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SECTION 2

SOCIETY AND SUBJECTIVITY

How are subjectivities produced by and governed through surveillance? If modern society and its institutions are organized around surveillance, as the previous section claimed, then surveillance encounters infuse all interactions individuals have with institutions, whether direct or indirect. One's individual identity, social relations, and life chances are shaped by such interactions, whether with government agencies, schools, healthcare systems, places of employment, or any of the other institutions that pervade society. More than that, to the extent that such surveillance operates in the background, as part of the largely invisible, rational functioning of society, its politics are insulated and obscured, making them difficult to detect or challenge. Some of the most influential work in the field of surveillance studies has explored and theorized these very dynamics.

The figure of the Panopticon—or "all-seeing" prison—is one of the most potent representations of such institutional power. As conceived of by philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century,[1] and then popularized by Michel Foucault's expansive analysis in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), this prison design afforded the efficient control of people by delegating governance functions to the architecture, to the very material and bureaucratic system of managing individuals in space. The excerpts in this section sketch the Panopticon in great detail, but, in brief, the prison design was that of a circular building with cells along the outer walls and a guard tower in the center. Inmates were housed individually in backlit cells, which facilitated their easy monitoring by guards or others. The vitally important design element of window blinds in the guard tower prevented inmates from knowing exactly when they were under observation, leading—it is argued—to prisoners' internalization of discipline such that they could be rehabilitated and introduced back into society as law-abiding citizens.

For both Bentham and Foucault, the Panopticon model was something that could be, or was in Foucault's reading, replicated in other institutions throughout society. The principles of comprehensive and individualizing surveillance could be found also in schools, hospitals, factories, military barracks, and so on. Across these settings, Foucault argued, control was achieved through complete visibility and legibility of subjects. In large part, the impetus for these transformations was the perceived instability caused by revolution, industrialization, and class mobility in Europe in the

eighteenth century. If older social hierarchies (guaranteed by monarchies or feudalism) could not be counted on to provide stability, this created a pressing need for new ways to regulate society and maintain order. At the same time, the Enlightenment provided a philosophical justification for such changes. Principles of reason, equality, and transparency were viewed as having the capacity to transform society positively. Thus, the Panopticon model was intended to reverse the logic of the dungeon by spreading light and reason to the dark space where evil might flourish; to eradicate physical and moral disease by intervening on the level of the soul, not the body; and to reform and rehabilitate prisoners for the larger social good.

The functioning of this panoptic design is predicated not necessarily on its efficiency, of many being watched by a few, but instead on its ability to instill in subjects the power of the gaze and of becoming self-disciplining "docile bodies" (Foucault 1977). As Foucault explains: "There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself" (Foucault 1980: 155). Over time, subjected to meticulous bureaucratic procedures and continuous inspection, one ostensibly loses the very desire to deviate from social norms.

Embedded in such articulations is a particular conception of power that differs radically from classic understandings of power as something possessed by people and used to exert influence over others. For Foucault, as his analysis of the Panopticon illustrates, power is a distributed social machine in which all are caught and shaped. It is not simply a *repressive* force, although it may have those elements, but is also *productive* of social relations, subjectivities, and materialities. While hierarchies may persist, power does not originate from the topmost position but rather from the larger system of relations. As Gilles Deleuze explains: "Power has no essence; it is simply operational. It is not an attribute but a relation: the power-relation is the set of possible relations between forces, which passes through the dominated forces no less than through the dominating" (Deleuze 1988: 27).

Although surveillance studies scholars have drawn heavily on the idea of the Panopticon and on Foucault's notions of disciplinary power, the field reached something of a consensus in the early 2000s that the concept of the Panopticon—as an almost obligatory invocation in writings on surveillance—was impeding theoretical innovation. As a result, a number of spirited critiques emerged, particularly questioning the empirical accuracy and utility of the concept for describing contemporary surveillance regimes (Haggerty 2006; Murakami Wood 2007). Some scholars challenged the implied separation of control functions by institution, when in fact data flow among institutions and individuals are subjected to multiple, overlapping articulations of surveillance simultaneously (Haggerty and Ericson 2000). Others focused on the difficulty in ascribing panoptic functions to digital technologies (Lyon 1993), the mass media (Mathiesen 1997), or unenclosed spaces (Norris and Armstrong 1999). Others noted that contemporary surveillance most often does not engender uniformity, but instead creates differences and sorts populations unequally based upon assessments of risk or value (Gandy 1993; Lyon 2003; Simon 2005). Others questioned the applicability of the panoptic model for describing consumer surveillance, which can prioritize pleasurable rewards and incentives over interdictions (Elmer 2003). Still others observed that surveillance is not used exclusively to govern people but also to monitor abstract data, organizations,

and even the environment (Haggerty 2006). Finally, instead of accepting the passivity of so-called docile bodies, others emphasized the agency of individuals to resist or appropriate surveillance or use it for pleasurable or empowering ends (Gilliom 2001; Koskela 2004; Monahan, Phillips, and Murakami Wood 2010). Clearly, there were cracks in the foundations of the Panopticon metaphor, leading some to call for the field to "tear down the walls" (Haggerty 2006) and move on to more descriptively accurate concepts.

Notwithstanding these frustrations with the limitations of the Panopticon concept, Foucault's writings on biopolitical power offer a much more inclusive and perhaps more relevant explanation of the broader molding of society through surveillance. If sovereign power represented a single, arbitrary system of punishment that acted on the body, and disciplinary power accounted for multiple closed systems of rational control that trained individuals' "souls," biopolitical power concerned itself with the creating and governing of populations through mechanisms of categorizing and controlling people in aggregate (Foucault 2003: 1978). Some of the most obvious instantiations of biopolitical power are public health programs, migration control, insurance schemes, or the census, but it can be witnessed with just about any efforts to classify, sort, and regulate populations or groups, whether by state or nonstate institutions. Obviously, scholars concerned with issues of surveillance and inequality can fruitfully draw upon these insights, even if the Panopticon, as such, is less helpful. It is important to note that Foucault was careful to say that even by Bentham's time, disciplinary power was mutating into, or being transcended by, mechanisms of biopolitical power, so he clearly did not view disciplinary power, or the internalization of discipline by individuals, as the culminating form of social control in modern society (Foucault 1980). Moreover, Foucault not only acknowledged that there were plenty of overlaps among these regimes, and no clear breaks, he also observed that disciplinary power could be put in the service of biopolitical efforts (see excerpt). Therefore, for a field interested in surveillance's role in the shaping of modern society and subjectivity, Foucault's influence will surely endure.

This section begins with excerpts of Jeremy Bentham's original eighteenth-century letters explicating the Panopticon design and extolling its utilitarian efficiencies. An excerpt from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* follows, wherein he describes the Panopticon schema as a generalizable model of disciplinary power that penetrates society, allowing for an "automatic functioning of power" without direct force. An excerpt from Gilles Deleuze's "Postscript on the Societies of Control" builds upon Foucault's analysis to argue that a new regime of power has taken hold—one characterized by corporate interests achieved through divisions, abstract codes, fluidity, and the production of insecurity. Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson's piece echoes some of Deleuze's themes, while also arguing that much contemporary surveillance operates more like an assemblage, allowing for the ready exchange of data and the convergence of control functions that act upon partial representations, or "data doubles," of individuals for instrumental aims.

Thomas Mathiesen's excerpt focuses on what he views to be a shortcoming of panoptic explanatory frameworks: their inability to account for the persistent role of spectacle, and particularly the mass media, in maintaining ideological control over society in the late twentieth century. Rather than the few watching the many with the Panopticon, he claims that significant ideological control is achieved by the many watching the few, such as news reporters, which is a relationship he labels "synopticism." Given

the discussion of Foucault's work above, it is worth questioning Mathiesen's emphasis on the panoptic efficiency of watching, when *Discipline and Punish* was certainly making a much broader argument about spread of disciplinary mechanisms throughout society and the internalization of discipline by people. That said, synopticism is undoubtedly a relevant area of investigation for surveillance studies today, especially in respect to celebrity culture and the dynamics of cultivated publicity on social media.

The excerpt by David Armstrong brings us back to a focus on population, with particular attention given to the construction of a modern medical imaginary that normalizes things like health screening and public health campaigns (see also French 2009). For Armstrong, "surveillance medicine" depends on the systematic measurement of entire populations, not just sick ones, which is a process that provides a comparative baseline for healthfulness while also changing the way people understand their bodies, risk, and care. The final excerpt, by Irus Braverman, demonstrates how social values and identities can be intentionally constructed—or disciplined—through experiences of observing nonhuman animals in painstakingly designed zoos. The presumed objects of surveillance in zoos may be nonhuman animals, but the audiences are zoogoers who are trained to embrace conservationist values through exposure to contrived scenes of "wildness."

NOTE

1. The Panopticon idea was initially conceived of by Jeremy Bentham's brother, Samuel, as an efficient means of overseeing workers (Semple 1993).

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