Book Review

Review of Lewis, Randolph. 2017. *Under Surveillance: Being Watched in Modern America*. Austin: University of Texas Press. 276 pp. US\$27.95. ISBN: 9781477312438.

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Over the last few decades, surveillance applications have expanded beyond historically risky and problematic concerns to include those that are law-abiding, mundane, and unextraordinary. This shift represents the normalization of ubiquitous monitoring, contemporary society's reliance on data-driven products and operations, and the rapid proliferation of surveillance technologies, practices, logics, and actors.

In *Under Surveillance: Being Watched in Modern America*, Randolph Lewis reviews how the surveillance of everyday events, people, and materialities incrementally and subtly changes subjects on a very intimate and sometimes invisible level. Lewis argues that if we are to capture critical nuances in the nature of contemporary surveillance, we must expand what counts as "surveillance" to account for underappreciated, micro-levels of monitoring. These micro-levels (especially emotional affects) work alongside existing surveillance trajectories and systems but remain underappreciated in surveillance literature. Surveillance concerns are undeniably important to everyone; in the present, almost nothing and no one are safe from tracking including the obedient, random, and seemingly unimportant. In fact, it is those subtle effects that appear to be most trivial or inconsequential that escape significant critique and arguably warrant the most attention.

The first chapter, "Feeling Surveillance," reveals the affective and bodily burdens of constant monitoring, illuminating the wide-ranging reactions, emotions, and sensations that it can produce. Investigating the oft-disregarded impact of surveillance culture on mental and emotional health enables an appreciation of the undeniably diverse and sometimes contradictory "forms, textures, and resonances" of surveillance (14). Psychological implications include shame, paranoia, anger, self-consciousness, passivity, and acceptance. Lewis's affective analysis reveals that the most privileged in society (i.e., white, male, cisgender, middle class) now experience the emotional side-effects from omnipresent surveillance that various minority groups have experienced for quite some time.

Chapter Two, "Welcome to the Funopticon," extends this affective trajectory by concentrating on the ways in which surveillance can be fun and entertaining. Lewis coins "Funopticon" to explain the pleasurable and playful sides of surveillance, which are increasingly experienced in tandem with its extractive and coercive effects. Produced by capitalist desires for profit surplus and enlarging consumer demand, and reinforced by consumers wilfully divulging their personal information in exchange for goods and services, Lewis's analytic sensibility complicates several existing surveillance theories by stressing how surveillance is much

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more than punitive. Funopticon surveillance has the ability to normalize and soothe ever-encroaching monitoring and data-banking, giving contemporary surveillance a pedagogical function that teaches consumers how to think and feel.

Chapter Three, “Growing Up Observed,” reviews how human understandings and experiences of surveillance begin early in life. Using autoethnography that places Lewis’s childhood experiences in conversation with critical cultural analysis, Lewis reveals how the psychological impacts of continuously being watched linger and resonate in ways that shape sensitivity to monitoring as we age. Readers are encouraged to reflect upon their own “autobiographical roots” (96)—which include family life, identity, childrearing, vulnerability, etc.—as a means of better understanding formative experiences of surveillance. Reviewing surveillance-laden parenting strategies, student-monitoring techniques, and small-town surveillance culture (among other examples), Lewis argues that surveillance consciousness is shaped by *and* shapes socialization.

Chapter Four, “Watching Walden,” employs the insights of mid-century writer David Henry Thoreau to make sense of the relationship between wilderness, surveillance, privacy, and autonomy. In a shift from most surveillance literature that analyses spatiality, Lewis analyzes natural locations as a special type of spatiality that is increasingly monitored—a unique feature of contemporary monitoring. Revealing the many ways in which modern surveillance applications transform traditional notions of “wilderness” and “nature,” Lewis argues that the increasing depth and scale of surveillance in remote areas—those far from human activity and with a reasonable expectation of seclusion (e.g., campsites)—make it nearly impossible to escape monitoring. The term “wild surveillance” is adopted to reflect upon “the emotional burden that these new technologies and practices are adding to the natural world” (126).

The fifth and sixth chapters highlight the commodification of insecurity and the surveillance-industrial complex (Monahan 2010). In Chapter Five, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” Lewis attends a church security conference in Colorado, revealing how American churches participate in surveillance culture via innovative surveillance measures and technologies. Christian security companies reproduce and profit from insecurity. They weaponize fear and market various security services as necessary to protect religious property, items (e.g., bibles), and followers from various forms of imminent threat. Rhetoric derived from moral panics (church shootings and a fear of racialized urban criminals), a paternalistic culture of masculine vigilance and guardianship, and systemic racism linked to 9/11 effectively target-harden the church and securitize religion. It is no wonder, then, that Lewis found most conference attendees (“roughly 96 percent”) to be “white men over forty” (168).

The book concludes with a chapter on the surveillance and security industry in which Lewis observes a security technology conference in Manhattan. Like the church-goers in the previous chapter, conference attendees are instilled with a sense of moral duty to be prepared and resilient. A collective “confidence” that attack is “unavoidable” (211) fuels patrons’ desire to purchase surveillance goods and services, making emotional imagery essentially unnecessary to encourage sales. Education sessions feature prominently at this conference and, interestingly, target the education sector in an attempt to capture untapped consumers.

Under Surveillance has several strengths. It reveals important gaps in surveillance literature and theories (e.g., emotion, wilderness, and childhood experience), adding new, empirically derived evidence to these areas, which makes for an inventive and original contribution. The book is written in a very clear and conversational manner with barely any lingo; if concepts arise, they are defined in a comprehensible and succinct manner. Lewis uses comedy and wit throughout the book, which I personally appreciate for adding light to otherwise dark and depressing topics. By picking examples that are largely unpublicized and head-turning in nature (e.g., bulletproof bibles), this book makes surveillance of the seemingly mundane fun to read and will surely appeal to individuals with diverse interests.

In another way, *Under Surveillance* is a breath of fresh air in that it does not rely on over-used explanations, scholars, and concepts (i.e., Bentham, Foucault, or Orwell). It offers distinctive insights by including diverse

mediums, thinkers, and disciplines (film, novels, personal memoir, popular culture, etc.) not often incorporated in discussions of tracking. Furthermore, Lewis openly addresses and interrogates his own privilege as well as that of other individuals (academics, activists, etc.). This provides much-needed context to appreciate how targeting and understandings of surveillance are often based on status and identity markers. I hope that other scholars follow suit by explicitly examining their own positionality in relation to how they think about surveillance.

The book is also careful to avoid simplistic explanations (e.g., good/bad dichotomies), which enables readers to appreciate the complexity of surveillance—its actors, applications, and consequences. Readers are encouraged to ask themselves important ethical, moral, and legal questions about its presence in our personal lives and in society at large. In doing so, *Under Surveillance* offers a level-headed assessment of present-day monitoring in America that sets itself apart from other surveillance texts by leaving readers reflective.

While I support the majority of the book's arguments and recommendations, I do not share Lewis's choice to make readers responsible for questioning and resisting surveillance creep. I believe in more abolitionist, radical solutions that call for a complete overhaul of existing governance and corporate systems if we seek to achieve the level of privacy and autonomy that Lewis and other surveillance scholars dream of. Emphasizing individual responsibility may lead to Band-Aid solutions that are incapable of addressing long-term, permanent change.

Conceptually, there are two areas I encourage the author to interrogate further. It would help if Lewis differentiated between surveillance, information gathering, and intelligence, as their specificities are important (Walby and Anais 2015). Relatedly, throughout the book Lewis continuously says, "normal people" (11), "regular people," "ordinary citizen," and "citizens" (34) to refer to the general public who are traditionally not under constant supervision. Such phrasing is variously defined and embedded with assumptions about normalcy/oddity (as they relate to race, gender, immigration status, etc.), making them exclusionary (Millei 2008). Furthermore, *Under Surveillance* is importantly critical in the sense that it has a social justice orientation emphasizing cases, rhetoric, and conceptions of surveillance that reinforce power asymmetries. Even though Lewis emphasizes the disproportionate effects of surveillance upon variously marginalized populations, I craved more in-depth discussions of foundational work by queer scholars and scholars of color (e.g., "racializing surveillance" in Browne 2015), especially in the chapter on emotional costs (see Tuck, Yang, and Gaztambide-Fernández 2015).

In conclusion, *Under Surveillance* is a memorable and effortless read that is great for an introduction to surveillance course. Arguments from a number of disciplines—sociology, psychology, political science, history, literary studies, and philosophy—are thoughtfully articulated in ways that make *Under Surveillance* ideal for audiences of any educational or professional background. Lewis offers viable and unsettling predictions of the trajectory of contemporary surveillance that will surely convince even the most skeptical readers.

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