Introduction

The start of the second decade of Surveillance & Society’s existence comes at a crucial time for surveillance and for surveillance studies. As we go to press, Bradley Manning has been sentenced to life imprisonment by an US military tribunal for his involvement in leaking US diplomatic cables to Wikileaks, and in contrast, ex-US intelligence contractor, Edward Snowden has been granted temporary asylum in Russia after handing over a huge cache of documents relating to the US National Security Agency’s communications surveillance programs.

These individuals are important, but we should not let their stories and their media-morphing into either heroes or villains obscure the bigger picture. We have to consider what has been revealed about surveillance through the Snowden and Manning cases alongside a cluster of related developments in global information and communications control. These range from the publicity around ‘Big Data’, through the struggle over the future of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and ‘net neutrality’, the tightening Intellectual Property and copyright laws, the attempts by multiple organizations from nations like China and Iran to corporat ifications like Apple and Facebook, to create walled gardens or brandscapes from which users are unable to escape, the extension of ‘lawful access’ regimes by which police and intelligence services can access communications data, to the hype over ‘cyberwar’ which seeks to rebrand multiple online activities as hostile and somehow equivalent to real-world violence even when no living being has been attacked or harmed. Meanwhile, the deployment of smaller, faster, more intrusive and increasingly ubiquitous surveillance technologies in everyday life continues, with debates raging in many countries about whether mobile surveillance technologies from drones to Google Glass should be used, when, how and by whom, even as in practice they are proliferating.

Surveillance studies has played a vital role in exposing the emergence of surveillance societies over decades, but this has now reached a critical pitch. Surveillance is now global, not just in the sense of it being in every country, but in the sense of it being a part of everyday life for all the world’s people, whether they know it or not. Surveillance practices do not just, as Katja Aas has stated, form the ‘contours of the global polity’ (2011: 332), but increasingly determine the shape of the economy and the contents of culture. It is no longer enough, we would argue, to consider examples of surveillance, and to note their nuances and differences, important though this is, especially in places where little attention has been paid to surveillance so far. Surveillance studies needs more serious attention to the political economy of surveillance, not just in terms of studies of particular corporate actors, or the growing ‘surveillance
The global surveillance society is the product of a complementary and iterative series of movement between state and corporate priorities, intimately linked with developments in the natural and applied sciences. The nexus of these priorities was frequently in war and security: either in the combination of espionage, cybernetics and military logistics that gradually emerged in the Twentieth Century during the succession of increasingly technologically sophisticated wars and confrontations; or in the continued attempts to control potentially unruly domestic urban working classes through policing, the prison system and other multi-purpose institutions like state welfare and health. However while private corporations brought their Taylorist strategies of close-monitoring and control of workers into this complex and the military-industrial complex grew vast as suppliers to the US state in particular, they also continued to operate and extend forms of workplace monitoring and increasingly the surveillance of consumers that had little initially to do with military or state goals.

With the combination of computing and communications, a new space for the mutual benefit of state and private enterprise was opened up. The Internet, originally a product of the US (Defense) Advanced Research Projects Agency (D)ARPA and elite US technical universities, has become the dominant new medium for social interaction, consumption and the collection of vast amounts of data by corporations and state agencies. And while it had been expected by some that the end of the Cold War would produce a ‘peace-dividend’, what actually happened was the diversification of many corporations and the application of dataveillance techniques and other forms of surveillance into non-military arenas. Companies like Raytheon and Lockheed-Martin that were previously specialists in missiles and military aircraft became contractors for all manner of non-military state activities, that built on the technical capabilities and knowledge that they had developed in the creation of these complex military systems, from the operation of censuses to CCTV cameras.

When the attacks on 9/11 occurred, as the American Civil Liberties Union (2004) and Statewatch (2009) have both argued the subsequent ‘war on terror’ agenda has now given governments and corporations in the global north vast opportunities to increase both social control and profits. Unprecedented access to data on individuals, gleaned from the private sector; unprecedented funding to develop new public-private partnerships which develop surveillance applications; access for corporations to politicians in procurement processes; advisory opportunities in government for defence specialists; extensions and intensifications of border control amid a cultural climate of vigilance and fear: all of these, widely promoted in the general populace, have normalised and legitimised mass targeted surveillance deep within corporate, governmental and social structures. In a number of key areas states have passed legislation which mandates the private sector to collect, analyse and transfer consumer data to government in the name of national security and to enable mass surveillance of the population.

The last decade has witnessed a blurring of the boundaries between public and private sector organisations; driven by the pre-emptive identification of the would-be terrorist and criminal through analysis of data relating to their purchasing patterns, transactions and preferences. Pre-empting the moves of these risky bodies is de rigueur in neoliberal government discourse and doctrine. In response to the 9/11 attacks, Kenneth Juster, the then US Under Secretary for Commerce and Export Administration spoke of the close connection which was required between homeland security and the interests of business. Speaking primarily about the United States, he argued ‘we seek to secure our homeland precisely so that we can enjoy the full benefits- economic and otherwise – of globalization. Homeland security and globalisation are the flip sides of the same coin’ (quoted in Gates, 2012). But while Juster might have envisaged enhanced homeland security as a way of protecting economic ‘freedoms’, security doctrine across the US and in Europe has moved far beyond these protectionist ideas. Instead it has sought to integrate the private sector into its goals as providers of intelligence on the consumers they
serve, enrol front line employees as security agents and annex corporate information systems into a securitised information infrastructure. Nevertheless it is far from a smooth transition as divergent corporate interests struggle to incorporate the public interest of security into their operations. Many do so on threat of criminalisation as tensions play out at numerous levels of analysis.

We are left with a situation that seems confusing to cursory analysis based in the assumptions of older disciplinary analysis: what exactly does it mean when US corporations build Chinese Internet surveillance systems and Chinese companies are considered as exemplary for the British government considering online censorship? When Facebook works actively with both the US and Pakistani states to gather personal data and censor posts respectively? When the NSA works with Google in China to deal with issue around Chinese state censorship whilst at the same time maintaining active collection systems with the assent of the Chinese state? There is a complex global surveillant assemblage which is not amenable to simple descriptions of many former theoretical approaches (Murakami Wood, 2013).

What the different practices of information management and surveillance at all levels share is a combination of the normalization of surveillance as a life-practice (i.e. something that everyone can and should do for their own protection and enjoyment, that is involved in all work and activities) with the sharing of the products of surveillance through organizations and systems that allow their use by a corporate-state nexus that seeks both to increase flows that create opportunities for exploitation and profit and at the same time reduce the uncertainties and risks that come from bad circulations - in other words what Foucault (2007) termed ‘security’. That this constitutes a kind of emerging neoliberal global government should be clear if one considers ‘security’ in this sense as the basic function of government. It does matter that the shape of this global government, pervasive and networked as it is, is not the ideal-typical model of government of political theories past.

For surveillance studies, what is important at this juncture is to recognize that there is a need to shift to an integrated political economic analysis of surveillance that is not bound by assumptions about either the nature of the state or of capital. This is already happening, with the new collection edited by Ball and Snider (2013) and other projects that take necessarily different approaches to political economic analysis. And beyond this, there needs to be even greater engagement with policy and activist communities so that this analysis is useful in confronting and challenging the continued expansion and intensification of surveillance.

At the same time, it is clear that Surveillance Studies has no lack of material to study and the field is in rude health. This double issue contains a huge diversity of papers, many of which were originally presented at the 5th Biannual Surveillance Studies Network / Surveillance & Society conference in 2012 in Sheffield, organized by Clive Norris, Kirstie S. Ball, Charles Raab, Nicky Green and Ben Gould. Coming issues will see specific focus on Big Data Surveillance, Sport and Surveillance, Surveillance Games and Play, Methods in Surveillance Studies and much more besides. We look forward to another ten years, but we hope that whoever writes an editorial at that time has more positive changes to reflect on than simply the consolidation of a global surveillance society.

References