

A Brief Note From the Author

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Thomas I. Voire is drawn from a forthcoming book *Windows Into the Soul: Surveillance and Society in an Age of High Technology* (University of Chicago). I sought a way to communicate about the variety of new technologies for collecting personal information, and I also wanted to convey the subjective sense of being a watcher and being watched. A simple table listing technologies or reporting things such as the number of hidden video cameras sold each year and the use of elaborate analytic conceptualizations to organize the empirical material, however needed, seemed lifeless and unable to convey the sense that something striking was happening in our society with respect to surveillance technology. The ability to cross personal informational borders goes far beyond big brother or big corporation. It involves all of us in our daily interactions. One approach is to offer a detailed case study. But then I would be bound by whatever elements happen to be present in the literal case. I wanted my account to be representative of the broad range of surveillance technologies. I also wanted it to communicate the emotional wallop that is often felt when covert surveillance is discovered as well as the powerful attraction of secret knowledge. To do this, I turned to the ideal-typical case of a clinical interview with Mr. Voire.

Like any ideal type, this is a fictional account—but it is fictional only in the sense that it didn't all happen this way, even though it all *could* happen and is largely based on actual cases and a composite from interviews. In my book, I follow this fictive account with traditional sociological analysis. Among some of the questions Voire's case raises for me are:

1. How can we explain the gender differences in cross sex observation and use of surveillance technologies?
2. What are the major structures, processes, and consequences in the relationships among various types of new information technology that laws, policies and manners are intended to regulate? Are there examples of laws that effectively anticipate the problems of new technologies without inhibiting invention, commerce, and freedom of expression?
3. How should the feelings of a target be balanced with the intentions of the observer? Where does the "real self" stop and a fictional self begin? Can an individual be hurt by the collection of personal information intended only for the private use of the collector? What is the harm from secret surveillance if the surveilled never knows?

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4. Given the ambiguity, elasticity, and frequently conflictual nature of values and norms, how is it that we have the degree of social order that we have? Why aren't there many more Toms?
5. If visibility brings accountability and we seek transparency in government and organizations (a fundamental assumption of democratic theory), why does our society go to the other extreme in the valuing of individual privacy?
6. Is there a role for more fiction in sociological work (holding apart that too many of our critics already think that what we do is fiction)? Should the creation of such fictions be added to our methods kit, along with established methods such as the quantitative fictions of simulations?

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