Book Review

Review of Ring, Annie, Henriette Steiner, and Kristin Veel, eds. 2018. *Architecture and Control*. Boston: Brill.

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These essays address the equivocation in surveillance studies between control as a concept and control as physical coercion. The book arose from a 2013 conference at the University of Cambridge on the theme *Changing Cultures of (In)Visibility*. Those parentheses are a tell: the essays are clear descendants of postmodern theory. The genealogy goes back to Michel Foucault's ambiguous use of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon both as a diagram for surveillance and as a diagram for architecture. The authors share Foucault's optimism that the ambiguity between conceptual and physical is productive. More precisely, the authors endorse Gilles Deleuze's suggestion that we can update Foucault's analysis to engage changes happening under late-capitalism. The reference here is Deleuze's brief article "Postscript on the Societies of Control," published in 1990 and quickly re-published in an English translation in the art history journal *October*. In it Deleuze argues that we have passed out of a Panoptical society of discontinuous enclosures and into a control society of continuous modulations. The essays in this collection, however, are not trial cases that test the validity of Deleuze's theses. Instead, the authors simply assume that Deleuze got it mostly right, and use detailed discussions of films, artworks, and, occasionally, buildings as apposite illustrations.

That's the meaning of the term control in the title. What architecture denotes is a little more complex. Architecture is first plural—the editors argue that there are *kinds* of architectures—and second, architecture serves as a metonym for infrastructure, buildings, urban space, cinema, and the built environment. The essays thus take on a familiar rhetoric, promoted by Foucauldians, that surveillance is best understood as an architectural metaphor. The result is that the discipline of architecture itself gets short shrift in the book. Media theorist Alexander R. Galloway, for instance, makes a case for an interface of aesthetics and function based on a superficial stylistic understanding of architect-designed buildings. This architectural analysis is at best jejune, which is unfortunate because Galloway's theoretical chops uniquely position him to contribute to current scholarship linking computation with architecture. Similarly, Rafael Dernbach deals with glass façades, but only as they are used in documentary film and theatre set design. He relies on a 1996 book by architectural historian Anthony Vidler to support his idiosyncratic use of the Freudian term "uncanny"—so far so good—but does not engage with any historians or theorists of the "late-modern glass architectures" key to his discussion.

How do you write an essay about architecture without considering current scholarship in architecture? One tactic is to slip from architecture to cognates such as "space." Philosopher Pablo Bustinduy begins his reflections from a concept of space pulled from geography and phenomenology. He rehearses a discourse familiar to architectural theorists on the notion of limits, racing all-too-quickly through the philosophical

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ideas of Jaspers, Arendt, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Marx. These borrowings foreground phenomenology as the *best* description of architectural experience (i.e., subjective, individual, embodied), making it difficult to connect “space” to the social analysis of architecture the editors are interested in. In his postscript, literary historian Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht uses a similar list of texts to speculate about “space” (the scare quotes are his), musing that architecture merely indexes new spatial phenomena.

At times, *Architecture and Control* reads as a list of famous names perpetuated by byte-sized chunks of theorizing. That is due to the formulaic similarity in the way authors in the collection structure their essays. They begin by briefly limning a theoretical concept or two, attributed to a named theorist. Next there is a description of an art project, again bounded under the name of an artist. The art discussed can be documentary or fictional film, the entire oeuvre of a contemporary artist, or even an empty lot. The essays end with an assessment of whether the described artistic practice resists or submits to surveillance and control.

Runa Johannessen’s article on occupied Palestinian territories follows this template. She starts with Michel de Certeau’s notion of tactics and describes the skillful negotiation of political uncertainty in the planning and construction of a chicken farm and house. Natalie P. Koerner uses Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of chronotope to talk about the supersession of place over time in selected works of four contemporary artists. Michael Krause summons Jacques Rancière to look at photographic and video work that focuses on what he calls the “securitised” built environment. Krause suggests that security systems give artists a set of “artful techniques” that helps them to visualize, embody, or perform surveillance security. He ends with the optimism that such art works “stress the possibility for an egalitarian politics of urban space” (153). He just does not quite say how.

Two essays on cinema and the representation of surveillance in film present a more direct confrontation with architecture and control. Joey Whitfield’s nuanced analysis of two films about policing in Rio de Janeiro wrestles with the potential gap between what is depicted as resistance and control though film, and how those practices play out in the city. Even more direct is Laura Muir’s comparison of two recent spy films, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *Skyfall*. Muir argues that a formal analysis of mise-en-scène can help us see what a surveillance society looks like: for example, the use of computer-generated places in the films might help us understand the computer-generated spaces we inhabit outside of films. The predication of this reflection as resistance or progressive is, once again, merely posited as a possibility, but has persuasive power because of Muir’s handling of architectural metaphors.

Inevitably in an edited collection, some essays will seem out of place. Anne Elisabeth Sejten, for instance, provides an overview of Sophie Calle’s oeuvre based more on Deleuze’s work with Félix Guattari than on the texture of control societies. Likewise, Samantha L. Martin-McAuliffe’s engaging overview of Albania’s pyramid-shaped military bunkers and Maria Finn’s intriguing photographs of the Ellstorp Lot in Malmö (all images in the book are in black and white), Sweden, are at odds with the conception of control society as digital and therefore immaterial.

Overall, the essays in *Architecture and Control* belong to that academic genre that sees theory-framed writing as a path for resistance to neoliberalism, or, as the editors put it in their introduction, as an assessment of possible “progressive modes of control in the hands of newly empowered agents” (3). This critical approach works best when the authors grapple with the digital, that is, with invisible, immaterial modes of monitoring—modes of anti-architecture. From this viewpoint, the lack of sustained engagement with architecture in these essays is not a deal breaker. But it is an oddity.