Editorial

Doing Surveillance Studies (Part II): Critical Approaches to Methodology and Pedagogy

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Introduction

Inspired largely by a New Transparency workshop at Queen's University, Canada in May/June 2013, this issue of *Surveillance & Society* continues the discussion of 'doing' Surveillance Studies that Kirstie Ball and Kevin Haggerty (2005) introduced to the journal's audience in their co-edited issue. In a rapidly growing field with rich contributions that explicate, facilitate and illuminate substantive and theoretical research findings, the spotlight is rarely shone as strongly on the methods and pedagogies that we employ in Surveillance Studies.

By confronting this directly, this special issue encourages new conversations and recasts the spotlight on those that we often neglect. In doing so, the following pages expand the methodological and pedagogical repertoires of Surveillance Studies. The contributions in this issue mark a growing desire to transcend the normative frameworks of Surveillance Studies by developing alternative methodological and pedagogical approaches to research design, and by stimulating a discussion on the positionalities between the 'researcher' and the 'researched'. Our hope is that these approaches lead us to more revealing appreciations of key constructs in the field that constitute surveillance experiences and practices. By renewing the consideration of the ways in which we teach the discipline, conduct research and interpret findings, this special issue provides concerted reflections on a few of the pioneering ways to do Surveillance Studies.

Alfred McCoy provides such an analysis that is both substantively rich and methodologically illuminating. His method of historical inflection is used to trace the origins of U.S. global surveillance across military missions in the Philippines (1898–1907), Vietnam (1963–75), and Afghanistan/Iraq (2001–14). Despite the Americans skirting defeat in each case, the three technological regimes in these Asian wars show a trajectory of American advances in data management and coercive capacity. By focusing on the histories of colonial policing and political scandal, McCoy encourages us to question research methodologies in Surveillance Studies that do not insert the controversy over NSA surveillance in its historical context. By doing Surveillance Studies in this way McCoy (4) argues that 'the salience, and significance, of contemporary surveillance practices' in the U.S. 'can only be fully understood via an approach that contextualizes their historical unfolding within the changing character of U.S. imperial controls'.

Nicola Green and Nils Zurawski call for a re-examination of the potential for ethnographic methods to produce new conceptual and theoretical understandings of surveillance beyond the *a priori* in order to realize an understanding of ‘surveillance relations derived from the life experiences and categorical meanings empirically investigated via social and cultural members’ understandings of what relations constitute surveillant processes’ (Green and Zurawski, 28). By emphasizing the ethnographic study of the lived experiences of surveillance, Green and Zurawski reconsider the underlying assumptions made about surveillance, and the influence of theory on research design.

The recognition of the potential for Surveillance Studies to expand its conceptual and methodological scope is further supported by the need to acknowledge the gendered gaze of surveillance, as well as the necessity of furthering theoretical and epistemological frameworks informed by feminist scholarship. Here, Yasmeen Abu-Laban argues that it is increasingly necessary to draw attention to the relationship between methodology and normative epistemologies of surveillance, particularly to understand the underlying ethical elements that necessarily constitute surveillance practices into regimes of care and control. At the same time, Abu-Laban calls for a larger recognition for how feminist research ‘can further push the boundaries of normative understanding, and in the process reveal some of the paradoxical and ambiguous rationales and outcomes of surveillance’ (Abu-Laban, 46).

In collaboration with a group of performers, David J. Phillips presents his findings on employing theatre as a method for surveillance research and pedagogy, as well as reflects on how theatre can be used to develop new epistemologies of surveillance for academic inquiry. Phillips, in many respects echoing Green and Zurawski, notes that theatre as a scholarly method was first embraced by ethnographers and has the potential to engage participants as a ‘process of evoking the embodied understanding of others, of revealing the structures of everyday life, without doing violence to that understanding’ (Phillips, 60).

Nelson Arteaga Botello’s article asserts the importance of insecurity and violence as crucial points of investigation for Surveillance Studies. Choosing data from Mexico to illustrate this point, the article demonstrates the complexity of the concept of surveillance and insecurity, noting how insecurity finds expression differently across the different surveillance regimes of the state, social and criminal organizations in Latin America. As such, any singular explanatory link made between surveillance, identity, citizenship, or other factors, needs to be re-imagined to incorporate the multiplicity of forms through which insecurity and violence find expression. Arteaga notes how ‘the features of these surveillance regimes imply a particular way to collect information and data, while also suggesting methodological changes and the need for a specific manner in which to do Surveillance Studies’ (Arteaga, 78). As researchers move forward in doing Surveillance Studies, this article demonstrates the benefit of drawing in a multiplicity of contexts into research, as well as the potential richness of research that remains truly open to the belief that surveillance finds expression differently within different contexts.

The core argument of Julie Cohen’s article highlights the divide between legal scholars’ understanding of the concept of surveillance and that of Surveillance Studies scholars. In particular, it argues that each group’s background asserts a vision of surveillance as it relates to regulation, which ‘black-boxes’, or sets aside, certain variables. In the case of legal scholars, Cohen (91) notes a focus on surveillance as ‘simply the (potential) subject of regulation’, while for Surveillance Studies scholars, ‘the processes of definition and compromise that regulators and other interested parties must navigate, and the ways that legal doctrines and constructs shape those processes’ are black-boxed. Cohen is quick to note that this is not the case in *all* instances across the surveillance literature, but that these ways of thinking have encouraged surveillance scholars to avoid grappling ‘with the ways in which legal processes and doctrines are sites of contestation over both the modalities and the limits of surveillance’, and legal scholars too often overlook ‘the ways in which surveillance shapes emergent subjectivity’. The article demonstrates how, by allowing these established means of understanding surveillance to enter into a dialogue in which each draws understanding from the other, much explanatory power can be gained.

Each of the articles in this special issue contributes to *doing* Surveillance Studies in their own way. First, the contributions all provide a specific insight into how surveillance scholars can adopt new approaches and methodologies. More specifically, each of the selected articles introduces a space or direction for research that presents a deep potential for exploration, as well as the capacity to develop new and innovative insights into the relationship between surveillance and society. Second, each article also provides practical approaches to take on the challenges of investigating these new directions and exploring these new spaces. Third, given the range and varied approaches of the selected articles, they also strongly demonstrate the assets of adopting an inclusionary approach to scholarship in the study of surveillance, as well as highlight the benefits that can be reaped by being exposed to critical approaches to method and pedagogy across a range of disciplines and backgrounds. It is our hope that readers will find value in this special issue of *Surveillance & Society* and that the doing of Surveillance Studies presented in these pages will inspire new research, insights and debate.

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References

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