

We Like to Watch: Surveillance and Society

INF 327E, #28280

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Friday 9:00AM – 12PM; UTA 1.502

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Overview

What do Big Brother, Facebook, al-Qaeda, Josef K., Tosh.O, the CIA, MasterCard, Sasha Grey, Google, the “dog-poop girl,” Fox News, and *The Biggest Loser* have in common? Well, that’s what we’re here to find out...

We spend much of our lives watching each other. Whether you are an NSA signals analyst working through the data provided by SIGINT intercepts; a marketing executive ordering carefully targeted consumer lists from Acxiom Corporation; or a UT student googling and friending that hot new prospect you met last night on Sixth Street, we are all conducting surveillance (or playing voyeur or exhibitionist, as the case may be) in our lives. Whether we realize what we’re doing as we’re doing it, or realize that someone is actually watching, is another matter entirely.

Surveillance is a loaded word, and a topic of increasing concern and controversy within our country and our society. The September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks caused us to consider and reconsider many of our positions on privacy, domestic surveillance, and the intelligence community. Without a doubt our society has shifted towards more emphasis on national and homeland security, and more surveillance powers for government. But this shift has not gone uncontested. The debate over surveillance and privacy has become heated in the years since 9/11, both in the wake of disclosures of new surveillance programs and in new attacks and threats. Images of police states and abuse of power are set up against concerns of increased vulnerability. Many fear that our society is becoming a surveillance state, where personal privacy erodes further every day in the face of (both real and imagined) threats; while others see antiquated ideas of civil liberty in the face of an enemy that uses a free society against itself as the graver threat.

But does either of these perspectives capture the whole story? Surveillance encompasses far more than just wiretaps or spy satellites, terrorists or watchdog groups. Surveillance goes hand in hand with the entire development of modern society, and impacts how we live both our private and public lives. Companies and marketers do as much if not more surveillance than the intelligence communities, albeit in different forms (perhaps less different as time goes on). The healthcare community also conducts surveillance in the service of public health and epidemiology, and plays an increasingly important role in the defense against bioterrorism. And surveillance is often hard to separate from voyeurism in today’s world of webcams, Internet pornography, visual cultures of celebrity and fashion, and reality television. Our technologies have made our society much more open and visible, and we seem to really enjoy watching. Indeed, we seem to have a need to

watch.

So what is surveillance, really? Where does it exist, in what forms, and for what purposes? How is surveillance connected with the necessary institutions of a complex and industrial society? And how do we engage with surveillance practice in our daily lives? We all watch, and we are all watched, but often the infrastructures and processes of our monitoring are invisible to us (even when we're the ones doing it). Surveillance is often seen as something that is done to someone else, particularly a "bad guy". In fact, a very common response to concerns over surveillance is "if you have nothing to hide, then you have nothing to fear." Just how accurate is this statement, and how dangerous is an uncritical acceptance or rejection of it?

This class will examine the phenomenon of surveillance in depth. We will analyze surveillance in many guises and from a number of perspectives. We will explore basic concepts and theories of surveillance, as well as some of the methods and technologies that are used to accomplish it. We will read about and discuss the users of surveillance, including law enforcement agencies, the intelligence community, marketers and corporations, artists, and individuals. Our goal will be to challenge the conventional ideologies of surveillance as crime/terror prevention on the one side, or as invasion of privacy on the other. By exploring surveillance in a more depth, we can come to a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon of watching (or listening, or collecting data) and learn skills that can help us understand the role of surveillance in our daily lives.

Required Textbooks (alphabetical order)

- Doctorow, C. (2008). *Little brother*. New York: Tor Teen.
- Gilliom, J. (2001). *Overseers of the poor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Huxley, A. (1989). *Brave new world*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Kafka, F. (1988). *The trial*. New York: Random House.
- Lane, F. (2009). *American privacy*. City: Beacon Press
- Nathan, D. (2007). *Pornography*. Toronto: Groundwork Books.
- O'Harrow, R. (2006). *No place to hide*. New York: Free Press.
- Orwell, G. (1983). *1984*. New York: Plume.
- Rushkoff, D. (2010). *Program or be programmed*. Berkeley: Soft Skull Press.
- Solove, D. (2007) *The future of reputation: Gossip, rumor, and privacy on the Internet*. Yale University Press. Available free at <http://docs.law.gwu.edu/facweb/dsolove/Future-of-Reputation/text.htm>.

In addition to the books, I will assign supplemental readings made available on BlackBoard. We will also be watching several movies that are considered required texts.

Assignments

This course is designed to be an exercise in critical thinking and an examination of a complex topic. It's also my hope that the topics we cover in class will map appropriately to the real world in a way that adds value to your understanding and learning as students. To that end, assignments will reflect a mix of group and individual engagement with the

topic through discussion, research, and writing.

- *Class Participation and Discussion* – All students will help to lead and facilitate discussions in class by contributing readings and coming to class prepared to contribute. More details will be provided in class.
- *Surveillance Exercises* – There will be several surveillance exercises that you will accomplish during the course of the semester. We will discuss instructions and schedule in class.
- *Exams* – There will be three two-hour, in-class exams during the semester that will focus on the readings, films, and class discussions.

Grading

First of all, it is important to state up front that this is a discussion class, not a lecture course. **Attendance is mandatory.** I will be taking role each week and the following penalties for missing class will apply:

- 1 class missed – no penalty
- 2 classes missed – 5 point penalty on final grade
- 3 classes missed – 15 point penalty on final grade
- 4 classes missed – 25 point penalty on final grade
- > 4 classes missed – Epic Fail

There will be **no exceptions** to the above penalties – *please don't put us both in the awkward position of having to explain that your responsibilities as an adult and a university student are your own.*

To be successful in the class you must attend **and** participate in the discussions. This does not mean that you have to be the most verbal participant in class, but it does mean that you must be actively engaged in the discussions. We will discuss how I will this in class so that it's clear to everyone.

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty

50% of final grade (varies by exercise) 20% of final grade (5% each) 30% of final grade
Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information please visit the Student Judicial Services Web site:
<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>.

Undergraduate Writing Center

Students wishing help on writing assignments or improving their writing skills should consider visiting the Undergraduate Writing Center, in FAC 211. More information can be found at the Center's website: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/uwc/index.php>.

Class Calendar:

Jan 18

Introductions, go over the syllabus, start the discussion

Jan 25

Key concepts in surveillance and privacy

Feb 1

1984

Feb 8

American Privacy (chapters 1-6)

Feb 15

American Privacy (chapters 7-12)

Feb 22

Little Brother

Mar 1

MOVIE

Mar 8

Overseers of the Poor
The Trial

Mar 15

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Mar 22

No Place to Hide

Mar 29

MOVIE

Apr 5

OPEN

Apr 12

The Future of Reputation

Apr 19

Program or Be Programmed
Brave New World

Apr 26

Pornography
Supplemental Readings
NC-17 Week – Class Optional

May 3

MOVIE

Closing discussion