

Chapter 6

Why Watch?

Assessment

ABSTRACT

The process of surveillance allows the watcher to assess the worth of the life story of the watched. In certain cases, this has significant value. In the case of I2I, one of the outcomes is better understanding of the competition; in some cases, such as I2P, there is a better understanding of the “worth” of a person. For the P watcher, there is an assessment of another person just as the person can now assess institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The notion of security has been a compelling and universal justification for different forms of surveillance because a need for security, as discussed earlier, is a universal need. It is difficult to argue against a process that makes things safer for people. Most social and political systems, from relatively “open” democratic countries to “closed” totalitarian systems can make the argument that surveillance is needed to ensure the protection of a place and its people. This was demonstrated after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York which was followed by significant changes to the security protocols for air travel worldwide. And most passengers accepted the changes and the

enhanced scrutiny at airports because it offered a sense of security, knowing that there were no potential terrorists in the airport and on the planes. This argument for security was repeated, again within the travel industry globally in response to the pandemic of 2020 and people traveling readily accepted the new travel protocols such as reporting tests for virus in the body to frequent recording of body temperature and contact information as a part of the process of securing the World against the spread of a disease.

What is shared in the experiences of surveillance is the creating of a narrative about a person or an institution that results from the persistent watching. This is the principal outcome that is achieved from the processes and in this chapter I would demonstrate how surveillance is justified by arguing for assessing the characteristics of the personal or institutional story. Here, I argue that the logic for watching is no longer only securing the safety of the person or the institution but assessing the “worth” of the person or institution. The pervasive surveillance offers the opportunity to create a relatively elaborate story and then consider what the story says about the person or institution. I call this motivation of surveillance – assessment. This logic is used, along with the justification based on security, in nearly every instance of the different forms of surveillance discussed earlier. This narrative has also been called a profile.

Profile

The term profile has been in use for as long as it has been possible to produce a narrative about a person or institution. As I stated in my earlier writing, “pervasive narb-based profiling can have some significant impacts on how we live our real and digital lives (Mitra, 2014).” In the case of a person the profile is a composite image that includes many different pieces of information about a person which all add up to create a nearly complete life story of the person. The information is gathered using many different forms of surveillance and the process of creating the story is often called profiling. The primary use of the process has been in criminal investigation where people in law enforcement would carefully examine the available evidence to create their best assessment

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