

Book Review Symposium – Queer Geographies

Toby Beauchamp, *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and US Surveillance Practices*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-4780-0157-7 (paper); ISBN: 978-1-4780-0122-5 (cloth)

Going Stealth is an artful book by cultural studies scholar Toby Beauchamp that uses the politics of surveillance and transgender critique to look at personhood and citizenship (as raced, classed, able-bodied, etc.) in the United States post 9/11. While one might recognize the word “stealth” as a term that trans* people use to signify that they are concealing their gender transition, this book uses the term to consider how surveillance in the US forcibly outs trans* people as deviating from gender norms in a collection of ways. Appropriately, Beauchamp shares that they “have at times wryly remarked that this is a transgender studies book that is not terribly interested in transgender people: instead, it considers surveillance practices through a transgender critique to explore that category’s edges and its complicated interactions with racialization, citizenship, disability, and militarism” (p.22-23). Beauchamp’s book follows a recent trend in trans* studies to look at “transgender normativity” (Stryker and Aizura 2013), but broaden the scope of how gender non-conformity can convey citizenship along racial, geographic, and class lines. In the past, trans*ness often has been associated with ideas of whiteness and US-centricity. Yet, Beauchamp’s text is not about the description of trans* lives, but rather how surveillance outlines the ways that people fit into certain gendered expectations of citizenship. Thus, *Going Stealth* excitingly opens up trans* studies to a broader audience in how bodies are constructed with surveillance practices (ID

documents, Transportation Security Administration [TSA] scanners, bathrooms, and the legal system) within and in crossing borders of the United States.

Beauchamp does not quite examine these ideas transnationally in *Going Stealth*; however, this fits the central argument of the book. Beauchamp makes it clear that they are looking at “US Surveillance Practices” from the title forward. The author looks at the fraught negotiations between the category of transgender and the working of surveillance. Beauchamp creates a transgender critique around identity documents (Chapter 1), TSA x-ray scanners (Chapter 2), bathrooms (Chapter 3), and the trial of Chelsea Manning – a US army intelligence analyst who disclosed secure documents to WikiLeaks in 2010 (Chapter 4). While studies of documentation and bathrooms feel familiar in trans* discussions, Beauchamp compares US documentation with Pakistan’s third gender inclusion on governmental forms to highlight how the US isn’t a forerunner in all things progressive, especially since gender markers continue to be an issue on many US documents. Additionally, the chapter on bathrooms uses biometrics and borders to discuss citizenship, which adds a new dimension to the discussion.

Beauchamp is masterful in looking at instances in the everyday and how they continue to regulate gender non-conformity as a tool for citizenship status in the US. For instance, they discuss the location of the public bathroom as a space that encourages biometric surveillance under “Western science’s claim to a neutral gaze” (p.95). Thinking about bathrooms is often a negligible everyday occurrence for cisgender people, but Beauchamp connects the discussion about bathrooms and “safety” to the state-wide bills that restrict bathroom usage to sex assigned at birth included on identity documents. This idea confirms David Valentine’s (2007) notion about the idea of the term transgender and how it is too simplified and “implicitly taken white, class-privileged, US-based transgender-identified people as its subjects” (p.7).

With threads of Dean Spade's *Normal Life* (2015) running through the book, Beauchamp takes the surveillance discussion even further by using current proposed and passed bills, theory, and the case of Chelsea Manning. The chapter on Manning is convincing and an important contribution; at the same time, the chapter focuses so closely on the story of one (important) person that the book's focus on the larger US surveillance culture disappears. Beauchamp's argument at the beginning of the book is that they want to "examine the ways that state surveillance practices, ... long embedded in the everyday, produce a broad range of deviation from regulatory gender norms that exceeds the category of transgender" (p.6). The author looks at this larger gender deviation in the everyday through documentation, travel, and bathrooms, but loses this larger critique by focusing on the trans-ness of Chelsea Manning and aiming to stretch the case of Manning to include the broader category of gender deviation.

Manning was in a huge position of privilege as a US army intelligence analyst. The beginning of the chapter opens with an argument of how the US Department of Justice acknowledged transgender people in 2016, but ignored the everyday stories of incarcerated transgender people. If the audience is to take the case of Manning as an example of the everyday experience of gender deviant people in the US, then there needs to be more examples of incarcerated trans* people who were not specialized military officers. Beauchamp even admits that Manning is a "special case" (p.125) who leaked hundreds of thousands of classified military documents and diplomatic cables. She was convicted in 2013 and her gender identity was the focus of her defense team's argument for her case. The argument in the book is that she was tortured because she is transgender and considered deceptive because of this. According to Beauchamp, she was held in Quantico under harsher conditions than death row inmates. The trial focused on her issues with her gender identity as a reason for her actions, instead of a person who was concerned about the military's killing of civilians without concern. There does not seem

to be enough evidence to apply this to all of US surveillance, especially in the context of the carceral state. The chapters on documents and bathrooms seem to make a better overarching argument towards the intersection of transgender critique and US surveillance, because they use examples of the everyday for different gender deviant people as well as ways that commonplace sites are imbued with surveillance for reinforcing good citizens.

Going Stealth fits well within a new generation of trans* studies, working to broaden the term transgender with a focus on the US and surveillance studies. However, one of the key issues that this book does not address evenly is the larger issue of race in terms of spaces of surveillance. Of the major theorists that are quoted (Butler 2004; Davis 1983; Foucault 1995; Halberstam 1999; Puar 2017; Spade 2015; Valentine 2007) only two are people of color. There are a few examples of trans* people of color in the chapter on incarceration (Duanna Johnson, a Black transgender person arrested in 2008 on charges of prostitution in Tennessee, for example), but the larger argument about race and how it intersects with transgender studies and surveillance seems to be missing from this book. The examples of trans* people of color seem to be acknowledged, but not elaborated. For example, in Chapter 2 there is a mention of traveling with an acknowledgment of how race might flag a transgender person for further screening, outside of gender deviance, but it fails to explain how racialized bodies are already considered “dangerous” by the US and surveilled at higher rates. The author locates everyday spaces and shows how they are re-constructed under a gendered gaze in a masterful way, but neglects to discuss the ways that race is imbricated with gender to increase surveillance as a powerful force in the locations of bathrooms, airport security, and the legal system.

Beauchamp’s arguments deepen the audience’s understanding of how documents, bathrooms, and TSA scanners intersect with the US surveillance system to shape

perceptions of gender and citizenship. Beauchamp argues that these contact points regulate US citizenship through a gendered lens and shows the complicated ways that belonging is negotiated in terms of safety for the US. With its ease of argument and understandable prose, *Going Stealth* works for anyone who has a base knowledge of US surveillance and gender identity, undergraduate and graduate readers alike, as long as they are not looking for a trans* social history. At this point in the trans* studies argument, we should welcome a broadening of the transgender critique that has focused primarily on the US, with white citizens' social histories. Maybe the next step is to look at sites of racialized and gendered US surveillance?

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April 2019

