

Facebook surveillance and power

Power

1. Social networks have transformed **not just privacy but also power** - we are all empowered to **spy on spies**
2. On the Web, some argue, we possess tools to scrutinise the **personal lives** of all around us but also the **institutions that govern our** lives

Surveillance

1. Foucault's ideas about **surveillance, power and control** - affirms and challenges accepted truths about social networks.
2. There is subtle **power of narcissistic seduction** and **self-exhibition** on social media

Surveillance

1. Foucault examined the historical methods of state coercion over individuals
2. Tracing how **states once asserted power** over their citizens through **physical punishment**
3. Now there are more **subtle methods** of controlling people's minds and habits

Bentham

1. His theories about surveillance were inspired by the **philosopher Jeremy Bentham**, whose Panopticon idea was an **ideal prison**
2. Where the guards have visibility of the entire prison population without being seen themselves through a central circular screen, so that guards can see out, but prisoners cannot see into it.

Panoptic everywhere

1. It is possible to see **panoptic techniques** everywhere e.g. CCTV

Internet

1. It is more **ambiguous** about **social media**
2. Facebook and Google and web networks - do they **empower citizens**
3. Or give states more **effective techniques of surveillance** and control.

Data Mining

1. In late **2009** the government in UK was taking steps beyond video surveillance to impose
2. Legal requirement that all **telecom and internet service providers keep a record** of every customer's personal communications

3. Showing who they are contacting, when and where and which websites they are using.

Mining

1. The American Civil Liberties Union notes that the **CIA has a page on Facebook** and actively mines for recruitment
2. And uses social media as part of its **intelligence gathering operations**

Corporate surveillance

1. Beyond government agencies, corporations conduct **web-based surveillance** on their **employees** and mine the internet to garner information about candidates for jobs

Language and discourse

1. **Foucault** focused increasingly on how **individuals** are shaped through **language** and **discourse**
2. So that **power** resides in what people **believe to be true**
3. Power worked through **regimes of truth** – ways in which meanings circulate and come to take on force in a society
4. These ideas of truth produce what people believe and how people define themselves
5. Social media – can lend itself to this in a very influential way.

Little brother.

1. As well as top down surveillance, there is also the **bottom up visibility** and its capacity to empower collective action

Centralised power

1. Power is either **intensive or extensive**
2. **Intensive** is **highly centralised** – whereas **extensive** is **relatively diffused**

The modern state

1. The modern state is usually associated with **centralised power**
2. **States** are described as possessing the means of **legitimate violence** over defined territories and their populations
3. **Social networks** are characterised by **diffused power**
4. **States** tend to be suspicious of and belligerent to **self-organised** forms of networked power
5. The spread and influence of web based social networks are difficult to control

Diffuse power

Focus

1. Foucault focused **on daily lives**

Diffused power

1. Foucault argued that **diffused power** works **through knowledge**
2. Operating in all **micro-systems** where people accept discourses as truth
3. Power is no longer **simply repressive** but also **productive**
4. Power doesn't just stop people from doing things but **encourages people to do things**
5. Social networks like Facebook are platforms of diffuse power because they give people the categories with which they define themselves and determine what is true.

Self-presentation

1. **Facebook** encourages forms of **self-presentation** that shape how we think about ourselves and others
2. However, institutionalised power also use **tools of surveillance** to seize on such language and justify discrimination
3. It is also when people are **most actively engaged** in talking about themselves that they are **most controllable**.

Revealing

1. Revealing oneself to friends on Facebook can be a liberating experience, But the **diffused power** that emerges from online social interaction also **exposes us to scrutiny and control**
2. People on Facebook **expressing** themselves, are **subject to forms of power** of which they are **not aware**
3. There is a **contradiction** at the core of a **virtual panopticon** – where visibility is always on

Diffuse power and surveillance

1. We can even say that **diffuse power** is a **substitute for surveillance**
2. Foucault believed that **Panopticon** becomes **les necessary** in time as **discourse regulates power relations**

Managing the self

1. Foucault would likely have argued that **Facebook represents** a **diffuse form of power**
2. However, **all communication** Foucault argued is **subject to power games** And can **never be equal, egalitarian** and **open**
3. The implicit rules are hidden in our **discourses** which regulate power relations

Domination

1. Foucault did not believe there could be a society where someone would not attempt to dominate others
2. He believed that **ethical training** was key to **resisting the power** of **communication systems** which promise to **offer free exchange** but actually offer **domination**
3. Freedom is gained through **ethical management of self**.

Reciprocal panopticism

1. The virtual ritual of **narcissistic self-display** on social networks like Facebook, has become **compulsive** and many are unaware of the dangers of surveillance and control
2. The values **underlying traditional notions** of **privacy** are being **challenged**
3. As younger generations **fabricate** their **identities** online and engage in virtual forms of social interaction
4. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. provide platforms for personal liberty
5. And self-organisation that **can challenge centralised forms of power**

Expression – free ?

1. For Foucault there is a **more fundamental form of power** that works through the way **we learn to think about ourselves** and the **categories** that we use to **define ourselves**
2. The power to produce **ways of being** as well as other powers
3. The function of **surveillance**, according to Foucault, is to **encourage people to behave** according to established expectations, as they always imagine they are being watched
4. On Facebook, **someone is always watching us**
5. There can be little doubt that power has been diffused more horizontally but I would raise the question – **diffused to whom? Echo chambers?**
6. Is there just power **amongst certain groups** and **networks** that tend to have similar viewpoints on issues?