

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Surveillance on Reality Television and Facebook: From Authenticity to Flowing Data

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Aligning reality TV (RTV) with social networking sites (SNSs) enables the development of a genealogy in the use of surveillance for displays of the self. By moving from “older” media such as TV to “newer” such as SNSs, we gain insight into how issues at stake for critical scholars studying surveillance practices shift when the spaces (and practices) of surveillance change. We bring into conversation work in surveillance studies, critical media studies, RTV, and new media, emphasizing the necessity of seeing connections between types of surveilled subjectivity in popular media as these contribute to a larger ethos about surveillance, subjectivity, data, and our engagement with the world. We suggest that Facebook brackets practices for synthesizing the contextualizing.

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But, the message was not received. It circulated, reduced to the medium. Even when the White House acknowledged the massive worldwide demonstrations of February 15, 2003 [protesting the war in Iraq], Bush simply reiterated the fact that a message was out there, circulating—the protesters had the right to express their opinions. He didn’t actually respond to their message. He didn’t treat the words and actions of the protestors as sending a message to him to which he was in some sense obligated to respond. Rather, he acknowledged that there existed views different from his own.

—Dean (2008, p. 101)

In this quotation, Dean describes a proliferation of messages (protests, petitions, e-mails, etc.) sent through different means about the war in Iraq, without response from the institution (government) one might expect to respond. In this way, millions of U.S. citizens expressed their dislike for the actions of their government, and the government continued to pursue war without any appearance of a conflict of interest—though government is ostensibly meant to be responsive to the desires

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of its citizens. In essence, the expression of thoughts, ideas, and feelings is privileged, but reception, response, or assessment of the message is not. Different views can exist at once and there is no need to make sense of the different views: “Response” means letting citizens express themselves. This is freedom of expression in its purest form—what matters is expressing the self with no attention to how the expression is received. This article asks the larger question of how it can come to “make sense” to treat messages as bits of circulating data, how an emphasis on the proliferation of the data, rather than on synthesizing or addressing the content, can be naturalized, and how the lack of response to a message can come to be experienced as normative.

I take a decidedly focused microapproach to tackling the above: an examination of the currently most popular new (although no longer so new) media, the social networking site (SNS) Facebook. This allows me to explain in some detail how “things” function, how they are enabled, how they come to make sense in a given context, concomitantly providing insight into how they can operate beyond that context. Although Facebook produces a space where a number of behaviors are enabled, the one that is prioritized, through the architecture—the “composite result of structure, design and organization” (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 205)—animates an approach to messages similar to what Dean outlines about how the U.S. government treated opposition to the war in Iraq: the ability to put out messages, circulate messages, with no particular attention to the reception, contextualization, or synthesis of these. As Facebook continues to grow in popularity at an unprecedented rate, the ways in which it enables forms of communication are worth paying attention to, especially when these optimize, as I argue, practices that can be oppressive, such as a bracketing of contextualizing and synthesizing activities that are at the core of critical engagement with the world. Implicit in this article is the argument that by looking at everyday practices and technologies used for entertainment and diversion, we can understand the workings of larger phenomena (for instance, how messages of resistance to the actions of our government can proliferate while the government can ignore the content of these), as everyday engagements with technology enable, articulate, reflect, and habituate ideas and behaviors that exceed the technology.

Scholarship on SNSs is flourishing, much of it focusing on Facebook (Boyd, 2008; Cohen & Shade, 2008; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Papacharissi, 2009; Sawchuk & Shade, 2010; Stern & Taylor, 2007; Tong et al., 2008; Walther et al., 2008, 2009). Earlier work on online social environments looked at their liberating qualities and potential for expressing anonymity (Bolter, 1996), examined the notion of the “cyborg” (Haraway, 1991; Stone, 1996), and explored the idea of simulating life in virtual space (Turkle, 1995, 1997). Although much SNS research overlaps, a few distinct areas of inquiry have emerged: research methods and ethics (Acland, 2009; Hookway, 2008; Jacobson, 1999); privacy issues (Boyd, 2008; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Moscardelli & Divine, 2007; O’Neil, 2001; Tyma, 2007); how spaces impact presentations and expressions of the self (Dominick, 1999; Papacharissi, 2002, 2007;

Walker, 2000); risks and consequences of online behavior (Acar, 2008; Bradenburg, 2008; Mendoza, 2008); online user behavior (Ellison et al., 2007; Hargittai, 2007; Livingstone, 2008; Sheldon, 2008); the political economy of SNSs (Cohen, 2008; Hearn, 2008); and work on structural and design aspects of SNSs (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Donath, 2007; Ellison et al., 2007).

This article does not fit neatly into any of the above categories, but builds on extant work by aligning SNSs with reality TV (RTV), something none of the existing scholarship does. RTV and SNSs are forms of media that gained immense popularity in the last decade, creating spaces where subjects are constructed through the mediation of technology that does the work of surveillance, using the technology for displays of the self as well as for entertainment purposes. An analysis of the two affords insight into the displays of the self and the ways of being that are privileged when the subject is under surveillance.

In particular, I engage issues raised by critical scholarship examining surveillance and electronic media, as these problematize notions of privacy and illuminate ways citizens are governed (Andrejevic, 2007; Lyon, 2009; Lyon & Bennett, 2008; Zureik & Salter, 2005). As Andrejevic (2007) articulates, “individuals are becoming increasingly transparent to both public and private monitoring agencies, even as the actions of these agencies remain stubbornly opaque in the face of technologies that make collecting, sharing, and analyzing large amounts of information easier than ever before” (pp. 6–7). He notes that “state surveillance, at least in the United States, follows the same model: as more information is gathered, less accountability is afforded to the general public” (2007, p. 7). It is becoming habitual, mundane even, to input personal information into digital space. Concomitantly, giving up ownership and control of that information is naturalized. The result, as Andrejevic outlines, is that private information (Social Security numbers, addresses, information about purchasing trends, likes, dislikes, interests) can be culled from citizens for sale to big business. Increasingly, the movements of users of technology can be tracked, at the same time that users of electronic media input personal information that, once it enters the digital enclosure, no longer belongs to them. For instance, the global positioning systems (GPS) on personal digital assistants (PDAs) ask users to allow the GPS to know and make public the location of the PDA.

A critical examination of Facebook, contrasted with RTV as an earlier new media form where subjects are surveilled, reproblematises notions of authenticity, embodiment, and space, as these are configured in surveilled spaces. The ways that Facebook rearticulates these enables an understanding of some of the concerns Andrejevic (2007) raises—putting the self under surveillance, constantly inputting and circulating data about the self—and how these can be rendered habitual, mundane, a seamless part of one’s daily practices. I maintain a focus on Facebook, while seeking to bring into much-needed conversation work in surveillance studies, critical media studies, RTV scholarship, and new media, emphasizing the necessity of seeing connections between types of surveilled subjectivity engaged in popular forms of media as these contribute to a larger ethos about surveillance, subjectivity, data, and our engagement with the

world. By moving from “older” media such as TV to “newer” media such as SNSs, I gain insight into how the issues at stake for critical scholars studying surveillance practices shift when the spaces (and therefore the practices) of surveillance change.

Surveillance: RTV and SNSs

I view RTV and SNSs as what Walters (1995) calls “symptomatic texts” (p. 6), that is, texts that tell us about a cultural moment that is occurring (rather than designate the origin of this moment), serving as “symptoms” of the larger culture. Analyzing the “symptoms” provides clues about the workings of the larger cultural context (Walters, 1995, p. 10). There is an evolution from RTV to SNSs, in the sense that RTV matured before SNSs emerged on the cultural landscape, with SNSs building on some of the ways subjects display the self under surveillance in RTV, especially in how RTV habituates audiences and participants to the use of surveillance technologies for entertainment purposes. As I (Dubrofsky, 2011) have argued, RTV shows such as *The Bachelor* put subjects under surveillance who perform identities, with knowledge that potentially large audiences may be watching and observing their bodies, actions, and behaviors. RTV took over programming at the turn of the 21st century, becoming a major component of prime-time television schedules. Although RTV continues to be a mainstay of television programming, it has decreased in popularity in the last few years (most markedly apparent in the decline in scheduling of RTV shows during prime time). As RTV reached a saturation point around 2004, SNS technologies such as Friendster (created in 2002), MySpace (launched in 2003), Facebook (began in 2004), and Twitter (set up in 2006) hit the media landscape, with the latter two, at the time of this writing, still growing in popularity. RTV and SNSs coexist, with much cross-pollination (RTV shows and participants have their own MySpace pages, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, for instance) and people often consume both forms of media. Looking at these media together as symptomatic texts provides a kind of genealogy (a sense of history, continuity, and interconnectedness) of surveillance technologies used for entertainment purposes to put the self on display. These media reflect, rearticulate, and participate in larger cultural discourses about valorizing expressions and displays of the self under surveillance.

RTV affirmed a model for presenting the self through the use of surveillance technologies, the grammar of which was in part adopted in surveilled modes of self-presentation in electronic media. Thus, if we consider RTV as a symptomatic text about surveillance and displays of the self in U.S. culture, we witness the privileging of the desire to be on television, to share one’s life, thoughts, and feelings with a public audience, and to use surveillance as a means of verifying one’s authenticity (discussed in detail shortly). Enter SNSs around the height of the RTV phenomena (roughly, 2004) and we see the continuation of a love affair with surveillance technologies as a means of displaying the self. Hence, the movement from the popularity of RTV to the popularity of SNSs provides access to a shift in the culture surrounding surveilled displays of the self, with SNSs marking new territory in surveilled displays of the self.

A significant distinction between RTV and SNSs is that RTV is largely considered a low form of entertainment (“trashy” TV), whereas SNSs are gaining traction in every facet of the public and private arena, with private citizens, celebrities, and politicians setting up Facebook pages (the success of Obama’s campaign, for instance, is partly credited to the activities carried out by his campaign on Facebook). Indeed, in a recent *New York Times* article entitled “Digital Diplomacy,” Lichtenstein (2010) notes how Jared Cohen, a member of the State Department’s policy planning staff, and Alec Ross, first senior adviser for innovation to the Secretary of State, were given the mandate to “tweet” for diplomacy. Many people receive Ross and Cohen’s tweets—upwards of 500,000 (Lichtenstein, 2010). As Lichtenstein comments: “Their Twitter posts have become an integral part of a new State Department effort to bring diplomacy into the digital age, by using widely available technologies to reach out to citizens, companies and other nonstate actors.” SNS activities do not carry the social stigma associated with watching RTV and can be seen as a legitimate way of getting important information out to the general public, indeed, to win elections.

Although Facebook is increasingly integrated into the marketing of products, into popular culture, and into the lives of individuals, my focus is on individual users, as this is the largest group of users. This focal point allows for a symbiotic analysis of RTV, where displays of the self under surveillance are made by individual participants (even though these are manipulated by TV workers and fashioned into a television product), and enables an examination of how people are habituated to practices of surveillance.

Facebook

As the recent blockbuster hit film about the emergence of Facebook, *The Social Network* (2010), has documented in popular narrative form, Mark Zuckerberg began Facebook in February 2004 as a Web site exclusively for Harvard University students—an online version of the student catalog, providing basic information about each student (Phillips, 2007). The site quickly took off. Within a few months, by May 2005, Zuckerberg had set up the site for other universities.¹ Facebook opened to the general public in September 2006: Anyone with a valid e-mail address could join Facebook (Abram, 2006).

With more than 500 million active users currently, Facebook is the fastest growing SNS, exceeding in popularity in the United States the formerly most popular SNS, MySpace.² SNSs have been in high demand for quite some time, but never has an SNS gained such wide popularity—and with the 30+ and middle-aged crowd as well as the young.³ Not only has *The Social Network* further made Zuckerberg and Facebook cultural phenomena, references to Facebook are ubiquitous in popular culture—from the teen show *Gossip Girl*, where characters regularly mention their use of Facebook, to local newscasters imploring viewers to “like” the news station (become a fan of the Facebook page for the show and receive updates from the page),

or “friend” them on Facebook (be added to the newscaster’s list of friends, providing access to the content of his or her page). Facebook is a regular topic in advice columns (see *New York Times* column on Facebook ethics⁴) and a focus of songs on YouTube (that have gone viral on Facebook⁵). Facebook also provides a forum for consumers to voice their thoughts about popular culture products—many of which advertise their Facebook pages on their own Web sites, TV shows, magazines, and so forth.

Briefly, I offer details about the architecture of Facebook to frame my discussion.⁶ Facebook’s backbone “consists of visible profiles that display an articulated list of friends who are also users of the system. Profiles are unique pages” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 2) that rely on user-generated content. Facebook enables users to form a web of interconnected people linked up on a Web page. Facebook’s current incarnation (changes are made regularly) has two main tabs on a user’s page. A “home” page with a “news feed” that, as the Facebook instructions⁷ outline, is “a live stream of posts your friends have made—interesting links, thoughts, photos, and tidbits from their lives. This helps you keep up with things your friends are doing in their everyday lives.” This page also contains a status box where Facebook users can fill in what they are doing, thinking, or pondering, which will appear after the user’s name (for instance, “Aisha Richards wants a new coat. . .”).

The second tab on a user’s page is the profile page. As outlined by Facebook, this “represents the ongoing, flowing conversation between you and your friends.” This page only shows comments users have made on items posted (status updates, notes, photographs, etc.). It also gives a running account of the activities a user has engaged in (for instance, it may say something like “Aisha wrote on Josh Rodriguez’s wall”). In addition, on this page users can share basic information (such as their age, hometown, occupation, and marital status), likes, dislikes, favorite quotations, photographs, videos, and pictures;⁸ indicate where they work and their status (single, married, in a relationship, etc.); contact information and birthdays; and link their interests to other Facebook pages (bands, films, TV shows, etc.). This page also displays a list of people the user has friended (added to their list of friends) on the site.

Facebook has a messaging function (works like e-mail, allows links and photo and video attachments, but does not support document attachments) and applications enabling people to post comments on their own page (wall) and on the pages (walls) of the people in their network. At the top of all Facebook pages is a notification tab alerting users when someone comments on something the user has posted or comments on something a user has also commented on. At the bottom of the page is a chat function for users to engage in real-time text chat with other users in their network.

As users input more data into their page and into the pages of others, the data fall off the bottom of the Web page—that is, the information moves down the page and eventually onto an earlier page. This means users need to scroll back to earlier pages to access older information. In this way, nothing but the most current data remain on the page, and some additional effort is required to retrieve older data.

Surveilled subjects

With both SNSs and RTV, presentations of the self occur with the aid of technology that records activities and provides proof of these activities (proof that can exist in perpetuity), creating surveilled and “traceable” subjects, and enabling the mobility of subjects (Andrejevic, 2007)—that is, data about the subject travel in ways not possible when a subject circulates in the physical world. Entry into mediated space automatically creates retrievable data and lots of them. The hands-on shaping of the RTV subject by TV workers differs from Facebook’s processes of subjectification. On Facebook, users largely mediate their own subjectivities without third-party intervention. Surveillance technology—cameras, microphones—is used to record subjects and capture the image that mediates the RTV subject. This subject, before it is shaped into a televisual product, passes through the mediation of video evidence gathered on location during recording, to the editing room where this evidence is shaped, and throughout the entire process is transformed by TV workers into the final product broadcast on television.

For RTV subjects, surveillance works in the service of verifying authenticity. Here authenticity is often attached to capturing visual and auditory representations of participants shown verifying themselves as consistent under surveillance (Andrejevic, 2004; Couldry, 2002) in specific locations. As Hardy and I (Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008) outline, the barometer of authenticity in the space of RTV is in how well participants perform themselves in an obviously contrived (and surveilled) setting while under surveillance (Andrejevic, 2004; Couldry, 2002; Gillespie, 2000; Tincknell & Raghuram, 2002). Participants need to show, on camera, who they really are—that they are authentically, on camera, the same person they are (ostensibly) in their own lives (Dubrofsky, 2009), that they can be consistent on camera and off. A good RTV participant (one who gives the impression of being authentic) behaves on RTV as he or she is imagined to behave in an unsurveilled space. To be seen as adopting a behavior specifically designed for the space of RTV immediately designates a participant as inauthentic, unreal, and suspect. Authenticity is often what grants RTV participants access to the prize of the show (the object of affection, the cash prize, a sought-after contract) and, of course, fame. However, fame may happen just as well for participants who are verified as inauthentic (sometimes more so) as well as for those presented as authentic. The point is that the action on RTV centers on verifying authenticity: One submits to surveillance as a means of verifying authenticity, the emphasis on how authentic or inauthentic one is presented as being. Surveillance is key in this setup because the more willing one is to submit to surveillance, the more able one is to appear “natural” under surveillance and the more seemingly authentic one becomes. Thus, authenticity is implicated in configurations of bound space (a specific physical, marked, and enclosed space) because proof of authenticity relies on the ability to appear consistent across disparate social spaces and at different times. This notion of authenticity affixes displays of authenticity to a body and to a time and place.⁹

Social convergence?

Although Facebook users may desire to show consistency—and thus some kind of authenticity—in their displays and may succeed in this endeavor, this is not the core *modus operandi* of activities.¹⁰ On Facebook, there is no implicit comparison of behavior between different spaces (who a user is in the physical world vs. who they are in electronic space), and so notions of bound space do not quite apply. Papacharissi and Boyd's discussions of boundaries in electronic space articulate the difficulty of mapping out electronic space: Constructs used to map out physical space are ill-fitting for electronic space. Although Papacharissi (2009) notes that there is a “[l]ack of boundaries, walls in cyberspace” (p. 207), she outlines that subjects must then work to make their behavior in these spaces “appropriate for a number of different situations and relationships at once” (2009, p. 207). Boyd (2008) makes a similar point in her description of social convergence:

Social convergence occurs when disparate social contexts are collapsed into one. Even in public settings, people are accustomed to maintaining discrete social contexts separated by space. How one behaves is typically dependent on the norms in a given social context . . . Social convergence requires people to handle disparate audiences simultaneously without a social script. (p. 18)

There is another option: Perhaps Facebook (and other electronic spaces) has its own norms, ones that both incorporate those in the physical world and exceed these. In this sense, unlike the space of RTV, Facebook subjects are not impressed with the dictates of the social context: proving consistency across spaces—authenticity—via surveillance. In fact, Papacharissi (2009) notes that the applications and architecture of Facebook do “not necessarily enable authenticity, but they do facilitate multiplicity, showing audiences the many ‘faces’ of one’s identity and simultaneously negotiating and presenting identity to a variety of audiences” (p. 212). On Facebook, we do not see social convergence—the convergence of different social spaces—but rather the articulation of a particular electronic space with its own norms. Boyd (2008) writes that “physical features like walls and limited audio range help people have a sense of just how public their actions are. The digital world has different properties and these can be easily altered through the development of new technologies, radically altering the assumptions that people have when they interact online” (p. 14). Furthermore, Papacharissi articulates, “electronic media convey a lack of a situational place to orient the individual or, as Myerowitz terms it, ‘no sense of place’” (p. 207). Thus, it might be that while there is no sense of physical space in electronic media, there is nonetheless a space with parameters. As Papacharissi outlines, “the architectures of virtual spaces, much like the architecture of physical spaces, simultaneously suggests and enables particular modes of interaction” (p. 200), ones that do not require users to put on social faces that will satisfy a number of different audiences, but, instead, ones that animate ways of being that work for a space in which different audiences converge. Or rather, a space where the audience is not defined by a convergence of

audiences from the physical world, but instead by an electronic audience with its own contingencies.

Spaces, even electronic ones that do not have physical boundaries, direct behavior, privilege certain activities, and thus regulate who can take up space, who cannot, who benefits from the rewards of this space, and who does not (Rose, 1999, p. 252). To understand electronic space, I bring together Deleuze's notion of "rhizomatic space," as outlined by Rose (1999), with Andrejevic's (2007, 2009) notion of a "digital enclosure," to highlight that while virtual space is centerless, nonhierarchical, shot through and through with multiple connections enabling a flow of information, as Rose outlines, it nonetheless has specific contingencies and parameters, as Andrejevic insists. Entry into the digital enclosure means submitting to surveillance (Andrejevic, 2007). This is not a neutral space (Andrejevic, 2007). Facebook, while not delimited by physical parameters, is bound by specific requirements: that one submit to electronic monitoring and acclimate to the fact that "every action and transaction generates information about itself" (Andrejevic, 2007, p. 2). This is a space where data flow is optimized, where each piece of data can be tracked by the makers of Facebook (or by hackers), and much of it tracked and accessed by users in the digital enclosure. For instance, although e-mails between users are not available to other users not included in the e-mail exchange, the e-mails create a digital imprint that is retrievable provided one has access to that information or the know-how to access the information (the information is imprinted—available—the question is one of access). Indeed, the Facebook subject is marked by the details of its activities online, defined through online databases, it creates data tracks for every action it takes, a "data subject" (Poster, 1995). The data about itself are in the form of bits of surveilled information, not video or film data as is the case for the RTV subject, and this is personally uploaded rather than recorded by a camera operated by TV workers. This is not to say, as is the case with many Facebook profiles, that there are no photographs or visual representations of the subject's embodied self, just that the subject is primarily constituted by means of data.

Contra RTV, on Facebook a person brings the technology into his or her existing life—rather than set up camp in the surveilled space of a RTV show or modify the person's living space and life to accommodate surveillance technology, as is the case for the RTV subject. In addition, Facebook users, unlike RTV participants, are not being compensated for their time on the site, are not performing for a massive audience (though sometimes they are—depending on the privacy settings), there is no entry requirement, and no explicit competition, prize, or desired end result. The Facebook subject integrates surveillance into her life for an unspecified period of time (while living her life), unlike RTV subjects where surveillance is an aspect of a person's life for a set period of time (the duration of the filming for the series). For Facebook users, surveillance is an activity carried out alongside the living of their daily lives—not something that records their embodied existence as they carry out activities. This is in contrast to RTV, which, by the fact of surveillance, creates a contrived space in which subjects put themselves on display, where implicitly the action

revolves around habituating to surveillance: being able to conduct activities under surveillance that are normally not carried out under surveillance, while behaving as if one is not under surveillance. Facebook affords a space where subjects exhibit aspects of their life electronically, while they are living their usual life. The RTV subject, on the other hand, spends much time trying to align its existence under surveillance with imagined aspects of what life is like when not under surveillance. In addition, while participating in a RTV show offers explicit rewards—winning a prize, winning a mate, entry into the film/television industry, (usually fleeting) fame, or verifying one's authenticity by displaying consistency across disparate spaces, on Facebook there are no explicit rewards. Facebook is in fact not constituted as a remarkable activity. Rather, Facebook animates a seamless (unremarkable) integration of surveillance into the lives of users. Although surveillance is integral to the action (much of what one does on Facebook is under surveillance), it is not an element that explicitly verifies the identity of users (as it does on RTV), it *is* the action (most actions taken on Facebook are part of the surveillance mechanism). Facebook effectively situates users as the master of their own surveillance and as the producers of their self under surveillance. On Facebook, surveillance is a practice of the self, rather than the condition circumscribing one's display of the self, as on RTV.

Information overload

RTV cultivates a space where participants express their thoughts and feelings to one another with the emphasis on expressing personal feelings, on connectivity and interaction with others. Although the content of the confessions by participants on RTV is meant to have a particular impact in characterizing the participant's subjectivity (as nice, good, bad, genuine, etc.) and verifying authenticity, a subject on Facebook is not linked directly to a "live" visual representation of an animate physical body, nor does it necessarily signify an individual with particular traits in a given space. Rather, the Facebook subject is an aggregate of traceable (surveilled) data (albeit with users' imaginations possibly linking the data to memories of people's identities), and the connection between the bits of data is not at a premium; rather, it is the quantity and circulation of data that is important. This subject is defined by a constant flow of data about itself, unlike the RTV subject; it is determined less by the specificity of each piece of data, the consistency between the bits of data, or the relationship of the data to the subject (and the implications of this connection are largely irrelevant). What is important is the movement of data.

A user's page on Facebook is in fact nothing but a moving, changeable space infused with particular digital tracks of a user's data movements. Continuous interaction with one's page and with the pages of other users is the main method of establishing a presence on Facebook, and this is contingent on conscious and unconscious data marking. For instance, my Facebook page can be completely transformed overnight, as new actions taken by my friends are advertised on my page, pushing

notices about previous actions down the page until they move off the page (but can be retrieved). As I comment on my friend's photograph, change my status to "wants coffee," I cause a ripple effect and transform the appearance of my page and my friends' pages (which will now carry announcements such as "so and so commented on so and so's photo" and "so and so wants coffee"), which are recalibrated to make room for the announcement of my actions. Facebook pages are a bit like living beings, constantly responding to new input, changeable, reflecting the actions of their users.

The continuous movement of data across the page makes it difficult for an ordinary user to be attentive to every piece of data and to synthesize it. Yet, a key concept when dealing with information technology is the idea of "information overload," that is, "receiving too much information" (Eppler & Mengis, 2004, p. 326). As Eppler and Mengis (2004) outline, information overload gets used alongside synonymous concepts such as "cognitive overload," "sensory overload," "communication overload," "knowledge overload," and "information fatigue syndrome" (p. 326), focusing on

how the performance (in terms of adequate decision making) of an individual varies with the amount of information he or she is exposed to. Researchers across various disciplines have found that the performance (i.e., the quality of decisions or reasoning in general) of an individual correlates positively with the amount of information he or she receives—up to a certain point. If further information is provided beyond this point, the performance of the individual will rapidly decline. (p. 326)

Certainly, the setup of the space on Facebook dictates information overload is likely for active participants (however, it is possible users adapt to media—e.g., after a while, they may be able to take in more information than they were able to originally). Significantly, however, the architecture of the space is not set up for users to perform optimally (make quality decisions based on the information input), thus turning on its head the notion of "information overload" as Eppler and Mengis have outlined it. Facebook encourages users to generate and be exposed to a massive amount of information, so the concerns with "overload" do not apply, as "information overload," in a literal sense, is the aim: There is no expectation that users will synthesize information or even read or make sense of it. This does not mean users are not making some kind of sense of the information, simply that they may not be doing so in ways that Eppler and Mengis outline: making quality and reasoned decisions based on the information provided.

Effectively, what Dean (2008) decries as the problem with new communication technologies, alluded to in the quotation opening this article, is precisely the impetus on Facebook: output and circulation of messages, and producing an abundance of these (Dean, 2008, pp. 105–107), aspects integral to "information overload." The focus is not on impact—or use—of the messages. As Dean specifies: "The only thing that is relevant is circulation, the addition to the pool. Any particular contribution remains secondary to the fact of circulation. The value of any particular

contribution is likewise inversely proportionate to the openness, inclusivity, or extent of a circulating data stream—the more opinions or comments that are out there, the less of an impact any given one might make” (p. 107). Indeed, the importance of circulating data is embodied in the architecture of the newsfeed on a person’s Facebook homepage, with the “Top News” and “Most Recent” tab. By clicking on the “Most Recent” tab all the most recent news stories (activities carried out by friends) appear. Thus, if a user never interacts with Facebook, none of his or her activities will appear here and they will be invisible in this space. Even more interesting is the “Top News” tab. When this tab is clicked, a stream of what Facebook’s algorithms have tabulated as “top” news appears. According to the Help section on Facebook, “Top News” items are selected based on what Facebook deems most interesting. In answer to the question “How does News Feed determine which content is most interesting?” Facebook responds “The News Feed algorithm bases this on a few factors: how many friends are commenting on a certain piece of content, who posted the content, and what type of content it is (e.g., photo, video, or status update).” In essence, the more people comment on a piece of data, the stronger the likelihood that this bit of data will appear as “Top News” on a friend’s newsfeed, thus increasing the likelihood that the data will circulate and draw the attention and additional comments of other users, ultimately increasing circulation of data. In other words, the architecture privileges the actions of users who input data on a regular and frequent basis. Regardless, many still use Facebook in ways that do not make optimal use of its features, but those who circulate as much data, as quickly as possible, are maximizing their use of Facebook’s features.

The incitement to a constant flow of data is perhaps nowhere more evident than when a Facebook user attempts to control the flow of information about himself or herself. These attempts often increase the dispersion of information. For example, many users have their preferences set (also the default setting) so that whenever a user posts a comment on his or her wall he or she receives an e-mail notification. Suppose I post a comment on my friend’s wall and then decide I want to change what I wrote. So I delete the comment (I can delete any action I take or any action someone else takes on my wall) and post a new one. But if my friend has set up her account to receive e-mail notifications when things happen on her page, an e-mail will have been sent to my friend notifying her of my first post (also sent to anyone who commented on the post and who has their notifications set to receive such e-mails), including the comment I originally posted. This person will also receive a second e-mail (as will anyone else who commented on the post and who has these notification settings) alerting her of my second post, with my comment included. Although I can delete anything I post and delete from my wall anything posted by another user, I do not have control over the content of Facebook notification e-mails where posts are reproduced, regardless of whether they have been deleted on Facebook proper. In addition, even people not in my immediate network can see data about what occurs on my page. For instance, a third party (someone not in my network) may see on their friend’s page (who is also my friend) that he or she commented on a photo of mine. If I have not limited

access to that photo to just my friends (the default setting is that everyone can see photographs), that third party can click on the photo tab that appears on our mutual friend's page (attached to the announcement of their comment on my photo) and see all the photos in that album. If I did restrict access to the photos, the notice about my friend commenting on my photo (as well as a small image of the photo) appears on my friend's page, but the link will not allow a third party to view a larger version of the photo or see any of the photos in the album. Facebook fosters a constant movement of traceable data, even of data that have been discarded (deleted) by users. Facebook also disperses data to people who may not have indicated any interest in receiving those data or in having access to the data. Creating and circulating trackable data is the main imperative, with no emphasis on how users might make sense of the content of the data, their response to the content, or their level of interest—concerns implicit in the idea of “information overload,” but part of the objective on Facebook.

Timeliness

Papacharissi (2009) suggests that when it comes to applications (for instance, applications that let users display all the places they have traveled, or list the books they have read, or ones that quiz users to determine which *Harry Potter* character or famous writer a user is), Facebook users “cycle through these applications that are quickly added on and eventually abandoned in the same way that individuals enthuse about and get bored with new toys, or change their wardrobe when clothing styles change. Operating as a virtual wardrobe, these applications or props fleetingly support a performance of the self, only soon to be replaced by the next most popular add-on” (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 212). Facebook users are perhaps not so much fickle, but rather preoccupied with the here and now, the current status update (posted in real time), use of the latest application, because on Facebook what is forefronted is the need for things to be immediately relevant, and as such, things can quickly become irrelevant, easily replaceable. Indeed, in August 2009, Facebook improved its search engine, allowing users to look for information on people's pages, look up links, photos, videos, and status updates (rather than scrolling through pages to find information); however, always emphasizing timeliness, searches are limited to the past 30 days.¹¹

To put this question of timeliness into perspective, while it is possible to find older status updates for friends, older stories, and comments posted by users via the unwieldy process of scrolling back through the pages on a user's page, the setup is such that, for instance, commenting on a user's status update from 2 weeks ago, especially if they have since posted a bunch of newer status updates, is not encouraged (by the architecture of the site in terms of accessibility). In this way, the organization of the site is such that attention is drawn to the newest and latest bit of data—not what was posted by users a few weeks ago. After about a 24-hour period or less, items on Facebook are no longer front and center—they might as well not exist in the

world of Facebook. In fact, I would venture to guess that any information that does not fit on a user's screen when they click on the page is extraneous. As soon as a user has to scroll back to an earlier page to see the information, it is old news.

Closing thoughts

As a symptomatic text, RTV illustrates how RTV participants are habituated to putting the self on public display for entertainment purposes, and the Facebook text shows how people are habituated to using surveillance technologies in the service of producing consumable products (bits of data), suggesting the desirability of living a life that can withstand being under surveillance, as well as a life that can be broadcast to an audience. RTV highlights the importance of putting information about the self "out there" into the world, confessing one's thoughts and feelings for public consumption. RTV also affirms surveillance as a means of confirming authenticity: showing that one can be consistent across disparate spaces on camera and across imagined spaces outside the purview of the camera. The space of RTV suggests the importance of attending to a specific individual doing particular activities under surveillance. These activities become significant as these can be traced in a line of activities that constitute a seemingly cohesive and authentic subject (even if the images are decontextualized and manipulated by TV workers).

Facebook, as a symptomatic text, takes these trends in displays of the self and in circulating information about the self and places these in a context where surveillance is at a premium, but where notions of embodiment, authenticity, and consistency are not. The architecture of Facebook is not about message impact, about synthesizing messages, or about messages verifying the identity and authenticity of a sender. This is not to say that these things do not happen on Facebook, only that these are not at a premium. What is optimized is the circulation of data (loosely about the self), and surveillance is the means through which this happens. Surveillance does not verify a subject (as real or authentic, for instance), so much as enable its existence and mobility within that space. The Facebook subject exists mostly through the data tracks it makes (there are few activities a subject can engage in that do not create data tracks traceable by either the makers of the site or by other users), which verify its existence as well as create its subjectivity: Facebook subjects are aggregates of traceable data. The incitement is to put out information, to move the information off the page, and replace it with new information, with little space (literally) for the content of data to be considered, assessed, or processed in any significant way. Timeliness, constantly putting out data quickly becomes an implicit part of the architecture of Facebook. The main imperative is to upload endless data for others to pay attention to (by commenting on it or clicking the "like" tab) because the more attention the data get, the more the data circulate, and thus the more advertising a person's Facebook page receives on newsfeeds.

The use of surveillance for expressing the self emphasizes the subject as a producer of data, and data as a product that increases in value the more others consume it. On Facebook, the significance of putting out data is highlighted, with little attention to the content of the data or to reception (beyond the fact that someone, somewhere acknowledged a piece of data was circulating). This is freedom of expression in its simplest form: Put out bits of information, as much as possible, as quickly as possible. Any response to the data will do, as long as the information has been noticed, in some way, by someone, because noticing the information is important as a means of further circulating the information down the page, although the content of the response has no particular impact on the movement of data.

Although this article has remained in the micro, detailing surveillance as it exists within one SNS, in closing, I return to the opening quotation from Dean about the war in Iraq, drawing attention to how in that example communication and freedom of expression boil down to the same thing that is optimized on Facebook: circulating information. Thus, although RTV and Facebook have surveillance at their core, the behaviors animated exceed the bounds of surveilled spaces and of the two forms of media. As I suggested in the opening of this piece, RTV and Facebook are symptomatic texts, texts that tell us about the larger culture in which they exist. As such, we need to pay careful attention to technologies such as Facebook that bracket practices for synthesizing and contextualizing, as synthesizing and contextualizing are at the heart of critical engagements with the world.

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Notes

- 1 <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics#/press/info.php?timeline>, retrieved October 12, 2009.
- 2 <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>, retrieved July 26, 2010.
- 3 <http://www.istrategylabs.com/facebook-demographics-direct-from-their-system/>, retrieved October 12, 2009.
- 4 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/05/magazine/05FOB-ethicist-t.html?scp=16&sq=facebook&st=nyt>, retrieved October 12, 2009.
- 5 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7MuwPIOiNQ>
- 6 Facebook is constantly updating the platform. The discussion in this article is based on the incarnation of the site in September 2010. Most likely, by the time this article is published the site will have gone through some changes, although the fundamental principles (the emphasis on circulating trackable data, for instance) will probably remain and, in fact, be further optimized.

- 7 Information about Facebook applications is taken from the “getting started” section on the Facebook Web site in the “help” section http://www.facebook.com/help/new_user_guide.php?guide_section=explore_facebook and the Facebook site tour pages http://www.facebook.com/sitetour/homepage_tour.php
- 8 There are myriad applications created by users, allowing people to give each other gifts, create quizzes, answer trivia questions to test their knowledge on certain topics, and so forth.
- 9 I view authenticity on RTV as a performance, divorced from evaluations of essential qualities of “realness” or “truthfulness.” Hence, a “[p]articipant’s comfort with being on display must translate into a performance of not being on display, of behaving exactly as they would if alone Good RTV participants perform not-performing” (Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008, p. 378).
- 10 Casual users of Facebook may differ markedly from the usage profile I suggest. Such individuals might check the site infrequently and rarely post. This creates a different impression from heavier users. There are many who use the site in this manner, but my interest is in frequent users who take full advantage of the features on Facebook, maximizing flow of data and utilizing the optimal architecture of the site. To illustrate the importance of inputting data in this space, consider this: Subscribers who use Facebook to peer into the activities of their friends rarely, if ever, post anything or interact with others, quickly becoming static subjects, as data about them do not circulate. Optimal use of Facebook’s features increases the more friends you have whose data you can comment on and who will comment on your data. Facebook relegates inactive users to invisibility because there is no flow of data about them to keep others alert to their presence. Such users, quite literally, are out of circulation. This is not to say that their use is irrelevant, simply that their way of using Facebook does not set into action the most prominent feature of the site: circulation of information. If a user wants a presence on Facebook, he or she must input data into that space for it to circulate, advertizing his/her presence, drawing users to his/her page, contributing to the force that moves data down and off the page.
- 11 <http://johnhaydon.com/2009/08/improved-facebook-search-cares/>, retrieved October 30, 2009.

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La surveillance dans la téléralité et sur Facebook : de l'authenticité aux données en circulation

La téléralité et les sites de réseautage personnel créent des espaces où les sujets sont construits à travers la médiation de la technologie qui fait le travail de surveillance. L'alignement de la téléralité avec les sites de réseautage personnel permet le développement d'une généalogie de l'utilisation de la surveillance pour l'exposition du soi. Passer de médias plus « vieux » comme la télévision à des médias plus « récents » comme les sites de réseautage personnel nous donne un aperçu des manières par lesquelles les problèmes en jeu pour les chercheurs critiques étudiant les pratiques de surveillance se transforment lorsque les espaces (et les pratiques) de cette surveillance changent. L'article fait participer à la conversation les travaux en études de la surveillance, en études critiques des médias, sur la téléralité et les nouveaux médias, en insistant sur le besoin de voir des liens entre les types de subjectivité surveillée dans les médias populaires puisque ceux-ci contribuent à un ethos plus large sur la surveillance, la subjectivité, les données et notre participation au monde. En se concentrant sur Facebook, l'article suggère que Facebook groupe des pratiques de synthétisation et de contextualisation, pratiques au cœur de la participation critique au monde.

Mots clés : Facebook, téléralité, médias électroniques, sujet de données, surveillance, sites de réseautage personnel

Überwachung im Reality-TV und Facebook: Von Authentizität zu Datenströmen

Reality-TV und soziale Netzwerke erschaffen Räume, in denen Subjekte durch die Mediation von Überwachungstechnologien konstruiert werden. Der Abgleich von Reality-TV und sozialen Netzwerken erlaubt die Entwicklung eines Stammbaums des Einsatzes von Überwachung für die Darstellung des Selbst. Indem wir uns von „alten“ Medien wie dem Fernsehen hin zu „neueren“ Medien wie sozialen Netzwerk bewegen, erlangen wir Einblicke dahingehend, wie sich die Themenfelder kritischer Wissenschaftler, die sich mit Überwachungspraktiken beschäftigen, verlagern, wenn sich die Räume (und Praktiken) von Überwachung verändern. Dieser Artikel betrachtet Arbeiten aus der Überwachungsforschung, kritischen Medienstudien, Reality-TV und neuen Medien und betont die Notwendigkeit, die Verknüpfungen zwischen den Arten der überwachten Subjektivität in Populärmedien zu sehen, da diese zu unserem Denken bezüglich Überwachung, Subjektivität, Daten und unserer Verbindung mit der Welt beitragen. Mit einem Fokus auf Facebook, zeigen wir in diesem Artikel, dass Facebook Praktiken des Synthetisierens und des Kontextualisierens umfasst: Praktiken also, die für eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der Welt wichtig sind.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Facebook, Reality-TV, elektronische Medien, Datensubjekt, Überwachung, soziale Netzwerke

리얼리티 TV 와 페이스북에서의 서베일런스: 진실성부터 데이터 흐름까지

요약

리얼리티 TV 와 소셜네트워크킹사이트 (SNSs)는 주체들이 서베일런스를 담당하는 기술들의 중재를 통하여 형성되어지는 공간들이다. 리얼리티 TV 와 SNSs 들을 함께 취급하는 것은 자아의 전시를 위한 서베일런스 사용에서의 가계도를 발전시킨다. TV 와 같은 구미디어로부터 SNSs 와 같은 뉴 미디어로 변환을 통해 우리는 서베일런스 공간과 실행들이 변화할때 비판 학자들이 어떻게 현재 이슈가되는 서베일런스 실행행 변이를 다루는 것에 대한 안목을 얻을 수 있다. 본 논문은 서베일런스 연구, 비판미디어 연구, 리얼리티 TV 와 뉴 미디어에서의 대화를 가져다 줄 수 있는데, 이는 대중 미디어에서 감시되어지는 주체들의 형태와 세상에 대한 우리의 개입사이의 연계 필요성을 강조하는 것에 의해 실행될 수 있다. 페이스북에 대한 강조를 유지하는 것은 세상에 대한 비판적 연계의 핵심에서 활동하는 것이라고 할 수 있다.

La Vigilancia en la Televisión de Realidad y en Facebook: De la Autenticidad hacia la Fluidez de los Datos

Resumen

La Televisión de Realidad (RTV) y los sitios de red social (SNSs) crean espacios donde los sujetos son construidos a través de la mediación de la tecnología que hace el trabajo de vigilancia. Alineando la RTV con los SNSs permite el desarrollo de una genealogía en el uso de la vigilancia para las muestras de uno mismo. Moviéndose de los medios “viejos” tales como la TV, hacia los medios “nuevos” tales como los SNSs, ganamos entendimiento de cómo estos asuntos que están en juego para los estudiosos de las prácticas de vigilancia varían cuando los espacios (y sus prácticas) de vigilancia cambian. Este artículo da vida a la conversación sobre el trabajo en los estudios de vigilancia, los estudios críticos de los medios, la RTV y los nuevos medios, enfatizando la necesidad de ver conexiones entre los tipos de subjetividad vigilada en los medios populares dado que estos contribuyen a un “ethos” más grande sobre la vigilancia, la subjetividad, los datos y su compromiso con el mundo. Manteniendo un enfoque sobre Facebook, este artículo sugiere que las prácticas de paréntesis de Facebook para sintetizar y contextualizar, están al centro de los compromisos críticos con el mundo.

Palabras claves: Facebook, TV de realidad, medios electrónicos, sujeto de datos, vigilancia, sitios de red social

真人秀节目和 Facebook 的监督：从真实性到流动数据

【摘要：】

真人秀节目（RTV）和社交网站（SNSs）创建了话题空间，媒体技术则在此扮演监督角色。

RTV 与 SNSs 的联合为自我展示的发展提供了监督体系。当媒体由“老”媒体如电视向“新”媒体如 SNSs 转变，监督空间（和做法）的变化使我们对研究监督行为的批判学者的敏感话题更有体会。

本文将监督研究、批判媒体研究、RTV 和新媒体研究融为一体，强调大众媒体中各种监督主观性之间的联系。由此对监督、主体性、数据和我们对世界的参与的精神特质有所贡献。本文重点研究 Facebook，提出 Facebook 应对行为分类以利综合的梳理来龙去脉，它们是关注世界的中心纽带。

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