

# Chapter 5

## Watching the Watchers: Digital Panopticism in the Age of Algorithmic Culture

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### ABSTRACT

*The chapter deals with the ideology of Digital Panopticism as basically one of the major features of the algorithmic culture where power is exercised through the routine surveillance, data extraction, and predictive analytics. Using Michel Foucault's idea of the Panopticon as a starting point, the authors suggest that digital systems - for example, social media and algorithmic governance - are control structures that are spread out and therefore it is difficult to distinguish the zones where one is being observed and the zones where one is participating. The chapter links the concept of Digital Panopticism with the theories of the radical surveillance and digital capitalism and also examining the impact of the phenomena on subjectivity, autonomy, and behavior. The authors end the chapter by looking at moral theories and resistance movements to facilitate openness, taking responsibility, and the people's control in the age of digital technology.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The underlying framework of this chapter is digital panopticism - the ideological/normative component of the algorithmic paradigm within which power is exercised through the mechanisms of surveillance, data extraction, and predictive (data) governance. The primary concept for interpreting digital panopticism on a much wider scope than Foucault's (1977, p. 35) original interpretation is to apply the Panopticon to the thinkers Deleuze (1992) and Zuboff (2019). The chapter highlights that the phenomenon of visibility has been weaponised as a tool of control and, at the same time, turned into a prerequisite for engagement in digital societies.

This chapter not only theorises digital panopticism but also illustrates the changes in social practices and the concept of individual freedom brought about by the interactions with current technologies. A few examples of such interactions include social credit systems, workplace surveillance, algorithmic profiling, and the use of biometric data for identification. The author(s) situate the notion of digital panopticism within an extended philosophical discourse on digital capitalism, data colonialism, and psychopolitical control, thereby emphasizing the pervasiveness of surveillance through the omnipresence of technologies and the ubiquity of cultural narratives.

At the end of the chapter, the author(s) set forth the proposition that digital panopticism is far from just another technical arrangement but rather an ideological framework that determines how people, in an age of absolute exposure, understand liberty, faith, and membership.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DIGITAL PANOPTICISM FOUCAULT AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF DISCIPLINE**

The idea of Digital panopticism traces its intellectual lineage to classical panopticism. The criticism of the digital age follows closely Michel Foucault's (1977) analysis in *Discipline and Punish*, in which he discusses Jeremy Bentham's design for a circular prison, the panopticon, from the late eighteenth century, as a model of social control. From the central tower, the single observer could see all prisoners without being seen; thus, the condition was established in which visibility itself became a mechanism of power.

Foucault employed this architectural metaphor to illustrate a novel type of disciplinary power that was not enforced by force but through the psychological internalization of individuals. People change their behaviour on their own when they are aware that they might be observed. Foucault (1977) explains that the genius of the Panopticon lies in its ability to create subjects who self-discipline. According to

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