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One of the themes of this special anniversary issue of *communication +1* is to explore potential futures for inquiry in the communication field. I propose that communication scholars pay more attention to the surveillance studies literature. This is not to say that there are not already joint projects and conceptual, methodological, and topical overlap between the fields, it is just that with the increasing centrality of surveillance to many aspects of everyday life (from Ring doorbells to the data hoovering of online platforms) future work informed by both fields would be quite generative (surveillance *and* communication). But I also want to go further here and argue that surveillance *itself* is a communicative practice (surveillance *as* communication) and needs to be studied as such. We need to apply the insights, theories, and methodologies of communication to surveillance. First, I will briefly overview the field of surveillance studies before turning to how it works as a communicative practice. I then consider surveillance through James Carey's models of communication as transmission and ritual, including a performative approach to surveillance.

The surveillance studies field is relatively new but well-established at this point, coming into focus in the 1990s around the work of David Lyon¹ and others like William Bogard,² Oscar Gandy,³ Clive Norris and Gary Armstrong,⁴ and William G. Staples,⁵ and institutionalized in the establishment of the journal *Surveillance & Society* in 2002 and the launch of the Surveillance Studies Network in 2006.⁶ The roots of this discipline⁷ are in work on privacy and computer databases, such as that by James B.

¹ See esp., David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) and David Lyon and Elia Zureik, eds., *Computers, Surveillance and Privacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), but also David Lyon, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001), David Lyon, ed., *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk and Digital Discrimination* (New York: Routledge, 2002), and David Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview* (Medford, MA: Polity, 2007).

² William Bogard, *The Simulation of Surveillance: Hypercontrol in Telematic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³ Oscar Gandy, *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information* (Boulder: Westview, 1993).

⁴ Clive Norris and Gary Armstrong, *The Maximum Surveillance Society: The Rise of CCTV* (New York: Berg, 1999).

⁵ William G. Staples, *The Culture of Surveillance: Discipline and Social Control in the United States* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

⁶ See Torin Monahan and David Murakami Wood, "Introduction: Surveillance Studies as a Transdisciplinary Endeavor," in *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*, ed. Torin Monahan and David Murakami Wood (New York: Oxford, 2018), xix-xxxiv.

⁷ See Kirstie Ball, Kevin D. Haggerty and David Lyon, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2012), Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, and Torin Monahan and David Murakami Wood, eds., *Surveillance Studies: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Rule,⁸ and Michel Foucault's⁹ work on panopticism and discipline, and then research on surveillance and policing like the work of Gary T. Marx,¹⁰ though surveillance has been a social concern for much longer,¹¹ and surveillance as a practice is ancient.¹² Rooted in Sociology, Criminology, Privacy Studies, and other fields, Surveillance Studies is an interdisciplinary field and has featured a growing number of scholars whose work is grounded in communication: Mark Andrejevic,¹³ Rachel Dubrofsky,¹⁴ Greg Elmer,¹⁵ Oscar Gandy,¹⁶ Kelly Gates,¹⁷ Rachel Hall,¹⁸ Shoshana Magnet,¹⁹ Joshua Reeves,²⁰ Joseph Turow,²¹ and more, especially with the rise of reality television, social media, and big data. We can also consider the surveillant aspects of cinema and other visual media.²²

⁸ James B. Rule, *Private Lives and Public Surveillance* (London: Allen Lane, 1973.)

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

¹⁰ Gary T. Marx, *Undercover: Police Surveillance in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

¹¹ cf. Jacques Ellul's discussion of surveillance as an expression of technique applied to policing. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage, 1964 [originally published 1954])

¹² Lyon, *Electronic Eye*.

¹³ Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2007).

¹⁴ Rachel E. Dubrofsky, *The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television: Watching the Bachelor and the Bachelorette* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011). See also Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet, eds., *Feminist Surveillance Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

¹⁵ Greg Elmer, *Profiling Machines: Mapping the Personal Information Economy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Gandy, *The Panoptic Sort*.

¹⁷ Kelly Gates, *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ Rachel Hall, *The Transparent Traveler: The Performance and Culture of Airport Security* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

¹⁹ Shoshana Amielle Magnet, *When Biometrics Fail: Gender, Race, and the Technology of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

²⁰ Joshua Reeves, *Citizen Spies: The Long Rise of America's Surveillance Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

²¹ Joseph Turow, *The Aisles Have Eyes: How Retailers Track Your Shopping, Strip Your Privacy, and Define Your Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

²² See Thomas Levin, "Rhetoric of the Temporal Index: Surveillant Narration and the Cinema of 'Real Time.'" In *CTRL[Space]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, edited by Thomas Levin, Ursula Frohne, & Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 578-593; Catherine Zimmer, *Surveillance Cinema* (New York: New York University Press); and Erkki Huhtamo, "Toward a History of Peep Practice." In *A Companion to Early Cinema*, edited by A. Gaudreault, N. Dulac, & S. Hidalgo (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 32-51.

David Lyon, in his introduction to the field, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*, defines surveillance in this way:

For the sake of argument, we may start by saying that it is the focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction.²³

Surveillance is not just about watching but *attending*²⁴ in many different ways, including not just sensorially (by vision, sound, smell, touch) but also through the gathering of data of all sorts (Roger Clarke has termed this *dataveillance*).²⁵ It is attending that is purposeful, in pursuit of some sort of control (and/or care, Lyon is careful to emphasize) and is a key element in processes of social sorting across a diversity of sites and fields.²⁶ The direction of surveillance has been theorized in a number of ways from the traditional top-down of surveillance (seeing from above), to its reversal in the watching of the watchers (*sousveillance*, seeing from below²⁷) to the prevalence of lateral surveillance (when we watch each other, for example through social media²⁸). We can consider one-to-one surveillance (from voyeurism to police work), or the few watching the many (Orwell's Big Brother, Foucault's panopticism), or the many watching the few (the *synopticon*²⁹). While Foucault (still) looms large in the field, so does Gilles Deleuze and his notion of societies of control³⁰ and the surveillance-specific version of his and Félix Guattari's concept of assemblage by Kevin Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson.³¹

How do we find a place for surveillance studies within the field of communication? On the one hand, we can look at communication *about* surveillance. This could include discourse analysis of public policy or advertising around smart surveillant objects, or the rhetoric of privacy and secrecy, or the rhetoric of watching.³²

²³ Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, 14.

²⁴ J. Macgregor Wise, "Attention and Assemblage in the Clickable World," in *Communication Matters: Materialist Approaches to Media, Mobility, and Networks*, edited by Jeremy Packer and Stephen B. Crofts Wiley (New York: Routledge, 2012), 159-172.

²⁵ Roger Clarke, "Information Technology and Dataveillance," *Communications of the ACM*, 31 (1988).

²⁶ Lyon, *Surveillance as Social Sorting*.

²⁷ Steve Mann, "Sousveillance," 2002. <http://wearcam.org/sousveillance> (last accessed 6 July, 2022).

²⁸ Andrejevic, *iSpy*.

²⁹ Thomas Mathiesen, "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' Revisited," *Theoretical Criminology* 1 no. 2 (1997).

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*. Trans. Martin Joughin. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

³¹ Kevin Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage," *British Journal of Sociology*, 51, no. 4 (2000). See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

³² Thomas Levin, Ursula Frohne, and Peter Weibel, eds., *CTRL[SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

or work on critical regimes of vision,³³ or critical analyses of popular films and novels—something I do in my own work.³⁴ But we can also see the implications of surveillance in organizational, interpersonal, family, intercultural, political economy, and health communication, not to mention human-computer interaction, performance studies, or the surveillant practices of journalism.

On the other hand, we can consider surveillance *itself* as a means of communication. This can go in two directions. First, we could emphasize *means* over *communication* and apply medium theory to surveillance to consider surveillance as a human extension,³⁵ changing how we think, how we feel, and how we can act in the world (and how the world can act on us). We can consider the specificity of a medium and/or technology and how that specificity shapes surveillance, its affordances, and also how that device is caught up in an assemblage of objects, discourses, and affect³⁶. For example, a *surveillance* camera is a different device than a *video* camera, even if the “device” is the same.³⁷ The view through a surveillance camera is different from the view through a home movie camera, or a professional videographer’s camera. The scene from a Ring video doorbell is different from the scene from a door viewer (or “peephole”) without a camera even though they both show the “same” porch (though both do cast suspicion on that porch and those that occupy it). The relationship between operator, camera, and subject shifts dramatically.

A second direction in thinking about surveillance as a means of communication is to emphasize *communication* over *means*. As I said earlier, surveillance is the gathering of data (sensory or otherwise) of a subject for purposes of influence. As subjects of surveillance, our appearance and behavior are captured and encoded (via observation, note taking, recording, and other methods such as facial recognition), communicated to others, and they, in turn, decode and interpret them. The subsequent circulation of surveillance data is likewise a form of communication that can be studied with implications for the infrastructure of both communication and surveillance.³⁸ We can also ask: how does surveillance *itself* communicate? For example, what does a surveillance camera *mean* to different people (and that will vary

³³ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

³⁴ J. Macgregor Wise, *Surveillance and Film* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

³⁵ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2001).

³⁶ J. Macgregor Wise, “Assemblage,” in *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*, second edition, edited by Charles Stivale (New York: Routledge, 2014). See also Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*.

³⁷ Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, *Culture and Technology: A Primer*, second edition (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), especially Chapter Nine.

³⁸ On studying media infrastructures, see, e.g., Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, eds., *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

based on gender, race, class, and personal experience)³⁹ In Britain, for example, they were meant to connote (especially for women) safety and security to promote shopping on high streets despite the fact that CCTV operators were known to watch female subjects voyeuristically.⁴⁰ As Hille Koskela has put it, “Although one of the aims of surveillance is to increase people’s feelings of security, being the object of surveillance does not necessarily *encourage* feelings of safety.”⁴¹

If surveillance is the focused gathering of data or information, we can see it as a form of communication in that the surveillor is gathering, interpreting, “reading” what the subject is communicating (through posture, expression, and other aspects of nonverbal behavior, to sorts of behavior such as acting “suspicious”⁴² or just clicking on a web link). The communication is not always intentional, indeed surveillance practices often make it a point to bypass intention--and so, for example, your fingerprints communicate your identity indexically, bypassing self-reported identity⁴³; and surveillance capitalist strategies calculate patterns of behavior which stand in for “you” whether or not you are aware of them.⁴⁴

Surveillance technology can also be a means of communication, a “social medium,” as Gavin Smith puts it, giving examples of subjects communicating with CCTV cameras (usually gesturing) and CCTV operators answering back by “nodding” the camera.⁴⁵ But Smith also points out “the role of the watched as subjects of communication,”⁴⁶ meaning that they become characters in the imaginaries of the CCTV operators, who vicariously involve themselves in their lives. The subjects themselves, aware of the cameras, communicate with and react “to the presence of an unknown *human* observer” who may take a role in the subject’s imaginary (who is watching me and why?).⁴⁷ Consider the Twitter meme, “My FBI Agent...” where folks would depict imagined humorous interactions with the presumed bored, yet caring,

³⁹ Hille Koskela, “You shouldn’t wear that body’: The problematic of surveillance and gender,” In *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*, edited by Kirstie Ball, Kevin D. Haggerty, and David Lyon (New York: Routledge, 2012), 49-56.

⁴⁰ Norris and Armstrong, *Maximum Surveillance*.

⁴¹ Hille Koskela, “The Gaze Without Eyes: Video-Surveillance and the Changing Nature of Urban Space,” In *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*, edited by Torin Monahan & David Murakami Wood (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 197.

⁴² Norris and Armstrong, *Maximum Surveillance*.

⁴³ Lyon, *Surveillance Society*.

⁴⁴ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Foreign Affairs, 2019).

⁴⁵ Gavin D. Smith, “Exploring Relations Between Watchers and Watched in Control(led) Systems: Strategies and Tactics,” *Surveillance & Society* 4, no. 2 (2007).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 294.

FBI agent dedicated to watching them 24/7.⁴⁸ However, this meme minimizes the threat surveillance can represent for vulnerable populations who might have a quite different surveillant imaginary. And, perhaps obviously, social media themselves are both technologies of communication and surveillance (in many of its directions).

If surveillance is a form of communication, what models of communication apply? Considering James Carey's⁴⁹ differentiation of transmission and ritual models of communication, we could see surveillance through each. The transmission view sees communication as a means of control and the ritual view sees communication as a confirmation of shared beliefs, an embodied practice which locates an individual within cultural and social relations. Carey's example is that of reading the daily newspaper. From a transmission view, we see the newspaper as providing information and achieving effects (it affects what we know, how we think, perhaps how we vote). But from a ritual view, it is "a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed."⁵⁰ He writes, "What is arrayed before the reader is not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world."⁵¹ It is not about the specifics of the information, but "a presentation of reality that gives life an overall form, order, and tone."⁵² These contending forces might be nation against nation, or political group against political group, heroes and villains. It is a drama you watch play out; the names change, characters sometimes shift positions, plots resolve and recommence. Similarly, think of our habits (rituals) of scrolling through social media. Yes, there is information that we glean, but from a ritual view it is about a reaffirmation of the form and order of the world and your place in it. You watch the drama unfold (of the political posts and memes, or the shape and dynamics of your group of friends); it is ever-changing, but familiar.

Applied to surveillance, the preponderance of research comports better with the transmission model: surveillance in this view is about the control of people and populations. As Foucault noted, the core of what he called discipline was the collection and arrangement of information and knowledge for means of disciplining and organizing individuals and populations.⁵³ Surveillance was a means of gathering that information. From surveillance techniques aimed at prisoners, workers, students, soldiers, and the mentally and physically ill, to those techniques trained on colonial

⁴⁸ <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/government-agent-watching-me>

⁴⁹ James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

⁵⁰ Carey, *Communication*, 20.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Carey, *Communication*, 21.

⁵³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

populations and slave populations on plantations,⁵⁴ surveillance is about control. For Foucault, the result of discipline was the internalization of this surveillance; knowing we may be watched, we change our behaviors to suit what is expected.

In addition, in terms of the transmission view, this is not simply the meaning transmitted (in order to inform or persuade, which is when subjects are aware of surveillance and performing identity and motivation for the watchers) but can also be seen as part of a cybernetic feedback loop (information is gathered as to the state of the system, decisions are made about that state, and corrections or modifications are made to the system—whether this is the feedback given to the panopticon’s inmate or a shift in movie recommendations on Netflix).

But there are other models of communication. How can we see surveillance as a ritual, as a performance of social power? If, as Carey writes, “A ritual view...is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs;”⁵⁵ and if ritual communication “creates an artificial though nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to provide not information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process,”⁵⁶ then how does surveillance produce shared beliefs or “an underlying order of things” or a “fragile social process”?

It is here that I turn back to the work of David Lyon, who argues that surveillance is a relationship. It is a relationship between surveillor and surveilled, watcher and watched, and we should ask what the nature of the relationship is that is being performed in that act of surveillance? Is it, for example, a relationship of trust? If so, why the surveillance? If I decide to place a tracking device in my teen’s car or on their smart phone, what does this say about our relationship and communication? If a company puts surveillance cameras on their employees, what does that say about how they consider their employees? If consumer-based surveillance targets certain populations for benefits rather than others, or police surveillance targets some populations for more intensive scrutiny rather than others, doesn’t that say something about an underlying order of things and how different groups are perceived and treated in society? How do security officers see the world and the social roles of different individuals and groups, and how can this affect how they look at subjects on

⁵⁴ Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. (Durham: Duke University Press: 2015). Ahmad Sa’di, “Colonialism and Surveillance,” in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*, edited by Kirstie Ball, Kevin D. Haggerty, and David Lyon (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁵⁵ Carey, *Communication*, 18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

their screens and the actions they take as the result of what they see?⁵⁷ In viewing and behaving in this way, their actions then shape the everyday life of citizens since othering of some populations becomes reinforced. Each time surveillance is encountered or enacted, those roles and perceptions are further engrained (or resisted).⁵⁸

Surveillance scholars more recently have described surveillance as *performative*:⁵⁹ a ritual enactment of a drama where we are interpellated into roles of prisoner, guard, consumer, suspect. Take for example, as Lyon⁶⁰ does, the process of going through airport security. We refer to it as security theater not because it is fiction or faked but because it is an overt, visible performance of a state's power to maintain security through scrutiny (carefully examining our bodies and possessions) that is ritually enacted (repeated over and over).⁶¹ The TSA agents perform their roles as officers of the state (and where do they learn their roles? Lyon reports on a TSA agent who would watch cop shows in his spare time to help him prepare for his role). But passengers also perform a role. Rachel Hall has written about how passengers perform as transparent travelers with nothing to hide.⁶² They know the ritual, they know the actions they have to perform, they know how to act so as to not raise suspicion: how to dress, how to comport themselves, what to say. I am reminded of a line from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where Winston Smith sets "his features into the expression of quiet optimism which it was advisable to wear when facing the telescreen."⁶³ This performance under the gaze of security is especially salient, though fraught with anxiety, for populations overly targeted as suspicious by security in the first place. In participating in these rituals, as agents and passengers, in spaces established to enable this performance, the underlying "order of things" is reinforced and responded to.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Norris and Armstrong, *Maximum Surveillance*, and Smith, "Behind the Screens" and "Exploring Relations."

⁵⁸ This is not just a question for security officers, but also welfare agents, teachers, and others.

⁵⁹ Hall, *Transparent Traveler*; Rachel Hall, Torin Monahan, and Joshua Reeves, "Editorial: Surveillance and Performance," *Surveillance & Society*, 14 no. 2 (2016); Lyon, *Culture of Surveillance*; John McGrath, *Loving Big Brother: Performance, Privacy and Surveillance Space* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁶⁰ Lyon, *Culture of Surveillance*.

⁶¹ "Security theater" is Bruce Schneier's term for "security measures that make people feel more secure without doing anything to actually improve their security." I mean something a bit broader here in my use of the term than just ineffective security methods done for show. Bruce Schneier, "Beyond Security Theater," *New Internationalist* (November 2009). Online at https://www.schneier.com/essays/archives/2009/11/beyond_security_thea.html.

⁶² Hall, *Transparent Traveller*.

⁶³ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), 6.

Surveillance, then, in a ritual view, is a confirmation of a particular view of the world, not its discovery. For example, many surveillance schemes (and indeed, policing algorithms) target populations authorities already suspect of criminality.⁶⁴ And also in this view, it is not just involvement in surveillance practices that “produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed”⁶⁵ a view of the world, but other communications about and representations of surveillance. Hence the importance of recent turns to consider the culture of surveillance⁶⁶as well as surveillance imaginaries.⁶⁷

A continued and intensified interaction between communication and surveillance studies would not only be productive but I think necessary as what Lawrence Grossberg might call a radically contextual inquiry into conjunctural crises. Radically contextual means that social, cultural, political, and economic conditions and arrangements change and that our response to contemporary conditions depends on an understanding of the specifics of the current crisis.⁶⁸ Radical contextuality means that we cannot assume that the tools, knowledges, methodologies, concepts, or theories that helped to understand the past will be sufficient to understand the present. If our goal is to have a better understanding of “what’s going on,” in an era dominated by what Jonathan Crary⁶⁹ has scathingly critiqued as the internet complex, marked by what Zuboff⁷⁰ has termed surveillance capitalism, both communication and surveillance studies offer powerful tools to tease out questions of power and meaning in everyday life. Surveillance and communication do not in themselves provide an answer to the crisis. And arrangements of surveillance and/as communication are as much in need of explanation as they are explanatory. But they also map shifting arrangements and investments of power and how those are enabled, renewed, and challenged (or, as Carey would put it, “produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed”⁷¹).

⁶⁴ See Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology* (Medford, MA: Polity, 2019).

⁶⁵ Carey, *Communication*, 23.

⁶⁶ Lyon, *Culture of Surveillance*.

⁶⁷ Wise, *Surveillance and Film*.

⁶⁸ Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁶⁹ Jonathan Crary, *Scorched Earth: Beyond the Digital Age to a Post-Capitalist World* (New York: Verso, 2022).

⁷⁰ Zuboff, *Age of Surveillance*.

⁷¹ Carey, *Communication*, 23.

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