

Big Brother: DARPA's Control Freak Technology

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According to Wired, the Pentagon is “about to embark on a stunningly ambitious research project designed to gather every conceivable bit of information about a person’s life, index all the information and make it searchable?. What national security experts and civil libertarians want to know is, why would the Defense Department want to do such a thing?”

Once again, “security experts and civil libertarians” fail to understand the authoritarian, psychopathic mind. Our rulers do these sort of things because they are the ultimate control freaks, paranoid and suspicious of the average person ? or rather what the average person may do in order to get rid of the controllers, the parasites, who are compelled to spend billions of dollars on such projects, that is to say billions fleeced off the people they want to monitor and control. As usual, the excuse is they have to protect us from the terrorists, never mind they created the terrorists, too.

“The embryonic LifeLog program would dump everything an individual does into a giant database: every e-mail sent or received, every picture taken, every Web page surfed, every phone call made, every TV show watched, every magazine read,” Wired continues. “All of this ? and more ? would combine with information gleaned from a variety of sources: a GPS transmitter to keep tabs on where that person went, audio-visual sensors to capture what he or she sees or says, and biomedical monitors to keep track of the individual’s health.”

In fact, a large part of this is already in place, thanks to the NSA’s vacuum cleaner approach to searching for “al-Qaeda phone calls,” cataloguing millions of phone calls each and every day, reading email, snooping internet destinations with the help of the telecoms. As for GPS, you have one in your cell phone, as well as a way for the snoops to listen in on what you say, even when you think the phone is switched off.

If the government had its way ? and it may very well in a few years, thanks to the bovine nature of the average American ? you will be chipped or at minimum have an RFID in your wallet or purse, thus they will be track where you go and when.

This gigantic amalgamation of personal information could then be used to “trace the ?threads’ of an individual’s life,” to see exactly how a relationship or events developed, according to a briefing from the Defense Advanced Projects Research Agency, LifeLog’s sponsor.

Someone with access to the database could “retrieve a specific thread of past transactions, or recall an experience from a few seconds ago or from many years earlier ? by using a search-engine interface.”

For instance, it could be determined if you harbor “discontent” with the government, in

other words if you're with al-Qaeda.

On the surface, the project seems like the latest in a long line of DARPA's "blue sky" research efforts, most of which never make it out of the lab. But DARPA is currently asking businesses and universities for research proposals to begin moving LifeLog forward. And some people, such as Steven Aftergood, a defense analyst with the Federation of American Scientists, are worried.

With its controversial Total Information Awareness database project, DARPA already is planning to track all of an individual's "transactional data" — like what we buy and who gets our e-mail.

While the parameters of the project have not yet been determined, Aftergood said he believes LifeLog could go far beyond TIA's scope, adding physical information (like how we feel) and media data (like what we read) to this transactional data.

"LifeLog has the potential to become something like TIA cubed," he said.

No doubt, the pointy-heads in the Pentagon are particularly interested in this "how we feel" aspect of the program. Not even Orwell was able to imagine such a scary control device.

You see an image of our commander-guy on television or the web, your biomedical implant registers an elevated level of disgust, and the thought police are dispatched in SWAT fashion. It's off to the re-education camp for you.

Of course, that's really "blue sky" stuff at this point. Instead, for the moment, we'll have to settle for DARPA tracking us on the internet, thanks to technology under development at Microsoft.

In the private sector, a number of LifeLog-like efforts already are underway to digitally archive one's life — to create a "surrogate memory," as minicomputer pioneer Gordon Bell calls it.

Bell, now with Microsoft, scans all his letters and memos, records his conversations, saves all the Web pages he's visited and e-mails he's received and puts them into an electronic storehouse dubbed MyLifeBits.

DARPA's LifeLog would take this concept several steps further by tracking where people go and what they see.

Of course, if you know the government is tracking where you go, chances are you may not go there. And that's why DARPA is spending your hard-earned tax money on technology you can't get around, just in case you're with al-Qaeda or a Ron Paul supporter.

That makes the project similar to the work of University of Toronto professor Steve Mann. Since his teen years in the 1970s, Mann, a self-styled "cyborg," has worn a camera and an array of sensors to record his existence. He claims he's convinced 20 to 30 of his current and former students to do the same. It's all part of an experiment into "existential technology" and "the metaphysics of free will."

DARPA isn't quite so philosophical about LifeLog. But the agency does see some potential battlefield uses for the program.

Indeed, military types are not normally interested in all that philosophical stuff, as they are too busy finding and eliminating enemies. DARPA concentrates on the battlefield and the battlefield is right here on Main Street. DARPA does somersaults to fit LifeLog into a traditional military context but it fails and fails miserably. Obviously, this system is for us, the commoners, and the real enemies of power.

John Pike, director of defense think tank GlobalSecurity.org, said he finds the explanations "hard to believe."

"It looks like an outgrowth of Total Information Awareness and other DARPA homeland security surveillance programs," he added in an e-mail.

Sure, LifeLog could be used to train robotic assistants. But it also could become a way to profile suspected terrorists, said Cory Doctorow, with the Electronic Frontier Foundation. In other words, Osama bin Laden's agent takes a walk around the block at 10 each morning, buys a bagel and a newspaper at the corner store and then calls his mother. You do the same things ? so maybe you're an al Qaeda member, too!

Bingo! And as we know, al-Qaeda now encompasses a lot of behavior, as even garden variety criminals are considered terrorists. But the run-of-the-mill pot smoker or bad check writer pales in comparison to those who are walking around experiencing "discontent" with the government. Obviously, a bad check writer will have at best minimal influence on the government while an al-Qaeda terrorist in a 9/11 truth t-shirt is most certainly a direct challenge and threat to the guys in charge, and that's why DARPA was put on the case.

"The more that an individual's characteristic behavior patterns ? ?routines, relationships and habits' ? can be represented in digital form, the easier it would become to distinguish among different individuals, or to monitor one," Aftergood, the Federation of American Scientists analyst, wrote in an e-mail.

In its LifeLog report, DARPA makes some nods to privacy protection, like when it suggests that "properly anonymized access to LifeLog data might support medical research and the early detection of an emerging epidemic."

But before these grand plans get underway, LifeLog will start small. Right now, DARPA is asking industry and academics to submit proposals for 18-month research efforts, with a possible 24-month extension. (DARPA is not sure yet how much money it will sink into the program.)

Not that money is an object when the American tax payer is picking up the tab.

Like a game show, winning this DARPA prize eventually will earn the lucky scientists a trip for three to Washington, D.C. Except on this excursion, every participating scientist's e-mail to the travel agent, every padded bar bill and every mad lunge for a cab will be monitored, categorized and later dissected.

And if the scientists are not extra careful, they may end up dead or missing, like not shortage microbiologists, as secret program like to clean up and stragglers who may cause embarrassment or Nuremberg-like trials down the road.

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