

Pallavi Krishnappa

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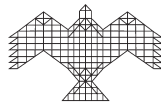




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# The Social Life of Surveillance

## Abstract

In the popular imagination, the term 'surveillance' either brings to mind an Orwellian Big Brother state, images of a Panoptic all-seeing structure or discourses around privacy and data within a personal information economy to serve state and corporate interests. While new technological modes of surveillance continue to occupy the dominant public understanding of the concept, it obscures other social and cultural modes of surveillance practices in everyday life for the maintenance of social order and cohesion. By offering an alternative approach to viewing surveillance as having a social life of its own through the engagement and participation of social actors in the watching of both themselves and others we can see it as an integral part of socio-cultural practices instead of an entity serving only the malignant interests of the powerful few. In presenting the everyday practices of both old and new modes of surveillance, the paper provides a broad view of capturing surveillance as a dynamic social process thus offering new possibilities of studying the modes of subjectivity of how individuals, social groups and institutions situate themselves within surveillant practices.

**Keywords:** Surveillance, Social Process, Culture, Watching, Social Institutions, Power

## Introduction

Everyone watches. Furthermore, evidence from many different sources implies that from the late-twentieth-century onwards, the growing intensification of the use of digital surveillance technologies for not only state and corporate but even domestic interests has led to a response in the emergence of new scholarly attention towards the rise of surveillance culture and society as a way of life (McGrath, 2004, Lyon, 2001, 2018; Gilliom & Monahan, 2013). This invites a further reflection on what it means to live under a surveillance gaze, one which is both entangled and co-constituted by its embeddedness in the norms and rules of its social actors from the apparatuses of the state to the institution of the private family. Surveillance in itself is neither a new concept nor a modern technological phenomenon (Markland & Skouvig, 2021) but looking at the current scholarship there are three ways in which it has largely been understood. First, it was concerned with the specific form of focussed and systematic watching of objects, data and persons commonly through ICT's (Lyon, 2010a). Second, there remained a pre-conditioned understanding of social relations within a specific systematic institution, site or gaze (Monahan, 2011; Green & Zurawski, 2015) located

in a negative top-down power over understanding that was dependent on a clear distinction between the watcher and the watched. Third, it rested on an assumption that surveillance existed on the margins of everyday life leaving very little scope for understanding ways in which it both emerges and is co-produced through its social practices.

In everyday life, forms of watching differ from traditional modes of understanding surveillant power (governments watching over citizens, corporations over consumers etc.) but instead, people watch and gather information over each other through more mundane, decentralised modes of surveillance as well such as eavesdropping on a conversation, gossip among colleagues at work, or stalking a celebrity figure. Additionally, the exercise of power in everyday life cannot be imagined as a monolithic entity, the presence of power in daily realities occurs through constant negotiations and renegotiations through what David Macey (1994) points out "forms of rationalisation" that are inscribed in "specific practices". Similarly, surveillance as a central instrument that organises social life cannot be pinned down as a specific exercise of power limited to specific sites, institutions or even the mere presence of digital technology but is deeply embedded in these very practices where the socio-

cultural, spatial and temporal contexts matter.

While different types of surveillant behaviours especially through the use of digital technologies have been conceptualised by scholars to capture surveillance among individuals instead of specific sites or organisations such as lateral surveillance (Andrejevic, 2006), participatory surveillance (Albrechtslund 2008) or social surveillance (Joinson 2008; Tokunaga 2011), the role of non-technological and the different location and cultural contextual nature of surveillance in defining social relations continue to remain—although exceptions exist such as Nils Zurawski's (2002) study on the role of direct face-to-face surveillance in a conflict-driven zone of Northern Ireland—largely ignored within studies of surveillance's role in organising social relations. As Zurawski finds, both practices of external and internal surveillance along with new measures such as the introduction of the CCTV must be 'seen in the light of the 'culture of watching' and former practices of surveillance'. Within technologically-focused studies as well aspects of this 'culture of watching are evidenced in the vast amounts of personal information people share on social media sites. people are less concerned with governments or corporations watching over them than they are with how key members of their

social groups and networks perceive them (Marwick and boyd, 2011; boyd and Hargittai, 2010; Hogan, 2010) causing people to self-monitor their actions online (Marwick, 2012; Fulton & Kibby, 2017) to not be seen as deviant from the expected dominant practices at play. What Daniel Trottier (2011) argues as the "potential of being watched by others" leads to the contextualisation of our own surveillance in terms of self-presentation strategies acting as a reflection of the social norms, rules and practices that make up surveillance processes. Similarly, these strategies of internalisation of surveillance practices both of ourselves and others are not just limited to digital sites but are institutionalized as a social practice in other forms within the family, the school, and other social institutions.

By focussing on these dimensions of surveillance where power asymmetries aren't as clearly defined through overt and/or systematic disciplinary practices of punishment or coercion within a specific site, organisation or institution but instead through other subtle means of socialisation of the internalisation and "normalisation" of how surveillance is deeply embedded in the norms and rules of a larger socio-cultural practice where different social groups interact and inform how these practices play out becomes much clearer. To capture these dimensions of surveillance in their

application in everyday life, the paper begins by first outlining the need for surveillance in social life, the purposes it serves and conceptualising a definition that is dynamic enough to capture a broad picture of surveillance processes. Second, it looks at how the informal rules and norms of social groups such as the family, peers, and other social groups define how rules of the state, the workplace and other institutions operate in everyday life, where rules themselves are not static but constantly co-produced through these interactions between different social actors. It then goes on to look at how surveillance processes are shaped by space and time which allows it to expand on some of the various social mechanics of watching a person from gossip, self-surveillance to sousveillance. The paper concludes by presenting a broad picture of surveillance in everyday social processes through showcasing the interactive processes of both the watched and watcher in different socio-economic and political contexts which demonstrates the need for an expansive definition of surveillance to include its everyday, ordinary practices.

### **Rethinking surveillance as a dynamic process**

Despite its generally negative image in popular discourse, surveillance in its various modes, now more so than ever,

largely due to the proliferation and spread of surveillance technologies is recognised, albeit in its technological presence, as an inescapable fact of social life. In its most technocratic form, it adversely informs people's life chances from the unthinking implementation of rigid conditions to access welfare schemes (Gilliom, 2001; Henman & Marston, 2008; Henne, 2019; Amrute et al., 2020), securitisation of spaces like the shopping mall, the fortification of public spaces and residential apartment complexes (McCahill, 2013; Kajalo, Lindblom, 2016; Low & Maguire, 2019) which enforces a surveillant gaze against 'undesirables' often leading to the further marginalisation of the already vulnerable. But other tactics of surveillance underlie these newer processes of enforcing social control, like within residential complexes instances of housing discrimination against particular religious identities, food preferences, gender identities inform other kinds of surveillance strategies such as self-presentation, which will be discussed further in a later section. For now, it remains important to remember that surveillance as Lyon (2001a) points out, surveillance always exists on a 'spectrum of care and control' where people watch each other out of different interests to mitigate their notions of risk as it presents itself to them. Not all surveillance is bad or undesirable, such



as the careful watching of a sick elderly person as an act of ensuring timely medical care or the loving watch of a parent over their children or its use as a powerful instrument by traditionally marginalized communities in bringing about conditions of collective empowerment (Monahan, 2010). Thus, if we were to think of surveillant arrangements as being intimately tied to dynamic power relations that serve to empower or disempower depending on the specific socio-spatial context it is located in we would be better able to study surveillance in all its aspects and not just as a unidimensional concept of negative social control attributed exclusively to one site, organisation or institution but as something that occurs as a social process informing everyday interactions among individuals as well.

By doing so, we can go beyond the traditional models of surveillance to capture the many ways in which surveillance might be considered desirable and even needed which allows us to heighten our awareness of the varied loads of meaning that the concept carries across different spaces and periods. While traditional models of surveillance often assume there is a self-evident category of unequal power between the 'watcher' and the 'watched', these categories themselves are not stable. Far from bearing a static meaning, the surveillance concept has aligned itself

with a range of idea clusters from time to time, making it impossible to explain it by tracking its etymological roots alone that implies a spatial hierarchy (to 'watch over') which sets up domination and subordination as opposite poles of relation within a monolithic exercise of power. Instead, if we were to look at it as a cultural expression of public/private vulnerability and risk we would be able to better explain the demand and rise of a culture of surveillance where it becomes not a mere technical process but a fundamental feature of social life. In the thickly social space of everyday life, surveillance is often a tacit category, one that can't be given an explicit expression or pinned down. Because people often experience and participate in surveillance strategies without calling it such that it becomes such a normalised aspect of navigating everyday realities. It is so often taken for granted that we forget the work it requires, the assumptions that surround its use, the mechanisms and processes of surveillance in social practice, a broad overview of which this paper attempts to provide.

## Defining surveillance

Surveillance itself remains a difficult concept to define, such that scholars themselves have been unable to reach a consensus on its definition. As Ross Bellaby (2012) puts it, "Surveillance can

cover a wide range of activities from CCTV cameras and 'covert surveillance' to dataveillance and data mining. Who the individual 'is', where s/he is going, with whom s/he is associating or what s/he is doing all become the concern of the watchful eye.". Thomsen (2019) rightly points out that while Bellaby manages to cover the various types of surveillance, it remains too loose to be considered a definition. On the other hand, Lyon's (2001b) definition of surveillance as "any collection and processing of personal data, whether identifiable or not, for the purposes of influencing or managing those whose data have been garnered", becomes too narrow and dependent on as Kevin Macnish (2017) observes, specific purposes of influence and management and attaching surveillance to the idea of collecting data it excludes other possibilities such as voyeuristic surveillance, direct surveillance such as in conflict zones (Zurawski, 2002).

Here, it is important to distinguish between watching which is fleeting in the case of two people passing by each other on the street and watching which is surveillant in nature. Not all forms of watching can be classified by surveillance, for watching to be considered surveillance implies a careful and sustained form of watching with the purpose of influence or social control, management or even entertainment

whose presence could be registered in various forms. An obvious form is that of physical acts of surveillance as in the case of stalking where the person being stalked may be either unaware or aware or it could be mutual stalking in the case of intimate relations that arises out of emotions such as jealousy, insecurity and so on. However, careful and sustained watching could also be implicit or internalised in the case of interpersonal or self-surveillance like a woman choosing how to dress to avoid unwanted sexual attention, or the anticipation of surveillance or its 'felt' presence which may or may not happen as a way of self-regulating one's behaviour as in the case of employees strategising what to reveal or hide to avoid being gossiped about, how individuals sense themselves as being 'watched' could also be embedded in the way a space presents itself such as an urban gated community, or the changes over time of a public street which informs how people organise and present themselves. Watching itself is a 'learned practice' whose norms and rules are defined by a larger social process that informs its nature. For example, acts such as stalking of women are normalised through accepted societal and cultural narratives of male dominance and sexual violence where stalking is associated as a form of courtship where it may even be invited by the one being stalked as a legitimate

form of courtship making it hard to draw a strict line between the two (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000; McKeon et al., 2014, Tripathy, 2019). For the purpose of this paper, by keeping the definition of surveillance deliberately broad and without determining its behavioural, locational or its technological elements, surveillance can be defined as the careful watching of a person or space for deviance from any expected institutional social and spatial practices.

Because several aspects of these 'expected institutional social and spatial practices' are so implicitly understood to the point that they aren't considered surveillance but as a way of life or the way things are, the intricacies of the normative rules and patterns that govern it are often not fully paid attention to or overlooked to serve a specific understanding of power relations which rests on a clear distinction of unidimensional "control" between the 'watcher' and the 'watched'. By opening up its definition we can better capture not only why surveillance may be both challenged and embraced by both the 'watcher' and the 'watched' but follow how surveillance and processes of social control are often intricately bound up in the social practices, tensions and relations that make up social groups which in turn inform how institutions are formed.

## **Surveillance as a social process: Local practices in the everyday**

Given the technologically-mediated emphasis within the scholarship since the 1980s and a focus on the social control rather than care dimension of surveillance, Abu-Laban (2015) raises questions surrounding the possible bypassing of other approaches that 'better capture emotive and expressive contexts than others?', such as those mediated by non-technological modes of the 'surveillant gaze' which offers us the ability to capture the often blurring lines between 'care' and 'control'. As Abu-Laban further notes, leading scholars on surveillance have observed that "one of the greatest surprises in the field of Surveillance Studies has been the comparatively muted public response to developments in Surveillance Studies that seem to be self-evident threats to personal liberties" (Ball et.al, 2012), the solution may lie in a broad approach to understanding the multiple nature of surveillance practices and the meaning-making processes that govern them. For instance, a study by Nils Zurawski's (2011a) on the local practices that make up consumer surveillance does so by following the use of loyalty cards by consumers. As Zurawski observes, even when consumers are aware of the data extraction practices at play, the benefits

of the loyalty card in the context of the economic and social relations where their identity as consumers far outweigh any worrisome reflection on the loss of privacy. By bypassing the dominant discourse of data and privacy protection on consumer surveillance and instead following the 'aspects relating to the nature and modes of consumption through consumers' perception of the use of loyalty cards, Zurawski offers an alternative view of consumer surveillance within the sociocultural practice of shopping. Here the consumer as a social group informs the practices of the institution of shopping within which the use of loyalty cards functions as a "cultural practice in its own right".

Zurawski's focus on the micro-practices of modes of production and reproduction highlights how ritualised surveillance systems are normalised. Surveillance exists not just as a malignant totalitarian state or corporate led-interest but also evolves as a need within local practices of increasingly enmeshed business, personal and social interests. At no point is there a case being made to sink into relativism where all surveillance is justified as a way of life, value judgements on the ethics of surveillance must exist in both the public and private sphere, along the lines of harm done by "referencing principles established in human

rights norms" (Abu-Laban, 2015) where we must be able to categorise surveillance as negative, positive or even inconsequential. In doing so, we are able to follow surveillance as a social process where further likely intersections of different identities of caste, class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality can be studied for the ways they inform how social practices are embedded in institutions of the state, the family and the workplace. To be able to do that a case for viewing surveillance as a social process is being made which demands connections be made between the seemingly dichotomous spheres of the public and private spheres of inquiry as sites of understanding the emergence of ritualised, systematic, internalised local surveillance practices. As an instrument of reducing 'insecurity' and 'risk', surveillance is informed by the underlying logic of the intersection of multiple actors from the state, the family to other social groups in the creation of a culture of insecurity which produces what Pramod Nayar (2015) calls a 'culture of surveillance'. The logic behind surveillance is deeply embedded in the norms and rules that govern our social identities which isn't limited to a specific site or institution but occurs as a social process where these norms and rules are conceptualised in different ways across different social as well as spatial relations. While the nature and structure

of surveillance may have changed considerably due to the proliferation and use of technology, surveillance cultures are not just embedded in these technologies.

Scholars (Ingre, 2012; Richards, 2012; Philip, 2013) have pointed out the ways in which disciplinary practices are normalised by the intersections between the highly regulated space of the school and the family through parent-teacher relations, mandatory adult supervision over children's playtime, gender regulation and punishment through the binary spatialisation of the bathroom and even playground. Gendered socialization in particular is something that through repeated performance of an established masculine or feminine role by an actor is normalised across different domains. The logic behind surveillance is deeply embedded in the norms and rules that govern our social identities which isn't limited to a specific site or institution but occurs as a social process where these norms and rules are conceptualised in different ways across different social relations. Each situation an individual finds themselves in calls for a performance of a different role or what Erving Goffman (1959) calls "impression management" where each person presents themselves in the way they want to be perceived. In Annavarapu's (2021) study on the intersection between women's strategies

of self-presentation and class relations within the temporarily shared space of a cab in public spaces, multiple strategies of surveillance play out where an atmosphere of suspicion pervades how both the lower-class male cab driver and the largely upper-class female passenger view each other. There is the additional presence of technology that allows a passenger to rate the ride or report inappropriate behaviour thus enforcing already existing perceptions of power imbalance where the upper-class female passenger views the male driver as a perceived threat from the lens of sexual violence and the male driver views the female passenger as having more power to destroy his livelihood through the abuse of their class privilege. The way a space as in the case of the bathrooms in school, or the design of a workspace or even the transitory one of a cab, presents itself also defines the presentation of social roles and how one is watched as well as does the watching. The way surveillance is experienced is not just through its social landscapes but also its spatial constitution where space shapes our selfhood and how a surveillant gaze is produced.

### **Embedded Gaze: Spaces of watching**

The history of surveillance is a history of spatial restructuring where surveillance has been an instrument

of organising space through political and legal-moral boundaries to enable disciplinary power in accordance with the dominant norms and rules of the space and time in question. A focus on space and socio-spatial relation is of critical importance in not only understanding the wider implications of surveillance but how surveillance techniques become embedded in the production of space itself (Klauser, 2017). While the idea of space within surveillance arrangements is not new from Foucault's Panopticon (1977) to other works on how surveillance is used to categorise and manage different spaces (Sewell, 1998; Koskela, 2000; Coleman and Sim, 2001; Franzén, 2001; Adey, 2004; Warren and Zurawski, 2014; Nayar, 2015) and the role of architecture and our built environment in influencing the social dynamics that organise our lives (Flynn, Mackay, 2017); there still remains a choice of site and institutional space where technological forms of surveillance particularly video surveillance are largely present. This often overlooks other ways in which space in itself also informs surveillance practices and the other kinds of surveillant logic at play within the concerned space. Instead, it could be argued that surveillance could emerge from space like that of an absolute space of geographical dimensions, like that of shared borderlines between two

countries or how a landscape exists informing disaster surveillance. To put it simply, surveillance can also emerge from the very spaces that individuals inhabit. Space is also experienced through other modes like that of the space of memory, time, sense of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. The boundaries of space could also be experienced through spaces of representation in the form of symbols, codes embedded in monuments, architecture and so on. Space matters not only in understanding everyday life but especially regarding matters of surveillance and control.

Even when we associate a space as being under more visible strategies of surveillance as embodied in technology, these techniques are mediated by the social practices that interact with all the aspects that go into the making and functioning of it. Understanding the relationship between space and social relations thus becomes critical in understanding what the rules, players and norms being protected within them are.

## **Absolute Space**

The understanding of absolute space predates back to Plato and Aristotle, where space for Plato was imagined as an external 'container' that was separate from all its relational aspects. Newton further conceptualised the physical dimensions of this container-

like absolute space as an immovable 'thing in itself' with fixed geographical boundaries which are not expected. A more contemporary understanding lies in David Harvey's (2006a) conception of absolute space as the space from which we 'record or plan events within its frame'. It is the space of fixed lines, points and axes used by cartographers, engineers and even geographers. While absolute space has been contested for its lack of acknowledgement of the role of perception by the relational actors it 'contains', it remains an important defining point to begin conceptualising how a space is understood and how it affects the surveillance and control of it. Surveillance of absolute space can largely be understood as border control, geostrategic conflict and other aspects that involve the control, defence and administration of a territory.

### **Relative Space-Time**

In the tradition of relative space concepts coming from Aristotle to Leibniz, Einstein argued that space and time are purely relative, the order of a neighbourhood was understood through the order of what followed next (Peters & Kessl, 2000). Geographers like Harvey (1990) for whom the idea of space-time compression was critical to understanding the changing human experience under capitalism leading to a new spatial turn that was

more virtual, individualised and well planned. Surveillance in the space-time dimensions can be measured by looking at the acts of making and working with material landscapes such as the infrastructures which determine how social groups interact and how forms of governance and citizenship are mediated and how time affects the surveillance of space. Processes of capital accelerations and displacement, time-space, temporal aspects and mobility are some of how relative space-time interactions are understood (Harvey, 2006a). The nature of surveillance is shaped by these macro (as well as micro) changes in relative space and time, where social groups order themselves according to spatial and temporal divisions. Take, for example, the nature of how a space changes not only with economic transformations from informal street vendors to high commercial branded shops with security but also with time where the same street during the day that is crowded by people across gender, caste and class locations turns into a heavily patrolled and deserted street by night or a public park frequented by children during the day is used by couples and teenagers at night.

### **Relational Space**

While the absolute and relative space-time conception of space may be perfectly adequate in understanding



geographical dimensions and the mapping of movement of people, goods, services and information flow they do not suffice in understanding the web of social relations between humans and non-humans agencies and interactions through which global and local identities come to be intertwined. Surveillance is also relational. The actions taken in the absolute and relative space are influenced by the relational (Harvey, 2006b). How people experience space and time is generated by many relational factors—career, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, access to technology, and institutions.

What constitutes normative behaviour varies both according to time and space and in relation to personal qualities such as gender, sexuality, age, race, caste and colour. This means that what specific appearances will be regarded as "deviant" in a particular context is not a straightforward matter. People also react differently to being under surveillance, conditioned by personal histories informed by class, gender, caste and race. The relational concept of space as context becomes the key to connecting the micro-social to the macro-social analyses of surveillance as 'context thus connects the most intimate and detailed components of interaction to much broader properties of the institutionalisation of social life. Behaviour within these spaces is also

clearly defined within the particular norms of that space. For example, employees at the workplace would have clearly defined roles and hierarchies in place. The enforcement of these performativities would also differ based on class, caste and gender as well as the attitudes of those who enforce as well as the resistance or subversion potential of the workers themselves.

### **Lived Space**

Lived space is what Van Manen (2011) categorises as 'felt space'. It is a category through which we can experience both the abstract and the physical lived reality of a particular space, where we experience feelings of fear, contentment, security, uncertainty, a sense of power or domination. How the absolute, relative space-time and relational space converge affects how a space is experienced. A study of migrant workers living in a resettlement colony in Kannagi Nagar (Coelho, 2019) demonstrates this change in experience from their earlier urban slum residence to living in the new 150 sq. ft. tenement style apartments on aspects of community support and gendered relations. For several female domestic workers in the colony, the change in the spatial distance led to greater surveillance and control of their mobility. Rising unemployment among male members within the colony, the distance between



her former employer's home and the lack of networks upon which informal 'unskilled' labour depends were contributing factors to further regression into upholding patriarchal roles within the household and community. The built structure of the apartments also created a push towards atomised nuclear family households breaking the scope of the possibility of spillover accommodation that often happened in household units in urban slums in the form of neighbourly and childhood support. Thus the features of the resettlement house contribute to how she experiences this phenomenon, where the neighbours and community have become spatially distanced leading to new modes of community relations as well as expected norms and practices.

### **Organic Space**

Surveillance of the organic space takes place through the use of an individual's five senses. It would appear as though the five senses are the work of common sense yet we experience these sensations in ways that are more 'socially constructed' than they seem to be. In our everyday life most of us pay little attention to how we sense, we are more aware of what we sense but how we inform our perception of sense tends to recede into the background. Our organic senses also dictate the subject of social construction, negotiation,

regulation, and control. The codes we rely on to classify sensory experience we do not do it as individuals but as members of social and cultural "thought communities" (Fleck 1979; Zerubavel 1996) and extrapolating from Zerubavel as 'members of socially and culturally sensory communities: groups of people who share common ways of using their senses and making sense of sensations'(Vannini, Waskul, Gottschalk, 2012). An individual may refuse to eat at a restaurant that serves non-vegetarian dishes. The smell and sight of animal meat may invite feelings of revulsion, nausea and impurity which may arise out of a particular community's religious sentiments that she belongs to.

Sensory communities' aesthetic preferences also dictate the norms of self-presentation from the way a person dresses to the way olfactory (body smells) codes construct social categories. Olfactory surveillance can be witnessed in class segregation within cities where high-rises with a regular water supply and individual bathrooms are marked as more hygienic and a worker from the adjoining slum is 'othered' when they engage in domestic work within these buildings with a separation in utensils for drinking tea or eating as well as designated washrooms. Many don't even use the washroom within their employer's homes despite their

long hours of work as it is implicitly understood as being out of bounds.

### **Conceptualised Space**

A space can be conceptualised in several ways, depending primarily on the purpose of the representation. It is the way a space is known. We understand that all of social space is socially constructed, both from the social situation of a particular place (historical associations, control over its use and value ascribed to it by competing interests) and objective material relations (access to how space is manufactured and organised. These constructions of space always take place in an active and dynamic process.

Surveillance in spaces is often conceptualised through discrete spatial practices in design (buildings, monuments, public spaces), management (ownership and control over the means of surveillance systems) and promotion (media representations) which can be analysed in terms of their relation to spatial control. In effect 'social spatialisation' or the way a space is conceptualised occurs through the ongoing social construction of the spatial at both the level of the imaginary (collective mythologies, presuppositions) as well the construction of the landscape around us in the form of the built environment (Shields, 1991). In terms of understanding surveillance within the space of conceptualisation, based

on this concept we see surveillance as not just through the use of different devices (CCTV, spy camera) or spatial strategies of control (architectural boundaries) but also made up of several other tangible and intangible elements which create or impose an identity on a place. The normative sense of a space is created and sustained not just through surveillance technologies but in conjunction with physical (design) as well as non-physical (advertisement, management, policing) tactics of placemaking.

### **The many mechanics of watching: Gossip, Sousveillance, Technology**

How the identification of deviance and the dominant normative sense of space is maintained is often through a series of smaller, decentralised interactions that manifest in everyday life. Because it acts as a deterrent to deviant behaviour, where what constitutes deviant varies across space and time, different mechanics involve the process of information gathering through the watching of others and ourselves. Although there are possibly many other ways in which social order through watching is maintained, this section outlines four broad types of surveillant mechanics in everyday life that an individual, group or community both experience as well as participate in.

### **Warning! You're on gossip watch: Gossip as surveillance**

"Log Kya Kahenge?" (What will people say?) is a popular refrain one encounters in everyday life in some form or the other as a way of signalling against behaving in a manner that might invite gossip which causes reputational damage. Gossip in this sense acts as a powerful deterrent from deviance from written or unwritten forms of social norms and expected behaviour and can even be "prosocial" where it enhances cooperation among different members of a community, organisation or social group (Barkow, 1992; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Feinberg, Cheng, & Willer, 2012; Levin & Arluke, 2013). It permeates all aspects of social life where it acts as an unfiltered sharing of information that facilitates social bonds motivated by shared feelings of empathy, envy, care, dissatisfaction, fear, uncertainty over a particular shared situation between two or more social actors. Petty motivations of jealousy about another person's perceived success can also inspire an individual to spread falsehoods about a particular actor for selfish gains. It has traditionally been defined as idle chatter, chit chat or the evil tongue (Jaegar et. al, 1998; Schein 1994). It can be an avenue for learning the unwritten rules and norms of social groups and cultures and facilitating the socialisation of new members into these groups (Baumeister,

Zhang, & Vohs, 2004; Laing, 1993; Noon & Delbridge, 1993; Suls, 1977) thus promoting normative behaviour. Anthropologists and sociologists alike have treated being privy to gossip as a sign of successful participant-observation (Kniffin, Wilson, 2010) where the inverse of not gaining access to gossip within the community being studied is looked upon as a failure to grasp the complexity of the ways in which people relate to each other. Within traditional technology-driven understandings of surveillance, the role of gossip, eavesdropping, stalking as forms of information gathering of social media has been instrumental in the definition of more decentralised forms of surveillance like lateral and participatory surveillance, social searching (Lampe, Ellison, Steinfeld, 2006) and social surveillance offering insights into how people use social media. But this effect of being 'watched' is by no means limited to technology, surveillance through gossip occurs across various domains from the workplace, to the home to tabloid news on celebrities and should be studied as it occurs in its various local and cultural practices.

### **Watching me, watching you: Modes of online watching**

Despite the emphasis on the non-technological modes of surveillant

practices, it would be remiss to not address the important role technology-aided surveillance plays in enforcing the social logic of surveillant practices through the use of technological tools as well. What Joinson and Tokunaga call 'social surveillance' which is the watching of our friends, family and peers online activity on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram reflects newer modes of sociality and surveillance in dimensions that transcend what earlier was natural (distance, darkness, time) and constructed barriers (walls, gates) to older modes of watching, eavesdropping reflect a need for understanding its impact on the social practices of different forms of surveillance operate along the lines of "care" and "control" in both online and offline domains of everyday life. The rise of a surveillance society is also given credence by the fact that there is now widespread use of domestic surveillance technologies for 'mundane, local and civilian' (Monahan, 2011) purposes as well from nanny cams at home, to the use of tracking apps by parents over their children, CCTV cameras in schools to stalking or abuse of intimate partners (Tseng et.al, 2020) through tools and tactics like spyware apps, social media or account compromise. But given that even surveillance technologies cannot be extracted from their particular socio-cultural and spatial

practice, they are equally embedded in social practices of consumption, play and even entertainment as Zurawski's (2011b) work on the use of loyalty cards for shopping, Ellerbrok's (2011) study on the element of play around controversial facial recognition technologies, as well the role of media in shaping public debates and knowledge around surveillance which is often tantamount to fostering "moral panics" (Barnard-Wills, 2011) and cannot be simply be understood as a monolithic exercise of top-down power or loss of personal data. People participate in the use of surveillance technologies for several reasons even when they are aware of the data extraction practices at play and derive varied meanings out of such engagement that serves their own purposes.

In the decision-making process of arranged marriages in India, there are multiple ways in which the interplay between the surveillance mechanics of gossip, technology as well as socio-spatial arrangements play a huge role in the decision-making process. The continued desirability of arranged marriage itself happens to avoid community gossip and reputational damage to the family. On online and newspaper personals, there is an evident emphasis on the compatibility of class, caste and other criteria of socio-cultural compatibility such as

shared morality and values that go into ensuring a good marriage arrangement. Considerable gossip surrounds the process of matchmaking where the moral character, the family's prestige, past relationships, sexual preferences as well as financial strength are all assessed before a match is finalised. Formal matchmaking businesses and informal matchmakers such as a traditional arranged matchmaker who is usually a neutral and reliable family friend or distant relative (Prakasa, 1982) rely on the gathering of such 'insider knowledge' from neighbours, friends of the family to make an informed decision. In addition, with the rise in online matchmaking replacing traditional forms that involved close knowledge of the prospective in-laws through community gossip, there has been a boom in pre-matrimonial private investigation companies (Vaidyanathan, 2011) to conduct background checks on the prospective bride or groom which involve covert surveillance strategies of stalking, spying the other party to assess their habits, the company they keep; sometimes even gadgets like spy cameras were used.

### **Watching from below, watching as resistance: Of surveillance as sousveillance**

While the exercise of surveillance as a social process involves the engagement

of all social actors across various power differentials, there is still a relation of power at play despite there being no clear distinction between the 'watcher' and the 'watched'. Within sousveillance as well which is loosely defined as 'watching from below' or a form of 'reverse surveillance' (Mann, Nolan et al. 2003; Stalcup, Hahn, 2016; Ganascia, 2010) this distinction continues remains unclear as the nature of sousveillance could either be transparent such as citizens recording instances of police brutality or mutual where both the watchers are aware of being watched or even surreptitious where the individual or group being watched isn't aware of it. What distinguishes surveillance from sousveillance, however, is that there is an evident assumption of a large social power asymmetry with a distinctive moral value judgement that is made between surveillance that is good and that which is bad, although these distinctions themselves are not stable since who has more power cannot be understood through mere broad social categories of class, gender, caste, religion and so but requires a more individualised case-based approach. Broadly speaking, sousveillance exists as a way of negotiating and resisting negative aspects of surveillance. When workers in a labour union complain to higher authorities about the presence of cameras or the use of in-built apps to

track their online activity during work hours they are establishing boundaries of surveillance. This resistance can also be present in aspects of presentation where young girls may defy conservative dress codes through subtle strategies of changing into different clothes outside the home. In each of these cases, the limits of surveillance are established, negotiated and redefined and through these strategies of resisting surveillance not only is the dynamic nature of power asymmetries continuously revealed but simplistic assumptions of surveillance as technological or top-down managerial intentions are challenged.

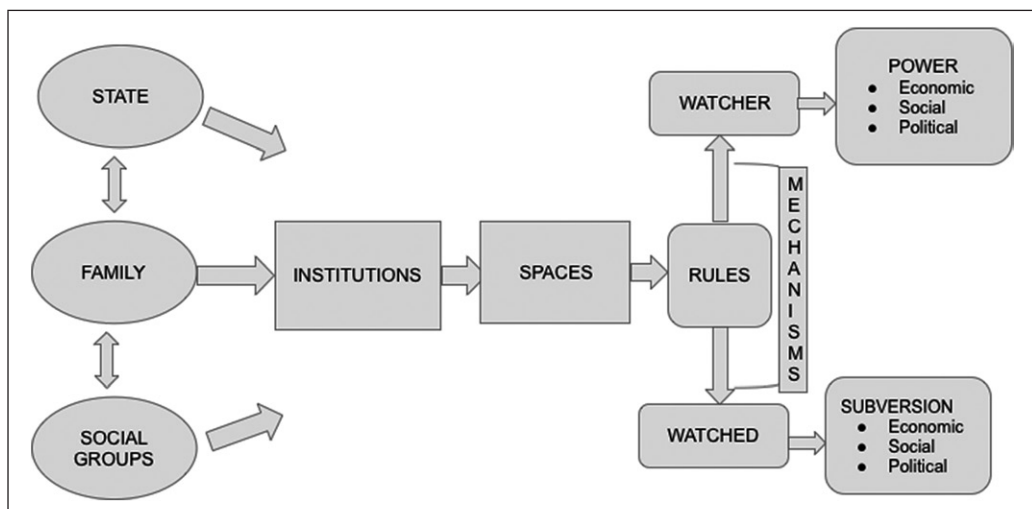
### Conclusion

The social experience of surveillance cannot just be pinned down to a form of technology or site or institution. Instead,

technology largely acts as a symptom of a cause, as one of the observable symbols of a practice that is deep and enduring in the form of the social and cultural heritage of the norms and rules that drive social control for maintaining social order. Just like a CCTV on the street, or a biometric at the workplace cannot by itself signify the presence of active surveillance, surveillance cannot be understood by limiting itself to its technological sites of watching. Within the landscape of social relations, it exists as an aspect of social life that emerges out of a complex interactional process between space, institutions, organisations, actors, agencies and individuals that seek to protect certain norms, rules and players in place.

In the figure presented above, an overview of surveillance as a dynamic

**Fig.1. Surveillance as a dynamic social process**



social process is outlined which helps us frame the possible connections between how certain social practices of gender, class, caste, religion as embedded within the state, the family and social groups inform institutional practices of surveillance within the space of the workplace, school, housing, and other collective entities with a specific purpose and need. Through this broad view, it is clear that surveillance is not something that is wielded only by totalitarian states or large corporations. Instead, it takes up a social life of its own even within certain inescapable surveillance practices such as the inevitable data extraction that everyday mundane practices of consumption, browsing the internet that require people to participate and engage with it in routines through which such institutions are legitimised.

While traditional models of surveillance include individuals or groups who are surveilled by top-down hegemonic interests or those who counter-surveil as a form of resistance to structural models envisioned as that of the state/subject and the corporate/consumer, the social processes that involve the unfolding of surveillance practices in everyday life incorporates models of hierarchies that exist beyond the state/corporate based on social status with very real power differentials along the lines of caste, class, gender, race, social roles location and so forth.

A dynamic model of surveillance is also able to capture how power is internalised and used for self-discipline as well as control to models of how we represent ourselves in different spaces. Taking social, rather than structural or systematic hierarchy into account allows us to account for such complexity. Without the overarching frame of negative social control and domination or technology, the social processes of surveillance which are just as pervasive yet harder to identify or regulate like the dominance of certain kinds of spatial aesthetics, peer surveillance, gossip, strategies of isolation and groupism through which social order is established and maintained are better captured.

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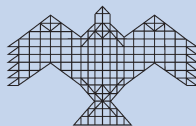
This paper provides a broad view of surveillance as a dynamic social process that is located as an integral part of socio-cultural practices through the engagement of social actors. It offers new possibilities of studying modes of subjectivity of how individuals, groups and institutions situate themselves within surveillant practices.
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