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A U T H O R	Milan Elsen	
D A T E	2025	

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B. B. T. B.		2025

I N S T I T U T E  
**Cologne University of Applied Sciences**  
Faculty of Cultural Studies  
Köln International School of Design

C O U R S E  
**Intermediate Project**  
Bachelor of Arts »Integrated Design«

S U P E R V I S I O N  
**Prof. Dr. Lasse Scherffig**  
Interaction Design

S U B M I T T E D O N  
**June 26th, 2025**

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**Hereby I declare that the Intemediate submitted is my own  
unaided work. All direct or indirect  
sources and aids used are acknowledged as references.**

**Cologne, June 26th, 2025:**



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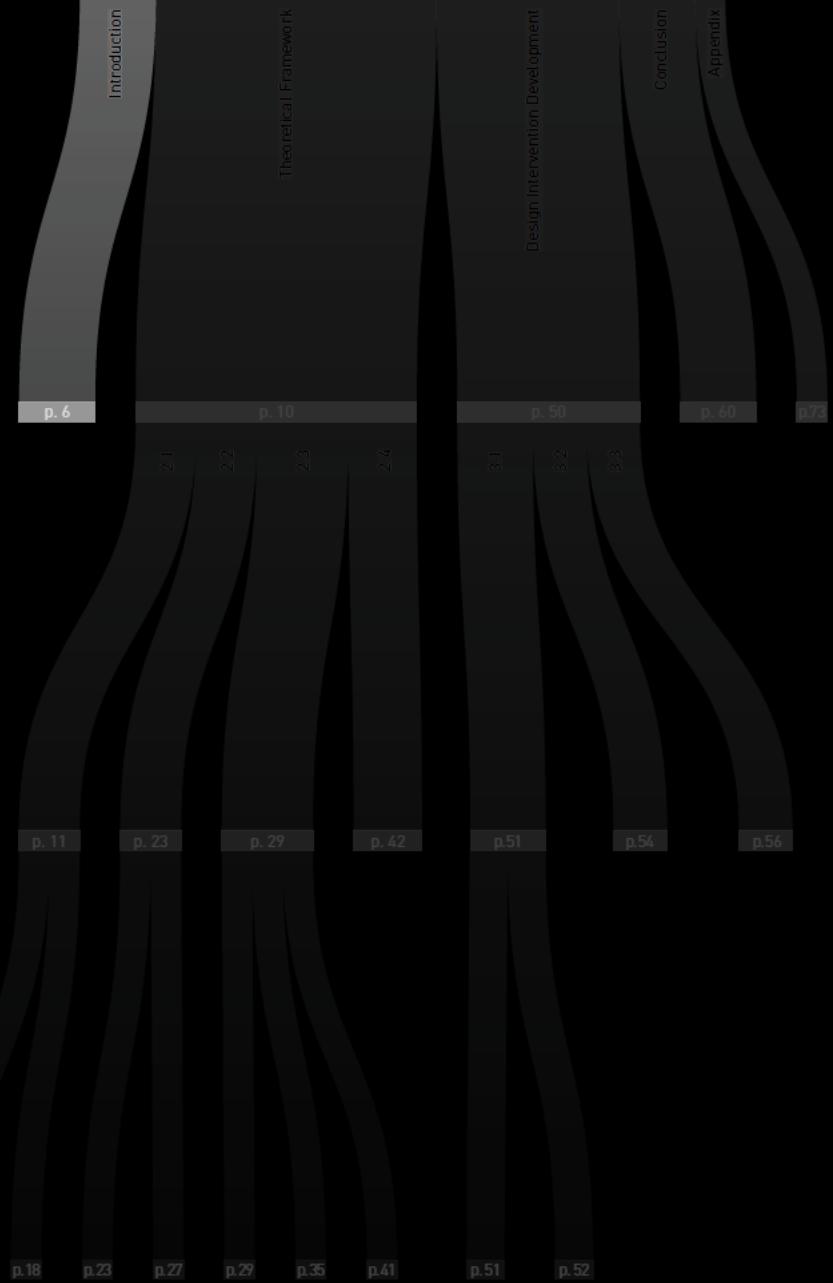
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# Part 1: Introduction



Contemporary Western societies are surveillance societies, but not in the popular, centralized sense of a "Big Brother" figure watching from above. Instead, they are better understood through the lens of theories of distributed surveillance, sousveillance, social surveillance, and surveillance capitalism.

Today, surveillance society operates through a decentralized and pervasive infrastructure of data collection embedded in everyday life: from digital payment tracking to fitness wearables, messaging app read receipts, and social media. Individuals both generate and are subjected to continuous streams of data across physical and digital environments.

This research hypothesizes that such a system alters conceptions of trust and intimacy, with constant visibility and verification injected into trust-building processes.

While participation in many of these technologies appears voluntary, the condition as a whole is inescapable and functions as a cultural condition rather than a series of isolated choices. Surveillance no longer merely disciplines, it creates its own subjects, shapes the performance of the self, and changes social relationship mechanisms.

The analysis begins by recapitulating and contrasting the foundational and highly respected theories of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze on surveillance and control. These classical frameworks are then used as a backdrop to examine a few exemplary contemporary technologies of distributed data collection to answer the question of whether these theories are still applicable today. Building on this, theorists Steve Mann, Shoshana Zuboff, and Alice E. Marwick provide insight into how contemporary surveillance society is both decentralized and driven by the logic of digital platforms. Finally, the affective and interpersonal dimensions neglected by Foucault and Deleuze are introduced. Drawing on Alice Marwick and Erving Goffman and using social media as the most prominent example of a contemporary control mechanism it explores performativity under anticipated visibility, and how these dynamics alter conceptions of trust. In doing so, the research examines how surveillance society reshapes social relations.

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On this basis, the project explores how design can function as a critical tool for engaging with the lived experience of surveillance society. Unlike theoretical critique or policy analysis, design operates at the level of affect and perception; it can render abstract, systemic conditions tangible and experiential. Critical design can interrupt everyday assumptions by staging interventions that reveal the practices of surveillance society. To ground this approach, existing design strategies and methodologies will be examined, and forms of technological intervention will be critically assessed.

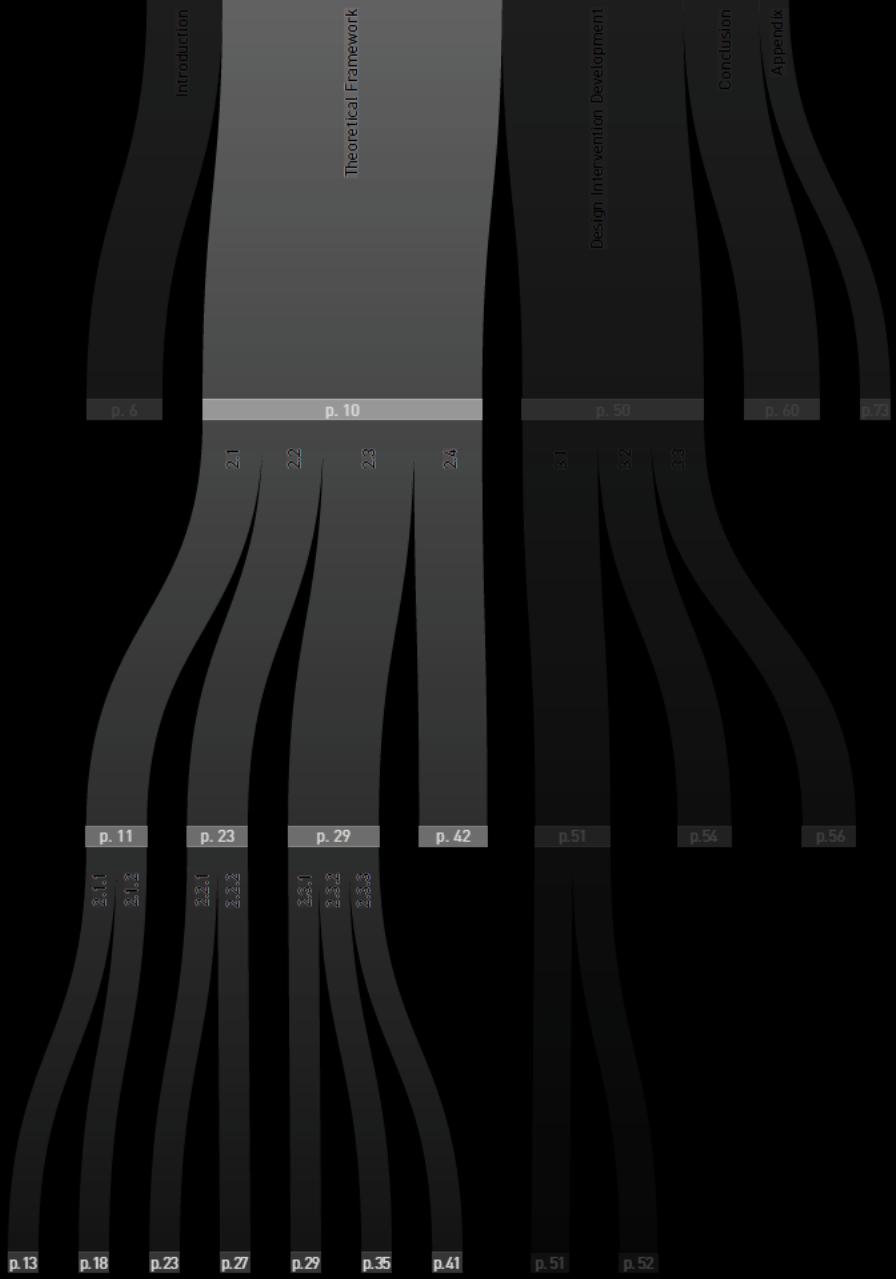
The approach taken here draws from speculative and critical design traditions, which use designed artifacts not to solve problems, but to surface them, provoke

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awareness, discomfort, or critical thought. The goal is not to visualize surveillance in its dystopian, cinematic form, but to reflect its banal, integrated presence in daily life. Visually it avoids dystopian clichés in the familiar, but outdated surveillance aesthetics. The project instead adopts more recent developments of surveillance aesthetics by using a design language that mirrors the seductive rationality of platform design. The goal of this work is to build a prototype of an interactive installation that encourages reflection on surveillance society's social effects through subtle interaction. The outcome will stage these dynamics in a focused experience. It does not simulate or illustrate surveillance society, but exposes its ambient presence and invites reflection on how it mediates social relations.

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## Part 2: Theoretical Framework



### 2.1 Disciplinary Power, Panopticism and Surveillance

In the milestone of surveillance theory, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, first published in French in 1975,

Michel Foucault outlines a historical transformation in the penal systems of Western society that he locates in the 19th century. While his analysis is grounded in historical research conducted specifically in France, the structural changes he describes, and the broader societal implications, can be understood as part of a "genealogy of the present scientifico-legal complex"<sup>1</sup> that is applicable across modern Western societies more generally.

The shift Foucault describes is one from punishment through visible pain and torture to a more passive system of disciplinary conditioning. This transformation is not merely a change in methods, but a deeper restructuring of how power operates on individuals and bodies.

Although Foucault offers an extensive account of pre-disciplinary penal systems, this overview will focus primarily on the

<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1977), 23.

disciplinary societies and their use of surveillance. Nevertheless, some background is necessary to understand this shift. In so-called sovereign societies, all power was concentrated in the figure of the sovereign, who ruled over the people and inflicted pain on criminals as a symbolic extension of god-given authority. Torture was not only a public spectacle of punishment but also a theological trial: a means of extracting confession and testing guilt before God. If a person withstood torture without confessing, they were sometimes spared execution regardless of the available evidence.<sup>2</sup>

Punishments and executions were public events. While the sovereign did not personally enact the punishments, these displays were meant to manifest their absolute power, often accompanied by military parades or rituals of state.<sup>3</sup> Over time, however, these spectacles began to backfire. Instead of glorifying the sovereign's authority, public torture and execution came to provoke widespread discontent. The brutality of these punishments was seen not as righteous, but as archaic and shameful, casting doubt on the justice system's claims to fairness. It raised questions about whether punishment truly adhered to equitable principles.<sup>4</sup>

A reform movement began to emerge from within the justice system itself. The magistrates, then the *privileged points* of power, wielded disproportionate authority not only over the people but also over one another. Their judgments were marked by a lack of accountability and a tendency toward arbitrariness. The reformers criticized both the system's excessive violence and the inconsistency of its application.<sup>5</sup> Public sympathy also increasingly shifted toward those being punished. They identified with the executed rather than the executioner, not only out of shared vulnerability

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to sovereign power, but also because executions often dramatized social tensions and injustices that many spectators themselves experienced or feared. Rather than reinforcing the intended deterrent effect and the authority of the sovereign, the spectacle increasingly revealed the arbitrariness and fragility of their rule.<sup>6</sup> This crisis demanded reform, a new system, one that would be more uniformly distributed, more efficient, and more totalizing, yet without exposing the raw violence of punitive power. The first principle of this new system was to hide punishment from view. Instead of staging power as a bloody spectacle, disciplinary power would operate invisibly. By abstracting punishment from the body and embedding it within institutions, the ruling authorities maintained full control over the narrative of justice.<sup>7</sup>

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At this point, one might ask: Why actually do the work of torturing people, if you already control the story? This question marks the emergence of a new mechanism of power: the birth of the prison.

### 2.1.1 Panopticism

The emergence of the prison marked not only a shift in how punishment was carried out, but also introduced an entirely new logic of power: one based on surveillance, normalization, and internalized control. The Panopticon, from the Greek *pan* meaning "all" and *optikon* meaning "for sight",<sup>8</sup> is a concept for prison architecture invented by Jeremy Bentham, a design that, for Foucault, becomes a key to understanding the broader dynamics of disciplinary society. It has a very particular structure, with cells arranged in a circle around a central watchtower. This way, the guard in the watchtower has a 360-degree view of all the cells. The prisoners, however, cannot see whether there is actually a guard present.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 37–40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 47–50.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 9.  
<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Harper, "Panopticon – Etymology, Origin & Meaning," etymonline, accessed May 31, 2025, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/panopticon>.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

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1 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1977), 23.  
2 Foucault, 37–40.  
3 Foucault, 47–50.  
4 Foucault, 80.  
5 Foucault, 80.

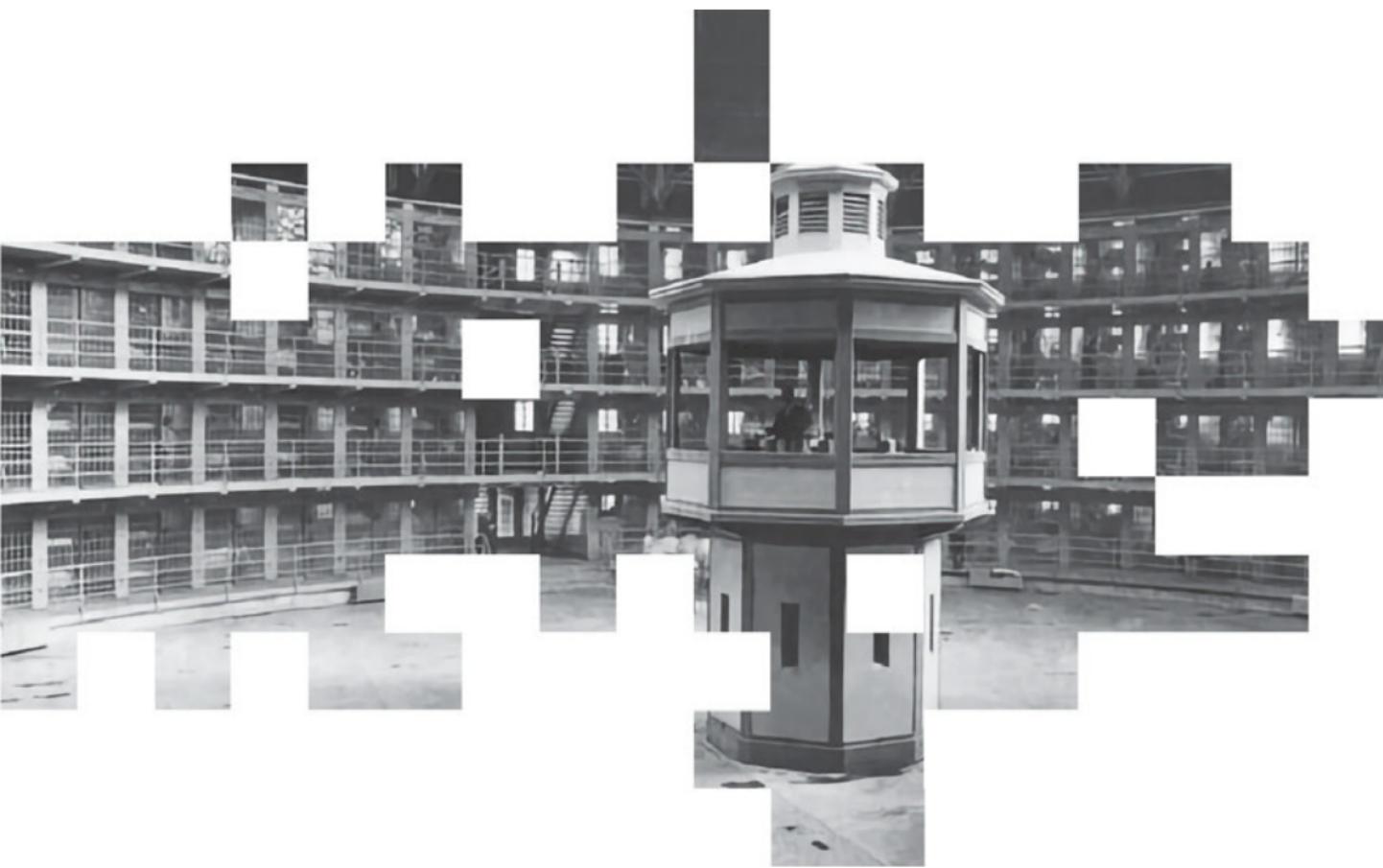
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6 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1977), 23.  
7 Foucault, 37–40.  
8 Foucault, 47–50.  
9 Foucault, 80.  
10 Foucault, 80.

**FIGURE 2.1** “PANOPTIC PRISON IN ILLINOIS”



Foucault picks up on the idea that it doesn't actually matter whether there is a guard in the tower at all. The behavior of the prisoners is shaped by the assumption of being watched, whether that is actually the case or not. Prisoners are practically controlling themselves. Visibility becomes a mechanism of control, rather than freedom.<sup>10</sup> Disciplinary power doesn't just punish people or prevent them from acting out; it shapes them. This means that surveillance under disciplinary regimes doesn't simply repress deviance, but generates compliant, self-regulating individuals.<sup>11</sup> The move toward this system was presented as a humanization, since it shifted away from physical pain as the primary means of punishment. However, it also expanded the scope of power, increasingly targeting not just spectacular crimes, but more everyday offenses, issues previously treated as petty, like theft.<sup>12</sup> Crime was no longer felt as an attack against the sovereign, but as an offense against society as a whole. This shift led people to identify with disciplinary power rather than its victims, mistakenly equating its interest with those of society as a whole.<sup>13</sup> Foucault uses the concept of the Panopticon as a metaphor for disciplinary society as a whole; it is not limited to criminals or prisons. Its logic also describes institutions such as the family, schools, hospitals, and the military that operate on the same principles of observation, assessment, and normalization.<sup>14</sup> While it is essential to criticize the normalizing and disciplinary functions of institutions such as schools, hospitals, and families, this should not be misread as a call for their complete rejection.<sup>15</sup> These institutions also fulfill essential roles in education, care, and social cohesion. The objective of critique should be to reveal the operations

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10 Ibid., 201.

11 Ibid., 170.

12 Ibid., 86–89.

13 Ibid., 90.

14 Ibid., 205.

15 Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?": Lecture to the Société Française de Philosophie . May 27, 1978," in "What Is Critique?" And "the Culture of the Self", ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud, Daniele Lorenzini, and Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024), 22.

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of power within these institutions and encourage thought on reimagining them in more equitable and participatory ways. This is something difficult, as these institutions have become so pervasive and ideologically anchored, making it challenging to imagine alternatives, according to Foucault.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.1.2 Surveillance

In both everyday language and academic debate, "watching over" has become a metaphor for nearly all monitoring activities,<sup>17</sup> but Foucault attributes it some very specific properties. As evident by the metaphor of the Panopticon, surveillance is a fundamental technique

of disciplinary power. It produces what Foucault calls docile bodies, individuals who regulate their own behavior in anticipation of being seen.<sup>18</sup>

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Surveillance works by creating visibility, not to punish, but to normalize. It is not primarily about identifying deviance, but about shaping conduct so that deviance never occurs in the first place.<sup>19</sup>

Foucault describes this form of control as perpetual, ubiquitous, and uninterrupted.<sup>20</sup> It becomes embedded in routines and institutions through behavioral monitoring, and continuous assessment, none of which require a sovereign figure or explicit violence. Surveillance in this sense is a power over the mind rather than the body.

He emphasizes that the gaze of surveillance need not come from a single authority figure; rather, it can be enacted by virtually anyone. "Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine,"<sup>21</sup> he writes of the Panopticon, whether it be a guard, a visitor, or even a fellow inmate. Surveillance functions not through the monopoly of power but through its circulation. This is what Foucault means

16 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 184, 211, 222.

17 Anders Albrechtslund, "Online Social Networking as Participatory Surveillance," *First Monday*, March 3, 2008,

18 Ibid., 183.  
20 Ibid., 206.  
21 Ibid., 202.

**FIGURE 2.2** “CCTV CAMERA”



by power being capillary:<sup>22</sup> it does not flow from above, is not localized, but is diffused through a network of institutional sites in the entire social body, enacted at every level.<sup>23</sup> The effect is a kind of ambient vigilance, where the possibility of being observed exists everywhere and the role of the observer and the observed can no longer be clearly separated. “He who is subjected to a field of visibility [...] simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection”.<sup>24</sup> An example of this dynamic is stopping at a red light late at night, even when no one is around. The behavior is not enforced by a present authority but by an internalized sense of being observed.

Surveillance does not treat individuals as autonomous subjects but rather as objects of knowledge and correction.<sup>25</sup> Yet paradoxically, it also individualizes them and distinguishes each person from others, tracking their behavior, and creating differentiated paths through society.<sup>26</sup> Surveillance renders the individual both subject and object: a source of agency within set boundaries, and a target of continuous regulation. Metaphorically, it can be thought of as a cabinet of mirrors. It is a room where every wall reflects back the individual. Although one is free to move within the room, the reflections subtly influence how one carries oneself, what one chooses to reveal, and what one learns to suppress. After all, one also is still physically confined to the room.

Surveillance thus draws the lines of normativity. It tells people what is acceptable, not by decree, but by framing their sense of what is possible. It allows for freedom within the correct bounds. This autonomy can make disciplinary power even more effective and insidious than sovereign force. This leads to a productive tension: while surveillance

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individualizes, tracking and categorizing each person uniquely, it ultimately works to homogenize behavior. Everyone may follow a different path, but the destination is the same: compliance.

Yet Foucauldian surveillance is more than a tool for normalization of socially accepted behavior; it is productive. It exerts power not by physical coercion, but through the internalization of norms. It operates permanently and silently, without the need for direct force or even visible authority. Its primary function, historically, was the production of docile bodies obedient politically and suited for the demands of factory labor.<sup>27</sup>

Foucault’s analysis has been widely received across philosophy, sociology, and other disciplines. David Lyon, a prominent surveillance researcher, has compiled many relevant theories and texts on surveillance from different schools of thought, in addition to his own substantial contributions to the field. Lyon affirms Foucault’s influence by recognizing that panopticism and disciplinary societies remain dominant lenses through which surveillance is still analyzed. Indirectly, he also reinforces Foucault’s view by asserting that surveillance is so pervasive in today’s world that it is appropriate to “talk of ‘surveillance societies’”.<sup>28</sup> (Following him, I use the term as an umbrella for the contemporary condition described throughout this work, one whose facets are captured by the various referenced authors using different terms. This is to avoid confusion and maintain consistency.)

Yet he also criticizes some of the implications of the Foucauldian framework. In particular, he argues that surveillance does not affect all people equally. Especially in the post-9/11 era, it often operates in a differentiated

27 Ibid., 138.  
28 David Lyon, “Surveillance, Power and Everyday Life,” in *Emerging Digital Spaces in Contemporary Society: Properties of Technology*, ed. Phillip Kalantzis-Cope and Karim Gherab-Martin (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 107.

22 Ibid., 198.  
23 Ibid., 178-179.  
24 Ibid., 202-203.  
25 Ibid., 194.  
26 Ibid., 184.

**FIGURE 2.3** "TRAFFIC LIGHT AT NIGHT"



and exclusionary manner, disproportionately targeting specific groups.<sup>29</sup> As Lyon emphasizes, the central issue is not simply that surveillance may be intrusive or unwelcome; rather, “social relations and social power are organized in part through surveillance strategies”.<sup>30</sup> It is precisely this structuring of power and inequality that Foucault also described, which underscores the ongoing relevance of surveillance as a subject of critical inquiry. Though Lyon also notes that discourses on surveillance also emphasize different aspects of the phenomenon, not discussed by Foucault. Among others, he highlights Gilles Deleuze’s ideas on the matter.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.2 Control

### 2.2.1 Deleuze’s Control Society

In 1990, Gilles Deleuze published his famous essay *Postscript on the Societies of Control*. It is a speculative and prophetic text, written at the dawn of the digital age, describing and anticipating yet another shift in how power is exercised in societies.

Deleuze introduces his concept of control societies by contrasting it to the historically preceding disciplinary societies as described by Foucault. The defining feature of disciplinary societies for Deleuze is that they operate through control of space and time. The institutions Foucault described are physically separate, people move from one to another throughout the day and throughout a life, but can only be in one at a time. Each has its own rules, but all have in common that they organize people in space and time, they function as a mold, shaping individuals that pass through.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Gilles Deleuze,

“Postscript on the Societies of Control,” October 59 [1992]: 4.

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In school, as in the hospital, the barracks, or the factory, activities throughout the day are rigidly structured according to timetables, each happening in their designated space (dormitory, classroom, gym, cafeteria,...) and coordinated by clear hierarchies. This is what he means when he says that the prison “serves as the analogical model,” all these institutions share the prison’s logic of enclosure and normalization.<sup>33</sup> Building on the term control previously explored by William Burroughs and Paul Virilio, Deleuze speculates in the second section about what might replace the institutions of discipline: control society. Noting from the start that he wants to make no qualitative judgment whether this is better or worse, as the underlying conflict between oppression and individual freedom is present in both systems.<sup>34</sup> He describes the abstract logic of this system through drawing a number of distinctions between control and disciplinary societies:

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### ENCLOSURE VS. MODULATION

In control societies, the flow of power is modulated continuously, reflecting a shift from the segmented procedural control of disciplinary societies. It works with information, it is numerical, networked, and it functions through codes and passwords, rather than walls. There is no longer a clear inside and outside, control operates in an open environment.<sup>35</sup>

### INDIVIDUAL VS. DIVIDUAL

Where disciplinary societies worked on individuals, molded by disciplinary power into the mass, control societies break people down into data fragments, behavioral patterns, and statistical units as part of databases, patterns, and markets, or in Deleuze’s own terms, *dividuals* that are part of banks.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

**FIGURE 2.4** “CELL TOWER”



## I N S T I T U T I O N S   V S .

### N E T W O R K E D   E N V I R O N M E N T

We no longer pass from family to school to work to retirement. The boundaries between institutions dissolve. There is no start or end, as Deleuze notes, to the previously separate spheres of education, family, work, and leisure. Confinement is no longer necessary, as control is continuous and omnipresent. Control is not about confining within enclosures, but positioning individuals in an open environment and constantly readjusting access to spaces and information.<sup>37</sup>

### T R A I N I N G   V S .   T E S T I N G

Disciplinary societies emphasize training (molding) individuals to form the desirable behaviors and internal discipline, whereas control societies focus on testing. Individuals are continuously tested, re-evaluated, and sorted.

In sum, Deleuze's Postscript outlines a shift from disciplinary societies of enclosure to control societies defined by continuous modulation, where individuals become individuals, data fragments in open systems governed by constantly adjusted access control. Deleuze offers not a finished theory, but a conceptual map of a world where power operates without borders, shaping behavior through continuous circulation and code.

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## T H E O R E T I C A L   F R A M E W O R K

### 2.2.2 From Foucault to Deleuze: Novel paradigm or logical continuation?

Gilles Deleuze's Postscript on the Societies of Control does not articulate its claims in clear or systematic terms. This ambiguity is part of its appeal, the text is fragmentary, and its aphoristic style leaves it open to interpretation. While referencing Foucault's thoughts on disciplinary power, it might be read as describing an entirely new mode of power. A closer reading suggests that what Deleuze describes may not be that, but rather a continuation and intensification of disciplinary power.

Deleuze himself emphasizes the historical continuity between the two forms, noting that control societies are "in the process of replacing"<sup>38</sup> disciplinary ones and citing Foucault's recognition of the "transience" of the disciplinary model.<sup>39</sup>

The prison, as Foucault repeatedly insists, is always reforming and adapting.<sup>40</sup> In this light, the transition from discipline to control appears less like a replacement and more like a continuation.

The shifts Deleuze identifies, (enclosure vs. Modulation, confinement vs. access control, institutions vs. networks, discipline vs. preemption, and individuals vs. individuals) can be understood as extensions of disciplinary logics. Control societies no longer work with space-time confinement, but rather diffuse power beyond the institutional walls. Power is modulated,<sup>41</sup> variable and continuously responding dynamically to changing conditions.

Foucault never claimed that the disciplinary institutions he describes are the only sites where power is

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 234.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 4.

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exercised. Rather they must be seen as distillations of power relations that exist in society as a whole. These institutions are exemplary. In this sense, Deleuze's modulation sharpens an analytic already present in Foucault: What he describes as "control", is the role that surveillance played before within the institutions. What changes is not its function, exercising power through inducing self-regulation, but its scope: it shifts from being exercised in enclosed institutional instances to operating across generalized society-wide networks.

Access control to certain places is replacing confinement within institutions.<sup>42</sup> This still implies some sort of actor in deciding on this access though. One might even describe it as a privileged point of power in the Foucauldian sense, going back even before disciplinary power and reaffirming the presence of sovereign logic within control societies.

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Whether Foucault foresaw the shift from institutional to networked forms of power is more open to interpretation. The gaze, as Foucault describes it, is capillary, it flows throughout the social body, comes from everywhere and can look everywhere. Overseers monitor workers, who are in turn watched by managers, all governed by market forces. Power is decentralized in disciplinary societies. The possibility that anyone can be a watcher, and thus take on the role of the powerful, is already inscribed in the disciplinary schema.<sup>43</sup>

Just like control societies, disciplinary societies are preemptive as well. Preemption is fulfilled by the role surveillance plays: not merely to react, but to anticipate and correct behavior before deviation occurs. The disciplinary subject is always already engaged in anticipatory self-correction in the presence of surveillance.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>43</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 202–203.  
<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 201.

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The shift from individuals to dividuals, while an interesting neologism, and analytically certainly sharper than Foucault's terms, is also already laid out in disciplinary society. Its apparatus depends on examination and categorization, processes that also reduce subjects to data points and statistical aggregates.<sup>45</sup> The subject abstracted through disciplinary techniques thus can also be described as dividual.

In this light, many of the developments Deleuze sketches in his 1990 text are already accounted for in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, albeit roughly. Specifically, surveillance fulfills the role of "control" in the disciplinary paradigm, so what Deleuze describes seems rather like a shift in scale, a continuation and intensification of that paradigm.

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Nevertheless, Deleuze's *Postscript* remains valuable. It provides a concise and provocative update to Foucault's analysis, offering a new and sharper vocabulary to describe contemporary modes of power. It does not supplant Foucault, but extends and updates his insights for a new moment, one marked not by the disappearance of discipline, but by its changing nature. It enhances surveillance and subtler, more diffuse control mechanisms over institutions.

### 2.3 Contemporary Distributed Surveillance

#### 2.3.1 Control Society Today

Deleuze wrote that, in the future it will be up to the "young people [...] to discover what they're being made to serve".<sup>46</sup> Indeed, we might revisit *Postscript on the Societies of Control* today and ask ourselves: Do the concepts of *Control Society* still hold any merit today?

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>46</sup> Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 7.

First published nearly 35 years ago, the *Postscript* is compact, pointed, and highly speculative. Deleuze sketches a vision that is intentionally broad and open-ended. While he identifies early roots of control society emerging in his time, he deliberately refrains from anchoring his analysis in specific technologies. Instead, he aims to capture a more abstract logic of control. The question of its contemporary relevance has also been addressed by James Brusseau in his essay *Deleuze's Postscript on the Societies of Control: Updated for Big Data and Predictive Analytics* which draws connections between Deleuze's speculative framework and present-day technologies and governance systems.<sup>47</sup>

#### FAILED PREDICTIONS, ENDURING LOGIC

The strengths in Deleuze's Postscript lie not in its specific predictions, which, as we shall see, mostly failed to materialize, but in the abstract logic it sketches out. James Brusseau argues that Deleuze's core insights are, in fact, more applicable than ever in the era of big data, algorithmic decision-making, and biometric surveillance.<sup>48</sup> While Deleuze deliberately refrained from grounding his theory in specific technologies, his descriptions of access control, continuous modulation, as well as dividualism, anticipate precisely the dynamics that define today's digitally networked world. That said, many of

Deleuze's concrete examples have not unfolded in the ways he imagined:

His proposal that incarceration would be replaced by *penalties of substitution* has only partially come true: while electronic ankle bracelets exist, they mostly supplement incarceration instead of replacing it.<sup>49</sup>

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47 James Brusseau, "Deleuze's Postscript on the Societies of Control Updated for Big Data and Predictive Analytics," *Theoria* 67, no. 164 (2020): 1–25.

48 Ibid.

49 David M. Reutter, "Electronic Monitoring: An Alternative to Incarceration or a Troubling Extension of Punishment?" *Criminal Legal News*, April 15, 2024, accessed June 4, 2025, <https://www.criminallegalnews.org/news/2024/apr/15/electronic-monitoring-alternative-incarceration-or-troubling-extension-punishment/>

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The idea that *corporations would absorb all levels of education* has not led to the disappearance of schools, though forms of "perpetual training" and educational corporatization have advanced significantly.<sup>50</sup>

The *collapse of university research* has not occurred, although its increasing dependence on private funding and corporate partnerships is well documented.<sup>51</sup>

**31** *Doctorless medicine*, in which algorithms identify risk groups, has been partially realized through health technologies, though its application remains limited.<sup>52</sup>

The factory has not been fully replaced by the *corporation*. Although largely outsourced to the Global South, much material production still exists in Western societies like Germany.<sup>53</sup>

However, the fact that these predictions did not come true exactly as described does not undermine Deleuze's logic. In fact, some of the core logics of control have only become more firmly established, including continuous modulation, access control, the breakdown of institutional segmentation, and dividualism.

Access to almost every domain of life is now mediated through digital systems. Entry into physical as well as digital spaces, education, banking, dating, employment, travel, and even public space is often governed by abstracted, digital, data-driven identification. Importantly,

50 Heather Roberts-Mahoney, Alexander J. Means, and Mark J. Garrison, "Netfiliing Human Capital Development: Personalized Learning Technology and the Corporatization of K-12 Education," *Journal of Education Policy* 31, no. 4 (2016): 405–420.

51 Molly McCluskey, "Public Universities Get an Education in Private Industry," *The Atlantic*, April 3, 2017, accessed June 4, 2025, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/04/public-universities-get-an-education-in-private-industry/521379/>.

52 Dakuo Wang et al., "'Brilliant AI Doctor' in Rural Clinics: Challenges in AI-Powered Clinical Decision Support System Deployment." In: *Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–18. ACM, May 6, 2021.

53 Statistisches Bundesamt, "Germany - Share of Economic Sectors in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2024," *Statista*, February 28, 2025, accessed June 2, 2025, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/295519/germany-share-of-economic-sectors-in-gross-domestic-product/>.

51 Statistisches Bundesamt, "Germany - Share of Economic Sectors in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2024," *Statista*, February 28, 2025, accessed June 2, 2025, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/295519/germany-share-of-economic-sectors-in-gross-domestic-product/>.

even infinitely reproducible and virtually costless digital goods are subject to strict access control regimes. This demonstrates how, with the development of these new digital technologies, the logic of power itself has adapted: control now restricts movement and opportunity through conditional access based on digital technologies.<sup>54</sup>

Contemporary society is not organized around enclosure or fixed segmentation in space and time. Work or school may be done at any time or place: “Work emails get read in bed at 3 am”.<sup>55</sup> Flexible hours and remote labor exemplify how control in the context of the workplace now functions through constant availability rather than physical presence. Brusseau points to another domain: Love. As the institution of marriage loses its relevance and romantic partners often meet at the workplace, “work life and romantic life entwine”,<sup>56</sup> further blurring distinctions between the old institutions.

32

As Brusseau notes, data brokers compile fragmented traces, the didual, into resolved identity profiles that can be economically exploited.<sup>57</sup> These profiles are then used to regulate access, target users, and generate value. However, a profile is not unified. The didual today is a modulated construct, in the Deleuzian sense, assembled dynamically from dispersed databases. This may include data from social media platforms, biometric information, location data, or purchasing histories. These data points are held by completely separate entities (local on-device databases, corporations, platforms, governments)

even across different countries and jurisdictions.<sup>58</sup> These data points are constantly recompiled in relation to incentives such as marketing goals. According to

54 Jeff Howe, “Licensed to Bill,” *Wired*, October 1, 2001. Accessed June 3, 2025. <https://www.wired.com/2001/10/drm/>.

55 Brusseau, *Deleuze’s Postscript Updated*, 13.

56 Ibid., 7.

57 Ibid., 5.

58 Ibid.

this logic, the didual becomes a monetizable construct. It is always in process. What is rewarded, surfaced, or made accessible depends on the algorithmically inferred risk, value, or relevance. Thus, demonstrating Control Society par excellence: Preemptive calibration of subjects, rather than the correction of deviance.

#### REVOLT & SOCIAL UPHEAVAL

Deleuze also invokes the question of resistance, there is a revolutionary spirit in his text, as he writes: “There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons”.<sup>59</sup> He imagines control societies as fragile and under threat of revolt: “control will have to deal with [...] the explosions within shanty towns or ghettos”.<sup>60</sup> Yet this spirit feels largely absent from the present.

33 While uprisings and protest movements persist in Western societies, they are shaped by the very infrastructures of control. Social media, messaging apps, and live stream platforms have enabled new forms of mobilization, but they also produce metadata, location traces, and behavioral patterns that feed back into predictive policing, platform moderation, and algorithmic profiling. Social movements try to resist control, but in doing so, often reinforce it by relying on infrastructures that capitalize on their visibility.<sup>61</sup> Also, as will be analyzed in the following chapter, today’s control mechanisms do not feel forcefully imposed, but enjoyable—a shift from Deleuze’s dystopian tone.

#### ECONOMIC DIMENSION

Deleuze was explicit that control societies mark a new phase of capitalism. If disciplinary societies coincided with the industrial era, organized around factories, production lines, and institutional enclosures, then control societies reflect a reconfiguration of capitalism around circulation,

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59 Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” 3.

60 Ibid., 7.

61 Zeynep Tufekci, “Twitter, Tear Gas, Revolution. How Protest Powered by Digital Tools Is Changing the World,” *Wired*, May 22, 2017. Accessed June 2, 2025. <https://www.wired.com/2017/05/twitter-tear-gas-protest-age-social-media/>.

what Marx recognized as an expansive moment in the reproduction of capital, not merely its distribution.<sup>62</sup> “Capitalism is no longer involved in production, which it often relegates to the Third World,” Deleuze writes.<sup>63</sup> Yet this claim remains controversial. While production has indeed been outsourced to the Global South, it remains essential to global capitalism. Recent debates around import tariffs and supply chains confirm that material production is still very much relevant.<sup>64</sup>

Deleuze’s argument, however, can be salvaged if read not as an empirical claim about the end of production, but as a statement about where control mechanisms are most common. In service-oriented Western economies, control serves to shape consumer desire and behavior to support marketing and financial interests. Disciplinary logic may persist elsewhere, particularly in labor-intensive sectors and in the Global South, but is supplemented in Western economies by the logic of control societies.<sup>65</sup>

Brusseau describes this value extraction process in three stages: tracking behaviors, predicting behaviors, and targeting (as in offering incentives and advertising tailored specifically to the subject). He claims that when effective, this process directs people’s actions and therefore equates to Deleuzian Control.<sup>66</sup> The aim is not the production of docile workers, but of predictable behavior. Indeed, the manifestations of this contemporary control logic are not found in the domain of labor

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or industry. Algorithmically curated content, behaviorally targeted advertising, and gamified consumption all belong to the sphere of leisure.

### 2.3.2 Technologies of Contemporary Control

Control is no longer an abstract concept; it is embedded in tangible, nameable technologies that shape our daily lives, a subset will be examined in this chapter. Contemporary control is diffuse, commercialized, and voluntarily adopted. As previously discussed, the complete replacement of disciplinary institutions by new mechanisms has not occurred. Rather, these technologies supplement these institutions, extending control beyond enclosed spaces and into the emotional, social, and intimate spheres of life. They make control feel desired rather than imposed, which explains why the resistance Deleuze anticipated remains absent. Control is embedded in everyday, seemingly benign services and is driven by commercial imperatives rather than overt political agendas. These systems do not lock doors to punish; rather, they lead users through carefully tailored incentives, using emotional appeals and algorithmic seduction to guide behavior. As Brusseau writes, control today is more “festive than ominous”.<sup>67</sup> This renders Deleuze’s framework not outdated but urgently relevant; the mechanisms he anticipated have arrived in forms that are more seductive and widely accepted than he imagined.

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62 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke Bd. 24., Das Kapital, Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, Zweiter Band.* 19. Aufl. Dietz, 1977.

63 Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” 6. 64 Peter Foster, “Aggressive Reshoring of Supply Chains Risks Significant GDP Loss, Warns OECD,” *Financial Times*, June 2, 2025. Accessed June 2, 2025. <https://www.ft.com/content/e930fde-367c-4e23-9967-9181b5cf43bc>.

65 James Brusseau, “Deleuze’s Postscript on the Societies of Control Updated for Big Data and Predictive Analytics,” *Theoria* 67, no. 164 (2020); Tiziana Terranova, “Free Labor.” In: *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (2000): 39–42; Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor.” In: *Radical Thought in Italy*, edited by Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, NED-New edition, 7:133–48. A Potential Politics. (University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 133–148.

66 Brusseau, *Deleuze’s Postscript Updated*, 10.

#### LOCATION TRACKING

Deleuze anticipated location tracking specifically,<sup>68</sup> and it is now a ubiquitous feature of digital life. Earlier services, such as Google Latitude, made location sharing explicit and public. Thus, they made the data collection and the control exercised through it quite literal. Although the service has been retired,<sup>69</sup> newer integrations in services such as Apple's Find My or Google Maps location sharing have normalized continuous tracking in private, intimate settings. These tools offer personalized, selective sharing with friends, family members, and romantic partners, obscuring their broader implications for behavioral regulation. The seeming voluntariness of participation conceals the normalization of tracking, making it less likely to be questioned and more likely to be integrated into daily habits of care and connection.<sup>70</sup>

#### DATING AND RELATIONSHIP APPS

Dating and relationship apps are a key example of how control mechanisms operate in intimate spheres. These platforms not only match users but also create feedback loops based on desirability metrics, gamified swiping behaviors, and behavioral

data collection. They incentivize self-optimization of profiles and reinforce normative standards of attractiveness, identity performance, and relational dynamics. Users are continuously engaged in calibrating themselves in response to opaque algorithms, which fosters a dynamic in which emotional expression and social performance become intertwined with control infrastructures.<sup>71</sup>

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68 Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 7.

69 Google, "Latitude Has Been Retired - Maps for Mobile Help." Google Support, August 14, 2015. Archived May 26, 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150814192105/https://support.google.com/gmm/answer/3001634>.

70 Roy, Jessica. "I Love You, Let's Stalk Each Other." *The New York Times*, sec. Style, July 18, 2023. Archived July 18, 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230718171828/https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/18/style/find-my-friends-location-sharing-privacy.html>.

71 Carolina Bandinelli and Alessandro Gandini, "Dating Apps: The Uncertainty of Marketised Love," *Cultural Sociology* 16, no. 3 (September 2022): 423-441.

#### SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL IN INTIMATE SPACES

The domestic sphere has become one of the most heavily monitored environments, not through force, but through the allure of convenience. Smart home devices, fitness trackers, and lifestyle apps collect vast amounts of data under the guises of self-care, safety, and efficiency. These tools not only mediate but also commodify intimate routines. As users share data with partners, family members, and platforms, the subjects physical properties, the body and personal sphere, are quantified. The subject becomes individualized, reduced to metrics, graphs, and notifications. These measurements are then fed back to users in the form of insights, comparisons, or recommendations, subtly shifting how individuals understand their own state, they are recomposed. The recomposed self is observable and correctable.

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Apps encourage improvements: walk more, sleep longer, and live more efficiently. This feedback loop fosters a vision of the self as always needing tuning and aligns self-perception with capitalist ideals of efficiency and productivity. Here, control is emotional and participatory, functioning through a logic of optimization and visibility.<sup>72</sup>

#### SOCIAL MEDIA, ALGORITHMS & FEEDS

The internet functions according to Deleuzian control mechanisms par excellence. Everything is evaluated and ranked, from gig work reward structures to user rating systems on social platforms. This constant feedback loop disciplines behavior by reinforcing what is visible, acceptable, and rewarded. Unlike institutions of enclosure, the internet transcends physical boundaries and even state borders. The control mechanisms inscribed in it operate through self-regulation, guided by a desire for visibility,

72 Friedlander, Anna. "Menstrual Tracking, Fitness Tracking and Body Work: Digital Tracking Tools and Their Use in Optimising Health, Beauty, Wellness and the Aesthetic Self." *Youth* 3, no. 2 (May 18, 2023): 689-701.

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**FIGURE 2.5** “TINDER DATING APP”



**FIGURE 2.6** “SOCIAL MEDIA APPS”



affirmation, and relevance. Social media platforms are perhaps the most overtly visible form of contemporary control. As private, proprietary establishments, they can be understood as Foucauldian enclosed institutions within the Deleuzian open environment of the internet as a whole. The lack of clarity about who sees content, how it circulates, and what is rewarded fosters hyper-curated self-presentation. Users suppress behaviors and aesthetics that deviate from dominant norms, shaping their online personas according to assumed algorithmic preferences. This results in infrastructures of control and social performance where algorithmic moderation actively constitutes new social realities. The gamification of interaction (follows, likes, shares, and comments) further aligns behavior patterns with platform goals. Meanwhile, the rules remain opaque, constantly shifting, and hidden behind proprietary algorithms that, in Deleuzian terms, literally serve as the code that draws the lines of normativity.<sup>73</sup>

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Today's mechanisms of control are more dispersed and deeply integrated into daily life than Deleuze envisioned. Adoption is often voluntary and even desired, diffusing skepticism and potential protest. But this diffusion is not without pattern, it serves commercial interests. It is not surprising that these mechanisms are to be found in the sphere of leisure and consumption. As anticipated by Deleuze, the mechanisms of control today are less focused on producing docile workers for industrial labor. Yet they remain deeply tied to economic interests. Instead of disciplining bodies

for the factory floor, contemporary control systems seek to extract value from every facet of life turning attention, emotion, movement, and even intimacy into monetizable data. The goal is

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no longer to create obedient subjects but to generate predictable patterns of behavior that can be optimized, targeted, and capitalized upon. To scroll, click, like, share, and self-improve, these are now the behaviors that serve the financial imperatives of platforms and data brokers. Control today is about maintaining participation in systems of consumption and data generation, where the subject is not suppressed but rendered endlessly extractable across personal, social, and emotional domains. Rather than coercing subjects, it coaxes them, subtly shaping subjectivity and behavior through opaque systems of feedback and reward. The individual is no longer a speculative figure, it is a lived condition.

### 2.3.3 Sousveillance and Participatory Surveillance

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At this point, it is useful to introduce the concept of *sousveillance*, a term coined by computer scientist Steve Mann to describe a future in which individuals are empowered to hold authorities accountable by monitoring them through wearable consumer technologies.<sup>74</sup> Mann envisions this “watching-from-below” as a countermeasure to traditional surveillance from above, ultimately leading to a balance or equilibrium of power between citizens and institutions. Implicit in this view is the belief that increased visibility, when accessible to all, is inherently beneficial and promotes accountability. He makes a spatial differentiation between surveillance and sousveillance. While the former is institutional, top-down, and takes place in controlled, enclosed environments, the latter is performed by individuals in public. However, as outlined above through the work of Foucault and Deleuze, these assumptions can be seen as naive. Both thinkers demonstrate that surveillance is not merely a matter of *who* is watching but also of how the act of watching itself

<sup>73</sup> Alice E. Marwick and Danah Boyd, “I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience.” In: *New Media & Society* 13, no. 1 (2011): 114–133; James Brusseau. “Deleuze’s Postscript on the Societies of Control Updated for Big Data and Predictive Analytics,” *Theoria* 67, no. 164 (2020): 2.

<sup>74</sup> Steve Mann, “‘Sousveillance’: Inverse Surveillance in Multimedia Imaging.” In: *Proceedings of the 12th Annual ACM International Conference on Multimedia*, 620–27. ACM, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1027527.1027673>.

disciplines behavior and produces subjects, whether in public or within an institution. Visibility is not inherently liberating; it is a mechanism of normalization and control. Mann presents sousveillance as a democratizing force. Despite the fact that it never developed into a significant movement, sousveillance would have been easily absorbed into control society as just another means of data collection, thus helping to reproduce the very dynamics of power it seeks to resist.

Nevertheless, sousveillance remains a valuable term. More than the inversion of the gaze, which Foucault already accounted for, the idea that visibility is chosen, not imposed, is crucial. But unlike Mann's vision of sousveillance as a form of resistance or activism, today's data practices are participatory largely because the technology is ubiquitous and provides value.<sup>75</sup> This continues Brusseau's idea that control today is participatory, because it is enjoyable. The question arises, what exactly drives people to this participation.

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## 2.4 Social Implications

While theorists like Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze lay out comprehensive analytical frameworks for understanding surveillance, respectively as disciplinary and control based structural phenomena, they primarily locate the origins as well as the effects of these systems in the political and in Deleuze's case also the economic domain. As a result, their accounts neglect the cultural, social, and affective dimensions of surveillance as it plays out in everyday life. It is here that scholars like Albrechtslund, Zuboff and especially Marwick reintroduce this dimension. They too identify surveillance as a distributed, reciprocal phenomenon, but also reveal how it is shaped by everyday social practices.

<sup>75</sup> Lyon, "Surveillance, Power and Everyday Life," 109–110.

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As David Lyon reminds us, "Regarding power relations, individual surveillance is one thing, institutional surveillance quite another".<sup>76</sup> He is correct to distinguish between institutional and individual surveillance in terms of societal power structures. Institutional surveillance, whether conducted by states, corporations, or platforms, operates through asymmetrical relations of power, functioning at scale to manage, categorize, or discipline populations. In contrast, individual or peer-to-peer surveillance is typically horizontal and embedded within everyday interactions.

However, when it comes to the psychological and behavioral effects of surveillance, this division becomes less decisive. Drawing on Foucault's notion of the internalized gaze, Goffman's dramaturgical model,

and Marwick's work on networked visibility, we can see that both forms, whether imposed from above or enacted between peers, produce similar outcomes: normalization, self-monitoring, and behavioral conformity. Whether someone is curating their image for a potential employer or managing visibility to maintain social standing among friends, the internalization of surveillance leads to comparable modes of self-regulation. Thus, while the source of surveillance may differ significantly in terms of structural power, the subjective experience and affective consequences are comparable. This blurring is especially evident in social media, where institutional architectures enable and amplify peer surveillance, fusing both forms into a seamless system of control.

Anders Albrechtslund observed online social networks in their early stages. Through the concept of *participatory surveillance*, he expresses optimism about the social possibilities of these developing platforms, a sentiment absent from most other writings about surveillance.

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In 2008, during rise of social networks like Facebook, he argued that surveillance in these spaces is voluntarily embraced by people, instead of having it imposed on them. Users seek connection and visibility as a way of identity formation online. For Albrechtslund, surveillance becomes a form of playful social activity, a way of observing and being observed that supports intimacy, community, and trust. He emphasizes that users actively co-create digital visibility by sharing personal details, not just to be monitored, but also to maintain and deepen social bonds. He thus reframes visibility on these platforms as an empowering practice that supports self-expression and participation in digital communities—a departure from the more sinister connotations of the previously mentioned scholars.<sup>77</sup> This, however, reflects an optimistic view shaped by the novelty of early platforms. As social media platforms became structurally embedded in daily life, authors like Alice E. Marwick offer a more critical account again.

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In her 2012 writing she interpreted the dynamics of peer-to-peer visibility on these platforms as mechanisms of control society. She introduces the concept of *social surveillance* to describe how individuals monitor one another within networked publics. This monitoring occurs under the pressure of visibility, judgment, and conformity, not out of playfulness or empowerment.<sup>78</sup> Her key insight is that, although social surveillance lacks a centralized authority, it replicates the effects of institutional oversight. Users internalize the gaze of others and modify their behavior accordingly, a shift

from externally imposed discipline to internal self-regulation. On the basis of Foucault's analysis she thinks of social surveillance as social performance.<sup>79</sup> Practices such as deleting

77 Albrechtslund, "Online Social Networking as Participatory Surveillance," 7.

78 Alice Marwick, "The Public Domain: Social Surveillance in Everyday Life," 382.

79 Ibid., 381.

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posts, managing audience boundaries, and curating self-presentation illustrate how individuals adapt to perceived social expectations. These behaviors are not reactions to state power or corporate enforcement but rather responses to the distributed, reciprocal pressure of being constantly observed by peers. The collapse of social contexts, in which employers, parents, and friends constitute a single, undifferentiated audience, intensifies this pressure. It demands increasingly fine-grained control over what is made visible and to whom.<sup>80</sup>

### BLURRING OF SOCIAL CONTEXTS

These dynamics shape interpersonal relationships, particularly in terms of trust and suspicion. As Alice Marwick shows individuals cannot reliably predict who will see their content or how it will be interpreted. Social surveillance collapses clearly defined social roles and audience boundaries, a phenomenon that echoes Erving Goffman's dramaturgical

theory, where maintaining different self-portrayals depends on stable contexts and role separation. The "backstage" represents those hidden areas of social life, where people can drop their performed roles, step out of character and engage in informal communication. This space provides emotional relief, allows authentic self-expression and recreation from "frontstage" moments, as well as preparation of a coherent performance on the frontstage.<sup>81</sup> In social surveillance under constant visibility, however, these contexts blur. The backstage is increasingly exposed. The result is a new kind of social anxiety, not just about how one is seen, but who is watching and why. Visibility becomes conditional, and practices of monitoring others, "just checking," "keeping up," scrolling through profiles, become normalized. What might once have been seen as intrusive has now become ambient and expected.<sup>82</sup>

80 Ibid., 391.  
81 Marie-Kristin Döbler. "The presentation of self in everyday life: von Erving Goffman (1956)." In: *Schlüsselwerke: Theorien [in] der Kommunikationswissenschaft*, edited by Ralf Spiller, Christian Rudeloff, and Thomas Döbler, 131–149. Springer VS, 2022.

The added visibility in surveillance society reduces the need for direct, reciprocal communication by making people's lives increasingly observable without interaction. Platforms enable users to passively monitor others through stories, tagged photos, or public posts, without engaging in dialogue or disclosure themselves. This ambient awareness creates a sense of connection that bypasses the mutual effort traditionally required to maintain relationships.<sup>83</sup> In Goffman's terms, the frontstage becomes constantly available online. Willems et al. argue that a balance between disclosure and discretion is essential and needs to be renegotiated constantly in resilient long-term relationships, neither side should dominate too much.<sup>84</sup> This is difficult to achieve when interaction is replaced by silent observation. What results is a subtle erosion of communicative reciprocity: knowing about someone replaces knowing them.

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## TRUST / DISTRUST

Like Marwick, Shoshana Zuboff argues that in *Surveillance Capitalism* social media platforms do not merely facilitate communication, they extract and commodify behavioral data through the infrastructures of relationships themselves.<sup>85</sup> Thus, even intimate exchanges are filtered through systems designed for prediction and control, creating a climate of ambient suspicion. The normalization of interpersonal surveillance leads to significant affective consequences: people relate to one another through disclosure and observation.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Yauouk E. Willems, Catrin Finkenauer, and Peter Kerkhof. "The Role of Disclosure in Relationships." In: *Current Opinion in Psychology* 31 (February 2020): 33–37.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>84</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile books, 2019), 284–288.

<sup>85</sup> Willems, Finkenauer, and Kerkhof, "The Role of Disclosure in Relationships," 33.

In traditional interpersonal relationships, trust is built through reciprocal self-disclosure a gradual

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

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communicative process of revealing personal thoughts, feelings, and vulnerabilities. Such disclosure is essential not only for intimacy but also for monitoring the health and depth of a relationship over time.<sup>87</sup> While Willems et al. argue, that online disclosure may support in overcoming obstacles in relationship building, as people are more inclined to disclose intimate information,<sup>88</sup> I would argue that the notion of trust in surveillance society fundamentally changes. Trust is no longer grounded in mutual discretion or contextual intimacy, it is about performance. There is now a tradeoff to be made between authentic self-expression and strategic self-curation. To be trusted is to appear coherent, appropriate, and legible in the eyes of multiple, overlapping public performances. It must be constantly negotiated in relation to opaque algorithms, shifting social norms, and ever-present potential audiences.

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On the receiving side, this process is replaced by practices of verification. Instead of relying on mutual trust-building, individuals now often turn to checking last-seen timestamps, message read receipts, monitoring tagged photos, and scrolling through followers or likes as indirect ways to assess another's reliability or interest. These verification practices can undermine trust by turning interpersonal relationships into transactions of data and visibility and disturbing the above mentioned balance of disclosure and discretion.

## S Y M P T O M S

The logic reveals itself in a range of everyday practices. These behaviors may appear ordinary, but they show how surveillance society has become embedded in affective routines of interpersonal relationships. These behaviors include:

### **Cross-Platform Tracing:**

Piecing together someone's digital identity by following them across multiple apps to assemble fragments of visibility into coherent narratives of behavior or intention.

### **Asymmetrical Watching:**

Using anonymized secondary accounts, colloquially "finstas", to observe while concealing one's own identity creates asymmetrical visibility.

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### **Indirect social tracking:**

Looking through friends' content to gain indirect access to someone's activity (e.g., "She's not replying to me, but her friend posted her in a story"), which replaces conversation with inference.

### **Performative Transparency:**

Voluntarily disclosing intimate information to demonstrate transparency or emotional availability ("I don't have anything to hide"), not as an act of closeness, but as a performance of normative openness, what Marwick frames as peer-based pressure toward authenticity.

### **Algorithmic optimization:**

Curating identity in line with platform logics, posting content not only for human audiences

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

but also for the systems of sorting and visibility. This aligns with Deleuze's notion of continuous modulation and Zuboff's concept of behavioral surplus.

Surveillance society thus becomes a mechanism not just of power and societal control, but of affective and interpersonal relational discipline, quietly reconfiguring how people interpret, evaluate, and relate to one another. Intimacy is reshaped: not abolished, but recalibrated around visibility and coherence of performance.

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## Part 3: Design Intervention Development



### 3.1 Existing Approaches

#### 3.1.1 Beyond Technological Counter-Measures

This topic has been explored countless times through design. There have been numerous attempts to create technical interventions that prevent data collection or manipulating it to render it useless:

VPNs and the *Tor browser*, though not created by designers, are products that attempt to anonymize internet access.<sup>1</sup> *Stealth Wear* by Adam Harvey uses metallic-coated clothing to block thermal imaging by isolating body heat.<sup>2</sup> *CV Dazzle* also by Harvey, tries to trick facial recognition algorithms.<sup>3</sup>

*Unfit Bits*, by Tega Brain, tricks fitness trackers by using absurd methods to generate misleading data. For example, one method is to attach a Fitbit to a metronome.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E Ramadhan, "Anonymity Communication VPN and Tor: A Comparative Study," *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* 983 [2018].

<sup>2</sup> Tim Maly, "Anti-Drone Camouflage: What to Wear in Total Surveillance," *Wired*, January 17, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Lauren Valenti, "Yes, There's a Way to Outsmart Facial Recognition Technology—And It Comes Down to Your Makeup," *Vogue*, March 30, 2018. Accessed June 2, 2025. <https://www.vogue.com/article/computer-vision-dazzle-anti-surveillance-facial-recognition-technology-moma-ps1>.

<sup>4</sup> Tega Brain, "Unfit Bits." Tega Brain, 2015. Accessed June 2, 2025. <https://tegabrain.com/unfit-bits>.

All of these approaches have one issue in common, though. As Lyon notes: "Surveillance itself will not be slowed merely by resisting a particular technology or institution".<sup>5</sup> These counter-measures can only ever target one technology at a time. Since data collected today may be stored indefinitely and analyzed with more advanced methods in the future, these interventions are ineffective, even as temporary shields. They fail to account for the longevity and mutability of surveillance infrastructures. Rather than disrupting the logic of surveillance, they merely delay its effects.

### 3.1.2 Alternative Approaches

Rather than targeting specific technologies, *cultural solutions* resist surveillance through shared values, norms and behaviors. These approaches rely on collective agreements and social practices that make surveillance undesirable or socially inappropriate, rather than technically impossible. In recent years, nightclubs have increasingly banned photos and videos, or phones altogether. This is usually enforced by covering every visitor's phone camera with a sticker. Although removing the sticker is technically possible and easy, it is frowned upon. The effectiveness of this approach depends on the club and its visitors, but phone-free clubs do at least attempt to cultivate an environment where anonymous freedom of expression is protected not by encryption or facial obfuscation, but by a shared etiquette. These environments reject the logic of perpetual documentation and sharing. They create a kind of social encryption through refusal. In these contexts, not being seen (or not being recorded) becomes a cultural value, not a technological problem to solve. Cultural solutions spread through mimicry. They don't block surveillance; they make it feel undesirable.

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## DESIGN INTERVENTION DEVELOPMENT

*Narrative* can serve as a form of cultural problematization of surveillance by revealing its logics and making alternative imaginaries feel plausible. Rather than directly targeting a technology, artists and storytellers use fiction, and speculative scenarios to expose how surveillance shapes everyday life. In *Black Mirror*, for example, dystopian episodes dramatize the social consequences of data extraction and predictive control, often making viewers viscerally aware of dynamics they passively accept.<sup>6</sup> Hito Steyerl's video essays, such as *How Not to Be Seen*, blend satire and critical theory to challenge the visibility imperative itself.<sup>7</sup> Lauren McCarthy's performances make the logic of surveillance seem overly intimate and absurd. In her work *LAUREN*, she acts as a human version of Amazon Alexa.<sup>8</sup> These narrative interventions do not resist a particular technology; they resist the ideology that makes surveillance seem normal, inevitable, or benign.

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*Satire* and exaggeration offer another mode of narrative subversion: by pushing systems to absurd extremes, designers can expose their underlying logics and contradictions. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby's speculative design work often uses satirical or surreal prototypes to question the role of technology in everyday life. Rather than proposing solutions, they stage provocations. Their projects, such as the 2010 *Designs for an Overpopulated Planet*, imagine speculative futures in which humans adapt to dysfunctional systems through bizarre tools and rituals. These caricatures are not meant to be practical. They are deliberately strange and humorous to prompt reflection rather than compliance. Dunne & Raby emphasize that satire, rather than parody, is the goal in their work.

<sup>5</sup> Lyon, "Surveillance, Power and Everyday Life," 109.

<sup>6</sup> Gernot Rieder and Thomas Voelker, "Datafictions: Or How Measurements and Predictive Analytics Rule Imagined Future Worlds." In: *Journal of Science Communication* 19, no. 01 (January 27, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Jaela Harding, "Hito Steyerl: Heard But Not Seen." *Medium*. Archived June 14, 2024. <https://jaelaharding.medium.com/hito-steyerl-heard-but-not-seen-77ec77550f3>.

<sup>8</sup> Frankfurter Kunstverein, "Lauren Lee McCarthy - LAUREN." Frankfurter Kunstverein, 2017. Accessed June 2, 2025. <https://www.fkv.de/en/lauren-lee-mccarthy-lauren/>.

They argue that effective critical design should create a dilemma for the viewer, prompting them to question whether the scenario is serious or not, real or fictional, thereby engaging both imagination and intellect.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.2 Methodology and Criteria Development

This project aligns with the latter narrative and affective approaches. It employs strategies of critical design to interrogate the aesthetics and operations of surveillance in contemporary control societies. Drawing on the work of Dunne & Raby, critical design is understood as a method for challenging assumptions. In this context, “critical” means provoking reflection rather than offering solutions, foregrounding affect and ambiguity, rather than utility.<sup>10</sup>

A key concern in adopting a critical design methodology is to avoid reproducing the visual tropes and seductive spectacle of surveillance. Rather than mirroring the aesthetics of spy thrillers (CCTV feeds, night vision, biometric scans), the project draws inspiration from the understated visual language of corporate platforms and smart devices. It reflects the sleek, affectively neutral aesthetic of corporate control. This includes the design language of systems that ask for consent through frictionless UI, recommendation engines that observe without disclosing their logic and smart devices that feel helpful while quietly extracting.

Contemporary references influencing this visual strategy include the clinical minimalism and emotional detachment of *Severance* and some episodes of *Black Mirror* and the unsettling domesticity in the work of Lauren McCarthy, whose interventions

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## DESIGN INTERVENTION DEVELOPMENT

foreground relational surveillance and ambiguous trust. By embedding the visual trace within a clean, polished, and mundane environment, the installation creates an aesthetic dissonance: viewers are unsettled not by being confronted, but by being gently nudged.

The project resists technological specificity to reflect the generalized and modular nature of contemporary surveillance. It is not about a particular device, platform, or app, but about the relational dynamics that shape how people watch and are being watched. Viewers are made to inhabit the position of both observer and observed, enacting the modulation and individualization characteristic of Deleuze’s control society. Viewers must simultaneously rely on and suspect the mechanism that mediates their experience.

55 This methodological orientation informs both the design process and the criteria by which the work is evaluated. Rather than seeking functionality or legibility, the installation will be evaluated, based on the methodological approach, against the following criteria:

#### Reflexivity:

Does the work provoke reflection on the conditions of surveillance and control?

#### Ambiguity:

Does it resist clear interpretation, opening space for multiple readings?

#### Affect:

Does it generate discomfort, uncertainty, or tension around the act of looking and being looked at?

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, “CRITICAL DESIGN FAQ,” *Dunne & Raby*, accessed June 2, 2025, <https://dunneandraby.co.uk/content/bydandr/13/0>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

# DESIGN INTERVENTION DEVELOPMENT

## Abstraction:

Does it avoid reliance on a specific technology, instead engaging with broader dynamics of surveillance society?

## Role confusion:

Does it blur the boundaries between watcher and watched?

## Aesthetics:

Does it avoid spectacular or cinematic surveillance aesthetics?

### 3.3 Concept

#### MEDIUM

This project takes the form of an installation. At its core, the installation stages an encounter between a viewer and a mediated trace of a previous participant. To realize this technically it uses a two-way mirror, a screen behind it, and a camera to capture the visual traces. Upon approaching the object, the viewer sees not only their own reflection but also a visual trace of someone who came before. This trace is visually ambiguous in nature, neither clearly archival nor fully reactive, inviting viewers to speculate on its origin and function, before realizing it belongs to a previous viewer.

The installation is intended to be placed in a mundane, transitional space such as a hallway, where its presence can blend into the everyday environment. This context illustrates the embeddedness of contemporary surveillance mechanisms, which are not spectacular but integrated into daily life. By occupying a functional space rather than an environment dedicated to the installation, the work produces a subtle interference that prompts

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reflexive behavior without explicitly announcing itself as an artistic intervention.

The decision to work with an installation comes directly from the theoretical concerns of the project. Contemporary surveillance, particularly in the context of what Deleuze terms control society, is less about spectacular displays of force than about ambient, pervasive systems that operate at the behavioral level. The installation medium enables an encounter embodied within this everyday dynamic. Rather than representing surveillance from an external viewpoint, the work includes the viewer in it, requiring them to perform without guidance and, in the best case, reflect on that performance.

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This spatial and temporal framing positions the viewer in a state of reflexive uncertainty. By avoiding didactic instruction, the installation invites participants to consider not only how they are seen, but also how they regulate themselves in anticipation of being seen. Crucially, the absence of clearly exposed technology shows how surveillance today is ambient rather than overt.

#### INTERACTION

The interaction is intentionally minimal: the viewer is offered no instruction. As they begin to recognize the presence of a visual trace, they are encouraged to read it in relation to themselves: Is it responding to them? Is it watching them? Is it simply there? Through this uneasy and ambiguous interaction, the piece highlights the affective dynamics of surveillance. Visitors may adjust their posture and expressions or hesitate in their movements: subtle gestures of anticipatory self-regulation that mirror the behavioral correction enacted by surveillance society. It also introduces role confusion. The visitor is not simply a passive viewer,

but an active participant whose presence generates future traces. In seeing another, they come to realize that they too will be seen. The installation thus stages surveillance not as an act of authority, but as a relational condition in which participation is both voluntary and inevitable.

## Part 4: Conclusion



This work argues that contemporary surveillance operates not solely through centralized authority or coercive visibility but through decentralized, participatory systems that induce self-regulation and transform notions of trust and intimacy. Drawing from the works of Foucault, Deleuze, and Marwick, this work traced the evolution from disciplinary societies of enclosure to societies of control that introduce networked environments of modulation and access control. The work outlined which aspects of each model persist in today's surveillance society and connected them to concrete technologies. Today's surveillance society does not merely discipline in order to produce a docile workforce or enforce socially acceptable behavior. It operates ambiently and is highly seductive. It reshapes social relations by regulating existing cultural norms but also setting new ones. Interwoven with today's infrastructures for affection, surveillance alters subjectivity, fundamentally changing how we relate to each other. The research examined how the constant potential for observation alters the conditions under which the self is performed. The research also examined how injecting

verification and visibility into the dynamics of disclosure and concealment alters processes of trust-building and intimacy. Informed by this theoretical background, design was positioned not as a solution to surveillance, but as a method for making its conditions visible and tangible. Rather than depicting a dystopian future, the project engages with contemporary developments in surveillance aesthetics, aiming to encourage visitors to reflect on the mechanisms of control in surveillance society. Design, in this context, becomes a form of critical inquiry.

The prototype that is being developed in this project serves as a speculative probe into how surveillance subtly structures social behavior and self-presentation. While it cannot fully represent the complexity of surveillance society, it hopes to offer a microcosm for experiencing its affective and relational dynamics. By inviting viewers to inhabit roles of both observer and observed, the installation foregrounds the normalization of visibility. As surveillance society today is participatory and pleasurable, design must find ways to disrupt without alienating, through ambiguity, engagement, and critical reflection.

#### R E S U L T A N D A S S E S S M E N T

The final prototype of the interactive visualization was realized using TouchDesigner in combination with the MediaPipe machine learning toolkit via a Python interface. A simple USB webcam with a wide-angle lens serves as the input device, to detect presence and capture the silhouettes of passers-by. The visual output takes the form of a particle-based point cloud that captures and preserves traces of each visitor's movements. For the following visitor these traces are encoded and visible as in an abstracted form, rendered using Numbers as Pixels.

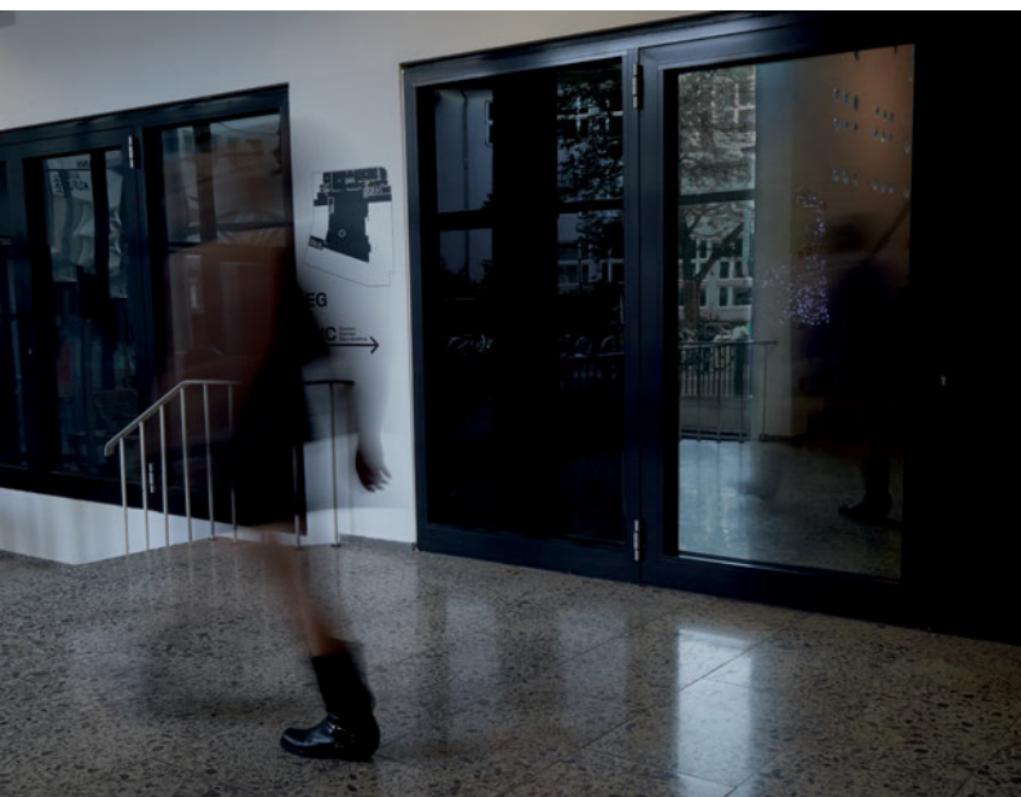
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## C O N C L U S I O N

The installation was realized in a showcase in the KISD hallway using a two-way mirror foil directly on the window glass, behind the glass two TV screens were placed, to create the illusion of this point cloud levitating in space, layered with the reality reflected by the mirror. This allows current viewers to see not only themselves but also the lingering, ghost-like presence of others who came before. The final result is abstract and ambiguous, requiring some explanation to reveal its connection to themes of surveillance and control. Still the connotations of visibility, memory, and data collection are subtly embedded and invite reflection. During the further development, another conflict emerged: rather than inducing the intended discomfort and uncanniness, the experience tends to evoke moments of surprise, and even delight. This suggests that the visual language may be too gentle to fully confront the unsettling implications it seeks to explore, but nonetheless proving that the underlying interaction concept works well.

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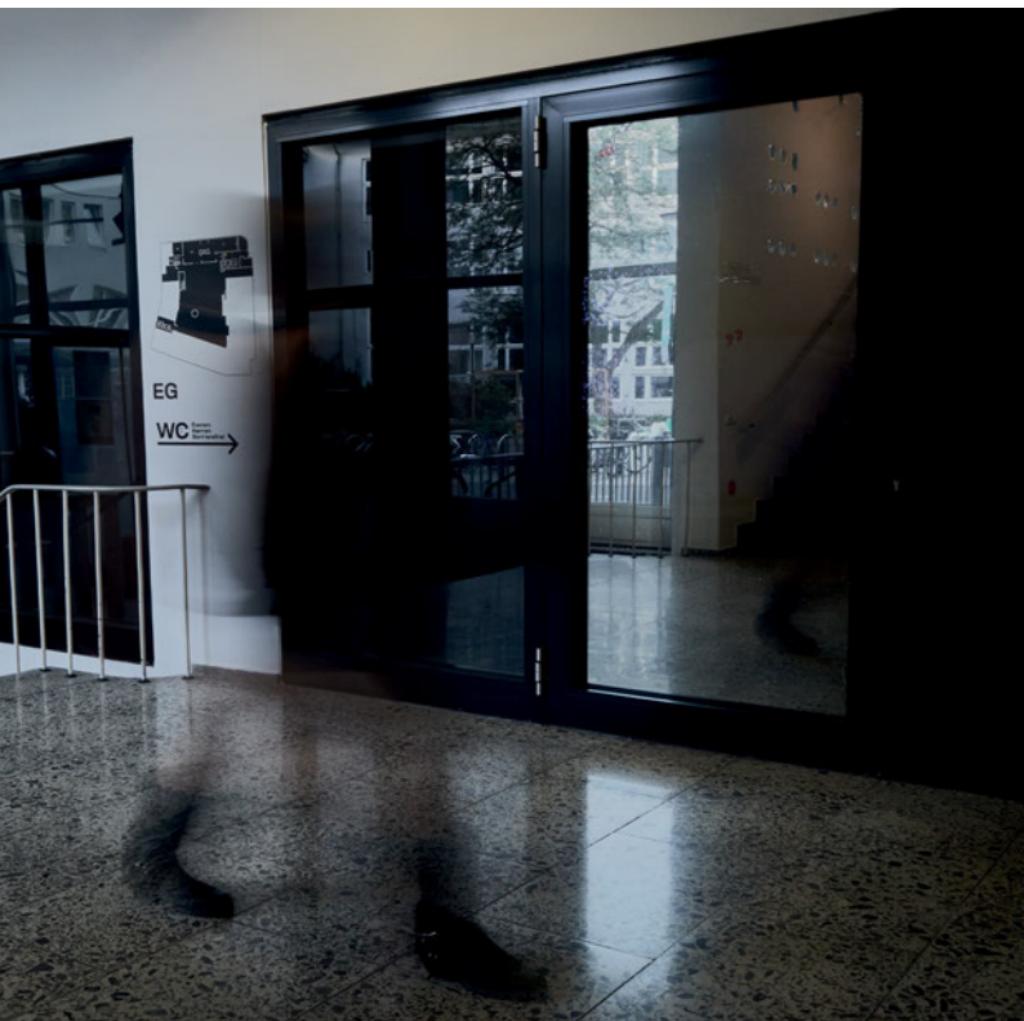
**FIGURE 3.1**



## FIGURE 3.2 (SCREEN CAPTURE)



**FIGURE 3.3**



**FIGURE 3.4**

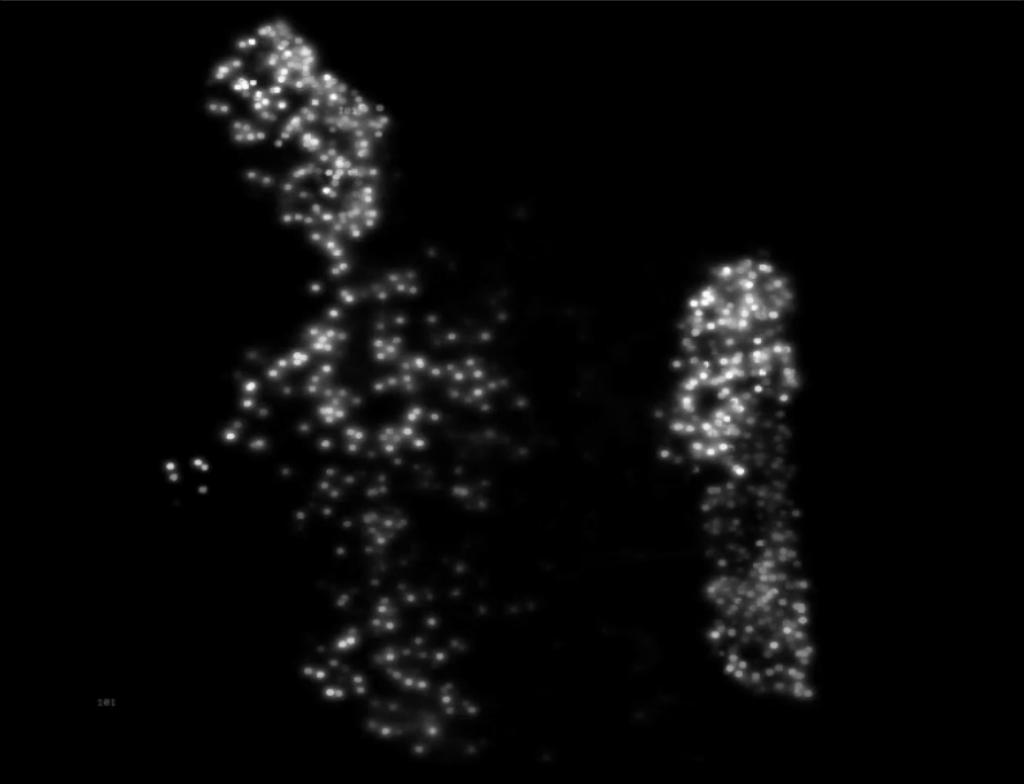


**FIGURE 3.5**



**FIGURE 3.6**  
**(SCREEN CAPTURE)**

"LIVE PARTICLE LAYER"



**FIGURE 3.7**  
**(SCREEN CAPTURE)**

"MEMORY LAYER"



**FIGURE 3.8**

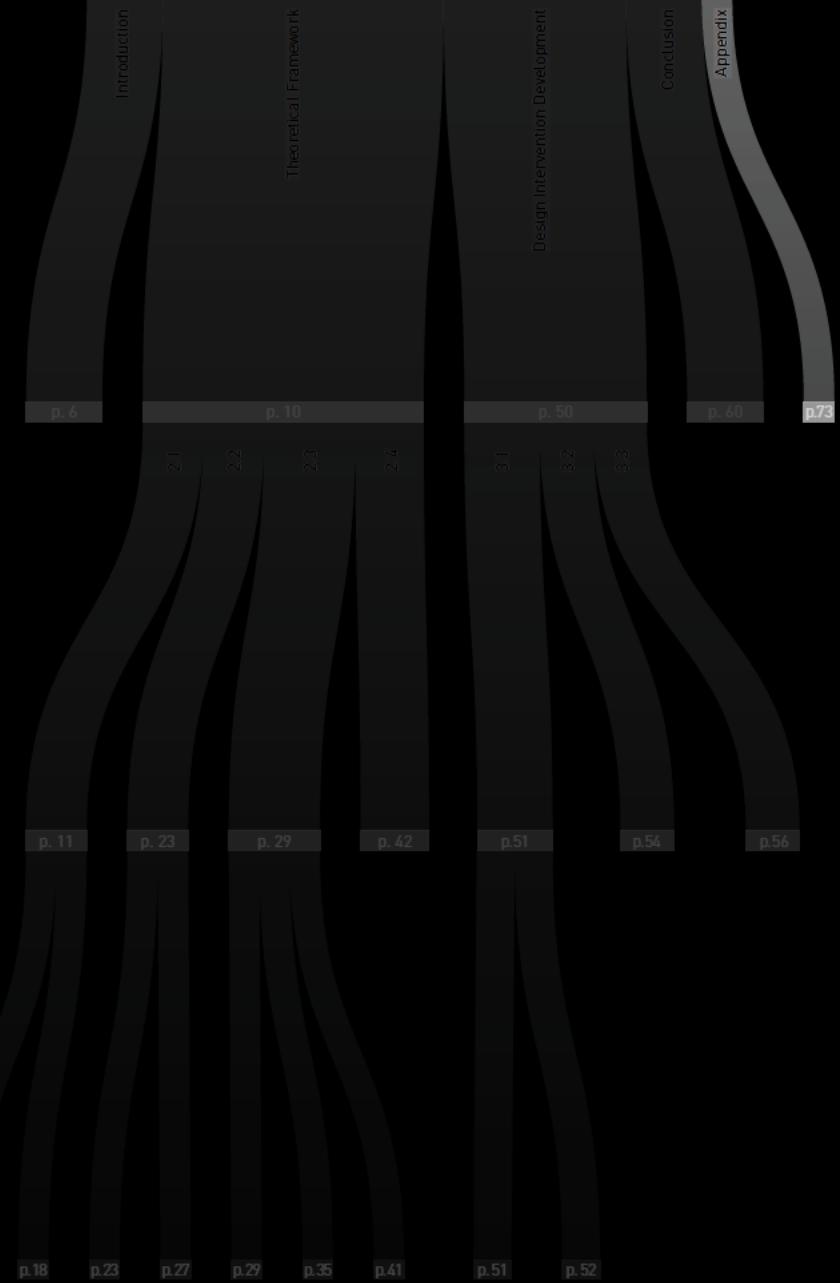


## **FIGURE 3.9 (DEMO VIDEO)**



[https://milanelsen.com/files/  
intermediate\\_docu.mp4](https://milanelsen.com/files/intermediate_docu.mp4)

# Appendix



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Source: Jan Schroeder. Die Tageszeitung: taz. April 20, 2022. URL: <https://taz.de/Ueberwachung-mit-und-ohne-Pegasus/!5846558/>.

### **Figure 2.2** “CCTV Camera”

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### **Figure 2.3** “Traffic Light at Night”

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Source: Miguel Á. Padriñán. Pexels. URL: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/signal-tower-579471/>.

### **Figure 2.5** “Tinder Dating App”

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### **Figure 2.6** “Social Media Apps”

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### **Figure 3.1–3.9**

Source: Authors own photographic and video-graphic documentation.

## APPENDIX

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

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