SECTION 3

STATE AND AUTHORITY

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Concerns with questions of power and authority are at the very heart of surveillance studies. State power, in particular, has been a persistent focus for scholars from across the many disciplines that contribute to this field. Although surveillance has existed in some form throughout history, there are good reasons for its association with the rise of the modern nation-state. The function of the "the police," broadly understood in the eighteenth century as what Foucault (1991) would later call governmentality (or the "conduct of conduct"), was theorized in emerging nation-states in Europe as the role the state should have in providing protection to its citizens. Thus, the first excerpt in this section—by the preeminent Prussian liberal jurist Johann Gottlieb Fichte—provides us with a description of ideal police states as well-ordered societies. Fichte concentrated, for example, as much on the role of police in making sure that unscrupulous medical practitioners did not prescribe fake treatments to patients as he did on questions of state control of citizens. Nevertheless, Fichte clearly argues that the efficient functioning of the state depends on identification (see more on this in Section 4) and the continuous surveillance of the population—ostensibly for the benefit of all. "No one," says Fichte, "must remain unknown to the police" (Fichte 1869: 378).

To present-day sensibilities, the construct of the police state might seem antithetical to modern democracies, but this is not necessarily the case. For example, Anthony Giddens (excerpted here) posits in *The Nation-State and Violence*, "aspects of totalitarian rule are a threat in all modern states, even if not all are threatened equally or in exactly the same ways" (Giddens 1985: 310). The expansion of surveillance supports such latent totalitarianism. Democracies have always depended on management of populations and limits to freedom. However, one of the key functions of the police has always been political policing, that is, the controlling of the boundaries of acceptable discourse and activity, and as Agamben (2005) argues, there is often a particular erosion of democracy at times of crisis. Finally, many liberal democratic states draw upon their imperialist histories to act in international arenas in ways that are contrary to their supposed democratic principles: waging illegal wars, depriving the citizens of other nation-states of their rights and freedoms, and supporting undemocratic regimes in other parts of the world when it suits their strategic aims.

The excerpt from Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's *Sorting Things Out* situates such imperial-colonial ordering practices in the context of identity schemes in apartheid South Africa. The authors

consider the ways in which the state created, maintained, and changed pseudoscientific classifications in its efforts to establish and police racial hierarchies. Here we see how arbitrary forms of racial surveillance were codified in infamous bureaucratic systems and "passbooks." Symbolic violence of forceful, arbitrary categorization merged with—and supported—physical violence of territorial displacement, containment, and policing that could lead to punishment or death. Thus, colonial and postcolonial systems often provide extreme cases of state surveillance that are later modified and applied to domestic populations as well.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the liberality of the nation-state system in Europe—but also in places like Japan, which had deliberately set out to imitate and improve on the Western model—came under threat from contradictions within itself. These arose from two opposing wings of the conventional political spectrum: first from the left with the communist revolution in Russia and then from the right with Benito Mussolini's Fascists in Italy, Francisco Franco's Falangists in Spain, and Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party in Germany. Each of these developments spawned state surveillance practices that today serve as cautionary tales of the dangerous endpoints societies must avoid (e.g., concentration camps, gulags, Stasi police).

Because surveillance critics are perhaps too quick—and often inaccurate—in declaring that the latest state surveillance programs are authoritarian or totalitarian, it is worth exploring what these terms signify and the distinctions between them. Basic authoritarianism or autocracy is government by authority, and often by violence. Such authority tends to be directed to contingent and corrupt ends. Generalized surveillance can be unnecessary in such states, but the threat of surveillance, along with disappearances and violence, creates a climate of fear and

intimidation. One can see examples of this in some of the military "juntas" in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. While these articulations of authoritarianism varied in their level of individual surveillance and degree of violence, they also varied in their stated political ideologies.

Totalitarianism, on the other hand, is a specific form of authoritarianism that imposes total control over society for ideological, even supposedly morally justifiable, ends. Totalitarianism implies total knowledge. First, this includes the production of knowledge, often with an intense state propaganda machine and control of media, cultural, and academic institutions. Second, it involves the collection of information through surveillance, usually overseen by secret police and a large bureaucracy of internal espionage. Related to this, totalitarian states often implement systems of terror, wherein people may be imprisoned, tortured, or killed for political—or even arbitrary—reasons. In part because of these shared characteristics, Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1966), argued that Stalinism and Nazism had common roots and were similar in operation—for example, in giving priority to the needs of the state over society (as Agamben [2005] later argued of Nazi Germany, the state was founded on exception from the law). In this section, the excerpt by Maria Los, who was herself a refugee from Soviet-era Poland, takes these insights further with an unflinching portrayal of the reality of surveillance in totalitarian states.

To further illustrate this coupling of surveillance and totalitarianism, the next excerpt comes from *Stasiland*, Anna Funder's brilliant series of linked interviews with both state agents and those put under surveillance in former East Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In the GDR, perhaps the apex of state surveillance in the twentieth century, internal control was the

business of the Ministry for State Security (Stasi). Its operations were characterized by an intensely paranoid style, particularly based around the recruitment and mobilization of legions of informers. By some estimates, the Stasi had 1 informer for every 6.5 people (Koehler 1999), leading to the development of a unique "Stasi consciousness" (Darnton 1993: 132)—or a justified concern that one might be watched or listened to anywhere, at anytime, and by anyone, even by family members. Funder draws attention to the numerous paradoxes of the rules that governed the Stasi, which seem to have been a combination of the visions of Franz Kafka and George Orwell; for example, surveillance was only permitted of "enemies," but investigation itself meant that the target must, de facto, be an enemy.

The relationship of states to populations shifted significantly in the final decades of the twentieth century, catalyzing transformations in surveillance too. On one hand, there have been sustained trends in the privatization of government, deregulation of industry, and responsibilization of people to meet their basic needs (Bourdieu 1998; Brown 2006; Harvey 2005; Wacquant 2009). This process is furthered through cultural shifts that normalize the commodification of all aspects of life, effectively establishing new forms of governmentality organized around market-based freedoms (Rose 1999). On the other hand, the state has reaffirmed its role in security provision, military campaigns, and internal policing of racialized minorities and the poor (e.g., through the prison-industrial complex), all of which are heavily supported by private companies and contractors. In the final excerpt in this section, Cindi Katz analyzes some of the implications of neoliberal responsibilization, where individuals are called upon to ensure social reproduction—particularly, in her examples, with child safety

Stasi smell samples for dog tracking, undated, John Steer, courtesy of the Stasi-Museum, Berlin, ASTAK.

and care—in the absence of state programs. As parents turn to surveillance technologies to do so, homes become mini-states that aggravate racial and class tensions more broadly, while leaving fundamental causes of inequality and need unchallenged.

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