

Orwell via Huxley

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Stockholm Syndrome (n.) - Feelings of trust or affection felt in many cases of kidnapping or hostage-taking by a victim toward a captor.

Perhaps you've heard about "Social Intelligence". Perhaps not. Perhaps it sounds like a harmless geek concept, like "The Singularity". Or some scam sold by a marketer with a Twitter profile that reads "Web 2.0 Enthusiast ! Online Marketing Consultant Specializing in 'Social Intelligence'".

It's neither. It's a company.

What does it do ? It keeps records of everyone's social media postings for seven years. Seven years after they've been deleted. Why ? To sell to corporations doing background checks on prospective employees.

Orwellian ? Far beyond that. Diabolical fits better. Who but a coven of subhuman parasites would create a product that ruins the careers of college kids before they start ?

Sorry, Percival, you're qualified, and it appears quite talented. But our gumshoes at Social Intelligence have found this Facebook shot of you standing next to a man smoking a joint at a Furthur show during your sophomore year at Colgate. This disqualifies you. Zero tolerance. I'm sure you understand.

If this product catches on, and it all but assuredly will, one of two things are going to happen. In the first instance, nobody's ever going to be hireable again. As in our political systems, corporations using social media background checks will be all but entirely staffed with milquetoast, vanilla robots. Armies of Mitt Romneys, corporate suites of congenital ciphers and bobble-headed Yes Men. Any last fumes of creativity and innovation left in the stagnant McIndustries of this country will be snuffed out. Asia, probably a BRIC nation, or perhaps even Old Europe - any place adult enough to realize most of us (and usually the most talented of us) are closet libertines of some sort - will soak up all the talent. We'll be left with corporate hierarchies entirely composed of Men in Grey Flannel Suits. And untold numbers of closeted freaks who were smart enough to stay off Facebook.

In the second instance, so much dirty laundry is going to be on display that screeners are going to have to set standards so low the only evidence disqualifying a prospective hire will be a Facebook post proclaiming his lifelong allegiance to NAMBLA or the American Nazi Party ("Interests : crystal meth (I don't fuck around, yo)", "Favorite book : *The Satanic Bible*"). It's entirely possible, if not likely, that when we merge the admissions of our real lives, where we're honest in a fashion we'd never be at the office, with our career personas, people will have to admit Every Man is Two People.

Of course, everyone knows life is 50% acting - that we spend untold hours of every week behaving in an artificial way around people we'd never otherwise associate with, to accrue money. But as much as we admit

that to ourselves, as much as we all know it's a baseline reality, we rarely talk about it. And we never discuss it at work, for this obvious reason : to so breach that "fourth wall" admits a duplicity at the center of society's operational mechanisms [*].

And allowing the admission one acts through half of his waking hours raises the question, "Why do I put on the facade ?" The response that necessarily follows that is, "I don't know", which then leads to this : "I'm dropping the false front. I'm going to speak my mind. I'm going to question the next directive that doesn't make sense. I'm going to admit my politics. I'm going to express myself, even if it's at odds with my community, or my employer's 'brand'."

Obviously, this reality - having this discussion openly - is not the one the corporations swallowing our society want. And that's where the evil brilliance of something like Social Intelligence emerges. That type of monitoring device allows corporations, and the governmental authorities who feed them our money, to control not only who gets hired, but through fear cause the population at large to eschew criticisms of them. The mere knowledge something like Social Intelligence exists will both cause people to think twice before writing something that doesn't fit the Accepted Narratives, and keep people who'd question the Accepted Narratives away from the levers of power. And away from audiences who'd hear them.

What are the Accepted Narratives ? We all know them very well. That you should spend. That you should extend yourself... That you should buy all the stuff the corporations sell. Get yourself in debt to the banks. Buy the American Dream... the expensive car, the expensive house, the granite kitchen you see on HGTV. Get addicted to stuff, and get larded up with debt you'll pay the banks from cradle to grave. Never sit back and think, even for a moment, "Isn't life's only real currency freedom ? Time ? Wouldn't I be happier owing less ? Wouldn't I be better off aiming to become free, rather than leveraged into a gilded prison ?".

That sort of introspection is treason to the marketers. Treason to the banks. Treason to every structure that keeps most of us who have to work for a living in some form of either serfdom or golden handcuffs. A society of free people who find satisfaction outside the work>spend>work more>spend more treadmill is Big Corporate America's greatest nightmare.

And let me assure you, if you're somehow unaware of this fact : Big Corporations are the Only Corporations Left. Sure, there are millions of small businessmen all over the place. Hell, one's writing this right now, waiting for a 10 :00 a.m. meeting. But the real money, the only money outside Wall Street, is in USA, Inc... In that interface between government and big business where all the crony contracts are inked, all the tax dollars funneled to massive hierarchical corporations that use them to buy all the small competitors and commoditize their innovations.

Which brings me back to Social Intelligence, why it gives me piss shivers, and why I think it's a canary in the coal mine. A leading indicator of a frightening acceleration in the corporate takeover of our entire society.

To borrow a horrible but apropos term, we're at a tipping point in history. And it has nothing to do with a struggle between Socialists and Capitalists. That's a side show for the tribe minds, the sorts who cheer along with Fox or MSNBC, to take their eyes off the real action - the Mass Corporatization of America... the Blending of Government and Big Business. And this corporatist movement's rapidly increasing control of you.

We don't have much freedom left in this country. I mean, yes, we're still free, freer than most, some would say. But only on paper. Only technically. From birth to death, the architectures of commerce, with double-fisted assistance from the government, keep us in a very tight line. Freedom of speech is near absolute, but good luck finding work if you should raise an unpopular political view in the public square. Freedom of association is sacred, except if you're interested in proclaiming your atheism, in which case you can't get elected to anything. Freedom to transact commerce is near absolute, except for all the regulations big corporations pay lobbyists to

enact to price innovators out of the marketplace.

If you look closely, it's clear - we're not really, practically, free at all. We're corralled and coerced every day, pushed to pretend we hold views we don't, act like we enjoy work we don't, and shut our mouths out of fear of losing our ever more tenuous economic security. Our ability to express ourselves is strenuously curtailed. We are compelled, if we wish to make enough money to survive, to bite our tongues, to support the Too Big To Fail interests that have eaten the economy, eaten Washington... made our votes irrelevant. Unless you've a staggering inheritance, you will Walk the Company Line.

And this is where you probably expect me to say it's the fault of evil corporatists, lobbyists, and our politicians. You probably expect me to say it's Orwellian, a top down control mechanism that keeps the population under thumb.

I wish I could, but I can't. Orwell's inapt, at least in describing the path that brought us here. The road to this nadir is pure Huxley. *Brave New World*. Led here through our own consumerist tendencies, and apathy. And though it's obvious, though we're warned of the danger invited by our willful ignorance every day - that our laziness in refusing to take responsibility for our personal finances and health care, our addiction to entitlements, and our endless consumption of diversions, is creating a two-tiered society of the Manipulated and the Opportunistic - the overwhelming majority of us blissfully continue marching toward captivity.

Cloud computing ? It's sold to us as convenience, as a bargain. "Get rid of those expensive hard drives !" But then consider... Is there any better way for corporations to mine your private data, and massage what you say ? To use your intimate conversations to sell you things, while simultaneously causing you to self-censor out of fear ? Do you think anyone using cloud computing in 2020 won't be thinking, "I should curtail the portion of this IM criticizing my boss. God only knows who's reading this stuff". And Facebook ? They sell it to us as necessity. "You can't be part of the society today without a Facebook page ! Everybody has one !" Again, ask yourself... Is there a better way to stop employees, or customers, from airing dissent publicly than by herding everyone you'd want to connect with into a pen where everybody must use his real name, and everybody knows his every comment might be scanned by his employer's HR administrator ? Or worse, kept for seven years by a company like Social Intelligence ?

Big corporations, and the government with which they work hand in hand, hated the Internet for years. They hated how it marginalized their media outlets. They hated how it flagged their falsifications, how it exposed their deceptive marketing tropes. They hated how it made fun of them, how it questioned their authority... how they couldn't massage their brand perceptions in it. They hated that it created risk they couldn't easily assess and hedge - that they couldn't control it.

But they weren't fools. They knew, as good marketers do, that most humans are pack animals, that they want to be led. That men desperately want to be part of the group, and that nowhere would they find more disconnected people wanting to belong to something, to connect to others, than on the Internet. All they had to do was give these masses a few exclusive platforms, a handful of herding applications that'd entice them to put all their information in a small number of places... have all their online conversations in a few controlled, recorded arenas. Once they could lull everyone into a limited selection of desirable architectures by playing on the desire to be part of a group, and offering them convenience, gadgets and games, big corporations could finally control the Internet.

And that's exactly what they've done. And we're not only letting them, but actively encouraging the process. Happily giving them our private information. Happily agreeing to bite our tongues, jettison our suspicions, for the promise of getting some new application or interactive game... Squelching the urge to lampoon corporate messages and products in exchange for the feeling we're part of something bigger - that we're in line with the rest of the tribe, embracing the toys the corporate interests provide, just like everyone else. That we belong...

we're social. Part of the cloud, part of the conversation.

Only it's not a real conversation. And it'll never be a real conversation, any more than you'd ever have a real conversation with a co-worker if you knew the boss was watching and listening to you through a short circuit camera overhead.

Cloud computing ? Social Intelligence creating files on Facebook users ? Orwellian results, no doubt, but all via Huxley. A population of willing supplicants, bought off with gadgets, games, convenience, and manipulation of our indefatigable neediness. The plan was brilliant, and so easy the only question remaining is why it took so long. Why it took these masters of industry and spin so many years to re-acquaint themselves with this basic axiom : true subjugation is always voluntary.

Note

The only admission of our duality allowed is indirect, nuanced - in response to situations like the Anthony Weiner scandal, where we'll observe a moment of adult pragmatism : "I don't care what he did. We all have our private kink. The problem is he was dumb enough to do it somewhere he could easily get caught, and that makes me wonder if he has the judgment to govern".

It's true. The act isn't the offense; it's the getting caught. We've all looked at porn, we've all been accomplices to some filthy shit at bachelor parties... We've almost all smoked pot at one point or another, and tried many other illicit substances... We've all acted out deviant fantasies in the bedroom, drunk way too much and made asses of ourselves, and 90% of us quietly wish, no matter how often we state otherwise in the presence of supervisors and co-workers, that we could quit our jobs. Being two people isn't a crime. Hell, that's just being human. *It's getting busted being two people that's the problem.*