

Summary

- Advances in technology have resulted in the disciplinary gaze being extended beyond the confines of closed and controlled environments, such as the prison or the factory, to encompass society as a whole. The exponential growth of surveillance techniques in most areas of contemporary life have led some commentators to suggest that the primary advantage of technological advancement is the potential that arises for risk management at a distance. Discussions of surveillance have been dominated by pessimistic images of 'Big Brother' and the panopticon, metaphors that have helped to perpetuate the notion that surveillance technologies are linked to insidious and repressive forms of regulation and social control. However, in recent years the idea of the 'synopticon' has emerged to challenge this cynical and despairing view. Views of surveillance systems are now split between those who hold that technologies such as CCTV constrain people's activities, restrict their behaviour, and are used to regulate demonized 'others', and those who characterize surveillance as essentially liberating and democratizing.
- It has been suggested that we are increasingly witnessing the convergence of once disconnected systems to the point that we can now speak of a 'surveillant assemblage' (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000). The systems of discipline and domination that make up this convergence of once discrete systems are driven by five principal motives: control of the body, governance, security, profit and entertainment, all of which have significant social and cultural implications. An analysis of surveillance in the workplace has served to illustrate these motives in situ, and has demonstrated the arguments for and against the regulation and monitoring of individuals.
- The subject of surveillance remains an ideological battleground, but whatever view one takes of its purposes and outcomes, it must be remembered that technologies such as CCTV do not exist in a cultural vacuum, and are inextricably entwined with the human motives, values and behaviour of both observers and observed.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Due to limitations of space this chapter has only discussed in detail a few of the systems and practices that can broadly be defined as 'surveillance'. How many other applications of surveillance (in both its guises as coded data collection and visual monitoring) can you identify in contemporary Britain?
2. Gary Marx (1995) demonstrates that surveillance motifs are pervasive in popular culture. They range from themes of erotic fantasy (of secret watching) to political paranoia about the 'enemy within'. What are the impacts of the widespread cultural treatment of surveillance as entertainment on the public at large? Do they help to 'normalize' surveillance and make it acceptable, or do they increase public fears and anxieties about crime?

3. For all their benign appearance, are sites like Facebook and Twitter simply the most instant and global means of surveillance on the planet? Are they just the most effective way of keeping in touch or do they legitimize people spying on each other and make the notion of privacy (and indeed friendship) a thing of the past?
4. The UK DNA database currently stores over two million profiles, but there are frequent discussions about whether it should be extended, even to the entire population of the UK (though such suggestions are currently being held in check by the European Court of Human Rights). What are the pros and cons of keeping samples taken from the entire population on a national DNA database? Would such a move reduce discrimination or might it create 'at risk' categories which reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes (Nelkin and Andrews, 2003)?
5. From your reading of this subject, would you say that on the whole, surveillance systems empower or constrain?

FURTHER READING

So vast has the subject of surveillance now become, and so expansive is the criminological literature on the subject, that this chapter has been able to do no more than scratch the surface. By including discussions of surveillance as entertainment, and the surveillant properties of Internet sites like Facebook, it has selectively picked out some themes which strike a chord with discussions throughout *Media & Crime*. Inevitably, however, this has been at the expense of more detailed analyses of the surveillance-governance-security nexus, which is more commonly addressed in criminological circles. The most comprehensive and up-to-date overviews of surveillance are: Coleman, R. and McCahill, M. (2010) *Surveillance and Crime* (Sage), and Mathiesen, T. (2013) *Towards a Surveillant Society* (Waterside Press). Also excellent are: B. Goold and D. Neyland (eds) (2009) *New Directions in Surveillance and Privacy* (Willan/Routledge); K. F. Aas, H. O. Gundhus and H. M. Lomell (eds) (2008) *Technologies of InSecurity: The Surveillance of Everyday Life* (Routledge); and K. Haggerty and R. Ericson (eds) (2006) *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility* (Toronto University Press). David Lyon has been prolific on the subject of surveillance and all his books are worth a look, including his published 'conversation' with Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Surveillance* (2012, Polity). There is an excellent e-journal devoted to surveillance – *Surveillance & Society* – which can be accessed at <http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/ojs/index.php/> journal, and *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* also embraces new research on surveillance technologies as well as other 'new' and alternative media: <http://cmc.sagepub.com>. Finally, it is worth reading the *Guardian's* reports on the Snowden revelations and their repercussions: www.theguardian.com/world/series/the-snowden-files