

# Postpanopticon: Control and Media in the New Digital Reality

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In this article, the object of research interest is the phenomenon of social control and the role of digital media in the process of digital surveillance. In the first part, the authors characterise the specifics of the panoptical and postpanoptical models of social control. The second part of the article explores the specifics of modern types of surveillance provided by digital media. It is shown that digital media extremely effectively modify communication systems, determine the main vectors of socio-cultural and personal development, and are also one of the key elements of the digital control system.

**Keywords:** information society, digital surveillance, information and communication technologies, digital media, datafication

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## INTRODUCTION

In modern economic, scientific and educational, political and private spaces digital technologies are being actively implemented. Governments of many countries emphasise the importance of digital transformations and declare radical changes aimed at new socio-economic structures like ‘smart city’, ‘smart village’, ‘smart household’, etc. However, except the increasing of the efficiency of social actors’ actions, digital practices potentially contain, if not a direct threat, then at least a serious challenge to the socio-political sphere, the life worlds of individuals, and culture in general.

Scholars are increasingly expressing worries about the dominance of the Internet and digital technologies, which, in their opinion, threaten humanitarian relations, fragment human consciousness and hinder the development of deep conceptual and narrative understanding (McLaren 2021: 570; Barnard 2023; Schmoelz 2023).

A separate group is the research into Society 5.0 – a new reality where capital is no longer decisive, but digital data that connects and controls everything. Proponents of the ‘Society 5.0’ concept are confident that intelligent technologies, nanodevices, virtual reality and cyber-physical systems will provide a positive social effect (Potočan et al. 2020; Mavrodieva, Shaw 2020). Critics of the ‘Society 5.0’ concept emphasise that an excessive enthusiasm for high-tech achievements threatens the loss of the meaning of existence and mental regression close to the complete dependence on artificial intelligence (Salgues 2018; Lanier 2010).

Many critical comments have been made regarding the consequences of the accelerated development of artificial intelligence in general. Thus, it is argued that the artificial intelligence industry is unable to provide a true and accurate picture of reality, to phenomenologically cover the broad context of the life world. Such technology collects only 'shadows', fragments of online interaction that can be recorded in the form of data (Broad 2018).

Analysts also predict an increase in the number of studies devoted to risks in the digital society: it is primarily about the danger of the global influence of Internet services (Vaidhyathan 2012), the deformation of interpersonal communication in digital culture (Turkle 2015), the problem of freedom in the information and communication sphere (Danilyan et al. 2018) and the anthropological status of a human in the contemporary environment of information technologies development (Meliakova et al. 2021).

In the context of digital transformations, research interest in the problem of control in a digital society is naturally growing, which is considered, as a rule, in the context of the impact of virtual reality on social relations (Lupton 2020; Harari 2017; Castells 2011; Kravchenko, Karpova 2020). Particular attention of the researchers is focused on the study of perception of the existing surveillance culture surrounding social media (Oguafor, Nevzat 2023), the governance of social media platforms going forward, including the spread of misinformation, hate speech and online surveillance (McCarthy et al. 2023), the scenario of ethics-related issues of infodemiology and infoveillance on social media for infodemic studies (Lotto et al. 2023). A separate academic discipline is gradually taking shape, which by its nature is intellectually open, inclusive, and requires interdisciplinary thinking.

According to the authors of the article, the Foucauldian understanding of the episteme as the driving force of culture, the idea of the leading role of information in the life of modern society and individual, the understanding of culture as a space of discourses and the related problems of control in the mediatised world are methodologically appropriate for understanding the stated topic.

## FROM THE PANOPTIC TOWER TO 'LIQUID' SURVEILLANCE

The origins of the thorough study of the phenomenon of social control are traditionally associated with the philosophical explorations of M. Foucault (1991; 2004; 2008). The philosopher shows that in the disciplinary regimes of the 18th–20th centuries, the main resource of the state is not the territory, but the population, 'human capital'. The basis of this type of management is the *raison d'État* (state interest).

The disciplinary model of management metaphorically imitates the Panopticon, a project of an ideal prison, where former corporal punishment gives way to conscious self-restraint. The effectiveness of panoptic disciplining is achieved not so much by constant surveillance, but by the *prerequisite of knowledge* of surveillance and the threat of punishment: the prisoner does not know when exactly the guards are watching him, so he is forced to monitor himself, which, as a result, encourages vigilance, self-discipline and responsibility.

As a space of social, panopticon encourages people to follow others as well – individuals discipline each other. The nature of punishment is determined not by rulers, but mostly by discourse or a specific *episteme* as a system of thinking and production of knowledge in a specific historical period (Foucault 2004). Accordingly, each episteme reproduces the power–knowledge relationship with certain types of surveillance.

In the 20th century, new rational knowledge combined with disciplinary technology led to the emergence of a society of normalisation, where people's lives and health become the object

of increased attention of control bodies. The sovereign right of the power 'to let live or make die' is now modified to 'make live or let die' (Foucault 1991). The very life of an individual, as noted by G. Deleuze, is transformed into a continuous transition 'from one close site of confinement to another, each with its own laws: first of all the family, then school ("you are not at home, you know"), then the barracks ("you're not at school, you know"), then the factory, hospital from time to time, maybe prison, the model of the site of confinement' (Deleuze 1995: 177).

*Raison d'État*, in combination with the ideas of liberalism, promotes the active development of biopolitics (Foucault 2008). Biopolitics impersonally invades the sphere of the *oikos*; the population is perceived primarily as biomass, subject to certain risks and in need of nutrition and reproduction. As a result, new management technologies emerge and work harmoniously in a single state mechanism – the health care system, education, security, penitentiary institutions, etc. The mentioned biopolitical institutes reproduce a certain type of surveillance, thanks to which the ruling elite gets the opportunity of almost total control over the life activities of citizens. The discipline of the analog era forms the subject through orders, prescriptions and words-orders. The person himself, according to the figurative expression of G. Deleuze, is personified by the old monetary greedy mole – 'the animal you get in places of confinement' (1995: 180).

In the second half of the 20th century, there was a transition from surveillance and discipline practices to a regime of supervision and control. New societies '... no longer operate by confining people, but through continuous control and instant communication' (Deleuze 1995: 174). The society of control resembles a highway that does not limit a person, but manages his movement and available options.

In control societies, people's behaviour is not so much sought to be subjugated according to institutionalised rules, as, according to N. Rose, 'Conduct is continually monitored and reshaped by logics immanent within all networks of practice' (1999: 234). 'The mole system' gives way to the 'snake system', where a person is 'wave, orbital, constantly present in the network' (Deleuze 1995: 180).

Z. Baumann's metaphor *liquid modernity* reflected radical changes in the arrangement of social conditions and institutions (2000). *Liquid modernity* is a consequence of the transition from a structured, dense and full of social obligations world to another one – plastic, fluid, free from barriers and borders. On the social level, this is embodied in the constant reconfiguration of institutions and lifestyles, which makes the conditions for the implementation of life politics extremely changeable and unpredictable.

Control as a series of continuous adjustments requires constant correction. G. Deleuze calls it social engineering. The philosopher considers the social function of television to be one of the examples of social engineering: 'Television's professional eye, the famous socially engineered eye through which the viewer is himself invited to look, produces an immediate and complacent perfection that's instantly controllable and controlled' (Deleuze 1995: 74).

In a control society, surveillance is combined with simulation. Computer simulations are able to provide fairly complex simulations of 'reality' on the basis of which governments, corporations, and other institutions make decisions. For example, it is not the actual behaviour of a person but his digital profile and simulated computer forecast is the basis for refusing the provision of an insurance or credit. Therefore, in the virtual environment, the referents of reality and truth disappear, the differences between the real and the imaginary are eliminated, and simulacra and simulation are transformed into determining factors of the motivation of human activity.

A powerful factor of socio-executive behaviour in *liquid modernity* is the consumer paradigm, which significantly affects the formation of the individuals' own identity and conditions the attitude towards them as a market. The competitive pressure of the global market, especially the information market, has caused a 'total surveillance revolution': the audience and markets are monitored not so much by the state as by the economic system, turning people into perfect consumers. As a result, the eye of control is complemented by the eye of marketing: the obedient individual becomes the subject of consumption, and marketing becomes another powerful means of social engineering.

A new terminology is proposed to denote the realities in which the latest practices of surveillance and control are carried out. The *ban-opticon* model, or *banopticon* (Bigo 2011), corresponds to the practice of *excluding* inconvenient persons from certain groups and 'acts mainly through mediated "social death"' (Kovalenko et al. 2021: 50). Analysing the practice of exclusion as a powerful factor of social order, G. Deleuze noted: 'Felix Guattari has imagined a town where anyone can leave their flat, their street, their neighborhood, using their (dividual) electronic card, that opens this or that barrier; but the card may also be rejected on a particular day or between a certain times of day; it does not depend on the barrier, but on the computer that is making sure everyone is in the permissible place and effecting universal modulation' (1995: 181–182).

The space of *synopticom* is the space of the audience, where 'the few watch the many' (Mathiesen 1997). Synoptic surveillance functions thanks to the growth of the latest digital technologies (primarily social networks) and social communication, or, in the terminology of M. Castells, 'mass self-communication', potentially capable of reaching a global scale; it is 'an ultimately new medium whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital' (Castells 2010: 30–31). This sphere of communication is based mostly on the mechanisms of temptive spying on other people's lives. Anonymous surveillance is provided primarily by numerous mass media and is justified by criminal chronicles, reports from the scene of events, etc., forming in the average citizen the belief in the need for prisons, severe punishments and total control in the form of surveillance cameras, checkpoints and biometric accounting systems (Kovalenko et al. 2021: 51).

## THE MEDIA MULTIVERSE AS A SPACE OF DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE

Digital information and communication technologies are firmly inscribed in the architecture of modern social reality. The media world, devoid of borders and absolute control, functions according to the laws of media logic, to which all basic social institutions are subject today. The systematic and gradual expansion of the mediatised world takes place under the influence of traditional mass media (periodicals, radio and television) and 'new media', which are social networks, blogs, messengers, interactive platforms for the provision of state, municipal and other social services. We should note that the media do not remain neutral in acts of communication: they form, institutionalise, and therefore control these acts.

In the era of deep mediatisation, the nature of the production and distribution of social knowledge is changing: information networks that have enormous computing and processing potential are becoming the source and translator of knowledge. Computer interfaces (the Internet search systems, social network services, online shopping sites) resemble 'black boxes' that people use and at the same time they use people, analysing profile posts, search history, queries, etc. Big-Data and algorithms that automatically identify, evaluate and classify users

are embedded in everyday interaction. Social knowledge obtained in this way is used primarily for commercial and administrative (controlling) purposes.

The media change the temporality of the social world, make time more concrete and tangible. They turn into social metronomes of everyday life, coordinate social interaction, creating, in particular, a 'culture of immediacy' and forcing many people to live in the 24/7 regime. The active use of smartphones and other gadgets implies the imperative to 'be always connected', even against the vital needs of a person. In this way, digital media imposes its own pace on actors, and social time is not structured in human relationships any longer, but produced and controlled by technological infrastructure.

The era of online communications affects the construction of personal and collective identity. Computer games, selfies, fan fiction, and blogs act as interfaces between the 'self' and the outside world. Being involved in the processes of primary and secondary socialisation, modern media form an 'algorithmic self', measured by the number of likes, posts, friends, shares, etc. The construction of identity increasingly depends on integration into the media infrastructure, which, in turn, sets the pattern of identity (as Facebook, for example), and maintaining one's own 'digital body' requires a constant access to social network services.

'Digital body' as a concept of mass culture is an imitation of a person behind the scenes, his or her data double in the form of an avatar or image. Digital technologies make it possible to 'deprive' the human body of its spatial characteristics, 'divide' it into a series of discrete flows and reassemble it in the form of virtual data doubles. Digital 'doubles' become the object of careful analysis and intervention by marketing and technology companies, as well as government guidelines, and that affects the rights and privileges of citizens. As a result, the datification of everyday life turns 'digital bodies' into co-founders of the individual and his or her various social relations – the so-called 'surveillant assemblages' (Haggerty, Ericson 2020). In turn, this underlines the unprecedented importance of the 'language' of biometrics, while 'talking individual becomes suspect and even unnecessary' (Aas 2006).

The fascination with the latest digital technologies has given rise to the phenomenon of *data-ism* – a new religion of the 21st century, focused primarily on the rapid development of technology, the obsession with the Internet and the general worship of data. The motto of dataism is the well-known saying: 'If you feel something, write it down. If you record something, upload it. If you download something, share it.' Dataists are convinced that the universe is formed by streams of data, and the value of any phenomenon or object is determined by its contribution to data processing. Human bodies are considered biological algorithms alongside more sophisticated electronic ones. For such an understanding, as noted by Y. N. Harari, representatives of *Homo sapiens* species (as an obsolete algorithm) can with a high probability turn into digital algorithms in the world-dominant paradigm of Big-Data (Harari 2017).<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental principle of modern media is the synoptic principle – 'the many watch the few'. Control in synoptic space does not involve high walls and watchtowers: objects of

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<sup>1</sup> Concern about the spread of dataism is also expressed in fiction. In the dystopian novel by D. Eggers 'The Circle' an extremely mediatised world totally under the control of the powerful Circle technocorporation is depicted. In such a world, there is a constant contact and mutual surveillance, where privacy is considered a crime, and 'transparency' (in particular, day-and-night video broadcasting of one's personal life) is transformed into a key ethical imperative. The corporate culture of 'circlists' has spread to all of humanity. Lack of an account or failure to update it threatens to deprive you of access to the digitised social world, transformed into an aggregator of possible data.

control themselves maintain public order and are ready to eliminate any attempt to 'break through' conventional walls. In this way, a space of responsibility for compliance with control measures regarding itself is formed – a space of supervision without a supervisor. D. Lyon calls it the 'revolution of managers': controlled subjects are given personal autonomy and the right to self-determination in the field of public control, and controllers are deprived of the duty to control, since the controlled are therefore obliged to independently maintain the effectiveness of control procedures (Lyon 2013: 92).

In the political sphere, digital media provide citizens with ample opportunities to monitor the activities of public and private organisations, as well as government and other institutions to monitor citizens thanks to large-scale information systems and bureaucratic interfaces built into them. A social order technologically rooted in the Big-Data infrastructure is a social factory built on non-stop mutual surveillance, the consequences of which are ambiguous.<sup>2</sup> It should also be emphasised that even national governments are increasingly dependent on a small number of dominant corporations such as Apple, Google and Microsoft in their control practices.

Thus, the complexly organised media sphere exerts a powerful influence on both individual actors and the social world in general. On the other hand, the 'capitalism of surveillance' and the 'state of surveillance' are interested in controlling the behaviour and relationships of citizens. The world of monitoring, tracking, sorting, checking and systematic surveillance forms a new panopticon: the cell of privacy is open to the impersonal gaze, and the feeling of at least potential surveillance is built into the awareness of modern life.

Conditions of constant control become familiar to people. The widespread technology of *dataveillance* allows continuous monitoring of the communication activity of users. As a rule, users are warned about the way and purpose of using their personal data. Thus, in particular, consent to the use of personal data has become a common practice when booking travel tickets, seats in restaurants and theatres, etc. In addition, the phenomenon of scopophilia in the sense of 'desire to be seen' merges with the ubiquitous practices of surveillance and creates a paradoxical effect: people who actively use digital technologies are acutely aware of the constant control over them, but continue to use their smart devices.

One type of media monitoring is locative monitoring. Thanks to locative media (primarily 'smart' mobile devices), an extensive locative integration is taking place: corresponding functions on Facebook or Twitter allow users to share their location, update status, etc. However, this technology is primarily related to the idea of surveillance: at first glance, locative media do not in any way influence the intentions of subjects, do not tell them where to go and what to do (unlike the disciplinary model), while in fact thanks to geolocation and flexible marketing forms capture the subjects in the open simulative space of the society of control. As a result, the source of knowledge production and distribution is the media giant Google,

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<sup>2</sup> In this regard, it is worth noting the recently published work of J. Habermas 'Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit und die deliberative Politik' (2022), in which the author discusses modern discursive ethics, including the influence of digital media on deliberative democracy. According to this authoritative philosopher, modern social networks and various platforms threaten democracy and political discussions, negatively affect their seriousness and depth, and destroy publicity as an open space for discussion. Habermas expresses a serious concern that the new sphere of publicity is not structured, devoid of 'filters' and 'gateways'. As a result, social networks replace reality, turn opinion into a commodity, and citizens find themselves defenseless against sophisticated manipulations.

whose algorithmic preferences 'influence how we value things, perceive things, and navigate the worlds of culture and ideas' (Vaidhyanathan 2011: 7).

The space of social networks is characterised by openness, disembodiedness, capitalist motivation and an inverted function of visibility. Unlike the disciplinary space and panoptic forms of surveillance that still operate in many social spheres, network tactics of control are not aimed at confrontation and coercion, but above all at simulation and temptation. Post-panoptic surveillance is a motivated capital whose purpose is to make sociality useful to the market and advertisers by proliferating hegemonic forms of 'soft' social control. Consolidated control over the behaviour and activity of individual people takes on increasingly new and diverse forms: in the field of media and electronic commerce, communication takes on the form of entertainment and pleasure, thereby increasing the effectiveness of control at the expense of its simplification.

At first glance, new forms of surveillance contribute to the rationalisation of life and increase its security aspect. Digital surveillance practices are used against epidemic challenges, in order to prevent deviant behaviour, manifestations of terrorism, etc. However, emerging surveillance practices need to be analysed in terms of their actual and potential dangers. The visible and hidden side effects are primarily authoritarian intrusions into the autonomous private lives of those being monitored. Digital video surveillance can be carried out by those in power against less influential citizens with repressive, invasive and exploitative purposes, highlighting the dehumanising aspect of digital surveillance and exacerbating digital inequality. Digital technologies also contribute to the spread of data brokering, whereby collected personal data of users is sold or bought by interested institutions and companies. Thus, in the economy of 'capitalism of surveillance', personal data has been turned into a commodity that allows someone to make profits.

In addition, privacy is undermined by numerous means of virtual communication (film and music platforms, personal pages in social networks, video conferences, messengers, etc.), reducing personal control over vital space, and often creating conditions for cyberbullying and other online deviance.

Digital copies of a person displace human consciousness, come into conflict with it. To a large extent, digital surveillance leads a person to war with oneself, threatening to turn him or her into an 'anti-person': 'We are beginning to see glimpses of the emerging anti-person who lives if our being a symbolic species can be ignored most of the time, only to surrender ourselves to becoming homo informaticus' (Vanderburg 2016: 133).

'Capitalism of surveillance' is interested in human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices. In the context of promoting the Society 5.0 model, which is, in our opinion, a continuation of the 'capitalism of surveillance', we can talk about the formation of a society of surveillance with an unprecedented scale of monitoring human behaviour.

## CONCLUSIONS

The modern model of control is able to cover the entire social space thanks to the combination of traditional vertical (panoptic) forms with horizontal rhizomatic (post-panoptic) forms. The first act according to the axial principle of organising social reality. Others envisage synoptic and banoptic strategies of temptation and simulation, relying on an invisible omnipresent surveillance.

The global matrix of extraterritorial control is provided by digital communication technologies. Public control is carried out primarily by modern media platforms, which allow one not only to monitor the actions of social actors, but also to model and program their desired behaviour.

On the one hand, digital surveillance is driven by the pragmatics of preventing various threats: society approves of the ubiquitous nature of surveillance practices against the background of a growing sense of danger and the need for constant vigilance. On the other hand, the 'payment' for security is loss of privacy, erosion of individual autonomy, social isolation, discrimination, etc. Such negative side effects threaten serious consequences both now and in the near future. In the conditions of non-linear development, combined with complex risks and vulnerabilities, the consolidation of natural-scientific and social-humanitarian knowledge is necessary in order to overcome the gaps and traumas of current existence and the formation of a unifying human-centered model of control.

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## Postpanoptikonas: kontrolė ir medijos naujoje skaitmeninėje realybėje

### *Santrauka*

Straipsnio tyrimo objektas – socialinės kontrolės fenomenas ir skaitmeninių medijų vaidmuo skaitmeninės stebėsenos procese. Pirmoje dalyje autoriai apibūdina panoptikinio ir postpanoptikinio socialinės kontrolės modelių specifiką. Antroje straipsnio dalyje nagrinėjama šiuolaikinių skaitmeninių laikmenų teikiamų stebėjimo tipų specifika. Parodoma, kad skaitmeninės medijos itin efektyviai modifikuoja komunikacijos sistemas, lemia pagrindinius sociokultūrinio ir asmeninio tobulėjimo vektorius, taip pat yra vienos pagrindinių skaitmeninės valdymo sistemos elementų.

**Raktažodžiai:** informacinė visuomenė, skaitmeninė stebėseną, informacinės ir komunikacijos technologijos, skaitmeninė žiniasklaida, duomenys