Review Essay/Essai bibliographique

Surveillance and Democracy

Kevin D. Haggerty and **Minas Samatas,** eds., *Surveillance and Democracy*. New York: Routledge-Cavendish. 2010. 271 pp. $ US 47.95 paper (978-0-415-47240-1) $US 140.00 hardcover (978-0-416-47239-5).

Elia Zureik, L. Lynda Harding Stalker, Emily Smith, David Lyon and **Yolanda Chan** eds., *Surveillance, Privacy, and the Globalization of Personal Information: International Comparisons.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press. 2010. 448 pp. $59.95 hardcover (978-7735-3707-1).

The fields of criminology and sociology, taken together, are still struggling to understand the later part of the twentieth century. The first of two turning points was the beginning of World War I, which marked the end of the Victorian era; the second was the end of World War II, which began the era in which we now live — the era of massively mediated social relationships. The relationships between "selves," "images of selves," and images of images of selves spin in Saturnalia. This is where we stand, vertiginously, on the shoulders of writers living briefly in the twentieth century, Durkheim and Weber, and a nineteenth-century writer, Karl Marx. The major figures of the later twentieth century, Talcott Parsons in particular, were attempting to synthesize the works of these earlier figures (absent Marx, enter Marshall and Pareto in the *Structure of Social Action*). Arguably, Parsons's student Harold Garfinkel is most successful in identifying the legacy of the twentieth century — that is a situationally oriented phenomenology, but his work is still being translated and read worldwide and ironically, as a result, his influence is now being recognized in North America.

The disarray of modern social theory can be attributed to a number of rather obvious facts: the vast effects of inexpensive travel, the globalization of the economy and the triumph of market capitalism. State-based

law and security seem rather elusive. Norms, values, beliefs, and rules no longer convey or indicate general properties revealed in social ordering. Associated with these changes are changes in the nature of beliefs, values, norms and other generalizations about human behaviour associated historically with fixed linguistic patterns and bounded nation states. The hinge that has fundamentally altered social behaviour and social control is the enormous, some say insidious, impact of mediated communication: the various forms of seeing, doing, being, and even dying shaped by the amplification and reductionist effects of technologies of communication. It is this series of events that social science has not captured theoretically. That is, there is no consensus about the perspective best used to frame such matters. The most important theorists of the last century, Goffman, Garfinkel, and even Bourdieu, have argued that order is interactional. Goffman argued flatly that the only thing we know empirically is the evolving relationships in face to face contexts. The rest is speculation. If this is so, methods of data-gathering, using surveys, experimental work, official records and questionnaires, should be questioned as well.

These two volumes, the latter reporting the results of survey-driven analyses, contain chapters on surveillance and democracy, surveillance policies and practices, and some case studies. They vary widely in depth and quality. The editorial introductions, as is usually the case, aim at producing a visible framework for papers written from quite different perspectives, databases, and cultural locations. Among the most interesting in the context of theorizing the effects of communication technology and privacy, are those of Brighenti, Lianos, Monahan, Lyon, and Whitson.

The primary theme set out in the Haggerty and Samatas volume is the tension between "surveillance" and "democracy." Unfortunately, there is no agreement on the definition of these concepts, let alone their relationships. The point appears to be that privacy and human rights must be defended in democracies, yet democracies to defend themselves are moving evermore toward systematic data gathering and use in the processes of ordering. Here, there may be confusion about what is the concern: the technologies and their effects *per se* on social relationships; their use by democratic governments as tools; their potential for disruption, crime, and distortion of experience; and perhaps the epistemological consequences of such technological packages on social reality. Each is a worthy topic of more research. There is far too much speculation and theorizing and far too little data on these questions.

One can generalize about the flaws in such books, flaws that are characteristic, and not unshared. The theorizing is derived from political philosophy, and wanders in the world of abstraction drawn from Derrida, Foucault, and continental philosophy. This is the tradition from which

sociology grew and rejected in part because it rests on argument, not on data or the empirically observable facts. The social object at issue is that which is produced by new technologies of communication, but this cannot be studied fruitfully outside the context in which the social object is created. These objects are nurtured in new social spaces, as Whitson explores imaginatively in *Surveillance and Democracy*. Social control in these new spaces works analogically, not literally as does social control in mass society. As Lianos points out in a series of powerful and persuasive propositions, there is little consensus on values and beliefs: social control is an exchange system predicated on social well-being. Durkheim began to articulate this in his work, but he has been misread as a structuralist rather than a precursor of modernity.

Much of the argument in these books is guesswork even when based on large data sets (over 9,000 interviews were gathered by phone and focus groups in the Zureik et al. book) Whether surveillance via the internet, other mobility devices, or medical or government records actually increases choice or diminishes it, increases inequality or reduces it, is a source of populist power or a governmental tool, is still to be established. Like most of Foucault, it is speculation based on premises about freedom and the power of the state. The Zureik book tells us about attitudes, but it has no material on the impact of such views on action, actual governmental operations, data banks, surveillance procedures, legal rules, or the politics of information in these countries. What about social context and the meanings of information? What difference does it make to be on Facebook or use Google in Saudi Arabia, China, or the United States? The Saudis and the Chinese government think it makes an important difference. Is the "self" much the same in Greece as in Canada (and where in Canada?). Is the narrow individualism that arose in the late eighteenth century in England the basis of that self from which all notions of "privacy" are to be derived? Although the profiling controversy has been in the news for some years, there is no evidence that police or federal agencies (especially Homeland Security) have abandoned this idea in training or practice. Is this a function of data and networking? Establishing the existence of these data banks does not speak to how, when, and where they are used, and for what purpose. The window into these questions is the workplace, and workplace studies of the practices that mobilize the data in use.

Responses from telephone interviews surely must be the least likely way to grasp the tensions and issues in privacy. It would appear that much of the purpose of the massive project summarized in *Surveillance, Privacy and the Globalization of Personal Information* is to report what concerns interviewees in selected countries. The social reality remains

hypothetical and the authors often resort to speculation to make sense of their data, such as why people in Hungary trust their government.

In these studies, some of the questions that require research are set out; there is an effort to move beyond the seminal works of Gary Marx, David Lyon, and Oscar Gandy, and the philosophizing of Foucault. At the heart of the dilemma is the formulation of privacy found in Simmel: trust and privacy vanish once they are questioned and investigated. One could image a philosophic conundrum: tell me your secrets! What are the things you *most* want to guard and protect? Why? From whom? Are they are at risk now? From whom? Why? Does the government of the day have access to them? Is the existence of an affair with your sister more dangerous if revealed than a sheaf of outstanding traffic warrants? The answer to such questions is unknown. No one knows precisely what government knows, and government agencies do not know what other government agencies know. How does concern about privacy affect one's choices and life style? I suggest that the social reality of privacy is itself changing.

Consider that two faces of personal information are tangled in everyday life. It seems to me at least that people continue to consider e-mail something like a private letter shared only between the sender and the intended recipient or recipients, in spite of the fact that universities and businesses increasingly regard them as at least tangentially relevant to work performance and therefore not "private." On the other hand, people on Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace and others reveal their thoughts and feelings in surprising detail. Are these then "private"? (Interestingly, Facebook allows one to edit and eliminate a comment one has made in haste, lust, or anger). One can learn more about friends and family from Facebook than from family letters or phone calls, perhaps because the risk and excitement is just beneath the surface tempting others to ask: "Why did you do X?"; "Are you ok?" This suggests a dialectic of communication. What about the cell phone and its massive indication that "privacy," "togetherness," "collective interaction," and self-communication are being radically altered? Has this changed as the functions of the "phone" have dramatically expanded in the last few years? Anyone for a game of "Angry Birds" or Fruit Ninja? And can great literature be reduced to a few Twitter entries? Is there any place or time when a cell phone cannot be used? Should not be used? I know the answer to only one of these questions: I could not make a cell phone call in Stonington, Maine except by walking up a steep hill away from the harbour.

Consider students sitting silently together in a bar, each occupied, eyes down, playing a video game, checking their e-mail, looking for a missed call or message, scrolling through "contacts" prior to making a

call, or checking Facebook. What sort of semiprivate collective interaction is this? What form of sociability? What marks the "private" from the "public" in that context? What about the almost endlessly expanding world of Facebook where I am now friends with "Franz Boas," several collective groups including "That's Interesting…" and some of my children and grandchildren. We are now mobile psychologically and visually as we sit alone anywhere in the world. We are certainly often alone together. The ethnography of communication in the twenty-first century is yet to be written.

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