

Marx, Gary T.

## Windows Into the Soul: Surveillance and Society in an Age of High Technology

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[English translation]

In the third chapter of the third part of 1984 Orwell writes that we control matter because we control mind. Reality is inside our heads. (Orwell 1992: 268). If skepticism is the key to sociology's revealing the scaffolding of reality and the purposeful construction of social relations (Bourdieu, 1991), Gary T. Marx, emeritus professor at MIT, has spent a lifetime devoted to sociology in capital letters. Since his writing in the 1970s on police responses to crime which resulted in the classic book *Undercover*, Marx has moved comfortably within the parameters of the issues elucidated by Goffman i.e., studies of interaction, symbolic interaction, self-projections and dramaturgy. Beginning with Simmel's argument that secrets are not only a source of fascination but also of power and oppression, *Windows into the Soul* is a logical continuation of *Undercover*. However, the focus on criminality there is abandoned in favor of broader questions involving monitoring and social control, means of extracting information and the ethical and social consequences of surveillance.

Surveillance was at the heart of Goffman's work on stigma and social institutions, yet he did not attend to technology. In contrast, Gary T. Marx stresses the importance of new extractive technologies. "The tools are not pumps or drills, nor is the extracted substance valued because of physical properties. The technologies are a broad family of computers, sensors, transmitters, biochemical assays, spectrographs, video lenses, software, and management practices that build the "new surveillance" and that transcend the senses, space, and time, as well as the traditional borders of the self, the body and the group. The substance is personal information" (Marx 2017: 1) The data reveal aspects of the person or, by mixing data from various sources, give rise to new identities alien to the person in question. The strategies of extraction move beyond violence to ubiquitous, more complex, subtle and voluntary forms of obtaining data. They drain data from the self and from social networks and acquire their own autonomy subject to interpretations outside the will of the subject.

Consequently, the field of surveillance studies shows a striking terminological confusion that Marx seeks to lessen in standardizing concepts and offering proposals and conceptual structures to help in the study of surveillance. Thus the book is divided into four long sections plus additional content available at (<http://press.uchicago.edu/sites/marx/index.html>).

Part one which begins with a Latin proverb *frago ut patefaciam* (I break in order to reveal) offers concepts basic to surveillance analysis. Marx tells us that at the theoretical level the ethereal surveillance concept is too broad and is unclear in its relation to privacy, publicity, secrecy, confidentiality and anonymity. Yet, at the empirical level it is too narrow. Surveillance can be defined "as a regard for or attendance to a person or factors presumed to be associated with a person. A central

feature is a certain form of data connectable to an individual, (whether uniquely identified or as a member of a category)." All surveillance entails the existence of an external agent receiving, observing and/or interpreting or manipulating the data. Various kinds of sensory data taken from, or associated with, the person provide the material for surveillance. How the collection of data are viewed depends upon socially constructed norms of privacy that establish the borders of the public and the private, the visible and the invisible and the accessible and the inaccessible. (Marx, 2017: 28). The identification and capture of data is carried out through surveillance structures that relate in an asymmetric way involving the agent, (or surveillor, auditor or investigator)- and the subject. The existence of these structures dates back to the fifteenth century with the search for heretics, goes through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the advent of states and modern politics and finds its pinnacle in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the world wars and Kafkaian bureaucratic nightmares. The categorization and management of individuals follows the normalization and, then, the normativization of the exercise of power. In recent decades, Marx says, the information captured has continued to grow as a result of technological development. An enormous amount of previously unseen and/or dispersed data treated by bots through a process of cohesion, attaches to a particular subject or object (Marx, 2017: 4). The scattered data become more coherent as they are applied for the purposes of agents. (Marx, 2017: 49). The uses and goals of the surveillance become semi-transparent for the agents, but are less visible to the subjects. Foucault (1993) erred in identifying control as the only goal; The goals can be diverse: verification, discovery, documentation, competitive advantage, prevention, protection, publicity, symbolism, profit, self-knowledge, curiosity or voyeurism.

In the following pages, Marx continues with his conceptual distinctions in dealing with boundaries involving the individual, the private, the sensitive and the intimate, the external, and the public.

Information maybe be analyzed according to the above characteristics. He moves from that which is the most intimate and private. Intimacy (as suggested by Davis in 1973), is first of all the innermost category of what can be known about the person. It is a kind of metaphorical nudity. To be intimate is to expose the fragility of the person and what is most precious. When this is in the wrong hands it can destroy us. As Marx notes: "the closer the relationship and the more protected the place, the greater the sense of betrayal" (Marx, 236).

Once results are obtained the surveillance "appetite may become insatiable as both a tool and a bureaucratic end in itself (Marx, 2017: 132) The various manifestations of data collection -videos, audios, cookies, etc.-are in general seen as less invasive and hardly visible being passively and silently gathered. The new surveillance reveals secrets while creating new identities and social patterns, we have here a new reality. Simple description is transformed into prediction. Any act that violates the interaction order tacitly agreed between agent and subject can result in actions of acceptance – the conformist [true conformist] or actions of rejection as with the unrepentant rebel [closet rebel] who struggle to neutralize the surveillance. One of the most effective counter-neutralization elements is the culture of surveillance, which frightens and justifies in equal parts. In a modern version of the Leviathan, minimum surveillance can serve as protection or, on the other extreme, oversight for purposes that were never agreed upon. Nevertheless, Marx warns that we should not fall into techno-fallacies involving protection, purchasing recommendations or the detection and annulment of the stigmatized (terrorists, pedophiles, etc.) - that can serve to legitimize intrusions without being questioned. Given this situation, Marx considers different contexts and cultures of surveillance: modern

organizations, childcare, and politics. These contexts demonstrate the undue Foucauldian simplification of surveillance. They demonstrate the need in the era of Homo Securitas to be aware of social and ethical consequences and to seek negotiation on the limits of surveillance with awareness of the benefits and harm that can result. Marx considers the Gordian knot of surveillance in which any simplification entails a future threat. He proposes several questions to the structures that carry out the surveillance and to the parties that, in an (almost) conscious way, will tolerate certain levels of intervention and management based on this. The transparency of a window is urgently needed, as is negotiation between the involved parties. All this occurs at a time when a single Smartphone brings extractive technologies more effective than the Stasi. The crux of surveillance, whether involving threat or response lies in the capacity of the agents to define limits and the conditions under which they can or should be crossed.

*Windows into the Soul* is a compendium and deep reflection drawing on the laboriously elaborated fruit of a life time of work. Time will tell if it is a touchstone in matters of surveillance for those not pessimistically resigned to accepting status quo constructions of social reality. As Marx points out at the beginning of the book: "the artist knows that something worthwhile lies within, but only immersion in the work can reveal it" (Marx, 2017: IX). The book is therefore a humble, but necessary, demolition of the epistemological barriers that inhibit understanding surveillance – whether these involve prejudice or annoying inaccuracies.

## **Bibliography**

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