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Article

Order as a Technology of Power: From Colonial Urbanism to Algorithmic Surveillance in Smart Cities

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Abstract: This article examines how the Western philosophical ideal of order, which is shaped from antiquity through the medieval "*esse est ordo*" to modern rationalism, was projected into colonialism and reappears in contemporary surveillance regimes in smart cities. Using a conceptual-genealogical approach, I analyze three layers: 1) the emergence of the order/chaos dichotomy in Western metaphysics, where order becomes an ontologically and morally superior category; 2) the way in which French colonial urbanism materialized this dichotomy—for example, by interpreting Muslim cities as "chaotic" and transforming them into controllable and disciplinary spaces; and 3) the current digital transformation of this ideal within smart city infrastructures, which, through Big Data and algorithmic governmentality, create an environment of permanent prediction and categorization. I show that today's technological regimes are not just a new form of surveillance but a continuation of the same epistemic project that previously legitimized colonialism. The digital "order" is not a neutral technical goal but a normative framework that creates new forms of moral and political dominance, particularly through the categorization of "others" and the normalization of controllability as an ideal of urban life.

Keywords: algorithmic governmentality, colonial urbanism, surveillance, urban rationality

Over the past two decades, urban surveillance has become one of the main tools of governance in Western cities. In the discourse of "smart cities," this transformation is often described as a technologically neutral process aimed at increasing efficiency and security. However, critical literature shows that smart city infrastructures are deeply political: they transform how residents are recognized and how the boundaries of legitimate

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behavior are defined.[1] At the same time, debates on surveillance repeatedly return to the question of whether a "balance" can be found between security and freedom—a debate that Mark Neocleous challenges by showing that security has always been prioritized over freedom in the liberal tradition.[2]

This article assumes that smart city surveillance cannot be adequately understood solely as a technological innovation or as a continuation of security policy. It is another historical phase of a much older rational and metaphysical orientation of Western thought, which emphasizes order as an ontological and epistemic principle. From ancient philosophy through medieval theology to modern rationalism, Western tradition has been shaped by the idea that to be is to be ordered ("*esse est ordo*") and that chaos (as "*tohu-bohu*" before the creation of the world) represents a negative pole that must be overcome.[3] This logocentric orientation[4] is not only evident at the level of philosophical concepts but is also gradually permeating the way urban space is organized.

To demonstrate this connection, the article traces the genealogy of the ideal of order in three steps. First, through primary sources, I reconstruct how the motif of order and its opposition to chaos was formed in Western philosophy: from Plato's cosmology through Aristotelian teleology, medieval "*esse est ordo*" to the modern conception of reason as a method. Second, I then show how this concept of order materialized in French colonial urbanism: in the Orientalist depiction of "chaotic" Islamic cities,[5] in the rationalization of streets and neighborhoods,[6] and in the disregard for culturally specific spatial

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[1] See Rob Kitchin, "The Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science," in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 374 (2016); Maroš Krivý, "Towards a Critique of Cybernetic Urbanism: The Smart City and the Society of Control," in *Planning Theory*, 17 (2016); Ayona Datta and Nancy Odendaal, "Smart Cities and the Banality of Power," in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37 (2019).

[2] See Mark Neocleous, "Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance: Towards a Critique of Security Politics," in *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6 (2007).

[3] See Alexandru Giuculescu, "Order versus Chaos or the Ghost of Indeterminacy," in *The Paideia Archive: Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, 37 (1998); Hermann Krings, "Das Sein und die Ordnung. Eine Skizze zur Ontologie des Mittelalters," in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 18 (1940); Ivan Blecha, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Olomouc: Olomouc Publishing House, 1998).

[4] See Andrew Belsey, "Chaos and Order, Environment and Anarchy," in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, 36 (1994); Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als widersacher der Seele*, Vol. 1, (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1929); Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Linguistics and Grammatology," in *SubStance*, 4 (Autumn 1974).

[5] See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977); Capitaine Villot, *Mœurs, costumes et institutions des indigènes de l'Algérie* (Paris: Béguin, 1983); Xavier de Planhol, *The World of Islam* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1959).

[6] See Ambe J. Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands* (Cham: Springer, 2016); Jean Dethier, "Evolution of Concepts of Housing, Urbanism, and Country Planning in a Developing Country: Morocco, 1900–1972," in *From Madina to Metropolis: Heritage and Change in the Near Eastern City*, ed. by L. Carl Brown (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1973).

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rationalities, as documented, for example, by Pétonnet.[7] Finally, I connect this genealogy with today's smart city regimes of surveillance and algorithmic governmentality, which translate the ideal of order into the language of data, security, and prediction.[8]

The research question of the article is: How is the philosophical ideal of order in the Western tradition reflected in colonial urbanism and further in contemporary smart city regimes of surveillance, and what are the normative consequences of this reflection for urban life?

The text's original contribution lies in its linking of the level of metaphysical genealogy (order, *logos*, rationality), colonial urban practices, and contemporary algorithmic governmentality. Unlike most studies of smart cities, which focus on technical infrastructure or legal aspects,[9] here I trace the continuity of one specific concept (order) across these layers. I show that smart city surveillance is not just another step in technological development but a digitized continuation of the same rationality that legitimized the colonial transformation of "chaotic" cities and that still structures the security imagination of Western societies today.

Methodological Approach

The text is conceived as a conceptual-genealogical study, not as empirical research in the sense of sociological investigation or discursive analysis of a large data corpus. The aim is not to provide a representative description of smart city projects or colonial cities but to observe how a certain philosophical ideal (order) is projected into various historical configurations of power and space.

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[7] See Colette Pétonnet, "Espace, distance et dimension dans une société musulmane: à propos du bidonville marocain de Douar Doum à Rabat," in *L'homme*, 12 (1972).

[8] See Antoinette Rouvroy, Thomas Berns, and Liz Carey-Libbrecht, "Algorithmic Governmentality and Prospects of Emancipation: Disparateness as a Precondition for Individuation through Relationships?," in *Réseaux*, 177 (2013); Richard Weiskopf and Hans Kause Hansen, "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics: Examples from 'People Analytics'," in *Human Relations*, 76 (2023); Andrea Pavoni and Simone Tulumello, "What Is Urban Violence?," in *Progress in Human Geography*, 44 (2020); Pete Fussey and Jon Coaffee, "Urban Spaces of Surveillance," in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*, ed. by Kirstie Ball, Kevin Haggerty, and David Lyon (London: Routledge, 2012); Marikken Wullf-Wathne, "The Utopian Logics of 'Smart Stockholm': Visibility, Predictability, and Controllability," in *Cities*, 146 (2024).

[9] See Kitchin, "Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science"; Isadora Neroni Rezende, "Facial Recognition in Police Hands: Assessing the 'Clearview Case' from a European Perspective," in *New Journal of European Criminal Law*, 11 (2020); Privacy International, *The UK's Privatised Migration Surveillance Regime: A Rough Guide for Civil Society* (London: Privacy International, 2021).

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Methodologically, I proceed as follows: First, I conduct a close reading of primary philosophical texts (Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, etc.) and reconstruct how the motifs of order, *logos*, and opposition to chaos function in them.[10] Second, I rely on a genealogical interpretation of colonial sources and secondary literature, especially works on French urbanism in North Africa and its Orientalist framework.[11] Third, I analyze selected contemporary examples of smart city surveillance and legislative or technological regimes: Kinalisoft software, the case of audiosurveillance in Orléans, "major events" legislation in France, the deployment of algorithmic surveillance during the Olympic Games in Paris. I place them within the framework of critical studies of surveillance, algorithmic governmentality, and security policies.[12]

I understand empirical "examples" as exemplary cases, not as a statistically representative sample. Their task is to demonstrate how the abstract concept of order translates into specific spatial arrangements and technological interventions. The epistemic status of the article is therefore interpretative: it is not about testing hypotheses but about developing a consistent conceptual trajectory that links metaphysical assumptions with colonial and algorithmic practice.

At the same time, I reflect on the limits of this approach. The analysis is based mainly on French European material and remains within the framework of Western archives of texts and cases; it does not provide a systematic comparison with other colonial contexts or a detailed ethnography of contemporary smart cities. The results should therefore be understood as

[10] See Stephen Menn, "Aristotle and Plato on God as Nous and as the Good," in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 45 (1992); Peter Slater, "Goodness as Order and Harmony in Augustine," in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992); James Brent, "God and Order in Thomas Aquinas," in *Acta Philosophica*, 25 (2016); Louis E. Loeb, "The Priority of Reason in Descartes," in *The Philosophical Review*, 99 (1990); Giuculescu, "Order versus Chaos."

[11] See Said, *Orientalism*; Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*; Dethier, "Evolution of Concepts of Housing"; Michelle Lamprakos, "Le Corbusier and Algiers: The Plan Obus as Colonial Urbanism," in *Forms of Dominance: On the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise*, ed. by Nezar AlSayyad (London: Routledge, 1992); Pétonnet, "Espace, distance et dimension"; Capitaine Villot, *Mœurs;* de Planhol, *World of Islam.*

[12] See Kitchin, "Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science"; Steven Feldstein, *The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019); Fussey and Coaffee, "Urban Spaces of Surveillance"; Weiskopf and Hansen, "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics"; Pavoni and Tulumello, "What Is Urban Violence?"; Marie-Helen Maras, "The Social Consequences of a Mass Surveillance Measure: What Happens When We Become the 'Others'?," in *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 40 (2012); Tatiana Lysova, "Video Surveillance and Public Space: Surveillance Society vs. Security State," in *What People Leave Behind: Marks, Traces, Footprints and their Relevance to Knowledge Society*, ed. by Francesca Comunello, Fabrizio Martire, and Lorenzo Sabetta (Cham: Springer, 2022).

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offering a conceptual framework that can be tested and expanded in various empirical situations in the future.

Key Terms

Order, Chaos, Anarchy

I use the terms "order" and "chaos" in line with the philosophical tradition that understands order as a condition for the possibility of being, knowledge, and justice.[13] Chaos here is not an empirical state but the conceptual opposite of order—that which cannot be captured by categories, mapped, or subjected to teleology. The term "anarchy" often appears in colonial and smart city discourse, which is not identical to chaos[14] but in political language it is often used as a synonym for disorder. In this article, I work with these concepts as they function in the analyzed discourses: as labels for what deviates from the Western ideal of order and can therefore be declared a deficit, a danger, or a target for intervention.

Logocentrism and Rationality

The concept of logocentrism[15] refers to the orientation of European culture towards *logos*—reason, order. In this article, logocentrism does mean broader ontological stance according to which what is real and valuable is that which is orderly and subject to rational control. This attitude is also reflected in urban imagination, where visually perceptible order is understood as a reflection of a deeper physical and social order.[16]

Smart City

In line with critical literature, I understand a smart city not as a neutral "smart" infrastructure but as a data-saturated environment in which the lives of residents become a continuous flow of "lively data"[17] and where

[13] See Giuculescu, "Order versus Chaos"; Krings, "Das Sein und die Ordnung"; Brent, "God and Order in Thomas Aquinas."

[14] See Benjamin Tucker, "Socialism: What It Is," in *Instead of a Book by a Man Too Busy to Write One: A Fragmentary Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism* (New York: Benj. R. Tucker, 1897); Hisham Abusaada and Abeer Elshater, "From Chaos to Order: Articulating the Urban Policies for Cities of Hardship," in *Industrial and Urban Growth Policies at the Sub-National, National, and Global Levels* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2019).

[15] See Blecha, *Philosophical Dictionary*; Klages, *Der Geist*; Derrida and Spivak, "Linguistics and Grammatology."

[16] See Abusaada and Elshater, "From Chaos to Order."

[17] See Deborah Lupton, *The Quantified Self* (London: Wiley, 2016).

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infrastructures generate "real-time, fine-grained and actionable data" about processes and the population.[18] In these cities, predictability and controllability are among the main goals.[19] The term "smart city" in this article does not refer to every instance of surveillance but to configurations in which technological and political interests converge in a project of total knowledge and control of the city.

Surveillance and Algorithmic Governmentality

I understand surveillance, in a broad sense, as a set of practices for collecting, sorting, and using information about people and spaces to control behavior.[20] I pay particular attention to algorithmic governmentality[21] in which subjects are reduced to "dividuals," i.e., data fragments that are predicted and intervened upon before the subject can reflect or act.[22] Following Weiskopf and Hansen,[23] I understand this regime as the creation of an environment in which the space for ethics narrows: action is increasingly pre-structured by algorithmic classifications and "nudge" mechanisms.

Philosophical Excursus of Order

In this article, I show how one of the dominant currents of Western philosophy—the current emphasizing the central role of reason and order—influenced not only theoretical thinking but also the shape of cities. I focus on the line of European rationalism that placed reason and its order on a symbolic pedestal, which, I argue, later provided a strong "intellectual argument" for colonial powers in evaluating and rebuilding "conquered" territories. It is no coincidence that France, the "land of philosophers" and heir to Enlightenment rationality, used this argument with such intensity in its colonial urbanism.

The aim of this section is not to present a complete history of Western philosophy but to select some representative examples (an illustrative sample of many) that show how deeply Western tradition is imbued with rationality

[18] See Kitchin, "Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science."

[19] See Krivý, "Towards a Critique of Cybernetic Urbanism"; Wullf-Wathne, "Utopian Logics of 'Smart Stockholm'."

[20] See Fussey and Coaffee, "Urban Spaces of Surveillance"; Privacy International, *UK's Privatised Migration Surveillance Regime*.

[21] See Rouvroy, Berns, and Carey-Libbrecht, *Algorithmic Governmentality and Prospects of Emancipation*.

[22] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," in *October*, 59 (Winter 1992), 3–7.

[23] See Weiskopf and Hansen, "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics."

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and the opposition of order to chaos. Western philosophy is literally full of such authors.

The order/chaos dichotomy has been present since the beginning of European thought.[24] The Pythagoreans did not regard the world as a product of chance or disorder: numbers, ratios, and geometry were understood as principles of cosmic order standing above any empirical or formless chaos.[25] This thread intensified in Plato, whose Demiurge imposes *kosmos* upon pre-existent chaotic matter: chaos being passive; order, active and divine.[26] Plotinus likewise conceived the Highest Good as complete order from which lower levels of being emerge through successive degradations: the less order, the closer one moves toward chaos.[27] Aristotle extended this tradition by identifying order with the very structure of being itself: nature aims toward a *télos*, ordered entities exhibit "true being," and deviations approach disorder, which he associated with ugliness. He also claimed, for example, that the main forms of beauty are order and symmetry.[28] In this context, chaos functions as a pre-ontological state of *tohu-bohu*, existing only as the conceptual opposite of order.[29] The tension between order and chaos can already be seen in the pre-Socratics, whose opposing doctrines—Parmenides's unchanging unity of Being and Heraclitus's perpetual flux—established a foundational dialectic that shaped the entire trajectory of Western thought.[30] Plato's theory of Forms then codified this dialectic by situating perfect, eternal order beyond the sensible world, with reason as the only faculty capable of transcending the instability and chaos of the sensible world and grasping true reality.[31] Even politically active authors such as Marcus Aurelius emphasized that *Logos* (divine reason) is a universal order that permeates the cosmos. Chaos is human misunderstanding or resistance to order.[32] Similarly, Boethius held the view that philosophy comforts us with the idea that the world has an order that transcends even visible evil. Chaos is an illusion; order is the divine plan.[33]

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[24] See Belsey, "Chaos and Order."

[25] Pythagoras, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings Which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy*, trans. by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1987), 22, 46, and 93.

[26] Plato, *Timaeus*, 28b.

[27] Plotinus, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 4, trans. by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (London: George Bell and Sons, 1918), 1049 and 1152.

[28] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1076a.

[29] Giuculescu, "Order versus Chaos," 89.

[30] See Daniel W., Graham, "Heraclitus and Parmenides," in *Presocratic Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Alexander Mourelatos*, ed. by Victor Caston and Daniel W. Graham (London: Routledge 2017).

[31] See Menn, "Aristotle and Plato on God."

[32] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (London: Penguin, 2015), 28.

[33] Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), 81.

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In the Middle Ages, this tradition merged with Christian theology: Augustine emphasized the transcendent order of divine law,[34] and Thomas Aquinas systematized it by positing that everything in creation has an order given by God. Chaos is not an independent force but a lack of order – *privatio boni*.[35] This is also where the famous "*esse est ordo*"—to be is to be in order—originates.[36] Order is not an attribute but a condition of existence. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment shifted rationality to the center of epistemology. For example, René Descartes rejected the "disordered" chaos of the senses and tradition, while his method emphasized clarity and order.[37] Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" places the conscious, rational self in the role of the organizing principle of the world.[38] This logic can also be found in modern philosophy: According to Immanuel Kant, human reason does not arise solely from sensory data; rather, it actively organizes this data using *a priori* forms of perception (space and time) and *a priori* categories (e.g., causality), so that experience itself is only possible when sensory "chaotic" material is structured by rational categories.[39] Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling then spoke of the "standing together of beings as a whole" and of "extreme discord" (great disunity/disorder), which must be overcome or incorporated into order.[40] Modern/contemporary critics have summarized this tradition as logocentrism. European cultures have always oriented towards *logos*: order and reason. *Logos* is not just a tool but an ontological principle of understanding reality. This attitude has shaped science, theology, politics, and art.[41] In urbanism, it manifests itself in the belief that the visible order reflects a deeper physical or social order.[42]

It is, of course, true that Western philosophy is neither homogeneous nor unilaterally rationalistic; current Western philosophers have rejected or deconstructed order. However, this does not change the fact that the duality of order and chaos is one of its enduring motifs, which has direct cultural and political consequences. In the following discussion, I show how this philosophical emphasis on order served as an intellectual legitimization of colonial urbanism. Above all, I show how the same logic is returning in today's Western cities, now through surveillance technologies that demand a

[34] Slater, "Goodness as Order and Harmony in Augustine," 153.

[35] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 25, a. 5.

[36] Giuculescu, "Order versus Chaos"; Krings, "Das Sein und die Ordnung," 89.

[37] René Descartes, *A Discourse on Method* (Aladdin Book Company, 1901), 35.

[38] Loeb, "Priority of Reason in Descartes," 7.

[39] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 261.

[40] F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. by Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 28.

[41] See Belsey, "Chaos and Order."

[42] Abusaada and Elshater, "From Chaos to Order," 43.

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standardized and controllable environment. The logic of order thus serves once again as a framework for justifying interference in urban space and the actions of its inhabitants.

Order in Colonial Thought

French colonial power (and by no means only French) entered new territories with the ambition of consolidating control and dominance. This project was structured around the dichotomy of "us" and "them," "reason and order" versus "irrationality and chaos." The reconstruction of urban structures was not presented as an act of subjugation but as an elevation of the supposed chaos of the natives to the Western idea of order. It was a gesture of "*mission civilisatrice*,"[43] which Edward Said described as the pinnacle of Orientalist self-confidence: the West is rational, logical, and value-based, while the Orient is none of these things.[44] A fixed binary is thus established in the Orientalist tradition: the West embodies order, rationality, and stability, while the Orient is portrayed as a place of disorder, irrationality, and cultural backwardness. This dichotomous framing serves as an epistemic and moral justification for interventions intended to remedy the alleged "disorder."

Ambe J. Njoh shows that this logic is deeply rooted in the Western modernizing ethos, which has become associated with industrialization and rationalization as a legacy of the Enlightenment. According to him, modernity was based on "the power of reason over ignorance, order over disorder, and science over superstition."[45] In this perspective, anarchy or chaos is not understood as an alternative form of organization but as the ontological opposite of order. Although the concepts of anarchy and chaos are not identical,[46] in this text, I use them as they function in colonial discourse: as labels for that which deviates from the Western idea of rationality. What is essential is who claims epistemic primacy and who is placed in the role of the "irrational."

Colonial material from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries confirms this logic. Capitaine Villot described North African cities as disorderly masses of houses without regular design.[47] A century later, de Planhol claimed that "the most striking feature of Islamic cities is irregularity

[43] See Matthew Burrows, "'Mission Civilisatrice': French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860–1914," in *The Historical Journal*, 29 (1986).

[44] Said, *Orientalism*, 50.

[45] Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*, 105.

[46] See Tucker, "Socialism"; Abusaada and Elshater, "From Chaos to Order."

[47] See Capitaine Villot, *Mœurs*.

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and anarchy" and that Islam leads to the negation of urban order.[48] From today's perspective, it is clear that these statements do not characterize Arab cities, but rather the observer's perspective: where the colonizer was unable to recognize "his" order, he declared the existing logic of space to be chaos. This interpretation conceals a deep Eurocentrism—the belief that only Western tradition is the bearer of rational thinking.

Michelle Lamprakos, therefore, accurately captures the difference between Western and Muslim urban forms: in the Muslim tradition, order often takes place within houses and courtyards rather than in open spaces, which can appear opaque.[49] Europeans often mistook this cultural difference for a lack of structure, which, in turn, reinforced the idea of their own civilizational superiority.

This framework was not merely intellectual; it became the basis of colonial policy. As Njoh notes, the civilizing mission was based on the belief in the necessity of "acculturating racial and cultural others."[50] In this logic, the city becomes a moral laboratory through which the population can be "educated" and the European order imposed on it. The narrow, winding streets of medinas and kasbahs were seen as spatial obstacles to discipline and therefore had to be replaced by transparency, clarity, and straight lines: in other words, urban order as an instrument of power.

For this reason, the French colonial authorities systematically promoted rectangular grids, wide boulevards, and the separation of European and Indigenous neighborhoods. Rectangular streets allowed the colonial army to monitor several kilometers of space from a single point.[51] Europeans lived in modern neighborhoods equipped with infrastructure, while the Indigenous population was placed under the supervision of the police and army.[52] Urbanism thus became a material interface of inequality.

This trend continued into the 20th century. Le Corbusier's Plan Obus for Algiers represented an extreme form of modernist "redemption" of the city through monumentality, geometry, and functional separation. His design ignored the sociocultural structure of Algiers and reproduced the logic of colonial dominance, which Lamprakos describes as "anchored in modern European values."[53] Although the plan for Algiers was not implemented, the modernist reorganization of the cities in French Morocco did become a

[48] See de Planhol, *World of Islam*.
[49] See Lamprakos, "Le Corbusier and Algiers."
[50] Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*, viii.
[51] *Ibid*., 5.
[52] *Ibid*., 145.
[53] Lamprakos, "Le Corbusier and Algiers," 185.

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reality.[54] Jean Dethier sums up this approach succinctly: "delicacy was abandoned in the fight against urban chaos," and the traditional street was "banished in the name of progress."[55]

This rationalization of colonial space not only fulfilled an aesthetic ideal but also functioned as what Michel Foucault calls, in connection with his analysis of the panopticon, the automatic functioning of power. The straight boulevards and clear grids of French urbanism are not only a tool of military surveillance but also create a space in which surveillance becomes permanent in its effects, even if it is not continual in its execution.[56] At this point, the metaphysical principle of *esse est ordo* is transformed into a technical apparatus: order is no longer just a goal but a machine that automates the obedience of the population without the need for constant physical violence. This transition from the material discipline of colonial space to the digital fluidity of the smart city can be theoretically interpreted through Gilles Deleuze's diagnosis of the end of "enclosed societies."[57] While colonial urbanism operated according to the logic of the "mole" (the construction of solid structures and enclosed spaces [enclosures]), today's digital surveillance is more reminiscent of the movement of a "snake," whose complex loops replace the fixed corridors of the disciplinary molehill.[58]

Colonial Order and Cultural Rationalities of Space

Colette Pétonnet's ethnographic study of the Moroccan bidonville Douar Doum[59] shows that even environments that arise without formal planning have their own culturally rooted spatial rationality. Winding paths, multifunctional rooms, an emphasis on intimacy, and patios are not signs of chaos but of a different concept of order that works with situational orientation, flexible time, and collective living.

Colonial urban planners often interpreted this cultural structure as disorganization because it was based on the European ideal of linear, transparent, and functionally divided space. However, Pétonnet shows that feelings of overcrowding or "disorder" do not arise from density or poverty but from the disruption of cultural boundaries and intimacy. Europeans were

[54] I am not mentioning Moroccan cities here by chance. Part of my broader research focuses on French colonial urbanism and its influence on Moroccan cities, and I am also interested in so-called Arab urbanism, whose manifestations I observe in Moroccan cities.

[55] Dethier, "Evolution of Concept of Housing," 215 and 221.

[56] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 201.

[57] See Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control."

[58] *Ibid*., 5, 7.

[59] See Pétonnet. "Espace, distance et dimension."

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not faced with an absence of order but with a different type of order: one that their own epistemic framework was unable to recognize.

This contradiction confirms that colonial urbanism was not merely a technical project but a clash between two different spatial ontologies. European rationality, presented as a universal norm, delegitimized culturally specific forms of organizing life. It is precisely this dynamic—the suppression of alternative spatial orders in the name of a single "rational" model—that reappears in contemporary smart surveillance technologies, where algorithmic systems once again construct a narrow norm of urban order through data classifications and predictions.

Critical Debates on Smart Cities and Algorithmic Governmentality

The current debate on smart cities and algorithmic governance provides a framework for grasping more precisely how the philosophical logic of "order" translates into contemporary urban management technologies. A fundamental starting point is the extensive tradition of critical security studies, which shows that modern Western political rationality prioritizes security over freedom. Neocleous, for example, shows that classical liberalism systematically subsumed freedom under the logic of security and that the so-called "liberal balance" between freedom and security never existed; security was "always the real political trump card."[60] This genealogy of security is relevant because the same logic of "order/security" continues in today's smart cities, now institutionalized through data surveillance infrastructures and algorithmic prediction.

A similar trajectory is also described in critical texts on smart cities, which emphasize that the digitization of cities leads to the emergence of "data landscapes" in which the lives of residents become a constant flow of "lively data"[61] and are continually subjected to prediction and classification. As Rob Kitchin points out, smart city infrastructures produce "vast deluges of real-time, fine-grained and actionable data" about city processes and residents, making the population "continuously measurable, predictable, and correctable."[62] This shift is not only technological but epistemological: algorithms establish a new configuration of truth where power operates from within opaque, hidden processes,[63] and their decisions acquire the status of

[60] Neocleous, "Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance," 144–145.

[61] See Lupton, *Quantified Self*, 42-45.

[62] Kitchin, "Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science," 8.

[63] See Frank Pasquale, *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms that Control Money and Information* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

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objectivity and rationality[64] even though their evaluations and classifications are political and value-laden.

In this context, the framework of algorithmic governmentality developed by Antoinette Rouvroy, Thomas Berns, and Liz Carey-Libbrecht[65] is fundamental. Algorithmic governance reduces subjects to "dividuals"[66]: data fragments that are sorted and used for predictive interventions even before the individual can act or reflect.

According to Richard Weiskopf and Hans Kause Hansen, this regime is characterized by three elements: 1) objectification, reducing subjects to data packages; 2) disconnection of human reflexivity from the categorization process; and 3) new modes of subjectivation that bypass the subject's autonomy and "nudge" them toward desired behavior.[67] These three elements form the core of closure of the space of ethics—an algorithmic environment that is incapable of addressing people as moral subjects, thereby closing off the space for ethical action.

From the perspective of the genealogy of urban order, algorithmic governmentality represents a digitized continuation of the same rationality that previously legitimized colonial urbanism and its disciplinary spaces. In Deleuzian terminology, there is a fundamental epistemic shift: from the "molds" that fixed the colonial city into clear grids to "modulation."[68] While the colonial planner sought to create a permanent mold of space, the smart city order "modulates" in real time: creating a self-forming system that constantly changes the parameters of control according to the movement of residents.[69] This regime definitively reduces subjects to "dividuals":[70] data fragments, samples, and codes (such as passwords) that replace the integrity of the person and enable predictive intervention even before the subject begins to act. Digital infrastructures thus fulfill Félix Guattari's vision of a city in which the movement of inhabitants is controlled by a central computer that, based on universal modulation, opens or denies access to urban functions.[71] Algorithmic systems today, like colonial administration, interpret social complexity as a domain of knowledge and immediately classify any deviation from the model of order as an anomaly requiring correction.

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[64] See Bernhard Rieder, "Big Data and the Paradox of Diversity," in *Digital Culture & Society*, 2 (2016).

[65] See Rouvroy, Berns, and Carey-Libbrecht, *Algorithmic Governmentality and Prospects of Emancipation*.

[66] See Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control."

[67] Weiskopf and Hansen, "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics," 497–498.

[68] Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 4.

[69] *Ibid*.

[70] *Ibid*., 5.

[71] *Ibid*., 7.

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The inclusion of these debates is also crucial to the relationship between smart city narratives and the atmospheres of security that Andrea Pavoni and Simone Tulumello criticize. In their genealogy of urban violence,[72] they show that modern security narratives create "atmospheres of fear" and produce an urban order that is a direct heir to colonial regimes of power and repression. Discourses of smart cities, which promise "cities without violence" through predictive security technologies, reproduce a logic in which violence is externalized and associated with certain groups of residents, while the real structural causes of inequalities and risks remain unaddressed. This criticism strongly intersects with the genealogical argument of my study: urban order is not neutral but a historically layered project that, from colonialism to algorithmic monitoring, understands urban dwellers as objects of risk and intervention.

Introducing these authors and concepts into the debate clarifies that smart city surveillance is not just a "new version of surveillance." Rather, it represents a new phase of rationality in which the ideal of order—from classical liberalism, to colonial urban rationality, to today's algorithmic performativity—is fully automated. Algorithmic governance does exactly what the genealogy of order expects: the world is to be governed according to a model of predictable patterns, and deviations are to be identified and corrected as quickly as possible. This continuity connects the philosophical concept of order to today's smart cities.

Integrating these debates clarifies that my contribution lies not in describing smart surveillance technologies per se but in showing how they extend a much older rationality of order—a point largely absent from existing smart city literature.

Smart Cities, Surveillance, and the Contemporary Logic of Order

The examples given in the previous section show that linking morality to references to "reason" and "order" has a long and problematic genealogy. Colonial logic worked with the opposition of order and chaos, rationality and irrationality, control and unpredictability. The contemporary smart city adopts this opposition in technological form. For digital surveillance to function, urban space must be measurable and stable; it must take the form of an environment that can be predicted and categorized. When urban structures are designed to accommodate technological needs, the same epistemic hierarchy that legitimized colonial interventions is reproduced: "order" is presented as morally unquestionable, while anything that deviates from it is seen as a problem to be corrected.

[72] See Pavoni and Tulumello, "What Is Urban Violence?"

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Domination in urban space is not a new phenomenon. What is new are the means: states that no longer have colonial territories, instead have technologies that allow them to control their own populations with unprecedented efficiency. Since the 1990s, image quality, camera sensitivity, and remote access capabilities have improved dramatically,[73] and the advent of artificial intelligence represents another fundamental leap forward.[74] Biometric and behavioral systems now operate in real time, categorizing bodies and behaviors and combining identification with instant analysis.

A particularly telling example is the Czech software Kinalisoft. The system identifies individuals by their gait with 99.2% accuracy, even when individuals try to change their walking style. A few steps are enough for a person to be recognized without any contact or sensors. The creator of the technology legitimizes its use by arguing that "we live in dangerous times"[75]: a classic framework that pits security against freedom and assumes that threats are omnipresent and require discipline.

A similar tension is evident in the case of Orléans, where the city council, in collaboration with Sensivic, wanted to install street microphones. It claimed that the devices only picked up "air vibrations." However, the court correctly stated that microphones connected to cameras "collect information relating to individuals" and, in the absence of legal support, banned the system. Deputy Mayor Montillot's response that the technology "saves lives" once again shows how easy it is to moralize about the technological expansion of state power.[76]

History shows where such technologies can lead. IBM identification systems played a key role in the Nazi classification of the population into categories designated for persecution.[77] The Czechoslovak communist secret police, in turn, created "pink lists" of homosexuals as a tool of social control.[78] If these regimes had had access to current algorithms, their ability to monitor,

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[73] See Levente Tóth, "The Evolution of Public Surveillance Systems in Europe," in *Magyar Rendészet*, 23 (2023).

[74] See Feldstein, *Global Expansion of AI Surveillance*.

[75] Jon Cartwright, "CCTV Software Identifies People by Their Walk," in *Horizon* (9 February 2016), <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/horizon-magazine/cctv-software-identifies-people-their-walk>.

[76] La Quadrature du Net, "Première victoire contre l'audiosurveillance algorithmique devant la justice" (17 July 2024), <https://www.laquadrature.net/2024/07/17/premiere-victoire-contre-laudiosurveillance-algorithmique-devant-la-justice>.

[77] See Edwin Black, *IBM and the Holocaust: The Strategic Alliance between Nazi Germany and America's Most Powerful Corporation* (Washington, DC: Dialog Press, 2012).

[78] See Dominika Chudárková, "Obraz lesbické zkušenosti v prózách českých autorek po roce 1989" (PhD Dissertation: Masaryk University, Czech Republic, 2011); Michal Pitoňák, "Sexuální orientace jako přehlížená proměnná: terminologická, metodologická a kontextuální úskalí v otázce měření sexuality v rámci „reprezentativních" šetření. Platí stále 4%?," in *Československá Psychologie*, 65 (2021).

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segregate, and eliminate "undesirable" groups would have been incomparably more effective. Warnings from the past cannot therefore be separated from the present: even democratic states can, in times of crisis or political shift, use technology in ways that exceed legal and moral limits.

This is confirmed by the broader context of "homeland security," where, as Pete Fussey and Jon Coaffee show, military-industrial structures, IT corporations, and police apparatuses are merging into a "surveillance-industrial complex."[79] Here, technologies are not neutral tools but carriers of a certain political ontology in which the city is understood as a problem of optimization and its inhabitants as sets of risk parameters. In this sense, the smart city fulfills Krivý's diagnosis: technologies are not mere infrastructure but a means of enforcing a certain kind of rationality[80]—one that requires the city to be legible, calculable, and disciplined.[81] This logic has concrete social implications. Surveillance has historically been applied unevenly, leading to targeted surveillance of certain groups and the retroactive production of statistical evidence that further legitimizes this inequality.[82] Artificial intelligence does not overcome these tendencies but reinforces them: algorithms adopt the racial and social biases contained in the training data.[83] It is therefore a technological extension of existing structures of inequality.

Surveillance also influences behavior itself: it leads to self-censorship, suppresses spontaneity, and normalizes the idea that public space is a permanent arena of evaluation.[84] As Maras shows, mass surveillance blurs the distinction between "us" and "them"—everyone becomes a potential suspect.[85] This changes the fundamental relationship between citizens and the state: mistrust is built into the infrastructure of everyday life.

This dynamic was particularly visible during the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, where the state deployed drones, QR codes, algorithmic video analysis, and a massive police presence, under the 2016 "major events" legal category. According to La Quadrature du Net,[86] this legislation opens

[79] See Ben Hayes, "The Surveillance-Industrial Complex," in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*.

[80] See Krivý, "Towards a Critique of Cybernetic Urbanism."

[81] See Wullf-Wathne, "Utopian Logics of 'Smart Stockholm'."

[82] Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*, 5.

[83] See Caya Carter, "Technoracism: The Inherent Racism Within AI and How It Affects People of Color" (PhD Dissetation: Elizabeth City State University, USA, 2023); Anupam Chander, "The Racist Algorithm?," in *Michigan Law Review*, 115 (2017), 1023; Nelson Colón Vargas, "Exploiting the Margin: How Capitalism Fuels AI at the Expense of Minoritized Groups," in *AI and Ethics*, 5 (2025).

[84] See Lysova, "Video Surveillance and Public Space."

[85] See Maras, "Social Consequences of a Mass Surveillance Measure."

[86] La Quadrature du Net, "Jeux olympiques: Fichage de masse et discrimination politique (30 July 2024), <https://www.laquadrature.net/2024/07/30/jeux-olympiques-fichage-de-masse-et-discrimination-politique>.

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the door to the normalization of exceptional measures and tests the limits of the rule of law. At a time of growing authoritarian and populist tendencies, the risk of abuse of these legal and technological possibilities is considerable.

In summary, the genealogy of order, colonialism, and contemporary technological surveillance shows remarkable continuity. Digital infrastructures are not value-neutral innovations; they embody a certain form of power that has historically legitimized interventions in spaces labeled as "chaotic" or "problematic." Today's smart city is thus not merely a technical project but a continuation of long-term efforts to make urban life predictable, controllable, and normatively structured—often at the expense of democratic ambiguity.

Discussion

The genealogy presented in this article shows the continuity between the metaphysical ideal of order, colonial urban planning practices, and contemporary smart city surveillance regimes. First, the motif of order is understood in Western tradition as ontologically and morally superior to chaos: from the medieval *esse est ordo* to modern rationalism. This framework also structured colonialism, in which European elites interpreted cities in North Africa as "chaotic" and therefore in need of correction. However, as it was shown, these environments had their own culturally specific forms of order that the colonial gaze failed to read.

Second, today's smart city infrastructure does not disrupt this logic but rather translates it into digital form. Smart cities create data-saturated environments in which residents are continuously categorized as model deviations or risks. Algorithmic governmentality thus narrows the space for ethics and replaces reflection with predictive intervention. What was a material reorganization of the street in colonial urbanism is now a digital reorganization of subjects.

Third, the security discourse that legitimizes these technologies corresponds to Neocleous's critique of the liberal idea of "balancing" security and freedom: security is always primary. Current examples as gait recognition, audiosurveillance in Orléans, and the legal regime of "major events" show how easily technological expansion can be morally justified.

Fourth, like colonialism, smart city surveillance is selective. The uneven focus on certain groups, historically evident from colonial segregation to IBM identification systems or the StB's "pink lists," is today reproduced by algorithms trained on data burdened with social and racial biases. Thus, "order" becomes not only a technical norm but also a tool of social categorization.

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Finally, mass surveillance transforms the urban experience itself: it leads to self-censorship, erodes trust, and turns everyone into a potential suspect. Combined with the techno-security paradigm, this creates a city of optimization rather than plurality.

This analysis shows that what is at stake is not only the scope of technology but the very form of urban life: whether it will be based on controllability or on the acceptance of ambiguity and unpredictability as legitimate elements of urbanity.

Conclusion

The article showed that current smart city surveillance regimes cannot be understood in isolation from the long history of Western thinking about order. From metaphysical ideas about cosmic order, to the theological claim *esse est ordo*, to modernist projects of colonial urbanism, the same motif recurs: to be rational means to be orderly, predictable, and controllable. In colonial cities, this ideal was transformed into a spatial practice that privileged rectangular grids, transparency, and segregation, while obscuring and delegitimizing other forms of order existing in medinas, kasbahs, and bidonvilles.[87]

Contemporary smart cities do not disrupt this logic but rather intensify it through digital infrastructures. Algorithmic governmentality translates the ideal of order into the language of data, models, and predictions: residents become dividuals whose actions are continuously classified and corrected.[88] The security discourse that legitimizes these technologies builds on a long tradition of prioritizing security over freedom[89] and exploits historical and current fears to extend surveillance into ever new areas—from "the fight against terrorism" to "major events" like the Olympic Games.

The genealogical perspective, therefore, shifts the debate on smart cities beyond the classic "freedom versus security" dilemma. It shows that what is at stake is not only the degree of surveillance but also the very understanding of the city and its inhabitants: whether the city is primarily a space of pluralistic and unpredictable life or an object of optimization in which only what is known and controllable in advance has a place. The greatest risk of the current techno-security rationality is not only the misuse

[87] See Said, *Orientalism*; Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*; Pétonnet, "Espace, distance et dimension"; Dethier, "Evolution of Concepts of Housing, Urbanism, and Country Planning."

[88] See Rouvroy, Berns, and Carey-Libbrecht, *Algorithmic Governmentality and Prospects of Emancipation*; Weiskopf and Hansen, "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics."

[89] See Neocleous, "Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance."

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of specific technologies but also the gradual normalization of an ontology in which anything that deviates from models of order is perceived as a problem to be prevented.

The text does not offer a simple "counter-recipe" but suggests several directions for further reflection. On the one hand, it is necessary to systematically highlight and take seriously alternative spatial rationalities that are not based on transparency and prediction—as shown, for example, by anthropological work on Douar Doum.[90] Furthermore, it is necessary to develop critical analyses of the specific technical and legal regimes that enable smart city infrastructures and assess them not only according to narrow security criteria but also with regard to how they affect the possibility of political dissent and urban otherness. Finally, it is important to consider forms of urban and technological practice that do not repeat the colonizing gesture of "bringing order" but rather allow for a certain degree of ambiguity and unpredictability as constitutive parts of the city.

If the city is to remain a place where new forms of life, politics, and social relations can emerge, we must question the assumption that a "good city" must above all be perfectly organized. However, this genealogy reveals the flip side of the problem: a specific form of the "tragedy of the commons" in urban space. Surveillance and technological structuring of order are not just manifestations of an abstract will to power; they often arise as a legitimate, albeit problematic, response to the abuse of urban freedom by "bad actors."

This is where a key paradox arises: in response to this abuse, urban design "tenses up" and, through its protective tendencies, begins to drastically restrict the movement and spontaneity of all its inhabitants. The result is a city that is easy to control and manage, but which becomes internally rigid. The real challenge for future "smart cities" is therefore not to optimize surveillance technology but to strike a balance between the necessary degree of order and the constitutive unpredictability of urban life.

However, this need for reevaluation opens the way to a deeper conceptual shift: from the logic of control to the paradigm of caring for possibility (*soin du possible*). Contemporary planning, dominated by "immune rationality,"[91] strives to extend immunity to infinity and attempts to isolate the city from risk, uncertainty, and otherness. However, if the city is to be politically and aesthetically alive again, it must be de-immunized: it must learn to accept vulnerability and difference not as a threat but as a fundamental condition of communal life.

[90] See Pétonnet, "Espace, distance et dimension."

[91] See Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären III. Schäume* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

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Future directions of research, therefore, suggest abandoning technocratic efforts for purity and unity in favor of the aesthetics of relationality and care understood as the art of presence. Following ontological theory of not-yet,[92] anarchist theory of place,[93] and the ethics of care,[94] planning can be rethought not as the enforcement of closed visions but as the role of a playful suggestor who cultivates intervals for unpredictable forms of being. The future of urban life thus does not depend on the transformation of protection into total control but on the courage to transform planning into an open framework of hope, where care becomes a condition of freedom.

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[94] See Jean-Philippe Pierron, "Ce que l'architecture fait au soin et inversement," in *Rhizome*, 84 (2023); Raphaël Boscarato, "Architecture thérapeutique : Prendre soin plutôt que soigner" (Master's Thesis: École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland, 2022).

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