

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

David Lyon, *Identifying Citizens: ID Cards as Surveillance*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2009, 192 pp. \$27.95 paper (978-0-7456-4156-0), \$71.95 hardcover (978-0-7456-4155-3)

David Lyon's *Identifying Citizens* follows his previous work on identification (ID) cards, such as *Playing the Identity Card* (2008), co-edited with Colin Bennett. It follows his other work on surveillance such as *Surveillance as Social Sorting* (2003) and *Theorizing Surveillance* (2006). Lyon aims to uncover the surveillant potential of ID card systems, which he argues are increasingly prevalent and interlinked. While a must-read for anyone interested in the academic study of surveillance, technology, security and citizenship, the book is not so theory-heavy as to deter a broader range of readers.

The book argues that ID cards complicate the distinction between liquid identities and static identifications. Using Bauman's concept of liquidity, Lyon argues that identity is itself liquid and consists of links to places, stories, biology or even hairstyles. Lyon distinguishes identity from identification, which is a contested process (who can identify whom and why?) involving the recording and presentation of such data. For example, he draws from the characteristics of 19th century American slave tags and the genocidal legacy of Belgian identification systems in Rwanda to highlight the dangerous effects of linkages between identities and identifications. The trouble, Lyon argues, lies in the confusion caused by their inherently relational nature, driven partly by the evolution of citizenship and the administrative need to identify and authenticate. Citizenship represents a clear locus of contention, and ID cards illuminate the variant social dynamics of care, control and identity.

Identifying Citizens covers technology, identity and identification, and the evolving relationship between law and society. Lyon argues that the ID card itself must be understood as part of a dynamic system of identification including bodies, databases, corporations and states. He goes on to provide a history of these systems from colonial administration to modern crime control, within the context of the changing nature of citizenship and the shifting role of technology. In the second chapter, Lyon reiterates the importance of social sorting, a theme central to his body of work in surveillance, tying the new objectives of security to a renewed need to treat citizens differently. The third chapter is devoted to

the “card cartel” of corporations, states and technologies, highlighting the economic interests behind ID systems and the dangers of transposing socially constructed technologies into state practices. Chapter four details the increased “stretching” of government through identification, driven by interoperability and the globalization of databases. The fifth chapter discusses biometrics, going beyond questions of efficiency and questioning its cultural implications, culminating in the sixth chapter probing the ramifications of identification systems on conceptions of citizenship. Three major themes emerge, all central to surveillance studies: the socially-shaped nature of technology, the link between identity and identification, and new forms of civic life.

Lyon emphasizes the convergence of the historical desire to control through identification and the growth of technologies which provide the new capacities and networks that make ID card schemes much more problematic. That these technologies are socially-shaped is reflected in the databases, protocols and biometrics upon which ID card systems rely. Databases are the primary form of harnessing citizenship and status data on identity cards to the extent that they almost make the physical card redundant. The increasing interoperability of databases globalizes and accelerates social sorting, recasts citizenship as exclusionary, and multiplies the possibility of error in technologies that are only as precise as their makers. The protocols of connectivity technologies create hierarchies of power that are reproduced in the social effects of the systems which depend on them. The internet’s Domain Name System (DNS) servers, for example, create hierarchical standards of data processing — against a social background whereby governments seek out new protocols for managing increasingly globalized data transactions. Biometric technologies politicize physiology in effective and pernicious ways. For example, biometric systems have stunningly high rates of failure in recognizing and enrolling some ethnic groups into their databases. If biometrics “makes whiteness the yardstick for access”, what are ID systems’ ramifications for civic life?

A running theme is the relation between the confluence of technological and governmental trends and the new precariousness of life they engender. Alongside the explosion of technology Lyon notes a growing securitization of identity driven by post-9/11 logics, facilitated by global standards set by organizations such as the ICAO. Technology has increased the importance and scope of the screen — both in terms of “screening” and reliance on “the computer screen” — which removes an element of personal discretion from interactions with states. We can bid farewell to the Gerd Wieslers of the world, Lyon says, referring to the Stasi agent from the 2005 film *The Lives of Others* who empathized with

the subjects of his surveillance. The diminishing importance of confession and personal narrative in interaction between states and their citizens is noted, against a backdrop of an increasing focus on behaviour as a biometric signifier and security panacea.

Identifying Citizens engages with a number of pertinent debates in surveillance studies, locating ID cards as form of government through identification. As the frame of reference in surveillance studies has expanded beyond visual surveillance, interventions such as this on identity cards have become more frequent. This book brings together social sorting, security, and political economy while providing a critical take on the sociological significance of technology. The overriding concern for human rights that Lyon shares with the broader surveillance studies community does not lead to a blinkered view of ID cards. Instead, Lyon's view is nuanced and he is conscious of the multiple expressions of citizenship beyond identification. As a result, the book does not read like a manifesto against the "function creep" of identification systems as much as it should. However, Lyon carefully details the increasingly interoperable databases which sustain identification cards, reiterating throughout that the card itself is only the tip of the iceberg.

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