Book Review

Review of Marx, Gary T. 2016. *Windows into the Soul: Surveillance and Society in an Age of High Technology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 400pp. Paperback. US\$35. ISBN: 9780226285917.

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In the opening pages of Gary Marx's latest work, *Windows into the Soul*, Marx speaks of his early research during the 1970s as a time when studying issues of surveillance was often deemed as conspiratorial, belonging to the realm of "science fiction writers, the sky-is-falling journalists, and ACLU activists" (Marx 2016: xiv). Whilst matters of surveillance have long captured the imagination of academics and the wider public, it was the global surveillance disclosures of 2013 that saw conspiracy give way to vindication. *Windows into the Soul* is a distillation of the best of sociology and Surveillance Studies; it probes, it provokes, and it presents an account of the many tensions at the heart of surveillance. David Lyon has referred to *Windows* as Marx's "*maxime magnum opus*" (Marx, Lyon, and Ball 2015: 540), a claim that is difficult to contradict. *Windows* is the product of a career's worth of knowledge, experience, and research that enable Marx to move seamlessly between empirical work, satirical accounts, and theoretically grounded discussions. Those new to Surveillance Studies are given a guided tour, whilst those more versed in the subject matter are provided with continual reminders of the significance and necessity of their study.

At its heart, *Windows* is a work of critical social science, finding its home primarily within the sociological tradition. The longstanding influence of Erving Goffman on Marx is evident throughout the book, and it is through Goffman that Marx's interest in the "broader fields of the sociology of information control and access" (p. xvi) can be located. In many ways *Windows* is as much a contribution to the 'sociology of information' as it is to Surveillance Studies.

Spanning 400 pages over fourteen chapters with additional material located online, *Windows into the Soul* is a sizeable work. Nevertheless, Marx laments having to cut the book by half for publication; it is perhaps unsurprising that a work with ambitions to produce "both a conceptual mapping and an encyclopedic reference source" (p. x) for Surveillance Studies would originally be so large. Whilst Marx is self-critical that this reduction in length has resulted in certain empirical accounts only being able to skim the surface, there is much within the pages of *Windows* that successfully achieves Marx's original ambitions.

Similar to Zeynep Tufekci's 'yes' (Tufekci 2014) in response to questions regarding whether surveillance and the internet are good or bad, so too does Marx take the ambivalence of surveillance as a central theme

Thornton-Lee, Robert. 2017. Review of Marx's *Windows into the Soul: Surveillance and Society in an Age of High Technology*. *Surveillance & Society* 15(5): 704-707.

<http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/index> | ISSN: 1477-7487

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of the book. To determine the ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ of surveillance, it is necessary to understand the nature of the surveillance acts under examination. Like many things, issues of surveillance are rarely divided neatly into clearly labelled moral boxes. Consequently, Marx is insistent upon the study of sites of surveillance in order to “suggest why *surveillance by itself is neither good nor bad, but context and comportment make it so*” (Marx 2016: 10). This unravelling of context and comportment is a central part of *Windows*, and underpins the two overarching aims of the book.

Seemingly, Marx’s first aim is the need for clarity and specificity in the analytical terms and definitions that are to be found within Surveillance Studies. To these ends, it is within the first part of *Windows*—“Concepts: The Need for a Modest but Persistent Analyticity”—that Marx focuses on establishing an account of the terms and concepts that fill Surveillance Studies literature.

The chapters within this move between detailing the terminology of Surveillance Studies (chapter one); outlining the histories and characteristics of surveillance (chapters two and three), with a particular focus on the continuities and difference between the solidity of the ‘old’ and the liquidity of the ‘new’ (pp. 50–51); and an account of the various dimensions of personal information (chapter four). Within chapter four, Marx details the dimensions and complexities of personal information, and discusses the role that information and knowledge play in everyday life; it is here that Goffman’s influence is particularly felt. Marx champions Goffman’s legacy within *Windows*, and it is a legacy that is essential for any attempt to engage with the ways that individuals perform, manage, and understand the relationship between information, privacy, and their identity.

In this first part, Marx achieves his ambition to map the territory of Surveillance Studies. *Windows* is replete with lists and tables that provide this conceptual mapping and enable Marx to work towards overcoming the potential lack of a ‘common language’ that faces any interdisciplinary endeavour (p. xv). That said, Marx is not seeking to offer a comprehensive accounting of the merits of each of the theories he draws upon; rather, he is wanting to highlight the contours of Surveillance Studies. Whilst the plethora of lists and concepts throughout the book can at times feel overwhelming, Marx acknowledges this and pre-emptively criticism by noting that “classification is central to knowledge, and scientific advances require specification of the minute and policies need to reflect context” (p. x).

Marx’s second aim is to explore the ‘social life of surveillance’. Through an accounting of the myriad ways in which surveillance operates in everyday life, Marx aims to draw attention to, and problematize, the complex relationships between the agents, institutions, technologies, and practices of surveillance. Moving on from the foundation building of part one, part two is an attempt to plant flags in shifting sands. Seeking to elucidate the social life of surveillance, this part of the book focuses on cultural, societal, organizational, and behavioural attitudes towards surveillance, and explores the transformations that occur within the ‘life’ of any surveillance technique. Here, Marx explores a number of technologies that have experienced surveillance ‘creep’ and ‘gallop’, as well as ‘contraction’, examining how the application and focus of technologies differ from their original intentions (pp. 133–136). This discussion culminates with a focus on the neutralization (and neutralization of neutralization) measures that serve to resist surveillance (p. 144).

In the same way that Goffman is seen as being expertly capable of dissecting the minutiae of everyday life (Elliott 2014: 37), so too does Marx highlight and untangle the complex social life of surveillance within the second and third parts, and it is within this third part in particular—“Culture and Contexts”—that the book comes to life.

Drawing from the stores of research accrued over his career, Marx presents several cases of satirical fiction in an attempt to highlight some of the contradictions and complexities at the core of contemporary issues of surveillance. To draw upon Marx’s own words, it is important that these satirical accounts are

not seen as the product of “an unrestrained dystopian imagination under the influence of some formally banned hallucinogenic at 3 a.m.” (Marx 2016: 174). Rather, through their grounding in reality, the reader is forced to ask questions about the problems and possibilities of surveillance futures.

From discussing the role of surveillance in the workplace (chapter seven) to surveillance in the home and its relationship to childhood (chapter eight); the public-private, subject-agent exploration of the relationship between the watcher and watched (chapter nine); and the fictional speech advocating the need for deploying maximum surveillance in all areas of life (chapter eleven), Marx guides the reader through several of the potential futures of surveillance.

Each of these satirical accounts highlight the potential that exists within surveillance techniques, and Marx excellently deconstructs their significance. In many ways this part of the book is its most engaging. The significance of this section is in its challenge of the future, and it is through these fictitious accounts that Marx reminds me of Nikolas Rose's (2007) writing on the ‘cartography of the present’:

Such a cartography would not so much seek to destabilize the present by pointing to its contingency, but to destabilize the future by recognizing its openness. That is to say, in demonstrating that no single future is written in our present, it might fortify our abilities, in part through thought itself, to intervene in that present, and so to shape something of the future that we might inhabit. (2007: 5)

These satirical accounts and their discussions remind the reader that the future of surveillance is open to transformation and definition; these surveillance futures need not become reality. In drawing attention to the various ways in which these satirical accounts emerge from already existing conditions, it also draws attention to those parts of our surveillance reality which need to be critically discussed.

Marx acknowledges his tendency at times to be critical of the technologies and techniques explored within *Windows*, but that this is necessary as the “cheerleading has a way of taking care of itself, while the bad news is too often unreported” (Marx 2016: 325). Marx is unapologetic for walking the line between critique and conservatism. For him, the social world is a chaotic one, full of compromise, second-guessing, ironies and trade-offs (p. 299), and it is the role of the social scientist to ask questions of our everyday life, to challenge underlying assumptions, and to adopt a well-informed, well-reasoned stance towards the social world in order to understand it (p. 326).

With the unfortunate inability to predict the future, and the often unexpected ways in which surveillance technologies tend to gallop and creep, “we are rarely prescient or adequately prepared for the full consequences of innovation and social change” (p. 299). Without a recourse to prophecy, the message of *Windows* is clear: those with an interest in researching and examining matters of surveillance must at all times remain critical, vigilant, and open minded. It is only through such a stance that the original question posed within the book, regarding the comportment and context in which surveillance finds itself, can be interrogated.

For anybody with an interest in surveillance, *Windows* is a must read. Those who are new to Surveillance Studies will find within its pages an exceptional accounting of the tensions and problems that lie at the heart of the surveillance techniques, practices, and technologies that we encounter every day. For those acquainted with Marx's work, or with Surveillance Studies literature in general, the arguments within will be familiar, but by no means does this familiarity result in complacency. In drawing from his significant reserves of knowledge and experience, Marx deftly moves between the broad strokes of context and the intricate particularities of the everydayness of surveillance. Whilst some may find the use of satire and absence of ‘hard’ empirical data unorthodox, Marx has accomplished an exceptionally crafted piece of

Sociological writing which constantly reminds us of the demands and questions we must ask of ourselves, of technology, and of society.

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