(In)Sensibilities to the Vigilance of Others in the City

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INTRODUCTION

In most contemporary cities, public and private surveillance technologies have been deployed to watch what others do or do not do. It is a phenomenon of the city on a global scale (Ramírez and Valenzuela 2017), one which has become “a key dimension in the modern world” (Bauman and Lyon 2013, 4).

Behind this urban unfolding, there is a public discourse that refers to these technologies being emplaced in order to reduce crime, and what is expected is that they are perceptible to the populations who transit public space with the purpose of dissuading them from any incivility or criminal activity, attributing to these devices a symbolic power. However, over time the presence of these surveillance technologies to which society has become accustomed and even desensibilized has been normalized.

1Video surveillance cameras and drones are mainly considered.
This article aims to analyse the (in)sensibility to surveillance of others in the city. In principle, it focuses on the study of the social effects of surveillance technologies in contemporary societies and cities, and the implications of watching others as the potential violation of fundamental prerogatives such as the right to privacy, to mobility, to the protection of personal data and to not be discriminated against.

The research is located in Mexico City where I have carried out fieldwork to study the planning and organization of surveillance technologies that converge in public space, and I have also conducted interviews with inhabitants of this city regarding their perceptions and sensibilities. However, in addition to studying the phenomenon at the local level, these social practices are also taken up on a global scale.

The analysis is circumscribed within the framework of a politics of sensibilities\(^2\) to study the social practices that normalize the presence of surveillance technologies in the city, as well as those that perceive and assume them as a latent threat in their daily lives and in response to which they have generated new horizons for action.

**Politics of Sensibilities and Surveillance**

Surveillance technologies with different social purposes and different technological scopes have been installed and are operating in practically all cities. The diversity of possibilities of these technologies is so wide that it is complex, at least to outline it in a few pages, in addition to permanently contributing to new forms and characteristics through technological innovation. However, in general, they all have the same objective: to watch the others.

Watching is associated with observing, and with the sight which is one of the five human senses. Sight is the motor of surveillance and is central to social life because, as Barreto Durán points out: “the eyes are my main connection with the world, with them I am constantly evaluating and questioning my surroundings” (2009, 7). Through the sense of sight, it is possible to look at objects, examine behaviours, understand the world,

\(^2\) It is understood that “the body as the first relationship with the world structures our wanderings and experiences, where sensations and emotions express the differential ways of feeling in the world, as the right ways of feeling, giving place to social sensibilities” (Scribano et al. 2012, 8).
among many other possibilities that, connected with the other senses, enhance our existence through sensibilities.

However, we do not observe objectively or neutrally, our glances are charged with subjectivities because there is an established order in which “shared symbols and accepted conventions give order to our lives, a refuge where we can rest easy, knowing what is right, how our environment has been determined and what we must see as real” (Barreto Durán 2009, 8); so, the possibilities of looking are multiple, and in a broad sense:

We never look at just one thing; we always look at the relationship between things and ourselves. Our vision is in continuous activity, in continuous movement, continuously learning the things that are in a circle whose centre is itself, constituting what is present for us as we are. (Berger 1972, 1)

The glance is dynamic and changes over time and in the face of various circumstances and contexts, but it is always related to our existence as individuals who are part of a society, accompanied by wisdom, knowledge, prejudices and social symbols. Thus, “there are a number of ways to see the world, to explore and understand it” (Barreto Durán 2009, 8). In summary, we could say that there is a force that homogenizes, but at the same time it coexists with another that advances in the opposite direction towards diversity, free will and discordance.

In our daily life in the city, “heterogeneous ways of seeing, saying, feeling and doing are promoted”, but also other ways that “condition them, showing the structural mechanisms that make it a particular socio-spatial and classist geometry” (Cervio 2015, 21). Urban design, the showcases and spectacular advertisements that present us with products, the lights and all that visual arsenal that nourishes the cities, are there influencing the views of society, potentially unifying sensations and, at the same time, providing information that can be discerned by each individual.

In this context, surveillance carried out through the sense of sight is impregnated with all this social baggage. Those who watch with the support of surveillance technologies are people who watch with prior prejudice, knowledge and beliefs. This includes those who watch from home, companies or businesses with a few cameras, and government institutions or police corporations that have hundreds or thousands of cameras in the city. In all cases, the people behind the surveillance technologies, receive
and process these images according to their own prior knowledge and prejudice. Even the images that are selected and analysed by artificial intelligence will eventually become part of the human glance and judgement for their interpretation.

Thus, even those who have received training and are trained to watch and find certain patterns of behaviour, cannot avoid their own subjectivities because “what we know or what we believe affects the way we see things” (Berger 1972, 1). When watching, and especially in the effort to do it “efficiently”, we will bet on the observation of certain types of people that according to their physical and social characteristics correspond to a certain ethnic, age, religious, ideological group, etc., “potentially” characterized—previously—as risky. This could be considered, to a large extent, as discriminatory by directing surveillance more intensely towards certain types of people than others.

In public video surveillance, watchers play a fundamental role, because they are the ones who, permanently—as humanly possible—are observing the images of the surveillance technologies deployed in the city and interpreting whether or not there is any abnormality, some data or image that corresponds to any incivility or crime. To enter that job, each of them participated in a training course in which they explained what they should observe, and what they should report as an emergency or incident, but of course their prejudices and socially shared symbols are added to their training allowing them to discern between one image and another.

It is evident that the watchers, when observing, do so with the received indications and with the social baggage and previous knowledge. But it is also clear that “our perception or appreciation of an image also depends on our own way of seeing” (Berger 1972, 2), and even when there are indications about what to look at, each one will see what they choose to see, even in the same image there will be those who appreciate a normal situation and where someone else perceives an unusual or suspicious situation.

Thus, the sensations that “arise as a result and as an antecedent of the perceptions that give rise to the emotions” (Scribano et al. 2012, 8), are there permanently influencing what we see and how we see it, and this is enhanced through surveillance technologies that magnify the quantity and quality of the images that reach human eyes.
Surveillance in Contemporary Cities

In contemporary cities, cameras and drones are watching what is happening, collecting images from different places in the territory, and have the ability to track events in real-time or remotely.

The cameras “can reach a wide spectrum by making possible the recording (and reproduction) of the activities of any person who is in the observed place” (Cordero 2015, 361). And even when surveillance is directed at a specific property or person or group, it will also record the activities of those who pass through it, violating their right to privacy.

But, “drones are changing the possibilities of our way of seeing, looking and observing” (Scribano 2017, 65). They are able to move quickly from one side to the other and obtain images of precise situations, they introduce a “vertical glance” (Arteaga 2016) to watch certain spaces such as borders, airports, roads or social manifestations, marches, confrontations or protests, at the moment in which these occur. All this serves to reduce the risk to those who monitor, and increases surveillance capabilities.

At the time of COVID-19, these technologies showed the potential of surveillance, especially in Asian cities, but also—keeping the proportions—in Latin American cities where even when surveillance technologies do not have the scope—both numerical and in capacity—as in Asian cities, have increasingly shown more possibilities.

In the media, we have witnessed how the health contingency has “accelerated the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems and surveillance technologies in China” (Vega 2020). It is largely a process that has been brewing for years in the cities of this country whose “artificial intelligence technologies and has set up the world’s most sophisticated surveillance state […] tracking citizens’ daily movements” (Feldstein 2019).

Starting from the contingency, there are cameras with computerized vision and infrared sensors capable of detecting the temperatures of people in public spaces, as well as having the ability to identify if people are using their masks properly (Vega 2020).

It is no secret to anyone that in China there has been a huge deployment of surveillance technologies for years, and that various activities of daily life are observed through different technologies with facial recognition, artificial intelligence, among other means that generate huge databases and the possibility of conceiving intelligence from its analysis.
It is no secret either that Chinese governments and companies have exported these technologies to various parts of the world. In Latin America, there is evidence that governments—from different orders—have received advice for the implementation of their surveillance systems and have even accepted donations from Chinese companies and governments (Jasso 2020).

Thus, it is known that there are cameras and drones capable of carrying out “dystopian uses” orienting surveillance to social control in cities. In this regard, Chokshi presents some of these uses:

In one, a politician requests footage of his enemies kissing in public, along with the identities of all involved. In another, a life insurance company offers rates based on how fast people run while exercising. And in another, a sheriff receives a daily list of people who appeared to be intoxicated in public, based on changes to their gait, speech or other patterns. (Chokshi 2019, 1)

To these amazing everyday uses of surveillance is added the fact that through drones and cameras more and more can be known about us. For example, the technology that, with the support of the cameras in the electronic advertisements on the streets, “recognizes our reactions and adapts to them” in order to have “a greater impact” on people’s preferences. These technologies have been used in Tokyo, Japan, allowing people to be discriminated according to their preferences and manipulated to consume, but for governments—particularly authoritarian ones—they can serve to “regulate social behaviour without anyone being able to protest” (Medina 2017).

Any place can be conducive to watching and observing. Facial recognition cameras have been placed in the public toilets in Beijing, China, the purpose of which is to deliver toilet paper to people who have not previously been in a certain period of time, and thus avoid wasting paper and using it responsibly. However, in terms of human rights, it is a latent violation of privacy, in addition to the right to the protection of personal data when compiling information from millions of faces.

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3 The first machines were installed in 2016 in the restrooms of the Olympic Park, “an area where up to 20 devices are counted and which, according to workers at the venue, has generated a saving of 2100 yuan per month (about 285 euros) per restroom” (Arana 2017).
In Latin America there is also evidence of these dystopian uses. In Mexico, in some gated communities in the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey, Nuevo León, surveillance cameras have been equipped with artificial intelligence that allows them to detect certain types of clothing or behaviour associated with youth groups.

As Guzik (2016, 3) notes, there are a “large amount of surveillance capabilities”, and with these dystopian uses surveillance technologies have unveiled the control capabilities they have over society, as well intervention to generate data and intelligence in crisis situations and the management of cities. This is relevant, because the analysis of databases implies the “material surveillance of massive amounts of information about people and societies” (Scribano 2017, 65).

But these surveillance technologies, like all affordable technologies, are not neutral and there is the possibility of making different uses of them. Thus, it is important to emphasize that “technology in itself does not have to lead us to create dystopian cities, it is only a tool. It is how it is used and for what purposes what constitutes the difference” (Medina 2017).

Sensitivity to the Vigilance of Others

In Foucault’s (1975) terms, vigilance is power. The fact that someone can be observed and cannot know who is observing them, generates “power mechanisms”. Above all, when there is no possibility of reciprocity and you cannot see who is watching, and—in the best of scenarios—you can only see the device that is located somewhere.

According to Berger (1972), there is a “reciprocal nature of vision” in which we can see something or someone, reciprocally they could also see us. However, in surveillance technologies, this reciprocity is broken because the glance is done remotely, and with difficulty, someone watched by the camera or drone will not be able to see who is watching him, at the most he will be able to see the device, but not who is really watching.

4 Commented upon by Leily Hassaine at the Round Table: “Urbanizaciones y barrios cerrados”, on August 27, 2018 at Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

5 The use of facial recognition software can identify the gender of passers-by with an accuracy of 85–90%, ethnic origin and approximate age (Fitzpatrick 2010).
In cities, most surveillance technologies are visible to passers-by on public roads (Bauman and Lyon 2013), precisely because they have a symbolic function in which they discourage certain social conducts or behaviours. In this sense, the “vigilant architecture” is displayed as “the technology of power in order to repress individuals, manufacture subjected and exercised bodies and impose silence” (Cortés 2010, 17).

The goal of these surveillance technologies is that their presence inhibits or dissuades social control. They are placed and managed hoping that populations are sensible to their presence and thus behave according to the established rules because they have the feeling that they are being observed. This agrees with human nature and the sense of sight, because “soon after being able to see, we are aware that we can also be seen” (Berger 1972, 1). In short, it is surveillance that constantly coerces by being permanently present in the cities, manifesting itself as Foucault refers, in the form of “the physics of power” in which:

control over the body is carried out in accordance with the laws of optics and mechanics, in accordance with a whole set of spaces, lines, screens, beams, degrees, and without resorting, in principle at least, to excess, to force, to violence. A power that is apparently so much less bodily as it is more wisely physical. (Foucault 1975, 108)

Surveillance technologies in cities, especially public ones, are placed in the urban area in a way that they are visible to everyone who transits through there. These are everywhere and it is about “privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance” (Harvey 2008, 32). In some cases, even advertisements referring to the presence of these devices are placed, either as a way to warn about the vulnerability of the right to privacy or to increase the symbolic, bodily and emotional effects on society. But whatever the case, they are made visible to maximize people’s perception and sensibility.

The visibility of surveillance can go beyond the symbolic and go to unsuspected extremes. In Medellín, Colombia, through the loudspeakers on the posts with surveillance cameras, citizens are warned that they are discovered or are about to commit an offence.6 That is, they show that

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6 That was the proposal of the Agreement Project 185 of 2019, which was filed with the Council of Medellín, Colombia (Restrepo 2019).
people are being observed and that could be evidenced and subject to a sanction.

In China, giant screens are displayed on the main streets of Xian, projecting images captured by cameras in the city. Therefore, watchers ensure that everyone who is there is aware of and is sensible to the presence of the surveillance devices and the possibility of disclosure of their image.

In this logic, the State “has the possibility and uses image and sound capture means, it is not illogical to think that this will have an impact on the behaviour of the individual in spaces open to the public” (Cordero 2015, 370). At least, this impact is what is expected to control society.

In the particular case of drones, it is noted that: “the propensity of the modern State to place, on one side, its ability to observe from a certain height, as well as to place itself symbolically above society” (Arteaga 2016, 269). They exercise hierarchical vigilance, not only because of their physical position above us, but also symbolic, as they can disappear from one moment to the next.

Thus, surveillance “affects the direct exercise of citizens’ rights that are exercised in public places. The fact of knowing that you are permanently observed and registered represses and restricts your full exercise” (Cordero 2015, 370) of the right to free transit, to privacy, to the protection of personal data and not to be discriminated against.

To this sense of surveillance in cities, we must add the unavoidable fact that the trend of surveillance technologies is incremental. Even though there are more and more voices criticizing the effectiveness of cameras and drones, and questioning the potential violation of fundamental prerogatives, the numbers of cameras in the urban structure are actually increasing.7

It seems that society has begun to internalize the presence of surveillance technologies and “one look is enough. A look that watches, and that each one, feeling it weighing on himself, ends up internalizing it to the point of watching himself; each one will exercise this vigilance on and

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7 In Mexico City, 8088 public surveillance cameras were installed in 2008. In the first months of 2020, they totaled just over 15,000, but in August 2019, the Head of Government announced that the installation of 58,000 cameras inside the neighbourhoods with high crime rates would start (La Razón 2019). To these are added the tens of thousands of cameras that the victimization surveys identify as having been installed in homes and businesses in the city.
against himself” (Foucault 1980, 18). It is largely a new social contract in which we give up part of our rights in exchange for vigilance that watches over me and others and maintains social order.

In the interviews conducted in Mexico City, there is evidence that society is sensible to the presence of surveillance devices and the permanent glance that is exercised.

An interviewee reported that, while we are being sensible to this surveillance, it has a regulatory function in society and serves “so that we are better people”. As a specific case, she pointed out that images are shown in the media and on social networks in which people are seen abandoning pets, but these videos manage to sensibilize society, because “knowing that they are being observed by the cameras, they no longer abandon dogs on the street”. This occurs either because they are sensibilized to images of abandonment and internalize the consequences, or because they are afraid of social sanction, but from the point of view of the interviewee, society is sensible to surveillance and also modifies its behaviour.

In several interviews, men and women reported behaviour modification in the presence of surveillance technologies, in such a way that when they know that they are being recorded—even when they get used to it—they behave differently because they have knowledge that they are being observed. In this regard, an interviewee shares:

In the cameras of the shopping centres you start to behave differently if you notice that there is a camera right in front of you. Because of course, you know that someone is going to see that recording, for me it is that someone is going to have my image, for some reason we have the instinct to behave under normal standards and [you have to] demonstrate that you are a normal person, even if you don’t have the intention to carry out criminal activity, but it is like an instinct to demonstrate that you are an ordinary person who will not draw attention.

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8 They were carried out anonymously—no socio-economic data was recorded—with inhabitants of Mexico City during March 2018–March 2019 as part of the field work of the Project: “Prevención del crimen y tecnología. Los efectos de la videovigilancia. Análisis de la incidencia delictiva y de las percepciones ciudadanas para la elaboración de políticas públicas”.
But what happens with the thousands of public cameras that are permanently monitoring in Mexico City? The probability that our daily activities are monitored is high and in this sense, “it can inhibit your normal activities” or “if you know that there is some kind of observation in you, you may change some behaviours” as two interviewees pointed out. And although we are aware of the location of the cameras either by the signs that point to them or by the diffusion of the places where they are placed, it is difficult for us to be fully aware of when and when we are not under the glance of surveillance technologies. Furthermore, considering that, in the colonies, both households and companies and businesses have added hundreds of thousands of cameras (Jasso 2020), how can we assess whether they are effectively watching us or not? Under what circumstances are we sensible to this surveillance that is everywhere?

In response to this question, an interviewee stated that “unconsciously, you feel watched”, and there are those who even express the social panic of being watched and persecuted permanently. But they warn that this effect increases when there is the certainty of a sanction for inappropriate behaviour, in such a way that: “your attitudes change when there is a sanction involved. The fact that there are cameras must have a follow-up, a result, a consequence or something […] it is more the fear of sanction”.

In summary, I agree with Bauman and Lyon (2013, 4) who affirm that “in many countries, people are very aware of the way in which surveillance affects their lives”. This holds even in circumstances where there is an absence of certainty about in which place or moment they are being observed. I particularly agree that surveillance is “a unidirectional process in which the glance of the watchers prevails over the watched” (Arteaga 2018, 9), thus the watched are not necessarily certain of when they are observed, and precisely in this uncertainty lies the power of surveillance because although the dream of the Panopticon, which allows one to

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9 “C5 operates and monitors more than 15 thousand surveillance cameras that exist in Mexico City (Closed Circuit Television, CCTV), in order to prevent and immediately alert the authorities of security and capital emergencies about any situation of risk”. See: https://www.c5.cdmx.gob.mx/dependencia/acerca-de/video-monitore.

10 In Mexico City a database was published in which “the locations of the posts of the Command, Control, Computing, Communications and Citizen Contact Center (C5) of Mexico City with security cameras, panic buttons, speaker, pole type and georeferencing can be consulted”. See: https://datos.cdmx.gob.mx/explore/dataset/ubicacion-acceso-gratuito-internet-wifi-c5/table/.
“see with a glance everything that is done in it” (Bentham 1971, 37) is impossible, the sensation of surveillance permanently affects society.

**In sensibility to the Vigilance of Others**

In the architectural design of cities “the problem of the total visibility of bodies, individuals, things, under a centralized view, had been one of the most constant basic principles” (Foucault 1980, 10). To a large extent, it became an aspiration to be able to observe others and a necessity to maintain order, thereby avoiding crimes and incivilities.

With surveillance technologies, the ability to observe was magnified. These devices have the ability to systematically watch for long periods of time, as well as to record enormous amounts of information in images. They can perform much more “effective” surveillance than is possible with human eyes.

Thus, the trend towards hierarchically structured cities, with the distribution of bodies in space and densely watched, is aspirationally one of the objectives of contemporary societies, and in the effort to achieve them permanent vigilance is accepted and assimilated (Jasso 2021).

Faced with this technological deployment, a kind of new social contract was generated in which society gives up all or part of its liberties and rights, such as privacy, free transit, not being discriminated against, in exchange for surveillance of itself and the others that, in turn, allows us to live in an orderly and controlled environment. In this context, drones and “surveillance cameras have become omnipresent and their presence is already understood as something normal “normal” that few of us come to question” (Cortés 2010, 33).

Much of society tends to the normalization of surveillance technologies, and “citizens dedicate themselves to their affairs almost without noticing the surveillance cameras that point from the top to the streets of all major cities” (Garland 2001, 31). In consequence we arrive at a situation in which “what scares is not the arrival of a surveillance society, but rather that we live in it without it worrying us” (Bauman cited by Ramonet 2016). Although a society in the midst of a social panic about

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11 Consciously demanding the presence of more surveillance technologies in the public spaces of the city, directly financing it with its own resources to protect its physical integrity and watching its heritage or requesting it from governments. But this also entails an unconscious agreement when normalizing the presence of this surveillance.
surveillance is not convenient, neither is one that normalizes and does not question the implications of surveillance.

Why does the normalization of surveillance technologies occur in contemporary societies? There are several answers, but in order to contribute to the debate in these studies, I will briefly state some of them.

One answer is associated with the “imperceptibility of surveillance”; even though most cameras and drones are exposed to the eyes of passersby just to make them sensible, there are also other schemes where “architecture and technology come together to achieve social control through the imperceptibility of surveillance” (Cortés 2010, 47). Especially when the aim is to surprise potential attackers, the devices are hidden as a strategy from homes or businesses, and even more so when it comes to national security intelligence operations.

On the other hand, the watchers are anonymous and the watched face the uncertainty of not knowing how, when and where they are being observed (Jasso 2021). It is not even possible to know if all the devices are working, and if they are also being observed at that precise moment by someone. Thus, it is known that there is a possibility of not being seen.

In this context, it is clear that surveillance is not, nor can it be, absolute. Even with the most powerful technologies, it is not possible to watch everything, much less in cities that are in constant movement and territorial expansion. There will always be something that escapes the glance of these surveillance technologies—both public and private—there will always be some object that in the structure or design of the city prevents the partial or total view of something that wants to be observed, from a tree, a pole, a building or a billboard.

Furthermore, from a different angle, the images about the same event could be so different that they manage to generate debates among those who observe them. Leaving a key person or perhaps a vehicle out of sight can make a real difference in investigating a crime. At the same time, it shows the impossibility of total surveillance and the implications for decision-making.

In addition, the possibilities for change and movement in the city are of such magnitude that it is not surprising that people assume that they are not necessarily watched in their daily activities. Furthermore, when it is known that although cameras and drones can record a large number of

12 The Government of Mexico City disclosed that in the first months of 2019, of the total of 15,310 cameras in the city, 500 were not working, representing 3.3%.
images, they are useless if there is no one behind them to analyse what is happening (Jasso 2021). Humanly speaking, it is impossible that the thousands of cameras installed in cities are being permanently watched, and even assuming that a person was hired to observe each of the thousands of cameras that are in the city, there would be moments of fatigue or distraction that would impede observation entirely.\footnote{The United States Department of Justice has said that watching those images is “boring and fascinating”, and that the attention fades after about 20 minutes (Chokshi 2019).}

Finally, I dare to propose that the normalization of surveillance technologies, and the insensitivity to their presence, occurs because they are considered necessary to maintain order, and society prefers it to avoiding chaos in cities. In contemporary cities, there is a strong demand for surveillance technologies and consequently, as Whitaker (quoted in Cordero 2015, 360) argues “the contemporary panopticon is surprisingly different […] The prisoners of Bentham dreamed of escaping; the Orwell dissidents in 1984 ardently wanted to flee to a better place, but they could not, for there simply was no such place. On the contrary, our panopticon is accepted, and above all demanded”. That is a new reality.

Also, it should be considered that in this process of normalization it could happen that people “get used to despising the public eye and become insensible to shame” (Bentham 1971, 42). In this way, it is not surprising that people even look at the cameras and smile and act as if no one were watching them,\footnote{In Mexico City, there was a circulation of “videos and photographs from security cameras of the moment when thieves, without fear of being recorded, look at the camera at all times” (Colín 2019) while committing the offences.} but it should be noted that what is risky is normalization to such a degree that it reflects insensitivity as a society.

Before the occurrence of high impact events, such as a crime, an interviewee in Mexico City reported:

[… I watched a video on where a guy comes out of the trunk and it is believed that it was because he was being kidnapped. He falls to the ground, and want to remove the bandages. The incredible thing is that a car recorded all this, but nobody stopped it […] many people have watched the video, it was on the news, but when talking to the authorities there was no lawsuit, no investigation folder, not even culprits, it is not known who is the person that flew out of the trunk.}
In another interview, we reviewed the case in which “the murderer records everything that is happening and then publishes it on social networks. As if he had made sense of his crime and spreading it was part of his goal”. With these types of events, the level of insensibility to images is revealed where “in society, the fact of recording is more for morbid curiosity than for doing justice”.

With these type of cases, the underlying reflection is that, although the witnessing and recording of an event through a cell phone manipulated by a person can become insensible, the more the glance through the video surveillance systems that operate en masse in the city, not only because they could escape the eyes of the watchers or the scrutiny of artificial intelligence and facial recognition, but because behind the decisions of which cases to attend, there are also social actors who prioritize what is priority, as well as what is possible and suitable for them to do.

It would be considered that “the fact that criminals smile at the cameras is an unusual attitude”, however, it is also a consequence of the fact that there is no effect on criminal behaviour. Thus, it happens that the cameras “inhibit us because we do not commit criminal acts, but when you are already doing something that you know has no consequences, that they are not going to punish you, then you take it as a joke”.

The existence of a sanction when a crime is committed is not always the rule, not even when the cameras are present, and this is the reason why those who commit crimes act with total unconcern even in front of the cameras. The case recalled in an interview stands out:

you can see in the assaults on the foreign trucks that all have cameras and the assailants get on, take off their headscarves and smile, they literally smile, they say: “look at what I do with your video” because there is no fear of the consequence, then there is no use in recording.

It is clear that in society the standardization of surveillance technologies has permeated to such a degree that they become insensible to its presence. In some cases, even extreme situations are recorded in which crimes or incivilities are committed in the presence of the camera.

Conclusions

Studies on surveillance technologies in cities are relevant because they represent a wide range of possibilities for urban coexistence and also have diverse social effects. But above all they are fundamental, because in most
cities, particularly Latin American ones, they are constantly expanding, even more so after the context of COVID-19 that has revealed the potential of these technologies.

It is important to study which effects surveillance has on individuals and society, what does it represent socially that someone else can observe us without us being able to look in reciprocity and without us knowing what happens to the images that are compiled from us every day. In short, how it affects our sensibilities.

Thereon, one of the main conclusions is that the effects of surveillance in society are not homogeneous. While some are permanently violated because they are sensible to the possible observation by others, there are those who manage to normalize this surveillance and even be insensible to its presence.

On the one hand, it is unavoidable that surveillance technologies potentially violate people’s rights by violating their privacy, the protection of personal data and the right to mobility. These devices are capable of making people feel persecuted and observed, particularly when urban design insists on manifesting the presence of surveillance devices and generates sensibilities in people that consequently force them to modify their behaviour.

However, there are those who normalize the presence of cameras and drones. It is a form of “normalized sensibilities” (Scribano and De Sena 2019) that is partly due to a process of rationality in which the impossibility of total surveillance is known, as well as the absence of information and the latent “imperceptibility of surveillance” (Cortés 2010), which is further accentuated when the devices are hidden for national security reasons, or for some other reason that warrants it.

But the process of normalization and insensibility also occurs because people accept this surveillance in a new kind of social contract, in which prerogatives are given in exchange for control in the city and more security. In this way, it is observed that as they demand more vigilance, and even in some cases finance it with their own resources, the criticism and questioning of the vigilance of others diminishes.

At the extreme are those who are totally insensible to the surveillance of others and to the images of crimes and violence recorded by these technologies. The fascination with the image is lost and even when scenes that should be important and shocking to our senses are shown, we normalize them and even make them invisible.
Surveillance in cities is a fact, and it is likely that it will increase in time both numerically and in its capacities. In this sense, what is socially pertinent is that the surveillance exercised by others be limited and controlled in order to avoid dystopian uses that further violate the social rights and sensibilities of those who inhabit the cities.

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