Book Review

Leistert, O. 2013. *From Protest to Surveillance—The Political Rationality of Mobile Media*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 280 pages. Hardback. £41.00 ISBN: 978-3-631-64313-6

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Those who study surveillance technologies in practice face no shortage of empirical cases. While the contribution of mobile devices and social platforms to global uprisings may be called into question, such questions precisely force a reconsideration of these tools. Likewise, Edward Snowden's revelations about PRISM and other global and opaque surveillance practices raise questions about state power and the role of technology in relation to these powers. In a context where social action appears to depend on mobile devices, Oliver Leistert offers a conceptually and empirically robust account of a particular stage of these developments, and their impact on individual and state actors.

From Protest to Surveillance considers the dynamics and paradoxes of socio-political power in the context of mobile media uptake. Two sets of practices are considered: protest (that is, bottom-up forms of resistance) and surveillance (understood as top-down assertions of scrutiny and influence). At the outset these practices are understood as interrelated, as a technological affordance to one is given to both. Yet the author is quick to eschew a binary perspective, proposing instead an analytics of rule, with power understood as "a productive force that bridges gaps as it proscribes a continuum of relations" (6). This invokes a problematic that is related to the fact that the subject is always addressable with mobile media. As Leistert states: "I am interested in exploring why subjects always carry a digital transceiver around, which makes them addressable and integrates them into the circuits of circulations of a political rationality" (4). While this is a theoretical exploration, it is also accompanied by practically oriented inquiries, including the current absence of privacy enhancing technologies among mobile users. Leistert asserts that mobile media is indicative of a (neo)liberal rule that takes shape as a "globalised communication regime" (9), and is embedded in a governmentality in which "all sociality is interwoven by governmental aspects that connect the subjects to programs of government while at the same time these aspects offer choices and allow the subjects to experience a certain freedom" (7).

In order to consider the kind of subjectivities that are produced through mobile media, Leistert draws from interviews with an impressive breadth of activists involved in grassroots initiatives. Due to the global spread of these participants, their input is lifted from any immediate context. Yet this is partly recovered in Appendix C, which provides a brief description of each group. Interview quotes are also treated as expert statements (33), in that neither the biography nor the narrative of the interviewee is directly considered. Yet Leistert still allows his focus to linger on certain examples, such as Pakistan's "Lawyers' Movement" in chapter four. His use of interview material facilitates a transition from grounded and empirical reports to conceptual substantiation. This approach underscores global/local tensions in mobile media: a global means to recount and distribute localized concerns is rendered intelligible on a global plane.

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In the sixth chapter, Leistert provides an overview of Surveillance Studies and its contributions to mobile media scholarship. Here, he takes the opportunity to critique a sociology of surveillance that regards social spheres as discrete. He states that surveillance scholars typically “separate a sphere that is interconnected and relational and suggest that each by its own have an explanatory capacity” (117). Yet he draws upon Haggerty and Ericson’s notion of the assemblage, as well as Lyon’s work on deregulation that both demonstrate an awareness of these complexities. Leistert’s understanding of surveillance also stresses the need to account for user/target subjectivity. Whether or not these are novel recommendations for those who identify as surveillance scholars, they remain useful as points of departure that position Leistert’s broader contributions.

While Leistert clarifies a narrow range of surveillance technologies at the start of chapter eight, this focus underscores more general concerns with information technologies. One such concern is the abstraction of surveillance “with the production of digital doubles and thus the disembodiment of social relations” (116). Likewise, contemporary mobile infrastructures facilitate (indeed, standardize) function creep, which “has its systemic place in networked and computerized society” (160). The current mobile landscape contributes to a machinic addressability in which cheap surveillance schemes produce knowledge about the “population and individual alike” (216). Thus, data doubles speak on behalf of the governed individual, without the burden of an ontological commitment or responsibility. Yet this configuration has the potential to be problematized. At the end of chapter nine Leistert considers the potential of “the radical approaches of a self-controlled, non-commercial, autonomous infrastructure” (213), but acknowledges that this potential is dampened by technical and socio-cultural limitations.

Leistert endeavours to produce scholarship that “can be informative for any groups that are working towards social justice with means of mobile media” (226). He concedes some obvious practical limitations to this ambition. Yet one of the book’s key contributions is his sustained and global engagement with activists using mobile media. Mobile media researchers interested in both civic engagement and state power will find value in his research. Likewise, those who are more generally interested in the role of emerging technologies on governmentality will benefit from his conceptual and empirical offerings.

From Protest to Surveillance shares a limitation with most monographs in this field: it cannot account for the most recent developments such as the Arab Spring and Snowden’s revelations. Yet it provides some insight into how social actors are aware of and able to respond to these practices. This book is also intentionally limited in terms of technologies discussed. Again, it rather aims to offer a conceptual and empirical cross-section of a global development at a particular point in time. This kind of analysis can be extrapolated to other contexts, and its relevance exceeds its immediate focus.