

The Control of Computerized Television

Predicted by *Fifth Estate* 30 years ago, but it arrived in an unexpected form (except by Dick Tracy)

Jason Rodgers

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In another age, in a different lifetime, David Watson (under the name, George Bradford) wrote in the Spring 1984 *Fifth Estate*:

“While there may be reason for concern about computer threats to privacy, it is generally overlooked that deepening privatization, with a computerized television in every room as its apotheosis, is itself at least as great a threat—a threat which makes the police almost superfluous.”

Right there, Bradford predicted the smart phone. But, acutely aware as he was, he couldn't predict that this “computerized television” would be miniaturized and carried everywhere.

The quote appeared in his essay, “1984: Worse Than Expected?,” reflecting on George Orwell's famously ominous year. It is a bit scary how closely this essay predicted the technocratic, totalitarian society we currently find ourselves entangled within. What is frightening is that he wasn't prescient enough. He couldn't predict how universally and enthusiastically this technology would be adopted by the populace. He couldn't imagine how expansive the virtual reality arena could become, how much social and personal space it could occupy.

How did this situation come about? The electronics, digital media, and other technology transform the ways we communicate. Through the controls of communication, our thought processes are controlled, and ultimately the nature of society. Bradford writes: “Once we realize that this pseudo-communication represents the central code of alienated, totalitarian discourse, we realize that its infrastructure and its result are mass society itself.”

Guy Debord's more negative (and paranoid) follow-up to *Society of the Spectacle*, his 1988 *Comments on The Society of the Spectacle*, did much to correct his previous positive outlook on the potential of technology.

In it, this founding member of the Situationist International states, “The computer's binary language is an irresistible inducement to the continual and unreserved acceptance of what has been programmed according to the wishes of someone else and passes for the timeless source of a superior, impartial and total logic.”

The computer allows for a level of control previously unheard of. It also automates control and renders it invisible. Computer users feel they are receiving information from which they can make their own conclusions. But it is not pure information, there is no such beast.

Information is also changed and shaped by the matrix it is transmitted through. When much of our lives are spent mediated by electronic media, these experiences are presented through the mode by which they are programmed. These media (like all media) are biased towards presenting specific types of information. In the computer's case this seems to be in the form of data, unchallengeable components.

Computers, smart phones, and electronic media shape society and our expectations of how we interact with society. They affect our perspectives and expectations. They form the superstructure of society. This is why even

seemingly subversive ideas are so easily recuperated, because they are presented in this context. It becomes impossible for any of us to actually believe in the possibility of overcoming this society.

It is impossible to imagine a coming insurrection when trapped in the coming singularity (the total control of the world by intelligent computers desired by the transhumanists, such as Zoltan Istvan).

In the early 2000s, some of the editors of the now defunct anarcho-primitivist journal *Green Anarchy* went on tour with several bands to promote their magazine. It was reported that the stage banter included statements that this tour might be one of the last aboveground actions of the group, implying that an imminent insurrection was at hand.

Did they actually believe they could wage a successful struggle against civilization? Who would believe anything so idealistic or naive now? Social war has become a concept for academic discourse now mostly employed by graduate students. It is not considered an actual struggle that can be waged and won, particularly not by a bunch of lumpen proletarians and intellectual vagabonds.

Even lesser actions are considered absurd now. Twenty years ago or more, one could advocate the elimination of television. Then, and until recently, one could live without TV and encourage others to do the same, as Jerry Mander does in his still valuable 1978 book, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*.

A person who did so then might be considered eccentric, idealistic, or a little weird, but it was still a viable option. Who in this day and age could even imagine living without a computer, living without the internet, living without a cell phone? It is now considered crazy talk; technological society has rendered such abstention impossible.

I bet even Bradford, whose writing in the 1980s offered the first critiques of technology within the anarchist milieu, has a smart phone. The *Fifth Estate* uses a pretty high tech setup to publish its anarchist magazine. I'm not calling them hypocrites, just pointing out the facts of our world, the terms of society. I don't have a smart phone (or any cell phone), use social media, or even have an e-mail address.

Sometimes I just want to say, "I give up," or just yell, "Face it, we lost." There are times when I think the entire anarchist project is done with. Yes, we lost this round; time to face it. The New World Order consolidated its globalized world.

Ziggurats to the computer gods have been erected. The cybernetic society has been perfected, if only we marginalized losers could get over our irrational dissatisfaction with totalitarianism and technocratic society.

However, those are in my worst moments. Maybe now is not the time to give up at all; maybe it is the ideal time to mount a resistance. The technocratic NWO relies on the myth of the machine. Maybe it is time to unveil our own myth of uprising! We need to believe in the power of total rejection of all conceptual frameworks that limit our ability to create a world beyond the megamachine.

The more ever-present and expansive a totalitarian system is, the thinner it is spread. The more powerful it is, the more internally reliant it is on all of its segments. If there were a collapse of one part, it would ripple out. Visualize total collapse. Vanguard Maoist parties would be totally unnecessary to combat this totality, and would be undoubtedly counterproductive.

Instead, individual micropolitical interventions could form an open conspiracy. The Frankfurt School's Herbert Marcuse's suggestion of the great refusal still seems applicable to fighting technocracy. The spirit of the Nottingham woods could return in the spirit of Luddism!

King Steam has transformed into a Cybernetic Pharaoh, but the Megamachine is weaker than ever, if only it is looked at directly. It has weak spots everywhere, distributed throughout its system.

The new struggle will be different than previous ones. It will be a struggle against the virtual reality matrix of control. The wrenches are still here, even if they're hard to see.

Jason Rodgers publishes *Media Junky & Psionic Plastic Joy* from PO Box 10894, Albany NY 12201. He does not use computers in their preparation.



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