

(Initial version of article for *The American Sociologist*, vol. 50, no. 4, Dec. 2019)

<http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/satire.html>¹

A Satirical (?) Book Review of *Windows*

Into the Soul: Surveillance and Society in an Age of High Technology by its Author *

Surveillance is neither good nor bad but context and comporment make it so
(at least most of the time). G.T. Marx

O poor Aristotle! Thou who has discovered for the heretics the art of
dialectics, the art of building up and destroying, the art of discussing all things
and accomplishing nothing! D.T. Suzuki

Gary T. Marx

In 2017 I published *Windows into the Soul: Surveillance and Society in an Age of High Technology*. It illustrates the profound and sometimes harrowing ways in which the new surveillance has penetrated and saturated institutional, organizational, social and personal lives – whether involving governments, merchants, employers, families, hackers or the merely curious. The book summarizes and expands on work over many decades dealing with issues of surveillance and social control. It is based on interviews, observation and the social science literature in the U.S., Europe and Asia, but also contains five satirical narratives that seek to convey the lived experience of being watched and a watcher. From an interdisciplinary perspective, and using a variety of methods, the book offers a systematic mapping and middle-range conceptual language to help understand our emerging surveillance society. It disentangles and parses the empirical richness of an emerging surveillance society.

It emphasizes the paradoxes, trade-offs, and confusion enveloping the field. For some readers the most controversial part of the book was its argument that surveillance itself is neither good nor bad, but that context and comporment make it so. Central here is the need to organize and account for variation. The book identifies a number of “techno-fallacies of the information age” embedded in culture and suggests a series of questions to be asked in assessing the ethics and wisdom of any effort to collect personal data. Several chapters on surveillance in popular culture (music, ads, jokes) had to be cut, but are available on the webpage the press created for the book: (<http://press.uchicago.edu/sites/marx/index.html>) Perhaps anticipating this self-satire, the book was not above the occasional stoop to humor.

*Expanded version of a seminar paper delivered at Law, Science, Technology and Society Studies, VUB, Brussels, 2017 with Serge Gutwirth, Tugba Basaran, Marieke De Goede, Joris Van Hoboken and Kristof Verfaillie. These thoughts were mostly written as I was finishing the book. I have also been informed from the kind, insightful, and fair reviews of so many people, most of whom I don't know: http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/wis_bookreviews.html

Being a conventionally somewhat unconventional kind of guy, let me offer a review of my own book. These are the backstage thoughts of a presenter and unmasker of the secrets and fronts of others who has sought honesty in scholarship and in self-presentations (at least most of the time). Of course, I hope that unlike Jim Carey in the film *Liar Liar* the harsh honesty of an untangling web will not have unwanted consequences. As Simmel demonstrated, secrecy and even a little prevarication can have a place, but not in this review.

But first a warning. The “look ma no hands” quality of this offering does not rest easily. Yet for fun and reasons of scholarship here it is. As a pretty neutral, distantiated observer, with Erving Goffman, I prefer to lift the veils of others, not my own. That fits Descartes' motto, “he lives well who is well hidden.” In studying surveillance, undercover police, dirty data and muckraking sociology I prefer to shine spotlights, not be under them. I am in the uncovering business, not in the business of being uncovered—our modest power, such as it is, is in revealing other's secrets, not our own. I know what I think. Social scientists need to avoid contaminating the data by showing their aces too early or weakening their work by showing its deficiencies.

Yet apart from the need to know when to hold, fold or be bold, there is a time to show, particularly if one believes that with decades of experience knowledge and wisdom ought to be passed on (Marx 2017). The imperatives of truth in advertising, the requisites of the psychology and sociology of knowledge and remnants of a guilty conscience require greater disclosure on the researcher's part.

This book review lodges within the broader, well-traveled genre of autobiographical life reflections (Franklin 2017, Tolstoi 2009, Malcolm X and Haley 1992). Indeed even self-dialogue ala auto-ethnology (Adams *et al* 2016) and autobiocritique (Shalin 2008) have a niche, in the discipline, if perhaps not in self-critical book reviews¹ Self-parody can be the playful elixir of the confident (e.g., the novels of Lodge 1975, Goldstein 1983 on the academy) and may even reflect *noblesse oblige*. Self-depreciation may be intended to salve the envy of some readers, or be a plea to the reader to appreciate the author in seeing how far he or she is from the person in the satire.

In being retired it is easy to offer these observations. I have a fellowship for life and nothing to hide anymore. As the song says, “Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose.” I did a similar AAR (*after action report*) after finishing a book on undercover police.²

The book sought to be pretty academic-objective (see the preface and an appendix “A Note on Values: Neither Technophobe nor Technophile”). This neutrality talk can offer plausible deniability in softening my strongly held concerns over abuses. The book is rich in aphorisms and its several cousins which, as with satire (“only kidding”), can bootleg in subversion without appearing to do so. Yet in spite of that, and high science rhetorical disavowals, the subtleties of the book make it clear that, while pulled between the pro and anti-surveillance camps, the book tilts toward the camp of the latter. However, this is somewhat balanced with the pro-surveillance world views strongly expressed in the fictional case studies (e.g., on work, children, police ,intelligence agents and private information accessible in public).

Research projects involve explicit and implicit choices with associated costs and benefits and can be seen as a metaphor for the broader choices life almost always involves. As with drawing, lines must be drawn and scholars (unlike artists) need to make their case. The book's preface and introduction make the case for my choices (at least the one's I am aware of) by emphasizing the benefits from keeping it pretty neutral, the need for a broad mapping and conceptual ordering, the need to listen to all points of view and the use of so many kinds of data.

In promoting my book I say far less about the obvious downsides of my choices. Hence the need for this insider's honest post-partum, post-mortem review.

The owner of a house or car knows its problems better than outsiders. I write this as if it was my secret voice or alter ego, things known or suspected, but not said to others for fear of tarnishing the brass. But if transparency is good for authorities, it ought also be good for authors. Perhaps we need lemon laws and full disclosure rules for the latter –whether out of high principle or self-interest – the best offence is a good defense. Being the first to own your weaknesses makes it harder for critics to argue you don't know sacraments from Shinola. Expressing one's silent, inner voices can be humbling and offers an honesty too little seen in our gilded image, controlled publications delivered in competitive, pressure filled environments where all the called are not chosen. The sincerity such an effort carries may also reflect on the author's earnestness, humility and good will. The self-parody might be seen as a way to keep the book alive as its publication and reviews become yesterday's story.

The observations below are offered in a playful vein, (although as Freud was reputed to have said, “there are no jokes” and he wasn't kidding). Some of my self-criticisms are satirically offered in the bad faith vein of, “the author didn't write the book the reviewer feels he should have written”; others are a reflection of the wanting perspicacity of the reviewer, or his or her unacknowledged biases. More welcome are criticisms that involve judgment calls that reflect enduring issues in social science with respect to matters of taste, preferences and priorities. In such cases, persons of competence and good will may disagree about methods, facts, values, and interpretations. Such civil disagreements reflect reasoned academic discourse at its best. Still other observations here involve new things I have learned, honestly felt regrets and things I would do differently if still working on the book with endless resources and time.

* * *

Review of Gary T. Marx, *Windows into the Soul: Surveillance and Society in an Age of High Technology*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2016. ISBN:978-0-226-28591-7, 400 pages.

*An Insider's Review of *Windows into the Soul**

I.C. Moore Lesslie

The Industrial noises broke the solitude, the sharp lights, though unseen, mocked it. A man could no longer be private and withdrawn. The world allows no hermits.

D.H. Lawrence

I offer these remarks in a supportive fashion. They are about the product not the producer. I have known Marx for a long time, he tries hard (something you hope you can always preface critical remarks with). He is a nice guy with pets and a Volvo etc. etc. who means well. I would never use a stiletto to cut Jell-O. If I didn't care so much about him and the issues he studies and know that **HE CAN DO BETTER**, I would not bother. As Abraham Lincoln said, “he has the right to criticize who has a heart to help.”

I know this book has received positive reviews from many respected scholars. However, that is to be expected given that Marx knows, and has praised the work of so many of the reviewers via blurbs, citations, letters of recommendation and reviews of, or introductions to, their books, or has been their teacher or co-author. But, beyond the warm glow of crony reciprocity, there is much to criticize. If you're familiar with how Gary T. Marx writes, then this book is more of the same. Given his academic style and long, convoluted, run-on sentences, it is easy to see why the book "fell dead-born from the press"³ and has been ignored by the mass media.

The reviewer should offer an evaluation of what the author set out to do and how well it was done. Authors hope to hear that they did the right thing and did it well. But the savvy reviewer often know otherwise on one or both accounts. Unfortunately, I can't offer Marx much good news on either account. He was misguided in what he chose to do and how well he did it can't be answered because his words exist largely only in a comic book's bubble of abstract words

The distinguished Scottish-Canadian scholar Professor David Tigger, in introducing Marx at a conference, noted that the eye is central to his work and, coincidentally, his work could be characterized by the 3 "I's" of – insight, irony and iconoclasm. Perhaps in some places, but surely in others 3 different "I's" apply – incessant, incompatible and indecisive, offering us a way to organize this critique.

A. Incessant: A Multitudinous Cacophony

The book, even in its "shortened" version with 400 pages, 50 pages of endnotes and over 700 references is problematic. I was warned in my graduate education as a scientist—keep it clean, direct and short – no emendations, no digressions, no run-on sentences, no convoluted Germanic phrasing, no literary embellishments. If it doesn't fit in the text, don't confuse the reader with qualifying footnotes that divert and muddy!

In casting such a wide and eclectic net Marx tries to be all things to all people, yet he risks being nothing to anyone. We need the majestic intricacy of a simply defined orange or apple, not the sloppy *mélange* of a fruit salad the book offers. Academic books should be uniform and consistent, not in 21 flavors. We should honor disciplinary and methodological purity, not the watered down, relativistic octopus of overstuffed ecumenicalism. Perhaps in offering so much Marx thinks he is protected against total failure, since if some of the ideas aren't useful, or are otherwise found wanting, others might escape that fate –a bit like shooting for the moon in the hope of grabbing a few stars on the way down (or up).

The book lacks thematic and stylistic integration, consistency and coherence. To take one example, the volume rightfully gives considerable attention to the importance of immobile, reoccurring *structures* that channel behavior, regardless of context or history. But then this is undercut by emphasizing social process, fluidity, the give and take of interaction and change.

We are not told how particular structures might make fluidity or fixity more or less likely. Nor are we told how process can lead to changes in structure that will then endure for a time. Nor is there any consideration of whether a focus on the effervescent contours of process and "the dynamic aspects of interaction" can

inhibit simple conceptual classifications. Such a focus works against the precise cumulative knowledge that is the essence of scientific understanding. Is the social scientist nothing more than a chronicler of ever-changing river currents?

The book drowns the reader with too many varieties of presumed *veritas*. There is lip service to many lists involving topics such as: four fundamental contexts of surveillance (contracts, care, coercion and the free range form of the private within the public); the seven "sees" or "Cs" of surveillance analysis (concepts and causes; contexts and contingencies; conflicts, courses and careers; cognitions; cross cultural comparisons, controls (courtesies, courts, counter-technologies, and consequences); 30 names for varieties of the surveillance society; 17 themes from surveillance essays; 22 general terms such as strategic and non-strategic surveillance, privacy and publicity as empirical outcomes and as norms, uncivil attention; 18 terms for capturing the relevant social structures such as role and non-role surveillance, internal and external constituency surveillance; 34 dimensions for contrasting any (whether new or traditional) surveillance; 13 tactics of resistance and four counter strategies of surveillance agents; seven strips of the surveillance "occasion" from tool selection to data fate; 10 dimensions of personal information; five concentric circles of personal information; 12 goals of data collection; 17 trends supportive of a panoptic world view and 13 opposing it; 19 "metamethod moral mandates" for students of the topic; 12 broad societal implications; nine broad categories for determining ethics containing more than 40 questions and so much more. This book nicely, if hardly intentionally, illustrates one of Marx's 44 *techno-fallacies of the information age*: "if some information is good, more is better." Physician heal thyself! Less is more.

But these concepts aren't adequately followed through on, or brought together in a grand crescendo, rather they are chimerical, throw away lines to trick readers and reviewers. They make it appear that Marx has a fulsome argument, but really he is just an undisciplined essayist cramming one concept on top of another, unbounded by any method, nice tight little hypotheses or grounding in a philosophical system. It is not surprising that his editor made him cut the book so much. Marx seems incapable of tying together the array of approaches, topics and examples. Better to tell a coherent little story than an incoherent story of a Humpty Dumpty fragmented universe that cannot be put together.

Or, if as a badass theorist Marx opts for a big picture story, where is the grand theory or a unitary, clearly defined conceptual framework to bind it together? Even granting the need for concepts to order the cacophony, we are not told where the cornucopia of Marx' new "inducted concepts" come from, nor why they are superior to existent, older concepts. Why, for example, is "windows" the best metaphor? What about a mirror, or a microscope, a mosaic, a giant vacuum cleaner, filter or pump?

Even absent a driving theme, Marx generally slurs over whether his concepts are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, ignores their interactions and fails to logically link analytic levels. Thus the neutralization efforts of "distorting" and "masking" overlap and both involve a temporal link to the effort of "blocking." The latter is both a form of resistance and a goal, yet is only shown as the former. With

respect to analytic levels piggy-backing and switching (other forms of "neutralization") can be subsumed under a broader category of the appropriation of another's data. The goal of "strategic advantage" is one form of the broader goal of "discovery," although these are shown as logically equivalent.

He appears not to know the difference between a category and a type. Of great importance for an author whose main legitimation is heuristic not empirical, we are not told how to apply the concepts. When does surveillance creep become surveillance gallop, is the telescope an example of the "new surveillance"? How do we disentangle the simultaneous presence of both care and coercion as goals going back at least to Bentham (e.g., the caring seen in the welfare state's paternal/humanitarian efforts with the coercive surveillance associated with eligibility for benefits or the caring and coercive control of parents for their children). (Neocleous 1996) Without explicit directions for application, his new concepts take us no further than the small ships built in a bottle.

Marx can offer wicked incisive critiques of others. In 2007 for example he observed that surveillance studies has produced, "an abundance of nominal (if rarely operationalized) concepts....For the systematic, comparative, context and empirically focused social analyst, much of the current work, while often elegantly phrased, exploratory and useful in offering background knowledge, raising issues and sounding alarms, remains conceptually undernourished, non-cumulative and non-explanatory (at least in being conventionally falsifiable) and is either unduly abstract and broad, or too descriptive and narrow." (p. 126) WOW! Talk about falling on your own rapier. Here he is presciently writing about the weak frames and broken windows of his own book that would appear a decade later.

Regarding interviewing, his "relatively unstructured and opportunistic format" is good in not constraining, or planting answers for the person interviewed. But we are not told how interviewees were chosen, what or who they represent, what questions were asked, or how answers were validated. The selective reporting of interviews that Marx offers paints a picture of uniformity and tells us nothing about the correlates of variation that would permit explanation and internal and external validation.

Talk is cheap. Anyone can throw up conceptual schemes and elaborate endlessly on their permutations – how many dimensions can (or better should), be fit into a paragraph? It would be far better to have fewer concepts and ideas and to apply them to real case studies, not fake scenarios.

Marx is certainly clever, maybe even imaginative, as some of the blurbs claim, but there is no way to tell if the claims of the book are right or wrong. If sociology is indeed the scientific study of society, there is no scientific way to test Marx's "findings." The so called method (*sic*) of "analytic induction" is just another way of saying, "trust me." With that approach and \$4, you can buy a cup of coffee.

Some of the author's ethereal ruminations are refreshing but they remain that until their usefulness is demonstrated. Half baked, tantalizing, provocative, ironic observations are the *métier* of the novelist or essayist not the disciplined social scientist. Life is short and I am busy. Get to the point. A barely coherent stream of consciousness might work well for a standup comedian, but has no place in the logical building blocks of academic work.

What Marx offers is largely heuristic and its worth is in its' application. Why then does he duck the final test of showing us whether or not it works, or at least in telling us how others might apply it? Is he so busy expanding the reach of his net and tightening its mesh that he has no time to test it? Or is it because if it was tested it might fail and all his effort would be for naught.

B. Incompatibilities: Mixed Methods, Varied Audiences and Doublespeak

This book's taxonomic completeness with its methodological and stylistic multiplicities overwhelms the reader who manages to get through it. Welcome to the city of hodgepodge in the country of dizzy where serious statements and the occasional statistic are followed by puns; conceptual tables and matrices sit next to cartoons and vivid images; charts and diagrams adjoin rock and roll music and photographs. Pure fiction (the narratives) co-exist along with the poignant, real life personal experiences of others and Marx himself (his being detained at the Polish - USSR border, finding a microphone in the ceiling of his Moscow hotel room, encountering agent provocateurs and informers). Such material weaves in and out of an academic voice that is often detached and antiseptic and at other times drenched in values. What is fact and what is fiction?

The social concerns that moved George Orwell are prominent in Marx' work, some in a way he doesn't realize. His highly unconventional (for a real social *scientist*) merging of actual cases with fiction is pure doublespeak. In describing his "intentional genre blurring," he refers to his narratives as "quasi-fictional," "imagined but realistic," "docudrama" and "mockudrama" and as "fabrications" which are "true but not empirically *accurate*" (italics added). What the hell does that mean? He can't have it both ways. Either it is an empirical fact or it isn't. The reader seeking a firm empirical grounding in current surveillance is left standing on oatmeal.

What kind of a book is this? It is confusing. There are ponderous tables, lists and hundreds of references to obscure academic books and journals most of which are not noted long enough to be even little remembered. But there are very few hard numbers. As the inscription over the Social Science Building at the University of Chicago states: "When you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meager and unsatisfactory kind." His supposed documentation is bootlegged by way of illustration. As a Yiddish expression claims, "For instance" is not proof"!

The book uses personal and fictional accounts to communicate the feelings and experiences of watching or being watched. If, as a serious student you care about that kind of thing, fine. However, such stories are the tools of the novelist or the therapist, not the scientist. For a scholar in one of the oldest and most hallowed of western institutions, Marx seems to actually be having fun in writing and is (God forbid) sometimes even playful about the most serious of subjects. That is a sacrilege! Some topics deserve tears not laughter, the righteous academic to honor his or her heritage, needs to be *engagé* and *enragé, pas de rire*.

Sometimes the various styles and methods occur together in the same chapter. But equally problematic is the offering of different chapter types. Some are

in a tight, rigorous, academic vein appropriately footnoted and referenced, others for a mass audience contain a loose collection of images, lyrics and fiction, while others for practitioners read like a policy manual with check lists. Do Shakespeare, Simmel and Superman really belong in the same book? What is going on here?

A related point: who are we to believe? The cacophony of voices makes it hard to know just who is talking. In opening the can of lumbricus – is it the agent of surveillance, its' object/subject, the mass audience, the scientist or the author of the book who we hear? Whose voice is it? Even then, rarely does a speaker have only one voice and speakers in the same group may not agree. Marx mixes his own personal voice with all the others. Engaging an author is difficult when you don't know to whom you are talking.

With respect to his satirical fiction Marx tells us (p.268) that "...the world views in the narratives intermingle compelling values and social analysis with the dubious and even the outrageous. Some statements are eminently supportable and ring true." But the mercurial, uncourageous Marx, who, in his previous works could speak with the wrath of the prophets, makes no effort to identify what he thinks is outrageous and what is true. It is hard to evaluate or know where the "author" really stands, or even when he is speaking. Bet hedging and safe? Maybe, but that cover is deeply unsatisfying. CYA is the mark of the bureaucrat, not those who speak truly to the powerful.

The book validates the 3rd *rule of socio-dynamics* regarding how to succeed as a scholar: never use humor, sexual referents or quotes to make your point. Solemnity, esoterica, obscurity, passionless neutrality and the absence of a personal voice are the mark of the true scholar. The book fails *the sleep test* – If a work doesn't put you to sleep, it is probably not a work of serious scholarship. Popular accessibility portages a host of red flags for the serious scholar. To be taken seriously, scholars should write deep things with pedantic, colorless, soulless jargon, – George Orwell's (1968) trenchant essay on "Politics and the English Language" to the contrary. The serious scholar views Mark Twain's (1984) writing about the "impressive incomprehensibility of scientific and legal treatises" as a badge of honor, not derision.

C. Indecisive: Cop Outs (or Better Cop Ins)

Marx defines surveillance as a fundamental process characteristic of any living entity and notes the small ways that individuals and groups can still try to neutralize it. This calls attention to micro-climates and short term resistance not yet devastated by the impending storm. Sorry W.I. Thomas, thinking does not make it so. There is no escape from the relentless march of the omnipresent and totalizing mediation of inegalitarian information technologies on our daily life. As the man said, "you can run, but you can't hide." Runners leave footprints and with the engineering of modern, preventive, automated social control their trail will be blocked. Doesn't Marx care about the loss of the hermit's liberty D.H. Lawrence warned us about? How tightly wound and indistinct should the self be from society (contrast Asian conceptions with those in the West)? You don't have to buy all of Ayn Rand's (1961) meandering, asocial and anti-social philosophy ("Civilization is the progress toward a society of privacy. The savage's whole existence is public,

ruled by the laws of his tribe. Civilization is the process of setting man free from men.”) to see the coming reality.

Marx tells us that surveillance is everywhere and that it is neither good nor bad. “It all depends.” However, that is a cop out for those of us who have come to expect that the impassioned author of *Protest and Prejudice* and so many articles on the abuses of state and private power and on inequality would continue to pen engaged works. While there are numerous references to Marx in the book, only two of these are to KARL.

When your house is on fire do you calmly carry out a scientific study of the water pressure, or do you sound the alarm? Where does Marx stand? He notes there are tensions here, but that’s no excuse for sitting on the fence. Those who sit on fences near a fire at worse get burned and at best get splinters. Human rights violations and the soulless surveillance machines marching to dystopia are not laughing matters. Note Einstein’s observation that “technological progress is like an axe in the hands of a pathological criminal.” To not take sides is to take sides.

The facts of the omnivorous, octopus-like, unrelenting march of contemporary surveillance must fill all persons of good will and clear vision with fear and trembling. The appropriate political and normative position for any scholar worthy of the name is not an Aristotelian listing and balancing of every possible point for and against or the worship of Mertonian empirical ambivalence, ambiguity, contradiction and paradox, but standing up and using the legitimacy of his or her position to document problems and offer solutions. Don’t tell us to wait until the evidence is in. If this requires a little selectivity for a good cause, a narrowing of focus to abuses rather than benefits, and the courage to see black and white rather than letting a mottled picture obscure justice, so be it.

I know there are others who would disagree with my call for a more committed approach. Even Marx’s interviewee, the famed Rocky Bottoms who played a central role in introducing operations research to the law enforcement and national security communities, argued for a committed value based approach with clear answers and directions.⁴ In his presidential address to the American Society of Surveillance Bottoms said, “Most of the social issues we hear so much about are technical problems to be mastered, not social questions to be analyzed – or worse, to be negotiated” (*Windows* ch. 11).

Reading Bottoms’ speech it is easy to imagine him saying to professors who purport to be neutral, “get off your assess in those cozy, sylvan campuses and join the real world! Wake up. Don’t tell us what is wrong with society, or that you have clean hands and are above the battle. We are in the ultimate battle for our lives and our civilization, there is no room for neutrality or worse, for attacking the very institutions that protect us. In this period of unrelenting war, we must unleash the full potential of surveillance technology and let the chips (*sic*) fall where they may. This is not the time to follow the social scientist’s mantra of being a good listener, understanding how others make sense of the world, or whining about how complicated and grey it is. NO, if you are not with us, you are against us.”

Doesn't Marx see how the failure to take a position bolsters the military surveillo complex? Marx claims that the views he attributes to Bottoms (an entire

chapter is devoted to these!) are merely satire. But they are so convincing one must wonder if the satire was simply (as it has often been historically) a way for the shape shifting Marx to safely and softly express his real beliefs, while avoiding the shaming (and worse) from his liberal academic peers, were they to know what he really believes. Where you stand depends on where you sit/sat –and even more, where (or when) you lie (*sic*).

A clue to what Marx really believes is revealed by some sleuthing I did to find out who the guy behind the guy really is.⁵ Is there covert enmity or at least appreciation of authoritative approaches, if not necessarily authoritarian ones, beneath the seemingly benign and humorous surface?

Twenty-five years ago in reflecting on his change of heart regarding undercover practices from seeing them as an unnecessary evil to a necessary evil (at least in the American civil liberties context), Marx wondered if he did “want to please and be liked by those sometimes heroic figures in almost white hats?” (Marx, 1995) He was born on a ranch and was riding a horse before he was walking and he came up in the macho world of the 1950s. He writes of “growing up in Hollywood during the Cold War, when little boys everywhere wanted to be the heroic sheriff with the white hat in the western movie, or the square-jawed G-man with the fedora watching from the shadows in a comic book.” His role models were the police officers who led his Boy Scout troop and hung out at closing time at his father's restaurant on the Sunset Strip. As fits his gender, he is also clearly drawn to technologies as a way to make things right and he spent decades at MIT. Gertrude Stein said that Hemingway was really a Rotarian at heart, – that might apply here as well. Is Rocky Bottoms satire or the organ grinder's monkey?

On the matter of relevant literatures, is Marx just lazy, or self-aggrandizing in not building more on the existing literatures (e.g., on neoliberalism, globalization and privatization) and in drawing extensively from the old news of his earlier publications – some going back more than 40 years! He claims that in forging a fresh path for a new field, he is offering “an idea generating, issue raising, selective example book.” But that is no excuse for his inadequate engagement with the classics, let alone his failure to link recent empirical work and his own conceptualizations to them. That critique particularly applies to Marx's treatment of Foucault and the latter's showing how the expanded carceral net and diffused, less visible means of disciplinary power become embedded in social relations and create subjectivities beyond the goal of organizational control. (McQuade 2018)

The book is hopelessly out of date with respect to recent events, with no little or no consideration of post- Snowden changes. With such a fast moving topic, better to have daily on-line revisions than the fixity of a printed book. A book on surveillance today needs to give much more attention to topics such as big data (and the misguided notion that with respect to finding solutions, correlations can easily substitute for causality or that integers do not require interpretation inspired by a degree of intuition); the merging of ubiquitous face recognition with far flung data bases and social media; fusion centers; drones (including the efforts to develop “no-see-ums”)⁶ robots, driverless cars, video-cams and policing, the internet of things, cyber-security; new biometrics (the ultimate windows into the soul) including implants, brain scans, heart beat identification and DNA analysis; smart cities, cars, homes and clothes; comparative and globalization questions

(including China's surreal, totalizing expanded Hukou social credit system); new tools for protecting information; new restrictions on the collection of bulk data after Snowden (2015 USA Freedom Act) and the subsequent abrogation of current privacy protections associated with the new *It **Can** Happen Here* (with apologies to Sinclair Lewis 1935) President of the United States.

* * *

Moving from alter-ego to ego and the direct first person voice of G.T. Marx:

Binary Bogs

This is a very complicated case,You know,
a lotta ins, lotta outs, lotta what-have-you's. And, uh,
lotta strands to keep in my head, man.

“The Dude” in *The Big Lebowski*

In finishing a project there are second thoughts and enduring questions with no easy answers, particularly for independent scholars not reliant on sponsored research who are stranded on an island without nearby colleagues or an institutional base. The doubts are even greater when the topic is controversial, lacks an established research tradition and is done from a broad, interdisciplinary, largely qualitative, somewhat critical (or at least skeptical until shown otherwise) perspective using a variety of methods and straddling science and art. A further recipe for angst, self-doubt, and role conflict exists when the same book is aimed at academics, practitioners, and the educated public. One group of questions involves professional and personal choices about method, discipline, work styles and the responses and obligations of the researcher. Another involves the substance of the research. I consider the former first.

For reasons involving the nature of argumentation (Bendix and Berger 1959) (and perhaps the structure of the brain), rather than the complexities of truth, these issues often appear as binary choices. Some are a didactic “yes” or “no,” but the most interesting are seen on continua as matters of degree and tensions between polarities. I won't replay my reasons or positions on these questions as expressed in the *Windows* book, but I hope listing them can help other researchers. The majority of negative reviewer's (and my pretenseful) criticisms involve the book coming down on one or more of the “wrong” sides of the binary choices.

After completion of my book on undercover police I discussed some unresolved professional and personal issues put in the form of questions. (Marx 1995) They remain unresolved 25 years later. I offer their skeletons and then some parallel thoughts regarding substantive, rather than professional binary choices. When their irresolvability becomes too uncomfortable and the flares of doubt become too bright, I take some solace in the “what me worry?,” “you can't win” implications of Erving Goffman's saying, “They always find a way to put you down.” (Hirschi 2012)⁷

Professional and Personal Binaries

1. Is it appropriate for social scientists (whose legitimacy and traditions involve ordering micro-empirical measurements with systematic theory) to study broad amorphous topics, such as

privacy, deception, authenticity, liberty, autonomy, and justice that belong more fully to philosophy and law?

2. Why not start with a simple, contained researchable question with clear boundaries? It is best to start with just one question replicating prior research and to express this in the form of quantifiable, testable hypotheses. However, with tight integration comes the likelihood of excluding important and, in the case of an unconventional approach, possibly provocative material.
3. Should a book have a disciplinary identity? Given the astounding expansion of technique and knowledge each year, the specialized, narrow, disciplinary-based approach is compelling. No one can master all the potentially instructive disciplines. However, if you opt for a broad focus using a multi- (or ideally) interdisciplinary approach you risk being a superficial poseur/poacher ever waiting to be shown up by the real experts.
4. What is a book's primary emphasis – description, classification, measurement, explanation or prescription/proscription? A book should not try to do too much. If these are mixed, find the right balance and the links between these. But don't let the allure of breadth come at a cost of depth. There is a difference between a social scientist, a historian, a journalist, an essayist, and a novelist.
5. Has a work honored and engaged with the classics and prior research? Is it aware of the giants it is building upon? Are they given their due, or is the author simply unlearned, narrow, missing the essence, a plagiarizer, too present- focused or too hell bent on slaying giants? That leads to an opposite question for classics the reviewer doesn't approve of, – does a work fawningly, slavishly and uncritically accept or misinterpret work that is seen as theoretically and empirically wrong or in need of qualification? Karl Marx and Michel Foucault are the flags waved most vigorously by critical book reviewers whether for being ignored or maligned.
6. How do you deal with the premium put on originality, innovation and freshness in scholarship with the need not to stray too far from locating yourself theoretically and methodologically within an epistemic community that demands respect for the norms and expectations that define the group and has, whether for reasons of self-interest or parochialism, narrow comfort zones for envelope pushers? To be only peer-market oriented can mean no inner compass/core, but to follow one's muse brings the danger of being arrogant, ignored and even jobless. To get along go along, or be the squeaky wheel who gets the grease? But does it and under what conditions?
7. Does the book have the “right” level of analysis – (whatever the reviewer's cup of truth happens to be) – world systems, comparative international, international or national regions, nation state, states, cities, neighborhoods, face-to-face interaction?
8. What does it mean to understand social phenomena? What are the goals of a sociological inquiry? Look for objective, easily measureable factors and see what they are correlated with, then try to relate them to causes in such a fashion that other researchers can replicate your method. Does empathetic understanding, “interpretation” and the meaning of other's subjective experiences belongs to literature, plays, film, art and music not the scientific treatise or are these

things the very essence of “understanding”?

9. You can't be both a value free and a value-committed scholar. Figure out what you are and understand what a university stands for regarding the pursuit of truth and wisdom, but also be moved to appropriate action by the injustices of world. With respect to normative claims about right and wrong be clear about whether your standard is the ideal (assuming in practice you can determine what it means) or are relative to actual known societies. Balancing social science and social criticism so that they are mutually supportive rather than corrosive is challenging.
10. Who is your audience – scholars, educated public, policy makers, activists? Can it really be all of the above. Work well received by one group will lose others. In making a book accessible to a general audience, one runs the risk of dilution and being labeled a popularizer or even a journalist. Yet the trappings of academic respectability – literature reviews, sophisticated techniques, jargon, the assumption of a learned audience, and detached and spiritless writing – are hardly endearing to the average reader. The policy maker wants to be told what to do and doesn't need endless digressions on the complications of “why.” The same work is unlikely to make significant contributions to both social science and public policy.
11. Know your limits. How does and should knowledge relate to action? Do you have to know “why” in order to know “how”? Can tentative academics (with their limited and qualified cross-case knowledge who act as Monday morning quarterbacks with no responsibility for the consequences of the actions that practitioners must take) really have much to say that is useful? Stick to the facts, don't go beyond your role and expertise. No one elected you. Where do you lie on the continuum between being an uncontaminated, basic scientist seeking fundamental knowledge with little notion of how, when, where, or if, it will be used to being a policy researcher seeking normatively based solutions to an applied problem someone else has defined?
12. It was always easy to start a project. I took strength from the biblical injunction (Matthew 10:19) “...do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say.” And so it was. There is so much to say and never time to say it all. But unfortunately, Matthew says little about when to stop. How do you know when you are done? When do you let go of a current events type topic when the next day's news or research reports will fill you with new examples and trigger new ideas? The love-hate relationship with the project can trap you in an endless spiral of done-not done. The desire to be finally finished is in conflict with your hope that with more time, observations, reading and feedback it will get better.
13. Once you are done, what obligations do you have to promote the book, particularly if it deals with a social issue you feel strongly about. Should you be the clean-handed, basic scientist seeking fundamental knowledge with little notion of how, when, where, or if it will be used; or are you a policy researcher seeking normatively based solutions to an applied problem? Does, or should, art for art's sake apply when the scholar is in a tax supported institution? Jeune graduate students in a meritocratic appearing system are led to believe that the cream will rise to the top. At its worst this optimistic view involves a conceit about how important the work we do is and how eager the outside world is for it. Even in the American academic context, with only a hint of the European genteel, scholarly aristocratic tradition, there is something a bit crass and self-serving about promoting your own ideas. Does doing this risk contamination with the corrupt

outside world as you become a self-appointed social engineer-moral entrepreneur, peddling your own brand of expert truth and action? But doing nothing risks contamination of your conscience. A related issue involves the obligations (anticipatory in the writing, as well as after publication) researchers have to guard against misuse of their findings.

A final point regarding some haze around the scholar as detached or engaged. Scholars must realize that they are part of what they are studying and can't always be separated from it, even as one needs to be clear about what kind of role they are playing and statement they are making. As a scholar drawing on one's knowledge about the present and the past to think about the future, what is *possible* needs to be kept distinct from what is *probable*. But there is the interesting paradox in seeing that these are not necessarily independent. Given the power of scenarios, describing what seems possible may affect the probability of its occurring by moving people to action. In publishing we may affect climates of opinion. This lies behind George Orwell's observation that "I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily will arrive, but I believe . . . that something resembling it could arrive" (cited in Crick 1980). Orwell was not making predictions, he was describing possibilities in the hope that this act could help avoid them. The subtlety of that distinction suggests another way that social science can lead to social change beyond direct policy recommendations.

Substantive Binaries

Finally I will consider some binary (often interwoven) choices in the form of questions that lead reviewers of surveillance research to offer criticism or praise because a "right" or "wrong" choice was made. Here I duck the weighty questions around reviewers disagreeing about whether or not the correct choices were made regarding both the broad approach and how well it was carried out. Can an author balance (or better weigh) the cynicism of a social construction of reality perspective with the belief that there really are empirical, logical and perhaps even universal-normative truths than transcend social settings? The tension between the somewhat cynical, anti-Enlightenment, post-modern – ("that's just your story, man") sociology of knowledge perspective, as against the hopeful positivism of an early era experienced by those of us entering the field in the 1960s is ever present.⁸

1. Is the advancement of knowledge best served by treating surveillance as sub-field of sociology or as a more inclusive field involving political science and communications, or even as an independent new field of "surveillance studies"? (Walby and Anais 2015, Fuchs 2013)
2. Is surveillance (or is it best seen as) something universal across societies and contexts (families, work) and interpersonal interactions involving watching or attending to others, or is it specific to political oppression or capitalism that began with the French Revolution and industrialization? Does it trivialize human rights abuses to view repressive political spying as just another garden variety of information discovery and control as with children's games of hide and seek?
3. Even if surveillance is seen as a fundamental property of *Western societies* is that also the case for non-western societies? In China for example concepts such as public and private and the links between the self and society are defined and viewed very differently. New forms of surveillance strengthen and reinforce traditional identities, as well as creating new ones. (Jeffreys 2009, Wang 2005, Siqueira Cassiano 2019).

4. Apart from specific contexts, does an exclusive focus on the political and coercive as defining attributes miss other central goals such as care, voluntary (contractual) forms, self-knowledge and play?
5. What should the unit of analysis be – the individual, group, organization, institution, society (and then neighborhoods, cities, regions defined geographically or culturally, the nation state, the world system)? , , Things have origins even as the present can be grasped for some purposes without attending to history – but when that isn't the case how far back does one go? Furthermore, why restrict the topic just to humans when much might be learned from the animals we evolved from who are master's at using their senses for surveillance (e.g. (Haggerty and Trotter 2015)?
6. Is the move from traditional to the contemporary technology-based new surveillance viewed as a qualitatively different or simply a continuation (if a deepening) of the watching characteristic of any society or social setting? Depending on the choice preferred by the reviewer (and the approach of the book), a book can thus be attacked for either failing to see that there isn't much new here, or for not seeing how much has changed.
7. Does the work go too far, or not far enough, in offering social as against technical determinism or the reverse?
8. Does the work label the emerging surveillance society as utopia or dystopia (doom and gloom or happy and snappy)? Is the author a technophobe or technophile?
9. Does the work view such a society as Bentham's panopticon, GT Marx's perhapsicon and/or nihilicon?

Ancoro Imparo

With Tennyson's Ulysses, it is better to burnish in use (even if somewhat dulled and limited with age) than to rust through inactivity – "though much has been taken much abides" and "some work of noble note, may yet be done." What a blessing to have the use of the hall for close to 60 years and the confidence to critically reflect on one's work and career! As Michelangelo is reputed to have said late in his life, *ancoro imparo* (I continue to learn).

There are empirical, ethical, legal and practical answers to some of the issues treated above. When there are no unqualified answers, the tension between polarities can be humbling, even as the discomfort remains and can keep us honest.⁹ Awareness of how socially situated reviews and our responses to them are can introduce self-questioning and caution. That awareness can help one from feeling too terrible about unduly critical reviews, or too prideful, about unduly laudatory reviews. It also helps to know when to apply the adjective "unduly." Yet hopefully, as in preliterate and psychoanalytic tribal traditions, there is something to be said for exorcising ghosts and demons by identifying them. We need to be skeptical without drowning in skepticism and to search for wisdom, as well as knowledge. The former is impossible without the latter and the latter is pedantic and lifeless when divorced from questions of values.

References

- Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S., & Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bendix, R. and Berger, B. (1959) "Images of Society and Problems of Concept-Formation in Sociology," in Llewellyn Gross, (ed.) *Contributions to Sociological Theory*, Evanston: Row, Peterson & Co., 1959, pp. 92-118.
- Crick, B. (1980) *George Orwell: A Life*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Franklin, B. (2017) *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Value Classics Reprints.
- Fuchs, C. 2013. Political economy and surveillance theory. *Critical Sociology*. 39 (5).
- Goldstein R. (1983) *The Mind Body Problem* Random House.
- Haggerty, K. and Trottier, D. "Surveillance and/of Nature." (2015) *Society and Animals*. vol. 23, 4.
- Hirschi, T. (2012) "A "Variable" Researcher's Memories of Erving Goffman" dclv.unlv.edu/archives/interactionism/goffman/hirschi_12.html
- Hudson, M. (2016) "What Surveillance Will Look Like in the Future" 2016*The Atlantic*. November).
- Jeffreys, E. (2009). *China's governmentalities: Governing change, changing government*. London: Routledge.
- Lawrence, D.H. (2001) *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Modern Library.
- Lewis, S. (2017) *It Can't Happen Here*. Penguin Classics.
- Lodge, D. (1975) *Changing Places*. New York. Penguin.
- Malcolm X, Haley, A. 1992. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Ballantine Books.
- Marx, G.T. (1995) "Recent Developments In Undercover Policing" in T. Blomberg and S. Cohen, *Punishment and Social Control: Essays in Honor of Sheldon Messinger, Aldyne de Gruyler*. <http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/recent.html>.
- (1997) "Of Methods and Manners for Aspiring Sociologists: 37 Moral Imperatives." *The American Sociologist*.
- (2007) Desperately seeking surveillance studies: Players in search of a field. *Contemporary Sociology* 36(2).

- (2017a) *Windows into the Soul: Surveillance and Society in an Age of High Technology*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- (2017b) “[What's It All About? Reflections on Meaning in a Career](http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/whatsit.html)” in R. Darling, and P. Stein, P. *Sociological Lives* <http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/whatsit.html>

McQuade, B. (2018) “*Windows into the Soul* or the Clouded Glass of Surveillance Studies.” *Critical Sociology*. 44:4-5.

Morente, F. and Marx, G.T. (2019) “I Break in Order to Reveal.” *Society*. Vol 56:5. <http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/morente-marx.html>

Neocleous, M. (1996) *Administering Civil Society*. New York: St. Martins Press.

Orwell, G. (1968) “Politics and the English Language” in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell— 1968*.

Rand, A. (1961) *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*.

Siqueira Cassiano, M. (2019) “China's Hukou Windows into the Family.” *Surveillance and Society*. vol 17 1-2.

Shalin, D. (2008) “Goffman’s Biography and the Interaction Order: A Study in Biocritical Hermeneutics” presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Boston, August 1, 2008. <http://cdclv.unlv.edu/ega/bios.html>

Suzuki, D.T. (2013) *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. Important Books.

Tolstoi, L. (2009) *Confessions*. Merchant Books.

Twain, M. (1984) *The Innocents Abroad*. New York. Penguin Books.

Walby, K. and Anaïs, S. (2015). ‘Research Methods, Institutional Ethnography, and Feminist Surveillance Studies’. In *Feminist Surveillance Studies*. Dubrofsky, R. Magnet, S. (ed). Durham: Duke University Press.

Wang, F. (2005). *Organizing through Division and Exclusion: China's Hukou System*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Endnotes

¹ Of course such endeavors are not without risks. More broadly, as Shalen (2008) suggests, “Biocritical inquiry raises ethical issues concerning privacy, hearsay, gossip mongering, and general propriety of exploring historical personae who have explicitly or tacitly eschewed publicity. It also puts into a spotlight the biocritics’ biases, agendas, and framing preferences. Those looking into other people’s backstage regions must be ready to grant access to theirs. The question is how we can conduct biocritical and autobiocritical investigations with both tact and verve, expose hearsay for what it is while making the most of it.”

² The section on “Second Thoughts and Enduring Tensions” in Marx (1995) - <http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/recent.html>.

³ David Hume’s words of disappointment regarding the response to his *Treatise of Human Nature*.

⁴ In contrast to Marx's critics on the left, Bottoms would say the bias goes in the other direction. The cultural materials (cartoons, posters, advertisements, song lyrics) are overwhelmingly on the anti-surveillance side.

⁵ But in a fluid and ambiguous world of contradictions is there “really”, or necessarily, a guy behind the guy, --the actor who knows what he or she truly is and believes? Are the changing signals the chameleon sends reflective of its essence as having no essence, or a useful cover for the inner core of what it really is? In the best, kaleidoscopic Goffman terms that is the question! Chameleons, like humans, are doubly blessed in being able to hide ala passive blocking (their coloration), but also to actively deceive in having eyes that can pivot and focus independently. The subject of its’ surveillance seeing the eye not looking at it may thus be unaware of being observed.

⁶ Consider drones that look like flies and hover like hummingbirds, "snakebots" that can slither under doors, and smart dust, micro motes and cyborg beetles (live insects) that can portage cameras and other sensors (Hudson 2016).

⁷ This was said to console then graduate student Travis Hirschi after an editor questioned whether his impressionistic article on prostitutes was “really” sociology. Hirschi went on to become one of the most widely respected criminologists of the 20th century.

⁸ Unlike artists, academics should not express disinterest or disdain for critics. That is because of the occupational power of peers and the tentativeness of scholarly endeavors in which we must learn from each other and any one person is limited in what they know. In the case of my undercover book, many reviews were a Rorschach test revealing about the reviewer as well as the about the book. About half the time I could predict at least some of a reviewers' responses by knowing their discipline and politics. (Marx 1995)

⁹ These issues are explored further in Marx 1997, 2017b and Morente and Marx 2019.