

Mass Surveillance

Briefing Notes of 22 August 2011

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Surveillance

Surveillance is **the systematic monitoring of the behaviour of one or more persons.**

Personal Surveillance

Personal surveillance is **the systematic monitoring of the behaviour of a previously identified person, for a specific reason.**

There are economic disincentives against personal surveillance, and the law requires that there be reasonable grounds for believing that the individual has performed or is performing an act which is of a sufficiently serious criminal nature to justify the intrusion.

Mass Surveillance

Mass surveillance is **the systematic monitoring of the behaviour of large numbers of people.** The primary purpose is to identify individuals who belong to some particular class of interest, in most cases as a means of creating suspicion and thereby justifying personal surveillance of identified individuals. A secondary purpose may be to deter behaviours.

In the past, there have been technical and economic barriers militating against widespread mass surveillance, but those barriers have substantially declined over the last 50 years.

The Case Against Mass Surveillance

Rather than deterring specific behaviour, mass surveillance has a general 'chilling effect' on many kinds of behaviour. People who know that they are under observation may commit fewer crimes, but also inevitably conform much more with social and political norms, and invent and innovate far less.

Mass surveillance leads to, and is consistent with, static societies of repressed populations. East Germany under the Stasi, the PRC, Burma and North Korea are common examples of societies that have valued stasis above freedoms and have been substantial users of mass surveillance.

Surveillance Technologies

It is essential to balance public protections (and, as a means to that end, to empower law enforcement agencies) against social, economic and democratic freedoms. Surveillance technologies have to be carefully designed, and very carefully applied.

Specifically:

- (1) mass surveillance must be designed to be **selective**. Only those behaviours that are very harmful to the public must be detected, and all others must be ignored
- (2) mass surveillance must be designed to be **intentionally forgetful**. Where data is provisionally captured (e.g. because it needs to be compared with other data captured previously or subsequently), it must be strictly limited to its specific purpose, and destroyed immediately that it is found not to serve that specific purpose

Declaration: The definitions above derive from a paper by the APF's Chair. On the other hand, they are consistent with the mainstream, and Google Scholar shows 284 citations of his main paper:

Clarke R. (1988) 'Information Technology and Dataveillance'
Commun. ACM 31,5 (May 1988) 498-512, at <http://www.rogerclarke.com/DV/CACM88.htm>