Queen’s University: Department of Sociology  
SOCY 903 Fall 2018

SURVEILLANCE STUDIES

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Class: Wednesday 2:30-5:30 M-C D528  
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Introduction

This course is about the sociology of surveillance. Surveillance is sociologically significant because it is a central means of social ordering, of governance, of organization, in Canada as elsewhere. Yet it develops unevenly and ambiguously. In recent years, government-led surveillance has been intensified significantly since 9/11; social surveillance since February 2004 when Facebook was launched. Since Edward Snowden’s revelations began in 2013, we know even more about how security intelligence and commercial internet companies work together. And following the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal of 2018, the power of platforms has become even clearer. Is this state surveillance, surveillance capitalism, platform capitalism or some other mode of influence or control through visibility?

Generally, the more societies depend on information infrastructures, especially electronically enabled, data-driven ones, the more everyday surveillance occurs. In one sense, the growth of surveillance is a product of the digital world or, more properly, digital modernity. At the same time, that digital world is not innocent; its current forms are imbued with neo-liberal globalism with which it is in mutual relation. But surveillance also increases the more people seek privacy, and do things at a distance. As well, it is a cultural phenomenon that involves imaginaries, practices and ways of life. Thus, the experience of surveillance has to be considered alongside the operations of surveillance.

Personal data are gathered by many means -- digital, video, biometric, genetic -- and are processed to create categories by which risks and opportunities are assessed, and through which people’s life-chances and choices
are influenced and managed. What once was thought of as a somewhat individualized process of targeted monitoring is now practiced on a large-scale, sometimes as mass surveillance. Rather than displaying discrete features, surveillance is best considered in terms of constantly mutating assemblages. Collectively, these processes may be thought of as ‘social sorting’ which, like all surveillance, is two-edged. Personal data flow in ways that are hard to track; indeed, surveillance itself seems increasingly liquid, which again reveals its relations with contemporary culture. Questions are raised about what is public, and what private, a debate that has a long history. The lines are very blurred today, even though ‘privacy’ rightly remains an important concept used to mobilize concern and to promote legislation.

Questions of power are always present: what are the consequences of everyday surveillance for consumers, citizens, travellers and workers? How is surveillance power exerted, by what agency and with what consequences and repercussions? While metaphors like ‘Big Brother’ or the panopticon are important to the sociology of surveillance, many other concepts, such as surveillance-industrial-complex, surveillance capitalism or visibility and exposure, are vital to fruitful analysis. This course is not primarily about prying, privacy or paranoia. A sociology of surveillance inquires critically about technology, culture, organizations, risk, ethics, and politics. And thus the “mainly” above is a reminder that with topics like surveillance, we have to draw from other disciplines as well as sociology to obtain a clear view (as it were).

During the course I shall give a series of lectures on surveillance based on my forthcoming book, Surveillance: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press, 2019). Here’s a summary:

Surveillance is everywhere today. Once a more limited and often remote aspect of social life, today surveillance is central to political, economic and everyday life. Every click on the keyboard, every call, text or email, every purchase, every contact with a doctor or the police or a government department, each time you walk under a video camera, pass through a security check, shop in a large store and in many other ways, you are recorded, identified, traced and tracked. Who has access to and can process these free-flowing data, how and with what consequences, is a critical question affecting everyone.

This is not an alien conspiracy. It is the way today’s digitally-dependent world works. Surveillance is not good or bad but neither is it neutral. It urgently needs to be understood better because people’s lives and life-chances depend on it. Depending on sinister Orwellian metaphors or complacent comments about having ‘nothing to hide’ will not cut it. We have to face to today’s realities in which surveillance is central to doing
Surveillance requires not just exploration and understanding but ethical guidance and political debate. How you get credit or welfare benefits or get on a no-fly list or are ranked as a consumer depends on surveillance. This book investigates how surveillance makes people visible, how it grew to its present size and prevalence, came to rely on technologies of data-handling, develops its own cultural features, displays its rights and wrongs and prompts political struggles.

**Guest lectures:** During the term, there will be two special classes involving guest lecturers. Note that on those days class will run from 2:30–4:00 only.

**Required Reading:**


This offers a guide to the field and *knowledge of its contents will be assumed for class discussions and in your written work*. Students are encouraged to question its conclusions and to suggest points at which it needs to be updated. You may do this in class or in one-on-one discussions or correspondence with me.

**Recommended Reading:**

Specific readings follow but I also strongly suggest that you familiarize yourself with the journal *Surveillance & Society*, which contains many fine resources.


See also the Surveillance Studies Network resources list at [http://www.surveillance-studies.net/?page_id=5](http://www.surveillance-studies.net/?page_id=5)

**Assignments:** Each student will participate in classes (*please let me know in advance if illness or accident prevents your attending*) by completing the assigned
readings, leading class discussions of the readings, preparing a seminar paper (30%); based on library research and relating to your own research plans; class participation, including the reading discussions and leadership (20%); and producing a term paper (50%).

**Readings**

These are listed under each class in the program. Everyone reads the ‘key reading’ and will be ready to discuss it. Students will also lead discussions on the assigned readings and make presentations on their research essay. Students are also – as far as possible -- expected to attend the SSC seminars [http://www.sscqueens.org/category/tags/ssc-seminar-series/] and other related events.

**Leading Class Discussions**

Students will take turns to summarize three of the recommended readings on a day assigned, offer some critical commentary and ask appropriate questions to elicit class discussion. Please ensure that you are not leading the readings discussion and presenting the seminar on the same day.

**Seminar Paper**

Students will each present on a specific topic. The idea is to stimulate discussion, not to give a comprehensive account. Work done by each student should be closely related to the term paper. The presentation may be supported with slides though this is not essential. As in the term paper, clear reference should be made to sociological and related theory by which topics may be explained. This is elaborated in the term paper. Students will discuss the topic with me in advance, to have it approved and to obtain advice. You are also required to distribute an abstract of your presentation and one related reading to the class during the week before the presentation. The reading is regarded as required for the class. *Presentations occur in the last 4 weeks of class.*

**Term Paper**

Each student will prepare a ~20 page (double spaced) grammatical, fully referenced, sociological essay. The bibliography is in addition to the 20 pages. A combination of good empirical evidence with thoughtful sociological reasoning
will garner the best grades. This is a research essay, so sociological -- and, where appropriate, other disciplinary -- sources will be sought. Students will tie the topic in with their research area. Due two weeks after seminar presentation.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility (see www.academicintegrity.org). These values are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive. Adherence to the values expressed through academic integrity forms a foundation for the "freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas" essential to the intellectual life of the University (see the Senate Report on Principles and Priorities).

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the regulations concerning academic integrity and for ensuring that their assignments conform to the principles of academic integrity. Information on academic integrity is available in the Arts and Science Calendar (see Academic Regulation 1), on the Arts and Science website (see http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/sites/default/files/Academic_Regulations.pdf), and from the instructor of this course.

Departures from academic integrity include plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification, and are antithetical to the development of an academic community at Queen's. Given the seriousness of these matters, actions which contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning or the loss of grades on an assignment to the failure of a course to a requirement to withdraw from the university.

**Program**

Class meets Wednesday 2:30-5:30.
Note: the following sessions may change due to circumstances or student request.

**September 12: What is Surveillance Studies?**
LECTURE: *The Study of Surveillance*

DISCUSSION: Surveillance Studies; how to define surveillance?

This area is multi-disciplinary, international, comparative, theory-guided, empirical, ethical. Surveillance Studies is not abstract but active. Students should come prepared for a critical discussion of *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*. Of course, I am willing to answer your questions but I shall also add my critical voice. You may wish to suggest ways in which your own work might be informed by or will go beyond the book.

READINGS:


Recommended readings:


Marx, Gary. 2016. *Windows into the Soul*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. This is a huge volume. But you could watch him speak on this at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYfR_dxSftQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYfR_dxSftQ)

**September 19: Situating Surveillance Studies**

LECTURE: *Surveillance and Visibility*

DISCUSSION: How do social and political theory connect with the empirical realities of the present? On whom do these authors depend for their theoretical orientations and critical perspectives?

READINGS:

Recommended readings:

Bucher, Taina. 2012. Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook. *New Media & Society*. 14(71) 1164-1180. Available Stauffer. Read this in conjunction with the following:


**September 26: Surveillance Histories**

LECTURE: *History of Surveillance*

DISCUSSION: Surveillance Histories readings

READINGS:


Recommended readings:


**October 03: Political Economy of Surveillance** [Note: DL research advising at the University of Essex, UK]

SPECIAL LECTURE: **Surveillance Capitalism**
Professor Rafael Evangelista, University of Campinas, Brazil

READINGS:

Required readings:


**NB** Today’s class will run from 2:30-4:00

**October 10: Questioning Technology**

LECTURE: **Surveillance, Technologies**

DISCUSSION: Beyond Determinisms and Constructions

READINGS:

Key reading:

Recommended readings:


**October 17: Data Images, Dividuals and Divisions**

**LECTURE:** *Surveillance, Data, Information*

**CLASS DISCUSSION:** Social sorting: class, race, gender and intersections

**READINGS:**


Recommended readings:


**October 24: Surveillance in Everyday Life**

**LECTURE:** *Surveillance Culture*

**DISCUSSION:** Erving Goffman, Michel de Certeau and Feminist Surveillance Studies

**READINGS:**


Recommended readings:


**October 31: Negotiating Surveillance**

**LECTURE:** *Surveillance Ethics*

**DISCUSSION:** Surveillance and ways of daily living

**READINGS:**
Key readings:


Recommended readings:


November 07: Contesting Surveillance

LECTURE: *The Politics of Surveillance*

DISCUSSION: Towards Data Justice?

READINGS:


Recommended readings:


**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

**November 14: Identification and Surveillance** [Note: DL lecturing in Philadelphia and Berlin]

SPECIAL LECTURE: **Identification: Colonialism, Place and Mobility**
Professor Asako Takano, Meiji Pharmaceutical University, Tokyo, with Dr Midori Ogasawara, Queen’s University

**READINGS:**

**NB** Today’s class will run from 2:30-4:00

**November 21: Where is ‘surveillance society’ going?**

LECTURE **Surveillance Futures**

**READINGS:**

*Key reading:*


*Recommended Readings:*

Ferguson, Andrew Guthrie. 2018. The high definition, artificially intelligent, all-seeing future of big data policing. ACLU. At https://www.aclu.org/issues/privacy-technology/surveillance-technologies/high-definition-artificially-intelligent-all


**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

**November 28: Staying with Surveillance Studies**

**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

**Additional optional readings**

If you wish to know my views on specific Surveillance Studies issues these extra items will give you some guidance.


