Marx, Gary T.

Gary T. Marx (1938 -), professor emeritus at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has written extensively over several decades on the topics of surveillance, privacy, social control, and policing. He has sought to define what he calls *new surveillance,* and to explain how it differs from the old surveillance. He explores the various ways in which this new surveillance takes place and argues that it must be viewed in the social context in which it takes place. He also discusses privacy issues that are raised by this surveillance as well as the ethical questions that must be answered in its use. He outlines the use of technology and surveillance as mechanisms for social control as well as non-technological forms of surveillance such as undercover policing. Marx's works have been in more than 300 books and journals, including non-English translations, and have had a major influence on the development of the field of surveillance studies. This entry examines Marx's definition of new surveillance, how he believes surveillance and information gathering contribute to social control and increased policing, and how privacy and borders are affected by surveillance.

New Surveillance

Marx defines traditional surveillance as close observation, particularly that of a suspected person. The purpose of surveillance is the gathering of information, either about people or about groups, and he notes that surveillance has been a feature of all societies, though it has differed in form and content across societies and history. The new surveillance, on the other hand, is more comprehensive, intensive, and extensive. It is defined as the use of technical means to extract or create personal or group data, whether from individuals or from contexts. This definition suggests that surveillance goes beyond what may be obtained by using the unaided senses. Surveillance may now be conducted from a distance rather than necessarily up close. It does not just extend the senses; it is also invisible or has low visibility. Persons being surveilled are not likely to know that they are under surveillance.

Modern surveillance encompasses contexts, not just particular persons. It looks at settings such as geographical places and spaces, time periods, and categories or aggregates of persons. This form of surveillance allows for the looking at patterns of relationships between people and places. Data that are collected may be cross-classified to look for meaning within them. This data collection is now done by computer rather than by machine. It is a continuous surveillance, done in real time, and allows for looking at the past and the present and can be used for the prediction of the future such as in crime analysis by the police. Another characteristic of new surveillance is that it also looks at categories of people; for example, all airport travelers are searched rather than just those who are suspects.

Social Control

Marx argues that new surveillance is related to, and used for, social control. Innovations in surveillance technology are used for social control purposes. These social control measures, which are mostly invisible and can be aimed at anyone, are capable of operating through time, space, and other physical boundaries. Marx describes this as a maximum security society in which people are closely monitored not only through technological means but also monitor themselves. This society has computerized records of everybody.

Decisions are made on the basis of risk and actuarial records that are based on memberships and categories in which people are placed. Furthermore, everyone is a suspect. Another feature is transparency in the sense that the traditional barriers and borders that once protected information are weakened by technology. Finally, people tend to monitor themselves, often voluntarily.

Marx argues that surveillance is important to social control in that surveillance is the exercise of power, and knowledge is key to the exercise of power. The use of technology to gain knowledge, and to use this knowledge once it is acquired, has changed greatly, leading to a massive expansion in data collection that covers more areas of life than ever before. Data collection has become embedded and automated as it is part of routine activity; for example, data can be obtained through the use of credit cards, rather than being imposed on persons.

In this technological model of social control, the line between the controllers and the controlled is great, as is the power of the state. The surveilled are often passive, and even cooperative, as a result of ignorance, deception, or manipulation.

Marx termed this *soft control,* and this includes techniques that are of either low visibility or invisibility. These techniques may be built into the environment and thus may not even be viewed as mechanisms of control. An example of this would be the GPS (Global Positioning System) tracking device in a cell phone.

Policing via Surveillance

An important purpose of surveillance is to gather personal information on people. Marx notes that this coincides with the growth of bureaucracy and the regulated, welfare state. Surveillance expands to collect personal information so that conformity to the growing number of laws and regulation can be verified, as well as eligibility for various state intervention programs. As the bureaucratic state grows, the bureaucracy self-perpetuates to administer an expanding set of rules that apply to the economy, public welfare, and morals regulation.

Managing this requires the systematic collection of information on people, which is accomplished through surveillance.

The growth of surveillance used in this fashion is tied to what Marx calls *high policing.* High policing is defined as intelligence gathering for the purpose of protecting and preserving society. It also includes the prevention of threats, and its work is characterized by secrecy and deception.

This is distinguished from *low policing,* which is traditional law enforcement. In addition, high policing makes use of informants, casts a wide net for information, and may be extralegal in means.

It is like a sponge soaking up all information and is laser-like in its ability to focus on profiles. It is dependent on new surveillance to accomplish its goals. This allows for many new ways by which to watch people and to gather information.

Marx warns that there could be danger in relying on technology rather than on people: There is no soul in the new machine. A reliance on technology could lead society down a dangerous road of an increased reliance on both coercive surveillance and coercive social control. The use of technology is not neutral; its value is determined by its application in a social context. In addition, this technologically driven surveillance raises issues of ethics and privacy. There are moral differences between what can be known through the unaided senses and what can be known through technologically enhanced senses.

Privacy

Privacy is an important social and individual value. Privacy is valued because the control of personal information is important to our sense of self and autonomy. This ability to control information is also of importance in the protection of borders. Borders refer to the personal boundaries that people have to protect their privacy, and there are various types of borders. Natural borders are those that protect information that can be gathered by the senses alone. Social borders refer to the protection of information we share with people whom we trust either because of a social role, such as an attorney, or because of a relationship, such as a family member. Temporal and spatial borders separate information from various periods or aspects of a person's life. This assumes that information is either compartmentalized or isolated. It is in this realm that technological surveillance plays a role. The gathering of information by the crossing of borders without consent violate" the dignity of the person and also violates trust. Marx referred to this as *informational rape.*

Surveillance and information gathering also raise issues of power differentials that may contribute to inequality and social stratification.

There is a connection between knowledge and power. The ability to decide what behavior is right or wrong as well as how to treat people involves power. Differential access to information favors the privileged—those who are in power and who have the advantage in the development, control, and use of technology.

Marx warns that surveillance continues to increase in intensiveness and extensiveness. There needs to be not only awareness of this trend, but also an application of ethics and law to the discussion.

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See also Biometrics: Policing and Society; Privacy; Social Control; Surveillance, Theories of

Further Readings

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Website

Home page of professor Gary T. Marx: http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/garyhome.html