



## Book Reviews 1: Surveillance and Theory

Lyon, David (ed.) (2006) *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond*. Devon, UK: Willan Publishing.

351pp, paperback. \$45.00(US), £26.50 (UK); ISBN-10: 184392191X, ISBN-13: 978-1843921912

Michael Zimmer<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2007, about twenty emerging scholars in surveillance studies gathered at Queen's University to participate in the first (of hopefully many) "Surveillance Summer Seminars" hosted by David Lyon and the Surveillance Project. Coming from across the globe, the participants exhibited a variety of academic backgrounds and interests: social scientists studying CCTV, consumer surveillance, and social networking websites, criminologists interested in modern prison design and practices, historians uncovering the origins and effects of pre-electronic surveillance technologies, and philosophers grappling with theories of privacy, subjectivity, and liberty, to list just a few. Over the course of the week, it became clear that most researchers felt it necessary to derive their own lexicon to help describe the surveillance phenomenon under examination: variants of the blanket term surveillance included lateral-surveillance, counter-surveillance, sousveillance, equivalence, dataveillance, and netaveillance. Similar reconfigurations were made of the key surveillance concept of the panopticon, including post-panopticon, super-panopticon, synopticon, and even the non-opticon.

The need to create various portmanteaus and neologisms stems not from some egoistic desire to be stake claim to new theoretical territory or to stand out in a crowd of surveillance scholars. Rather, such atypical terminology emerges from the realization that many of the foundational concepts in surveillance studies are insufficient in explaining the current state of our surveillance society, replete with a dizzying and constantly expanding array of powerful information and communication technologies. Can we expect the term surveillance, coined at the dawn of the nineteenth-century and meaning "to watch over," to adequately describe emerging scenarios where peers are watching each other in a much more symmetric fashion, as in the rise of social networks sites? Or, is the notion of the panopticon, characterized by subjects who persistently and consciously feel themselves under the watchful gaze of a centralized authority, useful when surveillance increasingly is hidden and dispersed among various private interests, such as in the tracking of commercial or Web-based activities.

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Recognizing such limitations in many of the canonical theories and concepts within surveillance studies is the organizing principle in *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond*. Edited by David Lyon, himself a canonical figure in the discipline of surveillance studies, *Theorizing Surveillance* is a collection of papers stemming from a multi-disciplinary, international workshop by the same name. The volume presents what Lyon describes as “the ongoing quest for surveillance theory” (p. 12), and argues that while surveillance theory cannot ignore its core principles, such as the metaphor of the panopticon, “it can surely move beyond it” (p. 12). Exhibiting an impressive depth and breadth of analysis, the volume provides a valuable assessment of and reflection on the core theories driving surveillance studies.

Perhaps the most provocative contribution is, appropriately, the opening chapter, “Tear Down the Walls: On Demolishing the Panopticon,” by Kevin Haggerty, a sociologist at the University of Alberta. Haggerty decries what he describes as the oppressiveness of the Foucauldian panopticon in surveillance studies, where “the panopticon now stands for surveillance itself” (p. 26). By examining the purposes, hierarchies, targets, agents, and dynamics of our modern surveillance assemblage, he concludes that the panopticon, as an analytical tool, “might no longer be well suited for understanding the complexity and totality of contemporary surveillance dynamics” (p. 38). While hesitant to try to replace the metaphor of the panopticon with some other – and potentially equally totalizing – theory of surveillance, Haggerty does acknowledge emerging perspectives on surveillance that might provide new insights beyond the panopticon, including the concepts of hypercontrol, social sorting, models of assemblage, and Foucault’s own theory of governmentality. Theorizing about surveillance through these alternative conceptualizations, Haggerty concludes, “offers a path forward for explaining many of the silences and omissions of the panoptic model” (p. 42).

The remaining contributions, by and large, support Haggerty’s criticism of the over-reliance on the panopticon, and help lay the groundwork to fulfill his (as well as Lyons’) hope that surveillance theory can find new frameworks beyond this Foucauldian paradigm. Many authors successfully bring surveillance studies into conversation with other disciplines to offer new insights, such as Didier Bigo’s use of critical security studies to expose how a post-September 11 “governmentality of unease” (p. 47) has led to a normalization of the widespread surveillance and profiling of individuals. Similarly, the discipline of science and technology studies is brought into conversation with surveillance studies by Lynsey Dubbeld’s contribution, revealing how our thinking about surveillance must move beyond a linear panoptic model (the watchers view, and effect, the watched) to embrace the notion that the implications of surveillance “are the result of the involvement (and lack of involvement) of a heterogeneous set of actors, both human and inhuman, in socio-technical practices” (p. 197). Stephen Graham continues this search for new and diverse theories outside the traditional panoptic paradigm, relying on military studies to try to “cut across the diverse theoretical, scalar and epistemological traditions of the many silo-like disciplines” (p. 248). By focusing on the military origins and goals of many surveillance technologies, Graham argues, we can better expose and understand the global functioning of power whose target is large-scale geographies and populations, superceding the metaphors of individual control provided by Benthamite/Foucauldian prison. Other contributions push surveillance studies further beyond the panoptic paradigm to include rhizomatic theory (William Bogard), moral governance (Hier, Walby

and Greenberg), and the politics of resistance (Kirstie Ball), and the collection benefits further from valuable insights by surveillance scholars such as Greg Elmer, Oscar Gandy, among others.

While *Theorizing Surveillance* is situated as a reaction to the limitations of panoptic theory to help explain “the growth of contemporary surveillance” (p. 18), discussion of the newest forms of Internet and Web-based surveillance remain mostly unaddressed. While Hille Koskela provides a valuable interrogation of surveillance theory in light of the emergence of Web cameras, the authors are relatively silent with regard to how the rise of other online surveillance infrastructures impact surveillance studies. Clearly, the rise of peer-to-peer surveillance via social networking websites, the widespread surveillance of online activities via Web cookies, the publication and sharing of user-generated photos (of themselves and others), and the sophistication of online facial recognition and other personal search algorithms, just to name a few, reveal additional gaps in the panoptic metaphor and other existing surveillance theories. Granted this volume represents papers from 2005, before many of these cutting-edge Internet technologies took hold, the rising popularity and ubiquity of these new technologies suggest *Theorizing Surveillance* will soon need updating – perhaps a task best undertaken by the young scholars who gather at future Surveillance Studies Seminars.

In short, *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond* is a valuable contribution to the growing surveillance studies discipline. It is suitable for advanced undergraduate and graduate level courses addressing our contemporary surveillance society from sociological, philosophical, or cultural perspectives.

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**Monahan, Torin (ed.) (2006) *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*. London: Routledge**

342 pp, paperback; \$33.95 (US), £19.99 (UK); ISBN-10: 0415953936, ISBN-13: 978-0415953931

**Chiara Fonio<sup>2</sup>**

If any proof were needed that surveillance and security issues cannot be addressed in terms of trade-offs, the evidence is in this book edited by T. Monahan. In the introduction, the editor emphasizes the importance of asking the right questions about surveillance and security systems. Indeed, this collection makes it clear that it is reductive to analyze the issues raised by surveillance systems without taking into account either the logics behind surveillance or the complex social relationships produced by new forms of technology.

*Surveillance and Security* is primarily devoted to highlighting the social changes brought about by new surveillance systems, mostly in the United States. In particular, the two main sections revolve around developments in neoliberal states and the emergence of new forms of insecurity. One of the central tendencies detailed in the volume concerns

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how security measures have become more individualized, and in the process how protection has also shifted towards more private domains. The progressive retreat of the state from social and educational programs has therefore contributed to the increasing use of surveillance tools in assorted domains, and includes the general embrace of CCTV and biometrics devices. Many of these technologies are deployed with minimal consideration of their potential negative social impacts. The contributors to this book draw attention to the “individualist” approach towards security in, for example, the growth of the child tracking industry (i.e. in the contribution by Cindi Katz) or in measures designed to prevent or address any number of contemporary moral panics, such as identity theft (i.e. in the contribution by Simon A. Cole and Henry N. Pontell). In examining such phenomena the authors address both the deficiencies of the state, as well as the recurrent absence of state oversight of potentially problematic surveillance systems.

The contributors devote considerable space to analyzing meaningful changes in social relationships that are connected to the proliferation of surveillance technology in different spheres of life. At the most general level this includes how a general culture of suspicion is fostered, often restricting the life chances of already marginalized groups. More concretely, the authors detail how new surveillance regimes produce more transparent identities and new “objects” of social scrutiny, such as testing pregnant women for drug use without their knowledge or the corporate practice of discriminating among consumers based on their consumption profiles.

Many readers will be interested in how the contributors turn attention to issues that are often left out of intellectual discussions of security or surveillance. For example the contribution by Laura Huey, Kevin Walby and Aaron Doyle emphasizes how, especially in urban environments, some social movements have attempt to document police agencies abuses through video surveillance, raising fresh questions about how surveillance might be used as a tool of resistance. Such an orientation raises different questions about the gaze and counter gazes. Another central concern in the book that is often at the margins of surveillance studies is the issue of mobility. In a time characterized by widespread globalization, and the countervailing pressures post-9/11 to limit mobility, it is interesting to contemplate the laws that were introduced in both in the United States and in Europe which aimed to increase the security of borders through the use of high technology systems. The result has been that biometrics and the extensive use of databases is now a common trend, particularly in non-places such as airports. The globalized network of surveillance and security devices simultaneously produces both rigid and flexible knots of regulation; making it possible to pass through borders only when individuals bear the “right” identity. Such technologized practices raise question about the degree to which the right to “move” and travel is now tied to ascribed characteristics (such as ethnicity) and social status. Such technologies tend to regulate and immobilize marginalized classes while enhancing the freedom and mobility of privileged groups.

While Monahan and the contributors do not claim that surveillance technologies are inherently bad or good, they do raise ethical and political issues about the use of information and communication technologies. If deployed in a responsible manner sensitive to issues of power and exclusion, these technologies appear less problematic. *Surveillance and Security* provides a number of useful and stimulating insights while going beyond the dichotomy of security *versus* surveillance by critically questioning the

efficacy of many surveillance tools and attending to the social impacts and unintended effects of assorted forms of surveillance.

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Poster, Mark. (2006) *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

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Jill A. Fisher<sup>3</sup>

In his most recent book, Mark Poster theorizes the cultural significance of the transmission of information through new media, particularly the internet. In his view, the ubiquity of digital technologies and digitized information has altered the relations between humans and machines and among humans situated in diverse global locations. The importance of these changes for Poster is in their impact upon the constitution of the self and subjectivity. Examining the human-machine interface, Poster claims that new media technologies have refigured subject and object, creating what he calls “humachines” (36).

The book develops multiple concepts of subjectivity and identity: “media unconscious” (36), “digital subjects” (43), “netizens” (78), and “digital unconscious” (92) to name a few. Poster mobilizes each to explain new subjectivities in diverse realms of everyday life, culture, and politics, but unfortunately, he never explores the differences in these terms. Instead, he examines diverse examples to underscore the multiple ways in which identity and subjectivity can be seen as shifting within an era of “humachines,” such as in identity theft, teletubbies, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, and Philip K. Dick’s novel *Ubik*, to name just a few. One such example in the book is Poster’s focus on the salience of postcolonial theory given today’s media technologies. He argues that these new technologies have a deterritorialized nature that minimize the degree of control that nation-states and corporations can exert over the content and flow of information (35). As a result, he claims,

The digital subject, then, is located automatically in the *global space* of the network. Colonizer and colonized subject positions are far less exigent here than in other media frameworks... Digital subjects are solicited not to stabilize, centralize, or unify the territorial identity that they were given by birth or social position, but to invent and construct themselves in relations with others. In the digital medium, subject formation becomes a task inherent in cultural exchange. And it does so at a planetary level. (42-43, original italics)

Whether or not one is convinced by Poster’s claim that power relations are transformed between former colonizers and colonized by new media technologies (and I am not), his

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analysis points to the importance of examining the extent to which identities and subjectivities can be transformed by access to global networks of information.

Given the heterogeneity of the cultural standpoints of those accessing information, Poster also points to the kinds of *miscommunication* or misunderstanding that are also made possible by the globalization of new media. Specifically, Poster examines the image of Sesame Street's character "Bert" on posters depicting Osama bin Laden during protests in Bangladesh of the U.S. bombings of Afghanistan in October 2001. Poster claims that regardless of the intentionality that went into Bert appearing with bin Laden on those posters, the reaction of the U.S. press to the image indicates the cultural meanings and interpretations that accompany the global flow of information as mediated by the Internet. Poster states,

Transmission of images, texts, and sounds may now in the digital domain, be both noiseless *and* incoherent. Interpretive practices must accordingly recalibrate themselves to the conditions of planetary culture. Since cultural objects undergo continuous, unlimited alterations, appropriations and reappropriations enabled and encouraged by networked computing, research about any cultural object in cyberspace entails an infinite series of interpretive acts. (24, original italics)

Although his explicit interest is in theorizing new subjectivities and identities, Poster's project seems actually to be about reconfiguring social theory to place new media technologies at the center of inquiry. This larger project manifests in both the organization and tone of the book. Each chapter is set up not only to discuss another example of shifts in identities through the globalization of information and digital technologies, but also to illustrate the extent to which other major theorists have been "ignorant" or have displayed "inadequate" or "incomplete" understandings of the role of the media and new technologies. In the course of the book, Poster mobilizes and criticizes Homi Bhaba, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze, Etienne Balibar, Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, François Lyotard, Henri Lefebvre, and Michel de Certeau. Even Steven Spielberg is described as not having "an adequate vision of new citizenship" in his film *Amistad* (73).

While the effect of Poster's mode of critical engagement could have been productive in building a novel, coherent approach to theorizing new media technologies, he rarely offers an alternative model. The book as a whole could have achieved this, but because the chapters are largely a string of unrelated essays, the work of sifting through all the critiques and all the concepts is left to the reader. Given the limitations of this work, it is probably ideally suited to be read and used in fragments based on the interests of the reader or the themes of an academic course. Each chapter can provide important literature review and critique that can be valuable to assessing the state of a field. As for the surveillance studies scholar, this book offers little mention of surveillance technologies or the capabilities of digital technologies to surveil. (There are only about four passages in the book that use the term surveillance). While discussion of digital information might be informative for surveillance studies, this book fails to theorize the politics and power of these new information and technology regimes.