

Preface

In November 2014, The Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Umeå University, Sweden, invited its researchers to a two-day research workshop in the city of Örnsköldsvik, about a hundred kilometers south of Umeå. During these days, groups formed around different themes suggested by participants as interesting convergence points for researchers from various humanities subjects. One of these themes, proposed by Stefan Gelfgren, was the issue of contemporary surveillance and the role and impact it has in people's lives. Surveillance is a phenomenon that saturates everyday life in modern societies, and researchers from different humanities disciplines could be expected to find interesting and important angles to this topic. That turned out to be the case!

In the wake of the workshop, an interdisciplinary group took shape with the initial aim of applying for seed money from the faculty for writing a research application focusing on “soft surveillance” – the kind of surveillance we are exposed to when we seemingly voluntarily share our personal information, not least through our online activities. At this point, the group consisted of five researchers: Stefan Gelfgren, Coppélie Cocq, Jesper Enbom, Anna Johansson, and Lars Samuelsson. The faculty approved the seed money and in early 2016 the group went on a short writing retreat to the village Vännäs outside of Umeå to work on their application. It was submitted in March 2016 to Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Foundation (MAW). The proposed research project got the title “iAccept: Soft surveillance – between acceptance and resistance”, and its aim was expressed as follows: “to investigate the tension between, on the one hand, contemporary forms of soft surveillance and the rationales provided by surveillance agents, and, on the other, the way individual users approach, understand, and negotiate the impact of soft surveillance in their everyday life”.

In December the same year the application was granted funding from MAW, and the real work could begin. Among the anticipated outcomes of the

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project was a book with the purpose of summing up important results and collecting relevant contributions from various humanities scholars (broadly conceived), illuminating different angles of the topic. The plan was to initiate the work with the book in relation to an international workshop, to be carried out within the framework of the iAccept-project. But like so many other things, the project was both delayed and had to be partly redesigned due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The workshop plans had to be abandoned, and instead we settled on either an anthology or a special journal issue based on an open call for chapters or papers. An advantage with this alternative was the possibility to reach out more widely to researchers from various disciplines and in different parts of the world. We presented our proposal to Nordicom, at the University of Gothenburg, with whom we had published an overview article earlier in the project. To our delight, Nordicom seized on the idea, and suggested we go for an anthology rather than a special issue – a choice that we are now very happy about.

In April 2021, the call for chapters was published on Nordicom's website and spread in various channels. Over the following months, we received a variety of interesting proposals, nine of which made it to the final book. It is our conviction that together these chapters make an important contribution to the field of surveillance studies – highlighting cultural and ethical perspectives on everyday surveillance, with a focus on the Nordic countries. We want to thank the authors of the chapters for their contributions to, and engagement with, the book; for their collaborative spirit and the work they have put into their chapters. Without them there would not have been any book.

The Nordicom staff has been fantastic – supportive and extremely helpful throughout the project. In particular, we want to thank scientific editor Johannes Bjerling, who has provided crucial comments and suggestions to each chapter, as well as regarding the book project as a whole; managing editor Josefine Bové, who has assisted us with practical matters and given valuable input; manuscript editor Kristin Clay, for her thorough and efficient editing of all the chapters; graphic designer Karin Andén for her layout of the book; and communications officer Sara Stenkvis, who administrates the marketing and communication of the book. In addition, we want to express our gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of the chapters for their important contribution to the quality of the book.

Working with this anthology – collaborating with the authors and the publisher – has been a pleasure. It is hard to imagine a smoother process – from the initial contact with the publisher and the online meetings with the authors, to the final stages of putting everything together in its final shape. We are very satisfied with the result!

We also want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the previous project members of iAccept: Anna Johansson – who took part in designing the project and applying for its funding, but who unfortunately (from our perspective)

had to leave it early due to a change of job – and Peter Bennesved, who joined the project as assistant professor during six months in 2021 to contribute with a valuable historical perspective.

This anthology is an outcome of the research project “iAccept: Soft surveillance – between acceptance and resistance” (MAW 2016.0092), funded by the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Foundation. We are grateful to MAW for the financial support that enabled both the project and the book. As we write this preface, we have just been awarded research funding for a new project (again from MAW): “Data Is the New Oil (DINO): Digital transformation – negotiating societal benefits and personal integrity”. With this project, we will further investigate the digital transformation of society and what it means to the people who live in the midst of this development – in the midst of a surveillance culture.

Lars Samuelsson, Coppélie Cocq, Stefan Gelfgren, & Jesper Enbom

Umeå, January 2023