

Are We Being Watched?

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Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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This question could have both positive and negative implications. It is positive, on the one hand, if taken in the context of security and protection as in a situation where one is in a particularly unfamiliar place at an unholy hour where s/he feels uneasy and worried. Police presence is usually what we have in mind (not necessarily in places like the Philippines where ordinary people fear the police and feel uncomfortable when and where there are policemen milling around), at least in the context of a civilized European city. Are we being watched by police authorities ready to protect us in troubled times, i.e., when disturbance or disorder presents the possibility of a clear and present danger, so to speak?

On the other hand, the question could take a negative undertone in the context of a police state where the same police authorities are being used by the dictatorial leadership of a country to closely watch and monitor the activities of people, particularly those suspected to be involved in clandestine undertakings with the intent to topple the powers-that-be. In this circumstance, the police and the armed forces as well are given extrajudicial powers to implement draconian measures and execute tyrannical orders issued by the despotic leadership. This is basically a condition in a country where there is curtailment of the citizens' freedom to congregate and ventilate in public their opinions critical of the failures of government to deliver and fulfill its mandate for the welfare and benefit of the nation.

In less economically developed - or to put it in a more sociologically technical parlance, developing - countries, this ambiance takes the semblance of legitimacy through the imposition of martial rule whose conditions are appropriated from the nation's constitution itself. In so many instances, victims of police and military intimidation, persecution, and brutality are ordinary and innocent people initially set up by an all-encompassing state surveillance network and later unjustly indicted through the unilateral decision orchestrated within a judicial system that absolutely functions at the behest of its authoritarian overlords.



It is in this negative aspect of “being watched” - or to put it in a more politically accurate term, surveillance - that makes the question “Are we being watched?” worth considering. Nevertheless, a deeper question that spontaneously arises from its affirmation, i.e., if we really believe that we are watched, is, “Why are we being watched?” This question doesn't, however, apply across the board since it is not accurate to assume the universality of the issue presented by the first question. In other words, we affirm that we are being watched if and only if we are subjects of particular interest for those who have realized and decided afterward that we are worth watching for whatever

serious and compelling reason(s) they have.

The art and practice of surveillance have already reached their apex with the leaps and bounds achieved in the “third wave civilization” (with apologies to Alvin Toffler) also known as the Information Age. Tracking lairs of criminal elements has already become a no-sweat operation. However, on a more disturbing side of the coin, even the shrouded activities and conspiratorial schemes of undercover agents of powerful countries operating outside of their territorial jurisdictions are very efficient and effective in tracking down government enemies through the information superhighway.

Though not exactly in a totalitarian political milieu, this situation is now a reality in the present dispensation known as the “Age of Information”. The condition may not be as harsh as the tyrannical ambiance in Orwell’s fiction but in our time, the constant flow of information via online monitoring even on the most guarded secrets of an individual person’s daily conduct of life may be accessed through the most sophisticated instruments and devices electronically connected/linked to computers and hand-held equipment we use and without which life doesn’t seem liveable to many of us on a daily basis. In other words, we denizens of the post-modern world are generally in one way or another being subjected to constant surveillance by the powers that be both in global and domestic landscapes. There may not be commensurate punishment yet at this point in time for every misdeed and misconduct people do but the fast-evolving information technology we have had in the post-modern reality could sooner or later be utilized by despotic and authoritarian regimes as a concrete tool to effect oppressive and onerous measures against their own citizens. If actual oppression is conceived as a real possibility in 1984 by sowing widespread terror even with all the technological limitations in the plot’s context, could such possibility be more highly conceivable in the present post-modern era with all the sophisticated technological devices the age of cyberspace has at its beck and call? [[“Nineteen Eighty-Four or Brave New World?”](#) by Prof. Ruel F. Pepa]



Yet, more than what we may associate with intimidation, harassment, and oppression in the political context, we could, at this point, advance the general notion that surveillance of subjects of interest in whatever conceivable context we could think of is fundamentally effected for manipulative purposes and more sophisticatedly for exploitative intentions. It has almost become an effortless endeavor for these manipulators and exploiters to watch the movements and activities of people of interest through well-formulated machinations utilizing the seemingly unlimited power of the Internet with all the available software applications and tracking devices that unceasingly evolve in the boundless realm of the cyberspace.

This entire scenario triggers the question, “Who among us are being watched?” In other words, who among us are the subjects of interest that have drawn the attention of these manipulators and exploiters? The truth is, there are millions of us who are wired to the inexhaustible reaches of the cyberworld’s information superhighway. We have left traceable

“footprints” of habits, predispositions, liabilities, proclivities, enchantments, desires, hopes and wishes, among others which are all recorded and thus detectable within and through the universal archive of a “global village” (with apologies to Marshall McLuhan) accessed online via the *World Wide Web*. In the most trivial consideration, a lot of us have already exposed online our vulnerabilities and weaknesses. At this point, we get into a cycle and return to the original question,

“Are we being watched?” and of course, the re-affirmation that yes, we who have been wired are definitely being watched.

But the crucial issue is, are we being watched for our safety and protection, or are we within the amplitude of a landscape ruled and overseen by the mighty controllers of the world order for the safety and protection of their very own jealously guarded global interest?

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