". According to him, it is the realm of production, where "we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced. The secret of profit-making must at last be laid bare". This was also the obvious place of economic violence manifested through little-to-none regulation in regards to the length of the working day, repetitive inhuman routines and commonly-present sweatshop-like working conditions. Both the brutality of exploitation and to a large extent also the techniques and methods of surveillance, needed for this exploitation, were already implicitly demonstrated by Marx in Capital Vol. I (1990/1867). For him, supervision of labour in the production process was "purely despotic". Later, this notion of surveillance in capitalist societies was historicized and actualized by E. P. Thompson (1967) in his celebrated essay "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism".

What is of central importance here is the fact that post-Fordist capitalism spreads the necessity of surveillance from the production process, where it was concentrated (but of course not entirely delimited) historically, further-out into the sphere of consumption and distribution, which is pointed out by several authors contributing to the volume. Fuchs (43), for example, writes that "surveillance is a central method of control and discipline in the capital accumulation process", it is a method employed for "controlling the production and circulation process". According to Andrejevic (82), "interactive media technologies facilitate new forms of communication and collaboration, but also represent the next stage of the colonization of social life by market forces". All new technologies contain an inherent contradiction distinctive of all social forms: multitudes are always able to use them for emancipatory purposes, but they can at the same time also be constructed and (ab)used

in order to oppress them (see also one of the central theses on contradictions of new technologies, made by Fuchs (2008)). There is an inherent capacity in digital technologies of having the necessary technical means to supervise almost every act and move people make, not only on the Internet, but also in their everyday lives (see again Albrechtslund's text). By collecting information and data, which makes people and their actions highly predictable (as furthermore demonstrated in a short analysis of data mining by Andrejevic), they are producing latent demands and influencing consumer behaviour (overall making advertising more effective), which can be seen as a new major form of power in society.

We can see at least two principal forms of surveillance: the political one being the most obvious and often also most oppressive, and the economic one that is surely not less important or less influential for the lives of people in capitalist societies. In most cases, quite the opposite is the case. The capitalist market can today be at least as violent as political repression, and according to Allmer (124), economic surveillance is a central aspect of modern surveillance societies; it is also worth pointing out that economic and political surveillance usually complement each other (the economy always needs as much servile politics as possible). Both forms of surveillance are aimed at controlling and directing behaviour of individuals and groups (Fuchs, 43). Through several chapters, this volume presents an excellent example of a critique of political economy, with its focus on questions connected to economic exploitation, and with them, it also touches on surveillance in the age of the Internet. Fuchs, for example, focuses on a reconstruction of the classic Marxian cycle of capital accumulation, pointing at surveillance in the workplace and consumer (or better prosumer) surveillance, also integrating into his account Marx's labour theory of value, its role in the "new economy", and commodity-form. Andrejevic, Fuchs, and Allmer are all offering a Marxian approach for an updated critique of surveillance from a plethora of different political-economic perspectives, focusing on various issues and together forming a well-rounded theoretical foundation for future researches. Hill is adding to their input an important, but extremely pessimistic Lyotardian theoretical critique of economic surveillance, complementing Andrejevic's account of exploitation. Both contributions point at alienation from one's own product of labour (Lyotard's approach also considering alienation from our species-being). Similarly, Arditi draws on Marx in his analysis of surveillance and disciplining of the consumer on the Net by leading players in the music industry. He points out that the latter successfully re-established the dominance over music distribution that they held already before the rise of the new filesharing Internet technology. Because it plays such a vital role, surveillance by capital is indeed a key feature of post-Fordism. This is what makes it so crucial to put it under scrutiny, which will provide a viable answer to the question why surveillance is so necessary for exploitation.

Most of the mentioned authors also point at free labour performed by users, which is either extracted through rent (i.e. Andrejevic, who bases his arguments on Italian critique of political economy, for example, on Vercellone and Pasquinelli, while also focusing on enclosures of digital commons), selling of audiences as commodities (Fuchs, Arditi) or indirect knowledge work and exploitation of produsage/prosumage. According to Fuchs (55), "prosumage in capitalist society can be interpreted as the outsourcing of productive labour to users who work completely for free and help maximize the rate of exploitation [...], so that profits can be raised and new media capital may be accumulated. Again, this situation is one of infinite over-exploitation. Capitalist prosumage is an extreme form of exploitation, in which prosumers work completely for free", which of course means users are essential for generating profit and surplus value in the digital economy. This circumstance is not disturbing only because of privacy concerns, but moreover because consumers are asked to pay extra for the surplus extracted from their own work (see Andrejevic, 73). Such a discussion leads us directly to the necessity of defining exploitation (an issue that is dealth with both by the contributions by Andrejevic and Fuchs, and to a certain extent also Arditi), and even if this might be seen as contestable ground in the Marxian critique of the political economy – especially today, because production and consumption are more and more blurring – Andrejevic (78) nevertheless attempts to redefine it in concordance with the changes brought by the digital age: "If someone else realizes a financial profit from one's efforts, and this capture of value is enabled by relations of control and ownership of productive resources," then exploitation is at work, Andrejevic writes. Fuchs calls this *infinite over-exploitation*.

At least two more points should be made here: on the one hand, these changes in the ways exploitation is carried out demonstrate it has moved well beyond the old confines of the workplace and the factory, where the production process traditionally took place, into what some strands of autonomist Marxism have termed the "social factory" or society as factory. Both production and consumption become productive as they have the capacity to create informational commodities (Andrejevic, 84). On the other hand, the sheer sociability can be exploited with new techniques of

exploitation. This is what Andrejevic (80), building on Arvidsson's arguments, defines as "direct exploitation of communitarian dimension of social life", which is again in line with the autonomist account. According to Hill (118-120), cultures and subcultures begin to have a market value, they can be sold, different communities become commercialized and become niche markets, cultural groups are exploited for profit, and even most subversive of countercultures can be marketed. This means that little can escape from the commodification process and "something as vital as social relation can be conditioned to exploitative logic", (Hill, 120) because the very act of communication is in accordance with the logic of post-Fordist capitalism. These are vast overall changes indeed, and they need to be taken into account when we attempt to produce new concepts for a very much different social context.

There are, however, at least two more types of surveillance, which are mostly present only implicitly in the debated publication. They are indicated especially through the empirical chapters, for example in Christensen's and Jansson's Bourdieuian analysis of networked communities (where they build on Bourdieu's notions of social fields and his understanding of the unequal distribution of power, which enables them to show the complex ways in which surveillance works at subjective, everyday levels), Taddicken's focus group discussions in Stuttgart, and Székely's analysis of interviews with IT professionals, which demonstrates their opinions on surveillance. The first form can be termed interpersonal surveillance, while the second one is social surveillance, social in this case being separated from political and economic. The latter type of surveillance can focus on problems of implicit social control through surveillance and can be connected to social pressures and expectations of individual behaviour, so to speak, social pressures for normalization. This phenomenon was perhaps most forcefully pointed out and criticized by Hannah Arendt (1998/1958), who lamented about *the emergence of society* and *the rise of the social*, and as a consequence public life (especially in comparison to its Ancient Greek meaning) would have more or less disintegrated. As she points out (Ibid., 39), "society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest". The rise of society according to Arendt (1998/1958, 40) brings about conformism: "society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action [...]. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to 'normalize' its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement". Indeed, when society rules, it can be seen as a kind of a 'no-man rule', but "the rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule; it may indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of its crudest and most tyrannical versions" (Ibid.).

The Arendtian critique of the (usually *concealed*) social surveillance over multitudes can be connected to what Foucault (2008), and after him Negri and Hardt (2009), have conceptualized as biopower. While this rule of society can be seen as a more and more manifest rule of neo-liberal technocrats with their demands for economic "rationalization", how one behaves in society and what opinions or actions are expected from citizens, is much more implicit, concealed and difficult to discern. Statistics plays a key role in the process of the production of different norms and categorizations, which serves to analyze distinctions and similarities between people. Hill (108), drawing on Lyotard's notion of performativity in techno-scientific computerized capitalism, sketches this as "inhumanity of social conditioning, the pressure to conform to prescribed behaviour", which is very much a constitutive part of postmodern society. This performative logic always spreads over to the Internet (or even emanates from it), where personal information is often shared without people realizing it, and even without wanting this to happen; but even if one is aware of the problems that are a part of being involved in social networks, it is social pressure (risk of being excluded) that makes one join and participate in them anyway. Monika Taddicken, for example, points at the privacy paradox in her contribution to the volume. She demonstrates how even if web users are concerned about privacy matters, this has little influence on their actual behaviour, amongst the main reasons for this circumstance being ignorance, lack of competence and awareness, and perhaps most importantly, the obtained advantages and gratifications obtained by being a part of these networks. According to observations made by Trottier and Lyon (98), these issues can be seen as a form of soft coercion. They are based in social ties, compelling people to share personal information with others.

These types of surveillance and consequent self-censorship of people's behaviour are often at the same time both inter-personal (micro-level, subjective surveillance by friends, family, relatives) level, what Christensen and Jansson termed "interveillance" (social control with peer-to-peer monitoring), and social (macro-level surveillance of "fitting into" particular society and social context). It can be seen as an important problem, that even if the user "adopts tactics to avoid worst consequences, it is difficult to anticipate all outcomes of published information" (Trottier and Lyon, 10) on

the Internet. Restricting access to the information people post online, can curb social and inter-subjective surveillance, but can also lead to partial social exclusion. It is impossible to leave no data traces when surfing the Web. It is therefore nearly impossible to completely escape economic, and probably also political surveillance. In these instances, people have little choice whether their actions will be closely watched or not.

## 3.  Techniques and Mechanisms of Surveillance

As pointed out at the beginning of this text, the Internet fully broke into people's everyday lives and became normalized, even naturalized. Trottier and Lyon (89) think that one of the main reasons for this circumstance is the "cultural, contextual and spatial versatility of web-based services". These services are constantly changed and modified and can be used on different platforms and in different life-situations and contexts. This versatility, however, at the same time indicates multiplication of surveillance opportunities. Digitalization enabled a dramatic change in possibilities for surveillance of individuals and groups in various situations, which historically could not provide opportunities for monitoring or measurement. With digitalization, several new techniques and mechanisms of surveillance have been constructed, making possible distinction, classification, and identification of individuals and their "value". This is done especially through a technique called data mining (see the chapter written by Andrejevic and Oscar Gandy's writings, e.g. Gandy 2011; 2012), which transforms measurable user patterns into a saleable information commodity. As Gandy (2012, 130, 131) points out, "data mining's special value is its ability to derive knowledge from the patterns and relationships in data that would be invisible without the aid of software designed to become more accurate through use. [...] Data mining facilitates the identification of individuals as members of 'groups' on the basis of the similarity of their 'profiles'". The application of these techniques to business and government surveillance ensured its wide explosion in recent years. Mechanisms such as tracking cookies and other information aggregators serve the market (and consequently group) segmentation, paving the way for consumer targeting through identification of people by measuring and differentiating them along multiple dimensions. Not all groups are equally desirable of course, which means this segmentation process furthers social discrimination and increases disadvantages of those already most disadvantaged (Gandy 2012).

According to Arditi (172), the main goal of surveillance and monitoring of individuals is altering human behaviour. He connects this finding to the concept of governmentality, developed by Foucault, through which he deals with norms, practices, and laws of society. They influence different types of surveillance, which were mentioned earlier, perhaps most notably social surveillance. In several instances in time, different types of surveillance may either operate instantaneously (yet as separate processes), as knit-together processes, or their singular operation may even be dependent upon operation of other processes (economic surveillance may well produce social surveillance and inter-subjective surveillance, while all may in some way be dependent on the political context of society). At the concrete level of social practice, we can therefore see that all types of surveillance may coincide with each other, forming what Marx called 'unity of the diverse' (or as he puts it: "The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse" (Marx 1993/1973, 101). What is perhaps most problematic is that it is "almost impossible to determine which information is collected and to whom it is disseminated" (Sandoval, 161), which holds true for most of the Internet, not only of Web 2.0 platforms that are subject-matter of Marisol Sandoval's analysis. She provides an empirical study of consumer surveillance on commercial Web 2.0 platforms that is grounded in Marxist political economy and analyses the platforms' terms of use and privacy statements, which enables her to answer the question how far owners of these platforms can collect and consequently sell their user's data. Not surprisingly, she finds out that Web 2.0 platforms are mainly commercial, which brings about quite far reaching consequences, as their main motive must be profit maximization and capital accumulation. This is mostly done through exploitation of user data, which render possible personalized advertising that is very much favoured by advertisers. Complementing Arditi's findings, she points out that "controlling the behaviour of consumer [...] also requires controlling their mind. Surveillance and manipulation are two complementary strategies for influencing consumer behaviour" (Sandoval, 149). Different discursive techniques (e.g. the use of the term "sharing" instead of "selling" information) are used by Internet companies selling information, but the key point of course is to render possible invasive information gathering techniques. They are covered in different legal mechanisms and even if individuals are able to control what data will be seen by one's friends or wider public, there are rarely any viable ways of controlling what information will be gathered by websites themselves and later-on sold to third parties.

In his chapter entitled "How Does Privacy Change in the Age of the Internet", Rolf H. Weber gives an outline of the weaknesses of the present legal framework in connection to privacy (where prevention of improper use of personal information can be seen as the crucial objective) and surveillance, which he defines as repeated surveying of certain activities. Weber's approach, which provides a welcome legal background, perhaps most effectively resonates with Wayland's, Armengol's and Johnson's chapter on the problems connected to transparency. Both texts effectively demonstrate how problematic the borders between secret(ive), (non)transparent, surveillance, and private are, and why transparency as such needs to be scrutinized, especially as it is such a fundamental concept for liberal theory in capitalist society (Fuchs, see 2011, provides an alternative conceptualization of privacy, also touching on its meaning in liberal theory). Transparency can even become a surveillance system, which is demonstrated through the metaphor of the "house of mirrors" by Wayland, Armengol and Johnson, using the notions of entry, bouncing, highlighting, shading, and rendering. They effectively demonstrate how transparency is not always transparent and their argument should actually take us back to square one: transparency, when it comes to what/who is being transparent, very much depends on the context and on the social hierarchies and asymmetries of power. The question is what and who should be transparent under what conditions. Wayland's, Armengol's and Johnson's opinion is that underlying the goal of transparency is accountability, which is essential to democracy. But it should be noted that accountability means accountability of those who are in power. The same is true for transparency. Either way, what seems clear is that a fresh look both at privacy and surveillance is unavoidable in a digitalized society. This society is, however, hugely influenced by transnational corporations that move beyond national borders and their bounded legal regimes, which has to be taken into account.

## 4.   Dystopian Nightmares of Huxley and Orwell

Some sixty years ago, George Orwell's dystopian account of a totalitarian world, which was delineated in his exceptional book *Nineteen Eighty-four*, was seen as a dark vision that societies should defend themselves against. The society he described was an unsettling world of near-total surveillance and control. Only a couple of years after the prophetic 1984, Neil Postman (2005/1985, xix) pointed out how people have, in the meantime, forgotten about another dark vision, "slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling", namely Aldous Huxley's dystopia of the *Brave New World*, which prophesied a decidedly different form of oppression than Orwell's. "The two worlds opposed each other in virtually every detail", Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 53) later stressed, "and yet there was something that united both visions", he continued. "What they shared was the foreboding of a tightly controlled world; of individual freedom not just reduced to a sham or naught, but keenly resented by people drilled to obey commands and to follow set routines; of a small elite holding in their hands all the strings" (ibid.). Postman's (2005/1986, xix-xx) interpretation of these two texts was remarkably similar to Bauman's:

*"Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think. What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. [...] In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us".*

Is it postmodern love for the trivial and insignificant that is "ruining" Western societies? Is this what the privacy paradox is all about? What about participatory surveillance? Are we prepared to give away some of our basic freedoms, exchange privacy for different types of surveillance, just so we can have a little fun? Postman (Ibid., 155-157) was certain it was not Orwell's, but Huxley's account of the future, that has realized itself in societies of abundance. Bauman (2000, 53-54) furthermore twisted this logic, claiming both authors had no vast disagreements amongst them, especially if their arguments were boiled down in respect to the world's future destination. In his opinion, they both agreed there will be less freedom and more control. They just envisioned different roads, which would lead us towards increased ignorance and obtuseness.

What do these dystopian accounts and their humanist (re)interpretations tell us of society? Which account is nowadays closer to reality, Huxley's or Orwell's? As perhaps holds true for all of the dystopian accounts in particular historical moments, they are usually both right and wrong, maybe not instantaneously, *but still always*. Brainwashed, uncritical consumerism can only be as effective as it gets, before its hegemony somehow breaks down and transparency of its ideological

mechanisms becomes too obvious to ignore. Huxley's vision may be seen as being predominant in some historical moments, especially when no significant social conflicts are on the horizon, but it is the Orwellian nightmare that seems closer to reality when multitudes rise and repressive apparatuses hit back at them with full force (or when "agreements" such as SOPA or ACTA are introduced through the back doors). Democracy and freedom of speech seem like nice ideas until the multitude tries to claim access to them at your own backyard. It is then, when situations get tricky. This was well demonstrated by several resistance movements and uprisings in the Western world last year. Mainstream Western media and politicians were widely celebrating quite similar revolts across North Africa and the Middle East only a couple months earlier, but then turned on the heat as soon as they started to develop at home – first ignoring, and then quite openly attacking different progressive social movements (i.e. the Occupy movement) when they became powerful. What can be seen is that the most important question is not which of these dystopian visions manifests itself in the real world more often (they all do to some extent), but to what extent resisting multitudes are able to produce societal changes in their struggles against repression and inequalities. It is here that dystopian accounts really fail. Multitudes neither stay silent and totally subjugated nor completely unreflective and passive. History never stands still. Multitudes have an inherent ability to resist their oppressors and demand more real freedom. They will always retain this capacity. History remains a history of class struggles, and today, these struggles have to involve struggles against surveillance.

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