

# Surveillance vs. social control



We live in a society that becomes more individualistic every day. The collective feeling decreases and the gap between civilians and state grows. At the same time, due to the increasing amount of uncertainties people have to deal with, fear and angst have gain terrain in peoples behaviour. People feel less safe in their own environment and the need for security increases. To increase the security in public spaces in the United Kingdom, many CCTV cameras have been placed throughout the country, resulting in a staggering 4. 2 million cameras overlooking the civilians' behaviour in 2006.

A number which the East German “ Stasi” would be very jealous of. The idea of such ‘ supersurveillance’ raised a big debate, since research pointed out that per 1000 cameras, only one crime was solved, and people could not walk anywhere without being seen. Over the last decade, this tendency also reached the Netherlands. Our local and national authorities have taken many measurements as well to increase control on behaviour of people through surveillance and social control; more police officers are surveilling the streets; CCTV cameras are placed in popular (nightlife) districts; since 2008 they are implementing the “ Burgernet” program in over 50 cities across the country and counting; a telephone line has launched s where people can tip the police anonymously; and the government even launched an advertising campaign in 2011, named: “ grab your camera, catch the offender” (Dutch:“ Pak de overvaller, pak je camera.”) in which it summons civilians to use their digital cameras or mobile phones to capture images of people committing a possible crime.

The government clearly intensifies the surveillance, and tries to intensify the social control. The idea of total surveillance is a frightening thought, like the

constant presence of “ Big brother” in George Orwell’s 1984, emphasised by the phrase “ Big Brother is watching you” underneath every poster or image of the Party’s leader. I personally am terrified by the idea of being monitored constantly, with disciplinary consequences for my actions and not having the power to act freely. The opposite is true for the concept of social control. The concept of social control does not scare me at all. In design studio projects social control is often used by students as a design tool to prevent unsafe places from existing in the designed buildings. Another example is the “ Burgernet” initiative, which is mentioned earlier, in which civilians are summoned through text-message alerts on mobile phones to help the police solve crimes, through civilian surveillance.

Since its first implication in 2008 it has proven to be a very helpful tool, and since this month, the system has been launched in our capitol Amsterdam. Apparently, social control, in which civilians are willing to co-operate, is often seen something positive, while surveillance, practiced by authorities or private parties, could be seen as something negative. My personal interest lays in how these mechanisms of power work. How can power be practiced through surveillance?

And what is the difference between surveillance and social control? And how is it then possible that social control is accepted, while surveillance by authorities raises aversion? To gain knowledge of these power technologies, we will investigate the Panopticon design by British philosopher Jeremy Bentham as the “ simple architectural idea” that was of great influence on the development of the discipline society we live in, which is described by the

french philosopher Michel Foucault in his theory of Panopticism. We will investigate how this model relates to modern surveillance and social control.

The tendency of individualising society or the amount of measurements taken, will not be discussed in this essay, neither will we discuss the cause of the growing need for security nor the constitution, nor the legislation of a disciplinary society. We will focus only on the workings of power mechanisms, their influence on society and the difference between surveillance and social control.

Before diving into the subject of the Panopticon, and the difference between surveillance and social control, we will define the psychological terms angst and fear first, and their relationship to power, which are important to get a hold on how the Panopticon influences human behaviour and to understand the influence of surveillance and social control on people's behaviour in our society.

**Angst and fear** The first thing we need to do is to clarify the meaning of the word Angst in order to define it later. Angst (derived from German, meaning anxiety) is introduced by philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) in his book "The Concept of Anxiety" (1844) and it describes an intense feeling of anxiety. Angst has a distinct difference with the term Furcht (meaning fear); Furcht is negative anticipation, targeting a possible concrete threat or object, while Angst is an emotion, nondirectional, without a target object.

We will use the word angst instead of anxiety, since the word angst is further defined and used in a psychological context, referring to the term introduced by Kierkegaard. Since the earlier definition is not satisfying enough to

support this essay, we will further explore angst by defining the term according to the anthropological approach of Gerrit Glas, a Dutch philosopher and psychiatrist as described in his book “Angst” (2001). In this book, he reviews different approaches to angst by philosophers and psychologists and concludes these with an anthropological definition of angst, which is usable in his field of study, psychotherapy. This essay does not include the psychological conclusions of his work; we are only interested in his definition of angst. To understand the context of his definition of angst, we will use the references to Freud, Goldstein and Kronfeld that Glas uses in his book to explain the concept of angst and its relation to fear.

In Freud’s view, neurotic angst is a reaction to an inner threat, while real angst is based on a perception of an outer threat (p. 23). Like Kierkegaard, Freud distinguishes two forms of angst: neurotic and real angst, which are comparable with Kierkegaard’s Angst and Furcht. In Goldstein’s view, angst is not solely an objectless form of fear. He even takes it a step further, giving angst a fundamental place by defining angst as a threat to the existential actions of an organism. What an organism fears is the occurrence of angst. Fear is the notion of the possible occurrence of angst and a way to face up to that angst. Fear encourages action, while angst paralyses the organism. (p. 42-43) In other words: Fear is a fleeing of angst, projected on something we can act upon to avoid desolation and paralysis. Kronfeld discusses angst being an emotion, and supports Goldstein’s existential approach. Emotions are by definition involved with an object. As angst is objectless, it surpasses the emotional state. Angst is in its full meaning always death angst:

Angst is the psychic form of the existential abolishment of the entity of a person. Her origin is death angst, the anxiety that occurs in vital destruction. (Kronfeld 1935, 378) Angst can not be reduced to a merely objectless form of fear, Glas continues (p. 46-48), for it implies that objectless emotions would be accepted in the domain of the intentionality. The self is, in the words of Kierkegaard, a relating to itself. This relating to itself, that constitutes the selfness, and gives the definition of the person meaning, exists in “ that it relates to itself, because it relates to an other”. (...)

From this principle, the full psychology of the intentionality gets its meaning and purpose. Meaning and purpose are not any longer philosophical, but immanent-psychological categories. (Kronfeld 1935, 386) Angst exists within the person itself, it is an immanent part of that persons psyche and it relates to the person like fear relates to other objects which it is projected upon in order to exist.

Finally, Glas concludes: Angst robs the human being of his freedom. In angst it becomes apparent to what extent freedom is a structural anchored quality of human existence. Angst isolates the human and alienates him from himself. Whoever lives in angst, lives in desolation. This indirectly points out the fundamental meaning of being connected to others and being in contact with oneself. In short, angst is indissoluble given with being a human: no self-development, no connection with others and the surrounding world, without there being angst. On the other hand, angst explains the threatening possibility of the collapse of structures which make this freedom, connection and familiarity possible and preserved. (Glas 2001, 59)

Since fear is a projection of angst on external objects, humans act to control these external threats in order to control the fear they experience and gain freedom through their actions. Let us take this one step further: Controlling external events and objects is an existential part of human life to free one's being. Total loss of control and freedom will therefore generate discomfort, fear and could eventually result in numbing angst. Humans will always have the existential need to control events in order not to live in desolation; they exercise power upon external influences in order to live a free life.

Power Power is described in most dictionaries as the ability to control external influences, organisms or events. Michel Foucault (1926-1984) defines power as “ a complex strategic situation in a given society social setting” (1980), with which he supports Niccolo Machiavelli's (1469-1527) theory given in Machiavelli's book “ Il Principe” (English: The Prince) (1517). Both Machiavelli and Foucault agree on the complexity of the matter, since it includes the balance of doing evil and doing good in order to exercise power upon others.

Foucault's approach to power is based on the concept “ technologies of power”, which is derived from his earlier book “ Discipline and Punish” (1977), referring to the technologies of power that were developed in the 18th and 19th century. Foucault sees power not as a way of enforcing one to act in a certain way, but making persons alter their regular behaviour by themselves. Not only is threatening with violence a way to gain behavioural change and therefore to exercise power, also marketing and branding are technologies of power; (trying to) make a person believe that he or she

needs an 'Ipad' to gain happiness, for example. Both of the previous examples contain the imposition of fear upon a person.

The first, a person fearing the possibility of being harmed in an act of violence, and the other, the (possible) fear of leading an unhappy life when a certain product is not purchased. These technologies of power are in essence founded on controlling the behaviour of humans through fear and therefore the notion of the possibility of angst. Jeremy Bentham's design of the Panopticon is a good example of this. The concept of the Panopticon will be explained later.) Niccolo Machiavelli also describes the relationship between fear and exercising power: one ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be wanting.

And men have less scruple in offending one who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared; for love is held by a chain of obligation which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails. <sup>1</sup> Thus, fear is a fundamental part of actively exercising power. Paradoxically, the ones who exercise power act out of fear as well: the fear of losing control and being overpowered by others and of course the fear of being in angst as well. In the ruler's case, to control other persons, one must actively constrain the freedom of others by generating and imposing (a notion of) fear upon others.

Ultimate power is obtained when the subject is in state of paralysis and all the freedom to act on its own is constrained. Every human can act in the role of the ruler, everyone can exercise power and try to control external



influences. Furthermore, power can be imposed not only on humans or other organisms, but also on events and objects and forces of nature.

**Panopticon** Let us focus on the discipline mechanism of the Panopticon, a prison designed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, in which fear, angst and power are well balanced tools to gain control over the behaviour of the inmates in the prison. The Panopticon is a cylindrical shaped prison, with well lit cells in the peripheral radius of the cylinder, in which the prisoners were individualised, a large courtyard in the middle of the prison, and a watchtower in the centre, from which guards could observe every single prisoner. The prison was designed in such manner that the prisoners could be seen by the guards in the central watchtower, but they could not see if they are being observed.

This resulted in a “ visible trap”. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication”(Foucault 1977: p. 201) What is very important in this equation of the panoptic principle, and what is not stated directly in Foucault’s explanation, is the suspense of terror/fear through the unknowingness of the prisoner or whoever is in a panoptic mechanism, the visible trap that he is in. Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon.

Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so the Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the seeing/being seen dyad: in the

peripheral ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. (Foucault 1977, p. 202) This last fact is important in the creation of fear among subjects of the panopticon. Not only can the subjects not see the observants, they also can not see the observants' actions, their ethics and their behaviour: the way the observants operate.

As if the prisoners know the game and the rules, but do not know how the rules are interpreted and when and how these rules are applied. The combination of full exposure, individuality, and uncertainty will be the source of discomfort, fear, and finally, having no object to project their fear upon, the fear can result in angst, paralysing angst. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which in simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 1977, p. 202-203)

Although the prisoners may not know the operations of the supposed observers and that uncertainty will be a great source of fear and angst among the prisoners, the operations of the supervisors are also observed, since the ideal panoptic system also penetrates the operations of the observers in the tower through inspection. The observers are constantly observed by everyone, so that autonomous power is prevented and the increase of power through the panoptic mechanism does not degenerate into tyranny.

The panopticon only works if everything is in balance and transparent from the top down. • If the observer can be seen by a lower level (prisoners), there is no “ visual trap”, no uncertainty, no fear, no angst and no control. • If the observer can not see everything, there are no consistent disciplinary actions, no total control, which the prisoners will notice, the “ visual trap” will fall apart, no fear, no angst, hence no power. • If the observer is not being observed, he will have the possibility to make autonomous decisions, giving him full power with tyranny as a possible consequence. Tyranny will cause injustice, and injustice will lead to hatred (according to Machiavelli), hatred will eventually lead to revolt and revolt to the destruction of power. From this point, it starts from the top.

The observers are observed in a similar way as the prisoners, with the same anonymity, but in their own environment. Anyone has the accessibility to observe any of the observers. It has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power maybe supervised by society as a whole. (Foucault 1977, ...) Although the Bentham’s design was never put to practice through realisation, its principles were very influential. When knowing the principle of the panopticon, it is not hard to see that this principle of panopticism is deeply nested into our society. In order to be controlled, members of society must have fear for possible disciplinary measurements in which to normalise their behaviour.

The fact that doing something wrong according to the laws of the state would have a negative effect on their lives and their freedom to act, would be enough to let one rethink one’s actions before putting them into practice. The only condition, according to the panoptic mechanism, is that a person

should have the feeling that he could be seen or heard any moment, so that the uncertainty of being seen would cause him to change his own behaviour.

Surveillance versus social control Surveillance through the 4.2 million cctv cameras in Great Britain's public spaces is a great example of the continued application of the panoptic mechanism in modern society. Its relation to the concept of the visible trap is apparent: the subject is always visible and can not see if their being monitored by the supposed viewer and what the intentions of the viewers are.

This increases the discomfort of the subject will result in fear when persons have no privacy left. In case of the cctv surveillance in Great Britain, according to this tendency, there will be no public space left where a person can not be observed. Although this tendency would mean that the control is applied very effectively, it brings back the comparison with George Orwell's 1984 and the East German Stasi. The problem with these "supersurveillances" lays in the fact that the panoptic mechanism that is applied, is not the concept of the ideal, transparent panopticon, where the maximum intensity of power is not at "the bodies that can be individualised by these relations", but in "the person of the king" (Foucault 1977, ...), the government or private institution in this case.

This way, transparency is lost, resulting in misbalance, which the panoptic mechanism relies on in order to work properly. Although social control is also founded on the same panoptic principle and also uses the concept of the visual trap, it is different from the concept of surveillance. The difference is that the person who are being observed, are the observers as well. Since the

power is known and its maximum lies not in “ the person of the king” it is accepted. Its a democratic panoptic system while surveillance is an oligarchic panoptic system. Moreover, the intentions behind the apparatuses of behavioural control aren’t unknown. Since everyone is an observer as well as a person being observed, they know what one’s intentions operations and ethics might be. Through participation subjects temporarily become objects of communication instead of objects of information.

That is probably the reason why the “ Burgernet” obtained such great results. By letting civilians participate in the apparatus, they become part of the system instead of mere prisoners of the system. In order for a state to function well, a disciplinary mechanism such as the panoptic mechanism is necessary. Persons in a society can only live together in a nation that is well organised and when the behaviour of persons can be normalised to such degree that nobody feels affected in their personal freedom by the actions of others.

Therefore, surveillance and social control are inextricable bound up with such societies in order to maintain control of these actions. These apparatuses must be implemented in such a manner that the perception of personal freedom remains unaffected. Its the authorities’ duty is to ensure that the civilians do not become prisoners of their own disciplinary society and become desolated individuals. Stimulating participation in society and collective effort are the key to achieve this.