# Book Review/Compte rendu

**John Gilliom** and **Torin Monahan**, *SuperVision: An Introduction to the Surveillance Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 188 pp., $22.50 paper, (0226924440)

Surveillance studies is a new area of research and intellectual inquiry drawing from numerous scholarly disciplines including sociology, political science, and communications. Many books and articles have recently been published on surveillance practices, though not many of these monographs have been aimed toward first year students or other nonspecialist audiences. *SuperVision* provides an accessible introduction to issues in surveillance studies, assessing the pervasive growth of surveillance practices across the globe today.

*SuperVision* is organized around ten "big ideas" that each chapter takes up to varying degrees. First, Gilliom and Monahan argue that established terminology such as privacy and Big Brother are no longer helpful for understanding how surveillance operates today. Second, not all surveillance is bad. Some of it, they argue, makes aspects of our lives more convenient and efficient. Third, not all surveillance is state surveillance. Private players are equally prominent on the surveillance stage. Fourth, surveillance not only entails us being watched by others but involves us watching others, which in turn shapes our sense of self. Fifth, not all surveillance is forced upon us. Some of it is participatory. Sixth, surveillance allows information to go many places faster than ever before, which in effect shrinks time and space. Seventh, surveillance is resisted. Not everyone participates in it or thinks it is a good thing. Eighth, surveillance can extend and intensify social inequality. To explain this point, Gilliom and Monahan focus on racism and discrimination in some chapters of *SuperVision*. Ninth, surveillance systems today involve cutting-edge technology. But elaborate and expensive monitoring systems fail as often as they work well. And finally, formal organizations are hungry for information. Collection and analysis of personal information is something that all formal organizations do.

The first chapter in *SuperVision* examines the relationship between surveillance and the self, arguing that the kinds of surveillance we are subject to and participate in shape us as people. In the words of the authors, "cell phones are the perfect symbol of the surveillance society" (p. 11). They collect and relay information about us almost endlessly to an

array of organizations, at the same time as they shape how we think of ourselves, who we communicate with, and what we know. The second chapter explores how identity, consumer loyalty, bank, and other cards we carry around end up shaping our daily lives. These devices are also used to collect and relay information about us, sending these figures and files to places that we are not even aware of, with every swipe of the card. It has become almost impossible to access government services and social programs without having a health card, a license, a bank card, and so on. Indeed, the authors argue that not having the required cards essentially diminishes access to social rights in contemporary Western societies. The third chapter examines online surveillance and the role of Google, Facebook, and social media in surveillance processes. Gilliom and Monahan then go on to consider surveillance in schools and in workplaces. The final substantive chapter assesses new developments in surveillance, such as National Security Agency spying programs and the use of drones by Homeland Security at US borders.

I thought that more empirical detail would have helped Gilliom and Monahan substantiate their claims made about the ten "big ideas." Just because a book is meant for first year students and nonspecialists or lay audiences does not mean that empirical detail should be surrendered when describing examples. It would be unfair to critique *SuperVision* for not offering an elaborate argument or not moving beyond basic ideas in surveillance studies such as care and control. The authors are prudent to claim in the preface that the book is not intended for academic audiences, and is instead meant as a truly introductory, popular account of surveillance in the world today. It is written in an accessible, non-academic style. *SuperVision* would be very useful to assign as part of first year courses on surveillance in sociology, political science, or communications. The book does what it sets out to do and should stimulate students immensely.

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