

Corporations
are now
after our
very beings

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THE AUTHOR

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A few years ago, compliments of the George W. Bush administration, I got an education in political reality. The kind of education that makes you get drunk at night and scream and bitch at every shred of national news:

“Do you see how these capitalist bastards have made so much money killing babies in Iraq? And how they are have brainwashed us and gouged us for every human need, from health care to drinking water?” I’d rage to my wife.

“It’s just the way things are,” she said. “It’s only a system.”

My good wife often thinks I have slipped my moorings. But she never says right out loud that I’m crazy because, let’s face it, honesty in marriage only goes so far. Furthermore, I’d be the first to proclaim that she’s right.

I have indeed slipped my moorings, and am downright ecstatic about it, given what the collective American consciousness is moored to these days. Anyway, I

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am, as I said, ecstatic. When I am not utterly depressed. Which is often. And always, always, always, it is because of the latest outrage pulled off by government/corporations – the terms have been interchangeable for at least 50 years in this country, maybe longer.

For all its pretense and manufactured consent, our government is just a corporate racket now, and probably will remain so from here on out. This is a white people’s thing, an Anglo-European tradition. Moreover, we no longer get real dictators such as a Hitler, or a good old bone-gnawing despot like Idi Amin. We get money syndicates in powdered wigs or Seville Row suits, cartels of robber barons and banking racketeers.

The corporate rackets of European white people, especially banking, have a venerable history of sanction, dating back at least to when William the Conqueror granted the corporation of London the rights to handle his English loot.

For all his cruelty (he skinned the

people and hung their tanned hides from their own windows, and if that ain't the purest kind of meanness, I don't know what is!) William, just like Allen Greenspan and Bernie Madoff, understood that the real muscle hangs out in the temples of banking and money changing.

Even a thousand years before that however, nobody in their right mind dared mess with the money cartels.

DATELINE JUDEA, A.D. 26 – Pontius Pilate to Jesus: “Look you seem to be a nice Jewish kid from ... where izzit? ... Nazareth? But you gotta quit fuckin wid da moneychangers, cause I get a piece of dat action, see? So stop dickin’ with ‘em. And especially you gotta swear off this Son of God, King of the Jews shtick. Ain’t but one king aroun jeer, and you’re lookin’ at him. So lay off that stuff, and we can put this whole thing behind us, you and me. On the other hand, I got a couple of thieves I’m gonna do in tomorrow; and you can join ‘em if you want. Your call kid. Now whose yer daddy?”

“I am the Son of God.”

“Grab a cross on the way out.”

On and on it goes. As the bailouts of the bankers recently proved, even Barack Obama, who descended to earth from Chicago with 10 gilded seraphim holding up his balls, doesn't screw with the corporate money changers. Or the banking corporations, or the insurance corporations, or the medical corporations, or the defense corporations ...

Corporations are now, for all practical purposes, the only way anything can get done, made or distributed, or even imagined as a way of anything coming into being (except babies). Look around you. Is there anything, from the food in the fridge to the fridge itself, from the furni-



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ture to the very varnish on the floors or the clothes we wear that was not delivered unto us by corporations?

Our dependency on corporations at every level of the needs hierarchy is total. We cannot see beyond the corporate manufactured reality because, to us, it is the only possible reality. We cannot see around it or out of it from the inside. Corporate reality is all permeating. Air tight, too. Each part so perfectly reinforces all of its other parts as to be seamless. Inescapable. In that sense, we are prisoners for life.

The corporate-government-mediacomplex that manufactures our mass consciousness (hereinafter referred to as “the bastards” for clarity purposes) is simultaneously unknowable, yet easy to believe in.

With its millions of moving parts, seen and unseen – financial, media, manufacturing, technological, material – no one, not even its most elevated masters, can conceive of the system’s entirety, or even in the same way. This great loom of ideation, with its many spindles, flycocks and shuttles, can weave any fantasy one desires and certainly sustain any individual’s commodity or identity fetish.

At the same time, the sheer magnitude of corporatism’s crushing drain upon humanity – for the benefit of an elite global few – is all but invisible to most Western peoples participating in its sustaining rituals.

Corporatism’s rituals are as reverentially and unquestionably observed in daily behavior as those of ancient Egypt’s theocracy or the blood sacrifice of the Aztecs. The Aztecs thoroughly believed their world would end if the gods were not fed enough still-beating human hearts. We believe that the world turns on employment figures, stock prices,

CORPORATIONS ARE NOW AFTER OUR VERY BEINGS

our jobs, productivity and consumption. Hourly, we receive reports from the media priesthood on the health of an aggregate god known as the economy. The masses pause to listen, then ask inside their heads, “Will my job, my only source of family sustenance, disappear? I must try harder.”

And so, fearfully, we render tribute to Moloch in the form of increased toil, more sheaves of what they alone produced (for it is labor that produces all authentic wealth) in the form of bailouts and sons sacrificed on the altar of war.

High and low, we have been transfigured into a society of performers behaving the way we are expected to behave as productive citizens. Production as measured by the bastards. And we cannot expect to find any Gandhis or Simón Bolívars among that high caste. One does not get there by leading salt strikes, nor does one appear in their boardrooms on behalf of the masses wearing beggar’s cloth.

“The masses, the masses, the masses. Whatever are we to do with them?” laughed a political adviser friend, only half-jokingly. True, we’ve always been such a herd, always been given to self-imposed blindness of the whole. But now we are blindfolded. There is a difference.

During earlier times in this fabled republic – and much of it has always been just that, a fable – there were somewhat better odds of escaping such blindness. Now it is considered the normal condition; we see it as in our best interests to embrace such national blindness. In doing so, we all but ensure a new Dark Age.

Oh, quit bitching you fart-stained old gasbag. The next Dark Age is sure to have a wireless connection and an RFID sex hot line locator chip in your neck.



Essentially, we’re talking about stripping the human experience from life, then renting it back to humans.

The boys in Tyson’s corporate are already doing it to chickens in the poultry market for a couple cents per bird. Just be glad you were born in America!

For sure it will be wired. Because the next phase of history’s greatest ongoing screwjob, capitalism, depends on it being wired. With the demise of first mercantile capitalism, and now with industrial capitalism on the ropes everywhere, and after having wasted most of the world’s vital resources, you’d think the whole stinking drama of greed and mass exploitation would necessarily draw to a close.

You’d think there would be nothing left to huckster after having pissed in most of the world’s clean drinking water, gutted its forests and jungles, leveled its mountains for coal and minerals, and turned the atmosphere into a blanket of simmering toxins, well, you’d think it was time for the bastards to fold the game and go home with their winnings. No such luck.

Enter yet a third phase: Consciousness Capitalism! The private appropriation of human consciousness as a “nonmaterial asset.” Or cognitive capitalism, in nerd and pinhead speak.

Which goes to show you can never underestimate the dark bastards at the helm. Yes, these guys are good.

Essentially, we’re talking about stripping the human experience from life, then renting it back to humans. So how does one do that? Through the same Western European historical process used to fuck over the world in the first two rounds of capitalism – propertization. Denying access to something because it’s MINE-MINE-MINE-MINE!

Charge rents for your monopoly on the access. Manufacture artificial scarcity, even of human consciousness and experience by redefining and reshaping it. The

tools here are legal means such as intellectual property rights, patents softwares ...

Cognitive capitalism by definition requires that mass consciousness be networked at all individual nodes. Each node is its own experiential realm of service relationships, entertainment, travel and the multitude of experience industries that are rapidly coming to dominate the global economy. Life as a paid-for experience, with none of the hassles of ownership. Rent a Life, Inc. (Actually, we've always rented our lives from the bastards, under such things as the pretense that mortgage payments were not just another gussied up form of rent, and so forth). If you've got the money to pay for access to their networks, it's great. I guess. If you're too poor, then you are left to fight it out in naked barbarian streets of the unwired. Given the choice, most of us would rather be inside the gates, not on the streets. But any rational person would fear the gatekeepers.

Already we are seeing cognitive mutations of our relationships with our homes, our communities and our idea of what the world is. I had an absolutely brilliant young man visit me in Belize, well known as a futurist on the Internet and avid player of Second Life. By his own admission, he could not find anyone in the entire country he could communicate with.

Community and the world are becoming concepts, images and ideas ungrounded in the earthly "thingness" and the attending husbandry and respect for such, and replaced by the ultimate purchased commodity, the experience of life itself. Each person becomes an experiential Empire of One. Occupant of a single node in the network, seeking personal validation through paid-for personal experience and free from the bonds of hu-



The new extortion is conducted through creation of a state of artificial scarcity, which is done by turning the dials of your patents, softwares and intellectual property rights machinery, which is protected by your corporate legal goon squad

man cooperation and responsiveness. Free from material boundaries.

Experience products, compared to those of industrial capitalism, are dirt cheap for the bastards to produce. The hard costs, land, factories, labor, are outsourced (dumped) in China. Let the Mandarin capitalists own those burdens.

The Mandarin capitalists are deliriously happy to accept 'em. Because they can offset those costs in a million ways they'd just as soon not talk about. Like burning the cheapest sweat-labor coal in the dirtiest power plants they can build to power their workhouse chip factories. As in, Hey Chang! It's quitting time. Go beat those goddamned peasant workers back into their chicken cages for the night!"

Meanwhile, back here in the land of free, we are, as always, at least one water buffalo step ahead of the Chinese when it comes to enterprise. Consequently, we have moved on from Proudhon's property-as-theft model, to extortion.

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The time for extortion through consciousness capitalism is ripe in both senses of the word. People in developed nations, America especially, are ditching material goods, the veritable mountain of Asian techno-junk, sweat-labor clothing, and gewgaws, not to mention the now-worthless, overpriced suburban fuckboxes they purchased to store all that stuff in.

Nothing is stranger, or sadder in a way, than watching the monolithic suburban yard sale that is now America subur-

CORPORATIONS ARE NOW AFTER OUR VERY BEINGS

ban Saturday morning. Material assemblage might be a better word than sale, because there are almost no buyers, not even many “for free” takers. Just sellers. Everybody needs cash to pay down the plastic. Or eat. It’s broke out there. (Although Europeans and North Americans don’t really know the meaning of the word broke yet. Ask folks south of the equator).

Meanwhile, at the Twilight Zone Café, in Winchester, Virginia, Ernie, the retired backhoe driver takes another pull on his Old Milwaukee beer and says: “Now tell me this perffessor, didn’t we bring all this on ourselves? Ain’t we got some personal responsibility for what happens to us?”

Good question. Did we create this catastrophic system, or was it created by the bastards, and in turn re-created us?

How much is attributable to the smallness and ratlike sensibilities of ordinary men such as ourselves? Has human ingenuity and ability to mass replicate goods and information provided nothing more than a theater of operations for some macabre and prolonged last act in the human drama – ecocide?

“Oh, science will come up with something,” observes Ernie. “It always does.”

I bite my tongue and don’t say that I believe human ingenuity is much over-rated stuff. But even assuming it isn’t, and that we all get issued solar-powered houseboats during the global-warming meltdown, we’re still gonna need oxygen.

Maybe Ernie is right, though. Maybe



Maybe we did bring all this on ourselves by not accepting that new “personal responsibility,” the Republican Party proffered a while back

we did bring all this on ourselves by not accepting that new “personal responsibility,” the Republican Party proffered a while back. But I’m blaming the bastards anyway, because first off, they’ve got all the power; and second, they’ve become obscenely rich off it; and third, I don’t like the fuckers to start with. And it’s not because I am jealous of their wealth either. I leave that mediocre sort of animal jealousy to realtors and super-striving dentists.

After a rather short stint in “the ownership society,” material products are now increasingly replaced by immaterial licensed experiences. We will no longer “own” anything, much less attempt to own everything we can lay hands on. Which is good. But the bastards will finally own everything. Which is bad.

Certainly cognitive capitalism will relieve stress on the world’s resources to some degree. A nation of cyber-vegetables trying to get laid or get rich in a Second Life-type experience may be easier on poor old Mother Earth, though she’s probably be gagging at the thought of what we’ll have become.

Malcontent that she is, Mother Earth has been unhappy with man’s behavior for a long time. And after being, bombed, mined, poisoned and generally molested for so long, who can blame her for her opinion, which is that, “On the sixth day, God fucked up.”

Three beers and a couple thousand words later, it’s hard to disagree.

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