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**Review: The Potential of Surveillance in  
*Windows into the Soul*, by Gary T. Marx**

By Giovanna Palermo, *Rivista Italiana di Confittologia* 2021, no. 2.

Gary T. Marx, since the 1970s, has devoted himself to the study of surveillance, although in that period this issue was of greater interest to science fiction writers, journalists and civil liberties activists than serious scholars (at least those professionally certified). In a 1985 article in *The Futurist* magazine, Gary T. Marx dwelt on the transformations that have occurred in the mechanisms of surveillance in the transition from modernity to postmodernity.

The American sociologist pointed out the profound difference between the classic mechanisms of modernity, in which the State collected data useful for the control of citizens, and the new surveillance of postmodernity, in which the State loses its monopoly of the collection and processing of data and personal information. This “New Surveillance”, is carried out by bodies and organizations operating in the most disparate sectors, such as commercial, insurance and communication companies, with the aim of manipulating and controlling choices, opinions and altering social relationships.

Gary T. Marx observed with great foresight, that thanks to information technology, the barriers separating us from total control are weakening. And so, in the volume *Windows into the Soul* Gary T. Marx proposes a sort of manual of surveillance, a summa that, starting from the analysis of the concepts and terms of surveillance and then analyzes its repercussions in the social, political, ethical and cultural spheres.

This penetrating volume represents the organic synthesis of his decades of activity as a scrupulous, enlightened and prophetic researcher. He treats the topic with scientific rigor and yet lightness. It is an accessible read. The American sociologist argues that surveillance does not represent evil in itself, nor is it exclusively good. "By itself it is neither good nor bad, but context and comportment make it so." [G. T. Marx, 2016, 10]. If Foucault emphasized the power-knowledge relationship and the importance of examination in the management and control of people's lives, Gary T. Marx points out that, in the era of contemporary surveillance, we are witnessing the profound transformation of this relationship. The new technologies permit, not only the State, but also private companies to acquire information in order to orient the tastes, preferences and opinions of citizens.

The theme of power is central to Foucault's thought, starting with the inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, "The order of speech" and, then, in "Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison", his study on the origin of the prison system of. [M. Foucault, 1997, 158]. For the French sociologist there is an inseparable link between power and knowledge. However, power must not be understood as something that emanates from a conscious subject and translates into political laws, rather it is an "impersonal, omnipresent power that operates through anonymous mechanisms".<sup>1</sup>

Foucault had emphasized how "every society has its own order of truth, I don't want to say that the State is unimportant; rather the analysis of power relations must go beyond the framework of the State. It must do so in two senses: firstly, because the State, even with its omnipotence, is far from covering the entire field of power relations; and then because the state can only function on the basis of pre-existing power relations. The State is superstructural in relation to a whole series of networks of power, powers that pass-through bodies, sexuality, family, attitudes, knowledge and technology. This metapower with its functions of interdiction can only really take hold and stand to the extent that it is rooted in a whole series of power relations which are multiple and

indefinite, and which are the necessary basis of negative power." [M. Foucault, 1977, 16].

Power, ultimately, according to the sociologist Poitiers, lies in a set of power relations, spread locally and widely<sup>2</sup>. It is not an unalterable amount of physical force, but rather a current of energy, devoid of real substance, which constantly flows through every human society. It is channeled into different patterns of behavior of the individual characters who hold power, and into different types of political, social and military organization.

It is a power that pervades social life, directs the actions of the individuals and, by training their bodies needs to know its target, its energies, its strengths and its weaknesses. This is the inevitable relationship that Foucault identifies between power and knowledge that pervades his works. It is in the disciplinary institutions that the link between knowledge and power that characterizes Foucault's work. While exercising control in the common sense, this allows it to "create through the continuous visibility of its object, a knowledge about its abilities or attitudes" [G. Campesi, 2009, 19].

Alongside the judicial institution, as Foucault observes in one of the 1973 lectures in "The Truth and Legal Forms", there is a very large institutional mechanism developed in the nineteenth century which exercises control of individuals, even at the level of danger. "It is an age of social orthopedics<sup>3</sup>, in which, as Foucault emphasizes in "Discipline and Punish", the transition from punishment to surveillance is realized, in which the exercise of penal practice makes use of extrajudicial knowledge that no longer focuses on the body to inflict suffering, but on the soul to re-educate it. It is a type of society based on a surveillance network that involves the entire social body and through its disciplinary institutions, manages to ensure obedience to its power through mechanisms of inclusion, exclusion and normalization that characterize the nineteenth century" [G. Palermo, 2019, 15].

The organizational needs of these institutions as explained by the panoptic metaphor, involve constant observation of the individual achieved through the practice of examination - "small techniques of annotation, registration, creation of dossiers in a framework that is familiar to us" [M. Foucault, 1975, 208]. The examination causes the bodies to be transformed into things, into numbers, into codes, creating a written documentation of each body, with the function of constituting the individual as an object that can be described and compared with others. "Every life like this is described and pigeonholed into spaces, filed, ready to be reused in the future. The description thus becomes a means of subjugation" [G. Palermo, 2019, 19].

The accumulation of knowledge occurs from the examination. Each mode of the exercise of power needs to know its target in order to prepare the most appropriate techniques and strategies: knowledge constitutes the complex of knowledge on which the success in the control of the individual depends.

Foucault, Deleuze observed [1990, 240] "placed disciplinary societies between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they reach their apogee at the beginning of the twentieth. They proceed to the organization of large environments of imprisonment. But what Foucault also knew was the brevity of this model... the disciplines will in turn experience a crisis to the advantage of new forces that will become dominant. After World War II we are no longer disciplinary societies. We find ourselves in a generalized crisis of all environments of imprisonment – the prison, hospital, factory, school... these institutions are finished. It is only a matter of managing their agony and keeping people busy until the new forces pressing at the door are installed. These are the controlling companies that are going to replace the disciplined companies. GDP "Control" is the name that Burroughs proposed to designate this new monster and that Foucault recognizes as our near future.

With freedom of movement, of trade and growing globalization and the spread of new information technologies and with the light capitalism

model, production is delocalized in every part of the world. This favors the transition from a disciplinary society to one of control. With this once again, the idea is strengthened that it is precisely knowledge that constitutes power. It is a new type of surveillance, which in Deleuze's perspective moves from disciplines to modules. This is a surveillance that can with great precision, modulate and change and is no longer dependent on closed spaces.

In the society of control, the new surveillance, of which G. T. Marx speaks, becomes less visible as it exploits all the new technologies. This is a surveillance that from the eye of the controller shifts the emphasis to the other senses, as it becomes more camouflaged and recalibrates the focus from the repression of crime to prevention. This surveillance no longer, however, only at the service of order and social and political balance, but also of bodies and organizations with commercial purposes. Thus, the idea is put forward that the body should not only be an object of control, but itself is the bearer of data that allows it to be always identified and controlled.

It is no longer and not just a body to be controlled, but also a controlling body.

The body, as Gary T. Marx observes, becomes a set of data with unique biometric characteristics for each person that allows us to become the information society [G. Deleuze, 1990; G.T. Marx, 2001; D. Lyon, 2001 and 2002]. The surveillance of which Gary T. Marx speaks to us, therefore, brings the power to classify the body, to objectify it, describe each one and then make it calculable to subjugation. The description thus becomes a means of control and subordination.

As the American sociologist points out, "New extractive technologies are fundamental in this context.... they are a wide family of computers, sensors, transmitters, biochemical analyses, spectrographs, video lenses, software and management practices that build "new surveillance", and that transcend the senses, space and time, as well as the traditional boundaries of the self, body and group.... The revealed data can have a

concrete self-evident quality, for example, at what time a person is in a certain position.

Or the data can create new organizational identities for the person...  
“New versions of the person are in a sense manufactured. The technologies offer possibilities for 'windows into the soul' in forms and on a scale previously imagined only in science fiction and in the superhero fantasies of children” [G. T. Marx, 2017, 1-2].

The influence that Erving Goffman has had on Gary T. Marx is clearly seen in *Windows into the Soul*, especially in the fourth chapter, where he delves into the forms and complexity of personal information and discusses the role that information and knowledge play in everyday life. The author wants to create "both a conceptual mapping and an encyclopedia source of reference" [Ibid., x] for studies on surveillance. While in some cases his empirical accounts are not too thorough, we can nonetheless consider that he has achieved his goal. Thus, in the first part of the book he clarifies the terms and definitions found in surveillance studies and offers a conceptual mapping. Classification is central to knowledge, and scientific advances require specification of meaning in varied contexts. A common language is needed.

In the second and third parts of the book, the American sociologist goes on to analyze the complex social life of surveillance, offering a list of the various ways in which it operates, exploring a series of technologies, to finally come to emphasize how neutralization measures serve to resist surveillance [Ibid., 144].<sup>4</sup> The North American sociologist emphasizes how new technologies are used to acquire information—no longer with coercive methods, but through a new mode of surveillance—one that is soft and silent and does not allow people to see the exercise of control.

One of his objectives is "... to advance understanding of the social and ethical aspects of personal information control... to understand how individuals and organizations present themselves through the control

and release of personal information, and how others respond to this." [ibid., x].

In *Windows into the Soul* Gary T. Marx explores the field of surveillance as it involves theoretical, empirical and ethical issues with continuous references to literature, cinema and pop culture. He addresses difficult issues with his broad vision and a sense of social justice.

Ultimately, we are faced with a complex work reflecting the American sociologist's long career as a researcher, highlighting his refined skills as an expert scholar, who deals with important and highly topical themes which he makes accessible in a simple, direct, even intuitive way—often, with a refined note of humor.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Even the Marxist orientation places the penalty within a network of power relations (organized on class lines and based on a mode of production), however, Foucault analyzes the penalty within—he deals with relations of power. In contrast, the Marxist orientation analyzes the penalty from the outside, that is, it evaluates the penal forms and the methods of sanctioning based on social class.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Foucault contrasts his own microphysics of power, aimed at the analysis of the multiple and widespread strategies of subjugation, with the macrophysics, proper to Marx's theory, for example, which gives more space to the opposition between rulers and do-mined. In fact, Foucault explains, you are always at the same time both, tamers and dominated: you can be dominated in the factory but, perhaps, dominators in the family.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the psychiatric hospital no longer merely excludes, but also becomes a point of reference for medical surveillance of the external population, to gather information and keep under control the health status of the region.

<sup>4</sup> In particular, in "Culture and Contexts" [ibid., chap. 7,8,9,11], he presents several cases of satirical accounts to highlight the potential, always uncertain, futures of surveillance.