

Surveillance technologies and social transformation: emerging challenges of socio-technical change

David Lyon

Professor, Queen's Research Chair, Queen's University, Canada

In the twenty-first century surveillance is not only hard-wired into the urban and national territorial environment, it is vital to organizational practice, a major economic sector in its own right, crucial to the constitution of social classes, and of course constantly encountered in everyday life. Social thinkers once claimed surveillance was becoming central to modernity and now, from street cameras, tracking systems, loyalty programs and airport security scanners to internet monitoring it is indeed taken-for-granted as a pervasive feature of our age. But what enables this structurally constituted, socially consequential formation? One key factor crucial to the emerging situation is the late twentieth century development of information and communication technologies and above all their remote, networked and searchable capacities. Any so-called information society is by the same token a surveillance society. This paper justifies the above grand claims and asks how far new media research is equal to the multiple challenges presented by such deeply ambiguous socio-technological developments.