



# Data Analysis Report

**Report title: The Curious Case of the Missing Sousveillance**

**Date: Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2016**

## **Document Information**

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Module Title and Code: Researching Crime and Criminal Justice

**Purpose of this Data Analysis Report:** to report on the findings of a data analysis that has been conducted on the concept of sousveillance as reported (or not reported) by both quality and tabloid publications in the UK and the US

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# Introduction

The following report outlines the findings of the summative content analysis report, “The Curious Case of the Missing Sousveillance”, that has been performed as part of the assessment strategy for the level 7 Researching Crime and Justice module.

## 1.1 Purpose of the analysis

The purpose of this analysis is to identify whether the concept of sousveillance – also called inverse surveillance, describing the process whereby citizens watch back at those who carry out traditional surveillance in the name of national and other security matters – is being described and properly understood by both broadsheet and what we might term quality publications on the one hand, and popular tabloids on the other.

## 1.2 Key articles

### 1.2.1 Broadsheet and “quality” publications

The Guardian editorial (2015) The Guardian view on surveillance: citizens must be the state’s master. Not its plaything. *The Guardian* [online], 4 December 2015

Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/04/the-guardian-view-on-surveillance-citizens-must-be-the-states-master-not-its-plaything>

[Last accessed 15 November 2015]

Bustillos, M (2013) Little Brother is watching you. *New Yorker* [online], 22 May 2013

Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/little-brother-is-watching-you>

[Last accessed 15 November 2015]

Mallaby, S (2005) Looking Back at Big Brother. *Washington Post* [online], 18 July 2005

Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/17/AR2005071701077.html>

[Last accessed 15 November 2015]

## 1.2.2 Tabloids

Doughty, S (2014) Bugging of phones by jealous partners 'rife'. *Daily Mail* [online], 29 December 2014

Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2889521/Bugging-phones-jealous-partners-rife-Campaign-group-warns-women-guard-against-spyware-tells-suspicious-husband-boyfriend-use-device.html>

[Last accessed 15 November 2016]

The Mirror (2011) My husband planted cameras all over our house to spy on me. *The Mirror* [online], 6 December 2011

Available at: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/my-husband-planted-cameras-all-over-our-house-95403>

[Last accessed 15 November 2016]

Keegan, N (2016) It's never been easier to spy on your partner! New 'spy apps' can help catch a cheat red-handed. (as per Reader view in Firefox; open-web headline as per URL). *The Sun* [online], 11 August 2016

Available at: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/1592196/if-youre-having-an-affair-new-spy-apps-could-massively-increase-your-spouses-chances-of-catching-you-in-the-act/>

[Last accessed 15 November 2016]

## 2. Analytical Strategy

### 2.1 Design

My area of study is related to concepts of surveillance, in particular inverse surveillance or sousveillance. I wanted to discover how well understood and discussed the subject is within current and recent media practice.

Sousveillance is very much the preserve of discourses which are to be found in quality and broadsheet publications, as well as academic texts. A total of only 56,100 results were produced for the word sousveillance using Google with my personal and search history on 14th November 2016. On the first page of results no tabloid I searched (in the UK, these being the Daily Mail, the Daily Express, the Sun, the Mirror; and in the US, the New York Post) was linked directly to the term. Meanwhile, in the quality and broadsheets I looked at in the UK and US, a variety of articles, both from the last decade and more recent, did explain in both serious and jocular formats, but nevertheless with a competent understanding of the underlying issues, the significance of inverse surveillance in relation to the surveillance carried out by the state and other centres of power.

As the only mention of what might be termed “surveillance carried out by citizens” in the tabloid press seemed to relate to citizens spying on each other, I used two sets of search terms: one, for the broadsheet and quality publications, was the keyword sousveillance – the justification being that I was interested in how the concept was being understood, not its practice; the second, for the tabloids, involved a trail of keywords which led from one article in one publication to another in a second, and where it soon was clear that practice – where more scandalous, the better – was far more interesting to these publications than the world of academic-oriented thought experimenting, and wearable-technology developments.

As far as the design of my study is concerned, this is clearly not an ideal situation, but the challenge was to find any references at all to the *conceptualisation* – and its popular diffusion – of the idea in question, which is what interests me.

As a result, I felt a summative approach would best serve my report. It seemed obvious to me at this stage that the tabloids *en masse* – and in some way the broadsheets too – were explicitly avoiding using even alternative words for the idea that the governed could control the actions of the governors by using such inverse surveillance. It would therefore be just as important for me to analyse what *opportunities* had been missed to discuss the concept of sousveillance, as

analyse what was being – ultimately – published, to the degree that even the tabloids managed to say something about the matter.

The choice of a summative approach, given the circumstances, was therefore not difficult.

## 2.2 Delivery

The summative approach I decided to use is a formalised way of “reading between the lines”. I feel this is particularly appropriate for the area of security discourse, as much of what is “said” will be covertly “said”: perhaps even left “unsaid”. In a world where self-censorship is more and more present, democratic citizens learn – often silently – the increasing number of activities and beliefs which cannot be voiced nor communicated, and not only in public but also in private. Therefore, analysing the fluctuating and sometimes heavily codified progression of meaning in common usage is an important goal for any definition of public discourse which aims to be useful and accurate.

From this point of view, the analysis I have carried out is appropriate to the context, content and environment concerned. However, one major weakness is the broken-backed nature of the keywords. I did not want to abandon the usage of *sousveillance* where it appeared, as I thought it of utmost importance to be able to analyse the understanding of *sousveillance as a concept*. However, it soon also became clear that it was quite impossible for me to find references to the concept *as a concept* in the tabloids. Whilst one search on Google did pick up on *sousveillance* and the Daily Mail, this was on a webpage where both were mentioned but not in a direct way.

It soon became clear, however, that for the tabloids the practice of what we might term “citizens surveilling other citizens” was of permissible interest: “jealous partners bugging phones” was a productive search term with many results (interestingly, not limited to the tabloids), whereas it appeared “overbearing state intervening in your phone conversations” would not be.

If I had to do my analysis again, I would work harder to see if I could include common keywords which provoked both discourses in all media: conceptualisation on the one hand, and descriptions of “scandalous” as well as more measured practice on the other.

However, it might also very well be a fair conclusion that the nature of the potential vacuum of discourse provisionally uncovered by this report would make this a nigh on impossible task, whatever the resources employed.

### 3. Findings & Discussion

As has already been advanced, there was a clear split between explanations of the concept of sousveillance on the one hand, and the practice of non-state and non-corporate “citizen-led, peer-inflicted surveillance” on the other.

This went down an unexpected route in one notable article: the first quality article I studied was a recent editorial from the Guardian (The Guardian, 2015) which whilst pushing the idea that citizens must be masters (one would assume mistresses, too) of the state, studiously chose to avoid discussing and popularising precisely the concept – sousveillance – which would enable such a dynamic. As an opportunity lost, this struck me as bewildering in the extreme.

The Guardian editorial was quite racist in its overtones: it used Vladimir Putin’s Russia as an example not to follow; it was also very self-congratulatory in its “we brave journalists against the big bad state” discourse. I could easily have seen this editorial appearing in the Daily Mail.

This self-congratulatory mode – “there’s one way, which is our way, of doing things right” – was mirrored in both the New Yorker account (Bustillos, 2013) on the new generation sousveiller (at least in the point of view established around the figure of the latter) who recorded a private off-the-record political intervention and released it via an established website to an apparently hungry sousveillance-loving audience, as well as the Washington Post column (Mallaby, 2005) which did explain in depth the concept of, and history and person behind, sousveillance, but with an arch tone of “I know what you don’t, so do let me clarify it for you”.

Summarising, the broadsheets and quality articles which have been looked at (not only the three included here, but others too) – whilst addressing the issues of inverse surveillance at a societal level – seemed unwilling to go all the way and say: “Sousveillance is this: this is how it works; this is what *you* can do with it; and it is the solution to overbearing state surveillance we’ve been looking for.” No complete manual of instructions is to be found. In a world full of listicles on “ten ways how to do this or that” (to be seen even in the broadsheets these days), it was clearly a missed set of opportunities to generate content. One can only assume the absences are coincidental. They do, however, make one wonder how.

The three tabloid articles I looked at, from the Daily Mail (Doughty, 2014), the Mirror (The Mirror, 2011) and the Sun (Keegan, 2016), located citizen surveillance of others in the space of individual criminal activity between jealous or abusive spouses or partners. Whilst the Daily Mail concentrated on arguing the threat was exclusively against women by men, both the Mirror and the Sun reported more even-handedly. The Daily Mail’s article used what this author can

only presume were press releases from “pressure” groups, later called “support” groups, to develop a Christmas-themed angle to the issue.

The Mirror’s article was a complex story of cameras installed by a jealous partner (and then husband) in a family home, and towards the end of the story took the opportunity – as did the Sun in its report – to detail quite carefully what tools could be used to carry out such horizontal surveillance against one’s “loved” ones. The Sun’s story was interesting with respect to the potential for racist overtones which it strove successfully to avoid, as it involved taking an Indian TV investigation and examined illegal activities in India.

Interestingly, in none of these cases was the opportunity taken to suggest that such surveillance might also be societally located in the context of, for example, local or national organised crime. Again, one wonders why there was such a pressing need to situate the idea of citizen surveillance of other citizens so firmly in the camp of individual families and their personal lives, and not expand it to other potential interactions of a much wider nature. We might be reminded of the phone-hacking scandals of earlier times which more than one newspaper was involved in: perhaps the explanation for the apparent ring-fencing of articles on this subject may become clearer in the light of such history.



## 4. Recommendations

- This author recommends a series of studies into the concepts, practice and implications of sousveillance, expanding on the approach – though perhaps not the tone used – of Mallaby (2005), and of Bustillos (2013), where a focussed examination of the real issues to hand could be conducted. The proponents of sousveillance generally suggest it is a tool which will be used in good faith, by “little” people against an overbearing state and private sector. This may be true in many cases, but as with all tools, and all weapons, it does depend on who is using them and to what purpose. It is not simply not good enough to suggest if such tools are used in bad faith, then they are not sousveillance. We need to be more sophisticated in our analysis. This author suggests we conduct studies – of a popular nature and diffusion – which are.
- This author recommends a far more comprehensive content analysis and discussion than this report has been able to deliver of the major broadsheets and quality publications on the one hand and the tabloids on the other, in both the UK and the US, to disentangle supposition from reality.
  - Firstly, is there concrete evidence that sousveillance is being proactively avoided as a subject for public debate?
  - Secondly, if there is such evidence, why are publications avoiding open and honest debate on the matter? Is it a question of self-censorship, or is there something else operating on the media?
  - Thirdly, why does there seem to be so little mention – when the opportunities present themselves in the writing of articles – of what this author presumes must be a common circumstance: the use made of sousveillance tools (wearable and portable technologies of commonly carried kinds) by more or less organised crime, as well as legitimate organisations, to conduct ongoing horizontal surveillance in national, local and hyperlocal communities?

## 5. Bibliography

### 5.1 Referenced articles

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Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/little-brother-is-watching-you>

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Available at: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/my-husband-planted-cameras-all-over-our-house-95403>

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## 5.2 Further reading

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[Last accessed 15 November 2016]

## 6. Appendix

To be delivered in agreement with Helena on Thursday as separate PDF files