

Test, swarm, normalize: how surveillance technologies have infiltrated Paris 2024 Olympic Games

Testar, proliferar, normalizar: como as tecnologias de vigilância infiltraram os Jogos Olímpicos Paris 2024

Matheus Viegas Ferrari [1]

Abstract

The present paper aims to discuss the correlation between surveillance technologies and Olympic Games. The latter have become a “security spectacle” only behind wars in terms of budget. Surveillance, however, does not pertain only to security, as it has infiltrated our everyday life and has become a “culture.” To prepare for the 2024 Olympics, surveillance technologies, through an array of innovations, have been put forward in the Parisian territory: from facial recognition cameras and behavioral analysis systems to drones and anti-drone technologies. If it were not for the Olympic context, they would be considered “exceptions.” However, as it will be discussed in the paper, they have been normalized and integrate all the planning dimensions of this sports mega-event.

Keywords: Olympic Games; surveillance; visibility; exception; Paris 2024.

Resumo

O presente artigo visa a discutir a correlação entre tecnologias de vigilância e Jogos Olímpicos. Estes tornaram-se um “espetáculo de segurança”, apenas atrás das guerras em termos de orçamento. Entretanto, a vigilância não se refere apenas à segurança, pois ela infiltrou-se em nosso cotidiano e tornou-se uma “cultura”. No contexto de preparação para os Jogos de 2024, as tecnologias de vigilância, por meio de uma gama de inovações, vêm sendo empregadas na construção do território da região Parisiense: desde câmeras de reconhecimento facial e sistemas de análise comportamental até drones e tecnologias antidrones. Se não fosse pelo contexto olímpico, elas seriam consideradas “exceções”. Entretanto, como será discutido, elas foram normalizadas e integram todas as dimensões de planejamento deste megaevento esportivo.

Palavras-chave: jogos olímpicos; vigilância; visibilidade; exceção; Paris 2024.



Introduction

The use of control and surveillance technology was intensely discussed during¹ the 2022 edition of the Winter Olympics, in Beijing. The concern reached such levels that athletes and journalists were bringing in “burner phones”, following the FBI’s recommendation (CISA, 2022). However, this discussion is not exclusive to the 2022 edition nor to the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing,² despite China’s government surveillance and vigilance history and the fact that athletes and attendees, in order to take part in the former, had to download an app called “My 2022”, through which they would provide daily reports on their health.

Every edition of the sports mega-event since the attacks of September 11, 2001 (hereafter 9/11) has had surveillance systems as their main concern, often referred to as a “future security investment” (Samatas, 2011, p. 3348), “to the extent that authorities and critics alike routinely describe the Games as the world’s largest security operations outside of war” (Boyle, 2012, p. 394). A major upheaval after 9/11 in terms of security expenditures and surveillance practices – not only in the Olympic sphere – was the lifting of previous individual limits and freedoms (Tsukala, 2008, p. 90; Zuboff, 2019, p. 112), which was agreed upon as being an acceptable level of control. According to philosopher and psychologist Shoshana Zuboff, the target of legislative actions to limit the intrusion that big tech companies were allowed to have in private lives was “quickly recast as mission-critical necessities” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 115). To this shift, she employs the notion of *surveillance exceptionalism*.

A recent example of such *exceptionalisms* comes from Tokyo 2020, “the first Olympic games in modern history to implement facial recognition technology as a security measure for athletes and accredited personnel, including journalists, volunteers and sponsors” (Duckworth & Krieger, 2021, p. 1). Five years earlier, in Rio 2016, the American company Logos Technologies, specialized in warfare technologies, had provided the authorities with the balloon “Simera,” the same that would help troops in Iraq and Afghanistan by supplying real-time images 200 meters from the ground (Duckworth & Krieger, 2021, p. 7). Along with other measures, such as the creation, in 2011, of the Special Security Department for Major Events (*Secretaria Extraordinária de Segurança para Grandes Eventos*) and what has been called “anti-terrorism laws,” the 2016 edition was particularly exclusionist and violent towards minorities, culminating with occupations of favelas³ and extensively documented human rights violations.⁴

Barely two years before the opening of the next edition, the Paris 2024 Olympics, a number of associations, activists and research groups have been denouncing a “security frenzy,” referring to the opportunity for the French government and industry to join forces to test, deploy and standardize their “arsenal of new surveillance devices” (La Quadrature du Net, 2021). Facial recognition, video surveillance relying on algorithms to analyze images and alert when certain behaviors are detected (crowd formation, intrusion in unauthorized areas, abandoned luggage, etc.), drones and anti-drone systems: these digital devices cover a wide range of technologies

that aim, above all, at controlling people's behavior in the public space (Picaud, 2021). As Zuboff (2020) claims, governments seek "total information awareness" – surveillance capitalism depends on a strict cooperation between governments and private companies.

This is the case in Seine-Saint-Denis, a department in the Parisian *banlieue* and epicenter of some of the Olympics construction sites, such as the Aquatic Center (CAO – *Centre Aquatique Olympique*) and the Olympic Village. An urban supervision center (CSU – *Centre de Supervision Urbain*) was inaugurated in this region in 2021, and its 93 cameras will be expanded to 400 by 2024. Elected officials are also planning to equip the video surveillance system with artificial intelligence to automate the recording of offenses (La Quadrature du Net, 2021).

According to Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, one of the most recurrent practices of contemporary states, including democratic ones, is the establishment of a permanent state of emergency (declared or not), which is a technique of government that suspends individual rights in the name of security or freedom – what he names "state of exception" (Agamben, 2005). Exception, as antithetical as it sounds, has become the "normal" (from "norm") and permanent form of government technique, often under the umbrella of "security reasons" (Agamben, 2014) – a variation of "national interest" or *raison d'État*.

Video surveillance, for instance, illustrates how we, as a society, have learned to normalize what was once reserved to carceral facilities (Agamben, 2014). Disciplinary innovations, as French philosopher Michel Foucault has sustained, often arise in enclosed spaces where conducts and behaviors are

produced. This phenomenon, or swarming (*essaimage*), is one of the three conditions of existence for a disciplinary society, as he called it, along with the inversion of the disciplinary mechanism – or the understanding that impeding deviation is not enough anymore. As for the third condition, behaviors must be created, through schools, for example, and through a form of discipline belonging to the State: the police (Foucault, 2016, pp. 246-248).

Even though the present paper does not seek to lean on disciplinary society as a concept, it relies on the rise of what used to be exclusive technologies employed by and for a select few – such as drones used in warfare or even the aforementioned video surveillance – to reinterrogate the state of *disciplinary power*. In other words, how have technologies that used to be employed exceptionally swarmed and become the norm of what a sports mega-event localized in time and space *should be*? This question will be addressed based on the case of the Paris 2024 Olympics edition, subsidizing the understanding of the relation between Olympic Games and surveillance technology through an empirical analysis. The main hypothesis is that the Olympics would be a sensible opportunity to *test* and *normalize* several technologies, allowing them to *swarm*.

Exception has a double meaning in relation to these technologies: it refers to their *exceptional* use in contrast with "normal" time, that is, outside the Olympics period, and it covers all processes through which they become "mundane," "ordinary" or "normal" (Aïm, 2020, p. 105). The exceptional use of technologies and the permanent discourse of emergency to legitimize the state of exception have, a priori, distinct usages. However, in the present text, both refer to the same

phenomenon: the normalization of exception through the Olympics. In other words, the swarming of technologies that were initially designed to discipline and punish is what allows them to become the norm and gain strength to legitimize a state of permanent exception. Exceptional and exceptionality refer to both the uses of technologies and the processes that allow them to swarm and be normalized. The present paper seeks to understand how these processes take place in the Olympic Games.

To achieve this, the present text will rely on extensive empirical material: field observation, official International Olympic Committee (IOC)'s documents, and third-party interviews with representatives of public and private sectors. To understand the processes, aside from analyses drawn from the field of Olympic Studies, two main conceptual frameworks will contribute to pin down what is at stake when surveillance is discussed. The first comes from French scholar Olivier Aïm, who has leaned on this topic to propose what could be called a "handbook", as he thoroughly retraces what constitutes surveillance as a theoretical field (Aïm, 2020, p. 21). On the other end of the spectrum proposed by Olivier Aïm – as an attempt to look beyond discourse towards the condition of its possibility – lies Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019). As the name implies, she draws on the eponymous concept to propose several definitions, from which two should be retained for the purposes of this paper: "a new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extractions, prediction, and sales" and "an

expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above: an overthrown of the people's sovereignty" (Zuboff, 2019, p. v).

Even though the present paper does not seek to discuss surveillance capitalism, it takes direct inspiration from it and uses Zuboff's assumptions in the analysis it proposes. The strength of her argument lies in the fact that "surveillance capitalism is not technology; it is a logic that imbues technology and commands it into action" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 15). Through her lenses, surveillance technology usage can be retraced to its political meaning, or to precisely why and how it claims "freedom and knowledge" to distinguish itself as a "profoundly antidemocratic social force" (Zuboff, 2019, pp. 512-513).

To understand how these issues relate to the Olympics and how they contribute directly to the metamorphosis of the Parisian territory, the first section of the text shows that the debate on surveillance raises important questions to the discussion on innovation. Then, surveillance capitalism is rearticulated to the Olympic Games, as they contribute to the actualization of what will be developed here as the "visibility imperative."

The second part of this paper addresses the Olympics as an urban matter. It investigates how they allow for a securitization process and call for policing and ruling on how bodies can circulate in the host cities. The Games are often used to improve security capabilities and surveillance infrastructures under the banner of the "Olympic legacy." It will be argued that such legacy is fundamental to allow surveillance culture to infiltrate Paris in a lasting manner, especially by transforming

the city into a laboratory through which technologies can be tested on a large and often unaware sample of people.

Finally, in order to normalize surveillance practices, Olympic agents have to create the conditions to deploy them. This often occurs in the context of risk management, which implements risk discursively, as a permanent danger that requires innovative solutions. This novelty discourse legitimizes the transformation of the territory and the rebranding of Paris as a *smart city*. The last part of the paper will enable the present analysis to lean on the *normalization* aspect of surveillance technologies *through* the Olympics and to interrogate whether these practices allow for novelty or are rather a reconfiguration of old patterns.

Can surveillance capitalism thrive in the Olympics?

Up to this point, surveillance was employed as a broad concept, oscillating between an object and a field. Considering the Covid-19 pandemics, this concept has become part of our everyday life, ranging from technologies employed to surveil the propagation of the virus and, more importantly, the circulation of people, to occasions when neighbors would denounce neighbors for breaking curfews, among other restrictions. All these cases relate to what can be broadly called *surveillance*.

“Surveillance” can take various forms and refer to several practices, which is why Olivier Aïm (2020, p. 229) proposes that this concept is neither unified, nor unilateral, nor univocal. Drawing on the perspective of the “surveillance

studies” school, he highlights it can be beneficial to approach it as a “culture” (Aïm, 2020, pp. 175, 229). The concept of “culture” is controversial and even less consensual than surveillance, and rather than leaning on its meanings or interpretations, what matters here is to identify Aïm’s root influence. His proposition stems from surveillance scholar David Lyon’s works and analyses, namely *The Culture of Surveillance* (2018).

In a 2017 paper, Lyon proposes that “culture” “is no longer merely something external that impinges on our lives. It is something that everyday citizens comply with – willingly and wittingly, or not –, negotiate, resist, engage with, and, in novel ways, even initiate and desire” (Lyon, 2017, p. 825). Surveillance as culture refers to the experimentation of surveillance and the contingency of being confronted with it in our everyday lives. For this reason, rather than approaching surveillance as a monolithic set of practices, what matters for the present analysis is the possibility to which citizens are subjected in their practices. Surveillance may concur with a set of top-down restrictions and controls – but it is much more.

Olivier Aïm (2020, pp. 229-236) rightly asserts that from a theoretical-analytical point of view, the analysis of these practices should focus on how they allow for the *possibility of being surveilled* rather than limiting them to the control of power. For this reason, he employs the notion of “surveillability” (*surveillabilité*) – a reminder that all actions are surveillable. The correlate of this affirmation is that anyone is also able to surveil – all they need is a smartphone. This “dystopian promise” of the swarming of surveillance (Aïm, 2020, p. 182) amounts to what can be called an

“underveillance” (*sousveillance*) (Aim, 2020, pp. 181-183). This is important for the Olympics because it gives the idea that they transitioned from a severe setting of monitoring and control to a “soft,” even recreational, use of surveillance technologies (Aim, 2020, p. 176). The potential controversy or concern raised by such questions is softened by our own usage of these technologies, which enable individuals to become data, and to authorize their images, bodies, and information to be gathered and claimed as data. For this reason, Zuboff’s (2019, p. 15) understanding of surveillance capitalism is related to how, as a logic, it “imbues technology and commands it into action.”

Both the *swarming* of surveillance in the social body and the arguments that allowed for these technologies to become normal are conditions for surveillance capitalism to become a standard and should be reinterrogated under the light of innovation and “the extraction imperative” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 87). Zuboff goes back to what Joseph Schumpeter coined as “creative destruction”,⁵ which “was seized upon as a way to legitimate what Silicon Valley euphemistically calls ‘permissionless innovation’” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 50). Her analogy can further be explored through economist Marianna Mazzucato’s (2019) lenses: “Innovation does not just have a rate of progression; it also has a direction. The threat posed by artificial intelligence and other technologies lies not in the pace of their development, but in how they are being designed and deployed.”

Surveillance technology innovations do not pose a threat by themselves. Rather – in consonance with the idea of “culture” explored above –, the presence or absence of a threat

depends on their usage and how they are integrated in our everyday lives. Zuboff (2019, p. 87) sustains that the “extraction imperative” means “that raw-material supplies must be procured at an ever-expanding scale.” Since, in surveillance capitalism, human experience and behavior are the raw material for commercialization, extraction, prediction, and sales, she is referring to the methods through which the extraction imperative infiltrates our everyday lives.

The premise that behavioral surplus must not only be extensive, but also diversified and thorough drives the economies of scope. Extraction operations are not limited to the “online” context anymore; they also extend to the offline world, “where the same foundational mechanisms that expropriate your online browsing, likes, and clicks are trained on your run in the park, breakfast conversation, or hunt for a parking space” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 10). For these operations to be effective, they must be constant and permeate our everyday lives.

In an innovation-driven context in which big-tech companies are motivated to infiltrate our everyday lives and extract an ever-expanding number of raw-material supplies, the Olympics are a prolific opportunity to *test* mass-affecting technologies and to gather a large amount of *data* – which means surveilling the behaviors of attendees, participants, athletes, and partners/sponsors. An innovation-driven context is one in which innovation is naturalized as technical progress, as a means to social progress. Innovation is not a monolithic concept and requires a taxonomical discussion as the one proposed by Christopher Freeman and Carlota Perez.⁶ Among the categories they developed,

innovations in the surveillance sector are closer to what they identify as a “technology system.” According to the authors, “these are far-reaching changes in technology, affecting several branches of the economy, as well as giving rise to entirely new sectors” (Freeman & Perez, 1988, p. 46). As it was argued above, surveillance culture calls for a completely new economy, a new sector, and a new system of thought that Soshana Zuboff has regrouped under the name “surveillance capitalism”. Thus, the next step is to understand how the Olympics create “surveillability” and allow technology to be “commanded into action.”

Sports mega-events, not only the Olympic Games, meet some common criteria that render them especially attractive to *test* surveillability. Specifically, mega-events are characterized by their dramatic (Roche, 2000) or spectacular (Harvey, 2001, p. 92) features, their massive popular appeal and recognized international importance (Roche, 2000). Consequently, they also imply significant impacts for the city, region or country that hosts them, as well as extensive international media coverage (Horne, 2007, p. 82). According to our framework, this means that they have a *certainty degree* attached to them; they are a surefire way to attract *people* – “the sources of surveillance capitalism’s crucial surplus: the objects of a technologically advanced and increasingly inescapable raw-material-extraction operation” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 10).

Based on the “spectacularism” criteria, a possible approach to the relation between surveillance and the Olympics could come from Guy Debord’s *La Société du Spectacle* [*The Society of the Spectacle*]. However, as Foucault (2016, p. 253) had already underscored in *Surveiller et Punir* [*Discipline and Punish*],

the necessarily spectacular manifestations of power are extinguished one by one in the daily exercise of surveillance, in a panopticism where the vigilance of intersecting gazes is soon going to render useless all the spectacular symbols of old.

Foucault argued that “our society is not of the spectacle, but of surveillance”. Such interpretation, sometimes referred to as a summary of *Surveiller et Punir* (Aïm, 2020, p. 60), has an often-underrated reading, highlighted by Olivier Aïm, that under panopticism, surveillance calls for a new economy, an innovation, one that puts inspection at the center of control. As it is advanced in *The Society of the Spectacle*, “the world at once present and absent that the spectacle holds up to view is the world of the commodity dominating all living experience. The world of the commodity is thus shown for what it is, because its development is identical to people’s estrangement from each other and from everything they produce” (Debord & Knabb, 2005, p. 17). This statement takes a new meaning upon the realization that people are being commodified – or at least, transformed into surplus as an economic by-product.

Returning to Aïm’s reading of Debord and the quoted excerpt, the most important word to retain is “shown,” from the verb “to show.” What Aïm sustains in *Théories de la Surveillance* is that this new economy of surveillance is one of visibility (Aïm, 2020, p. 60). The panoptical model is half obsolete because everyone *is seen* but everyone also *sees*: a new power of making visible emerges through surveillance capitalism as it radicalizes the visibility imperative of the Panopticon (Aïm, 2020, p. 60; Zuboff, 2019, pp. 470-471). In other words, if the Panopticon

relied on a central figure capable of *seeing* and on a structure capable of ensuring the subjects are *seen*, surveillance capitalism requires a step further. To be operative, “surveillance capitalism [must] dominate and instrumentalize digital connection” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 455) – it depends on our “mutual visibility” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 429). Sports mega-events ensure the actualization of this imperative as they create the conditions for surveillability: *everyone is seen by everyone*, much like in social media.

Three criteria – size, scope, and appeal – have been employed to classify different sports mega-events. The Summer Olympics undisputedly ranks first in each of them, while the Winter Olympics is the third most impactful in an overall ranking, taking the three criteria into account (Manzenreiter & Horne, 2012, p. 103). This overview draws from an observation of the Olympic Studies that dates at least to the 1990s: the Olympic Games are much more than a mere sports event. Olympic Studies scholar Garry Whannel argues that most of the Olympic Games’ visibility and relevance come from them as a television program. This is due, on the one hand, to the popularity of the Olympic Games as a spectacle, which far exceeds the popularity of each of the individual sports that make up the Games, and, on the other hand, to the fact that while sponsorship currently accounts for 40% of the IOC’s revenue, television revenue accounts for half of it (Lenskyj & Wagg, 2012, p. 13; Whannel, 2012).

In short, according to our conceptual framework, for surveillance capitalism to thrive, two main conditions should be met: (1) the technology has to be accessible, not only for it to infiltrate our everyday lives,

but also to allow anyone to surveil, and (2) it must *render visible*. This last imperative can be interpreted in its polysemy, namely as the need for individuals to be seen and as the conditions that ensure that all individuals are seen. What was argued in the present section is that the Olympics check both boxes, as they are a surefire way to attract investment and public, and because they are *spectacular* – due to their important appeal, scope, and size. In other words, they allow people to see and to be seen and, therefore, surveillance technologies to be tested. What remains to be explored is precisely *how* they can thrive, what forms they take and in which conditions they can *swarm* and become acceptable.

To see everyone all the time; to be seen, not by everyone, not all the time

Surveillance does not necessarily refer to security, but the latter is a fundamental dimension of the former in the *exceptionalism* context presented and employed today as a *raison d’État*. Even though the securitization process in the Olympics gained much weight after 9/11, it was effectively initiated “by the siege and subsequent killing of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Games and later accelerated by the detonation of a pipe bomb at Atlanta’s Centennial Park during the 1996 Olympics” (Boyle, 2012, p. 394).

Olympic Studies scholar and security issues specialist Philip Boyle (2012, p. 396) sustains that the Olympics have also become security spectacles. Even though he takes interest in surveillance matters, his analysis

roots them deeply in a securitarian dimension. Two of his points will be retained for the present paper, namely “the role of policing and surveillance in the branding of Olympic host cities” and “the planned delivery of security and surveillance legacies around the Games” (Boyle, 2012, p. 396). However, another lens through which to elaborate on this relation should be added: the usage of machine intelligence⁷ in the Olympics, namely because the surveillance culture, as it was discussed above, does not apply to security alone.

Policing, in this context, refers broadly to “efforts to regulate visible reminders of poverty and social polarisation [...] amongst cities preparing to host the Olympics” (Boyle, 2012, p. 396). Sports mega-events are an urban phenomenon and are thus subject to urban problematics. A city – a complex object to grasp – is, among other aspects, “a place of confrontations” and of conflictual “relations between desire and need” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 109). Such polarization is a consequence of the conflictual nature of cities.

Hosting the Olympics implies adhering to some standards and expectations, namely the IOC’s and the sponsors’. Efforts to meet such expectations “often involve strategies to ‘cleanse’ urban space by intensively regulating broadly defined ‘disorders’ and ‘nuisance’ behaviors before and during the Games” (Boyle, 2012, p. 396). This calls for a politics-driven definition of and solution to nuisances like poverty, violence, and exclusion, but the problem is that they are often endemic to the urban dynamics and history. The Olympic Games do not claim to solve these issues; rather, during their preparation, the people in charge seek to create the conditions for these “nuisances” not to meet the “eyes of the world.”

Policing, as a condition to disciplinary power, serves surveillance culture as an exterior tool to watch and control the routines of social life, with little to no concern for the city dwellers (Aïm, 2020, p. 176; Lyon, 2018). How space is managed is, according to Foucault, a central question to any form of power (Foucault, 2004, p. 14). The planning of a city infers who can and who cannot circulate in it through “regulatory controls” (Foucault, 2004, p. 20), one form of which is the police.

Preparing for the Olympics implies regulating those who can circulate in the city and how they can do it, especially during the event itself. The aforementioned Rio 2016 example, which used the balloon “Simera” and police occupation of favelas, illustrates this logic. On August 3, 2016, just two days before the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, a mega operation was carried out by the Civil Police and the Military Police at Complexo do Alemão, a group of favelas in Rio’s northern zone. This operation was a clear statement that not all bodies could navigate the city during the 2016 Olympics.

The surveillance function of the police ensures that what is politically constructed as a visual problem – often (and again) poverty, violence, and exclusion – is hidden from public view. In other words, during the Olympics, the *visibility imperative* ensures that everyone can be seen but not by everyone, and not all the time. A “future” police station is expected to be built in Élancourt, a town south of Paris that will host mountain bike races. The structure will serve as a hub for the national police forces of Élancourt, Trappes, and Guyancourt. This initiative will be supplemented by the establishment of a new urban supervision center, which will pool video

surveillance across municipalities, as well as the administration's purchase of drones. The operation will cost around 20 million euros, which will be shared between the Saint-Quentin urban community, the Yvelines department, the Île-de-France region, and the French government (Pouré & Le Foll, 2021).

As surveillance engenders the structuration of the territory, the IOC requires two strong legal commitments of the countries hosting the Olympic Games: signing a Host City Contract and voting an Olympic law that provides for a certain number of guarantees on legal and financial plans. Law n. 2018-202 of March 26, 2018, on the organization of the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, confirms the Host City Contract signed between the City of Paris and the French National Olympic and Sports Committee in 2016, amended in 2020 (Viale, 2022, p. 35). Its article 10 states that “temporary” structures linked to the “preparation” of the Olympic Games “are exempt from any formality under the urban planning code” (Légifrance, 2018). Exception roots through legal legitimation: the territory is not subjected to the urban planning code anymore; it now pertains to the Olympics.

Back to Philip Boyle, “The second point of discussion centres on how the Games can be used to accelerate improvement in security capabilities and surveillance infrastructure intended from the outset to be of lasting utility beyond the Games.” For the present analysis, this means understanding how surveillance culture and Olympic legacy relate to each other. The latter is a complex affair and has been extensively studied⁸ as a topic in itself. Officially, according to the IOC, it “includes the long-term benefits that the Olympic

Games create for the host city, its people, and the Olympic Movement before, during and long after the Olympic Games” (IOC, s. d.). In Olympic Studies, an often-cited and accepted definition is Holger Preuss’: “all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sport event that remain longer than the event itself” (Preuss, 2007, p. 211; Scheu et al., 2021, p. 4).

Concerning the website created to help people find jobs in the Olympic Games 2024, Pierre Lieutaud, head of the National Coordination Committee for the Security of the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games (CNSJ – *Coordination nationale pour la sécurité des Jeux Olympiques et paralympiques 2024*) and former member of the secret service, stated that “As the industry is motivated by the Games and their legacy in terms of employment, confidence is high. The draft law *Sécurité globale*, and in particular the provisions on the structuring of the [private security] sector and public/private transversality, is also a step forward” (Lieutaud, 2021).

The “Global Security Law” [*Loi pour une sécurité globale préservant les libertés*] was enacted four days after the interview with Lieutaud. This controversial law authorizes the reinforcement of the powers of the municipal police, access to images from pedestrian cameras, filming of images by drones, and regulates the dissemination of police images. A few weeks after the then draft law was tabled in Parliament, a black man was violently beaten by the police in his own apartment. Over 130 thousand people marched nationwide as a wave of protests overtook France, since one of the clauses of this law is that images of

on-duty police officers cannot be broadcast. Another variation of the visibility imperative: not everyone can be seen, not all the time.

Lieutaud relates this law to the Olympic legacy, as its text aims to provide a better framework for private security companies,⁹ while granting them broader prerogatives (surveillance missions against terrorist acts on the public highway, security pat-down operations) in anticipation of the Paris Olympic Games in 2024 (Brunet, 2020). Around the main Olympic structures, it is not unusual to see private security guards monitoring the streets and ensuring that the steel barricades installed in the vacant areas of the territory are not illegally occupied by migrants..

To paraphrase Freeman and Perez (1988, p. 46), the far-reaching changes in surveillance technology for the Olympics not only give rise to “entirely new sectors”, but they also call for legislative innovations. Exception must be enacted legally for it to take place in a given territory, hence an Agambian state of exception. These innovations call for “exceptional” “policing models that draw heavily on zero-tolerance orthodoxies” such as “the militarization of urban space, extensive private policing, architectural and environmental designs to harden targets and deter transgressive behaviour and heavy reliance on intensive technological surveillance measures” (Fussey et al., 2011, pp. 67-68).

In the Rio 2016 experience, another controversial bill was enacted for the Olympics: the “anti-terrorism laws.” They typify acts of terrorism for the first time in Brazil, distinguishing three: carrying dangerous products (toxic gases, explosives, etc.); using cybernetic mechanisms to disrupt public services; and attempting to harm people

(Presidência da República, 2016). During the mega-event, the federal police arrested 12 people in different states of the country for suspected connections with the Islamic State and for posing a threat to the Olympics. As sociologist Reginaldo Nasser sustains, “mega-events are moments that justify a series of drastic measures. [...] It is a moment for setting up a laboratory” (Bessi & Navarro, 2016). Surveillance is a project devised well-ahead of the Olympics, and whatever advancements are made in terms of technology are not prone to being abandoned later. The legacy in this case, and especially in the security domain, is a consequence of the previously discussed securitarian dimension in a world post 9/11 rather than a clear statement that can be praised publicly after the Games are held; hence the idea of a “future security investment” (Samatas, 2011, p. 3348).

This open future also sets the horizon for investors to profit from the opportunities opened by the scope, size, and appeal of the Olympics. French cybersecurity and surveillance companies, among which Thales, Idemia and Sopra Steria, dispute a share of this profitable market.¹⁰ It is the opportunity to test their technologies and promote them to an international clientele. Large-scale testing of surveillance algorithms is a necessary step before they can be exported within local territories or for border security (Pouré & Le Foll, 2021).

To understand how such testing is allowed to take place, the relationship between the major actors that finance the Olympics – the IOC, governments and private companies – must be reviewed. The year of 1984 marks an important turning point in the way Olympic Games are organized. The Games were

hosted by the city of Los Angeles, under the administration of the American president Ronald Reagan. From the conceptualization of the modern Olympic Games by Pierre de Coubertin in 1894, local governments played a major role in the financing of this sports mega-event; 1984 marks the beginning of sponsorship by private companies. In the context of the international crisis that began in the 1980s, the market orientation introduced in Los Angeles “saved” the Olympics from the financial burdens that could have been imposed on host cities and increased its economic attractiveness as a sports mega-event.

Since then, the IOC has developed as a business that continues to increase in value as the Olympics are becoming more and more of a brand (Neubauer & Gruneau, 2012). With the 1984 Olympic Games, the IOC regained control over the Olympic funding programs and private partners, as well as over media attendance. The IOC has since been the biggest beneficiary of Olympic commercialization, achieving windfall profits while relegating the burden of financial risk to the local organizing committees (Neubauer & Gruneau, 2012, p. 155). However, the main dilemma that it faces “is that it wishes to utilise all the new media resources of the internet and social networking sites to promote the Olympics brand while remaining in control” (Whannel, 2012, p. 270). The correlate of this is that big companies become bidders looking forward to financing the Games and often do so to develop their own political agendas and profit from the massive appeal of the Olympics to test the reception of their products and their applicability to large samples of people.

If the Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020 steps are followed, Paris 2024 will be an opportunity to test these technologies on a large sample of people, even though Pierre Lieutaud has set a warning: “If we introduce technology, it will have to bring real added value on the operational level and allow us to free up staff [...]. The Olympics will not be a laboratory!” (Lamigeon, 2019). Despite this statement, allowing surveillance technology to *swarm* on such a large scale raises some issues that are inherent in this domain.

Most recognition algorithms, for instance, rely on the decomposition of human body traits, depending on their objective and method: face, body, fingerprint, genetics, voice, iris, or veins density in the hands, for example (Aïm, 2020, p. 87). Olivier Aïm argues that this opens up the possibility for what Foucault called biopolitics, a polysemic concept, even though Aïm retains his classic definition from *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* referring to the group of mechanisms that constitutes the fundamental biological traits of the human species and how they are able to integrate a political strategy (Foucault, 2004; Aïm, 2020, p. 87).

In a Foucauldian interpretation, racism would be the articulation of a power to define, in the field of life, what should live and what should die. This power manifests itself in the division of the human species into races according to categories, hierarchies, and qualifications, which enables the fragmentation of the biological field. This allows the population to be treated as a mixture of races and subdivides the species. Racism, in this interpretation, is the fragmentation within the biological continuum

that is the human species (Foucault, 1997). Considering that the purpose here is not to unfold a discussion on biopolitics, what is important to bear in mind is that it adds a biological dimension to surveillance and specifically to machine intelligence, since it grasps the concept of “epidermalization” as the imposition of race on the body (Aim, 2020, p. 88).

In France, a country known for not having a racial census, the issues raised by epidermalization should be at the center of discussions on machine intelligence and surveillance. The question whether algorithms are “racist” due to their programming or as a by-product of their usage has yet to be taken seriously. In any case, an announcement that looks like a backpedal on the deployment of facial recognition is a validation of the technology’s utility. Once the government establishes a clear framework for the use of facial recognition or other “perhaps” racist technologies, companies will have free rein to deploy their tools (La Quadrature du Net, 2020). The first step to the “normalization” of surveillance technologies is officially taken.

Rebranding the city, normalizing exception

Up to this point, the discussion focused on surveillance capitalism’s testing and swarming capabilities during the Olympics. The condition for what has been proposed as the “normalization” of surveillance culture was also set: the legal apparatus or legislative innovations that permit exceptionality to take place in the urban space. Through the notion

of Olympic Legacy, the local committees that manage the territory must take these legislative innovations in consideration but also create the conditions for them to be profitable, in order to legitimize their implementation. A notable example is the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, which were planned and led by urbanist Jordi Borja, where 83% of the budget was spent on urban development and 17% was spent directly on sport promotion. This edition is often cited as a model of success, having achieved major infrastructural development, including the transformation of the waterfront district. At the same time, the effective cost of real estate has risen by 130%, entire communities have been evicted, and the number of overcrowded or inadequate housing units has exploded (Poynter, 2012).

Strategic planning openly dictates the Olympics preparation and legacy phases, and the organizing committees are thoroughly supported by the IOC in this matter (IOC, 2017). Paris 2024 Legacy and Sustainability Plan puts forward an original concept to structure a certain number of guidelines: that of resilience. In this document, it refers to a system’s ability to cope, bounce back and return to normal functioning after disruption by anticipating, preventing and managing risks, particularly those of disasters (e.g.: air and water pollution episodes, heatwaves, floods, terrorist attacks, cyber-attacks, electrical or computer breakdowns, etc.) (Comité de Pilotage Héritage et Durabilité Paris 2024, 2021, p. 5).

In this definition, the duality between “normal” and “disruption” stands out as the two poles of risk management. A risk, according to sociologist Robert Castel (2003,

p. 59), is a foreseeable event whose chances and the cost of the damage it will cause can be estimated. The role of security is, therefore, to anticipate risks. Insurance and retirement, as he exemplifies, are present bets for a future horizon of expectations. The problem is that most risks are not predictable, and their consequences are often incalculable (Castel, 2003, p. 59).

A world post 9/11 lives in a constant context of aggravated insecurity, because the variables are such that the predictability of the future is more and more obscure. To anticipate as much as possible, the worst-case scenario is the one that is considered: the “risk culture” extrapolates the notion of risk as it empties it of its substance and prevents it from being operative (Castel, 2003, p. 61). The risk culture consists of removing all that is predictable and presenting it as a permanent harmful element, but whose threat is invisible, like a virus (Arantes, 2014; Han, 2015).

In the Paris 2024 legacy plan, a risk lurks around, which justifies a resilience project, or a *persistent* struggle to face whatever threat decides to come at the Olympics. Contrary to what Lieutaud previously stated on the experimentation potential of the 2024 Olympics, the French Olympic Delivery Authority (Société de Livraison des Ouvrages Olympiques – Solideo) plans to implement experiments and demonstrations of innovative solutions on a small scale, alongside construction and development operations. Solideo is particularly interested in long-term innovations and solutions likely to be the subject of experimentation in terms of use (Comité de Pilotage Héritage et Durabilité Paris 2024, 2021, p. 37).

This novelty discourse about the usage of innovations calls for a vocabulary that accompanies the change, such as reconversion or renovation – all the “re” words that imply transformation and are found in the official discourse for the Olympics 2024. Reconversion applies to the process that most of the Solideo work and constructions will undergo. It covers, for example, how the Olympic Village will allow for housing or commercial purposes after the closing ceremony. “Renovation” accompanies Paris 2024 “compact concept” and the prerogative of prioritizing what has already been built, even though it may undergo transformations (Comité de Pilotage Héritage et Durabilité Paris 2024, 2021, p. 32-36).

Employing such words is not the problem, but they are often used as an urbanistic jargon that conceals the totality of the processes. The “re” prefix implies the need for change, which brings the interrogation of what it is that needs changing. If “re-silience”, which comes from the Latin verb *resilire*, meaning “to jump back,” is added to the list, a possible answer to this question concerns the usage of surveillance to legitimize a territorial transformation.

Anticipating risks implies mitigating their return even after the closing ceremony, hence the idea of legacy. The resilience that permeates the Legacy and Sustainability Plan refers to the capacity of predicting and recovering from damage. If the fear of risks is shared by the population, a discourse of innovation as a solution to security problems is more susceptible of being broadly accepted. Resilience, as one of the guidelines of the Olympic management of the territory, legitimizes a *permanent* anticipation of risks

and thus calls for innovative solutions to deal with them. These solutions, such as video surveillance and facial recognition, which are often of a technological nature, have strongly polarized the public debate. Such devices are presented as facilitating the management of flows and access authorizations to different spaces, for example, to manage differentiated access to the Olympic Village for the public, professionals and athletes (Picaud, 2021). The notion of legacy indicates that the required resilience to deal with potential risks will be incorporated as a tool to manage the territory after the Olympics.

In the context of the reconversion of the Village, nothing has yet been officially said about whether these technologies will remain in the territory after more than 15,000 people have moved in. The Olympics have been recently included in the 2020-2022 industry contract of the Strategic Committee for the Security Industries, signed in 2020 by Christophe Castaner, then Minister of the Interior, Agnès Pannier-Runacher, Secretary of State to the Minister of the Economy and Finance, and Marc Darmon, President of the Trust and Security Industries Council and Deputy CEO of the multinational Thales. This contract, which mobilizes public authorities and interest groups, aims to “position the French industry as a world leader in smart city security” (CNI – Conseil National des Industries, 2020; Picaud, 2021). Surveillance capitalism’s structural operations depend on machine intelligence, as it “processes behavioral surplus into *prediction products* designed to forecast what we will feel, think, and do: now, soon, and later” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 96).

What matters is not what *smart city* means, as an innovative concept, but rather what makes it operative: the branding, or the international recognition of the cities that are identified as such. As political scientist Evgeny Morozov and economist Francesca Bria sustain, the concept is often used as a hip synonym for “flexible,” “savvy,” “self-adjusting,” “autonomous,” “resourceful,” “slender,” or even “ecologically responsible” – positive, glowing terms that indicate emancipation, promise sustainability, and assure us that nothing will go to waste. The “smart city” is certainly one of the most prominent “smart” concepts to capture the public imagination in the last decade (Morozov & Bria, 2019, p. 14).

The *smart* enthusiasm around the globe has resulted in many products traditionally classified as surveillance and predictive policing tools being rebranded as essential components of the smart city package (Morozov & Bria, 2019, pp. 34-35). Seeking a *smart* branding is not unusual for cities that want to reinforce security and policing, particularly during or in preparation for mega-events, which have become the economic lifeline for many cities that have been forced to replace their industrial base with tourism (Morozov & Bria, 2019, p. 27). Most of Paris 2024 regions that undergo “reconversion” or “renovation” rely historically on an industrial activity, as is the case of Seine-Saint-Denis.

Normalization of surveillance technologies derives from them losing their security dimension and being rebranded as an everyday tool. The Olympics allow this process because they are accompanied by a discourse of exceptionality. It is their nature

to be exceptional, as standalone editions that disrupt “normal” time, but also in their functioning. They call for an innovation discourse that legitimizes the normalization of exceptionality, often under the banner of “legacy.” In many cases, the novelty that accompanies innovation is a “rebranding” of old practices.

Surveillance capitalists – the companies that “have grown immensely wealthy” from betting “on our future behavior” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8) – and the security industry – namely the French giants such as Thales, Idemia, CS, ECA Group, Bertin Technologies – have influential power in Paris 2024 decision-making process, as many of them are official sponsors of the organizing committee, such as Cisco and Samsung, while others want a share of this profitable market. Cisco is an interesting case because it “has 120 ‘smart cities’ globally, some of which have embraced Cisco Kinetic” (Zuboff, 2019, pp. 226-227); Paris being one of them. This program, as Zuboff (2019, pp. 226-227) shows through the company’s vice president’s statement, “is a cloud-based platform that helps customers extract, compute, and move data from connected things to IoT [Internet of Things] applications to deliver better outcomes”.¹¹ She proceeds by providing Cisco general manager of IoT’s explanation, “Cisco Kinetic gets the right data to the right applications at the right time... while executing policies to enforce data ownership, privacy, security and even data sovereignty laws” (Menon, 2017).

In a press release, Cisco announced that, as an official Paris 2024 sponsor, it “will provide the network infrastructure and is expanding its role to also provide cybersecurity infrastructure and conferencing software”

(Cisco, 2021). Surveillance capitalists rely on cities’ structures and networks; in an effort to transform urban commons into their factors of production, they must first be granted access to them. The Olympics are an often legal and profitable way to do so and with them comes a large sample of people, the source of surveillance capitalism surplus, to test their territory-shaping technologies.

Concluding remarks: who serves whom?

Surveillance as a culture evolves towards an imperative, which implies it is becoming a necessity rather than a contingency. This calls for an academic effort to *surveil surveillance*, that is, to accept that it is becoming a central question to most political and social fields. What the present paper has proposed is that one of the areas that has been *infiltrated* by this culture is that of the Olympic Games. Although the idea of “necessity” has been discussed under the concept of “normality,” the political project behind surveillance capitalists’ actions is precisely to create a dependency on *being surveilled*. Smartphones, for example, barely work if they are not given permission to access personal files, information and tools, and they always track the user’s location.

The Olympics undergo the same logic: not only accepting to attend them entails adhering to some user agreements and fine prints, but also *being* in a city that hosts them has some agreement implications. Not by choice, because most city dwellers will not attend the Olympics, but as a by-product of their capacity to transform the territory. As

Paris 2024 shows, citizens are already prone to being watched through the innumerable video surveillance systems with artificial intelligence scattered around the city. The difference is that, in the case of these terms of agreement, the citizen does not even need to give direct consent, as the issue is decided in a relationship between government and private companies that is not very open, if at all, to popular demands.

As it was discussed in the first section, surveillance technology and innovation by themselves are not the problem; what needs our attention is their political usage and the “technological system” they entail. Created to be *exceptional* and belong to security-related sectors, such as warfare or prisons, they have been normalized to a scale of dependency and deeply implanted in everyday life. What was argued in the second section was that the Olympics are one of the many tools that allow surveillance technology to be tested and swarm. As an exceptional sports mega-event by nature, they ensure an opportunity to normalize these innovations – not only technological but also legislative – as a legacy, often as a rebranding of old practices, as the third section concluded.

To propose an answer to the question that guides the present investigation, sports mega-events do not relate only to “sports.” They have become efficient mechanisms for cities to attain a global status of recognition and influence and to attract private business investment. Once again, this, by itself, is not an issue. Rather, the problem lies in how the Olympics *claim* for exception – often under the banner of change, transformation, future and especially legacy – and in how they allow for the normalization of projects that outside of a *state*

of exception would be considerate illegitimate or even illegal. For the Olympic Games, this process occurs in two distinct manners.

The first relates to what has been called “legislative innovation,” an example of which is the “Global Security Law.” Even though it is not related exclusively to the Olympics, the bill gives more rights and powers to private security companies and broader prerogatives to policing in anticipation of the Paris Olympic Games in 2024 – in this case, normalization refers to legalization. The second form it can take, complementary to the first in the management of the territory, is suspension of the current juridical order under the banner of “exceptionality” of the Olympics. What was illegal or illegitimate has not been legalized; rather, under certain conditions, it is simply not illegal anymore. One of the mechanisms behind this process is the previously mentioned “Olympic law,” responsible for suspending the urban planning code in Paris.

These projects do not come out of nowhere and often have a long history behind them, as is the case of France and research on facial recognition or behavior detection in airports. As the Olympics have become, since 1984, a matter of private companies, namely through sponsoring, their profits and objectives are also at stake. French surveillance technology market giants – through lobbies and political representation in decision-making spheres – and multinational businesses have a take in *how* the Olympics are being organized and how the territory is planned.

This confirms the hypothesis that “exception” is in fact “normality,” and that the Olympics are a sensible opportunity to “legitimize” exceptionality. But there is a twist. At first glance, it would seem that the

Olympic Games are an end in themselves; rephrased otherwise, cities may seem to pursue the *Olympics* for the sake of it – as if the profits they entail would come as a result of hosting them. However, this proposition should be reversed: the Olympics are a tool to legitimize exceptionality, that is, all the projects – be they political or economic, for example – that would not have public acceptance otherwise. As the Olympic Games understandably require an intense security and surveillance scheme, it is easier to accept that the technologies related to these domains are also necessary.

Thus, it is not surveillance technologies that serve the Olympics, but the opposite. They entail the opportunity to advance a political – namely security, as shows the “Global Security Law” – and economic agenda that requires surveillance mechanisms to be as effective, widespread and accepted as possible. The Olympic Games allow for testing, normalizing, and letting swarm what should be exceptional. Perhaps this is a clue as to why Budapest, Rome, and Hamburg, after holding popular consultations – never held in Paris – decided to withdraw their bids for the 2024 Olympic Games.

[1] <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2545-3068>

Universidade Federal da Bahia, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Relações Internacionais, Salvador, BA/Brasil.

matheusvferrari@gmail.com

Notes

- (1) It is hard to define precisely when a sports mega-event starts and ends. Regarding the Olympics, as it will be discussed in this paper, the notion of legacy complexifies even more the duration of the event. For a conceptual purpose, when prepositions such as “during” are employed next to “Olympics”, they broadly refer to the preparation, hosting and legacy period of the Games.
- (2) For instance, over 300,000 cameras were deployed (Broudehoux, 2012, p. 204).
- (3) See the reports written by Daiene Mendes, *The Guardian’s* correspondent in Complexo do Alemão. Rio Olympics: view from the favelas – ‘I can’t leave the house. The shots are too close’ (2016).
- (4) The *Comitê Popular da Copa e Olimpíadas do Rio de Janeiro* (Popular World Cup and Olympics Committee of Rio de Janeiro) has thorough reports on this matter, namely *Rio 2016 Olympics: The Exclusion Games* (2015). See also what was published on the matter in Rioonwatch.org.

- (5) Creative destruction is the process of productive activities disappearing and being replaced by new ones as a result of technical progress. Creative destruction is the incessant revolution of “the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one”; according to Schumpeter, “[i]t is what capitalism consists in and what every capitalist concern has got to live in” (Schumpeter, 2014, p. 83). These revolutions are not incessant: they occur in disjointed bursts, separated from each other by periods of relative calm. However, the process continues unabated, in the sense that at any given moment either a revolution occurs, or the results of a revolution are assimilated.
- (6) They distinguish between incremental innovation, radical innovation, new technology systems, and changes of techno-economic paradigms.
- (7) Machine intelligence refers to “highly specialized computational systems” and is better suited than other umbrella words because it “includes machine learning as well as ‘classical’ algorithmic production, along with many computational operations that are often referred to with other terms such as ‘predictive analytics’ or ‘artificial intelligence’” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 65).
- (8) See Poynter, 2012: *The Olympics : East London’s Renewal and Legacy* and Scheu et al., 2021: *The Legacy of the Olympic Games: A Review*.
- (9) In particular by limiting the use of subcontracting and by toughening up punishment for those who commit acts of violence against private security guards in the exercise of their professions.
- (10) The calls for tender for security equipment and service opened in January 2022. At the time this paper was being written, the chosen companies had not been announced yet.
- (11) The URL she cites is either broken or the entry has been deleted: https://www.cisco.com/c/m/en_us/solutions/industries/smart-connected-communities/digital-transformation-map.html.

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