Surveil and Let Surveil
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Flynn, Susan, and Antonia McKay, eds. *Spaces of Surveillance: States and Selves*. London: Palgrave, 2017. 278 pages. ISBN 9783319490847. Hb. $139.99.

Spaces of Surveillance, edited by Susan Flynn and Antonia McKay, is a masterfully collected volume of twelve essays containing valuable research that provides an overview of multiple vantage points, both artistic and critical, from which contemporary surveillance practices can be approached. The title was published in 2017 as the first fruit of the editors' cooperation, followed by *Surveillance, Race, and Culture*, their second edited volume published in August 2018. *Spaces of Surveillance*, focusing on contemporary manifestations of the concept of surveillance and their effects on identity politics, investigates the possibility of resisting the invasion of privacy through surveillance, and gives various reasons for the public to do so.

The term "surveillance" here refers to a specific form of "watching over" practiced by the state and large corporations, both of which, through acquiring private data about citizens, gain control over them. The fascination with this kind of "top-down" surveillance was introduced to academia by Michel Foucault's concept of panopticism, based on Jeremy Bentham's panoptic prison, according to which the contemporary subject is a result of the capacity for constant observation performed by the state, which has a disciplining effect on the subject (Foucault 217). It is along these lines that the chapters in Flynn and McKay's volume discuss the ways in which the experience of being objected to surveillance influences subject positions and identity negotiation.

Besides contemplating the ethical dimensions of the way citizens are always potentially surveiled, one of the central questions the authors investigate is whether there are ways in which state surveillance can be resisted and even fought against. The novelty of the volume lies not so much in examining the possibility of counteraction, since this has been subject to academic scrutiny in the field of surveillance studies for a long time, as in the fact that this concern is investigated with a focus on, as Vian Bakir puts it in the afterword, "what it feels like to be surveilled" (246). *Spaces of Surveillance* provides a platform for various disciplines, such as literary studies, visual studies, sociology, and political science, to indulge in a stimulating assessment of the subject's experience of surveillance. Apparently, as the editors state in

the introduction, "the psyche is not always comfortable" under constant observation (10).

Due to the authors' diverse fields of interest, it becomes possible to observe how their approaches to surveillance can even contradict one another. While the editors in the introduction point out how surveillance is becoming "disengaged from morality" in a process called "adiaphorization" (10), Bakir in the afterword notes how the public seems to regard surveillance as immoral since "popular culture responds to ubiquitous surveillance in a dystopian register" (258). This moral judgment is evident in most chapters of the volume, especially in those that examine the ways in which surveillance is challenged by what Steve Mann termed "sousveillance" (332). This term refers to the act of monitoring the state in the cases of misusing or abusing its power via recording devices carried around by the individual. (One example is GoPro cameras equipped on cyclists' helmets to record the traffic and potential abuses of power by the police). Amy Christmas, for instance, addresses Jill Magid's artistic oeuvre, which consists of recordings of Magid's body in ways that fragment and reassemble her body as well as her identity. Christmas claims the result of this identity work is that Magid "reclaim[s] agency and mitigates the negation of identity" resulting from state surveillance (27). Moreover, Mary Ryan discusses the ways in which sousveillance can be a tool for US citizens to actively negotiate surveillance and take back control over their privacy. Many contributors, however, are more critical of Mann's evaluation of sousveillance as an empowering tool for citizens. Caleb Andrew Milligan's illuminating chapter demonstrates through an analysis of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1998) how sousveillance is in fact another mechanism extending, rather than obstructing, the reach of surveillance (139). Jeffrey Clapp introduces Claudia Rankine, the influential contemporary American poet, as similarly critical of the fight against surveillance since throughout her oeuvre she suggests that surveillance is inseparable from liberal democracies (170). These few chapters illustrate the existence of a plethora of different, but equally well established approaches to modern state surveillance, while the palpable contradictions between different approaches enrich the readers' understanding of contemporary surveillance mechanisms and the current state of surveillance studies as an academic discipline.

As this short survey evidences, there is a rich selection of both primary and secondary sources that contributors to *Spaces of Surveillance* rely on. Besides the authors of literary and visual art mentioned above, Bret Easton Ellis's works as well as three post-postmodern novels are also discussed for their representation and critique of contemporary techno-surveillance society. Many films are also analyzed such as Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013), Katheryn

Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and vampire movies such as Todd Browning's *Dracula* (1931) or the Spierig brothers' *Daybreakers* (2009). The third part of the volume deals with some of the societal consequences of surveillance: Tecle et al., for instance, treat surveillance as a "castrating mechanism" (188), as in the case of the racial profiling of black Canadian citizens, sustaining and amplifying this emasculating effect. Flynn, on the other hand, takes a look at the way medical surveillance, or the "medical gaze," has been turned into "a form of peer-to-peer surveillance" by digital technology (242). Such diversity suggests how the volume seeks to gain the attention of a multidisciplinary audience, meanwhile providing a multifaceted survey of the most up-to-date academic approaches to the phenomenon of surveillance.

This multidisciplinarity, however, brings about several deficiencies that have to be addressed to do justice to *Spaces of Surveillance*. First of all, the title of the volume suggests an emphasis on spatiality in relation to surveillance, but this relationship barely gets explored in the individual contributions. The alleged focus of the volume seems to be obscured by the abundance of voices found in the book. Other than Christmas's aforementioned chapter, which explores the importance of spaces to some detail, it is only Alison Lutton's chapter on the significance of urban surveillance in Bret Easton Ellis that provides an answer to what a "space of surveillance" is. Lutton suggests that Ellis's *The Informers* (1994) presents the concept of a type of "surveillant urban environment" (124) in which the subject is simultaneously surveilling and being surveilled, while finding a strange sense of enjoyment in both. At this stage, the inclusion of a more detailed elaboration on the relationship between the kind of surveillance depicted by Ellis and that developed by Foucault would have been welcomed. Of course, one should not overemphasize Foucault's panopticism in relation to current surveillance practices, yet, since many contributors to the volume do position themselves in relation to his theory, some chapters' lack of such a reflection clearly appears as a deficit.

Another palpable problem the reader might be puzzled by is how at certain points some analyses get detached from the topic of surveillance and delve into aspects of the analyzed works that are difficult to connect to the focal theme of the volume. One example is William Thomas McBride's chapter on subjectivity formation through digital technology in the film *Her*. McBride provides an excellent close reading of the way shallow focus lens is used throughout the movie to convey the protagonist's psychological state affected by his failed marriage and the subsequent narcissism fueled by the lack of romantic love towards him. However, McBride rarely addresses the

topic of surveillance in a way that can fit his argument about *Her*. A noteworthy blunder in the editing process can be found in Jeffrey Clapp's "Surveilling Citizens: Claudia Rankine, from the First to the Second Person," from which two indented quotations are missing. Instead of the quotations, we get notes from the author about the fact that they are supposed to be placed at those points, asking about how they disappeared. Such an editorial mistake, as well as the oblique manner of McBride's chapter fitting into the framework of the volume, creates slight disturbances in the overall reading experience.

Despite these minor shortcomings, the chapters in *Spaces of Surveillance* will prove to be invaluable resources for researchers of surveillance studies, as well as those interested in digital culture, technology, biopolitics, film studies, and literary studies. The quality of the analyses in this highly stimulating volume itself provides a case for reading Flynn and McKay's book, while the novelty of the topics found therein no doubt broadens our perspective on the current state of surveillance and the cultural impact it constitutes. The ubiquity of surveillance in our everyday lives fascinates all of us to some degree, and thought-provoking works such as *Spaces of Surveillance* may well draw substantial scholarly attention towards the study of the societal impact of contemporary surveillance.

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