The sixth meeting of biannual Surveillance & Society conference, “Surveillance: Ambiguities and Asymmetries” was held in Barcelona, Spain during 24-26 April 2014. It was the first time that it was celebrated outside of the United Kingdom. The conference was a great success: about 170 experts from all over the world gathered in Barcelona for three days and 45 parallel sessions. 130 members joined or renewed their Surveillance Studies Network memberships for the next two years. The conference also reflected the increased number of Surveillance Studies scholars involved in EU funded research projects and three of these research projects organized panels: SECILE, IRISS and SURPRISE. The effect of the conference went further than the venue’s walls, having a noteworthy impact on the local media and as well as some attention in other European countries. Several newspapers and radio programmes mentioned and covered the conference.

The event was a unique opportunity to get involved in the current debates about surveillance and its resulting ambiguities and asymmetries at a very international level, including a wide range of topics such as Big Data, Security, Communication, Privacy, Terrorism, Fiction, Resilience, Theory, Censorship, Cities, CCTV and other surveillance technologies, Police, Social media, History, Democracy, Health or Education. It also included several special sessions. As it was the first Surveillance & Society conference after the Snowden revelations, the public plenary was dedicated to discuss “Surveillance after Snowden”. This session offered a lively discussion between independent privacy researcher Caspar Bowden, who sadly passed away this year, Director of Panoptikon Foundation, Katarzyna Szymielewicz, and one of Snowden’s lawyers from ACLU, Ben Wizner. The second plenary session was dedicated to Surveillance in Canada and the results of the Transparent Lives: Surveillance in Canada project presented by Professors Valerie Steeves, David Lyon, Kevin Haggerty and Colin Bennett. Finally, Professor Emeritus Gary T. Marx was awarded the Surveillance Studies Network lifetime achievement award, and the transcript of the presentation is included in this issue.

In the last couple of years, public perception of and resistance to digital surveillance has expanded exponentially with Snowden’s revelations about the ubiquitous surveillance by intelligence agencies such as NSA and GCHQ. In Europe the European Court of Justice ruled the EU data retention directive to be unlawful and many European countries have annulled their data retention laws (Boehm and Cole 2014). Furthermore, the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe says that it is “deeply concerned” by
the far-reaching, technologically advanced systems used by the US and UK to collect, store and analyse the data of private citizens and that mass surveillance is a fundamental threat to human rights (Omtzigt 2015). In the United States, as a result of the Snowden revelations, law reforms have taken place with the passing of the USA Freedom Act at the beginning of 2015, with huge advances for privacy and transparency. Brazil is planning to build undersea fibre optic internet cables to avoid surveillance by US intelligence authorities (Scola 2014). Notwithstanding the above-mentioned resistance, in other countries we see laws becoming drivers of mass surveillance such as the new anti-terrorism act in Canada, known as Bill C-51 (Thierren 2015) and the proposed surveillance laws in the UK and France in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks (Powles 2015). At the time of writing this editorial the French Assemblée National will vote on a bill which, according to a number of NGOs including EDRI, Amnesty International and Privacy International, will give carte blanche to mass surveillance globally (Amnesty International 2015).

However, as the many great issues of *Surveillance & Society* since 2002 have shown, surveillance is more than just mass surveillance. In this state of anomy as a result of the mass surveillance revelations more targeted practices of surveillance, such as ethnic profiling, discriminatory effects of credit scoring, border control systems that can lead to cumulative disadvantages and social sorting should not fall of the radar (Gandy 2009). Also, depending on the context, power relations are ambiguous and more or less asymmetric. Surveillance practices are also always changing and as “smart” surveillance systems proliferate utilising and generating “Big Data” and increasingly everyday objects are integrated in the Internet of Things new forms of ambiguity and asymmetry arise (Andrejevic and Gates 2014; Lyon 2014).

It can be argued that we are living in an era of statistical, algorithmic or pre-emptive surveillance whereby the predictive analysis and pattern recognition by intelligent algorithms of big or small unstructured and structured data is leading to whole new sorting mechanisms and actionable profiles which pose a whole plethora of old and new issues (see van Brakel and De Hert 2011; Gandy 2012; Lyon 2014). The topics discussed at the next *Surveillance & Society* conference, which will take place 21-23 April 2016 in Barcelona, will undoubtedly reflect these changes in surveillance and society.

The conference papers included in this special issue reflect the diversity of topics presented at the conference and the multidisciplinarity of Surveillance Studies researchers who attended.

**Acknowledgements**

Most of the articles in this double issue were initially presented at the 2014 *Surveillance & Society* conference of the Surveillance Studies Network, “Surveillance: Ambiguities and Asymmetries?” The conference was held from 24-26 April in Barcelona. Different aspects of the conference were organised by Gemma Galdon Clavell, Liliana Arroyo Moliner, Ona Tura Forner, Clive Norris, Dean Wilson, Daniel Trottier, Rosamunde van Brakel and Nils Zurawski, and thanks and acknowledgements go out to them all.

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