# Preface

*Thomas Mathiesen*

I am 77 years old. I remember very well indeed a world without the Internet. I remember the late 1930s in Norway, a humble close-knit society (with some wealthy shipowners on top), where people in fishing villages, rural areas, and towns lived as they always had lived. I remember how the world changed when Norway was occupied by German forces during World War II, I remember vividly our meeting with American soldiers who had come to Northern Europe in 1945 via the disastrous struggles and terrible manslaughter during the Italian campaign, "the soft belly" of German Europe, which turned out not to be soft at all, but which changed my life throughout. I remember how I went to the US with my mother, an American, by steamship in 1946, and came back for school also by steamship in the fall with a new worldview and a large Hershey chocolate bar for each of my classmates. I remember the '50s with more school, partly in the US, and the abolition of restrictions on buying the countless new things that capitalism now had to offer—such as a brand new car, which my father suddenly bought. I remember the '60s, '70s, and '80s, with several marriages in a row whereas the older generation had managed with one, I remember homosexuals coming out of the closet, their sexual secrets being decriminalized, I remember several trips—now by large jet planes—to and back from the US, I remember the oil coming up from the North Sea making us affluent, I remember the struggles I took part in, such as the prisoners' struggles, and the terrifying wars that took place, such as in Vietnam. And all of the instant media came along, such as television. I remember poverty and wealth.There were fast electronic typewriters and equally rapid stencil machines that allowed proofreading and correction with red wax before the duplication process.

I remember all of this and more, tremendous changes in ordinary peoples' lives over say six or seven decades. All of this and more happened without the Internet—although the Internet was in the making.

This makes me wonder: We often hear the saying that with the Internet, the world is entering something brand new, a new societal formation. The world is now leaving the age of the "the industrial society", on the

verge of and in fact entering the age of "an information society". Although unskilled and skilled labourers are still around and in demand, production of all the things we need (or think that we need), is increasingly dependent on information.

One of the first to try out the concept of an "information society" was the sociologist Daniel Bell (1973/1976) in his book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* from 1973. Bell tried to characterize the shift from what he called the industrial society to "the post-industrial society". According to Bell, the post-industrial society contained two dimensions—a far greater emphasis than before on theoretical knowledge and information, and a tremendous growth in service activities (transport, trade, insurance, banking, public administration, medical, legal, and other types of individual service, travel and so on). The first major change—the far greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge and information—has made us more dependent on science, with the increased role of scientifically based industries. The second change—the increased role of service-oriented trades—has created a strong relative decline of the industrially productive workforce. But Bell also emphasized that the postindustrial society does not *replace* the industrial society. It rather finds its place integrated in that society, erasing some of the features of the industrial society.

Many modern works have gone further. One of them is William H. Davidow and Michael S. Malone's fascinating but problematic book *The Virtual Corporation* from 1992, which contains illustrations from Silicon Valley, Northern Italy, and Japan. According to Davidow and Malone (1992), an industry is "virtual" when it produces material objects very quickly, in principle *in no time*. A perfectly "virtual industry" does not exist, but an industry may *approach* production and operation in no time. They construct a complex theory of information containing four levels, where information is instantaneously converted to complex actions. Neural networks inspired by networks in the brain are referred to.

This is of course just a brief sketch of the main argument. What are we to make of it? Two points:

> *First, I for one do not think we are approaching a situation of virtual production.*

The industrial workforce has declined, and significantly so, in our part of the world. This is partly due to forces such as those pointed to by Davidow and Malone. Information has become an important productive force. But there are also other forces, notably the *outsourcing* to parts of the world where labour is cheap and the *moving* of large-scale industries also to places where labour is cheap (and taxes low). Furthermore, there are limits both of a sociological and a technical nature—strong labour unions in many places, the culture of the workplace, and limits as to

how much labour may be mechanized. All of this prevents the transfer of our mode of production from industry to information. It may be too old-fashioned a view, but this is so far where my thinking has gone. If I am right, the significance of this should not be underestimated. It means, essentially, that a basic shift of the mode of production is not occurring, or is occurring only to a limited extent. Unlike the shift from feudal production to industrial capitalism, where whole generations of people originally tied to the land in serfdom were uprooted, fleeing to the cities looking for work in the large new buildings called factories, in which labour was organized in an entirely different way. Industrial capitalism is still with us, albeit with a smaller (un)skilled labour force and to some extent with a shift to service trades and technical expertise. The Internet has made invasions in industrial capitalism, but the Internet basically *promotes* industrial capitalism; it is much more effective as a vehicle of an advanced industrial society. It is not an end point of a mode of production, but an advancement of it.

> *Second, however, our social relations in our daily lives may be changing more significantly.*

Think of it. Students of all grades and classes are now using the Internet, for planning courses, finding out where the courses are given and which courses not to take, receiving exam questions, and a whole string of related things. If they ask a secretary for information, the answer is "look it up on the Net". Approximately 500 million people on a world basis are now daily users of Facebook (information from Wikipedia). In a class (on media and communication) I taught this fall with 70 students, 100% were on Facebook. I was the only person present who was not on Facebook. The prime minister of Norway is an ardent user of Twitter. Research has shown that US politicians increasingly adjust their media appearances on television according to how the messages are received on the Net. Groups on YouTube are able to influence US election campaigns very significantly. Radicals and liberals are ousted or received with warmth. In 1997, 50% of the Norwegian population had access to a computer at home. In 2009 the percentage was 92. In 1997, 13% had access to the Internet. In 2009 the percentage was 91. The same developments can be observed in many countries. The Internet is used for a wide variety of activities. The coffee shop is here for good, and all over the place you see cellphones, which people use as comforters or for calling. Many young people bring their laptops to do their homework. People like to be in places, where they both are alone *and* with other people. Women tend to not go to bars alone, but they can and do go to coffee shops (as a recent doctoral dissertation showed, Dokk Holm 2010). I recently read a research report that showed that Muslim women used the Net for information about dress codes, sexual practice and

malpractice, and a variety of other delicate matters (they received *fatwas* in return, which were quite pragmatic and rather women-friendly, see Sardar Ali 2011). Internet use is a worldwide phenomenon. In a streamlined fashion the other modern information media follow suit.

In short, though there are changes in production, I doubt that a new mode of production is coming up. But perhaps there is a new social formation over and above production? Or is there a new way of life? Possibly. The changes are great.

It is not only that. Most of the other changes since 1940 have actually been gradual, relatively speaking. You can trace the development from the combustion engine through various stages to the extremely rapid trains crossing all of Europe in a few hours. You can trace the development from the Spitfire to the jumbo jet. The Internet, and what has followed in its wake, has come more as a break, with whole generations involved within a short span of time. This is, mind you, in open public space, and in spite of the fact that the Internet also has developed and expanded gradually, but more "behind the scenes".

But I have to confess: Though this is a possible interpretation, I am uncertain even here. I wish I could live longer to see how it goes. If you compare 1990 with 2010, the difference in how people behave and act is great. But if you compare 2010 with earlier times, for example with the late 1930s, I am not so sure. This is why I started this little preface with a historical note. The 70 years that have passed since 1940 have been a period of enormous, dramatic social change in the Western world—from modesty to capitalist frenzy, from steamships to large and extremely quick airplanes propelled (or rather, not visibly propelled) by huge jet engines, to social relationships and family principles of a kind completely different from earlier times. Isn't the Internet just a further extension of a whole wave of *social change* over our Western social order, once again with a new technology that elderly people find difficult to learn?

I have doubts. This is where I have arrived—so far.

But is, then, nothing new? Of course there is. The whole period of 70 years, which we have behind us, is characterized by inventions and novelty.

*Surveillance* is new. Surveillance is the cardinal point of the Internet. Not that we did not have surveillance before. We have had surveillance since the construction of the state, and maybe before that. In the 1970s a man, a Marxist, who lived in the city of Trondheim in Norway found a cord linked to his telephone. He followed the cord—to the police station. This became a standard joke. But much of it was more serious. Many people, especially people of a Marxist or radical leaning, were followed closely by the secret police. I was tailed by the secret police when I participated at prisoners' conferences, and when I received dissident visitors from Eastern Europe under Soviet Rule. Secret police officers reported on my activities to their Norwegian headquarters. The situation was irritating, but at least

it was possible to detect that surveillance of a political nature was going on, especially when a special commission was finally set up to control these matters. The commission found much of the surveillance illegal.[1]

> What is new now is *surveillance that is hidden, unseen, and impossible to trace.*

Certainly sensational discoveries occur. One day in 2010 it suddenly turned out that the US Embassy in Norway employed retired Norwegian police officers, making them responsible for the surveillance of Norwegian citizens near as well as somewhat away from the Embassy premises. The Embassy did not trust the standard Norwegian surveillance as far as terrorism was concerned and felt vulnerable. Information was passed on to a US database. On the political level, no one had known: Not the Minister of Justice, not the Prime Minister. Again suddenly, a similar sensation turned up in Denmark. No one had known. Perhaps politicians preferred to be ignorant about the illegal activities of an ally. Perhaps the lower echelons of the Norwegian police, which had cooperated closely with the US Embassy, were aware of this preference and acted accordingly. We will probably never know.

Such sensational scandals do occur. The scandals enter open public space. But they are exceptions that prove the rule. Below the surface there is an enormous hinterland of undiscovered surveillance practices based on the use of the Internet. Surveillance on the Internet is hidden and unseen. So is the vast trail of electronic signs that we leave behind as we go about our daily affairs—in banks, shops, trade centres, and everywhere else, every day of the year. Surveillance becomes a system, or a set of systems, which "silently silences" you—suave, unnoticeable, and undetected surveillance of groups, categories, and large populations, its unnoticeable character in turn silencing opposition (Mathiesen 2004). Processes of corporate and political surveillance on the Internet also act as systems that silence people in a suave and silent way. Some Internet use is official to the extent that formal decisions are made to establish the system in question. An example is the EU Directive 2006/26/EF, passed on March 15, 2006, that concerns the retention of traffic data. That, at least, makes initial protests possible, but not after a while and only when the system is in operation.[2] At any rate, under the Data Retention Directive enormous amounts of data are stored about *all citizens in the country*—who calls who, who e-mails who for how long, start time and end time, place for initiation and place for reception, and so on—and may be used according to vague criteria of crime and terrorism. And most Internet surveillance is beyond any control at all. We simply do not know about it.

This is a very important sign of danger to our society. The surveillance activities and methods that have come up in the wake of the Internet

threaten the democratic fibres of our liberal state governed by law. At the same time, the bombing and massacre that cost close to 80 people their lives in Norway in July 2011 make the democratic fibres of Norway potentially more vulnerable. The Norwegian authorities and people therefore use precisely the values of democracy and solidarity as a defence. This makes the book, which you hold in your hand, all the more timely. It is a most important volume on a most important feature of our society today.

## NOTES

1. Important in this context was the so-called Lund-commission. It was headed by a Supreme Court Judge and set up by Parliament after the Cold War in 1994. The commission's findings were shocking. Illegalities were widespread.
2. Some systems are open rather than hidden also while in operation, such as those that control all passengers at airports.

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