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## 21. SOUL TRAIN

### The New Surveillance in Popular Music\*

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*Videos are watching me  
But dat is not stopping me  
Let dem cum wid dem authority  
An dem science and technology  
But Dem can't get de Reggae out me head.  
—Zepaniah*

*Under the spreading chestnut tree  
I sold you and you sold me:  
There lie they, and here lie we  
Under the spreading chestnut tree  
—The Chestnut Tree, 1984*

Most analysis of information technology uses printed words and numbers, and considers structures and behavior. As important as historical, social, philosophical, legal, and policy analyses are, they are insufficient for broad understanding. We also need cultural analysis to understand how surveillance is experienced.

Contemporary surveillance methods and popular culture are both distinctive kinds of *soul training*. The title of this chapter plays off of Michel Foucault's study of modern means of training the person to be compliant.<sup>1</sup> It also reflects popular rhythm and blues and disco musical culture. "Soul Train" was a 1970s song title and a popular TV musical program. In connecting these two markedly disparate uses of the term, I call attention to the close links between surveillance and culture, and control and entertainment.

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\* This article draws from *Windows into the Soul: Surveillance and Society in an Age of High Technology*, University of Chicago Press, forthcoming, and related materials at [garymarx.net](http://garymarx.net).

1. M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977).

In considering soul training, Foucault was primarily discussing the emerging modern organizational forms of control in the prison, workplace, and school. Popular culture as entertainment and recreation might seem very far from the sober, hard worlds of surveillance and control.<sup>2</sup> However, music along with television, film, literature, and advertisements can also serve as a kind of soul training along with the more familiar formal organizational structures.<sup>3</sup> Such cultural forms may also serve to undermine surveillance. Media depictions, humor, and visual art may do the same.

This chapter looks at surveillance in popular music over the last fifty years. In contrast to most studies of music lyrics, in which the focus is on a genre such

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2. Here we see the blurring and/or merging of entertainment and surveillance. Note video games with implicit morality tales. Or consider the camera that delivers crime and social control events to the six o'clock news. The video can serve as a means of both surveillance and communication (most frequently sequentially, but sometimes simultaneously, as with "live" helicopter video images of car chases. News footage also figures prominently in many music videos.

However, these are not the same as Orwell's "telescreen," which simultaneously brought the "news" and also watched. Yet over time the difference for some forms is one of degree (note cable TV systems that monitor viewer behavior and can collect other data from sensors in the home, including visual images for security purposes). Surveillance data feed the mass media's appetite. This in turn can reinforce cultural beliefs about crime and control and strengthen public support for surveillance as a result of the need demonstrated by the "news" (T. Mathiesen, "The Viewer Society," *Theoretical Criminology* 1 (1996): 215–234; D. Altheide, *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002); A. Doyle, *Arresting Images* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003)). Mass media communication about surveillance may serve to "normalize" behavior through morality tales of what happens to those caught by panoptic mechanisms. Yet when documenting abuses, it can also serve to arouse public indignation, and fear of exposure may modulate practices. Beyond overlapping functions we can note parallels in the ease of mass application of both. Rule notes twentieth-century developments permitting both mass surveillance and mass communication (J. Rule, "1984—The Ingredients of Totalitarianism," in I. Howe (ed.), *1984: Totalitarianism in Our Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

These are increasingly joined by precisely targeted forms that may, ironically, increase choice as well as the ability to be controlled.

As Leman-Langlois argues, the discourse of surveillance can also be changed by technology beyond literal impacts. See S. Leyman-Langlois, "The Myopic Panopticon: The Social Consequences of Policing through the Lens," *Policing and Society* 13 (2002): 43–58.

3. Marx suggests a number of categories for classifying aspects of surveillance (e.g., distinguishing between subjects and agents (and among the latter) organizations and individuals, conditions of use, kinds of technology, and goals; see G. Marx, "Surveillance and Society," *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* Vol. II (California: Sage Publications, 2004). Two goals reflected in other music not considered here that are treated in the forthcoming book involve surveillance as protection (as with a loving God or partner to look after the subject) and the search for true love. (New York: Vintage, 1977)

as country and western, teen pop, or rap,<sup>4</sup> my emphasis is on a particular kind of lyric expressed across a variety of genres. I view the musical themes as a window into knowledge about surveillance and society.

In identifying songs, I drew on my own observations and others' suggestions and searched the Internet for songs with words such as "surveillance," "watching," "police," "FBI," "DEA," "video," "spying," "big brother," and "privacy." In this chapter, I will discuss three major themes in the music: warnings from a male singer watching a love object, accounts of those who are watched, and protests against surveillance. I will conclude by considering some implications. Let us first consider songs by agents of surveillance applying it for personal ends.

### I. SUSPICION-DRIVEN SURVEILLANCE

The theme of suspicion-driven surveillance is reflected in early rhythm and blues and rock and roll music. It involves boasting about the lover's super-surveillance powers to discover unfaithfulness. Such songs contain an implicit threat and may be intended to deter. This is an individual form rather than a government or private sector organizational form.

In 1956, in "Slippin' and Slidin'," Little Richard has been "peepin' and hidin'" to discover his baby's jive, and as a result he "won't be your fool no more." Bobby Vee sings that "the night has a thousand eyes" and that these eyes will see "if you aren't true to me." If he gets "put down for another" or told lies, he warns, "I'll know, believe me, I'll know." The Who more directly imply the possession of extrasensory powers when they sing, "There's magic in my eyes." The singer knows he has been deceived because he sings, "I can see for miles and miles and miles and miles and miles." Hall and Oates sing about the inability to escape my "Private Eyes," which, while "looking for lies," are "watching you. They see your every move." The Doors sing about "a spy in the house of love" who "can see you and what you do" and who knows your dreams and fears, and "everywhere you go, everyone you know."

The Alan Parsons Project makes direct use of technology to discover lies and to tell the deceiving lover to "find another fool" because "I am the eye in the sky looking at you I can read your mind."

The classic song of this type is "Every Breath You Take," written by Sting, who reports that it is about "the obsessiveness of ex-lovers, their maniacal possessiveness"—written after a divorce. While Sting reports that he reads Arthur Koestler, who wrote about the dangers of totalitarianism,<sup>5</sup> he says his song is personal, not political. The female is warned that her faked smiles,

4. P. Vannini and S. Myers, "Crazy about You: Reflections on the Meanings of Contemporary Teen Pop Music," *Electronic Journal of Sociology* 6, no. 2 (2002), [www.sociology.org/content/vol006.002/](http://www.sociology.org/content/vol006.002/).

5. A. Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Bantam, 1984).

and broken bonds and vows, will be observed by the singer. The song is about surveillance, ownership, and jealousy.<sup>6</sup>

Although the song does not mention technological supports for the omnipresent and omnipotent surveillance it promises, it is easy to connect it with contemporary tools. One can hear the song to suggest an encyclopedic list of the means that were coming into wider use in the 1980s:

Every breath you take [breath analyzer]  
 Every move you make [motion detector]  
 Every bond you break [polygraph]  
 Every step you take [electronic monitoring]  
 Every single day [continuous monitoring]  
 Every word you say [bugs, wiretaps, mikes]  
 Every night you stay [light amplifier]  
 Every vow you break [voice stress analysis]  
 Every smile you fake [brain wave analysis]  
 Every claim you stake [computer matching]  
 I'll be watching you [video]

Songs about watching by individuals contrast with those about the watching of organizations. In Tom Paxton's haunting and threatening "Mr. Blue" we hear from the all-knowing "we":

Good morning Mister Blue, we've got our eyes on you. The evidence is clear,  
 that you've been scheming. You like to steal away; and while away the day.  
 You like to spend an hour dreaming. What will it take, to whip you into line?  
 A broken heart? A broken head? It can be arranged.

The song "The Chestnut Tree," at the start of this chapter, begins on a discordant note on the telescreen in the 1984 version of the film *1984* as Julia and Winston come to betray each other.

Let us next turn to the point of view of surveillance subjects. I will first discuss songs that express resignation, and then those of a protest nature.

## II. SUBJECT CHRONICLES: THERE IS NO ESCAPE

In contrast to the songs in which surveillance agents brag of their prowess and process, and even threaten, are chronicles of organizational surveillance that subjects experience. There is often resignation and an implied moral directive here. The singers, while hardly apostles of law and order and maximum security, conclude that resistance is likely to be futile and that the best response is to follow the rules.

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6. *Rolling Stone Magazine*, March 1, 1984.

In “I Fought the Law” Sonny Curtis of the Crickets sings

Breakin’ rocks in the hot sun  
I fought the law and the law won

Or consider the instructions of Ice-T in “Pain”:

Jail cells know me too damn well  
Seems like I’ve built on earth my own personal hell  
No matter how high I climbed, somehow I always fell  
I guess a lot of players got this story to tell  
. . . Custody haunts my dreams, nightmares of capture  
Paranoid of surveillance, phobia of cameras  
My banks bigger, but so are my fears  
. . . No matter who you trust, you simply cannot win  
It’s always fun in the beginning  
But it’s pain in the end

Nelly, in “Utha Side,” similarly tells a dealer in trouble:

I heard your clientele is doin well  
I see you boomin out the S-T-L . . .  
Now the feds knocking at your door, you took the bait  
They got taps on your mobile phone  
They do surveillance all around your home  
Now ya pawnin’ everything ya own  
Calling on your partners for a loan  
No more slip and sliding on the chrome  
Your good days have come and gone  
I tried to tell you

Judas Priest, in “Electric Eye,” sings of the awesome power of the technology, from which “There is no true escape”: “There’s nothing you can do about it.” It is unlikely that these heavy metal pioneers are advocates of such surveillance, but the satire—if that it is—is all too muted.

Ja Rule in “Watching Me” asks, “Are ya watching me? They be watching, niggas they be watching, keep watching. . . And hustlers ya’ll keep slanging. We stuck in the game wit not a lot to gain but everything to lose.”

The pessimistic note of resignation of the subjects in these songs contrasts with a more optimistic tone of songs more clearly of a protest nature, which are considered next.

### III. WARNINGS ABOUT AND RESISTANCE TO SURVEILLANCE

Protest is a rich—often veiled—theme in popular culture. The field hollers and shouts of slaves contained encoded messages of resistance, and their connotations

of biblical words in hymns have often been noted. The labor songs of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger and groups such as The Almanac Singers and the Weavers were more direct.

Much surveillance involves inequalities in power and can serve to sustain and strengthen a contested status quo. In broad outline, as Ray Charles sang, “those that get are those that got.” Yet in societies with civil liberties and a market economy, there are forms of resistance and unintended consequences. The situation is more complicated than a reductionist, zero-sum power perspective suggests. Music can serve as a form of cultural neutralization in offering ideas that rationalize and call forth resistance.<sup>7</sup> These are aided by the ambiguity of language.

Such music can inspire and sustain commitment. Songs such as “We Shall Overcome” and “I Shall Not Be Moved,” and more recent songs, such as “Oh Freedom” and “Blowin’ in the Wind” were vital to the civil rights movement.

In the protest songs considered next, the voice is not that of the surveillance agent claiming omnipotence, making veiled threats or offering a morality tale. Rather, we hear from the individual subject of surveillance, or a third party telling about it. A central theme is, “They are watching us and it’s wrong.” It can be wrong for a variety of reasons.

The songs are concerned with threats to liberty, racism, injustice (especially with respect to false accusations and lack of due process), inequality, and the chilling effects of being spied upon and the loss of privacy.

Judas Priest in “Electric Eye” offers an analytic summary of key aspects of the new surveillance involving omnipresence, omnipotence, accuracy, invisibility, and uninformed and involuntary subjects. Surveillance watches “all the time,” probing “everything you do” and “all your secret moves,” while offering “pictures that can prove.” The song links knowledge with power: “I feed upon your every thought and so my power grows.” People think they have private lives, but they should “think nothing of the kind.”

Jill Scott in “Watching Me” offers varied examples that suggest the comprehensiveness of contemporary observation:

Satellites over my head  
 Transmitters in my dollars  
 Hawking, watching, scoping, jocking  
 Scrutinizing me  
 Checking to see what I’m doing

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7. The idea of neutralization was first applied to culture by Sykes and Matza as they asked how cultural messages helped individuals rationalize rule breaking; see G. Sykes and D. Matza, “Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency,” *American Sociological Review* 22 (1957): 664–670. Music can be an important source for such counter-messages. Eleven behavioral techniques of neutralization used to thwart the collection of personal information are identified in G. T. Marx, “A Tack in the Shoe: Neutralizing and Resisting the New Surveillance,” *Journal of Social Issues* 59, no. 1 (2003): 369–390.

Where I be  
 Who I see  
 How and where and with whom I make my money  
 What is this??  
 . . . Se-cur-i-ty  
 Video cameras locked on me  
 In every dressing room  
 On every floor  
 In every store  
 . . . Direct TV  
 Am I watchin' it or is it watchin' me

Siouxsie and the Banshees, in "Monitor," sing of a "monitor outside for the people inside" that offers both a "prevention of crime, and a passing of time."

The duality of surveillance as control and entertainment is reminiscent of Orwell's 1984, in which a video device linked mass surveillance with mass communication. Having no control over being seen or over what they see, individuals are doubly controlled.

Narcissism, exhibitionism, and voyeurism can be joined with video technology. Fish, in "The Voyeur," sings of "private lives up for auction," information overload, and living vicariously through the mass media. As in Peter Sellers, role in the film *Being There*, the individual's persona is formed by reflecting back what is seen on television. Negative reactions to video invasions of personal space are very much tempered by the allure of being seen. The narrator identifies with media stars and fantasizes that he is also a celebrity. Rather than privacy lost, here we have "hey ma look at me."

I like to watch as my face is reflected in blank TV screens  
 The programmes are over, I like to pretend that that's  
 Me up there making headlines, camera close-ups  
 Catching my right side I don't care if it's only a moment  
 As long as it's peaktime, just as long as all of  
 My friends and family see me, the world  
 Will know my name—come on down.

Yet concerns over lost privacy are also common. In "Fingerprint File," the Rolling Stones complain about "feeling followed, feeling tagged," and "it gets me down"; also, in a rare direct attack, "There's some little jerk in the F.B.I. a' keepin' paper on me ten feet high." Concern is expressed over "listening to me on your satellite," informers who will sell out and testify, and "electric eyes." Listeners are urged to be suspicious, lie low, and watch out. The song ends in a whisper: "These days it's all secrecy, no privacy."<sup>8</sup>

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8. Here we see a common confusion. These are not necessarily opposed. Secrecy can be involved in protecting privacy when the very existence of a type of information is not

Rockwell feels “like somebody’s watching me and I have no privacy.” “Somebody’s Watching Me” begins with a synthesized voice asking, “Who’s watching me?” The narrator is just an average man who works “from nine to five,” and all he wants “is to be left alone in my average home.” The listener is led to ask, “Why would anyone want to monitor him?” Ordinary people there is no reason to suspect become targets, not simply those who “deserve” to be surveilled. Is this an out-of-control system, incompetence, or a logic of random application to create deterrence through uncertainty?

Anyone can be watched or a watcher. He asks if the watchers are neighbors, the mailman, or the IRS. These realistic questions give rise to paranoia. He wonders if the persons on TV can see him, and he is afraid to wash his hair—“cause I might open my eyes and find someone standing there.”

Nor does Sy Kahn in “Who’s Watching the Man” understand why he is a target, because he pays taxes and doesn’t vote or criticize. He reports a truck with a telephone company sign next to his house, which has no phone, and new wires on his roof. He wonders about three men in his barn “trying to read my electric meter through a telescope” and about someone living in his TV set. Kahn poses a classic endless regress issue for social control theory in asking, “Who is watching the man who’s watching the man who’s watching me?”

In the songs discussed above, subjects are watched for no reason. In other songs there is a reason, but it is viewed as illegitimate. Surveillance is based only on general stereotypic characteristics associated with lower status. Bob Dylan’s “Subterranean Homesick Blues” offers an early example of categorical searching based on age profiling. Youth are watched, regardless of whether they have actually done anything wrong. Given covert surveillance involving a “man in a trench coat,” microphones planted in the bed, and telephone taps, a warning is offered: “look out kid, no matter what you did.” To avoid surveillance, they are told not to wear sandals and to try to be a success.

Rather than discriminatory targeting, the protest may involve the goal. “Spy in the Cab” by Bauhaus protests meters recording the driving behavior of truckers. “Hidden in the dashboard the unseen mechanized eye” with “a set function to pry,” brings a “coldly observing” twenty-four-hour “unblinking watch.”

In “The Smoke Police” The Intended sing

Undercover smoke police  
sulk in holes and corners

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known or the key to accessing information is secret (e.g., a password). Yet the secrecy of covert surveillance can also be a means of invading privacy. Whether something is secret refers to the empirical status of information—whether it is known or not known. As such it is adjectival in a way that private is not. That is, information can be private in the sense of being normatively subject to the control of the person to whom it refers. If the person chooses to release it or if it is discovered, it ceases to be secret, even though it retains its normative status of being private information.

they do not warn you openly  
 like a cop in uniform does . . .  
 Who knows if they will ask to smoke,  
 thus hoping to entrap you?

Plainclothes enforcement is seen as sneaky. There is no warning and there is the danger of entrapment. In addition, the song reflects knowledge of the organizational process of goal displacement (e.g., as seen in parking enforcement in which a strong latent goal is revenue) when it asks, “will they make a busybody cause into a city cash cow?”

Concern over social control is a major theme in rap songs. Yet, as with graffiti wall art, the emphasis is most likely to be on direct coercion, harassment, and arrest at the hands of uniformed patrol officers, rather than with the more subtle forms of surveillance. N.W.A. in “Fuck Tha Police” calls attention to age and style:

Fuckin with me cuz I’m a teenager  
 With a little bit of gold and a pager  
 Searchin’ my car, lookin’ for the product  
 Thinkin every nigga is sellin narcotics . . .

For Anti-Flag in “Police Story” it is race and age:

Patrol man cruising in his car at night  
 Just looking for some homeys he can rough up in a fight  
 Pulled over 3 kids in a total rage . . .  
 The cops they did it just cause those kids color and their age

Trick Daddy in “Watch the Police” adds targeting by dress style and location to age and race. Unlike some rap songs where the emphasis is on not getting caught for drug dealing and related activities, here it is on not being framed.

Watch the police when I’m rolling through the projects  
 My pants sag so I’m labeled as a suspect  
 Who be the boys in blue, the authority  
 To arrest me cause I live in a minority . . .  
 Watch the police  
 In my hood, they’ll pull you over  
 And put dope on you and bring you to jail

In “The Men in Blue” Prince Paul talks of corrupt police, informing, and faked evidence:

New York’s largest crew, it’s the Men in Blue  
 we stick together like glue and make lies come true . . .  
 if we make this connection,  
 I’ll give you protection . . .  
 ‘cause I plant what I want on any crime scene  
 I keep my hands clean, you know what I mean

In the early rock and roll song “Framed,” the Robbins offer a first-person account of victimization by an informer rather than the police. The lead singer is put in a police lineup and realizes he is a victim of “someone’s evil plan. When a stool pigeon walked in and said, ‘That’s the man.’” In the political and commercial climate of the 1950s, it was easier to talk of betrayal by an informer than by police.

Other songs go beyond bringing the news about potential abuses and urge active resistance. As Rakaa Iriscience bluntly puts it:

No questions  
 I pledge resistance to the grass  
 That hides the snakes of America  
 so they watch it, now I walk with caution . . .  
 Under heavy surveillance  
 They might call you a traitor if you want something greater  
 In “Del’s Nightmare,” Del the Funky Homosapien observes,  
 . . . They give us a white Jesus to appease us.  
 We talk among ourselves and hope nobody sees us . . .  
 The slave master watching over you,  
 But ain’t nothing gonna stop me and my crew!

Tupac Shakur in “All Eyez on Me” will do what he desires in spite of being scoped:

. . . Live my life as a Boss playa (I know y’all watching)  
 (I know y’all got me in the scopes)  
 Live my life as a Thug nigga  
 Until the day I die

Black Bomb, in “Police Stopped da way,” notes that social control exists for the body and the mind, and it will be resisted:

Police for everything . . .  
 Police for da crimes . . .  
 Police for da mind  
 Stop da way  
 When you think I’ll surrender  
 You get it wrong  
 I will not stay in you shit  
 When you think you’ll get my mind  
 You get it wrong  
 I prefer to start a fight  
 You get it wrong

Jill Scott in “Watching Me” illustrates the neutralization moves of refusal and blocking in singing:

Excuse me miss  
 May i have your phone number and your social security?  
 Who me?  
 When all i came to do is buy my double or triple a batteries  
 Please  
 I decline!!!  
 . . . I'm gonna build me a lead house  
 Keep them satellites out

With respect to drug testing, Mojo Nixon applies Nancy Reagan's "Just say no" to his defiant "I Ain't Gonna Piss in No Jar" (1987). He can be fired from his job, but something more important can't be robbed: "my freedom and my liberty." He urges everybody to go to Washington. If "they want our piss we ought to give it to 'em. Yeah, surround the White House with a urinary moat."

Eric Carmen in "Lost in the Shuffle" is reminiscent of philosopher Herbert Marcuse's critique of what is seen as the illusion of freedom in ostensibly democratic countries.<sup>9</sup>

You know you pay your taxes and you work all day  
 But you better watch out for the CIA  
 'Cause they're putting together a dossier on you  
 And now I'm glad I'm livin' in the land of the free  
 Where I can speak my mind if I don't agree  
 But it seems like it really doesn't matter  
 What I say or do  
 'Cause I feel I'm lost in the shuffle

Anti-Flag, in "Police State in the USA," also suggests that things are not as they seem. Anti-Flag responded to the fall of communism by observing similarities between elite control in the East and the West:

Politicians from the West claim the police state's dead  
 But what of the police state in the West? . . .  
 The government controls everything you do  
 With police and fed watching over you . . .  
 It's a big brother state it's the same as the East  
 The cops protect the rich and corporate elite  
 Police State in the U.S.A.

In "Privacy Invasion," Exploited draws a parallel between physical and mental invasion and pessimistically suggests it's too late.

You're led to think we're free, a democratic race  
 Told of equal rights well that's just not the case . . .  
 Too late to shut your curtains they've caught you unaware

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9. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

They're not at your window man, they're sitting in your chair  
A privacy invasion of the head

In an uncommon juxtaposition, Dead Prez expresses the traditional bourgeois concern with privacy, as well as noting the role of surveillance in sustaining inequality. In "Police State" we hear

FBI spying on us through the radio antennas  
And them hidden cameras in the streetlight watching society  
With no respect for the people's right to privacy  
I'll take a slug for the cause like Huey P . . .  
And the jobs don't ever pay enough  
So the rent always be late.  
Can you relate?  
We living in a police state

In The Broadways' "Police Song" we see the counterintuitive suggestion that social control may threaten rather than protect public safety, and attention is called to the parallels between control in prison and in society more broadly:

. . . Tell me is this security, do we need protection from the police?  
we need to reassess the power vested in authority  
and social control threatens public safety do you feel safe?  
. . . I had a dream that my whole town had turned into a prison  
a cop on every corner but I don't feel too safe  
feels like I'm in jail

Similarly, in "Bang Bang" Young Buck asks, "Why you mad at me? The Government's the Drug Dealers."

Jill Scott in "Watching Me" her watching song suggests that surveillance is misplaced:

You busy watching me, watching me  
That you're blind baby  
You neglect to see  
The drugs coming into my community  
Weapons in my community  
Dirty cops in my community  
And you keep saying that I'm free

A few satirical songs make a joke of surveillance, perhaps de-clawing it for some listeners in the process. In "Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues," Bob Dylan parodies the surveillant's search for communist conspiracies. The problem is not surveillance, but the supposed cleverness of the communists in evading detection. This cleverness necessitates extreme investigative means. In a social process endemic to the truly paranoid, the failure of strong measures to find subversives proves the need for even stronger measures. Communists are looked

for “under my bed,” “in the sink and underneath the chair,” “up my chimney hole” even “deep down inside my toilet bowl,” “in my TV set,” “the library,” and among “all the people that I knowed.”

The 1985 film *Spies Like Us* is based on incompetent CIA aspirants who get caught cheating on the entrance exam.<sup>10</sup> They are then hired to be unknowingly used as bait against the Russians. In the film’s theme song, Paul McCartney sings,

Hey don’t feel afraid  
Of an undercover aid  
There’s no need to fuss  
There ain’t nobody that spies like us

#### IV. SOME IMPLICATIONS

*We didn’t have any answers, but at least we brought up the questions.*  
—David Crosby of Crosby, Stills and Nash

In the first instance, these songs literally or symbolically speak for themselves. As with a good meal, the value comes from the experience. Consuming is an end in itself. In the case of music, for example, maternal and religious surveillance songs such as “Lullaby and Good Night” can be uplifting and transcendent, and the evocative and clever poetry of love, or protest lyrics, are just there. Experiencing them communicates on a level beyond academic analysis. In that sense questions about representative samples, hypotheses, and social theory are beside the point.

The material might even be profaned by shining a too bright and probing scholarly beam on it. Yet it has meaning beyond the individual consumer. However, rather than deductively straining these materials through varieties of available explanatory theory, I will proceed inductively and indicate some implications for understanding surveillance and society.

Social scientists generally draw too rigid a line between their data and the offerings of the artist. Artistic creations can significantly inform us about surveillance and society. They can be approached from the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge, and we can ask about the message conveyed, how this has changed, and how it correlates with the characteristics of the context, the creator, and the audience. Here art is treated as a dependent variable. But the materials

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10. Consider also the theme music associated with the Pink Panther series and the misnamed Maxwell Smart in the 1960s sitcom *Get Smart*. As a bumbling secret agent working for CONTROL, Smart demonstrated a profound ineptitude. The sole of his shoe was a telephone that frequently dialed the wrong number, and his jet shoes propelled him into the roof.

can also inform us about broader societal issues, and we can speculate on their social impact as independent variables.

Artistic statements, unlike scientific statements, do not have to be defended verbally. But the social scientist can ask about their social antecedents and impacts. Do they move the individual? Do they convey the experience of being watched or of being a watcher? Do they create indignation or a desire for the product? Do they make the invisible visible?

The treatment of surveillance in popular culture—whether music, television, cinema, cartoons, literature, or advertisements—brings the news. These cultural forms may educate by offering descriptions and moral messages. They inform the audience about what surveillance can do, or is presumed to be able to do. Like some science fiction, they may offer a view of what could, or may, happen. Because they are not bound by specific empirical cases, such cultural forms can bring us the big picture and push conventional boundaries of thought and image.

Life may imitate art, as things based on the imagination of the artist later come to exist. An early example is the 1936 film *Modern Times*, in which Charlie Chaplin's private reverie, smoking a cigarette in the bathroom at work, is shattered by the sudden appearance of his boss on a wall-sized video screen gruffly saying, "Hey, quit stalling and get back to work." The boss has a two-way video camera. H. G. Wells, Dick Tracy, Spider-Man, Wonder Woman, James Bond, and *Star Trek* are other familiar examples.<sup>11</sup> Popular culture treatments of surveillance can help us "see" and understand (whether emotionally or cognitively) new developments in surveillance. Visual and auditory artistic expressions offer an alternative way of knowing relative to words—whether fiction or nonfiction. For example, we can more readily understand electronic data and microscopic DNA sequences when they are transformed into images through artistic representations. The blurry line between the human and the nonhuman—robots, cyborgs, implants—is more easily grasped when we see the results through artists' imaginary creations, or hear an electronically generated voice or weird sounds.

Songs such as "Watching Me" by Jill Scott or Judas Priest's "Electronic Eye," in bringing together so many different aspects, can help us grasp the scale, totality, comprehensiveness, and simultaneity of the new forms of surveillance across multiple dimensions. We can more easily "see" or better comprehend this in our "mind's eye." The above songs are the equivalent of a *New Yorker* cartoon by Fradon (June 29, 1987), "Joe's Drive-Thru Testing Center," which offers motorists tests for emissions, drugs, intelligence, cholesterol, blood pressure, and the polygraph. Note also the equivalence between the human and the machine on the assembly line Charlie Chaplin created in *Modern Times*.

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11. The originator of Wonder Woman went on to help develop the polygraph and a Spider-Man comic inspired a New Mexico judge to implement the first judicial use of electronic location monitoring equipment.

The meaning of authoritarianism, repression, domination, intolerance, and spying is likely to be different when experienced vicariously through seeing and hearing, as against reading and quantifying. The traditional role of the artist, in making the unseen visible (or what might be possible, imaginable), can be observed in some songs.

Art can educate in a distinctive and perhaps more profound sense than can the traditional written text. For example, a popular protest song that periodically enters consciousness will likely have a much wider, more enduring, and in some ways different, impact than an op-ed article or pamphlet on the same topic. Labor organizer and singer Joe Hill reportedly observed that a pamphlet, no matter how good, is read only once. A melody, rhyme, or rhythm may insinuate itself into consciousness (although the extent to which this comes with comprehension of the words is an open question).

Attention to the kinds of issues the music of a given period treats can help chart change, just as the analysis of news stories or research articles on a topic can. Contrasting song titles and lyrics over time and across settings can reveal the archaeological stratum of a culture as it influences, and is influenced by, social and technical change. Consider how song's concerns have evolved as the technology has.

Bessie Smith in her 1923 rendition of "Ain't Nobody's Business" offered a libertarian plea consistent with the Warren and Brandeis (1890) emphasis on the importance of a right to privacy that involves being "let alone":

If I go to church on Sunday  
And I honkytonk all day Monday  
Ain't nobody's business if I do

In contrast, in the early 1950s, Hank Williams in "Mind Your Own Business" complained about misuse of the telephone and about other individuals, rather than governments or corporations, invading privacy:

Oh, the woman on our party line's the nosiest thing  
She picks up her receiver when she knows it's my ring  
Why don't you mind your own business

By the 1990s REM, in "Star 69," sings about the ability to trace the last telephone number dialed in what could almost be an ad for the phone company's call trace service:

You don't have to take the bar exam to see  
What you've done is ignoramus 103  
. . . I know you called, I know you called, . . .  
I know you hung up my line  
Star 69

Popular culture, of course, reflects developments in technology. Paul Simon in the 1960s said of "Mrs. Robinson," "We'd like to know a little bit about you

for our [presumably manual] files” and in “America” sang of the spy in a gabardine suit whose “bow tie is really a camera.” Several decades later he was writing about, “lasers in the jungle” and “staccato signals of constant information” in “The Boy in the Bubble.” Still later songs are concerned with DNA and microchips. Compare Tom Paxton’s singing in 1967 about abstract concerns over an Orwellian dystopia to his more concrete songs in the early 2000s about “Homeland Security.”

In a period of rapid technological change, the songs risk being quickly dated and having their shocking, humorous, or satirical punch undermined by reality (e.g., songs from the 1970s and 80s suggesting that the TV one watches could be looking back at the watcher). Now, with systems for monitoring television viewing, webcams, and video-phones, this is science, not fiction. While still far from being able to know “everything I am thinking,” technologies for reading emotions and assessing truth telling from facial expressions, eye movements, and brain wave patterns are under development. Consider also seat cushions that measure wiggling as signs of attentiveness.<sup>12</sup>

#### V. MUSIC CONTENT: SOCIALIZATION FOR CONFORMITY OR RESISTANCE?

Artistic materials can educate and politicize by telling us what is happening and by offering warnings. They can bring the news to broader audiences and may use potentially more powerful and poignant means of conveying their messages. Which news is brought and the impact of that news vary—by its own properties and the social order in question.

Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and Michel Foucault stress the links between power and culture. Dominant groups and individuals have disproportionate control over the means of culture creation and distribution and the ability to censor. Glorification, spin, obfuscation, and censorship are prominent features of the mainstream media. Escapist media may call attention away from social issues.

The religious and children’s songs and those of suspicious male lovers considered support the established order. These songs may inspire confidence and reassurance, although they may also intimidate.

The case for conformity and the status quo are clearly heard. Beyond the reassurance offered by protection, their message is, “you are not alone and you can’t get away with it.” As with the implicit morality of the fairy tale, the dominant figure knows what the child (or adult) is up (or down) to. Rewards and punishment will flow from that knowledge.

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12. Marx considers this along with a variety of emerging unobtrusive techniques designed to illicit personal information in controlled settings; see G. Marx, “Surveys and Surveillance” in F. Conrad and M. Schrober (eds.), *Envisioning the Survey of the Future* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

The music may accustom the child to being watched by benign-appearing (sometimes unseen), all-powerful authority figures. This encourages internalization of the dominant society's standards, just as playing with surveillance toys does.

Children may come to look at themselves through the eyes of presumably loving authority figures that have their best interests at heart. The message carries over into adulthood as they become watchful and watched citizens and workers.

Songs with humorous or satirical components may suggest that there is nothing to worry about. The entertainment quality may be beguiling. If surveillants are simply Keystone Cop bunglers, or have magical and exaggerated powers far beyond what the technology can presently do, then there is little to worry about (at least for now). Their incompetence makes them incapable of doing harm, in spite of their technology, or the technology is depicted so unrealistically as to be unworthy of concern. Such songs, along with those that simply fold the technology into other themes, hardly inspire vigilance.

Even some songs from the point of view of those watched, though not meant to be supportive or reassuring, may encourage conformity by suggesting that resistance is futile.

Yet, in spite of fashionable concerns about capitalist cultural hegemony, we can also note capitalist irony and complexity. There is much space for counter-messages even if they are in the minority, or not found equally in all communications media (the Internet, for example, opens up vast new opportunities for those previously unable to own a printing press or a radio or television station). Whatever the disproportionate influence of the dominants (sounds like the name of a rock group), this influence is far from total. Factors undercutting dominant voices can be identified.

A counterview offered by the pluralist perspective, while not claiming that all messages or images are equal, observes that a free market economy with civil liberties offers opportunities for opposing voices.

Dominant groups are hardly homogeneous in their interests and values. The interest of elites in ideological hegemony may conflict with the profit motive of some segments (consider record companies profiting from selling anti-establishment materials—whether Columbia Records' early endorsement of folk music or the current establishment marketing of rap music).<sup>13</sup>

Marked discrepancies between the claims of the dominant world view and the observable empirical world may generate critiques and alternative views. Sometimes reality wins.

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13. In a related example the advertisements that accompany protest (and other lyrics) on the Web must cause a smile in even the most jaded social critic. Note advertisements to "Send [name of singing group] polyphonic ringtone to your cell phone" or a moving target under the banner "SHOOT THE PAPARAZZI! Get Your FREE Sony PSP or Nintendo DS."

Ideological systems may contain contradictory and inconsistent elements. Belief systems are rarely clearly specified and their inherent ambiguity, particularly as applied to a given case, also supports alternative views.

There may be dialectical processes in which what is dominant calls forth its opposite, which in turn calls forth opposites in an enduring chain. Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" was written in response to "God Bless America." The hegemonic lesson in "I fought the law and the law won" was eventually matched by the Dead Kennedys, "Drinkin' beer in the hot sun I Fought the Law and I Won." In spite of a large number of antiwar songs in response to Viet Nam, the most popular record of the period was "The Ballad of the Green Berets." The abundance of 1960s and 1970s songs criticizing establishment ways, encouraging protest, and supporting countercultural life styles was met by tunes such as Merle Haggard's "An Okie from Muskogee"—"a place where even squares can have a ball . . . wave Old Glory down at the courthouse And white lightnin's still the biggest thrill of all . . . and the kids still respect the college dean."<sup>14</sup>

The idea of the all-knowing surveillant carries the threat to conform to the standards of the watcher, or face the consequences. Where there is a high degree of consensus about rules, this is not an issue, but with contested norms (e.g., involving work monitoring, drugs, life style, or the legitimacy of political and other elites) critical artistic expressions are likely. The protest songs reflect cultural neutralization and a kind of socialization for rejection. Bringing the news about the bad things "they" are doing may encourage questioning and call forth resistance.

The means of expressing a cultural message, as well as its content, varies depending on whose interests are served. Views in opposition to the mainstream are not found equally across types of expression, media, or performers. They seem more likely to appear in popular music, in cartoons, and on Web sites than in television, major studio films, or newspapers. The degree of corporate control and the resources needed for expression are likely relevant factors here. Performers from less privileged backgrounds appear more likely to offer criticism than those from dominant groups.

The music and other artistic expressions can be seen as part of a broader political struggle over the meaning of surveillance technology and how it ought to be judged. Is surveillance best seen as benevolent protection or malevolent domination, and when? This involves conflicts over symbols and words. Cultural

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14. There is a paper here waiting to be birthed exploring surveillance in country and western music. It appears to be more self-pitying, self-blaming, or blaming other individuals than focusing on a social order seen to be unjust. The watching often involves seeing another man taking the singer's woman, dog, or truck, or police showing up at the scene of some misfortune that has befallen the singer. State surveillance agencies may be mentioned as offering no help in finding one's true love. Conservative religious themes involving an observant, knowing, and justice-dispensing God and watching over a love object also seem more common.

communications and political interests are often linked, and the conflict over symbols and words is about something more.

Each side has its preferred outlets and audience. For governments, manufacturers, and surveillance vendors, communications tend to be directed to potential consumers rather than mass audiences. There are no songs praising political surveillance, drug testing, informing, video surveillance, and work monitoring (although in Japan company songs might encourage conformity with the latter two).<sup>15</sup> Apart from the religious songs appreciative of sacred and parental protective surveillance, there are almost no songs honoring government, corporate, and employer surveillance. Instead print media—speeches, professional publications, and advertisements—are the preferred outlets for views stressing surveillance as protection, order, and security.

Employers and merchants generally say much less about their means of control, although signs may inform subjects about video cameras, searches, and drug tests. This display is for legal reasons and for deterrence.

In contrast, artistic expression is a prime means for expressing criticism, and this tends to be addressed to a mass audience. The songs offer a mix of the real and fantasy and are more likely to exaggerate than to underestimate the power of current technology (although here, as we note, they may be correct in the longer run in anticipating what it will be possible to do).

Plato wanted poets to be controlled by the state—and with good reason, from an establishment perspective. Cartoonists, popular songwriters, and artists often demystify, expose, and delegitimize surveillance. As the related forms of rap and folk music suggest, they are more likely to express a bottom-up view in taking the role of the watched, controlled, or victimized.<sup>16</sup>

Reduced to essentials, the artists tend to view technology as the enemy or the problem—as something that profanes and from which we need to be protected—while control agents and those who provide surveillance resources view it as the solution, bringing salvation. The sides are mirror opposites. It is an interesting exercise to fill in the other half of the story. The various means of communication are as revealing for what they say as for what they do not say.

In generally bringing a single message, the songs are one-sided against the richness of social life. Perhaps the medium's form (limited time, short and repetitive phrases) does not lend itself as well to this richness as the written word does.

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15. But contrast the propaganda efforts on behalf of informing seen in the USSR. The young boy who informed on his father's bourgeois sentiments was made a national hero. Note also efforts to encourage the use of hotlines for reporting everything from littering to bad drivers to suspicious persons increasingly seen in the United States.

16. There is, of course, variation within musical genre; thus religious and country and western music are, in general, supportive, and folk, alternative, and rap music, more critical. There are many country and western songs about "big brother," but these are always about an elder sibling.

Just whose message gets across most successfully, under what conditions and to what audiences, is a topic for quantitative research and goes far beyond the literal words of a song.

Frank Zappa observed, “there are more love songs than anything else. If songs could make you do something we’d all love one another.” In considering the impact of a song’s words, we must be humble and tentative and not assume that they will be uniformly heard and understood, or lead to feelings or actions that might be desired by the artist or sponsors.

Competing messages can make individuals cynical and questioning. The flood of efforts to convince may make for suspicion. In this sense, rather than “seeing [or hearing] is believing,” it may mean not believing. In communicating the fragmented and movable quality of the “realities” we perceive, such cultural materials may lead to a healthy skepticism—or an immobilizing paranoia.

There is great variety among listeners, contexts, music, and time periods. Lyrics can be analyzed for their presumed intended meaning (whether by the creator, performer, or promoter), or with more confidence, their meaning to a given listener. A song’s origins, assumptions, and connections to other songs and things happening in the society can be analyzed. But in most cases it is a leap from there to broad generalizations about the meaning of a song to mass, highly variegated audiences. However, song content can be considered with respect to some broad factors involving the contemporary sociology of surveillance.

Lyrics and music need to be disentangled. A song’s effect may stem from more than the meaning of its words. The interaction of lyric, musical structure, and instrumentation on the listener is a topic for a musicologist, rather than an amateur listener. But here we can at least note that certain chords, rhythms, and instruments are heavy and somber and that others communicate lightness and seem upbeat. One need not know how to read musical notation to read music. Consider John Williams’s work for *Star Wars* and other films, or the warning viewers experience when a film’s music suggests doom and dread, or the uplift when the music suggests that victory is at hand. The harsh sounds accompanying some rap music may bolster images of violence and angst.

Yet words may say one thing even as the melody communicates something very different. We hear through our bodies as well as through our ears. Thus Little Richard in “Slippin’ and Slidin’” is behaving badly in spying on his girlfriend, but the song has a toe-tapping, upbeat rhythm that makes one want to dance and ignore the content. Compare the infectious rhythms of this song to the somber, threatening feeling generated by Queensryche’s equivalent voyeuristic song “Gonna Get Close to You” with different instrumentation and slow rhythm. The words to Sting’s “Every Breath You Take” suggest a massive invasion of privacy, yet the song is often heard as a love song because of its melody. Consider also songs in a different language whose words are not generally understood, but that become popular because of a familiar melody. Nor are words necessary—note Jimi Hendrix’s protest version of the national anthem

at Woodstock in 1968 in which the guitar simulates the sounds of guns, sirens, and screams.<sup>17</sup>

This article began by suggesting that contemporary surveillance methods and popular culture are interwoven and can both serve as kinds of soul training.

But the story is complex. There is no sole form or impact. Using both hard and soft means, powerful forces may seek to reduce the soul to an object like a shoe sole that is worn down and expendable. But other forces resist and push toward a more soulful view of humans.

Settings are diverse and fluid. Certainly there are unsavory elites using doubtful means for nefarious ends. But they are often opposed by those favoring more communal and democratic means and goals. And individuals act back, frequently in ways unanticipated by professional soul trainers. The latter themselves have imperfect tools and a variety of (often conflicting) goals. This makes for a messy and un-utopian (if not fully dystopian) society, but one that muddles through.

I have tried, as singer David Crosby suggests, to bring the questions and to suggest some possible answers. Of course, whether (and under what conditions) music and other aspects of popular culture serve as soul training for compliance or as soulful messages encouraging resistance and dignity is a topic for more systematic empirical research. Music can also be more systematically contrasted to other surveillance message bearers such as cinema, jokes, literature, art, and advertisements.

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17. Performers may also encourage social and political change through concerts that seek to raise funds and increase awareness in which most, or all, of the songs performed lack a protest message (e.g., Farm Aid).

