

Chapter 16

We Are the Borg!

Human Assimilation into Cellular Society

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ABSTRACT

As cybersurveillance, datamining, and social networking for security, transparency, and commercial purposes become more ubiquitous, individuals who use and rely on various forms of electronic communications are being absorbed into a new type of cellular society. The eventual end of this project might be a world in which each individual, each cell in the electronic “body politic,” can be monitored, managed, and, if dangerous to the social organism, eliminated. This chapter examines the objectives, desires, and designs associated with such a cellular biopolitics. Are individuals being incorporated into a Borg-like cyber-organism in which they no longer “own” their substance, preferences, desires, and thoughts and in which they are told what they should be doing next?

INTRODUCTION

We know roughly who you are, roughly what you care about, roughly who your friends are.

The power of individual targeting—the technology will be so good it will be very hard for people to watch or consume something that has not in some sense been tailored for them.

I actually think most people don't want Google to answer their questions ... They want Google to tell them what they should be doing next. (Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google (quoted in Jenkins, 2010))

It is a dream of power to control human minds and bodies. Obstacles to this end are the materiality of the latter and the noncorporeality of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4582-0.ch016

human thought. In this chapter, we explore the technological and social potential for creation of a cybernetic collective, not terribly dissimilar from *Star Trek's* "Borg". We propose that such a socio-technological formation might not be quite the science fiction fantasy it is generally thought to be. Although we do not anticipate the full fusion of minds, as among the Borg, the combination of RFID-type brain implants, neuropsychological research and changes in individual subjectivities point toward a "cellular society", in which individual identities and autonomy are submerged in a greater whole. Our goal here is to assess the current state of technology, politics, and social control where minds and bodies are concerned and to suggest how new developments, yoked together, could lead to a re(B)organized cellular society, in which the individual members are linked to each other, in real time, via centralized data bases and surveillance systems available to state authorities.

Our conceptualization of the Borg centers on the collective ontological and cybernetic formation that results from being connected to other brains and bodies through embodied technology. Because of its connectedness, the Borg is more than a cyborg. That is, it is not just a fusion of biology and technology such that a new, bionic man or woman results. It is more akin to Michael and Michael's (2007) notion of the electrophorus in which a "bearer of electricity" acts like a network element or node in a larger electromagnetic field. The novelty of this networked being is not only that technology and society are fused (Stephan et al., 2012) such that human capacities are expanded and improved, but also that mechanisms for surveillance and social control are internalized, opening up the possibility that the Borg can be externally manipulated (Duhigg, 2012; Singer & Duhigg, 2012). The concern here expands beyond whether this kind of networked society is threatening long-standing notions of what it means to be human (pace the debate between Bostrom (2003) and Fukuyama (2004) on transhumanism). Certainly

new neurotechnologies are questioning and even threatening the primacy of traditional humanistic "mind over matter" world views (Benedikter et al., 2010). There is no doubt that humans continue to evolve in relationship to the technologies they develop. What is at stake, however, is the extent to which a re(B)organized society can exercise political and moral agency if its thoughts are tracked and controlled from without and if those in such a society feel confused, naked and lost (Mann, 1997) when they are not "jacked in" to the network (Gibson, 1984).

We begin with a discussion of the political motivations for extended electronic monitoring of "unruly bodies" that pose risks and dangers to the self-discipline and social order underpinning advanced liberal society. Preventing and preempting risks to minds and bodies is a central logic driving what we call the "re(B)organization" of society. The following two sections examine, first, recent technological and neurological efforts to measure and collect *in vivo* data on biochemical and neurotransmitter levels in brains and bodies, body temperature, toxins, and viruses, and to communicate real time data to remote electronic databases for assessment of risk potential; and second, recent developments in neuropsychology, mindreading and synthetic telepathy. In the fourth part of the chapter, we review recent research on changes in individual subjectivities following from instant and continuous communication with friends and families afforded by near-ubiquitous cell phones. Recent experiments with implantable RFID chips point toward more sophisticated, brain-implanted receiver-transmitters offering access to the world's communication networks while sending out streams of biodata. Already, the current mix of security, technology and subjectivity is transforming both society and individuality; we should not be surprised if future developments are welcomed with open arms and minds (Collins, 2002). We conclude with a discussion of the implications of a Borg-like cellular society.

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