

Surveillance, Control and Repression

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GPS enabled smartphone apps are being used by private companies to track and surveil employees during business hours and also during off times. A sales executive employee at the international wire-transfer service Intermex has sued because she was being tracked via the Xora StreetSmart app on the company issued phone which she was not allowed to turn off even while not at work. After complaining about the privacy intrusions and spying by the company, she was fired.

Bank of America is one company using 'smart badges' to biosurveil the voice and behavior patterns of call-center workers. Monitoring includes how employees talk to customers, who talks to whom within the office, when employees send emails and respond, make phone calls, go on breaks, leave their desk to go somewhere else in the office, etc. The technology and data analysis is done by Humanyze, a spin off from the MIT Media Lab, which works with over 20 companies in banking, technology, pharmaceutical and health care industries monitoring thousands of employees. The analyzed data shows how each monitored employee performs compared to others, which amongst other things can be correlated to sales data and analyzed to assess individual and collective job performance.

In the UK, a Cambridge neuroscientist and former Golden Sachs trader, John Coates, is working with companies to use biosurveillance to create 'human optimization' in business performance. This researcher focuses on using technology that measures hormones that increase confidence and other 'positive' emotions and those that produce negative, stressful behavior that would impact a trader's performance. The idea is to monitor employees and alert supervisors with an 'early warning system' if traders are getting close to a 'hormonal danger zone' where they won't produce the desired trading results. Such biosurveillance is used on employees at hedge funds, banks, call centers, consultant firms, and many others.

Lamar Pierce, associate professor at Washington University St. Louis published a research paper about the effect of wearable biosurveillance in the restaurant industry. The monitoring software called Restaurant Guard by NCR analyzes data on all payment transactions and all employee behavior. The data, for example, showed that when employees were surveilled, the restaurant's earnings increased weekly because employees felt pressured to increase sales. Other data showed that an employee who serves several tables faster may be less good at increasing sales with specific customers. The study looked at 392 restaurants in 39 states that used the biosurveillance and software programs on the employees.

Many companies in the US demand that employees provide their social media usernames and passwords to even be considered for employment and/or to stay employed. This can also be applicable to company owned computers, phones or other technology used by an employee. Only 9 US states have passed laws to ban companies and/or schools from such practices, however, in many other states like Florida a company can fire an employee who refuses to give up their private information.

A new Texas law (H.B. 121) allows police officers to function as debt collectors with credit and debit card readers in their patrol cars, which take payment from people with outstanding court fines and warrants during a police stop. Abuse is being reported in the tangled relationship between the police and the company Vigilant that provides the automated license plate reader machines (ALPR) and the data system for free. Vigilant forms a 'hot list' of outstanding fees given to them by the police, and this is part of the data police officers read when scanning license plates. During a police stop, a person is given a 'deal': either get arrested or pay the fine with a 25% additional processing fee that goes to Vigilant. Vigilant has sent erroneous warrant notices to an undisclosed number of people who never had warrants in their names in Texas, some of whom then may have paid the warrant fine or have been wrongly arrested. The ALPR system by Vigilant uploads 70 million images a month to the 2.8-billion plate scan database. Outstanding fines are a major source of city revenue, and are one aspect of institutional racism practiced in places like Ferguson, Missouri.

North Dakota police have weaponized drones with tasers, tear gas, bean bags, pepper spray, sound cannons, rubber bullets and other so-called 'non-lethal' and 'less than lethal' weapons, which is legal by an amendment to the law H.B. 1328.

The Associate Press reported that the FBI has a large fleet of airplanes that surveil entire cities and large rural areas with high-tech cameras, and cell phone monitoring equipment. In a 30-day period, the FBI made 100 spy plane flights over 30 cities in 11 states to collect data. The Wall Street Journal revealed that the US Marshals have their own program using planes mounted with Stingrays, which direct all cellphone activities to the machine rather than the closest cell phone tower and collect all the data. The CIA is involved in and is financing the Marshal's program. On April 19, 2015, Freddie Gray died of a severe spinal injury 7 days after having being transported in a police car after being arrested by the Baltimore police. Protests began on April 18, and riots, protests and other actions escalated immediately after Gray's funeral on April 27. A State of Emergency was declared, along with a mandatory curfew, and 2,500 National Guardsmen were deployed in the city. During this period, the ACLU has revealed that two planes operated by FBI in cooperation with the local police surveilled the city for hours at a time. It is unclear what surveillance equipment was onboard the planes, what kind of data was collected, who was targeted, or how the surveillance related to any of the 486 arrests made during the Baltimore riots.

Numerous investigative reports have shown how various local, state, and national police forces have surveilled and targeted #BlackLivesMatter protestors, sympathizers and activists. The Missouri National Guard labeled people involved in protests and riots in Ferguson after the killing of Mike Brown by police officer Darren Wilson as 'enemy forces' and 'adversaries'. Likewise, the Department of Homeland Security regularly coordinates and surveils Black Lives Matter activists and protests in numerous cities and rural areas around the country. The California Highway Patrol along with other police agencies spied on Black Lives Matter protests under the coordination of the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center, the counter-terrorism fusion

center, which also supplied information back to the regional police agencies. The NYPD used numerous undercover officers and agent provocateurs to infiltrate Black Lives Matter protests. Surveillance was also conducted by the Metropolitan Transit Authority, New York State police, and counter-terrorism officers against Black Lives Matter protestors.

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