

Gary T. Marx

Response to Brendan McQuade Review

Hi Brendan –thanks for your recent review. I am appreciative of the careful reading and the time and thought you put into it, your quoting extensively from the book so the reader can see what I said, your pointing out things I need to read, and worthwhile approaches not yet taken. It is vital that those with different epistemologies communicate. Critical sparks can burn through complacency. Those within the conventional sociological *métier* are oblivious to the taken for granted bubble they inhabit, while those outside of it are often unheard because they appear to start with answers rather than questions.

You really engaged the book and my earlier work. It is rare that a scholar has the benefit of such an in-depth, critical reading. Once you are established, too much praise does little to advance knowledge and can even detract, since it does not encourage self-reflection or self-criticism. Long after Simmel and Coser, JFK talked about the importance of controversy in generating impact. You were critical, but generally not in a petty or unfair way. You make some important points I wished I had taken into account at the time (e.g., the link between home drug testing and the pharma industries, criminal justice and schools, the literature on poor relief as care-surveillance and my lack of awareness of some of the references you offer). Some of your other criticisms re connecting it more to Foucault and to empirical knowledge is certainly a worthwhile task, but it is not what mine was here.

Re Foucault, I am not sure I agree and I may have erred for my own polemical reasons in stressing the variety of situations in which data are gathered relative to how he was initially read from the punishment book. Foucault, like the bible, is a giant Rorschach test, and scholars can pick and choose relevant sections to make their point, he wrote so much and a lot isn't translated and he also was not always consistent. Certainly I could have more deeply engaged his work, but my goal wasn't textual analysis or an intellectual history or application of his body of work. It was rather to draw on whatever tangents I could to offer insights into the topic --a topic I define differently and more expansively than you.

Yes, my earlier critique of the field's weaknesses certainly applies to my own recent work, but I think knowledge develops in a step-wise fashion. In the beginning there are the questions and concepts and methods and then they gradually get put together and built on. I would venture that I could not get away writing a book like this a decade from now, but even at this point, and much more when I first began in the late 1980s, the kind of foundation I offer was intended to provide some tools to do real, or at least conventional, social science. To be sure this is only one partial tool kit and there are lots of others. These were simply ideas that made sense to me. I would not make imperial claims that the book's way is the only way, it just seemed to make sense to me as I thought about it all over the decades.

To move beyond the sorry state of the field we noted in that CS review you cite, additional concepts were needed. However, I do not define the area as a sub-area of sociology, even as many of those working in the field are sociologists. I think sociologists are a small group of the many disciplines and perspectives in *Surveillance and Society*. I have profited from that, even in the incoherence and general lack of cross referencing often seen. The failure to have so few agreed upon definitions in such a varied field was a major problem I saw and what I tried to improve with the concepts.

There is need for a division of labor over time as we move from questions to ideas/concepts, hypotheses and new measurement tools. But this can also apply within time periods as scholars have different preferences and skills re what, and how, they focus. This approach gave me some concepts to make better sense of the haze and conflicts around the topic and being removed from research grants and a steady flow of students, sitting and thinking and ordering was my preferred way.

Without denying the importance of real research as this is conventionally understood, I am very comfortable leaving the actual application to others at this point, as well as any needed, new synthesis or grand theory that will be required, or possible, in light of new scientific and historical realities that are always changing to some degree. Systematic, empirical inquiry is particularly important for those early in their careers who don't have the luxury to think more broadly for fear of being attacked for not being empirical or systematic enough.

I had the leisure and position to opt for the broader, looser, provocative, more inclusive approach, even at some risk of grandiosity and that of course brings costs. I do agree with critics that some of the categories overlap or are not clearly differentiated, but this is also how fields can develop by identifying the failings in a body of work, or at least ways that it is not useful to a given agenda. I chose to cast a net that seemed broad, and yet differentiated enough, to capture it at the time, rather than to unduly worry about consistency or even precision.

I think the exact term used to label the activities of watching/being watched and border breaking re persons and groups for data collection is *not* of great importance and meanings evolve, whatever usage "surveillance" came to have during the French revolution. Nor does it matter that the family doesn't fully or literally fall within Goffman's definition of a total institution. The hierarchal family, particularly when children are present, shares something with other purer total institutions, relative to many other social settings that are more voluntary and where rights are more present in principle and practice. What matters is having tools to see and measure commonalities, as well as differences in gathering personal information (the narrower area within the broader data collection field) of course that connects to power, the state, the economy, gender and race. Politically, and as for citizens, some connections are much more important than others (repression from state/corporate surveillance vs. the private voyeur, at least seen across multitudes not the single individual victim of a voyeur), however great the damage that can do to a given individual. In the same way technological data differs from that immediately from the senses

Behavior easily spills out of our iron clad definitional categories or complex theories. As the literature suggests, certainly caring can be coercive, and draconian settings and behavior can have elements of care present. That doesn't mean that settings cannot be usefully compared by the degree to which various goals and norms are present.

As we know, sociology deals in connections (often unseen ala Merton), as well as in dissimilarities among the seemingly similar. To argue that all the forms or contexts I noted are of equal significance for a more democratic and egalitarian society would be foolish, but to deny commonalities across personal and social power imbalances, or to fail to note differences within them would also be unwise—whether these are reflected in process, structure, morality or experience. I was interested in that root commonality and a language for seeing difference within the seemingly similar.

I don't think the context distinctions create confusion, rather confusion lies in the failure to make such distinctions and in painting with such broad brush strokes, or so narrowly defining a topic just around

liberation from oppressive, undemocratic political structures, that we get trapped in emotion laden concepts that cannot transfer across observers who start with different frames, nor across varied settings. The issue around contexts and norms is a good one, they are interactive and fascinating questions are present re how the goals that also define context link to particular norms. But the norms of a given institution or context also can help define/inform the context. The comparative work on organizational cultures across orgs with the same function makes that clear.

I think we probably have a major difference re the nature of understanding and the role of science in sociology. I don't care greatly about sociology, or any other somewhat arbitrary subfield, and I do not find the debates about quality and quantity engaging. I am after knowledge and understanding of topics, science can give us a lot of that re our topics, but can only take us so far. I want to experience some of what others feel and try to communicate that in a more visceral, emotional sense. Humanistic methods do that, something Weber welcomed as well. Satire and art can do that beyond serving as entertainment, and consciousness raising and thought experiments can generate useful ideas. Weber's history and construct distinction, as important as it is, does not preclude that. Imagined knowledge/experience/understanding or whatever one chooses to call it, can come from walking in another's footsteps via its' emotional wallop and the "a-ha" moments it can engender. I prefer the term social studies for what I do rather than sociology because it has room for both humanistic and positivist approaches, while sociology is mostly defined by the latter. The point of the case studies was not to evaluate any theoretical propositions, indeed the book has very few of those in the usual propositional form.

Some of your points I took as criticisms for not writing the kind of book you think is needed. As a critic you need to do that, but I think that is best done after encountering the author on his or her own terms, did the author accomplish what he or she set out to do? Why or why not? I made it clear I wasn't trying to do a conventional social science inquiry and that mine was a mapping exercise. The first part of your review appropriately judges me for what I tried to do.

What I say or imply in the attached auto-review is a kind of self-defense against some of the failings of the book (or perhaps better many of the things I wish I had the time and enough smarts to be able to take care of). If I was to expand the book I would certainly qualify what I say about Foucault with the later readings and more clearly note how his seminal ideas characterize our age. I was responding more to those who failed to note the nuance in his work, whatever contradictions a close reading might also find within it.

I wrote the auto-review soon after finishing the book (and it drew from things I had thought and had written before). I am aware that I could have made other choices. I opted for breadth over depth and variety over consistency and selective illustration and imagination over a tightly ordered empirical or theoretical inquiry. My goal was not as ambitious as the one you suggest in the last part of your review which is not to deny the need.

There is also a danger of a certain solipsism when one lives on an island and is away from colleagues and students on a daily basis (and I have not had a real job since 1996). But at this point in my life, time is of the essence and I just wanted to be done with it and, even now, prefer to spend what time remains on other topics such as deception and authenticity more broadly, and tensions between the rational and the emotional or unknown, different ways of "knowing", and other projects such as family history, playing the guitar and working with driftwood.