In *Surveillance in the Time of Insecurity*, Torin Monahan describes the mutual constitution of cultures of insecurity and infrastructures of surveillance. Through a set of analyses of case studies of cultural products and surveillance practice, Monahan traces the cycle by which constructed fears prompt the mobilization of surveillance. Monahan examines that mobilization as it unfolds within the framework of the neo-liberal project, which he understands as the increased privatization of formerly public services, the deregulation of industry, and a bifurcation of risk management in which the protection of capital is seen as the purview of the state, while the protection of individual well-being (protection from illness and poverty, for example) is seen as each individual’s responsibility. Within this neo-liberal political context, surveillance in fact exacerbates real patterns of insecurity, vulnerability and inequality. It also produces the ‘insecurity subject’ as an ideal type. This is the individual who is constantly aware of risk, anticipates it and mitigates it through consumption in the market place.

In the first section of the book, Monahan considers the culture of insecurity. By ‘culture of insecurity’ Monahan is referring to two things. The first is the production of a popular imagination of threat (of terrorism, of illegal immigrants, of the apocalypse) and of the appropriate responses to those threats. The second is the actual production of lived insecurity, uncertainty, and risk in certain groups—particularly women, the poor, and racialized populations. Monahan uses participant observation and close textual readings to disclose the ideologies that underlie and are produced in sites of rhetorical construction. For example, he analyzes the tropes, metaphors and jokes at a large security technology conference—the nudges and winks that both take for granted and reify partnerships between governments and industry, particularly in the sharing of data and the mitigation of corporate financial risk. He also notes the unquestioned assumption of a trend toward increased surveillance and the blurring of its purpose from public safety to marketing and fraud detection. Likewise he shows how popular cultural products like the TV show *24* and the *Left Behind* series of novels naturalize urgency, crises, and perpetual states of exception. They propose as a necessary response an individualized hyper-vigilance. This also appears in the chapter on the rhetoric of ‘identity theft’, coupled with the reification of threatened digital ‘selves’.

Throughout, Monahan points to the political valence of these constructions of fear and threat—how some are framed as dire while others are pedestrian, some properly addressed by the state and others by individuals.
The second section includes case studies of infrastructures mediating surveillance practice. Again and again, Monahan critiques the supposed neutrality of technology, showing how these technologies, in practice, have disparate impact and ideological effects.

Monahan interviews residents of gated communities—both wealthy suburban enclaves and urban subsidized housing projects, to notice how, in practice, surveillance produces various patterns of fear and insecurity. Particularly, fear of others is endemic, but the others are racialized in some instances and not in others. Meanwhile the insecurity of the poor actually increases, as they are subject to an ever more intrusive surveillance that threatens their home and livelihoods. The theme of the cost of surveillance disproportionately borne by those who can least afford it are repeated in the chapter on Electronic Benefits Transfers.

Lived understandings of surveillance come to the fore in the chapter on Intelligent Transportation Systems control rooms, as operators carefully avoid the term ‘surveillance’ while bragging about the interactions between themselves and the police. Here, too, we see the effects of surveillance as privileging certain populations (drivers) at the expense of others (walkers and cyclists).

In the chapter on counter-surveillance, Monahan addresses the ideologies underpinning and produced by activists challenging surveillance infrastructures. In his analysis of the Institute for Applied Autonomy’s iSee paths of least surveillance, the RTMark Guide to CCTV destruction, Steve Mann’s Shooting Back project, and the Surveillance Camera Players guerilla theatre events, he again underlines how all of these valorize individual and local resistance to particular instantiations of surveillance, rather than a collective resistance to systemic structural power.

Monahan’s thesis—that the culture of fear, the expansion of surveillance, and the neo-liberal project are mutually constitutive and produce both industry-state collusion and a hyper-vigilant and responsibilized citizen—is articulate and politically useful. His case studies support that thesis admirably. In all, this is a most welcome addition to the literature on surveillance studies.