



## Book Review

Franko Aas, Katja, Helene Oppen Gudnhus and Heidi Mork Lomell 2008. *Technologies of Insecurity: The Surveillance of Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge-Cavendish. 279 pp, Hardcover, \$140 (US). ISBN 978-0-415-46455-0.

### Adam Molnar

Phd Candidate, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria, Canada, <mailto:apm@uvic.ca>

Similar to Zygmunt Bauman's (1995) characterization of postmodernism as "modernism coming to terms with its limitations," Surveillance Studies scholars are dealing with the vast range of multi-disciplinary interventions of previous decades. However, particularly in light of emerging empirical complexities, coming to terms with the enclosures of conceptual and methodological specters of the past is no simple task. Impressively, *Technologies of InSecurity: the surveillance of everyday life* confronts both the most pressing theoretical and conceptual issues raised by European criminologists and sociologists in the surveillance studies arena, and also offers a detailed account of cutting-edge empirical cases characterizing the contemporary horizons of surveillance practice and social control.

*Technologies of InSecurity: the surveillance of everyday life* presents a multi-disciplinary approach that "aims to examine how forms of contemporary (in)security are translated into issues of surveillance and social control, or vice versa" (2). The authors have pulled together an extraordinary collection of chapters that foreground an empirical focus on the "nexus between various uses of surveillant technologies and (in)security" (2). The sharp empirical focus brings to light a series of timely themes in surveillance and security: the deep normative tension between security and human rights, the striving for security and inevitable co-production of (in)securities and forms of distrust, as well as the securitization of mundane objects and common activities that leads to the co-productive deployment of a complex (and sometimes ontologically and normatively contradictory) field of domination.

Building on the critical connection between criminology and security studies, the book unravels the more general relational themes of technology, crime, fear, as well as broader cultural and political institutions that *enable* concrete practices of the securitization and surveillance of everyday life. On this basis, the collection is structured around five main categories: (in)security and terror, (in)secure spaces, (in)secure visibilities, (in)secure virtualities and (in)secure rights. Each section, (indeed, even each chapter) is worthy of its own explanation. Considered as a whole however, a focus on the application of surveillance technologies in localized, or "place-based" contexts reveals some crucial insights about how broader historical, institutional, agential, cultural and structural variables are implicated in the emergence of everyday surveillance practices.

For instance, David Neyland's chapter on "mundane terror and the threat of everyday objects" examines the role of objects in their relational contexts of governance, institutional accountability, and the emergence of surveillance practices. Neyland presents a coherent and careful exploration of the ontologically complex and contingent relationships involved in individual and organizational practices of security and surveillance by drawing together an ethnomethodological approach that utilizes ideas from STS with a Foucauldian-inspired emphasis on governance. It is precisely here that the text transcends its

Molnar, Adam. 2009. Review of Franko Aas, Oppen Gudnhus and Mork Lomell's *Technologies of Insecurity*, *Surveillance & Society*, 6(3): 334-336.

<http://www.surveillance-and-society.org> | ISSN: 1477-7487

© The author(s). 2009 | Licensed to the Surveillance Studies Network under a [Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives license](#).

primary function as a communicative expression of “surveillance practices”: Neyland’s contribution (as well as others in the text) offers highly relevant theoretical and methodological examples for surveillance researchers charting new approaches for their own theoretical and analytical investigations.

Similarly, Gavin Smith’s chapter presents perhaps the most in-depth and nuanced contribution on CCTV operational contexts since the foundational contributions of Norris and Armstrong. Lurking in the background of Smith’s analysis is a meta-theoretical underpinning that disrupts the trend toward instrumentalism in some previous contributions on CCTV. The texts’ meta-theoretical coherence is a welcome offering not simply for this collection alone, but as an exemplar to pique the interest of those in the wider field of surveillance studies.

While the theoretical and methodological terrain of surveillance studies is clearly evolving in this text, the empirical cases rooted in the reality of surveillance practices of everyday life stand on the cutting edge of the surveillance studies field. Emergent areas of substantive interest include David Lyon at his critical best on the historical and colonial implications of identity documentation; Francisco Klauser’s dissection of emerging security and surveillance trends in the context of the 2006 FIFA World Cup mega-event; Mike Nellis’ exploration of the development of satellite tracking of criminal offenders; as well as Benjamin Goold’s provisional theoretical exploration of the reflexive processes associated with surveillance and their co-production with the dissolution of institutional trust.

The many substantive contributions of the book illustrate the strongly historical, spatial and ontological character of security and surveillance configurations. As an expression of the limits of contemporary practices of security and surveillance, the volume reveals conditions where contemporary policies and technologies of security and surveillance are produced. At the same time, the contributions detail how this very production triggers a new set of conditions that simultaneously produce unintended and unforeseen insecurities. On this basis, the collection as a whole effectively explains how the organizational aims of technologies of security and surveillance are commonly and invariably linked with the underlying purposes and rationale for their deployment.

Edited volumes attempting to present an empirically driven set of chapters that focus on spatially and ontologically diverse technologies often face serious difficulties in maintaining internal coherence. This is not so for the *Technologies of (In)Security*. The editors have gracefully melded cutting edge theoretical insight with close attention to the concrete and the local. The range of technologies under discussion – their varied institutional and operational settings, bound by different motivations and interests – highlight the diverse cultural milieus and divergent meanings underpinning the full complexity of the “surveillance of everyday life.” Perhaps most importantly, however, the volume reveals how concrete and “open” social systems are much more complex than previously accounted for by many existing surveillance studies theories and explanations.

The insights contained in this collection point to a renewed surveillance studies architectonic that is theoretically cautious, conceptually reflexive and empirically incisive. The transdisciplinary flight of surveillance studies has been usefully augmented with this collection. *Technologies of (In)Security* slices a middle way between forms of reductive technological determinism and the misplaced essentialism of surveillance practices by making a case for the contingent articulations of surveillance technologies, *particularly* their embedded confluence with actors, institutions and wider social and political contexts. On this basis, the text should be central reading for those engaging in theoretical and empirical work in surveillance studies. For those searching for explicit engagements with privacy, militarism, or empirical cases of security and surveillance outside of the global-north, this book should be considered as supplementary, though still relevant. More generally however, the text is an attestation that there is much to be garnered from surveillance studies approaches that build upon the complexity of the concrete to transcend common theoretical and paradigmatic boundaries. It is for this reason that *Technologies of (In)security* will no doubt find its place as an influential collection in the porous and shifting field of Surveillance Studies.

## References

Bauman, Z. (1995). *Life in Fragments*, Oxford: Blackwell.