Satellite Surveillance and Environmental Law Enforcement in the Brazilian Amazon

Raoni Rajão &Theo Vurdubakis (Lancaster University)

The proposed paper focuses on the use of satellite surveillance technologies in environmental law enforcement. Over the last two decades in particular, scholars and policy makers alike have argued that the implementation of satellite surveillance technologies, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) will be able to drastically curtail or even stop illegal deforestation in the Amazon. The present paper presents results from a three year 'multi-sited' (Marcus, 1995) ethnographic study of the use of these systems in the detection and prosecution of illegal deforestation in Brazilian Amazonia. The focus of the investigation has been the role that such systems *actually* play in the work performed by forest rangers in the course of their law enforcement activities as they seek to establish the pertinent 'facts' about particular sites, acts and agencies of deforestation.

On the basis of this study, a more complex understanding of the actual impact of these technologies is proposed. The paper consequently argues that the extant literatures on the role that practices and technologies of surveillance play in contemporary social life, have often tended to remain preoccupied with what we might call the 'ideal logic' of techno-logical systems. That is to say, such discussions often accept the claimed technological *potential* of such systems (for good or ill) as reality therefore conflating potentiality with actuality.