

## SECTION 12

# PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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The advent of participatory media destabilizes top-down models of surveillance in fascinating and oftentimes fraught ways. Social media, in particular, challenge the dominant idea of institutional surveillance as centralized, bureaucratic monitoring and control of individuals. Certainly, centralized and opaque forms of organizational surveillance persist, as the architectures of social media platforms are designed to encourage users to produce data that can be harnessed for capitalist gain, but the practices of individuals using participatory media far exceed the data-collection imperatives of organizations.

This raises difficult and potentially transformative questions for the field of surveillance studies: Should peer- or lateral-surveillance (of individuals watching each other online) count as surveillance? If so, where are the control dynamics? Is control, governance, or behavior modification necessary for peer observation to be considered surveillant? How should we modify our explanatory frameworks to include the nuanced complexity of micro-level influence or the subtle production of social norms through social media interactions? Can surveillance be thought of as liberating or empowering? If so, under what conditions and for whom? When social media surveillance might simultaneously include capitalist data

extraction, exploitative “free labor” on the part of users, rewarding forms of social cohesion, empowering or playful expressions of individual identity, and monitoring by myriad actors (friends, parents, partners, employers, law enforcement agents, and more), how can one begin to evaluate the overall effects—or merits—of social media surveillance?

The excerpts in this section represent a range of responses to questions of this sort. Mark Andrejevic interrogates the ways in which participatory media encourage unreflective production of data on the part of users. Such data are clearly profitable for companies, but the deeper concern for him is that robust forms of democratic empowerment are ultimately foreclosed in the emergent media ecology he calls the “digital enclosure.” Hille Koskela upends typical pronouncements that exposure makes one vulnerable to external influence or manipulation. Rather, for her, participatory media, such as home webcams, can be harnessed by actors to create forms of “empowering exhibitionism.” Koskela argues that such media can be liberating, allowing individuals to experiment and craft new subjectivities apart from the dictates of others. Anders Albrechtslund likewise emphasizes the subjectivity-building potential of intentional sharing on the part of users. It is important to

note that both Koskela and Albrechtslund are responding to what was largely a hegemonic construct at the time of their writing: that of hierarchical models of disempowering forms of surveillance. As the field adapted to the idea of simultaneous, multidirectional, and reinforcing surveillance affordances—particularly with regard to social media (cf. Trottier 2012)—scholars placed less stress on deconstructing hierarchical models, as these were no longer presumed to be the only valid ones.

While recognizing the problematic data-extraction design of social media platforms, Priscilla Regan and Valerie Steeves explore the possibility that the very surveillance functions of social media architectures might catalyze empowering experiences for users. Especially for teenage users, the self- and group-surveillance functions of social media platforms may encourage reflexive experimentation with self-presentation, along with the cultivation of social capital and political imaginaries, all of which are crucial for

identity development. Finally, Alice Marwick also attends to peer-monitoring and intentional self-presentation on social media, but she seeks to reanimate analysis of power asymmetries, with a focus on the intimate relationships among users. Borrowing from Michel Foucault's metaphor of "capillaries of power," which operate on the micro-level of everyday practices, Marwick develops the concept of "social surveillance" to visibilize power dynamics in the exchanges among users and across networks. In an important difference with Koskela, rather than emphasizing information sharing as an expression of agential exhibitionism, Marwick perceives it as being motivated by relationships of trust and intimacy, but nonetheless reproductive of disciplinary social norms.

#### REFERENCE

- Trottier, Daniel. 2012. *Social Media as Surveillance: Rethinking Visibility in a Converging World*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.