Daniel Trottier
Social Media as Surveillance. Rethinking Visibility in a Converging World
Farnham, Ashgate, 2012, pp. 222

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The so-called social media increasingly form everyday living spaces, spaces where we dwell and which we cross both digitally and materially. Their hybridity and cogency – their veritable 'territoriality' – become apparent when we consider how connectedness to the media now accompanies us in our pockets as well as across the urban spaces we inhabit. Simultaneously, digital media are spaces of visibility and inter-visibility. As such, they entail all the promises and perils of exposure. If, by *public domain*, we mean a contested territory of visibilities and appropriations, social media should be recognized as a noticeable part of it. The phenomenon Simmel first described as the 'mixing of social circles' now takes place in such an enlarged mediated public domain. This fact may cause problems. In other words, since people live different aspects of their lives on these media, the social circles one belongs to can end up by intersecting dangerously.

In his book, Daniel Trottier has sought to understand how the harvesting of personal information for institutional, business or policing purposes – which, on the social media, is an ongoing task – can change people's life. From a slightly different perspective, perhaps, it could be said that the problem arises from a double tension: on the one hand, there is a tension between different *interactional registers* in our lives, which vary in function of the social context – e.g. family, intimate, study, professional, recreational contexts and so on; on the other hand, there is a tension between the *transience* that characterizes the mundane details of everyday life and the *permanence* of networked digital data (let us not forget, resilience was initially a much sought-for quality that drove the development of digital networks). So, data that we did not mean to create – or that we meant to create for a specific purpose – are in fact created and get disseminated in ways which can hardly be controlled by its creators. *A fortiori*, these user profiles, posts, entries, comments and logs can be searched, collected and studied, that is, used by different people for very different purposes.

According to Foucault, surveillance is always a cooperative activity, for it entails self-surveillance, *alias* disciplination. While, taking a broader definition of surveillance, this might not always be the case, in the sense that we could also speak of surveillance in cases where people are unaware of being scrutinized, still, it is certain that in the domain of the social media a wide array of 'self-surveillant' practices is present: many people consciously take advantage of the visibility of others and no less consciously put themselves on stage, distributing personal information about

themselves for a number of reasons, ranging from having a laugh with friends to promoting their professional activity. The problem, however, is that simultaneously users of social media platforms have very limited control over the content that circulates in both their restrained social circles and the media sphere more generally. Most people, in other words, can barely keep up with the *technical* and *legal knowledge* about settings and regulations, as well as with the sheer *quantity of* user-generated *content.* Precisely for this reason, we increasingly record concerns about the 'risks' associated with personal information disclosure. So, while we might not always find the 'disciplination of conducts' Foucault had in mind, we can certainly observe an array of practices consisting in the 'disciplination of data' and data production. The focus, in other words, might not be so much on what one actually does, as much as on which data end up being uploaded and whether or not they 'leak' somewhere.

Trottier's research – based on three sets of semi-structured interviews about Facebook usage, respectively with 30 undergraduates students at a large Canadian university, 14 university administrators and campus employees, and 13 business consultants – illustrates this point. In the first place, social media are a space of interpersonal surveillance, where users are both the subjects and the agents of surveillance. The interactional games Goffman described as 'impression management' and 'face-work' are extensively re-enacted on social media. As one interviewee plainly put it: "there's a necessity to defend yourself or prevent people from really seeing [your own] problematic behaviors such as drinking or, you know, embarrassing photos that have a tendency to get up on Facebook even when you don't want them to" (p. 111). We thus find that pressure to join the media leads to increasing reliance on social media platforms for a number of purposes like meeting friends. Simultaneously, the attempt to secure privacy and the concerns about personal reputations also determine the emergence of sets of normative expectations about acceptable behavior along, with attempts to sanction stalking and other forms of personal harassment. "Users – writes Trottier to summarize these complex and partly contradictory requirements – feel responsible for their presence, but aware that managing this presence is beyond their control" (p. 82).

Besides interpersonal surveillance, social media also enable a good deal of 'parasitical usages', in other words they help all those jobs and professions whose business is to focus on the behaviour – as well as attitudes! – of consumers, customers or suspects, by extracting information voluntarily provided by users (albeit, in many cases, for different purposes). These 'parasitical' actors may of course also have their hard time, not so much in accessing data, as much as in coping with the increasing amount of information that exists on social media. As one interviewed university marketing and communication expert admitted: "it's very explosive, this use of social media that it's pretty hard to keep on top of, there's no one person that can control or audit everything that's happen-

ing" (p. 94). Thus, specialized procedure of *visibilitization* become pivotal, insofar as they provide the essential tools to identify relevant social media data and make sense of them. The capacity of an institution – be it a university or the police – or a market actor to effectively surveil a target population is proportional to its ability to 'visibilize' – rather than merely visualize – information, that is, to crawl through the crowds of information available in order to extract or reconstruct readable patterns. To this, it should be added that, just as other digital media, social media are interactive by definition. In such a fast-changing scenario, skilful surveillance may function by elicitation, turning, once again, into something akin to cooptation.

With this book, Trottier has provided a valuable contribution to the empirical study of everyday surveillance practices. The book is clear and well organized, two qualities which also make it suitable for teaching purposes. While his empirical research is limited to a tiny case (the use of Facebook at a specific Canadian university) and does not include ethnography – which would have arguably made it more exciting – it nonetheless manages to flesh out all the major points and issues in current social media research.

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Antonello Ciccozzi
Parola di scienza. Il terremoto dell'Aquila e la Commissione Grandi Rischi. Un'analisi antropologica [The Word of Science. The L'Aquila Earthquake and the Major Risks Committee. An Anthropological Analysis]
Verona, DeriveApprodi, 2013, pp. 188

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The book by Antonello Ciccozzi can be described as an open path through the anthropological rooms and cultural semiospheres – as the author describes them – of the earthquake in the city and among the citizens of L'Aquila. Through the case of the earthquake of L'Aquila, on the 6 April 2009, Ciccozzi shows the divisions, conflicts, dominations, subordinations, alienations that are reproduced through the current relationships between forms of subjected and dominant 'knowledges', in contemporary capitalist societies.

In that earthquake, Ciccozzi was directly involved in several senses: he is a citizen of L'Aquila; he survived the earthquake; he was a 'privileged' witness during the different phases of the trial, appointed to investigate the management of the earthquake of L'Aquila, and, in particular, the