



## Book Review

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\$35.00. ISBN: 9780226285917.

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Anyone who has listened to Gary Marx talk, or spent any time on his website, will know what a truly prodigious knowledge and understanding he has of surveillance in contemporary society. This book, which David Lyon has described as Marx's *maxime magnum opus*, is demonstrative of this impressive grasp on the subject.

*Windows into the Soul*, a deliberate misquote of Elizabeth I (pg. 1), divides into four parts. The first two of these provide an excellent framework for analysis of surveillance, the third a collection of satirical stories that illustrate concerns with much of contemporary surveillance, and the fourth the beginning of a normative analysis. Taking these in turn, the first two parts offer a structure for analysis of what Marx has long called the "new" surveillance. Early on he distinguishes this from traditional surveillance, although it is not clear exactly where the distinction lies. This has a tendency of leading the reader to question whether a particular example given is really "new" or traditional, which can become a distraction. It was not obvious to me why much of the analysis in this section could not equally be applied to 19<sup>th</sup> century means of surveillance, or even those of Elizabeth I, as to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, it is certain that Marx has in his sights the particular target of contemporary surveillance practices.

Part I considers the contexts and structures of surveillance, the means of surveillance, the goals of surveillance, and the types of data collected. In considering means, for example, Marx raises questions regarding how comprehensive the surveillance is, who collects it, where they collect it, and what technology they have available. Turning to goals, he lists twelve concepts ranging from compliance through profit and symbolism to curiosity and self-knowledge. Here he is critical of Foucault and of those who follow Foucauldian analysis somewhat slavishly (pg. 64). While recognizing that power is unquestionably one goal of surveillance, Marx is keen to point out that it is not the only goal, nor necessarily even the most important.

Marx makes the point that "a central argument of this book is that understanding and evaluating surveillance require attention to the setting" (pg. 86), a theme to which he frequently returns. He holds that setting is crucial in drawing normative conclusions, such that "surveillance is neither good nor bad but context and comportment make it so" (pg. 284). While this is almost certainly true, his taxonomy of those contexts (consent, care, and coercion) is confusing. Surely surveillance can be consensual and caring, or caring and coercive. While "consent" and "coercion" may be a genuine dichotomy, these deal with the perspective of the surveilled subject, while "care" refers to the intention of the surveillant.

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Part II of the book reads as a continuation of Part I in providing an analytic structure of surveillance, moving from static to dynamic analysis. The focus remains on providing an analytic framework through looking at alternative approaches such that actions can be categorized and understood. Here Marx takes up the changing nature of surveillance and resistance to surveillance (and responses to that resistance). He asks, for example, how goals and subjects of surveillance change over time. In this, he notes a softening of surveillance in society, contrasting Orwell's dystopia against Huxley's in recognition that surveillance does not always come about as a result of coercion but also as a result of seduction. The fact remains that many of us are as guilty in offering up reams of data about ourselves to states and corporations as those states and corporations are in helping themselves to the same.

Drawing from Erving Goffman (a clear influence throughout), Marx notes this softening in a progression of surveillance practice from maximum security prisons to non-custodial settings and activities, a "trend toward the maximum security society" (pg. 131), and suggests that Langdon Winner's function creep may be more a matter of a "surveillance gallop." At the same time, he is careful to balance these trends with evidence of a contraction of at least some surveillance practices, refusing in the process to be drawn into a simplistic "pro-" or "anti-" stance and in the process bringing home the centrality of context.

The satirical stories in the middle of the book provide a radical change in tone before Marx returns to his analytic purpose in chapters on techno-fallacies and ethics. These last are heavily abridged chapters which amount to little more than lists of concerns and an appeal to the reader to reference the complete versions on his website. In some ways this was a shame and, while a practical response to pressure to keep a book to publishable length, I would rather have seen the satirical chapters sacrificed to an online location for a fuller development of the analytic approach. I suspect that I might be in the minority, though, as the stories do make Marx's points strongly in a way that analytic prose cannot. However, I also suspect that relatively few readers will move beyond the abridged chapters to read the online explanations. I hope that my scepticism is misplaced, as this would be a loss.

While the subjects of these last chapters are not new for Marx, he does introduce novel material in the space that he has, including an impassioned plea for academics to avoid becoming activists (pgs. 273-75). He takes pains to argue for the distancing of the academic from too great an emotional engagement in the subject such that her judgment (and pronouncements) risk being clouded by bias, while also recognizing that one cannot be entirely divorced from the world one inhabits. Hence he also attempts to move beyond distanced reflection to offer normative criteria for ethical analysis. In this he focuses on the ethics of the surveillant rather than of the structure or of the surveilled subject, but without demonising the former or lionising the latter. As with his earlier approach, and consistent with his analytic approach throughout the book, he takes a ground-up view, rather than seeking over-arching theories that will explain everything. I am sympathetic to this approach, although I do think that greater coherence is possible here than Marx is willing to concede.

There is a good sense of balance throughout *Windows into the Soul*. It presents a picture neither of doom and gloom nor of a rosy, utopian "end of history," but, in Marx's own words, "it depends." In the final chapter he presents a list of evidence to suggest that we are rapidly approaching a surveillance Armageddon, which is immediately followed by a list demonstrating that we are moving away from a dystopian future. In an entertaining twist, both lists are introduced with quotes from the same psalm.

Critics may argue that Marx's proposed analytic framework is neither logically exhaustive nor is it necessary. There might be exceptions to his categories, although based on his experience I suspect that he would argue not. It is not even clear that a single act of surveillance might not fall under several different categories (an act, for instance, may have a number of goals, not all of them consistent). However, any metaphysician can point to a number of ways in which the world can be "sliced." The point is not necessarily to identify the correct way but to find that which is most useful. Taking this perspective, Marx's framework is both practical and approachable (unlike that of many metaphysicians) and is one that I can see many

coming to use in their own analyses. For this reason alone I think that *Windows into the Soul* is of tremendous value. In addition, the work is entertaining throughout with a number of cartoons, references to popular culture, and a rich sense of irony.

This is a valuable work that provides an analytic framework for approaching Surveillance Studies while avoiding the temptation to find simple solutions or offer easy judgments. It should find its way onto the shelves of every serious scholar and student of surveillance.