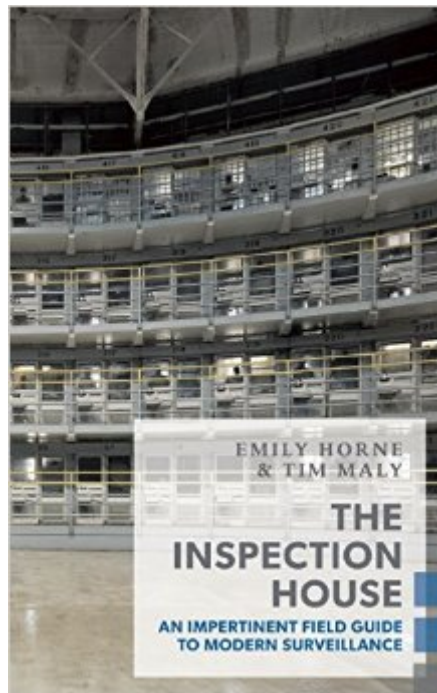# The Inspection House: An Impertinent Field Guide To Modern Surveillance (Exploded Views)

Synopsis

In 1787, British philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham conceived of the panopticon, a ring of cells observed by a central watchtower, as a labor-saving device for those in authority. While Bentham's design was ostensibly for a prison, he believed that any number of places that require supervisionâ "factories, poorhouses, hospitals, and schoolsâ "would benefit from such a design. The French philosopher Michel Foucault took Bentham at his word. In his groundbreaking 1975 study, Discipline and Punish, the panopticon became a metaphor to describe the creeping effects of personalized surveillance as a means for ever-finer mechanisms of control.Forty years later, the available tools of scrutiny, supervision, and discipline are far more capable and insidious than Foucault dreamed, and yet less effective than Bentham hoped. Shopping malls, container ports, terrorist holding cells, and social networks all bristle with cameras, sensors, and trackers. But, crucially, they are also rife with resistance and prime opportunities for revolution. The Inspection House is a tour through several of these sitesâ "from GuantÃ¡namo Bay to the Occupy Oakland camp and the authors' own mobile devicesâ "providing a stark, vivid portrait of our contemporary surveillance state and its opponents.Tim Maly is a regular contributor to Wired, the Atlantic, and Urban Omnivore and is a 2014 fellow at Harvard University's Metalab.Emily Horne is the designer and photographer of the webcomic A Softer World.

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Customer Reviews

The use of technology and infrastructure to monitor, modify, and control human behavior has never been a more important issue. Tim Maly and Emily Horne do well to place the modern surveillance state in a historical context, and to show that the state's goals haven't changed nearly so much as you might think in the last few centuries.This is a powerful, thought-provoking, book, and it's not unnecessarily padded with redundant efforts to make the same point over and over again. Well worth your time, whoever you are.

This is a short, interesting read. It helps contextualize our modern surveillance state by tracing its history, which, as with many things in this world, stretches back longer than you'd expect, and has more nuance than most people are willing to talk about. From the pie-in-the-sky idealism of 18th century architect Jeremy Bentham to the always-on monitoring of the smartphones we carry around every day, this is worth reading if you're even a little bit interested in surveillance (and you should be, because it's definitely interested in you).

Tech Book Club appreciated the book for unpacking what has become a conceptual shorthand for surveillanceâ "The Panopticonâ "and thinking more about it as a technical design and architectural project. We lamented the constraints of the shorter book formatâ "wanting to get into the juicier details, more depth into Tim and Emilyâ ™s position on the examples they explored, especially the iPhone. But we also enjoyed the brevity and levity of the essay form, including takes like â œBentham would have loved CCTVâ • and â œls it possible that the fine line between a brilliant designer and a crank might just be defined by adequate financing?â •Indeed, "Yesterday's ideologies are frozen into today's architectures."

I really enjoyed this, it had a lot to say about surveillance and society in general. The use of the panopticon and "Discipline and Punish" to orient the reader to the different modern systems was an interesting and insightful take. This isn't a book on practical surveillance (ie an actual field guide on surveillance), it is a well-written work on the levers (especially via surveillance) and resulting implications of various attempts to install order/discipline.

A very enjoyable update on the idea of the Panopticon as it's played out in real life. I bought it with no regrets, you should do the same.

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