Computers, Surveillance and Privacy: Book Review

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Computers and new information technologies have greatly increased the power of surveillance by government and large corporate entities. The state is a repository of a growing array of data bases that provide it with information on its citizens. Corporations also now possess increasing power to accumulate information on potential consumers. This power to collect information is significant and can be instrumental in securing loans, insurance, and credit; increases the power of law enforcement agencies; makes possible surveillance of workers and the workplace by managers; and provides information on consumer habits and preferences that can be useful to the marketing and promotion of consumer goods. The intensifying computerization of information raises important questions concerning privacy and individual rights in the current information revolution, such as: who collects what kind of information, what is done with this information, and what rights do individuals have concerning privacy and the circulation of information about them?

These questions are at the core of a collection of essays edited by David Lyon and Elia Zureik. The editors open by defining their key concepts and suggesting some of the ways that new technologies are producing novel forms of surveillance and social control. They suggest that key social science approaches to the problematic include the Marxian theory which focuses on how surveillance and technology adds to the power of capital in exercising control over citizens, workers and consumers; a Weberian perspective that focuses on the process of rationalization within modern organizations and the ways that surveillance and new technologies increase the power of organizations over individuals; and a Foucaultian perspective that centers on "disciplinary practices" diffused throughout a variety of social institutions, which use surveillance and technology in different ways to augment social control and the power of discourses and practices over individuals. The authors suggest that they and their contributors will attempt "to produce an intelligent synthesis of the best of each" (8), and for the most part this is true of the collection.

The editors organize the studies according to the categories of Workplace, Marketplace, Culture, and Regulation, and the compilation as a whole provides an extremely useful overview of how surveillance threatens the privacy and prerogatives of individuals in a variety of domains. The focus of the collection, however, is limited to surveillance concerning gathering of information and neglects the vast new powers of physical surveillance ranging from satelitte imaging to television cameras on public streets. The focus is on the ways that information gathering and dissemination provide threats to privacy and an essay by Priscilla Regan provides a useful analysis of the concept of privacy and the ways that it is both a category that involves individual rights and social goods. Thus, Regan, following Dewey, suggests that the privacy issue not be formulated in a way that opposes individual to society, but be seen as a configuration of issues that "involves a dynamic relationship between the two" (32). Fleshing out this approach, Regan provides an analytic delineation of "the social importance of privacy" in terms of privacy as a "common value" that all of us value and would agree is important to preserve; a "public value" whose delineation and preservation involves structural configuration of the public sphere to

protect and nourish it; and a "collective value" that is indivisible and accessible to all. This framework allows discussion of the social importance of privacy and enables Regan to make a case for the social importance of "genetic privacy," a relatively recent concern in relation to the development of DNA and sophisticated genetic testing.

Judith Perrolle in turn offers a useful distinction of privacy as "the freedom to be left alone by other individuals and by social groups" in contrast to "privacy as freedom from the intrusions of formal institutions and authorities into personal life" (47). Other analyses include studies by James B. Rule of "High-Tech Workplace Surveillance," which discusses some of the ways managers deploy high-tech monitoring of workers, and Rob Kling and Jonathan Allen's theorizing of the emergence of information-based entrepreneuralism and computer-based surveillance within large organizations in contemporary capitalism. Studies of representations of surveillance in a myriad of forms of media culture by Gary Marx show how anxieties and concerns about the erosion of privacy appear in popular media. The volume concludes with policy-oriented studies of public surveillance in different nation-states by Colin Bennett, and Simon Davies' proposals for surveying and measuring the extent of surveillance in society.

On the whole, the collection is informative, well-organized, and a timely discussion of issues of immense importance that will become even more salient in the future as computerization and new technologies take over more and more domains of life and threaten the privacy and autonomy of the individual. The collection could be usefully deployed in courses on new technologies and provides the reader a valuable overview of a set of important issues concerning privacy, computerization, and surveillance. Given the dramatic rate of technological revolution in the present moment, there is, of course, the danger that collections such as this will be soon outdated, but for the moment this is a state-of-the-art collection on the issues under investigation. I would have liked to see, however, a study of how computerized information and technologies are used in elections and to provide surveillance of voters in terms of voting preferences. There was also inadequate discussion of the new commercial data bases and implications of the commercialization of information in terms of who can and cannot afford access to expensive data bases and how oppositional data bases can be used to provide surveillance of corporate and government corruption, and thus be used to promote social criticism and change.

Indeed, access to and use of information will be a crucial feature of the construction of the future. On one hand, corporate control and the commercialization of data bases threatens to increase the power of the wealthy and the state who control data bases, thus increasing the potential for expanded corporate and state power and class division. On the other hand, the computerization of society decentralizes information and gives citizens and oppositional groups the ability to circulate critical information about the government and corporations. How the information revolution will play itself out and what policies government will develop over privacy and surveillance will be among the great adventures of the foreseeable future and the collection under review provides an occasion to reflect upon the futures and choices that currently confront us.