

Daniel Trottier

*Social Media as Surveillance: Rethinking Visibility in a Converging World*, Ashgate: Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2012; 213 pp.: £55.00.

**Reviewed by:** Thomas Allmer, *Unified Theory of Information Research Group, Austria*

In recent years, based on the employment of various surveillance technologies, there has been an extension and intensification of privacy threats and surveillance risks in economic, political, and cultural contexts. The Internet and new media are among these technologies. The fact that one can find Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook (rank 2), YouTube (rank 3), LinkedIn (rank 8) and Twitter (rank 10) among the most frequently accessed websites worldwide indicates the enormous popularity of these sites (data source: Alexa Internet, 2013). It is therefore important to conduct theoretical and empirical studies of these research areas. In *Social Media as Surveillance*, Daniel Trottier (2013) makes an important contribution to this task. Along with *Identity Problems in the Facebook Era* (Routledge), it is Trottier's second book within the field of new and digital media to be published in almost 1 year and shows how active and energetic this scholar is. It can be expected that he will provide many new and inspiring contributions to the academic community in the near future. The book

looks at the rise of surveillance practices on social media, using Facebook as a case study. Drawing on in-depth interviews with different types of users, it underscores new practices, strategies, concerns and risks that are a direct consequence of living on social media. (p. 1)

The author 'concentrates on the process by which users manage their personal information on social media, while taking advantage of the information that others put up' (p. 1). Trottier focuses his analysis on four different social groups, namely, individuals (such as students), institutions (such as universities), economic actor (such as marketers) and political actor (such as the police). The subsequent research questions are the subject of the book: How are sites like Facebook used by these four social groups to exchange personal information? What kind of dynamics exists between these four bodies? While the first question is treated in chapters 3 to 6 by analysing the social media usage of distinct actors in the context of surveillance, the second question is answered in the concluding chapter.

The chapters are based on the results of 57 semi-structured interviews with Canadian undergraduate students, university employees, and employed and self-employed social media users including market researchers, brand managers and communication officers. The author conducted the study at a mid-sized Canadian university between 2008 and 2009. The face-to-face interviews took place in the author's office and ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in duration. The data of the student interviews are used for analysing the individual level in the third chapter, the results of the academic staff interviews are the foundation for the study of the institutional level in the fourth chapter, and the empirical outcomes of the interviews with employees and self-employed consultants are applied for facing the economic level in the fifth chapter. How political groups such as the police and security agencies use Web 2.0 tools for investigative

purposes is treated in chapter 6 and is more based on external sources including reports of advocacy groups and journalists.

I enjoyed reading the book. I think it is a very fruitful contribution that combines surveillance studies and social media research on a theoretical and empirical level. While I am very supportive of this effort and I agree that this is a worthwhile publication, I have some reservations that I will explain in the following way.

Trottier provides a short introduction to surveillance studies in the first chapter (pp. 17–20). He presents several theoretical approaches of important surveillance studies of scholars such as David Lyon, Oscar Gandy, and Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson. From my point of view, the author simply strings several approaches together without really interpreting them. The treatment lacks from a theoretical discussion about the different concepts and how surveillance should best be defined. Important questions that one could ask are the following: How is surveillance defined in the existing literature? What do the different notions of surveillance have in common and what distinguishes them from one another? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such definitions?

I have outlined elsewhere (Allmer, 2012) that many surveillance studies scholars use a broad definition of surveillance and tend to mix up very heterogeneous phenomena on one single level of analysis. If, for example, the same term is used for pretty harmless experiences like watching over a baby, on the one hand, and for powerful economic and political surveillance, on the other hand, it becomes difficult to criticise contemporary surveillance phenomena such as closed-circuit television (CCTV), Internet surveillance, the European Union data retention directive, biometrical iris scanners, facial recognition software, computer-assisted passenger prescreening system (CAPPS) and the collection of DNA samples. Many approaches understand surveillance in a non-hierarchical and decentralised way, where everyone has the opportunity to surveil. This argument overlooks the fact that corporations and state institutions are the most powerful actors in society and are able to undertake mass-surveillance, which private actors are not able to do. Neutral surveillance concepts tend to overlook power asymmetries in contemporary society and therefore tend to convey the image that private actors are equally powerful as corporations and state institutions. Hence, a general and neutral understanding is not fruitful for studying surveillance as it does not take asymmetrical power relations and repressive aspects of society into consideration. Approaches stressing that everyone today has the opportunity to surveil, that surveillance techniques democratise surveillance societies to a certain degree and that surveillance has comical, playful, amusing and even enjoyable characteristics are typical for post-modern scholars and disguise the fact of power and domination in contemporary surveillance societies. What I missed in the book is a theoretical analysis and conceptualisation of the notion of surveillance.

As already mentioned, Trottier discusses social media surveillance in the context of individuals, institutions, marketers, and the police, which is really impressive. But throughout his analysis, he tends to convey the image that these very different phenomena are tantamount to the same thing and of equal importance (see pp. 157–158). The author omits to question asymmetries of distinct surveillance actions. The emergence of corporate social software can be seen in the context of the need to find new

strategies of capital accumulation under post-Fordist conditions after the dot-com crisis around the turn of the millennium. Given the fact that the majority of the most popular Web 2.0 platforms are privately owned and commercially organised and that the business model of most Web 2.0 platforms is based on personalised advertising, I find it more appropriate to study Web 2.0 in the context of economic surveillance and targeted advertising. Social media activities such as announcing personal messages on Twitter, uploading or watching videos on YouTube, writing personal entries on Blogger and creating profiles and sharing ideas on Facebook enable the collection, analysis and sale of personal data by commercial Web platforms. With the help of legal instruments including privacy policies and terms of use, social networking sites have the right to store, analyse and sell personal data of their users to third parties for targeted advertising in order to accumulate profit. The co-founder and CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, is the 36th richest person of America with a net worth of US\$13.3 billion (data source: Forbes, 2013). Facebook's revenue has increased by a factor of 18.7 from US\$272 million in 2008 to US\$5.1 billion in 2012 (data source: Securities and Exchange Commission, 2013).

Trottier examines interpersonal surveillance in chapter 3, that is, 'people actively watching and being watched by family, friends and former lovers' (p. 30). Although private actors monitor and watch over other individuals in everyday life experiences (e.g. parents taking care of their children, providing personal information on Weblogs and using social networking sites on the Internet), these acts are processes to which people mostly agree and which involve no violence, coercion or repression. In comparison, economic and political actors use (online) surveillance and exercise violence in order to control certain forms of people's behaviour, and in most cases, people do not know that they are being surveilled. Corporations control the economic behaviour of people and coerce individuals in order to produce or buy specific commodities for accumulating profit and for guaranteeing the production of surplus value. Corporations and state institutions are the most powerful actors in society and are able to undertake mass-surveillance extensively and intensively (such as the collection and gathering of information on Internet user profiles in order to implement targeted advertising) because available resources decide surveillance dimensions. In the modern production process, primarily electronic surveillance is used to document and control workers' behaviour and communication for guaranteeing the production of surplus value. The commodification of privacy is important to target advertising for accumulating profit. State institutions have intensified and extended state surveillance of citizens in order to combat the threat of terrorism. There is also a relationship between economic and political surveillance, as PRISM demonstrates. PRISM is a clandestine mass electronic surveillance programme operated by the National Security Agency (NSA) of the United States mining data from different Internet companies including Microsoft, Yahoo, Google, Apple and Facebook. It shows that state surveillance and corporate surveillance interact. One can assume that corporations and state institutions are the main actors in modern surveillance societies. From my point of view, these insights are not adequately taken into account in the book.

In conclusion, my reservations aside, I think this is a very valuable contribution bringing together surveillance studies and social media research on different levels.

## References

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Mark Wheeler

*Celebrity Politics*, Polity Press: Cambridge and Malden, MA, 2013; 240 pp.: £16.99

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In recent years, there has been a huge amount of academic interest in the intersection of celebrity and politics, with various studies exploring the nature of celebrity within the political system. Mark Wheeler's book makes a valuable contribution to this debate, in his systematic discussion of politicians who are celebrities and also celebrities who engage in politics. Wheeler takes as his starting point the argument that celebrity politics operates in a post-democratic context. He offers a historical contextualisation for the commodification of politics in the last 100 years, where politicians have become celebrities and celebrities have become politicians, employing the conventional shorthand CP1 to refer to the celebrity politicians who have achieved political office and CP2 for celebrities who are politicised and engage with politics in some way outside of official, elected office. He shows how the celebritisation of politics has brought about alternative forms of political engagement and shows how these can be linked with cultural changes in concepts of citizenship and participation.

The book opens with a chapter that serves to theorise a normative position for celebrity politics in an era of post-democracy and late modernity. Drawing on a wide range of studies from both Europe and the United States, he teases out the nuances of celebrity activism and public engagement. Wheeler outlines several analytical approaches to develop a systematic taxonomy for the consideration of celebrity political engagement along with the rise in the personalisation of politics. The book then moves onto a historical overview of celebrity politics, thus dismissing the commonly held view that this is merely a product of late modernity. He shows that 'fame' in politics arose in antiquity but came to develop more fully with the onset of mass communication in the 20th century. In particular, Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy are shown to have used the cultural capital of iconic film stars of their era to promote themselves on radio, television and in the print media where they sold themselves as heroes of the 'American dream'. This established a template for modern endorsements, which Wheeler discusses in more detail later. At the same time, as this template was being laid down, celebrities sought to attach themselves to political campaigns, with the civil rights and anti-war campaigns of the 1960s and the 1970s attracting film and rock stars into political debate.