

DIY Surveillance Drone

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Adapting the 'Parrot AR' Hobby Drone for Surveillance

The public seem to have finally caught on! It became very clear in the early stages of the orchestrated, do-nothing, 'Occupy' movement that the police were very sensitive to being filmed and monitored -- it seems authorities can't handle what they apply to others!

A lateral thinking 'Occupier' has adapted a hobbyist [copter drone](#) to act as a surveillance copter for the people.



Parrot AR Drone

The 'Occucopter' -- who's watching whom?

Tim Pool's 'Occupy surveillance drone,' which keeps tabs on police and other regulators, may lead to a surveillance nightmare. But that's exactly what we want to demonstrate a point!

The police may soon be watching you in your garden picking your vegetables or scratching your bottom.

As police plan to increase unmanned aerial surveillance, a new twist emerges. Private citizens can now buy their own surveillance drones to watch the police!

This week in New York, Occupy Wall Street protesters have a new toy to help them expose potentially dubious actions of the New York police department.

In response to constant police surveillance, police violence and thousands of arrests, Occupy Wall Street protesters and legal observers have been turning their cameras back on the police. But police have sometimes made filming difficult through physical obstruction and "frozen zones". This occurred most notably during the eviction of protesters from Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan, where police prevented even credentialed journalists from entering.

Now the protesters are fighting back with their own surveillance drone. Tim Pool, an Occupy Wall Street protester, has acquired a Parrot AR drone he amusingly calls the "occucopter". It is a lightweight four-rotor helicopter that you can buy cheaply on Amazon and control with your iPhone.

It has an onboard camera so that you can view everything on your phone that it points at. Pool has modified the software to stream live video to the internet so that we can watch the action as it unfolds. You can see video clips of his first experiments here. He told us that the reason he is doing this "comes back to giving ordinary people the same tools that these multimillion-dollar news corporations have. It provides a clever loophole around certain restrictions such as when the police block press from taking shots of an incident."

Pool is attempting to police-proof the device: "We are trying to get a stable live feed so you can have 50 people controlling it in series. If the cops see you controlling it from a computer they can shut you down, but then control could automatically switch to someone else."

This is clever stuff and it doesn't stop there. He is also working on a 3G controller so that "you could even control the occuicopter in New York from Sheffield in England". We asked him if he was concerned about police shooting it down. "No," he said firmly. "They can't just fire a weapon in the air because it could seriously hurt someone. They would have no excuse because the occuicopter is strictly not illegal. Their only recourse would be to make it illegal, but it is only a toy and so they might as well make the press illegal - they have already arrested 30 journalists here."

Ordinary people having the technology to watch the watcher is not something George Orwell predicted in his futuristic vision of 1984. He introduced us to the idea of a totalitarian state using total surveillance to suppress the entire population. This is why CCTV cameras and police drones watching us unseen sends shivers down the spines of so many of us. We are not so much worried about the current political establishment than we are about the possibility of a technology that enables the creation of a repressive regime.

That might be less likely to happen when the same surveillance systems are turned back on the authorities. But it is not all good news. These devices could also extend the range of potential breaches of privacy. You could fly over your neighbour's garden or up to their bedroom window. And drones could be a great asset for criminals to "case a joint" or to keep watch for the police.

There are also concerns that the roll-out of citizen drones might be disingenuously used by the police to justify and speed up police acquisition and use of drones for the surveillance of protests. Police departments in the UK and across the US are eager to use drones, but there has been little or no debate about the impacts on public safety, privacy and liberty. And there has certainly been no public engagement about this expansion of police surveillance.

It will probably not be long before there are test cases in court or before legislation is introduced to ground citizen drones. Our spirits were lifted talking to Pool about his occuicopter, yet we feel uneasy about the ever-increasing use of drone surveillance. Like all tools they can be used for both good and bad, and for repression and resistance.

The question is, do we really want the paranoid nightmare of our airspace being polluted by police and personal drones with all of us watching our watchers? We are not sure how this will unfold, but we are sure that the outcome will be as unpredictable as the technological developments themselves.



<http://tinyurl.com/c2anmel>

Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-2903.html>