Debate

Picking the Speck and Missing the Beam in the Eye of Surveillance: On the Failure to See Eye to Eye with David Lyon

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Feedback in the Echo Chamber

Much of my work—and particularly my recent book *Performance, Transparency, and the Cultures of Surveillance*—is grounded within the conceptual models of performance studies. Given the book's title, this may be somewhat obvious, and I only mention it as a point of departure for my reply to David Lyon's response to the small segment of the book's first chapter that concerns his writings because the exchange that Torin Monahan has been kind enough to arrange between the two of us reminds me somewhat of the exchanges that Richard Schechner often orchestrated in the pages of *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies*. As will become evident momentarily, the parallel that I am drawing here is not so much between Schechner and Monahan as editors of prominent journals but rather between Schechner and Lyon as prominent figures within their respective disciplines. For just as performance studies scholars readily acknowledge Schechner as one of the leading if not founding figures in the interdisciplinary field of performance studies, so too do surveillance studies scholars rightly acknowledge Lyon as one of the leading if not founding figures in the interdisciplinary field of surveillance studies. The fact that Lyon and I are even having this dialogue is, I want to acknowledge from the outset, a testament not only to the interdisciplinary bridges that Schechner and Lyon have cultivated throughout their careers but also to the resonance that Lyon's work in particular has had across disciplinary boundaries in scholarly communities like my own. But as physicists will remind us, resonance is not echo. It is the physical phenomenon of one sound or force amplifying that of another—one tone activating and amplifying a different one. While the two may complement one another, they are not necessarily the same. Echo, on the other hand, is basically circular and, rather than moving forward, it tends to end up back where it began. So while it is easy for me to imagine the numerous places where I echo Lyon's work, it seems to me that there is a lot more insight to be gained by acknowledging its resonance and by exploring how that resonance might amplify our differences. That, in short, is what I do in the first part of the opening chapter to my book, and, ironically enough, it is what I must echo here in the space that Monahan has allotted me. And this brings me back to Schechner and to the exchanges that he often orchestrated in the pages of *TDR*.

I've never been much of a fan of those forums, exchanges, debates or whatever else one might call them, because all too often they were a bit of a set-up in which a couple of scholars, egged on by Schechner, would go after one another in ways that might have been gratifying to their individual egos but that were not particularly useful in terms of advancing scholarship. I don't want to give the impression that I think Monahan is following a similar path. There is a fundamental difference between Schechner's calculated

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pitting of scholars against one another across the pages of *TDR* (like the distasteful public shaming of Phil Auslander in 2009 [*TDR* 53.1]) and Monahan agreeing to publish Lyon's response to my book only if he also provided me the opportunity to respond. I am grateful for that courtesy even if Lyon has not really responded to my book. In fact, he hasn't really even responded to the book's first chapter. Instead, he focuses on the very narrow segment of the first chapter where I draw attention to particular moments in the work that he has produced over the course of his long career in order to illustrate a larger point about the ways that surveillance has been conceptualized historically within the discursive tropes of Christianity.

Despite the fact that throughout that first chapter I discuss the work of a wide range of scholars, intellectuals, artists, and even of prominent church figures (like the infamous letter written by Pope Benedict when he was still a Cardinal repressing open discussion of sexual abuse in the church), Lyon's response construes the complexity of that range of references into an argument about his own personal religious beliefs, and even this argument is based upon the mistaken assumption that the expression of my profound philosophical differences with Lyon is tantamount to questioning the overall "worth of [... his] work on surveillance" rather than simply fleshing out important differences in the governing assumptions that underlie our respective approaches to the study and critique of surveillance as a socio-political phenomenon. So for the record let me say this. Amid those philosophical differences, I have never lost sight of the value or worth of Lyon's often definitive contributions to the field of surveillance studies, and to be frank, I am surprised that he seems to believe that those contributions are fragile enough that he cannot let a critique go unanswered.

Perhaps if I had been clearer about this in the email exchanges that Lyon initiated with me shortly after the publication of my book,¹ I might be writing a very different piece in dialogue with him now—a piece that, as I suggested to him then, rather than rehashing the particulars of my book as he proposed might instead engage in a more forward looking and collaborative critical dialogue on the topic of surveillance and complicity,² the kind of critical dialogue that would quickly and constructively demonstrate that we have common concerns against which our philosophical differences pale in comparison. In my last emails with Lyon I told him that one reason I wanted to discuss "the concept and phenomenon of complicity with relation to issues of surveillance" was because of a growing concern that I had from our email exchanges that, despite my having only written briefly about his work, he was somehow under the false impression that "the opening chapter to my book is primarily about [... him] and the individual particulars of [... his] beliefs."³ Lyon assured me that this was not the case, but he stated that "the chapter also reflects on [... his] work, in ways that [... he found] hard to swallow because it underestimates the maturing process of scholarship over time and assumes that some rather naïve youthful writing offers a hermeneutic key to what follows." He added that he "take[s] responsibility for writing the little tract" (i.e., the book *Christians & Sociology: To the Challenge of Sociology ... A Christian Response*) that I cite, but that he is "profoundly critical of it" and that he has "tried to express some deeply contrary [...] views in subsequent publications over the past 40+ years."⁴

All of this is worthy of discussion, I suppose, even if it personalizes things in a way that I suspect neither Lyon nor I are comfortable with. Certainly, it is worth reflecting on what it actually means to "take responsibility" for what one has written. It is also worth reflecting upon what the "processes of maturing" mean for the body of work one publishes over the course of one's career. Lyon obviously places a high premium on those processes since he rehearses this same claim in the later formal response to my book that he has written for this issue of *Surveillance & Society*. But before moving on to that formal response, it is worth reflecting momentarily upon the earlier rendition of this claim in Lyon's email correspondence with me—if only because in that email Lyon sets up the maturing process of scholarship as a contrast to finding hermeneutic value in the early work of a scholar.

¹ David Lyon, Email to author, June 26, 2018.

² Email to David Lyon by author, August 22, 2018.

³ Email to David Lyon by author, August 22, 2018.

⁴ David Lyon, Email to author, August 22, 2018.

Of Ownership, Specificity, and Maturity

As I suspect Lyon is well aware, one of the major branches in the rich traditions of hermeneutics is that of biblical exegesis, and what we know from that tradition is that while Christian theologians may become increasingly erudite and refined in their understanding of scripture, the underlying assumption that they carry through their processes of maturing if they are believers is that while they themselves may mature the truth value or “revealed truth” of presumably sacred texts remains constant and transcendent, and it thus provides the basis for a set of core beliefs and for the professions of faith that also remain relatively constant as one develops, ages, and matures. No one has question whether Lyon has matured as a scholar. I certainly haven’t. The question is about how the beliefs that he has professed throughout his career and that he continues to profess even in his response to my book influence the way that he conceptualizes surveillance in his contributions to the field of surveillance studies. Unfortunately, his own answer to that question tends to raise the same question it seeks to answer. It is an uncomfortable question, I admit, because most of us—including myself—embrace the right of religious freedom and expression so long as the practice and expression of one’s beliefs does not encroach unreasonably on the same rights to which one’s neighbors are also entitled. The question is uncomfortable because it is often difficult to determine where that encroachment begins and where criticism itself is a form of that encroachment. All of this demands a bit of “good faith” between strangers—something that in these trying times tends unfortunately to be in short supply. But with these concerns in mind, let us consider what it means to “take responsibility” for and to be “critical of” what one has written in the past.

Since I have already summoned the specter of the exchanges in which Schechner had been involved, let me begin first by recalling an exchange that occurred in Toronto at the 2004 American Theatre in Higher Education Conference, an exchange that provides some insight into the opportunities—both existing and missed—that might be found in this exchange between David Lyon and me. The exchange in Toronto was not a product of Schechner’s direct orchestration, but was the result of a 2003 article that drew attention to an editorial that Schechner had penned in 1963 shortly after having taken over the editorship of *TDR* (at that time called *The Tulane Drama Review*). As the article’s author, Stephen Bottoms (2003), inconveniently noted, that 1963 editorial was explicitly homophobic (177). In it, Schechner (1963) denounced the playwright Edward Albee and his play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and proclaimed that he was “tired of morbidity and sexual perversity which are there only to titillate an impotent and homosexual theatre and audience” (9). Written apparently in the heat of the moment, those homophobic comments from the early sixties were not very forward looking, and some forty years later, they were the source of significant embarrassment when Stephen Bottoms stumbled across them again and asked scholars to reflect upon the legacy of Schechner’s bizarre heteronormativizing gesture at what plausibly could be called the initial impulses of performance studies as an emerging discipline.

Taking up that very call, Joshua Abrams and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck invited a number of prominent performance studies scholars to a roundtable discussion of Bottoms’ article at the 2004 ATHE conference in Toronto, and they asked both Schechner and Bottoms to serve as respondents.⁵ When it came time for Schechner to respond, he turned to the audience, which included me, and told us that he was not the man today who penned that homophobic rant years ago. Then, much to everyone’s surprise, he categorically renounced what he had written in that 1963 editorial. It was an amazing moment of ownership: no cry of foul or of the supposed unfairness of Bottoms’ digging up what Schechner had written and published of his own volition forty years earlier. There was no dismissive and evasive talk of “juvenilia,” “naïve youthful writing,” or “maturing.” There was only Schechner’s clear acknowledgment of the deeply bigoted nature of what he had once written, followed by an unequivocal, pointed, and self-reflective repudiation of the views he once espoused.

I suspect the point I am making here by way of analogy is fairly clear. But let me spell it out so that we can get on to more important matters. At the most basic level, the analogy that I am drawing centers on questions

⁵ Joshua Abrams, Email to author, October 21, 2018.

of ownership and specificity. In his response to my book, Lyon refers to the “unfortunate appearance” of *Christians & Sociology: To the Challenge of Sociology ... A Christian Response* (InterVarsity Press, 1975) as if somehow forty years ago the book appeared of its own accord rather than as a consequence of his own decision to write and publish it. Schechner didn’t traffic in such euphemisms with respect to the deeply problematic arguments that he penned early in his career. He owned them, and he was specific about what he disavowed in light of the recirculation of those arguments years later. Lyon by contrast sidesteps a book he wrote but doesn’t seem to want anyone to talk about—let alone want to talk about himself—and at some basic level I understand that. It is far easier to dismiss the book as “juvenilia” and to state in vague terms that his views have “matured” than it is to confront his own writing directly and parse in specificity what in that early book he still embraces and what he now genuinely rejects. Despite his assertion that he is “profoundly critical” of *Christians & Sociology*, I can find no instance in his writing where he explicitly is. In fact, I suspect that Lyon can’t really do what I am suggesting here since the stated objective of *Christians & Sociology* is to teach young students how to study sociology without jeopardizing their Christian faith, which is something that over the course of his career Lyon has apparently mastered.

I applaud the fact Lyon does not want to “be seen as supporting Israeli policies in Palestine, denying climate change, voting for strong-man populist demagogues, or agreeing that gay people should be excluded from the church,” but all of that is easy, and it begs the question of how the processes of Christian maturation to which Lyon refers actually distance him from the specific views he disseminated in his publications with InterVarsity Press. I remain curious about what particular views from *Christians & Sociology* still (or no longer) have play in the assumptions that govern Lyon’s scholarship on surveillance today. Since in my earlier discussion of his work, I cite the book’s central claim that “man is a slave to society, not because he is malleable, or because he is a social pawn, but because he is fundamentally a slave to sin, and therefore to a sinful society” (Lyon 1975: 68), maybe that would be a good place to start. Does Lyon still believe that we are all slaves to sin, that as we as scholars “examine society, we dare not overlook the tendency to sin and [that] we must never forget that our own study will be tainted by that same sin” (1975: 66)? Since this kind of statement implies that academic study and scholarship is inherently tainted by sin, why shouldn’t one ask whether this distinctly Christian assumption of universal guilt prejudices the way that Lyon—or other scholars like Eric Stoddart, Jacques Ellul, or even Louis Althusser—conceptualize surveillance? Indeed, this question seems all the more pressing in light of the fact that when, in his current response to my book, Lyon quotes Torin Monahan’s review of my book earlier this year, he edits Monahan’s (2018) statement that “state surveillance and Christianity share additional similarities, at least conceptually, in their construction of submissive subjects who are hailed (or interpellated) as inherently guilty or sinful and in need of oversight” (259). Surprisingly, Lyon eliminates Monahan’s reference to Christianity’s ideological construction of its subjects as “sinful.” Perhaps this is coincidence, but the editing effectively circumvents the question that *Christians & Sociology* raises with respect to “sin.” That being said, I would suggest that there is a question that is more pressing than queries about what happened to textual references to sin.

Since, as I have previously noted, *Christians & Sociology* (1975) acknowledges in its opening paragraph that it seeks to fortify those who are “quite unprepared for the subtle and persistent tendency of sociology to erode faith and raise doubts” (7), perhaps it would be equally helpful to know how the Christian maturity that Lyon now embraces as a scholar positions his current work with respect to this expressed goal. Does that maturity involve an unequivocal disavowal of the kind of anti-intellectualism—so clearly articulated in *Christians & Sociology*—that is intent upon short-circuiting lines of inquiry which would “erode faith” in and “raise doubts” about Christian doctrine, or does that maturity involve a more sophisticated and rhetorically masked pursuit of the same agenda—in short, is that maturity “tainted” by the same pre-calculated doctrinal agenda—that Lyon articulated in blunter terms when writing for InterVarsity Press as a younger scholar? This too is an important question because at some level, Lyon’s response to my book seems intent upon that self-same agenda.

On the Long Shadow of InterVarsity's Steeple

Larger questions loom as well. If the “appearance” of *Christians & Sociology* was an unfortunate bit of “juvenilia” as Lyon claims, are we then to understand that *Karl Marx: A Christian Assessment of His Life and Thought* (1979), the book that Lyon published with the same press four years later, was also an “unfortunate appearance” and also another bit of “juvenilia?” I ask this question because in his response to my book, Lyon asserts: “Harding suggests that I write from evangelical, even fundamentalist, positions.” A more accurate statement would be that I point out that Lyon wrote not one but two books for InterVarsity Press, which, as I note in my book, is the pseudo-academic publishing wing of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a self-described “evangelical” organization.⁶ Perhaps Lyon confuses me with other scholars like Rex Rogers (1987: 568) who calls him an “evangelical sociologist” or Raymond English who cites Lyon’s commitment to “Evangelical Christianity” (1988: 28). I understand why Lyon is sensitive about that label. Over the years, that label has also “matured,” and done so in ways that ought to make most scholars and intellectuals want to distance themselves from it. But while one cannot help but seek the significant lines of continuity in any process of maturation, what Lyon ultimately calls himself or what anyone else calls him is really beside the point.

What matters is how and whether these “unfortunate” texts are indices of the underlying metaphysical assumptions that, for better or worse, continue to shape Lyon’s own work and influence the critical lens through which subsequent scholars conceptualize the field of surveillance studies more generally. Here, we might recall, for example, that in his review of Lyon’s 1987 book *The Steeple’s Shadow: On the Myths and Realities of Secularization*, English (1988: 28) notes that “Lyon’s point as a sociologist is that human beings belong to the species *homo religious*” and that, as a result, when “traditional transcendent religion” is in decline, we are apparently inclined to seek “*ersatz* objects of faith and worship: ideology, state, nation, ‘civil religion’, ‘permanent revolution’, sexuality, health, ‘the family’, and the symbols of counter-culture.” Broadly speaking then, one is certainly justified in asking whether Lyon’s underlying assumption is that the problem of surveillance is actually a problem of idolatry and that, having abandoned god, we thus—*what ... instinctually?*—turn to surveillance as *ersatz* for the god we supposedly really desire. This is certainly what Lyon is suggesting in works like his 1995 essay “Whether Shall I Flee? Surveillance, Omniscience and Normativity in the Panopticon,” where, as I note in my book, Lyon (1995) positions the watchful eye of god as an alternative to surveillance’s suspect pursuit of what he calls “secular omniscience” (308). Likewise, it is also what Lyon is suggesting in his response to my book when he professes that “biblically put, when some token or practice is thus elevated to an ‘idolatrous’ position, it quickly blinds participants to the realities of the situation and binds them into servitude.”

For non-believers, such suggestions aren’t particularly useful—indeed, I would argue that for anyone who is not seeking a reaffirmation of Christian thought they are not particularly useful—especially when they guide the course of scholarship. So the questions here are neither trivial nor random. In this respect, Lyon’s assertion that my discussion of *Christians & Sociology* “assumes that some rather naïve youthful writing offers a hermeneutic key to what follows” is simply wrong. The possibility that Lyon’s work assumes that we are tainted with universal guilt and sin, or even that surveillance is an *ersatz* for a redemptive surveillance-savvy savior, emerges not only from a coordination of his numerous writings on the sociology of religion with his writings on surveillance, but also from the numerous moments in his work on surveillance itself where, even as he has done in his response to my book, Lyon openly acknowledges and echoes what he stated in his first book on surveillance, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (1994): that he “is guided by the converging traditions of Christian social thought” (ix).

Although I am not suggesting here nor do I suggest in my book that Lyon’s work can be distilled into a single assumption like surveillance is an *ersatz-god*—and anyone who has read the astonishing range of Lyon’s important work on surveillance knows that his understanding of surveillance is far more complex than that—I do want to suggest that Lyon’s reading of Jeremy Bentham decades after the publication of

⁶ <http://evangelism.intervarsity.org/> [accessed November 19, 2018].

Christians & Sociology as well as his reading of the Old Testament narrative of Hagar in his response to my book ought to give us pause. For both indicate that this notion of surveillance as *ersatz-god* is not an altogether inaccurate approximation of at least one of Lyon's key governing assumptions. More about that momentarily—in the meantime, I don't think that anyone should assume that the gist of my critique disqualifies the genuinely significant contributions that Lyon has made to surveillance studies over the years. What that critique does do, however, is to suggest that it is worth asking scholars to consider the ways in which the combination of views expressed in works like *Christians & Sociology*, *Karl Marx: A Christian Assessment of His Life and Thought*, *The Steeple's Shadow*, and even *Jesus in Disneyland*—views that Lyon echoes throughout his response to my book—might hinder a more nuanced understand of surveillance as a socio-political phenomenon. Some may conclude with me that those views are in fact a hindrance; others may not. But the point is that there is nothing particularly novel or untoward about a call to rethink a body of work based upon the re-emergence of writings which others have overlooked or about which a scholar has been silent.

After Forty Years in the Wilderness

With this last acknowledgment, I admit to being puzzled by the whole “debate” about having discussed a text written by Lyon early in his career. For this is what scholars and historians do. Conducting research, occasionally they stumble across an oddity. They present their findings to their peers and offer a plausible explanation about how that oddity complicates current understanding of any number of things like the work of a prominent intellectual, artist, or scholar; the significance of a cultural event or historical occurrence; the limitations of a school of thought or a field of study; or, the underlying assumptions that govern a particular cultural, political, or philosophical discourse. Since Lyon is apparently fond of T.S. Eliot and cites him in his response to my book, one might ask, for example, how he views Eliot's (1934: 7) pageant play *The Rock* (from which he paraphrases the lines: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? / Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”) in light of the anti-Semitic speech that Eliot gave at the University of Virginia and then published that same year, a speech that punctuated Eliot's (1933: 19-20) embrace of Christianity by proclaiming that what is “important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable?” Here was an advocacy of a “social sorting” in Jesus' name that with the advantage of informed hindsight now looks particularly untimely given that it was sentiments like these that led to a fascist surveillance assemblage geared toward the systematic murder of six million Jews. But it's not just that such despicable comments provoked the kind of serious reevaluation of Eliot's other work that scholars like Anthony Julius pursued in *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (1997). They did so largely because when Eliot attempted to limit the damage that these comments did to his reputation by refusing “to allow *After Strange Gods* [the book in which the speech appeared] to be republished,” he never once addressed its “anti-Semitic passage” (Toynton 1997: 142). One suspects that Eliot was hoping that the “wisdom” of that book would be lost without ever having had to address its repulsiveness in specificity.

On a smaller scale, of course, Bottoms did something similar with the attention he drew to Schechner's early work, provoking a very different and more constructive response from Schechner. But in this respect, Schechner was more the exception than the rule. Perhaps much more can thus be gained by recalling more famous examples like the case of the prominent literary theorist Paul de Man and the 1987 discovery of his wartime journalism by Ortwin de Graef forty some years after it was written—journalism that came amid the war and, much to everyone's astonishment, expressed clear “fascist and anti-Semitic sympathies” (Jay 1988: 18). Since de Man was a central figure in what is commonly called the Yale School of Deconstruction, this discovery led many to question the ethics of poststructuralism more generally. Others were more cautious about drawing hasty conclusions but still acknowledged that the discovery required careful consideration. Writing shortly after this early journalism by de Man was made available to the public, the historian Martin Jay argued, for example, that “without [...] succumbing to the temptation to polemicize mindlessly against a body of thought that cannot be reduced to any one forgotten point of origin, it is nonetheless imperative to ask hard questions about the implications of these deeply troubling writings” (24). Even when Geoffrey Hartmann (1989)—de Man's colleague at Yale, his close friend and his defender—

posed the question, “Would it be better to stop the fuss and dismiss the early journalism as immature and [as] relatively trivial?,” his answer was clearly no. He not only conceded that “trivial causes can trigger significant reactions” (69). He also suggested, sensibly I think, that we need to consider the larger implications of those reactions. De Man’s “betrayal,” Hartman argued, “is a piece of our—not only of de Man’s—un-mastered past” (69).

If one separates these arguments by Jay and Hartmann from the sensationalism of the particular case of Paul de Man, my sense is that a worthy road map remains for addressing the inconvenient writings of prominent intellectuals and scholars that resurface or recirculate forty years after they were published, a roadmap that is as applicable to de Man as it is to other scholars like Schechner and Lyon—all three of whom have been pricked by their own pen for writings from four decades earlier that even at the time of composition were indefensible. The map is relatively simple. It combines Jay’s call to ask hard questions without being reductive and Hartmann’s call not to excuse as the product of immaturity or triviality that which might point to unresolved issues that are larger than the individual who triggers them into play. This is the kind of map I follow in the first chapter of *Performance, Transparency, and the Cultures of Surveillance*, and despite Lyon’s suggestion to the contrary, my interest there and here in Lyon’s publications with InterVarsity Press has nothing to do with discrediting the worth of his subsequent work *in toto*. My interest is in how the more troubling aspects of those publications might provoke a critical engagement with the deeply problematic ways that surveillance itself and the discourses rationalizing it are embedded in the logic of Christianity. As Lyon has made clear in his response to my book, he doesn’t see that logic as a problem. I suspect others will be divided in their opinions about whether it is or is not a problem. But Lyon’s umbrage at the suggestion that he writes from a “fundamentalist position” indicates why I think it is.

About Those Fundamental(ist) Issues, or Re-reading Psalm 139

It is worth noting that in my book I only once use the term “fundamentalist,” and I do so with specific reference to Lyon’s attempt in a 1991 essay to hold Jeremy Bentham to a strict, prescriptive reading of Psalm 139 (Harding 2018: 60). In its reinforcement of a narrow, literal reading of scripture, that attempt is in fact a fundamentalist gesture, and it is one that Lyon repeats in his later writings about Bentham as well. In that 1991 essay, Lyon accuses Bentham of “secular parody” primarily because of Bentham’s use of verse 2 (“Thou art about my path, and about my bed: and spiest out all my ways.”) as an epigraph for the original proposal that he wrote for the Panopticon (Lyon 1991: 599). As I detail in my book, this accusation of “secular parody” rebukes Bentham’s secular reinterpretation of texts presumed to be sacred, and, I argue, the rebuke is ultimately accompanied by an ambiguous metaphysical threat (“We forget its origins at our own expense” [599]). I could rehearse those arguments again here and explain one more time why, in light of Lyon’s claims that we are all “slaves to sin,” that I associate that ambiguous threat with the punitive notion of “eternal damnation”—a notion that, whatever Lyon’s apparent belief to the contrary, is very much a part of the baggage of Christian discourse. That punitive threat is written in all four gospels, is scattered across the Pauline epistles, and is a central graphic image of the book of Revelation. (Indeed, there is nothing “gratuitous” about Revelation 20:11-15 as an image of divine punitive sorting.) But since Lyon takes such strong issue with this point in his response to my book, I would simply refer readers to the first chapter in my book where they can read the argument in its entirety and judge for themselves whether the claim is warranted.

Rather than rehashing the arguments in my book about an essay written in 1991, perhaps it would be more constructive in this essay to move forward a couple of decades so as to be more attentive to Lyon’s charge that I do not take into account the “processes of maturing” that he has gone through as a scholar. Indeed, there is a clear segue for doing so since the same rebuke of Bentham from 1991 finds a ready echo in Lyon’s more recent essay “Surveillance and the Eye of God,” which he published in *Studies in Christian Ethics* in 2014. I regret not having also discussed this essay in my book since, at the very least, doing so would have helped to clarify in more precise detail the ways in which Lyon’s commitment to the traditions of Christian social thought often tend—across the spectrum of his writings—to pre-calibrate the moments of insight that he offers with respect to surveillance. Perhaps I can offer that clarity here.

It is difficult to say whether this 2014 essay actually marks an evolution in the views that Lyon expressed back in 1991 about Bentham's citation of Psalm 139 or whether it simply marks a shift in the language expressing those views. For while in this more recent essay Lyon (2014) has abandoned the odd accusation of "secular parody," he replaces it with an accusation that Bentham has done "violence to the text" and is blinded by "the 'Enlightened' blinkers of modern social imaginaries" (28). And blind to what exactly? Bentham's heterodoxical reading of the psalmist, according to Lyon, blinds him to the need for "a healthy respect for the one who can as it were see right through human beings" and it deprives him of "a sense of relief that someone has noticed, [and] is aware of the situations of life with all their uncertainties" (29). Of course, all of the "healthy respect" for a higher authority that Lyon believes that Bentham is missing is based upon the assumed existence of divine benevolent omniscience and thus upon the acceptance that one is "known by God" and that one can be the beneficiary of his "'agapic' love" (29) if only one submits to his authority. Not to do so, Lyon implies, is to be misguided, i.e., to be blinded by "modern social imaginaries"—the term that Lyon adapts, somewhat idiosyncratically, from the work of Charles Taylor and that Lyon then positions as the binary opposite to the faith-based imaginaries that his own argument privileges. But once one acknowledges these underlying assumptions, problems quickly come into view. Never mind that in his critique of Bentham, Lyon presupposes as true that which is actually a matter of faith and that which Bentham rigorously critiqued in writings like *Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind* (1822) and *Not Paul, But Jesus* (1823). The point is that Lyon's formulation implicitly pathologizes as "unhealthy" any view that does not presuppose the existence of a benevolent higher authority, which in this case is a divine authority. Since that presupposition is ultimately a matter of faith—and since Lyon is certainly entitled to his own spiritual beliefs—it only really becomes a matter of concern to surveillance studies scholars when Lyon blurs his proselytizing call for a "healthy respect" for god's authority with a call for a "healthy respect" for the authority behind surveillance assemblages, and this is in fact what he does in his discussion of Bentham.

Lyon's critique of Bentham—both in his 1991 essay and his 2014 essay—forms the basis of the "care to control" spectrum of surveillance that he also refers to in his response to my book. In fact, Lyon's notion of "care to control" is arguably grounded in the reading of Psalm 139 that he provides in his discussion of Bentham. Maintaining that the divine omniscience described in Psalm 139 is "a knowing that seems to engage the person in a whole way and demands to be thought of as 'love,'" Lyon (2014) concludes: first, that "this view insists that care, not just control, should be included in the surveillance picture"; and second, that what in this regard "is true of the divine 'seeing' [...] is also so, in slightly different ways, of human surveillance" (29). Here in concrete terms is a clear example of Lyon taking a biblical notion of a seemingly benevolent god and using it to conceptualize an image then posited as a model for understanding surveillance. In my book, I questioned precisely this kind of construction, and I want to question it again here in equally emphatic terms: equations like this are not only suspect; they are deceptive.

It doesn't matter whether one is a believer or a non-believer, the western notion of god—the notion that runs across the monotheistic traditions of all three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam)—positions benevolence as an inherent manifestation of a uniform divine agency ostensibly capable of engaging in a personal relationship with willing individuals. But to extend this notion of benevolence and care to surveillance is to fall prey to the profoundly misleading tropes of anthropomorphism. Surveillance as a socio-political phenomenon possesses neither uniformity nor agency in its numerous manifestations. On the contrary, it is diffuse, multivalent, and rhizomatic in its structures of operation and power. Surveillance doesn't care or feel any emotion; it doesn't possess volition; and above all, it doesn't possess the kind of agency that "demands to be thought of as 'love'." Authoritarians and corporations are not loved by surveillance, but they do love surveillance, and their powers of manipulation and control are only further enhanced when the general population dons "the blinkers" of pro-surveillance propaganda and believes that surveillance loves and cares for them or that it is the embodiment of such devotion. Framing surveillance in the discourse of Christianity encourages that fantasy—and it does so irrespective of whether one is or is not a Christian convert.

Despite his having suggested a rough equivalency between “divine seeing” and “human surveillance,” a sense of the above mentioned problem shadows the one major caveat that Lyon offers in the analogy that he constructs between the concept of a benevolent god and that of surveillance. “Given human proneness to deceive and distort,” Lyon (2014) cautions, “some suspicion is warranted in surveillance systems. But if it is in any way to resemble ‘God’s eye’ in Psalm 139, it will be tempered by trust” (29). While Lyon, based upon the expression of trust in god that the psalmist voices in Psalm 139, thus calls upon us to temper our suspicion of surveillance with trust, I want to suggest that a more attentive and less selective reading of Psalm 139 points to the reasons for the exact opposite course of action. Our suspicion should not be tempered by hopeful trust—our trust should be tempered by legitimate suspicion. On this point, Lyon and I find ourselves at opposite ends of the spectrum.

It is not just that the immense potential for abuse ought to temper our trust in surveillance systems; the same potential for abuse ought to temper our trust in anything resembling an appeal to god’s benevolent omniscience as an ideological justification of those systems. And the psalmist gives us clear reason for doing so. For what Lyon doesn’t mention in his reading of Psalm 139 is the immediate consequence of the psalmist’s acknowledgment of god’s benevolent eye: the call for a violent repression of non-believers. Having recognized that god “spies out all” of his ways, having borne witness that his “soul knoweth right well” that god’s works are “marvelous” and having testified in song that god’s “counsels” are “dear” to him, the very first thing that the psalmist then does is to ask god to “slay the wicked.” And who are the wicked? The wicked are those who do not embrace the psalmist’s view of the divine: those who “speak unrighteously against” god and take his “Name in vain.” Proving himself a faithful servant of god, the psalmist declares: “I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee” and “I [am] grieved with those that rise up against thee. Yea, I hate them right sore: even as though they were mine enemies.” One might well argue that the distinction that emerges in this last part of Psalm 139 is a distinction between god’s benevolent omniscience on one hand and the use of “god’s eye” by his zealous devotees on the other. But that is precisely the problem, isn’t it?

For all its ostensible benevolence, the omniscient eye of god is celebrated by a psalmist who recognizes it as a powerful rhetorical tool for purging the ranks of dissent. He sings of a divine power of surveillance while simultaneously calling for the death of those who do not embrace the articles of faith that reaffirm that power. And in doing so, the psalmist gives voice to the biblical equivalent of that most deceitful justification of surveillance: “only those who have something to hide, have something to fear.” But what we actually have to fear are the zealots, the ideologues, and the opportunists who not only have powerful tools of surveillance at their disposal but also sacrosanct ideologies that excuse the misuse of those tools with the promise of something more caring in the future. And in this respect, we should be gravely concerned about those who, using metaphors and narratives drawn from the bible to discourage critical suspicion of surveillance and to advocate “trust,” inadvertently become apologists for those who are all too willing to utilize the tools of surveillance for personal and political advantage. Let the psalmist sing of god’s benevolent omniscience, but remember that his chorus calls for your murder if you don’t share his faith in the divine. And remember too that what in this regard is true of those who laud the care of “divine ‘seeing’ [...] is also so, in slightly different ways,” of those who laud the care of “human surveillance” (29). The issue here is not a spectrum of “care to control,” but of care becoming control’s ruse.

Hagar Revisited

It is not a matter of coincidence that I have devoted a substantial amount of space to Lyon’s discussion of Psalm 139 in his 2014 essay “Surveillance and the Eye of God.” For in that essay, Lyon’s discussion of the psalmist prefaces a discussion of the story of Hagar, the well-known biblical narrative from the 16th chapter of Genesis that Lyon references in his response to my book. Although more concise, what Lyon says in his piece for this issue of *Surveillance & Society* is a pretty clear echo of what he writes in that early 2014 essay, and it is intended to reinforce a perspective on surveillance that benefits from rather than is compromised by Christian thought. Yet what is noteworthy about Lyon’s return to this Old Testament biblical narrative is not so much what he says or repeats, but, once again, what he leaves out or selectively describes with respect to surveillance both in his essay from 2014 and then again in his response to my book. In the latter

instance, Lyon cites this famous biblical narrative not only to counter the notion that the watchful eye of god is punitive, but also to assert that in the story of Hagar we can find what Lyon describes as an “optics of hope for surveillance, clues for an ethics of surveillance, and the basis for censuring certain modes of surveillance as simply unacceptable.”

Given the current trajectories of increasing consolidation of economic and political power among an entrenched ruling elite, how this censorship of unacceptable modes of surveillance is supposed to occur or, more importantly, how it will allow acceptable forms of surveillance to blossom is not entirely clear in Lyon’s argument or even in the biblical narrative of Hagar that he cites in support of his faith-based notion of “an optics of hope.” The censorship to which Lyon refers certainly does not come from the god of that biblical narrative, and the same can be said about an ethics of surveillance. For a closer reading of Genesis 16 indicates that the god of the Hagar narrative is decidedly indifferent when it comes to censoring any mode of surveillance as unacceptable. In fact, a strong case can be made that it is god’s intervention that deserves censorship since it directly reinforces the link between slavery and surveillance that, as Simone Browne (2015) reminds us in *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, is common to “the historical formation” of both (50). And this, once again, is the larger point.

The emphasis that emerges from Lyon’s selective reading of the biblical narrative of Hagar is a kind of devil’s bargain with respect to the conceptual lenses through which we frame and understand surveillance. It posits the ostensible watchful eye of god as a hopeful model for surveillance but does so only by softening the significance of the actual historical formations of surveillance that provide the context of the narrative of Hagar—formations that are at the core of anything one might call “social sorting.” This is certainly true with respect to the slavery depicted in the narrative, which is surveillance’s crudest, most violent and thus most repugnant form of social sorting. But, it also seems to me, that a god who has a “chosen people” with whom he makes “a covenant” at others’ expense is little more than a mystified rhetorical construct that facilitates “social sorting” while masquerading as divine care. So the problem with using the Hagar narrative in order to argue on behalf of a faith-based “optics of hope for surveillance” is that the narrative not only reinforces both of the above-mentioned problematic forms of social sorting, but that it also does so by downplaying the violence against women that those forms also facilitate.

As Lyon would have it, that narrative from Genesis tells the story of “how Sarai persuaded Abram to accelerate [...god’s] promise of an heir by taking Hagar, her Egyptian servant, as a wife-substitute to bear a son for her” and of how Sarai then becomes “jealous and kicks Hagar out” of Abram’s home (2014: 30). But though called a “servant” or “handmaid” in some English translations, Hagar, as I am sure Lyon knows, was in fact Sarai’s domestic slave. As Elsa Tamez (1986) notes in her essay “The Woman Who Complicated the History of Salvation,” the “Hebrew word *shaffat*” used in Genesis is synonymous with “slave” (131). In this respect, a more constructive way to tease out the structures of surveillance in this narrative would be to forego discussion of Sarai’s efforts to persuade Abram to have sex with Hagar—since persuasion was not the problem—and to focus instead on the issue of coercion and on the fact that Sarai was able to force Hagar to have sex with Abram as a result of the surveillance assemblage commonly known as slavery. The issue here is not so much that Hagar was “victimized by patriarchy” as Lyon claims—although that is certainly also the case—but rather that she is a clear and identifiable victim of the abuses facilitated, indeed produced, by the surveillance assemblage of slavery that governed her day-to-day affairs.

That assemblage stripped Hagar of agency and volition and made her the victim of a sexual assault leading to an unwanted pregnancy at the hands of the patriarch of the world’s three major monotheistic religions—the same patriarch who under the watchful commanding eye of god later proves himself to be capable of a premediated, attempted sacrificial murder of his son (Kierkegaard 1986: 60). Indeed, when speaking of the benevolence and care of the Old Testament god, it is always good not to lose sight of the fact that, acting in the name of an omniscient benevolent god, the patriarch of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam was both an attempted murderer and a rapist. Both acts were rationalized by an ostensible covenant with the god whose watchful eye Lyon posits as a hopeful model for surveillance. But more to the point, the rape of Hagar in particular was facilitated by the power that surveillance—in this instance, that the controlling power of the

institution of slavery—provides to its beneficiaries. The consequence of all of this is not, as Lyon suggests, that Sarai becomes “jealous and kicks Hagar out.” The actual biblical narrative states that Sarai saw that Hagar “despised” her, that Sarai then “mistreated” Hagar further, and that as a consequence Hagar “fled.” And why wouldn’t Hagar despise and flee Sarai who set her up for rape, an unwanted pregnancy, and further abuse? On this note, I simply have to pause and admit to being dumbfounded here, for it is nothing short of astonishing that Lyon would even go near this toxic Old Testament narrative as the basis for what he calls “an optics of hope for surveillance” or as an illustration of the value of “Christian social thought” to the study of surveillance, sociology, or anything else.

Lyon makes much of the fact that Hagar flees to the desert where amid her wretched plight the angel of the lord intervenes, and his reading of this intervention is that god’s eye or “vision is both *critical*—seeing the mistreated stranger, widow, orphan embodied in Hagar—and *caring*—she’s not just a chattel, an object to be discarded, but a person who can make choices and has a future” (2014: 30). This all sounds quite hopeful. But lest we forget, the angel of the lord is a lot less caring than Lyon suggests, and, unfortunately, a lot less punitive than one might expect the emissary of god to be, at least with respect to Hagar’s abusers, Sarai and Abram. The angel doesn’t censor the abusive form of surveillance to which Hagar has been subjected, and there is no indication that the trauma to which her body has been subjected at the hands of Sarai and Abram is healed. On the contrary, the angel commands Hagar to submit to the same abusive surveillance regime once again by returning to Sarai, who mistreats Hagar further and who then finally casts her and her son Ishmael out, thus depriving Ishmael of his rights as Abram’s first born and legitimate heir. In this respect, the surveillance assemblage personified in the angel of the lord amounts to little more than something akin to a rhetorically skilled, divine sheriff who orders a run-away slave to return to her abusive master, who announces belatedly what has already been made known—that Hagar is pregnant by rape—and who then offers her a misleading promise that her seed will “multiply.” What the angel doesn’t tell Hagar is that her seed will multiply outside of the covenant of god and hence as a socially sorted, second class race vis-à-vis god’s “chosen people.” It is not Sarai and Abram who instigate this racialized act of social sorting. It is god himself.

While it is true as Lyon (2014) notes that Hagar, a “foreign female fugitive names God, as El Roi, the ‘God who sees me’” (30), the problem is that she does not see god, or at least does not see god for the double-dealer that he proves to be in this narrative. For, as Tamez points out, Hagar could rightly assume by the laws of the day – and by the ambiguities of god’s promise that her seed will multiply—that returning to the house of Abram would mean that her son would be Abram’s legitimate heir and that this would “give him rights [not only] of inheritance in the house of Abraham” (1986: 137) but make him the legitimate heir to god’s covenant with Abram as well. Yet such assumptions prove ill-founded. For un(ore)seen by Hagar, god cuts another deal with Sarai, a deal that he makes after his promise to Hagar and that ultimately leads to further abuse of Hagar, who along with her son Ishmael, is thrown out of the house so as to make way for Isaac, Sarai’s late born son, as Abram’s heir. That the god of Abram is complicit in all of this is borne out by the fact that while he misled Hagar with the promise that her seed would “multiply” as the presumable heir to the house of Abram, he subsequently promises to bless Sarai, to give her “a son” and to make her not only a “mother of nations” but a mother of “kings” among god’s chosen people. Indeed, he tells Abram that “Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.” In a moment of *divine social sorting*, god then tells Abram that he will make Ishmael “a great nation.... But my covenant will I establish with Isaac.” This is the eye of god in the narrative of Hagar, and in this respect alone, I agree with Lyon: the eye of god is not punitive. It is egregiously unjust, for what remains at the end of this narrative from Genesis 16 and 17 (and even at the end of Genesis 21) is not merely “Ishmael, the son of the slave Hagar, who,” as Tamez notes “cannot be erased from history and will always be demanding his rights as the first born and legitimate son of Abraham” (132), but Hagar herself who is victimized by every form of surveillance depicted in this narrative from the book of Genesis—victimized even by the knowing eye of god.

When all is said and done, the biblical story of Hagar leaves us with two competing, layered narratives of surveillance: a privileged narrative, on one hand, grounded in the Old Testament's mystified yet contradictory depictions of a god who is a bit of a double-dealer and who likes to play favorites while pretending to do otherwise; and a subaltern narrative, on the other hand, from down below so to speak, where the actual undercurrent historical realities of slavery exist as one of the originary sources of surveillance as an operative mode of power. It is amid a grounding in that historical reality that we might formulate some key critical questions about Lyon's embrace the narrative of Hagar as a point of illustration for his response to the arguments that I formulate in my book. To that end, it is worth returning to Lyon's assertion that it is from "texts like" the narrative of Hagar that he finds "an optics of hope for surveillance" as well as "clues for an ethics of surveillance." And here, let me be blunt: one can only find such optics and clues in the story of Hagar by turning a blind eye to what is actually happening in the text that Lyon has cited.

Granted I have read the story of Hagar decidedly against a fundamentalist grain that considers the notion of a "chosen people" sacred rather than suspect, so perhaps Lyon will excuse my inability as a non-believer to discern an "optics of hope for surveillance" out of his embrace of this horrible, horrible narrative—unless, of course, that hope lies beyond an affirmation of all that this biblical narrative condones. Indeed, if Lyon is serious that such optics and "such embryonic ethics valorize recognition," if he is serious "that one should hesitate before acquiescing to use a system that offers no such recognition," and if he is serious that "this applies especially to surveillance as social sorting [...] in which people are categorized in order to be treated differently," then I would suggest that he avoid the narrative economies of biblical texts that advocate precisely the opposite of these worthy goals.

The Circularity of the Barber's Bowl: A Conclusion of Sorts

Worthy though they may be in the abstract, I remain skeptical about whether those goals can be achieved amid the practical political realities of the surveillance society. Indeed, the primary focus of my book, *Performance, Transparency, and the Cultures of Surveillance*, is an exploration of the overwhelming evidence suggesting that the moment that surveillance became a mechanism of private corporate enterprise, the idea of hedging it in or of redirecting it toward more socially constructive roles became an anachronism, and in this respect, I see "the optics of hope" that Lyon posits in his response to my book to be something akin to Ulrich Beck's "zombie categories," those "'living dead' categories which," according to Beck, "govern our thinking but are not really able to capture the contemporary milieu" (Slater and Ritzer 2001: 262). Contrary to what one might expect, however, I think that Beck's notion of "zombie categories" has very little to do per se with the Christian ideals that Lyon embraces personally. Depending upon one's beliefs those ideals may very well capture the contemporary milieu with respect to individual spiritual matters and questions of faith. I just don't see that those ideals add anything constructive or anything ethically distinct to the study of the surveillance society. In many respects, they simply cloud the issues and get in the way, particularly when the deeply penetrating critical analyses of surveillance of which someone like Lyon is capable are framed within an embrace of supposedly sacred texts that upon closer examination advocate horrible things or at the very least accommodate them.

As I note in my book, that clouding is most problematic when the notion of Christianity as an inviolate ideal generates a parallel ideal with respect to surveillance. However problematic surveillance's current formations may be, that ideal somehow imagines a more sophisticated form of surveillance to be the answer to the problems that surveillance itself creates, and it thus encourages one to side with surveillance's ostensible potential rather than to find something indicative about surveillance itself in its numerous egregious manifestations. The irony, of course, is that such encouragement contributes to surveillance's "continued development and use" and to its further expansion and invasiveness into our lives (Harding 2018: 39). So let me be as pointed here as I hope I have been throughout this essay. The ideal behind that encouragement has outlived its usefulness with respect to the study of surveillance. Lyon and I can squabble all we want over the relevance of his early writings to his later writings, over the proper place of religious beliefs vis-à-vis the assumptions governing scholarship, or even over interpretations of biblical texts, but in

the end it is the clear identification of the logic of this one zombie category that matters. It is this logic that finally must be laid to rest.

More than anything else, I want to suggest that we are very late in recognizing how that logic has outlived its usefulness to all except to those who benefit *not* from surveillance's ostensible potential but rather from its repressive assemblages. In this respect, there is urgency in the broad general need to remain critical of the multiple ways that the discourses of Christianity bleed into and feed dubious political rationalizations for surveillance. But so too, unfortunately, there is also a pressing need to resist the kind of self-exculpatory, circular logic in which Lyon wraps Christianity in his response to my book—a need that becomes all the more pressing when he attempts to wrap the critique of surveillance into that same circular logic. For even if one accepts the circularity of Lyon's claim that "Christianity contains within itself a critique of its own practices—and the means of forgiveness and renewal," this is not true with respect to surveillance. And here, it is not just that the special pleading of Lyon's claim privileges the immanent critique of Christianity's "own practices" as being in a category unto itself—i.e., as something other than also being a practice of Christianity—and thus as something following a logic that is somehow magically exempt from the very internal critique to which Lyon refers. It is the circular logic behind Lyon's claim that "on *Christian* grounds [...] every appalling action done in the name of Christ [...] should be denounced and measures taken to understand and to try to repair the damage done." For the logic behind Lyon's claim is in fact *the identical logic that was always already in place, providing cover for those self-same appalling actions when they occurred in the first place*. The stakes are too high here to be Pollyannaish about what this is. That circularity is the logic of self-righteousness. It is the logic of Christianity's hermetic Master Narrative, mystifying its own special pleading. It is the logic of the echo chamber.

To extend that same mystified circularity to surveillance is to venture dangerously into the quixotic and to flirt, in Jesus' name, with the kinds of rationalized acts of complicity that have punctuated the history of Christianity in every era. At what point, one must ask, will an action done in the name of Christ finally be appalling enough that believers will begin to question seriously whether their own discourse may be the culprit? I would suggest that one place to start that questioning would be with an examination of those moments when Christian discourse begins to provide rationalizations encouraging us to believe that surveillance—like something akin to "the soul in the machine"—can be redeemed and is therefore worthy of our trust.

Let me conclude with one final reflection on Lyon's argument that Christianity contains within itself an immanent critique of its own practices. I offer a reflection that is also a moment of disclosure. Whether that disclosure matters is anyone's guess, but there is a way in which I find my own positionality mapped out in Lyon's claim. For at some level, I am closer to Lyon than I have so far acknowledged. Having had a minister as a father, I am very much of the Christian community without being in that community. So if I speak critically of the discursive economies of Christianity and of the church, I do not do so altogether as an outsider lobbing rocks through the windows but rather as an unbeliever who left through the church's front doors so as to gain some perspective.

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