



Book Review of Cybercrime: The Transformation of Crime in the Information Age¹

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Cybercrime: The Transformation of Crime in the Information Age, David S. Wall, 2007, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 288 pages, AUS \$49.95, (Paperback), ISBN 9780745627366

Information networks have brought us new sorts of crimes. We only have to look into our email inboxes. Scammers are luring us to follow links to fake websites, to give up our security codes and passwords or to download malicious software that enables criminals to hijack our computers.

Wall's book *Cybercrime: The Transformation of Crime in the Information Age* is an exploration of the transformations that have taken place in criminal activity and its regulation as a result of networked technologies. Wall's central thesis is that cyber crime is not merely behavior mediated by technology but also by social and legal values and economic drivers. Wall lists one of the social issues to be "social deskilling" where network members do not experience a holistic community experience. For instance, it is easier to steal a penny from millions of bank account owners using the Internet, than to rob a bank with a gun in a bank teller's face. The apparent "anonymity" of victim-offender relationships is a characteristic feature of this and all other forms of cyber crime.

Wall acknowledges in the preface that the task of describing Cybercrime is hard as the subject matter changes rapidly. Nevertheless, three years after Wall finished his work it is still in many ways current. The fast pace of evolving cyber crime is not the only challenge researchers face. As Wall points out, discussion around cyber crime has been dominated by media and politicians who often act out of fear and without real knowledge of the nature and scale of the problem. This has often lead to the introduction of new legislation which has tried to satisfy the interests of corporate and State, while at the same time discussion of the principles of liberty and freedom of expression has been dampened.

Wall raises the level of argument by providing a collection of relevant data and a scientific framework for his analysis of the phenomenon. Wall's approach is

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interdisciplinary and he ties his research to previous work of social scientists like Manuel Castells and cyber-lawyers like Lawrence Lessig and James Boyle.

David Wall's work provides two excellent distinctions. Firstly, Wall distinguishes the generations of cyber crime. First generation cyber crime used computers for criminal activity, whereas second generation cyber crime is committed in networks. The emerging third generation of cyber crime is automated and mediated by Internet technology.

Secondly, Wall groups cyber crime into three groups: Offences related to the integrity of the computer system (think of viruses and spam in your email box), offences assisted by computers (for example "419" and selling pirated medicines) and offences which focus upon the content of computers (file sharing and kiddy porn).

These distinctions make the cyber crime phenomenon easier to grasp. It is easier to study and fight crimes that are more narrowly defined. Wall's criminals are crackers, spammers and script kiddies who spread malicious software and try to scam our money and hijack our computers. Nevertheless, many European countries have criminalized peer-to-peer file sharing which turns tens of millions of teenagers into cyber criminals. The everyday cyber crimes where the criminals are not the Chinese mafia or nasty black hat hackers is something that Wall ignores. However, Wall's book might not be the right forum to examine the question.

Cybercrime is a well researched, thoughtful and up-to-date examination of the reasons why cyber crime flourishes. It describes how we have ended up in the current situation and how we could study and fight cyber criminals. I warmly recommend the book for any cyber crime class and cyber society scholar's bookshelf.