

# Undercover: Police Surveillance in Comparative Perspective

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Undercover: Police Surveillance in Comparative Perspective, edited by Gary Marx and Cyrille Fijnaut. The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1995. 337 pp. NPL paper. ISBN: 9-04110-015-6.

This is a potentially important book from a number of sociological perspectives. Comparative sociologists might look to it for lessons in how to structure a cross-national, multi-authored inquiry. Political sociologists might look for clues for understanding political policing and its role in sustaining contemporary state formations. Organizational sociologists might wish to read it in order to glean some insight into the paradox of how (clandestine police) work of low visibility is integrated and controlled within rank-structured bureaucracies. Sociologists of crime and policing would certainly be attracted to the title. While this book may not be received as haute cuisine by all sociologists, it is likely to satisfy most appetites. The book's 16 chapters, penned by no fewer than 20 contributors, make for a banquet. In the interests of brevity, it will be served as a four-course meal.

L'Aperitif (For Comparative Sociologists). The subtitle suggests that this volume would offer lessons to those of us interested in the conduct of comparative sociological inquiry. The lack of a unified framework therefore grates on the intellectual palate. Authors have been left to explore their own preoccupations and, while these admittedly overlap, they by no means precisely coincide. Consequently, much of the work of sociological comparison is left to the reader. The table of contents is fairly detailed, but without an index the book is, at least in this regard, difficult to digest. Gary Marx and Cyrille Fijnaut dish up a synthesis, and here it becomes evident we are not considering comparisons between differing systems anyway; rather, we are observing the processes of transnationalization as different police systems collide on the global smorgasbord. Marx correctly points out that this is not a simple process of diffusion of American taste in law enforcement (p. 324), although, as some of the contributors show (Van Ostrive and Cappelle; Nadelmann), such taste tends to predominate.

L'entree (for political sociologists). One of the ways we might seek to justify a need for undercover police work is the old Hobbesian chestnut: Citizens grant to Leviathan the right to use exceptional means (such as coercion and deception) in order to guarantee a certain level of social harmony. Michael Levi considers this idea, among others, in the context of examining crimes of the powerful. Nikos Passas and Richard B. Groskin examine the transnational dimension and note that cosmopolitan crimes cannot be answered by parochial controllers (p. 307). They make a meal out of the diversity of substantive laws for controlling policing in the transnational domain. While they shy away from the vocabulary of the postmodern, the questions they raise may flambée the considerations of the older thought-style based on the sovereignty of nation-states. Certainly policing issues in the late twentieth century pose meaty questions for political theorists, and the menu available here ought to be well received in such circles. Not because it has any answers, merely because it fuels the fire.

Le Plat de Resistance (for criminologists). Attention to the activities of uniformed police has tended to dominate the sociology of policing. Gary Marx has been central in turning attention to the less savory aspects of police work. This book shows how clandestine policy methods (wiretapping and high-tech spying, buy-bust and sting operations, undercover cops and snoops. . . the list goes on) are being adopted in North America and Europe in a variety of police organizations. What was most interesting to this reviewer was seeing how the unique histories of various national police traditions create subtle differences in undercover police styles, even when the basic ingredients are the same. Readers will find a cornucopia of interesting bibliographical references in the footnotes of individual chapters that will help them add spice to their own sociological work.

Le Dessert (for organizational sociologists). The idea that police manipulate the image of particular folk devils, making them appear more dangerous than they are in order to justify their own actions, was a sociological recipe initially developed by Stanley Cohen and later elaborated by Stuart Hall. Dick Hobbs and Gary Armstrong rehash this idea, showing how British police continually depict the amorphous social phenomenon of football hooliganism as a rank-structured conspiracy of military precision. The perpetuation of the ideology of a hierarchical criminal conspiracy creates the organizational space in which police can exercise almost unfettered discretion. The theory applies to the conspiracy of narcoterrorism just as well. In the transnational domain, as Ethan Nadelmann shows, the marketing of that set of folk devils leads to-adapting Ritzer's terminology-the McDonaldization of policing. This strange dialectic between the disordered and the ordered is a central problem for the sociology of the police institution, and there are many case studies in this volume that clearly illuminate this, and other, organizational processes.

With so many good cooks in the kitchen, this book cannot help but provide substantial fare a la carte. Like any good restaurant, it will be worth returning to several times in order to sample the menu in its various combinations.

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