A Short Comment on Surveillance and Security in the E-Planned City

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In the current information era, cities are being called “smart” or “intelligent”. They are becoming increasingly digital, which is to say, a digital layer has been added to spaces, streets, buildings, and squares. Objects that in the past were only material are becoming now both physical and virtual. For example, an elevator today is more than a simple steel box with pulleys; they are now equipped with sensors and decision-making computers that increase their efficiency, turning them into “smart” or “intelligent” technologies.

At the same time that the digital is embedded into the material, the materiality of space is translated into digital formats. There is thus the emergence of a two-way movement where urban space is becoming simultaneously “digital” and “digitized”; digitized in the sense that it is being “inserted” into computer in order to be virtually represented. Examples that illustrate this creation of “virtual” cities are those of flight simulators and videogames, which reproduce landscapes with impressive precision. Another example is that of the spread of video surveillance, where cameras translate people, objects, and actions into digital pixels.

The more digital cities become, the greater their openness to surveillance. Every day practices such as grocery shopping, taking a bus, withdrawing money and making a call all leave digital trails that are likely to be tracked. With the spread of surveillance cameras throughout the urban milieu it is increasingly hard for an individual to avoid digital recording while taking a walk along the streets. In the course of a day, the amount of information produced about one’s activities can be enormous. With the digital trails we leave behind it is possible to find out where we were, what kind of food we ate, what we bought and paid for with a credit card, and so on. If we take into account the entire population of a city, the immense scale of the

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