Chapter 83

Stealing Consciousness:
Using Cybernetics for Controlling Populations

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ABSTRACT

In light of the recent revelations about the electronic surveillance by the US National Security Agency, this essay analyzes such surveillance as part of state strategies to control populations. It also examines the use of terror scares—that is, fear mongering—by states as the rationale for their control practices. It contrasts the origins of terrorism in the French Terror to contemporary terrorism, and shows how cybernetic control and surveillance steal human communications and thereby steal consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines the verb 'to steal' as "To take dishonestly or secretly." What did the thieves steal? They stole human communication. Therefore, the thieves can now steal our consciousness. Symbolic communication is definitive for humanity. It is what sets us apart from other living creatures. They depend on non-symbolic signs—for example, pheromones, angles of sunlight, visible movements, and so on. Humans use signs with meaning, or symbols, such as verbal signs, mathematical signs, and music, to name the most prominent. It is through symbols that we make meaning and thereby gain human consciousness, as opposed to mere states of awareness we observe in our household pets. To take control of the movement of our symbols is to control our consciousness. That is what they have stolen, our ability to be subjects, active agents in what we do.

The same reference (OED) defines 'cybernetics' as "The field of study concerned with communication and control systems in living organisms and machines." Humanity learned that it was controlled in June 2013. Before Edward Snowden provided the proof of total surveillance, James Bamford (2008), William Binney (2012), and Thomas Drake (2013) said it was possible. Before that, most people could take refuge in the myth that individuals controlled their own consciousness, despite assiduous efforts to bend it toward certain desires by advertisements and public relations campaigns. After June 2013 we had

no refuge. Edward Snowden, erstwhile CIA operative and employee of intelligence apparatus contractors Booze Allen Hamilton and Dell, showed us documents, proof, that the US National Security Agency (NSA) captured all electronic communications in searchable data bases, and stored them in a mountain in Utah. In its tortuous attempts to spin the evidence, politicians in the United States and its comprador governments pointed to the attacks of 11 September 2001 (9/11) as their excuse. It was, they said, all to protect us from murderous attacks by terrorists. Similarly, many of these same politicians, bureaucrats, and the state apparatuses where they work, devised ways to destroy electronic communications systems of people they did not like—for instance the government of Iran. The very same apparatuses boasted of their capabilities for cyber warfare.

The electronic surveillance that steals consciousness must be understood in historical context. Only there does it reveal its logical necessity. The current surveillance grows out of contemporary warfare, terrorism, and the so-called war on terrorism that is really just the usual kind of terrorism—that is state terrorism. Before the war on terrorism there was the Cold War. Warfare in the decades following the Second World War took two forms. The first, which gave rise to the second, was nuclear warfare. Two sides, one led by the United States and the other by the Soviet Union, were ready to hurl tens of thousands of nuclear bombs at each other. The objective of each side was to obliterate the opposing society, not to conquer as in the old pre-nuclear era. Since neither side dared risk obliteration, the Cold War became manifested as small, often guerilla style wars in the political and economic periphery of the world. Toward the end of the Cold War era, the nuclear weapons and presumed defenses against them, actually against their delivery systems, became increasingly dependent on computerized cybernetics. Nonetheless, the ultimate objective remained mass destruction. When the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, a new kind of warfare began to take form. Governments and their media organs called it terrorism. Understanding terrorism is crucial for understanding contemporary cyber warfare and its accompanying electronic surveillance. Again history provides insight.

LA TERREUR

'Terrorism' first entered the English lexicon with Edmund Burke's anti-democratic fears of the French Revolution. Burke (1790, 1791) characterized the Jacobin ascendancy as a reign of terror. The origin of the word reveals its affinity with a fear of popular uprisings and revolutionary governments. Historical and contemporary surveys of terrorism emphasize its political character. 'Terrorism' and 'terrorists' were and are value laden epithets used by established elites. Only when the political right, the Girondins, gained control of the revolutionary French government July 27, 1794 (Thermidor) did the democratic leaders, Louis Saint-Just and Maximilien Robespierre find themselves criminalized and executed by a second, reactionary terror.

It began with the treason of the king and queen, along with their closest, aristocratic supporters. They conspired with European monarchies to invade France and restore them to the throne. Invaded, the people of France made a fateful decision. They constituted themselves as a nation, and as a nation, they declared themselves in danger. Defense of the nation meant that the treasonous conspirators were not criminalized. They became enemies, and not enemies of the state, but enemies of the people. An outcome of the French Revolution, possibly the most important, was the identification of the populace as the nation, with the state merely as a tool or apparatus for executing the will of the nation—hence the modern nation-state. The Terror, *la Terreur* also called "the Reign of Terror" by Anglophones, is a

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