

# The Individual and Everyday Surveillance

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## Abstract

Surveillance is common in modern society, with individuals subject to many forms of data collection and monitoring in everyday life. Many of these forms are through information and communications technologies (ICTs), which hold an ever increasing place in modern living. To understand this trend, surveillance theories have shifted from Foucauldian influenced panoptic surveillance towards post-panoptic approaches. However, there is little consideration given to the individual's experience of surveillance within these theories. This is problematic, as in order to sufficiently address the implications of surveillance, the individual's experience of surveillance must be considered (Friesen, Chung and Feenberg 2006). This article explores the panoptic and post-panoptic approaches to surveillance, and the ways in which ICT surveillance is integrated into everyday life, and highlights how there is a gap in surveillance studies literature regarding how the individual experiences surveillance. More recent post-panoptic approaches such as the surveillant assemblage (Haggerty and Ericson 2000) are identified as holding few additional contributions to this gap. Instead, it is Foucault's writings that are more insightful, despite being sometime dismissed in surveillance studies. The article concludes by suggesting that a greater recognition of the positive contributions of surveillance theory would be more productive for surveillance studies than a paradigm shift.

**Key words:** Surveillance, experience, ICTs, panopticism, post-panopticism, everyday life

## Introduction

Surveillance is an integral part of the social world, and is an area of ever increasing scholarship. The recent interest in surveillance coincides with the rapid development of electronics and computer technology, a key factor in the spread of surveillance (Higgs 2001). Computers, and in particular information and communication technologies (ICTs), have expanded the functions and applications of surveillance to new levels. Surveillance practices have generated a number of social implications, such as issues relating to security, discrimination and categorisation (Lyon 2002). In exploring surveillance however, certain approaches are privileged over others. Foucault's panopticon and Orwell's Big Brother once dominated surveillance research (Boyne 2000). However, post-panoptic perspectives are increasingly the focus of surveillance research. Yet all these approaches adopt a structural focus to exploring surveillance, ignoring the individual's perspective, and thus not adequately addressing the implications of surveillance (Lyon 1994:2). In order to sufficiently address these implications, the subjective, individual experience of surveillance must be considered

(Friesen, Chung and Feenberg 2006). This article explores the panoptic and post-panoptic approaches to surveillance, and the ways in which ICT surveillance is integrated into everyday life, and highlights how the individual's perspective is not well considered in surveillance studies. More recent post-panoptic approaches such as the surveillant assemblage (Haggerty and Ericson 2000) are identified as holding few additional contributions to this gap. Instead, it is Foucault's writings that are more insightful, despite being sometime dismissed or misread in surveillance studies. The article concludes by suggesting that a greater recognition of the positive contributions of surveillance theory would be more productive for surveillance studies than a paradigm shift.

### **Technology and Surveillance Perspectives:**

Foucault was amongst the first to note the role of technology in the development of surveillance. Foucault conceptualised surveillance as being panoptic, drawing on Jeremy Bentham's prison model as an analogue to conceptualise how surveillance and power are distributed in modern society (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 2000:53). For Foucault, surveillance is conducted by the few on the many, with the many unaware or unsure of this surveillance and thus driven to self monitor and modify their behaviour (Green 1999). How these surveillance strategies create changes in the individual's behaviour is Foucault's (1984:190) main interest. Foucault's use of the panopticon has drawn attention to the relevance and importance of surveillance and its use of technology in modern society (Wood 2007). As a result, many theorists have drawn on elements of Foucault, creating a panoptic approach to surveillance (Boyne 2000).

ICTs have added new dimensions to the scope and ability of surveillance, with wide social structural impacts (Rule 1973:34-36). For example, databases allow large amounts of data to be stored and accessed on demand, which allow individuals to be cross checked and categorised without their knowledge (Orito 2011). These databases are linked to other forms of documentation to create a profile of the individual's life, referred to as a data self, data double, or data image (Haggerty and Ericson 2000:611). This serves many functions, such as to specifically target consumers through advertising (Turow 2005).

Although panoptic theories of surveillance have accomplished much in surveillance studies, Foucault failed to account for ICTs and technical advances such as the internet. Post-panoptic theories have sought to fill this gap, such as Haggerty and Ericson's (2000) attempt to reconceptualise surveillance as an assemblage. The assemblage considers surveillance to be a dispersed and rhizomatic phenomenon, being conducted by an unrelated multiplicity of groups and practices (Palmas 2011). The conglomerate of surveillance entities instead seeks to break the individual into a desired set of discrete data, called flows. These flows represent the many streams of information that contribute to databases, circulate in information networks, and form an individual's data self.

The technical developments and implications of surveillance have encouraged many theoretical explanations. However these theories often favour analysing broader social and technical trends, without considering the individual in the analysis. Haggerty and Ericson (2006) attempt to include more of the individual by examining flows of personal data in the assemblage, but they again ignore the effects of surveillance on the individual's lived experience (Wood 2007:256). Many of these perspectives also assume surveillance to be a uniform social phenomenon, and do not attempt to explore how those under surveillance react or respond to it. While the technical and structural aspects of surveillance are clearly

highlighted, how the individual's experience fits in these structures is obscured. Such considerations are especially important, given the spread and implications of surveillance in contemporary Western society.

### **The Everyday Integration of Surveillance:**

Surveillance has had an enormous impact on society, being central in the development of modernity (Giddens 1985), and is today implicated in many daily processes in Western life. Global finance (Turow 2005), government bureaucracies (Rule 1973; Gilliom 2005) and business and advertising (Campbell and Carlson 2002) have all benefited from surveillance. Customers have also benefited, with surveillance practices enabling individuals to conduct a wide range of social activities from home, such as shopping and banking (Ashworth and Free 2006). Everyday aspects of an individual's life, such as shopping, healthcare and business are all steeped in surveillance processes.

However there are implications with these everyday forms of surveillance. Despite any potential benefits, surveillance practices are a source of social friction between those conducting surveillance, and those subject to it. Examples of this tension can be seen in surveillance conducted by private business. With the growth of online commerce, "cookies", or stored pieces of internet data are used to harvested data or monitor an individual's use (Bennett 2001). The use of cookies presents several privacy issues. Users are often unaware of how much data are being collected, and have little choice in using cookies, as they are integral to the internet, and act without the user's knowledge (Kristol 2001). Efforts to collect such data include unseen technical means, coercive measures or seducing an individual to disclose through the promise of a reward (Elmer 2003:237). The user data gathered by cookies are then stored, analysed and traded by advertising companies, who then can tailor specific advertising to target groups (Fuchs 2011). The importance of data collection is often framed in relation to structural processes, such as in relation to businesses or bureaucratic administration. These perspectives ignore the negative effects data collection may have on the individual.

The absence of research into the individual's experience of surveillance is also clearly visible when examining privacy. Privacy is often perceived as the polar opposite and solution to surveillance (Bennett and Raab 2006:337), and has resulted in extensive research about the relationship between the two. This includes empirical studies on the degree of governmental surveillance (Dinev, Hart and Mullen 2008), the consequences of state sponsored surveillance (Ditzion 2004), the impact on identity (Warner 2005) and consumers' concerns regarding online privacy (Dinev and Hart 2006). Regardless of its orientation towards privacy, much of this literature has focused on the technical and structural aspects of surveillance and privacy, while ignoring the individual's position. This has resulted in many assumptions. For instance, Gilliom (2005) finds that structural concerns such as privacy are not even considered as an issue by those subjected to invasive welfare surveillance. Instead, subjects focus on the issues relating to their daily lived experiences, such as the difficulties of being able to adequately provide for their families. Such insights are few in surveillance studies, where the focus is predominantly placed on the uses and applications of surveillance strategies, understanding the impact of surveillance strategies on social structures, and on investigating the changing patterns of surveillance.

With the widespread growth of surveillance systems into everyday life, resistance is becoming more widespread. This is a result of the structural consequences of surveillance

systems. Lyon (2006:369) suggests such systems inspire feelings of fear and isolation in individuals, prompting action against surveillance. Yet individuals' subjective feelings and experiences have been rarely explored in the surveillance literature, despite being the aim and motivation for surveillance strategies (Freisen, Chung and Feenburg 2006). Like surveillance, resistance is a negotiated and contested experience (Lyon 2007). For example, Gilliom (2001) describes a variety of measures welfare recipients use to resist invasive surveillance, including changing living arrangements, and not declaring paid work. This kind of research is rare in surveillance studies, with research tending to focus on privacy, or grass root anti-surveillance campaigns (Lyon 1994:177-178). These perspectives ignore individual experience and rely instead on social assumptions, such as that surveillance is counter balanced in society by preserving the private sphere (Bennett and Raab 2006).

### **Reintegrating the Individual**

With the continuing growth of everyday surveillance, understanding the experiential aspects of surveillance is becoming increasingly important. Post-panoptic approaches like the surveillant assemblage have aided in understanding the role of technology and everyday surveillance, however, they have yet to fully incorporate the individual into the analysis. Individuals are considered as collected pieces of data, or flows, that are removed from any individual context to be reassembled as a 'decorporealized body, a data double of pure virtuality' (Haggerty and Ericson 2000:611). The collected data, regardless of how accurate or representative it is of the individual, is the basis of any institutional or bureaucratic function (Haggerty and Ericson 2000:614). While documenting the rhizomatic structure of surveillance today, the assemblage divorces an individual from their context. The experience and lived reality of surveillance for those who are under it is not clear. Instead, unanswered questions remain regarding how individuals make sense of, resist or even embrace surveillance in their everyday lives.

Curiously, Foucault offers more on the individual than any of the post-panoptic positions. Caluya (2010) suggests that many of the post-panoptic positions misread Foucault, using panoptic surveillance as a singular concept, without considering Foucault's broader theories of power. Ball (2006:93) confirms this suggestion, indicating that the work of many surveillance theorists take this reading, and assume panoptic surveillance as structural and top down. This is the opposite of what Foucault suggests. For Foucault, surveillance is a part of the micro-physics of power, an example of but one of many methods and techniques by which power is exercised in society (Foucault 1977:26-27). This power exists in every facet of social life, and is not accumulated in any one individual or group, but flows through everyday life. It is not repressive, but performative and productive, shaping the way an individual thinks and acts (Collier 2009:81). In this way Foucault recognises the individual in greater detail than post-panoptic theories, providing a framework for understanding aspects of an individual's experience. Drawing on Foucault, patterns of resistance can be better understood, such as those described by Gilliom (2001). Therefore, the dismissal of Foucault maybe premature, given the insights his theories provide.

What is perhaps needed is recognition of the positive aspects of existing theory, and not a paradigm shift. The move towards post-panopticism came as a response to the perceived problems of panoptic surveillance, this being that it was overly structural and top down, and that it failed to consider ICTs. The first problem stems from a narrow view of Foucault's work and how it is applied, not as an inherent problem with Foucault's ideas. The second is

also understandable, given Foucault's genealogical method focused on historic antecedents, making studying emerging technology difficult (Wood 2007:251). While post-panopticism has made significant contributions in recognising the changing patterns of surveillance with ICTs, especially the rise and dispersion of data surveillance practices, the question of the experience of surveillance still remains. The answer to this question may lie in recognising the contributions made by Foucault in understanding surveillance, power and everyday life, while considering them alongside the advances of the assemblage.

## Conclusion

Surveillance studies literature has remained focused on understanding surveillance from a structural perspective, with the individual's perspective less well developed in the research. This is despite the growing integration of surveillance into the everyday lives of citizens. Post-panoptic theories have still failed to explore the individual, missing the insights that Foucault's broader theories have on the subject. It is perhaps worth considering how the advances of post-panopticism may be combined with Foucault's analysis of power in everyday life. If the implications of surveillance in social life are to be adequately understood, a conceptual toolkit is needed that addresses the structural, technological and individual in the analysis.

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