The Gaza Strip as Panopticon and Panspectron:
The Disciplining and Punishing of a Society

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the different yet complementary aspects of the panopticon and the panspectron using the case study of the Israeli controlled Palestinian territory, the Gaza Strip. Beginning with a brief theoretical discussion of the concept of panopticon and panspectron expanding on the existing literature, the paper moves on to discuss the implementation of panoptical and panspectral technologies and practices in the Gaza Strip and situates these within a larger framework of control of the Palestinian population under Israeli occupation, and discusses seepage of these surveillance technologies into Israeli society proper and beyond into the international arena.

1. FROM PANOPTICON TO PANSPECTRON

In the late 18th Century, English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham designed an institutional building which he called the Panopticon. Bentham saw the design as "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind in a quantity hitherto without example". (Bentham, 1787/1995:i). Essentially, the architecture of the building allowed surveillance of people at all times without the objects of surveillance knowing that they were being observed at any given moment. The constant observation or gaze of the authorities would then serve to affect and change behavior. Since then, Bentham's panopticon has served as a model for the construction of prisons, and has become a metaphor for surveillance and "big brother". Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975/1977) later continues the exploration of the panopticon from an institutional perspective noting that the role of the panopticon is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (p199). The following passage from Orwell's novel 1984 summarizes succinctly the effect of panopticon:

There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought

Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time… You had to live – did live, from habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every moment scrutinized (Orwell in Sclove 2000: 22.)

Manuel DeLanda (1991, Palmas, 2011), describes how the National Security Agency in the US was putting together a surveillance system that he calls 'the panspectron'. In contrast to the original panoptic architectures and social and organizational constructs of Bentham and Foucault, the panspectron monitors a wider segment of frequencies of the electromagnetic spectrum, if not the entire spectrum. In other words, the panspectron not only registers that which is visible to the human eye but also radio, radar, microwaves, cellular communication, and so on:
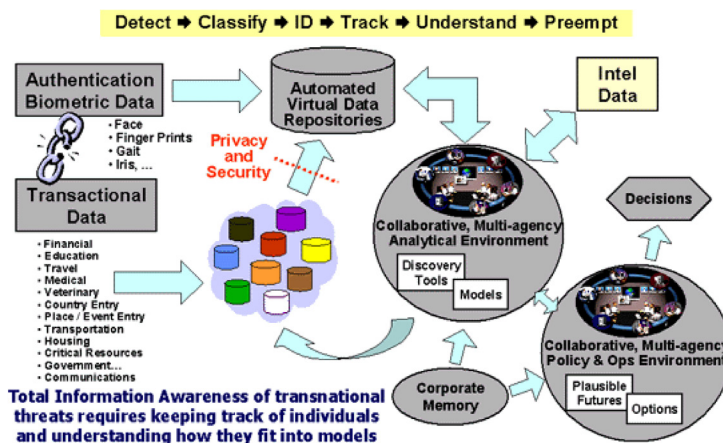
Instead of positioning some human bodies around a central sensor, a multiplicity of sensors is deployed around all bodies: its antenna farms, spy satellites and cable-traffic intercepts feed into its computers all the information that can be gathered. This is then processed through a series of 'filters' or key-word watch-lists. The

Panspectron does not merely select certain bodies and certain (visual) data about them. Rather, it compiles information about all at the same time, using computers to select the segments of data relevant to its surveillance tasks. (DeLanda 1991: 206).

While the panopticon is concerned primarily with individual surveillance and control, the panspectron is about mass surveillance and control: everything and everyone is observed all the time. The goal here to being to monitor as completely as possible what Floridi (2002) terms the "infosphere". In many ways the Total Information Awareness (TIA) program instituted by the Pentagon in the aftermath of 9/11 is panspectral in nature. While the program was discontinued in 2003, many components of the program continue to be developed under different names. The infographic in Figure 1, provided by the now defunct US Information Awareness Office provides us with a possible conceptualization of the panspectron.

It is important to note here that panoptical and panspectral technologies are not mutually exclusive and can and often do coexist in given situations. Sandra Braman (2006) goes further and uses the concept of the panspectron to describe, among other aspects, the ability of what

Figure 1. Total Information Awareness diagram. Source: http://infowar.net/tia/www.darpa.mil/iao/TIASystems.htm -- mirror of decommissioned US Federal government initiative.

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