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# Chapter 1
# Introduction

In many ways this book is the story of three iconic technological artefacts. Or more accurately, the story of a story told about these artefacts.

The first artefact is no longer in existence. On 10 February 2011 the hard drives containing the UK's National Identity Register were physically destroyed, putting an end to a scheme which had its roots at the start of the previous decade. It was brought to an end by a change in government, with the May 2010 elections bringing to power a coalition of Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties with shared opposition to the scheme. The National Identity Card might have been the artefact of concern for many but the database and the political infrastructure that supported it are in many ways more important. This scheme was an attempt to provide an authoritative statement of individual identity in response to a range of social problems that were seen as undermining identity.

The second artefact is the personal document shredder. This device, formerly limited to the office and associated with the disposal of incriminating documents in many a political thriller, is now a common sight in UK homes. It is used to make the paperwork that surrounds modern life unreadable and as such is a tool for physically destroying information. The shredder is put to work to help dispose of the flood of junk mail that has been turning up at the house ever since you signed up to that website. It is also a protection against the identity thieves imagined to be raiding your paper recycling every alternate week. It is relatively inexpensive, you can get one for a little over £20, and they are not difficult to use, but they do represent a change in our information handling behaviour.

The third artefact is the credit file. Unlike the other two, this one isn't really physical. You can have a copy of it printed out and sent to you (and this is your right). But this is just a representation, a snapshot of a moving thing at a moment in time. It is a digital record of selected elements of an individual's financial history, used to make judgements about their suitability for financial services and to enter into relationship with financial organisations. It is also something monitored by the individual, and an increasingly important part of our identity that we are told we need to protect. The credit file, acting as our representative or an image of us, can have great impacts upon our life experiences and chances.

These three items are in many ways paradigmatic; they represent a particular paradigm, a way of thinking about information, identity and forms of political, economic and social life in the UK in the first decade of the 21st century. They are different types of information technology, each with different patterns of ownership, different uses and different ways that they can be controlled and manipulated. To a particular way of thinking they were all necessary (even the

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now destroyed identity register). They are also linked. The shredder is supposed to protect from threats to the credit file. The identity card registration process was to draw upon the electronic verification methods developed in the private sector, of which credit histories were a part. The identity card was also pitched by government as a protection from identity theft. They are all 'humble and mundane' mechanisms of government through which political rationalities and programmes of government become deployed (Miller and Rose 2008:32).

This book is not just about these technologies however. It is much more about the things that link them together. These three technologies are all examples of a nexus of surveillance, identity and language. This is nexus also draws in technology, risk, authority and the contested role of the state.

Surveillance is a fundamental social and political activity. It involves control, influence and management through the medium of information, and as such is a combination of knowledge and intervention. Far from just being an activity associated with policing or intelligence agencies, any social process which functions through the gathering and processing of information can be understood to have a surveillant dimension. Surveillance is therefore linked to processes of the production and use of knowledge. It is also strongly linked to social sorting and discrimination, processes which use information about people to sort them into categories for differential treatment. Whilst this can be useful, it is also prone to being used in exclusionary politics with damaging and unjust impacts upon the lives of people and groups. Surveillance is about power, and therefore fundamentally political.

In recent years, the issue and subject of surveillance has attracted increased academic interest across a range of disciplines. This has led to the development of a multidisciplinary sub-field of Surveillance Studies, in which this book is situated. Surveillance Studies seeks to make sense of the practice of surveillance, and is explored in detail in Chapter 2.

Surveillance is a contested social practice. It attracts support and resistance in response to various manifestations. There is however enough of a shared way of speaking and thinking to understand a number of fields of social life as producing a shared governmental discourse of surveillance. This includes a privileging of surveillance as a response to social problems, an identification of negative practices and social actors, political individualism, risk aversion and a positive orientation towards technology. This discourse serves to legitimise and normalise the use of surveillance, based on accounts of risk and necessity.

The National Identity Register is therefore an obvious technology of surveillance. It was created to hold information on each member of the UK population and to be accessible as a resource for institutional decision-making. The credit file is similarly a product of surveillance, pulling together information from financial actors and submitted by the individual subject. It exists for the purpose of deciding a given individual's risk of defaulting on a credit agreement. In practice, it encourages acting in ways that are beneficial to financial organisations. The shredder is a response to surveillance practices. The identity thief, who is to be

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frustrated by a pile of hamster bedding where there was once a rich documentary source with information about our spending habits, is a criminal surveillance actor, attempting to use information about an individual for their own benefit. These technologies demonstrate that whilst it is a capacity of the state, surveillance is not solely the prerogative of organised government, but also found in commercial and criminal manifestations.

This is also a book about the problem of identity – the way that a particular idea of how identity works, what it is, and what its vulnerabilities are, has become dominant at a particular moment in history. At issue is the fundamental contestation between an attributive, surveillant understanding of identity and a sociological or individual creation or determination of identity. Identity is an act of power, and the way that political actors think and talk about identity has political and social effects.

This book therefore engages with UK identity cards as part of this politics of surveillance and identity, but it is not restricted to them. It takes a somewhat oblique approach stepping back from the cards, the register and the other two technologies. There are already valuable academic accounts of both identity cards in general (Stadler & Lyon 2003; Bennett & Lyon 2008; Lyon 2009; Nabeth 2009) and also on the specific details of the UK scheme (The Identity Project 2005; Wills 2008; Whitley 2009), so what this book offers is to situate this particular political intervention within a context of both language and surveillance.

The core articulation of the problem of identity is that older forms of identity cannot be relied upon for the proper functioning of governance in society and must be updated, modernised and secured. The governmental discourse positioned the state as the guarantor of identity security, while the individual is responsible for appropriate security conscious behaviour. Part of the governmental discourse of surveillance is a way of understanding identity that this book terms the governmental surveillance identity. Identity is represented as a series of institutional reputations mediated through specific types of personal information disclosed to the formal institutions of structured society. Identity produced and attributed by surveillance is taken by institutions as more reliable than any account of themselves that any individual might be able to give. This perception problematises attempts by individuals to negotiate or escape from attributed identities, or to challenge them with alternate forms or contents.

The card and the register, as well as the credit file, represent parts of this governmental surveillant identity. The shredder represents the role of the individual in being given responsibility for securing this model as well as their vulnerability and need for identity. Conventional social theories of identity focus upon subjectivity. This fails to capture the practices of identity management, identity theft and the full politics of identity cards.

Identity is a concept put to many social functions. It is also politicised, finding use in identity politics, but also pivotal to individual activity. Being able to express some form of identity is fundamental to lived experience. Holding a particular type of identity is often linked to access to elements of social, political and

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economic life. This is not a modern phenomenon, but it is one that is increasingly technologically mediated.

Language is understood through the concept of discourse. These are structures of meaning and relations, ways of making sense of the world, evaluating and judging it. Language is the medium through which the political and social world is both understood and acted upon. Language is the way we communicate with other political actors and those we encounter in our social lives. Language is also often how we act politically. Theories of discourse also provide the methodological basis for this work. It is based upon empirical examination of the material traces of discourse left in publically available texts and documents. The book attempts to understand the way surveillance and identity are constructed and contested in public use. This is not just rhetoric but the operation of language is seen as functional.

This is a book about the politics of technology. Surveillance Studies engages with technology and in many ways is a response to a particular type of information technology. Surveillance as a social and political problem (rather than an analytic category we use to make sense of the world) can be thought of as the capture of information technologies, their ubiquity and networked nature, by concerns of security and capitalism, rather than being leveraged to human scale projects and opportunities. Historical and sociological research has shown that the phenomena of surveillance (if not its study) is basic to human societies. We currently live in a period in which many of our social and political practices, especially those that involve knowledge and information (such as exclusion, inclusion, judgement, suspicion, the allocation of resources, decision-making, moral assessments, crime, statecraft and warfare) are being made technological. This is an uneven and developing process, but it raises challenges to both our political lives and to our political theories. It is important to avoid the danger of technological determinism, in which a change in social life is directly read off from the capacities of technological innovations, or to assume that technologies emerge unaffected by their social milieu. For this reason, the book will often refer to technologies and practices, as well as their discursive representation. The way a technology is represented in language, the way it is thought about and thought to work, is vital to the way it interacts with political and social life. For example, if we think about a technology as a tool, then we think about our having control over it, becoming better at using it, and what the affordances of that tool are. If we think of technology as a system, we are more likely to see ourselves as caught up in it (Nardi & O'Day 1999). To bring politics into technology enables us to move beyond deterministic notions about the inevitability of technology.

Engaging with this requires a sufficiently broad understanding of politics and the political. It is not just the institutions of government and the state (although these are important), but the contestation of power diffused throughout social life. This is an important reason for using governmentality theory with its understanding of politics beyond the state and the Foucauldian importance of micro-politics. The ID card may be obviously political, being championed by government and

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political parties and opposed by social movements and the official opposition, however the argument here is that the document shredder and the credit file are also political. Politics includes relations of power and strategies by which subjects are able to contest, negotiate and modify the practices that shape their identities and conduct. As an intervention in political theory, this book draws upon Foucauldian governmentality and post-Marxist discourse theory. It follows Tully's suggestion to focus on practices that are called into question and contested, to disclose the conditions of possibility of a set of governmental practices, including a critical study of the languages in which government and the contestation of government are framed and challenged, to work in relation to concrete policies rather than abstract theorisation, and perform a critique of relations of meaning and power, within which we think and act politically (Tully 2003:534–535).

The critical heart of this project is firstly to reflect the diversity of identity in social practices and to regard with concern any attempts to close it down or to restrict its diversity and flexibility. It is also based upon caution over the exercise of power and especially the unintended consequences that can emerge from even well-intentioned political and technological programmes. These consequences tend to fall most heavily on those individuals least well positioned to mitigate them. It also assumes that knowledge is not neutral. It is politicised and therefore falls under the scope of ethics. Politics therefore must encompass ways of seeing and regimes of truth, as well as what can be said. The politics here also draws inspiration from Bernard Crick's defence of politics against technology (Crick 2000). Crick critiques scientism and technological certainty as a social doctrine in which politics might be rendered unnecessary. It is based upon caution towards untheoretical claims to non-political, objective knowledge. Secondly, Crick suggests that one is not studying politics at all, if one is not speaking on the issues of the age. Surveillance and identity certainly appear to be such issues.

This is necessarily a somewhat interdisciplinary project due to the subject material and the surveillance studies perspective. This interdisciplinarity is stimulating and provides advantages for engaging with complex problems from a diversity of perspectives as well as encouraging productive collaborations. The primary influences are politics, discourse theory and governmentality theory, but the subject requires stepping onto the terrain of technology, law, information systems, banking and finance and linguistics (as well as on other social science disciplines). It is hoped that this book is relevant to those more familiar with these fields and that the inaccuracies are not too severe.

The artist Austin Kleon suggests that the best way to approach writing is to wonder at something, and then invite others to wonder at it with you (Kleon 2011). So this is my invitation to wonder at this particular intersection of surveillance, identity, language, technology and politics. This book hopes to make three key interventions. The first is the double role of identity as both subjectivity and contested concept in contemporary surveillance politics.

The second is the application of discourse theory to the issue of surveillance. This follows directly from the role of language in our particular nexus of factors.

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Discourse theory is a particular approach to politicised language which can be applied to a range of political topics or issues. It has not previously been applied to surveillance research and this book therefore demonstrates the value that can be gained from this. Discourse theory has contestation and the fundamental contingency of the social world at its core. This means this work is socially constructionist, but in a way which focuses upon how the social world is made up, rather than just claiming it to be so. Discourse theory also provides conceptual tools for understanding the way that subject positions are provided by discourses and arranged in relation to each other.

The third is a detailed discourse analysis of the politics of surveillance and identity in the United Kingdom. The UK is a very appropriate country to use as the basis for a case study into surveillance and identity. During much of the research that would eventually become this book, the proposals for an identity register and card were being introduced, debated, contested and opposed. The destruction of the database we noted at the start of this introduction coincided with writing about the scheme. This book therefore provides an account of this period in history. The UK has been described as one of the most surveilled countries in the world, largely on the strength of the amount of surveillance cameras the country is said to have installed. Surveillance had become an important political issue in a way it was not when this project started. Understanding the politics of surveillance and identity in the UK requires understanding the language in which this politics is conducted. This book maps and analyses this language. This may serve as both a record of that language, and the way it was contested, but also it may serve as a point of comparison for the analysis of the language and politics of surveillance in other countries. Researching and writing about the politics of the UK is also an important part of the author's intention to give back to the society of which he is a part.

The book asks what discourses of surveillance are identifiable in the contemporary United Kingdom. How is the nature of the problem defined, what roles or subject positions are made available and how is the idea of individual identity articulated in these discourses? It does this across four main discourses: the discourse of the government, the Information Commissioner's Office, the opposition to Identity Cards, and the banking and financial sector. This selection allows comparison of representations of surveillance across different areas of social life and demonstrates that the politics of identity and surveillance spreads beyond the state. These areas were selected as illustrative reference points at which there is contestation over the representation of surveillance and identity, their evaluation, and the subject positions available.

The book is divided into two main parts. Chapters 2 and 3 are broadly theoretical, with Chapters 4 to 6 being based upon empirical analysis. The theoretical chapters do the work of setting up how the analysis of the empirical source material is conducted, but the empirical analysis chapters should be understandable in their own right. A reader primarily interested in the particular case study of discourses

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in the UK might choose to read the empirical chapters first, and then work back to the theoretical ones if they wish.

Chapter 2 describes surveillance theory from a variety of disciplines and the developing field of surveillance studies. It engages with debates about the idea of a surveillance society, the centrality of the state, and resistance to surveillance. The chapter also looks at existing work on identity and demonstrates the importance of identity to surveillance, as well as the role identity can play as a critical point of entry into surveillance. The dual role of identity in surveillance as both contested and constructed is introduced here. This chapter also demonstrates the importance of discourse and language to understanding surveillance, including an engagement with existing work on the representation of surveillance in cultural products, and an expansion of the surveillant assemblage model to include a linguistic dimension. It is here that governmentality theory based upon the work of Foucault is introduced as an approach for conducting political research. The chapter contains an argument for the suitability of conducting a discourse analysis of surveillance based upon a governmentality framework, before setting up the central problematic of identity in discourses of surveillance. The governmentality approach is suitable because it accounts for the importance of both identity and discourse in politics. It also provides a perspective on the appropriate level of analysis for surveillance research, the role and make-up of the contemporary state, an account of resistance and power, and the importance of regimes of knowledge.

Chapter 3 is an overview of discourse theory drawing upon the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and their successors, situated against the background of discourse analysis more broadly. It provides an examination of the key concepts of post-Marxist discourse theory, including discourse, articulation, hegemony, logics of equivalence and difference, the model of identity in discourse theory, dislocation, ideology and the contingency of the social. This chapter also sets out the applicability of discourse theory as a research methodology and shows how the theory can be operationalised into textual analysis. This chapter also covers the methods of text selection and how one might go about evaluating a post-positivist discursive research project. It concludes with an argument for the specific reference points of this book and the translation of our specific questions into discourse theoretical language.

Chapter 4 is the first empirical chapter, which documents the representation of surveillant social practices in the UK. It shows how language is structured around four reference points of the government, the Information Commissioner's Office, opposition to identity cards, and the banking and financial sector. This language includes ways that surveillance practices are evaluated. This chapter includes the representation of identity cards, data profiles, identity theft, identification practices, credit ratings and the information economy. In so doing it examines the contestation and resistance between government and opposition over the nature, necessity and implications of identity cards, and the contested way in which a practice is defined as surveillance or not. It concludes with an examination of normalisation, regularities and problematisations in these discourses. This chapter

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maps the rationalities of discourses of surveillance and shows the common ground that makes it possible to think in terms of a governmental discourse of surveillance.

Chapter 5 engages with identity in the form of subjectivities and subject positions made available in discourses of surveillance. The chapter starts with an examination of identity theory and subject positions – places within discourses from which it is possible to speak, as well as a form of identity that a discourse can apply to an actor. The chapter finds three core politically salient subject positions that occur across the discourses examined. These are the individual, threatening actors, and the category of the vulnerable. The chapter finds that a model of possessive information individualism is dominant in surveillance discourses – this is the individual as a possessor of personal information. This possession is vulnerable, and they are under an obligation to manage and protect it. This individual finds themselves in a range of relationships with other social actors mediated by their choices and their historical behaviour. Threatening actors include a range of hostile subject positions – the identity thief, the terrorist, the benefit fraudster and the illegal immigrant. These actors put pressure upon identity infrastructures and are the suitable and appropriate targets of surveillance. Their exclusion serves to aid in the construction of a shared 'legitimate' identity. Surveillance systems are criticised when they bring 'innocent' people into this category. The actual occupants of the subject position of the vulnerable vary strongly across the discourses. Government discourses suggest that the vulnerable are those most at threat from the absence of secure identity systems, whilst opposition movements challenge that the proposed cards will impact most upon the socially vulnerable.

Chapter 6 examines how identity is articulated in discourses of surveillance in the UK. It sets out the dominant model of governmental surveillance identity. This is a way of understanding identity that assumes that identity is ontologically objective, unitary, biometric, contains shallow yet expansive content and is behavioural, based upon probabilistic and actuarial logics. Identity is controlled not by the individual but by attributed and trusted institutional sources. Identity is valuable and socially vulnerable, it can be stolen (this is the basis of identity theft) and as such requires action to secure it and prevent abuses. Current mechanisms and process of identity are seen as inadequate. The chapter examines two responses to this insecurity of identity. The first is a government response that a more secure form of identity is needed. This was the root of the proposals for a national identity card. The second response, arising in governance and financial discourses is that individuals should take greater responsibility for securing their identity, with assistance and advice from experts and technologists. This is the response that advocates the purchase and diligent use of personal document shredder. This chapter also includes analysis of the counter-articulation present in opposition discourse that social problems are not primarily problems of identity at all.

Chapter 7 concludes the book by drawing together its theoretical and empirical elements and identifying some implications. It contains the theoretical implications for surveillance theory, in terms of the dominance of privacy, the account of the surveillance society, the dual role of identity, and the importance

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of language to understanding surveillance practices. It also evaluates the usefulness of governmentality theory and assesses the implications for political and social theories of identity. This chapter also contains the political implications that arise from the representation of surveillance, subject positions and the articulation of the governmental surveillance identity. These include normalisation and the acceptance of surveillance, the positioning of machine truth against human truth, exclusionary practices, identity management, the problems of using biographical identity as a condition of access, and the privileging of a 'normal' lifestyle over others.

It concludes with a number of policy suggestions related to the politics of identity and surveillance in the UK. This is an attempt to look forward towards post-surveillance identity. These suggestions focus upon the way that technological and bureaucratic identity systems should acknowledge the socially constructed nature of identity, a call for context-sensitive use of identity information, making more information available on the accuracy (and inaccuracy) of surveillance systems and the need for clarity of language surrounding information and security based crime. Identity is a social phenomenon, and how we decide to build it into technology is a political question.

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