

Version 19 September 2012

This is a pre-edited version of a review article published in *Science as Culture*:

Grommé, Francisca. 2013. "Technologies of Control: Identity Cards and Media Censorship." *Science as Culture* 22 (2): 272–78. doi:10.1080/09505431.2012.742497.

The final version of the review article can be retrieved on:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09505431.2012.742497>

REVIEW

Technologies of Control: Identity Cards and Media Censorship

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Playing the Identity Card: Surveillance, Security and Identification in Global Perspective, edited by Colin J. Bennett and David Lyon, Routledge, 2008, 287 pp., £21.99/€29.99/\$39.99.

Edited Clean Version: Technology and the Culture of Control, by Raiford Guins, University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 242 pp., £50.50/ €63.99/\$22.50.

Governments, companies and citizens use technologies in ways that visualize conduct, like identity cards do. But technologies may also be used to *obscure* information in order to steer or influence populations, as is the case with media censorship technologies. The books reviewed here each discuss one of these applications. In doing so they take on the challenge, as articulated by Kevin Haggerty, of examining contemporary surveillance technologies from a governmentality perspective (2006; also see Deleuze, 1992). Michel Foucault put forward the notion of governmentality as the 'art of government' (2000, p. 203). His work was mostly historical, however, focusing on the 19th century and earlier. Therefore, he did not answer the question of how contemporary ICTs contribute to the dynamics of freedom and control described by governmentality theory.

The concept of governmentality refers to the 'institutions, procedures, analyses and tactics that allows a complex form of power over the population' (Foucault, 2000, pp. 219-220). Governmentality theorists instruct us to study power as a result of the use of the techniques and methods of government. They also teach us that the art of government in 'advanced liberal democracies' is the promotion of a controlled freedom in which citizens govern themselves (Rose, 2000). Citizens do so within norms of conduct based on scientific and professional knowledge from domains such as psychology and medicine. Individuals enact these norms in ways that are not only oppressive, but also empowering and enabling.

The contributing authors to *Playing the Identity Card: Surveillance, Security and Identification in Global Perspective* (2008) discuss the implementation of identity cards that are intended to make citizens visible, readable and traceable. The authors in this book examine new technologies and governmentality from the perspective of the relatively new field of surveillance studies. In line with the normative orientation of this field, important (but not the only) preoccupations of the authors are the exclusionary and repressive effects these

technologies might have (Ball and Haggerty, 2005). In the second book under review here, *Edited Clean Version: Technology and the Culture of Control* (2009), Raiford Guins analyses the effects of home censorship technologies that obscure media content, such as internet filters. He writes from the tradition of cultural studies and aims to explain how media technologies are part of new strategies of monitoring and control. Together these books show that states, companies and individuals use ICTs in ways that are empowering, yet controlling. A governmentality framework helps these authors to bring out the ambiguous effects of these technologies. And, as this review will point out, these books raise some analytical issues as well.

Technologies that Visualize: Identity Cards

Playing the Identity Card is an edited volume by David Lyon and Colin J. Bennett. Two introductory chapters by Lyon and Bennett and Louise Amoore describe the main problem and argument of the book. Following these two chapters, the remaining fourteen chapters of the book present case studies about the introduction of national identity cards in Asia, South Africa, Europe, the Anglo-Saxon world, and by international organizations. The book takes identity cards as a point of departure, but takes into account the larger identity management schemes that these cards are part of. Lyon and Bennett describe how during the past decade more states than ever have introduced identity cards and identity management systems. This is a remarkable development, they state, because identity cards were originally introduced in the context of authoritarian regimes and warring nations. Yet, in many of the countries that are introducing identity card schemes these circumstances no longer apply. Today's motivations for large-scale identification schemes are fuzzier. The arguments that states provide range from service provision to the fight against money laundering, identity theft and terrorism.

There is more at stake than merely the idea that citizens carry identity cards, voluntary or not, so the authors argue. The general argument running through the book is that identity itself is becoming a key mode of governance. In arguing so, the authors draw on the notion of the 'securitization of identity' that Nikolas Rose put forward in his work on governmentality (Rose, 1999). As is argued most clearly by Bennett and Lyon (Chapter 1) and by Kelley Gates (Chapter 13), being able to prove your official identity has become a prerequisite to exercise liberties, ranging from international travel to using public spaces. The authors explain this development by the partial or full renunciation of the welfare system in many countries. Instead of being governed by the state, the citizen is expected to govern himself in various circuits of activity, such as education and employment. Active participation in these circuits has become a precondition for citizenship, civil rights and socio-economic rights. In this system, in- and exclusion of citizenship is accomplished by the identification of individuals in these different realms of activity.

Louise Amoore explains why these developments are reasons for concern in the second and most theoretical chapter of the book. She argues that today's identity cards are part of pre-emptive systems that do not simply stop a person at the border. Long before the border has even been approached, identity management systems attach a risk value to a person on the basis of predefined risk categories. The old idea of the violation of privacy in terms of publicly exposing personal information is no longer applicable to these practices, Amoore argues. Contemporary governance limits the possibility of entering the public domain at all without suspicion or judgment.

As might be expected from an edited volume, the authors of the case studies express very different views of the nature and consequences of national identification systems. Whereas some authors argue that the state's capacity for control may not increase because the

practical implementation of these schemes is inefficient and prone with error (e.g. Keith Breckenridge in Chapter 3 on South Africa), others warn that identity cards increase the potential for ‘tyrannical rule’ (Midori Ogasawara in Chapter 6 on Japan). Notwithstanding their diversity, these case studies teach us two general lessons. First, we learn that introducing systems for identity management is a highly problematic effort, and the consequences of these systems are mediated by national and international contexts. Lyon and Bennett explain that

(...) these trends [the worldwide diffusion of identity cards] may be mediated, diffracted or obstructed by the quite distinctive institutions and cultures of specific states. These policy instruments have to be selected and adapted by public and private sector agents influenced by a myriad of historical, cultural and institutional constraints (p. 9).

The case studies in the section about the European and Anglo-Saxon countries provide the strongest illustrations for this point. For instance, Pierre Piazza and Laurent Laniel demonstrate how the implementation of the French biometric identity card (INES) was stalled as a consequence of the opposition of NGOs (Chapter 12). In addition, at that time the French institutional consultation committees were critical of this megaproject. So, far from being a ‘powerful instrument (...) bent on opaque and ferocious designs’ (p. 199), the identity card should be regarded as the outcome of a contextualized struggle.

The second lesson we learn is that official identities are always mediated identities, and that identity card systems can be part of the construction of these identities. Various chapters argue that state efforts to create stable citizen identities are fundamentally problematic because ‘official identification involves verifying an object that does not exist a priori, but that is constituted in the act of verification’ (Gates, p. 222). In sum, identity is not pre-defined and often ambiguous, and the introduction of new official identities does not necessarily simplify identification practices. Taha Mehmood illustrates this in his contribution about India (Chapter 7). In India, the multi-purpose national identity card introduces a new category of national citizenship in border regions where a complex of identities according to religion, caste and community exists. Introducing notions of national citizenship complicated the matter of governance by identity to such extent that the state refrained from issuing national identity cards.

As a whole, the book provides a valuable contribution to the field of surveillance studies by showing how total visibility is not a likely outcome of the drive towards identity management because of the mediated and contested nature of identity construction. In addition, the authors examine aspects of contemporary identification schemes beyond the widely discussed issues of international mobility and state power. However, several of the case studies read as the first steps towards an understanding of what identity management means for governance. These chapters read like factual reports or research notes on the implementation of identity cards (this is true for particularly, but not only, the chapters on Hong Kong and the Gulf States). Consequently, the reader is provided with a large amount of facts without a strong framework for interpretation.

Technologies that Obscure: Censorship Technologies

With *Edited Clean Version*, we move from making citizens visible to covering up nudity, profanity and violence in the media. In his monograph Raiford Guins applies the framework of governmentality to the domain of cultural regulation in the United States. The book presents five case studies of censorship technologies, preceded by a theoretical chapter. The

first case study opens with the ‘nipple-gate’ incident at the 2004 Superbowl. During a half-time performance Janet Jackson’s right breast was exposed due to what was called a ‘wardrobe malfunction’. Guins shows that this incident not only strengthened the drive for censorship by television channels, but it also regenerated a push for the use of television filters (the V-Chip) and other filtering technologies from the homes of the viewers. After this chapter about the V-chip, Guins devotes a chapter on each of the following technologies: internet filters; video store policies and filtering software for DVD players; the production of clean-version films and CDs; and new and future practices of filtering video games and mobile technologies such as the iPhone. These cases represent the mode of ‘do-it-yourself regulation’ (p. 39) that has replaced the censorial cut.

As in *Playing the Identity Card*, an important part of the argument in this book is based on the notion of self-regulation. Guins takes this argument to the home sphere. He contends that censorship technologies contribute to the governance of culture according to the logic of ‘control’, as put forward by Gilles Deleuze (see Deleuze, 1992; Deleuze, 1990). In line with Deleuze, Guins argues that the regulation of the media has become

Not restrictive, but freeing. Not detrimental to freedom, but productive, freeing and regulatory. Not disabling, but enabling. The multilayering complex of federal, retail, industry, and privatized efforts rationalize and instrumentalize regulation across culture and put it into the hands of consumers, who govern over themselves as “policy” becomes a personalized governing practice at the touch of many buttons and the new posture for the reconstitution of censorial practices across media (p. 170).

Control is no longer operated by a central authority, but media users seemingly regulate the content themselves without state interference at the level of content creation or programming. Security is practiced by self-censorship and relies on self-expertise about acceptable media content.

Guins draws on Rose (1999) to explain how state institutions, media corporations and technology providers ‘govern at a distance’ (p. 6). These actors do not directly impose censorship, but they do design the protocols and rating systems that are inscribed in censorship technologies. Consequently, the exact meaning of ‘family values’ is not determined by media users themselves. Filtering and editing technologies therefore offer a highly disciplined form of freedom. What is more, the option of parental control itself has become a prerequisite for freedom. Framed as ‘choice’, parental control now functions as the counterpart of restrictive government regulation. So paradoxically, this version of choice is the only way to exercise freedom. Choice, so concludes Guins, is not a matter of personal autonomy anymore, but has become a tool for governing at a distance.

Control is ‘designed in’ media technologies in two ways, Guins shows. First, software protocols influence media content in a highly biased manner. For example, a DVD player that blocks film footage of an American soldier under attack does not hide images of the violent death of Somali soldiers. Hence, ‘left intact and clearly visible are religious, political, and ideological biases that come to substantiate family-friendly media according to the sanitizing policy of these companies’ (p. 92).

Second, and most important, family values have come to signify what counts as ‘good’ in media regulation. These technologies visualize and emphasize their security function. Consequently, they have redefined the ways in which users understand and interact with the media. Even if users opt for an explicit version of a CD, these control technologies operate on a more fundamental level to redesign the media as a site for ‘morality management’ (p. 19). This is to say that our understanding of the media has shifted towards the media as control devices; ‘to use the media is to engage in and to enable practices of control’ (p. 20). For

instance, DVD players have become content shifting devices through the introduction of filtering technologies. The inclusion of a parental control option has become a normative basis for goodness.

In relation to this second point, Guins explains how the presence of security through blocking, filtering or editing has become a visible (and audible) part of the media experience. Chapter 5 about 'cleaning' the content of DVD's and CD's provides the strongest empirical argument for this point. Censorship has attained the status of art as the content of media is changed in ways that receive aesthetic appreciation. For instance, the suggestive sound effects used in songs to mask references to sexual acts or profanity have become an accepted art form.

Because of its analytical innovativeness *Edited Clean Version* is compelling from the beginning to the end. By distinguishing the activities of 'blocking', 'filtering', 'sanitizing', 'cleaning' and 'patching', Guins offers the reader new terms that clarify the specific contribution of these technologies to contemporary modes of governmentality. This is where Guins is more inventive than the authors in *Playing the Identity Card*.

Answering the Challenge

So what can we learn from these two books about the challenge of examining contemporary surveillance technologies from a governmentality perspective? First, it needs to be noted that, at times, governmentality theory seems to be a heavy load to carry. In *Playing the Identity Card*, validating the governmentality framework seems to become the objective rather than a critical enterprise for some authors. The risk of this type of analysis is that the effort of validating the theory replaces the analysis of the case study itself. This is the case, among others, for Chapter 6 in which Midori Ogasawara concludes that the Japanese state is enabled to accomplish a totalitarian agenda by using identification systems (p. 108). In making this strong claim she fails to appreciate the daily functioning of these systems in governance practices. She articulates the threats that these systems pose solely on the basis of the theory she applies to them.

In Guins' work we see another pitfall of governmentality theory. At times he endows the concept of control itself with agency, instead of the actors (Prainsack and Toom, 2010). When Guins asserts that 'control' has redefined the media landscape on a more fundamental level, control is referred to as an independent entity. Because he emphasizes the agency of control itself, he neglects the capacity of users to evade censorship, for instance by illegally downloading explicit videos.

This latter critique relates to a more general analytical issue. On the one hand, we cannot ignore questions of resistance and inefficiency that characterize local applications, as demonstrated in Lyon and Bennett's edited volume. On the other hand, by applying a local focus one may lose a sensibility for the ways in which ICTs help generate new forms of media usage and new practices of governmentality. It might be that these analytical perspectives cannot be easily reconciled within the theoretical frameworks discussed in this review. In any case, it is up to the analyst to carefully and transparently weigh down the aspects of surveillance and control he or she intends to highlight.

Overall, both books succeed in contributing relevant refinements to a field in which the consequences of contemporary technology of surveillance and control have all too often been discussed in terms of their Orwellian or panoptic consequences (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000). To name a few contributions, the authors discussed in this review show how ICTs might enable citizens in circuits of travel, employment and the media, while these technologies also influence their conduct. Moreover, they demonstrate how these technologies

are involved in subtle processes of change, such as authority shifts, morality shifts and the shaping of identities. Visualization is never total or detached, they also show, it is always partial and mediated, and sometimes technologies visualize by obscuring, as is the case with home censorship technologies that track the activities of their users.

To conclude, such refinements and complexities make both books interesting for readers with an interest in issues of freedom, technology and democracy. Lyon and Bennett's book is a good choice for readers interested in learning about the empirical details of implementation processes. Guins' book is advised to those with an interest in an advanced analysis of the dynamics of control and self-regulation.

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Biographical Note

Francisca Grommé is completing her PhD dissertation in Science and Technology Studies at the Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Her research focuses on the 'micro-politics' of trying out new surveillance technologies outside the walls of the laboratory. She is interested in how norms, surveillance subjects and objects, spaces and authorities may be affected by the performance of experiments in surveillance.

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