David Lyon’s *Surveillance After Snowden* compellingly demonstrates the relevance of the former NSA contractor Edward Snowden’s revelations about the global mass surveillance implemented by the National Security Agency (NSA) in the United States and throughout the world. Even if authorities and intelligence communities sought to disregard the value of these revelations, they constitute a turning point in citizens’ understanding and realisation of the scope of the surveillance to which they are subject in contemporary societies.

It is not surprising that this book is written by David Lyon, one of the most prominent scholars of surveillance studies whose *Surveillance after September 11*1, released in 2003, shed light on the process of engineering societies through surveillance capabilities and its impact on individuals’ freedom and privacy in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

Professor of Sociology and Law at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario where he holds a Research Chair in Surveillance Studies, David Lyon’s work on surveillance is internationally known. Marked by the impact of the breakthroughs in information and communication technologies (ICT), the introduction of high technology in ordinary citizens’ every day life, and the implementation of the post 9/11 surveillance systems, his work brilliantly demonstrates how surveillance is no longer implemented only by the State but extends its impact on our daily life through mundane places, commercial activities, work places, leisure and travel.

Beginning from June 5, 2013, *The Guardian and The Washington Post* started the publication of a series of revelations about the implementation of a global mass surveillance by the US National Security Agency (NSA). These publications clearly decrypted the functioning of specific tools such as the PRISM datamining programme allowing the direct access of citizens’ email accounts, and the XKeyscore analytical device enabling the collection of almost anything on the Internet on a daily basis. These revelations sound as a wake up call to millions of individuals throughout the world who never imagined that their emails and phone communications would serve as the core devices of a global mass surveillance. The author of these revelations, which shed light on the scope, methods and targets of this massive surveillance system, is Edward Snowden, a young Booz Allen Hamilton employee contracted by

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the NSA in 2013. Snowden, who previously worked for the CIA and Dell, handed thousands of secret NSA documents to journalists and filmmakers such as Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras and Ewen MacAskill, from July 2013 onwards.

A smooth encounter between David Lyon and Edward Snowden

The day after the beginning of the disclosures, David Lyon was on a plane heading to Victoria, British Columbia to give a lecture on one of his topics of interest – the emerging culture of surveillance. Although caught in the midst of sensational scoops, anger and negative reactions from governmental authorities and intelligence communities, Snowden’s revelations appeared to him as the evidence of the implementation of the global mass surveillance.

In fact, this book reflects an encounter between the two men. However, these two never met in person and had only one occasion remotely to discuss on November 12, 2015 (after the publication of the present book) through a Skype talk organised by the Queen’s University between students and Snowden where Lyon acted as moderator. Although Edward Snowden is the primary focus of attention, the book is not that kind of narrative where the author delves into Snowden’s life, personality or psychological traits, and relates his thoughts about the character of the person. Very smoothly the book places the two men together without engaging them into a live discussion or a debate but addressing the impact of the revelations on politics, ethics, privacy and personal life through Lyon’s eyes.

Considering the growing public awareness about surveillance practices since 9/11 and in the aftermath of the Madrid, London, Paris, Beirut, Ankara, Brussels… terrorist attacks, when opening this book, the reader may have in mind several critical questions regarding surveillance practice and theory, its impact on terrorism and its consequences on fundamental rights and privacy. Although each of the five chapters deals with a specific aspect of these questions, it is important to note that the book cannot be read without the Preface where the author clearly addresses what the book is about and what it is not. First of all, this is not a book where surveillance theory is discussed and updated. The theoretical work has been intensively done in David Lyon’s other books. The author clearly states that he essentially writes, “not only as someone interested in the headlines – citizen – and in explaining trends – a sociologist- but also as one who identifies as a believer, in my case a Christian” (p. IX). Whatever the religious, ethical or moral strands that underlie his endeavour, the author involves every citizen when he seeks to show why Snowden’s revelations are so significant.

The relevance of the revelations

Defining surveillance as “any systematic and routine attention to personal details, whether specific or aggregate, for a defined purpose” (p. 13), David Lyon addresses

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the impact of the revelations through 5 well-interrelated chapters (1- Snowden Storm; 2- World Watching; 3- Menacing Metadata; 4- Precarious Metadata; 5- Framing Futures). These chapters clearly address the implementation of the algorithmic metadata surveillance by the NSA and its British counterpart GCHQ (Government Communications Head Quarters), the voluntary or involuntary contribution of private telecom companies such as the AT&T, and the development of a kind of a continuous ‘soft surveillance’ power enhanced by the advances in the field of big data. Emphasising the context of the computational turn where social engineering is conducted through databases and dataveillance, the book takes privacy as the central concept that explains what is wrong with mass surveillance. Lyon forcefully demonstrates why privacy matters taking examples from citizens’ lives such as the American Muslim citizen Faisal Gill whose emails have been covertly monitored by the FBI and the NSA because of religious identity.

To what extent these revelations seem original and relevant? Lyon recognises that some former NSA employees and journalists already attempted to raise NSA’s surveillance activities before Snowden, but nobody made it so effectively and thoroughly. Indeed, we can recall the former NSA employee and the New York lawyer James Bamford’s book-length investigative publications such as The Puzzle Place (1982), Body of Secrets (2002) and The Shadow Factor (2008) and the former NSA intelligence programme inventor William Biney’s criticism of the systematisation of the surveillance system. Surveillance scholars were also aware of the investigative journalists such as the Scottish Duncan Campbell and the Australian Nicky Hager’s discovery of the ECHELON signals intelligence network established by the NSA and operated in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Starting each chapter with a quote from Snowden’s different interventions, the book shows that he not only described a system but also addressed their impact on our ability to live freely in democratic societies. Lyon clearly shows that such an endeavour reflects Snowden’s willingness to link technical capabilities with ethical, political and democratic issues giving them a wider political meaning than just disclosing them to experts.

So, what kind of whistleblower is Snowden? Although not delving into a specific analysis of whistleblowing and its history, Lyon puts the emphasis on three significant points about how to characterise Snowden. First, he “chooses not to speak out as a whistleblower and allows the news to be picked up by the media. Instead, he contacted the filmmaker Laura Poitras and the investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald, and invited them to participate in the process. Journalists were thus involved in and in a sense implicated in the revelations” (p.106). Second, as above mentioned, he did not limit himself to the mere disclosure of the system, but his stance is to give society a chance to determine if it wants to continue with it or to change it. Third, anticipating the severity of the potential retaliation from the US government, he self-exiled to Hong Kong first and later to Moscow from where, despite the limited conditions, he continues to stress the ethical, political and societal implications of his revelations.

Despite asserting, “no further than Edward Snowden, aged just 29, who rocked the world” (p. viii), Lyon does not develop further the appropriate descriptor for Snowden. It is only later, after the publication of the book, during a Paris conference

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in October 2015 that he came across the concept of *parrhresia* that could better fit to Snowden’s case.

Used in the Ancient Greece, the notion of *parrhresia* means not only freedom of speech (to speak like everybody and by extension to speak freely), but also to speak truthfully. The concept has been clarified and studied by Foucault in his last lecture at the Collège de France where he emphasised the obligation to speak the truth for the common good, even at the expense of personal life. As such, the parrhesiatic action has definitely political and ethical impacts. So, what is it in contemporary societies where information and communication technologies (ICTs) allow also numerous modalities of contest and resistance? The question deserves to be further discussed in light of the emergence of figures such as Julian Assange the founder of WikiLeaks, Chelsea Manning, the US army soldier stationed in Iraq who disclosed in 2010 to WikiLeaks sensitive military and diplomatic documents, and Edward Snowden, in a little lapse of time.

*After Snowden, is there room for some hope?*

The most challenging part of the book is undoubtedly the last chapter (Framing Futures) where Lyon talks about politics of hope. However, readers should not place their expectations on the presentation of concrete policy changes to be taken in the aftermath of the revelations. Except a reference to the report commissioned by President Obama to the President’s Review Group on Intelligence and Communication Technologies, the book does not delve into the presentation of what has been done even timidly on the policy and legislative levels, and what needs to be done. Some may criticise Lyon for not looking outside of Canada and the US that he knows well and not including initiatives taken elsewhere such as the European Parliament’s critical stances as well as its legislative and policy work. Although no clear-cut action has been taken so far both at the EU and the Member States level, the ready-to-be adopted EU data protection reform package could nevertheless be examined in light of the impact of Snowden’s revelations.

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5 “Debate Surveillance after Snowden”, October 27, 2015 at Sciences Po-CERI, organised by Didier Bigo and the research network on “Intelligence, Espionage, Surveillance and Obedience”. David Lyon acknowledged the impact of this conference on his conception of whistleblowing in his keynote at the interdisciplinary three-day symposium “Images of Surveillance: The Politics, Economics and Aesthetics of Surveillance Societies” at the Goethe-Institute, New York on December 4th, 2015.


Instead, Lyon’s objective is to assess in a normative sense that there is still space for freedom and hope. This approach is also prompted by Snowden who in different speeches delivered from his exile invites citizens to imagine a more democratic and less surveillant society. Following a conversation with one of the prominent philosophers of our times, Zygmunt Bauman, where this latter asserts, “It is intrinsically impossible to live with the belief that all is lost”\(^\text{10}\), Lyon pleads strongly for abandoning the Orwellian-types of dystopia in which we have been caught so far. Fortunately, humans have this tremendous capacity to develop the hope in the future. How then can we envision the future after Snowden? Lyon is realistic. He limits the contours of utopia by saying that it is not fantasy or pure fiction. He wants to call for a realistic imaginary where the digital world is not suppressed but a society in which rights are respected and democratic participation is realised. Hence, this chapter raises the issue about how to think through the questions raised by Snowden and overcome their effect in a more democratic society. However, it does not propose suggestions on how to approach it. We can assume that this will be the topic of a next book. Let us then wait and see. David Lyon is a prolific author. It is very likely that he will up the ante, elevate this discussion further and that we will have a new release soon.