

Book Review

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Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life. Ed. Torin Monahan. New York: Routledge. ISBN 0-415-95396-6

In *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*, Torin Monahan has gathered together a slate of social scientists for the purpose of exploring how surveillance technologies shape our everyday lives. This edited volume is divided into two sections: in the first, “Neoliberal States,” authors explore surveillance technologies employed in the service of neoliberal policies (for example, covert diagnostic screening of pregnant women for illegal drugs, electronically tagging surgical patients to increase hospital efficiency); in the second section, “Mobilities and Insecurities,” authors discuss surveillance technologies associated with the movement of bodies, via mass transportation systems, through airports, and across borders.

Monahan’s overarching goal with this edited volume is to challenge the taken-for-granted assumption that surveillance is necessary for security and as such, trade-offs for surveillance pit civil liberties against security management. This is such an engrained notion, especially in contemporary society: that we “pay” for security by necessarily giving up our civil liberties. Even as a sociologist, I found myself coming back to this dichotomy instead of questioning it on its foundational claims, as Monahan suggests. I enjoyed reading *Surveillance and Security* immensely. In fact, I had a hard time putting it down once I began reading it. In each chapter, the authors push past the obvious issues surrounding security vs. civil liberties and force readers to engage in how the technologies are used to influence processes of social reproduction.

As a new mother, I freely admit that I find the idea of surveillance technologies for my infant almost irresistible: could I ensure that childcare workers provide adequate care by using some kind of camera? Could I keep my increasingly mobile baby away from bodies of water or other unsafe environments with a monitoring bracelet? While that may not sound so terrible, given the vulnerabilities of curious toddlers, what about implantable tracking devices to keep our teenagers “safe”? Would that be going too far? In “The state goes home: local hypervigilance of children and the global retreat from social reproduction,” Cindi Katz explores the lure of these technologies that claim to keep our children safe and the social issues that such technologies obscure. Let’s return to the issue of the “nanny-cam”: Katz explains that the makers of these kinds of monitoring devices promise parents control over their little ones’ day-to-day care by revealing caregivers’ minute-by-minute actions. By offering parents the illusion of control through the ability to monitor their children from afar, Katz argues that we lose sight of the larger scale social forces at play. These include the willingness of middle-class women to scrutinize the actions of the lower-class women caring for their children and the demands that working parents place on largely underpaid, highly exploitable domestic workers as well as the tremendous profit potential for firms marketing these devices.

Throughout the text, Monahan and individual authors remind us again and again that surveillance technologies have done little to earn their reputation for making the world safer, more efficient, more equitable, or more of whatever else the technologies’ manufacturers would like us to believe. Moreover,



Monahan points out that there have been few studies even solicited to measure the efficacy of surveillance technologies by those who would pay hundreds, thousands, millions, even billions of dollars for them. In other words, that surveillance technologies work is a taken-for-granted notion. These days, the unwavering faith in surveillance technologies is wrapped up in a culture of fear so that questioning the technologies is itself suspect. If you think this is overstated, try one or more of the following: ask your coworkers if virtual cameras along the US-Mexico border will keep out illegal immigrants; balk at your employer's next mandatory drug test; tell your students that your low ratemyprofessor.com profile doesn't really mean anything negative about your teaching; or suggest that your baby's combination sock/shoe couldn't possibly be dangerous to an airport security agent when she insists that they be removed.

Monahan's edited volume is not just a sociological critique of surveillance technologies. In each case study, authors impart with readers a set of strategies for dealing with surveillance technologies, even the ones that are so ubiquitous that we forget they're there (like how shopping club cards give you discounts but also catalog every single item you buy). One, readers can better identify surveillance technologies for what they are (from drug tests to google searches); two, readers can dismantle the arbitrary claim that surveillance is necessary for the greater good; three, readers can see the social relations driving the market for surveillance technologies; and four, readers can demand that surveillance technologies be designed with an understanding of these social relations.

This book would be appropriate for a number of courses, from science and society ones to more general sociological curricula. The cases studies are very well-written and engaging and would certainly hold appeal for both undergraduates and graduates. In short, this volume is such an important and timely set of conversations that I think it should be left out on coffee tables and in doctor's offices or wherever people just happen to pick up things to read.

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