As in Miesian architecture, form should follow function. The nontraditional form of one's insights doesn't—or shouldn't—matter a bit in terms of the correctness of one's insights. All that matters is that we write our sociology well enough to actually get the results of our research into the venues of circulation that we seek. Of course, one must also be willing to pay the price of rejection by anyone who feels otherwise. (Perhaps we should ask Andrew Greeley what he thinks about this.)

A fiction story is a great pedagogical space, though. It is akin to film, poetry, or novels—anything that isn't a classic, scholarly reporting of findings—in helping to reach people. It is perfectly, intentionally, ironic and important that Marx has chosen a far more accessible form to present his observations on the dangers of accessibility. Nonetheless, choices like these embrace readers/viewers in ways that our traditional forms of writing do not. They also let us reach into ourselves and develop our understandings of our foci of attention—as sociologists, as writers, as teachers—in ways that scholarly articles and monographs don't. It takes talent to be able to let the form in which one presents one's findings match or emerge out of the findings themselves. It takes not only an ability to feel what might be the best way to present one's ideas to one's desired audience but also the storytelling skills to execute this vision as one wishes. In addition, it takes the courage to give it a try.

Ultimately, the best sociological writing invites and allows readers to share the results of an author's hard work. It offers original conceptual tools and information about empirical patterns and interweaves these with similar disciplinary elements that have already been put out there. The best sociological writing also may provide an opportunity for readers to explore and develop their own concepts and empirical understandings. Rich, engaging descriptions of people, behavior, places, events, and artifacts more openly invite readers to develop their own interpretations of what's going on. At least one of the goals of authoritative, scholarly reporting is to beat us over the head with the author's sociological expertise. With the carrot of entertainment, however, the same expert could write a different kind of piece, using her or his authority more quietly, more enticingly, as it were. Its role would be to help filter out endless details and story line options, so that only the most sociologically salient remain. The result might be a better invitation to think, to imagine, along with her or him. Such a piece might be much better at opening discussion rather than closing it.

For sociologists, then, at least two of the implications of this essay are, first, we ought to pay close attention to the actual and potential manifestations of privacy concerns in everyday life. These are important aspects of daily life within a changing culture and society. Second, we should definitely consider writing scholarly insights in less scholarly formats, more often. In fact, it will be interesting indeed to see if the next step in the life of this essay involves Gary Marx negotiating with Hollywood. I suspect they will seriously insist on changing the ending, though.

NOTE

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SELF, SURVEILLANCE, AND SOCIETY

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We have met the enemy, and he is us
— Pogo

There is much to admire about Thomas Voire. At a time when many contemporary observers express concern about increasing crime rates, an economic downturn, xenophobia, and political apathy, Tom is presented as a law-abiding and hard-working citizen. We do not use the word "citizen" lightly. Born in 1966, Tom has lived peaceably, stayed gainfully employed, served his country, explored non-U.S. cultures in libraries and museums, and, most laudably, demonstrated a willingness to articulate and defend nationally cherished and constitutionally protected personal freedoms. In Thomas Voire, Gary T. Marx provides us with an archetype of the postmodern democratic man—educated, tolerant, worldly, and a staunch believer in equality under the law.

Tom is a product of much that is good about a nation devoted to preserving and enhancing individual liberties. The fact that Tom is a voyeur who collects personal data on unsuspecting women, tapes his consensual sexual relations with them, and spies while they disrobe does not challenge or undermine the nation's or Tom's foundational principles—it merely extends them. Marx shows how mass media and visual and communication technologies, omnipresent elements of postmodernity,[1] have constructed a fragmented and alienated self. Tom is a contemporary everyman whose freedom to engage in voyeurism represents the triumph of universal, abstract individual rights over the particular, real-life social relationships that constitute his actions as harmful. He is entirely dependent on collective discursive and material practices, yet denies his interdependence through the invocation of a radical individualism.[2]

By having ready access to the enabling tools—remote cameras, hidden microphones, the World Wide Web, and personal computers—Tom can live independently from others yet enjoy as much of others as he desires. In doing so, he occupies a moral and legal safe house. By appealing to both contemporary discourses of freedom and individualism and traditional ideals of equality under law, he tries to persuade us that his private fantasies

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harm nobody and are perfectly legal, keeping with the foundational principles of American society and justice. Tom's actions are mediated through electronic artifice and protected by the law in its "majestic equality." It is a world without obligation or constraint to the degree that reciprocity is mechanical and transactions are virtual. Isolated in his electronic anonymity, he can focus on his personal feelings—his only sensate experience—and reasonably disassociate his actions from understandings of power, gender, and privacy that suffuse everyday interactions. Without a social context to define and provide meaning, Tom has no sense of the harm that his actions cause. In denying the consequences of his behavior, he is appealing to one of law's grandest principles—it applies universally. Just as the law claims to disengage itself from context, history, and intersubjective connections, Tom's virtual world is similarly disconnected from everyday life. If "the rich and poor alike are forbidden to sleep under the bridges of the Seine," surely, Tom's reasoning suggests, peeping is equally innocuous whether the perpetrator is a man or a woman. Just as legal authority denies its disproportionate effect on the rich and poor, Tom expunges the influence of power and gender in social interactions. Marx's satirical description of Thomas Voire not only illuminates the frightening logic of a society that creates and facilitates this individualistic antisocial self, it also provides us with a subtle and compelling sociological critique.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT TOM

Marx presents Tom's history of sexual dysfunction and voyeurism as a fictional clinical case study. Early on, we find out that for the first seven years of his life Tom was entombed in a body cast, the result of a rare bone disorder. Rendered immobile and interactionally isolated, Tom observed life by reading comic books, watching television, eavesdropping on family members, and aiming his boy's telescope at neighbors' apartments and windows. At twenty he joined the military but was discharged when the Navy, unable to locate his records, accessed his Internet account and discovered that he had listed his marital status as gay. Later we learn that his therapist suggested that he record his sexual encounters to improve his technique. While applying this advice, Tom quickly develops his fascination for secretly videotaping women. (Due to feelings of embarrassment and a fear of rejection, Tom ignores his psychiatrist's advice to seek permission.) When he is eventually discovered, he promises his partner that nobody else would ever see the videotapes. In addition, he reasons, "An image is just an image, regardless of where it originates or resides." In good poststructural analysis, the representational properties of images are opaque, if not indeterminant. While in college and working as a security guard in a women's department store, Tom gets caught in a relay of surveillance: his employers observe him with the management's hidden camera while Tom is using the store's video monitoring equipment to look at women undressing in the changing rooms. He argues that he is the victim of gender discrimination since only female employees are permitted in the video-monitoring room. He justifies his conduct by stating that the female customers "didn't even know I was watching, so no harm was done." Some of his other trespasses include: being caught using the women's restroom in the department store (he claims it was more comfortable than the men's); being arrested and imprisoned for soliciting an undercover policewoman (he states he simply wanted to talk); and while in jail using a private database (as an inmate he is given a job entering data from medical insurance records) to mail unsuspecting women letters requesting companionship. (He argues that by honing his computer skills and fostering community he was rehabilitating himself.) Before the file's end, we read that Tom has achieved his ultimate fantasy. He has fabricated a long-term relationship with a woman he has technologically composed through pictures (video camera, electronic scanning), sounds (laser listening device, answering machine, speech synthesizer), life-size mannequins (3-D computer modeling), and personal identifying information (public records, databases, trash receptacles) abstracted from the visual, oral, and documentary representations of a real woman he has never actually met. Collecting detailed and intimate knowledge of his "girlfriend's" apartment, work, friends, thoughts, and habits, his virtual relationship is testimony to his technological wizardry and sociopathic tendencies.

AN ANALYSIS: THE TRIUMPH OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE FAILURE OF THE SOCIAL

In presenting Tom's licentious and delusional behavior in the form of a clinical case study, Marx makes us willing participants in the very surveillance culture that he is prodding us to condemn. Through this literary device, Marx illuminates how individual behavior, no matter how ubiquitous and familiar, although discrete and nonviolent, can be quite destructive when looked at from a broader sociocultural and structural perspective. Just as Tom's isolation and virtual relations prevent his apprehension of the implications of his actions, so too the very success of the human sciences in observing patterns of variation and developing criteria of normalization can limit our ability to provide sustained contextualized analysis and sustained critique. The modern authority of the human sciences has made us, to a degree, accomplices in the constitution of a contemporary society that produces a Tom Voire. Thus, Marx's parody amplifies two destructive characteristics of contemporary life: (1) an over-reliance on individual explanations for social problems and individual psychology to mitigate them and (2) the role played by experts (e.g., therapists, lawyers, managers and sociologists) in eroding the social context for meaningful relationships by promoting the commodification of knowledge and technique and by failing to condemn antisocial behavior.

In therapy, Tom's imagination is ignited and his narcissism exacerbated when his psychiatrist's recommendation leads him to tape his own sexual encounters. Despite a cursory nod to obtaining consent, the therapist ultimately encourages Tom to focus on his own self-development, rather than the consequences of his actions. Tom does not regard his voyeurism as destructive because he considers himself to be a moral individual who intends no harm. At this point, therapy as an exploration of oneself, one's desires and emotions, becomes a metaphor for an ethic of intentions. Object(ive) relations become submerged within a totalizing emotional and moral subjectivity. Rather than bridge the distance between self and other, Tom erases the distance in a world of nonintersecting selves imagined as sets of internalized systems of neuroaesthetic signals (i.e., feelings). According to Tom, if women are put off by his behavior and "feel badly," then they must deal with *their* feelings rather than use him as a scapegoat. Both Tom and his therapist elevate his individual needs and desires over any explanation of the social conditions that encourage voyeurism. Furthermore, the fact that Tom's peeping destroys the trust indispensable for making and sustaining social relationships is never addressed.

Our justification for examining Tom's file, counseling him as a patient, and monitoring him in the workplace rests on our professional authority. As experts, we appeal to higher purposes for reading Tom's confidential medical records because, after all, by

examining his file without his permission we are violating the same privacy rights that Tom's disturbing behavior compels us to defend. As therapists we are attempting to change Tom's behavior; as employers we are using video monitoring to watch and regulate his behavior to improve employment conditions. Unfortunately, our knee-jerk fears of the repressive effects of power and knowledge prevent us from explicitly recognizing the social context of these unequal relationships (therapist/patient, employer/employee). By failing to explain to Tom how we are using our socially constructed authority to invade his privacy, it is understandable that he is confused about why his actions are deemed more harmful than ours. He may be a patient and an employee, but how does that justify our invasions of *his* privacy? By failing to come up with *any* explanation for why some types of secret surveillance are preferable to others, we are effacing the distinction between invasions of privacy for purposes of social control and medical treatment and invasions of privacy for sheer self-gratification. His argument that as a "professional" security guard his action is similar to a male doctor watching a female patient allows Tom to exploit the postmodern sensibilities of a self-centered culture. He is not guilty of peeping. He is the real victim.

Marx continues to expose the frailty of our moral claims. For one thing, as a society, we are responsible for creating "Peeping Tom," especially those of us with professional and technical expertise who are helping to fashion this "open" egalitarian society, a world where all distinctions (of social status, of truth, of gender, of subjectivity/objectivity) are elided and commodified for profit taking. Tom is a utilitarian consumer of the popular market as well as a good student of our expert knowledge. We learn that he broadens his knowledge of surveillance techniques in mainstream institutions (the military, jail, and college) rather than in extremist survivalist groups or illicit chat rooms. Furthermore, ubiquitous mainstream media (e.g., "reality" television) that blur the distinction between fact and fiction nurture Tom's voyeuristic tendencies. He relies on the pop psychology of supermarket magazines to reason that his leering at young women fulfills their need to feel attractive and better about themselves. The line dividing unwanted and threatening sexual attention from harmless flirting is as unclear to Tom as the difference between supermarket tabloids and college classrooms. Thus, Tom learns to articulate antisocial reasons for his behavior while taking college-level courses in criminal justice and women's studies. He explains that he was in the department store's video-monitoring room while conducting research for a paper on shoplifting (personal edification). Referencing a phrase he encountered in his women's studies class, he argues that he was not "cowardly or exploitative" because he was not gaining any sexual gratification from his voyeurism (self-righteousness).

We want to protest (surely Tom's actions are more deplorable than ours?), but Marx startles us with a thunderclap. Perhaps there is *no* distinction between our surveillance of Tom and his voyeurism. No matter how laudable our reasons, our actions constitute an invasion of privacy and are equally destructive in their cumulative effects. Marx's critique of the conditions that elevate the individual over the social remain, but he also troubles our understanding of social context. Is it sufficient? Might not our critical self-reflexive practices, operationalized through the ethical procedures for engaged consensual research, provide a ground of differentiation between Tom and ourselves? Does an awareness of the fuzzy boundary between self and other, and a sensitivity to the authority and power of professional knowledge help us monitor and hopefully contain the possible violence and coercive tendencies of our own research? And might not our research

surveillance expose relationships of inequality and subordination whose otherwise relative invisibility might sustain a kind of sacrificial positioning in the collective social structure?

Marx is suggesting that perhaps an understanding of social context does not provide us with sufficient means for evaluating social or legal harm. If social meaning varies, depending on who acts, against whom, at what time, and whereabouts, there are no universal standards for evaluating behavior or intentions. He demonstrates this limitation by showing how socially constructed rules and meanings impact differentially on men and women. For example, Tom complains that female correctional officers are able to watch him dress, shower, and use the bathroom, but female inmates are not subject to the same humiliation since male guards cannot conduct similar surveillance in womens prisons. He argues that this violates his right to practice Christian modesty, and is also an example of employment discrimination based upon gender. It is, of course, possible to argue that this unequal treatment is reasonable given that women have been, and continue to be, disproportionately victimized by men. Nevertheless, this does not provide a particularly clear and consistent refutation of Tom's argument. Isn't it possible that Tom feels unfairly victimized and debased in this situation? Why does gender trump Tom's freedom to exercise his religious beliefs? To make such an argument—about the weight of historic discrimination and subordination—requires an abandonment of that cherished legal equality. Moreover, it would require some notion of aggregate effects that modern society is unable to grasp epistemologically and morally. The therapists, lawyers, judges, and social workers that know Tom are unable to explain to him why he cannot do to women what they can do to him. In effect, his case reveals that at the heart of modernity is a political, moral, and philosophical reductionism (individual freedom, equality, subjectivity) that has not yet found the grounds to explain or justify human aggregation or social bonding.

Marx is implying that laws are too general and social norms too capricious for defining and preventing antisocial behavior, just as they are inadequate for explaining and justifying sociality. They fail to provide rational, defensible, and consistent criteria for condemning (and hence discouraging) actions that are destructive on both individual and social levels. Perhaps the impossible justificatory burden derives from the desire for consistent criteria. Perhaps the seductive qualities of increasingly sophisticated technologies render us insufficiently pragmatic in the face of technologies' instrumental, positivistic epistemologies. Here, Marx suggests that perhaps sociology can help us resolve this conundrum by more clearly establishing the nature of the relationship between society and self, by creating the bridge that Tom Voire denies. In a sense, Marx is valorizing C. Wright Mills's claim for the sociological imagination: to connect biography and history.

Marx has already laid this foundation by introducing us to Cooley's observation that part of our sense of self is constructed through interactions with other people. Unfortunately, Tom has already used this knowledge, gleaned from a social psychology class, to his advantage. When Tom argued that by staring at attractive women he was helping them feel good about themselves, he was relying on Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self." It is only when Tom reads a copy of Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* that Tom reassesses his behavior and seeks therapy. In acknowledging the effect of Goffman's rather profound concept of the performed self, Marx suddenly reveals a compelling sociological argument for why invasions of privacy are invidious and, more generally, for why the surveillance society is no society at all. Even

though a sense of self does rely on the perceptions of others, taken out of context, off the stage of ongoing social transactions, the looking-glass self can be interpreted in a reductionist manner. This is exemplified by the solipsism of Tom Voire. By looking at the surface, or only the image in the glass, Tom fails to understand the importance of preserving the individual self's personal borders and back-stage regions from assault. If these are invaded, social relationships and appreciative illusions, in our own eyes and the eyes of other people, can no longer be sustained.

Goffman provides Marx with his critical wedge against epistemological and moral nihilism. Tom is irretrievably split between his surface, front-stage behavior and his back-stage subjectivity. He is unable to bridge these seemingly bounded terrains perhaps because the same "positivistic"[3] and reductionist logic that justifies formal legal equality in the face of social inequality ("The rich and poor alike are forbidden to sleep under the bridges of the Seine") also produces the abundant technological marvels that populate the material front stage of Tom's life. From this individuated reductionist logic, there is no need to consider how front and back stage are related. At the same time, we note that Tom is not insensitive to the power of internalized subjectivity, the back stage of desire and need, an immaterial although equally real world to his front stage of technological wizardry. Moreover, Marx describes the transactions across these terrains for Tom—his desires propel his technological mastery and his technological mastery satisfies his emotional needs. Despite the permeability and exchanges across these terrains, however, the discourses Voire mobilizes (individualistic psychology, legal rationalism, consumer utility, freedom, equality) do not, until he encounters Goffman, explain the mutual constitution of the front and back stages. Without Goffman's recognition and explication of the intimate connection between subjectivity and performance, Tom, like many postmodern selves, remains fragmented, unmoored, and alone (with his virtual girlfriend).

In his invocation of Goffman's sociology as a framework for overcoming both empiricist reductionism and affective solipsism, Marx offers us grounds for moral judgment as well as epistemological critique. In recognizing that these personal, yet socially constructed, boundaries are sacred and central to human dignity, Marx circumvents the failure of moral relativism and identity politics to protect our right to privacy. He replaces the unfair outcomes of discriminatory laws and inconsistent social meanings with the universal principle of the performed self. It is the application of this standard that protects Tom's right to maintain personal fantasies and, simultaneously, provides us with reasonable, equitable, and defensible criteria to judge when his actions constitute an invasion of privacy. Tom's actions are reprehensible when his imaginary world depends on his violation of another individual's personal borders. Similarly our actions, if nonconsensual and unreflexive, are indefensible when we violate his.

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NOTES

1. We use the term postmodernity to refer to a structure characterized by separations of time and space, and flexible, instrumental, distanced, and disembedded social relations as well as high degrees of reflexivity and trust in expert systems. Giddens (1990, 1991) refers to these as the consequences of modernity; Harvey (1989) describes it as postmodernity.

2. In his essay "The Jewish Question," Karl Marx ([1843] 1978, pp. 33–34) states that legal rights, promulgated by the democratic state under capitalism, claim to guarantee universal freedoms by effacing social distinctions based on birth, social rank, education, and occupation and by eliminating property ownership as a qualification for citizenship. In reality, however, democracy serves capitalism's interests by conveying some abstract notion of individual "personhood" through a set of specific laws. Thus, Marx argued, capitalism contributed to the erosion of the communal norms and associational ties (e.g., guilds and kinship) that protected individuals from economic exploitation under feudalism (Sutton, 2001, p. 75). Similar to Marx, we are looking at what factors contribute to the construction of isolated selves in contemporary society, but we do not assert the primacy of economic relationships. We are suggesting that the social conditions associated with postmodernity (influenced and exposed by the law and modern forms of technology) may perpetuate an egoistic ethos that protects Tom's right to peep while simultaneously denying that his actions are destructive. While Karl Marx advocates recomposition of the self through class struggle, this commentary explores the possibility that Erving Goffman's conception of the self (1959) can be used to help identify and redress the social harm caused by violating others' privacy.

3. We distinguish positivism, a legitimate tradition of self-conscious empirical method, from positivistic, the assertion that only what is known through methodological positivism is real.

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