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Article | Are Schools Panoptic?

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Abstract

Schools are often understood by social researchers as panoptic spaces, where power is exercised through constant surveillance and monitoring. In this paper, I use Foucault's notorious account of the Panopticon as a point of departure for a detailed empirical investigation of the specificities of surveillance in schools. Drawing on ethnographic data from fieldwork in a primary school, I argue that how surveillance actually operated in this context diverged from the panoptic programme in two crucial ways: surveillance was (i) discontinuous rather than total, and therefore open to resistance and evasion, and (ii) exercised through sound and hearing as much as through vision.

Introduction

Foucault's well-known writings on the Panopticon outline a model of power which can seem strikingly familiar to those who have spent time in modern schools. Consequently, it is commonplace for researchers refer to schools as panoptic, providing a wide range observations to support this claim (see for example Selwyn 2000; Perryman 2002 and 2006; Bushnell 2003; Blackford 2004; Azzarito 2009). In this paper, I will argue that, though tempting and easily made, the common parallel between schools and the Panoptic model of power risks overshadowing important features of how power operates in educational institutions.

There is a clear consensus amongst Foucault scholars that his account of the Panopticon is most useful if it is understood as an ideal model of power, rather than as a description of how specific institutions actually function (Gordon 1980; Philo 1989 and 1992; Driver 1985 and 1994; Elden 2001 and 2003; Hannah 2007; Murakami Wood 2007). This is not to suggest that the Foucaultian account of the Panopticon is of no use for empirical research; on the contrary, I hope to show that it provides a useful point of departure for such investigations. Following recent work in surveillance studies (Lyon 2006; Murakami Wood 2007), this paper presents an empirical study of school surveillance that goes 'beyond the Panopticon'. As such, the paper addresses recent calls for detailed empirical data on contemporary forms of surveillance (Walby 2005; Marx 2007), and also contributes to the growing number of Foucaultian studies of power and surveillance in educational institutions (Holt 2004; Hope 2005; Hayter et al. 2007; Hemming 2007; Metcalfe et al. 2008; Pike 2008).

Surveillance, power and the Panopticon

The word Panopticon literally means 'all-seeing', and was used by Jeremy Bentham, a utilitarian philosopher and social reformer writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as the name for an architectural design which he developed. The basic structure is now so infamous as to need little explanation: a ring of cells encircling a watch-tower, from within which a single supervisor is able to see inside each cell. The tower can be seen out of, but not into, by way of blinds, screens, or one way mirror glass. Bentham's intention was that, being unable to discern when they were being watched and when they

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were not, the inmates in the cells would begin to behave as though they were being watched all of the time, ultimately removing the need for any kind of external supervising presence whatsoever. In psychological terms, the Panopticon is a kind of conscience-building device whose design, for Foucault, typifies the functioning of disciplinary power in modern western societies: "It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being always able to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection" (Foucault 1977: 187). It can be argued that, in modern western societies at least, this kind of surveillance has become part of everyday life, inculcated and reinforced by social institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools.

However, the place of the Panopticon in the wider context of Foucault's work, and its central role in surveillance studies, have been subject to extensive discussion. Several authors have expressed concern and exasperation at the general tendency to take the (admittedly striking and memorable) discussion of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* as representative of Foucault's entire oeuvre. Human geographers Driver (1985 and 1994) and Philo (1989 and 1992; see also Sharp et al. 2000; Laurier and Philo 2004) have insisted that recourse to the Panopticon is no substitute for detailed empirical explorations of how disciplinary principles have been applied in specific contexts. Elden (2001 and 2003) has likewise argued that the subtler details of the various spatial analyses presented in *Discipline and Punish* and elsewhere are lost if, as Elden puts it, one sees Foucault through Bentham's eyes, reducing all of his descriptions of power to variations on the panoptic theme (see also Hannah 2007). Indeed, Foucault himself was highly resistant to such simplistic interpretations (see for example Foucault 1996a; Foucault 1996b). In surveillance studies, Haggerty (2006) has suggested that the Panopticon has, somewhat ironically, come to exert an oppressive influence over the field as the dominant model of surveillance (see also Yar 2003; Marks 2005; Hier et. al. 2006).

Elden (2003) argues, constructively in my view, that it may be helpful to look upon the Panopticon as the culmination of disciplinary power, rather than its most basic form. After all, it was pre-dated by a series of other architectural forms. Bentham borrowed the idea from his brother, who had been inspired by a visit to the Ecole Militaire, Paris, built during the 1750s and designed to ensure the complete visibility of its pupils (see Foucault 1977: 172 and Foucault 1996a). According to Markus (1993), the evolution of Bentham's plans, developed in 1787, can be traced from Pope Clement XI's *Silentium* women's prison of 1734-5, to the 1772 Maison de Force at Ghent, through the ideas of reformer John Howard and prison architect William Blackburn, and Cockburn and Steuart's (unsuccessful) 1782 plans for the Edinburgh Bridewell prison. Foucault himself makes reference to a number of similar examples of pre-existing disciplinary architecture, including the Ecole Militaire, Ledoux's Arc-et-Senans (Foucault 1977: 173) and Le Vau's menagerie at Versailles.

Thus in Foucault's hands, the Panopticon is re-thought as a generalised programme of power rather than an architectural system (Foucault 1996c; see also Gordon 1980; Ainley 1998; Murakami Wood 2007). It can be seen as the most perfect and complete codification of the principles of the disciplinary political anatomy, principles of which Bentham was certainly not the originator. Foucault appears to think that its importance lies in the principles underlying its architecture: "it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form" (Foucault 1977, 205); "the Panopticon was a utopia, a kind of pure form elaborated at the end of the 18th century, intended to supply the most convenient formula for the constant, immediate and total exercising of power" (Foucault 1996b: 257). A more efficient economy of punishment; coercion by means of observation rather than physical violence; the use of training and correction to produce docile, useful, bodies; the separation of individuals; the examination of individuals to produce knowledge of 'cases' – these disciplinary principles are all expressed in the Panopticon.

The Panopticon can therefore be understood as model of how, in the most perfect case, power might be exercised by surveillance. Its principles can be applied in any number of specific situations, built into both architectural designs and forms of social organisation. Such structures may adhere more or less closely to

the panoptic schema and, in operation, they may be more or less effective in realising the aims of that schema; for example, Foucault notes that "the whole history of the prison – its reality – consists precisely in its never having come near this model." (Foucault 1996b: 257) As Elden (2003) argues, the Panopticon itself is therefore less interesting than the more general programme of *panopticism*. In this context, it might be argued that Foucaultian empirical studies of specific disciplinary institutions – prisons, hospitals and, in the case of this paper, schools – will be most useful if they take the Panopticon as a point of departure, something to move beyond (see for example Yar 2003; Lyon 2006; Murakami Wood 2007), rather than a model with which to draw simple parallels. As Driver suggests, "It is a matter, then, of detailed research to ascertain how the disciplines and the wider process of 'normalisation' emerge and evolve, for what purposes and in whose interest." (1985: 435)

The doctoral research reported on here aimed to address these empirical concerns in the context of a Scottish primary school. In the remainder of this paper I present findings from this project to highlight how, in this particular school at least, surveillance operated in ways which went beyond the idealised model of the Panopticon. My intention is not to mount a destructive critique of the panoptic model of surveillance, but rather to contribute to an enlarged understanding of what panopticism might encompass.

Ethnographic research in a primary school

I began the project with the intention of looking in detail at how children and teachers use and produce space in a primary school. To this end, I carried out in-depth ethnographic fieldwork over seven months with a single class in a state-funded, suburban primary school in the Scottish central belt. The fieldwork period spanned the class's transition from the third to the fourth year of primary school (ages seven to nine). The class numbered 28 (which was average for the school), and had a roughly even gender balance and little racial diversity. Only one child was from a minority ethnic background. Economically, the school was not in an area of deprivation, but neither was it particularly affluent. Many parents worked in retail and the financial sector. The head teacher described the majority of families as being financially comfortable, but having limited education and cultural capital.

Data collection involved participant observation supplemented by some 'participatory' methods such as mapping and construction activities (see Gallagher 2009 for further details). Once I had begun the participant observation, it quickly became apparent to me that the social production of space in the school was inseparable from the wider issue of power, and its exercise in the everyday activities of the school. Taking Foucault's writings as a starting point, I began to pay close attention to how disciplinary strategies and tactics were deployed and developed in practice, at the smallest scale, looking at their forms and assessing what their limits might be. This theoretical focus was helpful in drawing my attention to how power was being exercised at the micro-scale. However, inevitably it also produced some 'blind spots'. As Thrift (2007) points out, Foucault is notably silent on various themes which have potential relevance to his work, including perception, materiality and relations with objects. With hindsight, my own study suffers from similar omissions. I was also not particularly attuned to axes of difference such as gender. I observed that different children were subject to different kinds of power, but beyond the predictable finding that a small number of (relatively confident, dominant, loud and aggressive) boys were the most common targets of surveillance, issues of identity and difference were not foregrounded in my analysis.

At the start of the field work, my initial impression was that the school was almost disturbingly panoptic, an 'empire of the gaze' (Welland 2001) ruled by visual surveillance. The following field notes is illustrative of this interpretation:

> At the end of playtime, when the bell goes, the children move towards the entrance and form the most straggly, incoherent and noisy of lines. Several times, I notice children drift off back into the playground area…Then the teacher arrives and stands on the step watching the class. She says nothing, but simply looks at them. Within moments, the

> entire class has fallen quiet and formed into a much more orderly line, with everyone standing still on the flagstones, keeping away from the grass…I'm astonished at how she can have such influence over them with so subtle an exertion of power.

The ways in which surveillance produced an embodied docility in the children were particularly striking. My field notes recall how teachers regularly targeted their surveillance at the children's posture and comportment. Instructions to sit up, for example, sometimes had an effect akin to pulling the strings of a set of puppets: the children's slumped bodies would immediately straighten, heads lifted and alert. Furthermore, I observed that the teachers did not have the monopoly on surveillance; everyone, myself included, seemed to become caught up both in being surveyed and in surveying. The method of participant observation is itself a form of surveillance, and my research quickly became embroiled in wider currents of power. Teachers sometimes told the children that I was looking to see how well they were behaving:

> "Mike's not here to hear reading groups and do my photocopying…" Miss Johnson begins.
> "Yes he is!" chirps Kate.
> "…he's here," Miss Johnson continues, "to see how well you're working and how quiet you can be."

At other times, teachers made comments which suggested that they saw me as an inspector who was there to judge their teaching, despite my assertions to the contrary. Some of the children also suggested, albeit it playfully, that perhaps I was a spy. All of this is strongly reminiscent of Foucault's interpretation of the Panopticon; he suggests that "This is perhaps the most diabolical aspect of the idea…this is a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise the power as well as those who are subjected to it." (Foucault 1996a: 233-234)

The children sometimes took up the role of surveyor, echoing Joseph Lancaster's monitorial school system:

> [Bobby] wanders off…towards the blue table, and stands just behind David, who doesn't notice. James Bond[1] sees Bobby and warns David, who immediately turns around, and asks, irately, "Were you copying me?"
> "Yeah, he was," chips in James Bond.
> "Nah," protests Bobby, "aave finished mah work."
> "Then why're you wandering around the room?" David retorts.
> Jason asks to borrow something from the red table. They consent with some reluctance. "Make sure James Bond doesn't use it, he has to ask first," says Alison. Kate says to Yo, "Go and watch him [i.e. Jason]," and Yo walks across to Jason's seat to keep an eye on him.

The children also made attempts to enrol me into these games of power:

> Today, Bobby and David are at each other's throats again. The ever-vigilant Yo calls me in to help. "Mike, Mike, problem, problem!" he shouts, pointing at the pair of them fighting. "Mike, did you not see that?" He seems exasperated at my lack of action. Feeling compelled to do something, even though the squabble doesn't seem to have got out of hand, I try ineffectually to separate them, telling them to keep away from each other.

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[1] At the end of my study, I allowed the children to choose pseudonyms for themselves if they wished. Several chose fictional or humourous names.

As these data suggest, surveillance was a common feature of everyday life in the school, involving regular attempts to exercise power by watching and looking, with the roles of both surveyor and surveyed available to all[2]. In these respects, the school bore more than a passing resemblance to the panoptic model of power. However, as the fieldwork progressed, it became clear – perhaps unsurprisingly – that these techniques of surveillance were much more messy, complicated and compromised than the idealised scheme of the Panopticon might suggest. In particular, surveillance in the school was:

- profoundly discontinuous, in contrast to the panoptic ideal of total and constant visibility; and
- often carried out by hearing as well as vision.

I will address each of these issues in detail below.

Discontinuous surveillance

In the Panopticon, self-surveillance is encouraged simply by preventing the inhabitants from knowing whether they are being watched or not. Bentham's principle was that power should be visible, so that the inmate is always aware of a watching presence, but unverifiable, so that "the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he always may be so." (Foucault 1977: 201) Ultimately, in the perfect case, self-surveillance should become so effective that the supervising presence is made redundant: "the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary" (Foucault 1977: 201)

It is worth noting that in Foucault's account, the juvenile penal colony of Mettray, held up by him as an exemplar of disciplinary power, operates on a different principle. There, without the architectural technology of the Panopticon, the effects of continuous surveillance required the maintenance of a continuous gaze. The monitors and foremen "had to live in close proximity to the inmates…they practically never left their side, observing them day and night; they constituted among them a network of permanent observation." (Foucault 1977: 295) The need for constant observation in this model feature betrays a certain lack of faith in the power of discipline to inculcate the self-surveillance of delinquents.

Returning to the Scottish primary school in which my research was based, maintaining a continuous gaze was impossible, even where teachers had support from classroom assistants (not to mention co-opted researchers). Moreover, in the hustle and bustle of the classroom, the children often temporarily forgot that might be being watched. In this context, surveillance involved regular reminders by the teachers of their presence:

> I notice David stand up and do a little dance, right in the middle of the lesson. He sees the teacher watching him, and turns to her, smiles and dances again, rather optimistically. She shakes her head and he stops and sits down.

Despite the effectiveness of the teacher's surveillance in this instance, this is still far from the panoptic scenario. The fact of the teacher's presence alone was evidently not sufficient to convince the David that he *might* be seen; she had to remind him that he *could* be seen.

Emphasising the totality of surveillance in the Panopticon, Foucault wrote that "in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen." (Foucault 1977: 202) In school, however, there were no venetian blinds, one-way windows or other such

[2] The focus of my fieldwork on the interactions between the children and their teachers meant that I did not directly observe the staff being subjected to surveillance. However, it was clear from comments made in the staff room and elsewhere that this was taking place (see also Perryman, 2002 and 2006; Bushnell, 2003; Hayter et al., 2007).

crafty technologies. This meant that surveillance was difficult to conceal, since the children could look around to see whether the teacher was watching them or not. In the following example, the gym teacher had separated all the children, distributing them across the gym hall:

> The children all dance about on the spot. James Bond spirals around doing an extremely novel kind of freestyle break/tap dance, which quickly turns into him falling onto the floor. Then when the teachers' backs are turned, he runs over to Tom Cruise, then back to his position, then, seeing the teachers still looking the other way, fancies his chances and does it again, all the while looking to see if he's being watched.

This practice of 'looking to see who's watching' was also common in the classroom. For example, Miss Johnson, the class's teacher in their fourth year, told me that "[David] knows I'm watching him at the moment, and he keeps looking over at me to see how he's doing." Later, however, it occurred to me that David might have other reasons for looking over at the teacher; I wondered how he would behave if he were to look over at her and see that she had *not* seen him. The children were certainly adept at identifying lapses in the teacher's surveillance, and at monitoring these lapses in a kind of reverse-surveillance:

> Miss Longford [a teacher] comes into the classroom to get something. The children chorus a good morning, much to Miss Longford's enjoyment…and then the teacher goes with her into the store cupboard to find what she wants. Immediately, the children start talking to each other and moving about, always glancing over to make sure the teacher can't see them.

This would suggest that, in contrast to the Panopticon, the teacher's gaze was discontinuous, often restricted within the classroom space. When observing the class, I regularly noticed incidents which escaped the teacher's understandably limited attention:

> Someone has snatched Alison's Pritt Stick and she storms across the room to retrieve it, without much immediate success. I see that she is getting really angry and upset, but the teacher doesn't notice as she's busy helping people stick their pictures together.
>
> I see David put his hand in his trousers and make a rude bulge at the front to Hannah as she walks towards him across the room. She frowns and walks past him.
>
> Bobby enters the room, returning from the toilet, and Jason makes a series of "you're an idiot" faces at him. He's able to avoid the teacher's gaze because he's facing the door, with the back of his head to the front of the classroom, where the teacher is standing.

The classroom tables provided another means of avoiding the teacher's gaze, acting as screens beneath which illicit activities could be carried out:

> There is a lot of movement and noise during this session, with people fetching, swapping and sharpening pencils. Jason crawls about under the tables, scuttling across the classroom floor just out of the teacher's sight…

Similarly, games which would have attracted the teacher's attention, had they been played in the open, were adapted by the children for use in the concealed realm below the tables:

> While the teacher explains what to do, I watch Alison and Spike engage in a 'leg fight'. Alison instigates this, and then checks Spike's shoes for mud before commencing. It seems to be like an arm wrestle, but with legs and feet instead of arms and hands.

In summary, the teacher's surveillance, as a discontinuous process, could not guarantee the docility of bodies in the classroom. Rather, docility was a matter of contention, something which was struggled for and against. The total effectiveness of surveillance was not secured in advance by the institutional structure; rather, surveillance was a strategy, only ever partially and temporarily effective, deployed regularly in an ongoing struggle. The children frequently found opportunities for evasion, resistance and recalcitrance. In short, the everyday reality of disciplinary surveillance, in this school at least, bore only a limited resemblance to the generalised programme of omnipresent institutional power described in *Discipline and Punish*.

The surveillance of sound

The Panopticon is generally understood as a mechanism where surveillance is carried out by sight. The inmates are placed in "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 1977: 201). Yet despite the ocularcentrism of the original blueprint, there is no reason to suppose that disciplinary surveillance must be limited to the realm of the visual; as Foucault himself acknowledges, "the procedures of power resorted to in modern societies are far too numerous and diverse and rich. It would be false to say that the principle of visibility has dominated the whole technology of power since the 19th century." (Foucault 1996a: 227) Indeed, Zbikowski (2002) uncovers a long history of sonic surveillance architectures, from communication orifices in Megalithic temples to Althanasius Kircher's seventeenth-century systems of aural surveillance for buildings. Moreover, though Foucault does not mention this feature, it seems that Bentham's original design for the Panopticon included metal listening tubes to augment the visual surveillance (Markus 1993; Johnston 2000). All of this suggests that surveillance might be usefully reconceptualised to encompass 'panauralism' as well as panopticism (see Gallagher, forthcoming).

One of the dominant themes throughout my fieldnotes is that of achieving quiet. Throughout a typical day, the injunction to be quiet appeared again and again: when the children arrived and came to sit on the carpet; when the teacher was explaining their lessons; when they sat at their tables working; when they lined up for gym; when they lined up after playtime; before they went to lunch; when they returned from lunch; at every juncture, the teacher tried to find ways of regulating the noise level in the classroom. In this context, it is not surprising that while surveillance usually relied upon sight in some capacity, it often also involved hearing. The following except from my field notes typifies this close connection between sight and sound:

> "I'm just looking at the class to see who's working quietly and who's not working quietly," says the teacher.

Similarly, on another occasion, the teacher said, "I would like to *see* complete silence" (emphasis added). This idea of 'looking to see who is being noisy' seems to suggest a surveillance which involves both looking and listening. Sometimes, the listening predominated, as suggested in the following quotes from teachers:

> "Come on, Jennifer, James Bond, you're not here to talk. James Bond, I can hear you over here."
> "The green and red groups can take three points each – all the noise is coming from the yellow and blue groups."

These instances suggest a slight twist on the Panoptic theme. Rather than being able to see that they might always be seen, the children were able to hear that they might always be heard. It could be argued that the school's regime of sonic surveillance in the classroom arguably conformed more closely to the panoptic model than visual surveillance, since the former was more easily concealed. The children could usually

determine when they were being watched by looking around to find out who could see them. Ascertaining whether they could be heard or not, by contrast, was less easy to achieve – how does one know if one is in the teacher's field of hearing? However, in practice, many children did not act as though they might be heard at any time. As in the examples of visual surveillance discussed above, the teachers had to repeatedly remind the children that they could be heard in order for their surveillance to be effective:

> The children commence their language work. Mrs. Oliver and the teacher take reading groups into the corners. Again, the teacher shushes and shoots remarks to individuals from the maths corner: "David, I can hear your voice over here. Matthew, Bobby…"

I was often taken aback by Miss Johnson's uncanny ability to identify and target disruptive individuals in this way, even when she was hearing readers, and when the children in question were sitting some distance behind her. It did seem, on occasion, that she was able to create a convincing illusion of omnipresence using these techniques. Yet if the classroom was not always a space of transparent, continuous visibility, neither was it one of complete audibility. Like her gaze, the teacher's aural surveillance was often rendered discontinuous by factors beyond her immediate control. Sometimes, she simply failed to hear illicit verbal exchanges:

> I…notice friction developing between David and Bobby. David gets out of his seat and goes over to Bobby and says something which sounds like, "If you touch ma wee brother, I'll kill yer. Y'ken [i.e. do you understand]?" Then he returns to his seat, having escaped the attention of Miss Johnson.

As emphasised earlier, some of the children did not hesitate to exploit such lapses in surveillance, using them as opportunities for conversation, play and other unsanctioned forms of behaviour. During lesson time, when the children were supposed to restrict their conversation only to the task at hand, I often overheard more informal discussions:

> I hear Kim say, "I'm gonnae get it cos my brother's got a DVD player. You got a Playstation One?" to Spike. I overhear Alison at another table talking about who Kim fancies, and James Bond talking about Spiderman again.

As with visual surveillance, sonic surveillance was often more discontinuous in lessons which permitted more fluid, autonomous uses of space by the children. This was especially the case in less formal lessons, such as art, as opposed to more regulated desk-based numeracy and literacy sessions:

> In the afternoon, we do art, making long boats. I hear the teacher say, "Primary 4, do not use this as an excuse to wander round the classroom like last week." Later, she says, "It's good to have a fun afternoon, but there's such a thing as taking it too far. It's not an excuse for a carry on." However, this is exactly how several of the children use the lesson. The increased movement and noise tolerated in art act as a kind of 'smokescreen' for deviance. The teacher's sporadic absorption with different groups of children around the room mean that she drops out of her usual surveillance role, being unable to see the whole class at any one time. The high ambient noise level means [that she] is unable to pinpoint individuals who are causing a disturbance, as she does when she is hearing readers. For example, while the teacher is helping with cutting and stapling at the blue table, behind her back Steven and Kate lie on their chairs with their heads dangling off, giggling away.

I also observed more subtle forms of subversion, in which children attempted to evade the

teachers' hearing by operating quietly, using what could be termed stealth tactics:

> I see Helen trying to communicate something to Nicole, who is waiting for the teacher to look at her work. She shouts at first, then realises this is perhaps imprudent and begins furiously making signs [with her hands].
>
> I notice the children at the green table talking and giggling to each other, but they do so very quietly, so the teacher doesn't notice. They are becoming increasingly adept at this kind of flying beneath the teacher's radar.
>
> I notice that Bobby is using his position at the writing table to turn around and chat to Jason, who is sitting just behind him at the green table. What interests me is how quietly they speak. I only notice because I see them – I am unable to hear their voices even though I'm only a couple of metres away.

In the latter instance, Bobby was eventually caught because the teacher saw him; he had managed to evade sonic surveillance, but not the disciplinary gaze. However, I occasionally observed children managing to evade both by chatting whilst doing a necessary classroom task:

> I see Yo, Steven and Kate sharpening pencils around the bin together. They chat to each other informally, without arguing or creating enough fuss to attract attention from the teacher.

Such evasive stealth tactics suggest that these children had developed a capacity for self-surveillance, monitoring their actions carefully to prevent detection. If this interpretation is correct, my data illustrate how subjects may actively shape their consciences, rather than simply internalising external rules, as Bentham – perhaps naively – had hoped. The classroom rule "do not talk unless your conversation pertains directly to the task at hand" seemed to have given rise to different internal rules to which the children were subjecting themselves, such as "I must make sure that the teacher can't hear what I am saying" and "I must chat to my friends only when I appear visibly to be carrying out the work I have been set". This resonates with Ransom's (1997) interpretation of Foucaultian power: "The fact that we are vehicles of disciplinary power reveals…not the omnipotence of power but its fragility. Such vehicles might go off the designated path in directions that frustrate the purpose for which they were originally developed" (Ransom, 1997, 36). It also suggests connections beyond the scope of this paper to Foucault's intriguing later work on governmentality and techniques of the self (see Foucault 1988, 1990, 1992 and 1994).

Surveillance in schools: beyond the Panopticon

In conclusion, I want to emphasise that my intention in this paper has not been to provide a critique of Foucault. As I hope I have made clear, his account of the Panopticon, as various commentators have been insisting for some time, is best understood as (a) only one part of a much wider body of work, and (b) an idealised theorisation of a programme of power. Despite its basis in historical documentary research, and its author's professed scepticism towards the notion of theory, *Discipline and Punish* is in my view a theoretical work (albeit an unconventional one), rather than an analysis of how specific institutions actually operated on an everyday basis. The book outlines a brilliant conception of disciplinary power, thereby providing a point of departure for detailed empirical research. I have shown in this paper how such research can go beyond the model of the Panopticon to examine how surveillance functions – and fails to function – in particular institutions.

In the Scottish primary school examined here, surveillance was widespread, common and carried out by both teachers and children. Yet it was also discontinuous, and its effects were limited and temporary.

These findings highlight the importance of attending to the limits of surveillance, its malfunctionings and blind spots, rather than assuming that technologies of surveillance will in general be effective.

One possible explanation for the discontinuity of surveillance in the school is that neither the teachers nor the children were fully committed to it. Foucault's idealised account of discipline depicts it as a comprehensive regime, in which even the smallest details are subject to scrutiny. At the programmatic level, this portrait rings true. In practice, however, it may be sufficient for schools to develop a more realistic level of surveillance that is 'good enough' to maintain an acceptable degree of order and facilitate teaching. It is probable that the teachers simply 'turned a blind eye' (or a deaf ear) to the instances of mild recalcitrance I have described, such as children talking whilst sharpening pencils, preferring to focus their energy on more substantial threats to the classroom order. This suggestion builds on previous work in this journal which approaches surveillance from the perspective of performance (e.g. Schienke and Brown 2003). We might think of surveillance as activities designed primarily to produce the illusion of control in the face of untameable chaos. Such an interpretation seems to me to get to the very heart of the Panopticon and its mode of functioning. There may be scope here for rethinking panoptic surveillance via, for example, Goffman's ideas about the presentation of self, Butler's work on performativity and Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and simulacra.

Finally, I have shown how surveillance within the school relied as much on hearing as on seeing. These findings suggest that dominant ocularcentric understandings of surveillance could be enlarged to encompass what might be termed 'panauralism'. However, what is needed here is not merely a refocusing on sound, but a much broader appreciation of the multi-sensorial nature of surveillance. Explorations of surveillance technologies using smell (in alcohol and drug policing, for example), touch (such as in body searches) and taste (who knows?) might offer intriguing insights.

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