Building Power, by Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, has the potential to become a critical benchmark for scholars in surveillance studies, offering a compelling range of micro-scale studies into the multiple and complex relationships between surveillance and space. More specifically, the book explores the manifold and highly elaborate ways in which, in the Victorian period, surveillance informed and codified the design and spatial arrangement of various building-types in the United States: prisons, post offices, factories, private houses and religious camp grounds. Anchored in the field of architectural history, yet refreshingly unconstrained by the discipline’s heavy traditions, Andrzejewski’s investigation is structured into four main parts, relating to four key objectives of surveillance: discipline, efficiency, hierarchy and fellowship. The book illuminates one by one each of these dimensions of surveillance, by discussing its mediating role on architecture and spatial design. In this sense, the book offers much more than a simple collection of case studies into different ‘architectures of surveillance.’ It points towards a broader problematic that relates simultaneously to the surveillance-relevant role of space on the one hand, and to the space-producing role of surveillance on the other.

Although discussions regarding the interactions between surveillance and space are not new, Andrzejewski’s work is exceptional in both its depth and detail. In particular, Andrzejewski’s wide and powerful use of plans, maps, photos and paintings illustrates and substantiates her analysis, adding much-needed precision to a subject that often lacks fine-grain research. For example, Andrzejewski’s discussion of the spatial arrangement of factory workspace goes as far as to investigate the configuration of desks “that forced clerks to keep their work areas neater, since there were no pigeonholes in which to hide work materials” (page 80). Multiple other examples could be presented to illustrate the unique precision of Andrzejewski’s analysis.

Importantly, Andrzejewski does not limit her study to a simple analysis of architectural configurations of space but, rather, draws on a wide range of documents – from advice literature on household management to witness accounts of religious camp meetings – in order to centrally place the intentions and social values underlying surveillance-driven architecture. Thus, her investigation of the architectural provisions for discipline, efficiency, hierarchy and fellowship ultimately leads to a powerful relational problematics: What kind of socio-spatial relationships are produced by, and result from, surveillance-driven spatial arrangements? As Andrzejewski puts it, “surveillance[…] framed all kinds of buildings in the Victorian period, albeit in more complex and less sinister ways than Foucault and others have discussed. Examining these and other myriad instances of surveillance undoubtedly enrich our knowledge of American architectural history. It also helps us better understand the asymmetries of power in American culture and the role of buildings and landscapes in shaping everyday experience” (page 12).
Yet despite *Building Power*’s great value and importance, the book is not without its problems. Namely, it is regrettable that Andrzejewski does not really draw on the range of already existing, ever more sophisticated post-Foucauldian studies of the relationships between surveillance and space. In recent years, a rapidly developing body of literature has sought not only to examine the spatial dimensions of surveillance in particular buildings – from airports (Fuller, 2002; Adey 2004) to shopping malls (Benton-Short, 2007) – but also to explore the relationship between surveillance and the physical fabrics of the city more generally (Graham, 1998; Hannah, 1997; Franzen, 2001; Coaffee, 2004). Although these literatures neither deal specifically with Victorian architecture, nor are they necessarily positioned in the field of architectural history, the silence of *Building Power* on this work is somewhat surprising and problematic. Furthermore, a similar criticism can be made as regards Andrzejewski’s engagement with Michel Foucault, which ignores completely the wealth of previous discussions on the subject (Wood, 2003).

From these observations arises an additional analytical issue. Indeed, a more explicit positioning of Andrzejewski’s study within already existing surveillance literatures could have helped emphasize the architectural specificities of surveillance in the 19th century, or clarify some more general principles regarding the imbrications of surveillance and space throughout history. Readers of the book might miss a more substantial discussion of these issues, which could have been outlined at least briefly in the book’s introductory or conclusive section. In this regard, however, it is worth mentioning Andrzejewski’s plans to produce a second book on the subject (announced in the introduction of *Building Power*), focusing on architectures of surveillance in more recent periods. It would be wonderful if this second book could also allow for a more substantial discussion of some of the historic specificities in surveillance architecture, relating also, but not only, to new and emerging information and communication technologies.

These critical comments should however in no way diminish the value and importance of *Building Power*. On the contrary, by way of conclusion, I would like to underscore again Andrzejewski’s exceptionally rich and original empirical and analytical contribution to the field of surveillance studies. The book should be read not only by those interested in surveillance, geography and architecture, but indeed deserves a much broader, cross-disciplinary audience!

**References**


