Book Review

Rosen, D. and Aaron Santesso. 2013. *The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature, and Liberal Personhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

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Surveillance Studies' multidisciplinary archive can sometimes have an oddly skewed emphasis upon empirical knowledge. With technology, law, sociology and policing often leading conceptual and methodological approaches to surveillance, more qualitative and less tangible disciplines such as literature and art can be somewhat neglected. Although prominent surveillance scholars such as David Lyon and recent publications such as last year's book by Sébastien Léfait, *Surveillance on Screen*, present an important counter to this epistemological asymmetry, particularly in the use of film in exploring contemporary surveillance thought, other potential sources of cultural and critical insight remain relatively unexplored (Léfait 2012). Indeed, despite the fact that George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is one of the canonical texts of Surveillance Studies—arguably comparable to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*—disciplinary explorations of that novel as a *literary* as well as theoretical text are relatively few. While “Orwellian” has entered the discipline of Surveillance Studies—and popular usage more generally—as a byword for repressive, totalitarian sociopolitical structures, we often forget that part of that hypothetical structure was “newspeak,” a self-consciously modern verbal program that Orwell portrayed as instrumental to that power, and indicative of the ways in which literary aesthetics were crucial to Orwell's groundbreaking imagining of the spread of social monitoring practices throughout the modern world.

The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature, and Liberal Personhood, by David Rosen and Aaron Santesso, intervenes in this neglect of literary sources within contemporary surveillance theory. Scholars of modernism and 17th- and 18th-century literature, respectively, Rosen and Santesso contribute to current Surveillance Studies by both exploring the humanistic origins of modern notions of autonomy and privacy and by using those literary sources to challenge prevailing notions of surveillance as a necessarily repressive and violent practice. Through a historically wide-ranging survey of literary works from the Renaissance to the 20th century, Rosen and Santesso argue that literary texts are primary sites of the relationship between external appearances and assumed intention that is stake in many surveillance scenarios. As the authors suggest, the literary convention of allegory—in which a sustained system of symbols represents abstract ideas organized to convey a larger idea—constitutes a naïve or primitive form of knowledge roughly comparable to the “ascending” forms of power that Foucault describes as characteristic of the pre-classical age of sovereignty and punishment. Common in early modern works such as *The Tempest* and *Gulliver's Travels*, allegory soon gives way to a modern understanding of the possible discrepancy between physical characteristics and interiority, as amply demonstrated in the psychological realism of the modern novel. Contrary to the usually depressive and dystopian mood that

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pervades much critical writing upon surveillance, however, Santesso and Rosen also foresee ways in which the subtle and occasionally subversive knowledge modeled by literature and the literary arts can empower individuals to understand and capitalize upon their societal embedding. In a strong critique of surveillance and strident assertion of the liberatory power of literature, the authors claim that literature and humanist study more generally offers a model by which individuals can begin to achieve agency within existing power structures.

Both the literary origins of surveillance theory and the argument that some texts may model ways of resisting contemporary surveillance society are important and intriguing, and at times the fusion of literary and surveillance theory is truly inspiring—such as when the authors describe paranoia as the empirical uncertainty that is the consequence of a post-allegorical age (194). Such virtuoso literary arguments within *The Watchman in Pieces*, however, may position the volume to be of more use to literary than surveillance scholars, as the former will be more familiar with the fast-moving references to historically important but hardly well-known works such as Thomas More's *Utopia* and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. In the same vein, Rosen and Santesso's study is impressive for its formal and historical compass, as it folds together poetry (Whitman), popular fiction (Le Carré and Conan Doyle) and even legal reasoning (Warren and Brandeis on "The Right to Privacy"), but some literary critics may demand a more specific thesis about surveillance's aesthetic and formal properties. An underlying factor in this ambitious amorphousness is their book's claim to present surveillance as an incipient context of the rise of literary realism, but in fusing together a vastly different cultural and aesthetic range the study lacks the precision of D. A. Miller's still influential 1988 book, *The Novel and the Police*, which merged Foucault with longstanding notions of the 19th-century novel to show how "discipline provides the novel with its essential 'content'" (Miller 1988: 18).

Literary and surveillance scholars alike might yearn for more acknowledgement of Miller's work—and perhaps more sustained discussion of the stylistic attributes of *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the two preeminent literary texts of surveillance culture—but *The Watchman in Pieces* belongs to an important and growing branch of literary scholarship whose value for Surveillance Studies Rosen and Santesso amply demonstrate. Foucault himself notes in *Discipline and Punish* that literature and literary aesthetics are an important element of the disciplinary society, apparent in the "whole aesthetic rewriting of crime" that occurs with the disappearance of torture and execution (1977: 68). More recently, literary and cultural scholars like Christopher P. Wilson (2000), Yumna Siddiqi (2008), and Lauren Goodlad (2003) have documented the ways in which monitoring, investigation, detection, apprehension, patrol and control structure the stories and narratives of British and American culture. Indeed, although *The Watchman in Pieces* is consistent with these other scholars in using an entirely transatlantic field of inquiry, Rosen and Santesso are effective in highlighting the fundamental problems of such geographically limited field of inquiry. Exploring the recurring emphasis on islands in *The Tempest*, *Utopia*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Brave New World*, the authors map a "speculative archipelago" (p.185) of literary works about surveillance and social control whose empirical corollary is the important contemporary work of social scientist Paul Amar (2013).

In summary, by restoring the humanities to surveillance theory and practice, David Rosen and Aaron Santesso make an important step in humanizing a discipline profoundly concerned with the human but in which the humanities are often strangely absent. Showing how literature can both enable and obstruct a "liberal theory of reading," *The Watchman in Pieces* is an engrossing contribution to both Surveillance Studies and the intriguing subfield of literature about surveillance.

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Editor's Afterword

The Watchman in Pieces has been shortlisted for the 2014 Surveillance Studies Network Book Prize for the best monograph on the subject of surveillance published in 2013.