

Abstract

Surveillance Technologies and Policy Issues of “Ugly Co-Veillance” in our Digital Age

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Every kind of surveillance, especially the illegal and without consent, which violates privacy and other personal rights, is a kind of negative practice. This study analyses the real ugly type of new, electronic surveillance, a “horizontal” ‘ugly co-veillance’ or a peer-to-peer monitoring and spying between friends, family members, neighbors, fellow citizens and allies.

In the neoliberal, post-9/11 surveillance society, where all people are suspects, public authorities, private corporations and mass media urge ordinary people to spy on everybody. Hence, we have again the age of citizen and neighbor spies, who have the “duty to inform” the authorities on their fellow citizens (Purenne & Palierse 2016).

Yet, the ‘neoliberal ethos’ of spying is reflected on a ‘digital vigilantism’ and ‘a new prudentialism’, which are both cultivated by the antiterrorist policy (Andrejevic 2005). Sophisticated spyware applications and deceptive technologies reinforce a “McVeillance society”, which is growing by the spread of digital surveillance capabilities of Internet and the new social media, like Facebook. “Spying” on your child, girl or boy friend, spouse, colleague, neighbor, competitor, etc. is to watch them secretly for various purposes; this can become a real ugly process because it ruins trust and social bonds, family, friendship, neighborhood, or acquaintances.

In our study, after we expose such spywares and policies we clarify the pertinent terminology of stalking, snitching, grassing, naming and shaming, and whistle-blowing. Yet, we also point out when Facebook Surveillance that is a peer surveillance of friends watching friends (Fuchs 2011 & 2012), is getting ugly, by function creep, digital stigma and identity theft.

Do we have to blame the surveillance technologies or social factors for the growing ugly coveillance? In other words, do we agree with the ‘technological deterministic approach’ or with the ‘social constructionist perspective’ which suggests humans inscribe values and functions into technologies? We adapt here a mutual shaping approach which reconciles technological and social influence, arguing that technology and society shape each other (Trottier 2014).

We conclude that although ‘sousveillance’ and ‘counterveillance’ are considered as resistance forms to surveillance society, only trust and solidarity (social capital) and democracy are the real foundations of a ‘good society’, working as antidotes to ugly surveillance.