

The New Industry of High-Tech Spying

The post 9/11 spending splurge by the U.S. national security state has given rise to a new industry devoted to developing technology for spying on almost everyone. These gizmos now represent a threat to what's left of personal privacy, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

It was certainly ironic that the Wall Street Journal, the mouthpiece of capitalist ideology, would publish an exposé on "a new global market for off-the-shelf surveillance technology," entitled "The Surveillance Catalog" and subtitled "where governments get their tools."

The WSJ story references some "200 plus marketing documents" from companies worldwide and describes an array of surveillance tools designed to rob every person on the planet of his or her privacy. Here are just a few examples of the kinds of capacities that are being offered for sale to government agencies:

–Hacking: hardware and software that take advantage of "black-hat hacking" and "malware" methodologies to acquire a target's financial and other data. This can now be done to large numbers ("hundreds of thousands") of people simultaneously.

–Intercept: "infect computers by falsifying web sites or updates of popular software" and then "remote monitor ... what the user is doing on the internet."

This goal also can be achieved with "man in the middle" software that allows the monitoring of two sites that are communicating with each other. This software not only monitors communications but also can "alter the communications, possibly inserting malicious software into the data transmission or tricking the parties into believing they are communicating over a safe channel."

–Web Scraping: the gathering of "massive amounts of information" along with the ability to store it and sort it so it can be used by analysts. Among the most important targets are "social networking sites."

The industry magazine, PC World, called "The Surveillance Catalog" a "creepy read ... at best disturbing and at worst unnerving." PC World also notes that most of the buyers of these tools will be police departments, intelligence agencies and other government departments that now constitute a large part of an "annual retail market for surveillance tools [that] has mushroomed from nearly nonexistent in 2001 to \$5 billion today."

Actually, "unnerving" is something of an understatement. According to The IT

Manager Web site, “one vendor executive acknowledged their products could be misused by dictatorships and oppressive regimes. ‘This is a dilemma. It’s like a knife. You can cut vegetables [with it] but you can also kill your neighbor.’”

The executive goes unnamed in the article but the shallow nature of his or her insight does not bode well. Clearly, “dictatorships and oppressive regimes” have no monopoly on “misusing” this sort of “product.” With the USA Patriot Act and the power trips of the George W. Bush administration sadly carried forward by his successor abuse has become the U.S. Justice Department’s middle name.

A 2007 audit of the FBI revealed that the agency had abused its power under the Act “a minimum of one thousand times to secretly obtain personal information” of U.S. citizens. There is absolutely no reason to believe the abuse has ceased.

A knife is for cutting and that entails a wide array of different uses. The products cited in “The Surveillance Catalog” article are not made for a broad variety of purposes. They are made for a very narrow range of applications, all of which are inherently intrusive. Indeed, they are made to invade other’s privacy and that is it.

It is important to keep in mind in whose hands these tools are to be placed: officials in positions of power who really don’t feel bound by the law, even as they see themselves enforcing it. People like:

–The Oakland police who have no problem playing at being Storm Troopers against peaceful demonstrators.

–The University of California at Davis police who have no problem casually dousing passive protesters with pepper spray.

–The New York City Police who have no problem spying on innocent Muslim citizens.

–The FBI’s Anti-Terrorist Unit whose unique approach to making us “safe” entails designing their own terrorist crimes and then luring individuals into attempting to commit them.

And on it goes. “Law enforcement” institutions are always at high risk of corruption by virtue of their position and power. Given this fact one might argue that the surveillance tools being slickly marketed to them are actually made to be abused.

The Market Environment

Here are some other observations engendered by “The Surveillance Catalog.”

Give some thought to the ideological precepts of capitalism. A major precept is that the capitalist should make profit by producing things that other people want to buy. Yet there is nothing in this prescription that precludes any specific product. Indeed, in theory, a capitalist can produce anything that commands a market.

That means in an entirely “free market,” capitalists will deal in anything that sells: sex, guns, drugs, slaves, you name it. If it sells, capitalists will bring it to market. Unless, of course, the capitalists are working within the law and the product is outside the law, i.e. if the product is illegal. And what makes a product illegal is a law that results in the direct and often necessary regulation of the marketplace. \$\$\$

Yet, why are some products deemed illegal? One reason is that they are destructive of community bonds and values.

Some illicit drugs have that potential; some forms of deviant sex may also have that potential; and so do the offerings cited in “The Surveillance Catalog.” They can, and no doubt will, make minced meat of the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution which is supposed to guarantee all of us the right to be “secure in [our] persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures.”

Therefore, it follows that these products should be relegated to the illegal side of the capitalist ledger before they erode what little is left of our community bonds and values – particularly privacy. But who is to enforce this hypothetical regulation if the police and the justice system, including the Supreme Court, have already been led to abuse these powers by the trauma of 9/11?

That is very good question and I am not sure of the answer. Perhaps we need some variation on the Roman Tribune of the people. An ombudsman standing apart but also able to protect.

The trend toward an ever greater abuse of power through the act of spying has apparently created its own capitalist market. And the products designed to meet the demand of that market are now there for all to see.

But many citizens will not look because they feel that the government is only interested in “subversives” and not them. This is a naive assumption. “The Surveillance Catalog” is a danger to us all. But then, perhaps as writer Larry Niven asserts, “privacy is just a passing fad.”

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Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.

OWS Shatters the Political Frame

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and right-wing talk-show hosts are whipping up their supporters against Occupy Wall Street, while some Democrats support the OWS goals but fear the backlash. However, poet Phil Rockstroh says this movement transcends traditional politics.

By Phil Rockstroh

I've noticed a meme beginning to fester among liberal insiders who are positing that the Occupy Wall Street movement is starting to "distract" the citizenry from the wicked machinations of Republicans of the legislative class. Nonsense.

The OWS movement is not a distraction from, but serves as an alternative to, the disingenuous theatrics staged by the political hacks of this faux republic. Conversely, movement members have grasped that it is the hollow grandstanding the modus operandi of the present U.S. political system itself that serves as distraction from the realities of the day.

Those drawn to the OWS movement realize this: Vast sums of money are required to get the attention of and gain influence over the entrenched class of self-serving political insiders who hustle their wares in Washington, D.C.

Year after year, election cycle after election cycle, Washington's political class has revealed whose interests it serves. Accordingly, let the 1percent and their political operatives continue on their present myopic, self-serving, society-decimating course: By doing so, they will just bring more outraged people into the streets and hasten their own undoing.

Yet, because arrogant power, girded by duplicity and ruthlessly maintained, does not yield without a fight, we should expect more of the following: Stories are circulating that Clark, Lytle, Geduldig & Cranford, a well-connected Washington lobbying firm, with ties to the financial industry, have floated a \$850,000 plan to pillory Occupy Wall Street.

This should not come as a surprise. Living in a society dominated by the power of massive corporations, and the inequitable wealth these self-perpetuating

organizations have at their disposal, we will be relentlessly subjected to the narratives they generate.

“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”, Steve Biko

Since birth, most of us have been enveloped by the consumer state’s commercial hologram.

Almost every daily act we perform and attitude we evince is in some measure determined by the dictates, demands and the incessant, commercial come-ons (the *de facto* propaganda) of the corporate state e.g. from what time you rise in the morning, to the food you eat, to what you clothe yourself in, to how you spend your days, to what time you go to sleep at night, to what stories you are audience to the cultural myths you have internalized by means of mass media saturation, to the manner you celebrate festivals and holidays, to how your illnesses and of those around you will play-out, even the circumstances of how you will approach and succumb to your death.

Because these are the waters in which we swim, most will accept societal and cultural circumstances as a given believing, for example, that when they posit a political utterance that the opinion expressed has been formed exclusively of their own mind, by the exercise of free will.

Accordingly, a large percent of the populace of the U.S. believes consumerism is a form of freedom that the exercise thereof mainly involves being at liberty to trundle to a mall and be in possession of the right to choose between a big-ass cookie or a giant Cinnabon that freedom of choice is expressed by over-priced running shoes or security can be found in a massive SUV.

In this manner, the propaganda campaigns of the corporate/national security state have proven effective at promoting and perpetuating the inequitable status quo in place at the present time. Do not underestimate the well-rewarded, professional con men employed in the criminal enterprise known as “public relations.”

Remember, these masters of deceit sell wars, which are fought by the poor and in which the underclass kill and die for the profits of a ruthless few. War is a money train for the rich and connected but a death wagon for the rest of humankind.

Ready yourself to be buffeted by a barrage of virtual reality blunderbuss volley after volley of mainstream media launched Big Lies and the ground fire of social media small distortions. Don’t walk unarmed into the line of fire.

Remember this: Most likely, the corporate state has, to some degree, colonized your mind, as it is well on its way to destroying the ecosystem of the entire planet.

Conversely, let your soul occupy you. While there might be an ongoing effort to scour Liberty Park of liberty, they cannot do likewise to your heart without your consent.

Turn the tables on them: Evict the corporate occupiers from the public realm within as all the while, you challenge propaganda whenever it crosses your path on the streets, at your workplace, at family gatherings, and on social media because a lie left unchallenged begins to be accepted as truth.

And worse, invades, colonizes and exploits (and often kills) a portion of the soul of the world. Importantly, do not underestimate the ruthless nature of calcified power. Regarding the subject: On Thursday, Nov. 17, near Foley Square, there was blood on Broadway.

At the scene, I witnessed thuggish, NYPD motorcycle cops driving directly into groups of peaceful demonstrators, with the intent of antagonizing those gathered, and when people stood their ground and refused to be bullied then phalanxes of blue-shirt bastards, swinging nightsticks, waded into the crowd.

Even with my wife, tugging at the back of my jacket, attempting to tow, as we say down south, my narrow ass away from the direction of injury or jail, I could not contain my outrage; I growled at a smirking cop, gloating over the carnage, "just keep it up, you mindless thug, when you get folks angry enough, the boot just might be on the other neck ... namely yours."

In hindsight, in my own defense: Being on scene and witnessing peaceful people attacked and brutalized, one is apt to become seized by rage. But what is the excuse for the mayor of New York City and his Police Commissioner?

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Commissioner Raymond Kelly and the ranks of NYPD have proven themselves willing to barricade and checkpoint the city into chaos as opposed to enduring ongoing moments of freedom of assembly and free expression.

And this is why we must not retreat. Their tactics of repression are very expensive to the city budget, and money is the only thing they love. Hence, they have, in turn, provided us with a tactic we can use; we can hit them where they feel it. (Conversely, they can take blow after blow to their honor because they are devoid of that character trait.)

The ground is shifting below our feet and this phenomenon involves more than the echoing footfalls of marchers and the trudging of militarized formations of riot

cops on city streets worldwide. The first vibrations, closer to tremors, transpired because the ground below us has been fracked of dreams ... the void engendered seismological activity.

Now, from Cairo, Egypt's Tahrir Square to Syntagma Square in Athens, Greece, to Liberty Park, in New York, New York, to Oscar Grant Park in Oakland, California, we have become like tuning forks, in sympathy with the resonances of the tormented earth.

Subsequently, the walls of the neoliberal prison are cracking. We are no longer isolated, enclosed in our alienation, imprisoned by a concretized sense of powerlessness; daylight is beginning to pierce the darkness of our desolate cells.

"The state can't give you freedom, and the state can't take it away. You're born with it, like your eyes, like your ears. Freedom is something you assume, then you wait for someone to try to take it away. The degree to which you resist is the degree to which you are free." ~ Utah Phillips

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