



## Chasing Shadows: Visions of Our Coming Transparent World

Editors \_ David Brin and Stephen W. Potts

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Reviewer \_ Lauren Elizabeth Hamm, Head of Reserves, William T. Young Library,  
University of Kentucky

The premise of *Chasing Shadows: Visions of Our Coming Transparent World*, edited by David Brin and Stephen W. Potts, is to show the reader that what we assume to be normal interaction with our social media, technology, and our government may not be as normal as we thought. Through the use of varying writers, perspectives, short stories, and essays, this book illustrates a world that could be our future or may very well be our present. It argues that this type of invasion of privacy, often allowed by us through our constant interaction with social media platforms, will soon become just another facet of life, one we'll be completely accustomed to. In some ways, this invasion of privacy can be painted in a positive light, showing how it has the possibility to prevent heinous crimes. It can also be a negative aspect of life that affects our relationships, our identity, and the way we live daily. This book challenges its readers to examine their own habits in communication and use of technology, offering advice that readers might exercise more caution in regards to their online lives.

*Chasing Shadows* aims to show the reader exactly how we've become just as transparent as the stories presented in the collection. The book offers a mix of short stories and essays, showing the stark comparison between the two. It argues that while we've read and written fiction about our loss of privacy and protection for years, we've now entered an age in which our fiction has become reality, using surreal examples based in truth. The book explores several different aspects of privacy and transparency, namely surveillance through the use of technology by our own justice system and government. It asks the reader whether we're ready to believe that some of the fictionalized accounts of "Big Brother"-like government behaviors are truly here at present and possibly here to stay.

David Brin and Stephen W. Potts are both esteemed and well-written authors. David Brin is an award-winning science fiction writer, including the esteemed Hugo Award for his 1983 novel *Startide Rising*. His books have been adapted for films, and he holds a degree in

astrophysics. Stephen W. Potts is a professor with the University of California. He specializes in modern fiction and pop culture. Through their work with these topics, these editors have created a collection that could start or at least help conversations about our dependency on technology and social media, and our lack of privacy.

*Chasing Shadows* is essentially a collection of short stories. This book separates twenty-eight short stories and essays into six sections as a way of honing in on different facets of surveillance. It explores the use of social media, remaining "plugged in," and whether it's constitutional to use technological means to investigate crimes, even if it involves a blatant invasion of one's privacy. Some stories use werewolves to demonstrate these ideas while others stick to the traditional science fiction tropes we've become accustomed to. One thing the reader will come to realize is the book is well paced in that it isn't too serious, but it also doesn't continually poke fun at the possibility of our loss of identity through invasion of privacy on our own part. While the writers do illustrate this concept in different, sometimes humorous ways, the idea that it's happening during this present age is haunting.

There are some aspects of this collection that remain strong throughout. The pacing is well thought-out, offering serious ideas and complex ideas with darker atmospheres and themes while remaining humorous with other stories that offer the same ideas with less heaviness. This makes reading a book on the age-old argument of privacy less of a chore and more of an enjoyable experience. It allows the reader to examine their own lives and decisions when using technology to communicate with others, how it affects their personalities, and their relationships with others, but isn't overwhelming.

Like any collection, there are some stories that don't quite hit the mark and seem weaker than the others. This is the case for a few of the stories, though their themes are still important and worthy of discussion. The lack of labeling whether something is a short story or an essay, while



clever in that it makes the reader question what's real and what's not, is also confusing. I found myself checking the table of contents just to be sure what I was reading wasn't a short story like the others, but a well-researched essay—and found no real indication that it was one or the other. While this may be the effect the editors were looking for, I think simply labeling them as such would allow just as much consideration and postulation.

*Chasing Shadows* is an important book at present. The themes it explores offer insight to a problem that's been

studied, predicted, and possibly come to fruition. The choice of stories and essays used allow the reader to make real-world connections, making it easier to examine one's own behaviors concerning transparency online. This book is for readers of science fiction, conspiracies, and for those with an interest in sociology. The short stories are all entertaining, making it easy and enjoyable to read and understand. It's accessible to most audiences and absolutely worth your time.

## Free Speech Beyond Words: The Surprising Reach of the First Amendment

**Authors** \_ Mark V. Tushnet, Alan K. Chen, and Joseph Blocher

**Publisher** \_ NYU Press, 2017. 272 p. Cloth \$28.00. ISBN: 9781479880287. E-book available.

**Reviewer** \_ Wade F. Richardson III, MS in Library Science, MA in History.

*Free Speech Beyond Words: The Surprising Reach of the First Amendment* addresses a straightforward, and seemingly simple, question, posed right at the beginning of the introduction to the book—the issue of why instrumental music (without lyrics), nonrepresentational forms of art, and nonsense poetry such as “Jabberwocky” (and, by extension, nonsense itself) are covered under the First Amendment. Why is it that certain art forms that do not communicate a specific, clearly articulated message are considered “speech” and, thus, are covered under the First Amendment? In this work, the three authors explore various arguments that might explain, or justify, why nonrepresentational art, instrumental music, and nonsense are, or should be, afforded coverage under the First Amendment.

The book has three authors—Mark V. Tushnet, Alan K. Chen, and Joseph Blocher. It is divided into an introduction, three main chapters, and a concluding chapter.

The introduction, as noted, asks the primary question that the book attempts to address; it also introduces and explains a few important concepts—such as the difference between “covered” and “protected” under the First Amendment—and tries to show some of the potential issues and problems facing legal scholars exploring the issue of why things like nonrepresentational art are covered under the First Amendment. Finally, it gives a short summary of each of the main chapters, and the final, concluding chapter.

In chapter 1, Alan Chen addresses instrumental music and the First Amendment. In chapter 2, Tushnet tackles nonrepresentational art under the First Amendment. In chapter 3, Blocher addresses the relationship between the

First Amendment and nonsense—not just nonsense in the form of recognized art, but nonsense as a whole. The final chapter tries to examine, in brief, other forms of expression that might be covered under the First Amendment, although they, too, might not be recognized as “speech” in the sense of communicating clearly articulated ideas—dance and new technologies such as data gathering and video games, among other forms of expression.

In the introduction, the observation is made that many people seem to just assume that, of course, these forms of expression (nonsense, nonrepresentational art, and instrumental music) should obviously be covered by the First Amendment, and that, because the answer seems so obvious, there appears to have been relatively little research or scholarly interest in this subject. Yet the authors make it very clear that they have considerable difficulty when they try to justify First Amendment protection for these forms of expression under traditional First Amendment arguments.

For example, one of the problems that the authors seem to keep running into is that of over- and under-inclusion—that is, they find that the argument they are using either excludes some area that should be covered or includes activities that are not, and should not, be covered. For example, one school of thought on justifications for coverage under the First Amendment can be broadly grouped into arguments about protecting or advancing the autonomy of the speaker. Yet there are clearly many activities that could be considered to be expressive and to further the autonomy of the individual or individuals performing those activities that few, if any, people