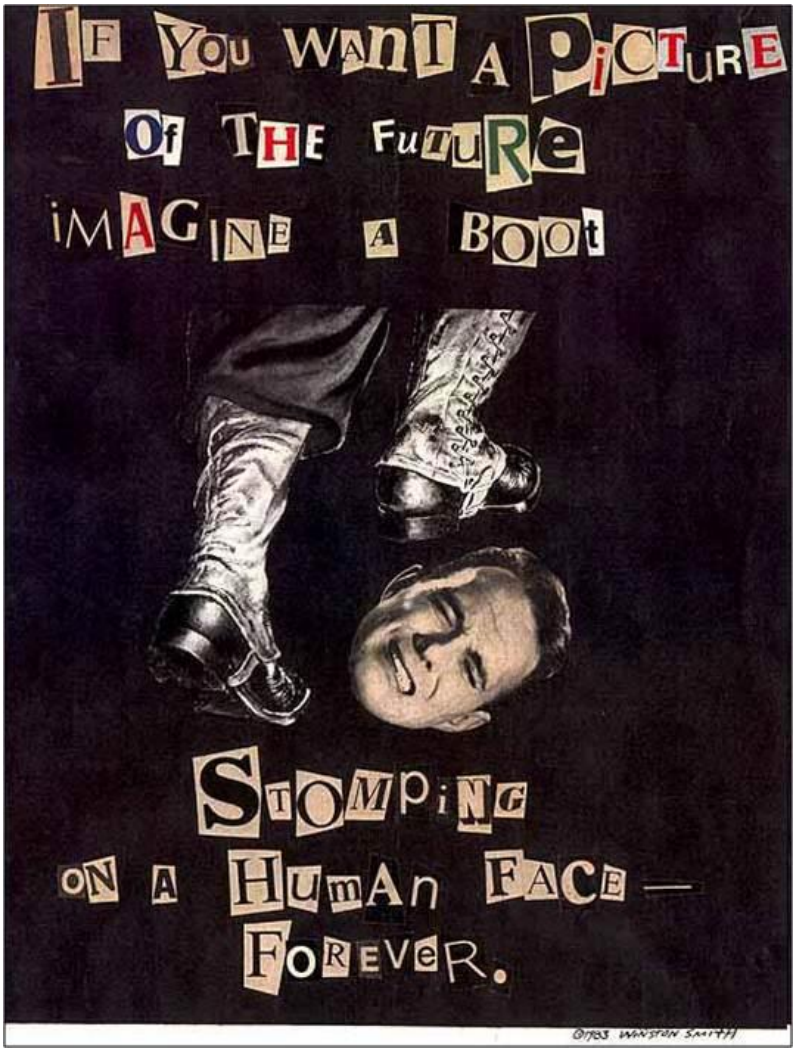

1984

READINGS

Simpler Terms; If It's 'Orwellian,' It's Probably Not

By GEOFFREY NUNBERG

Published: June 22, 2003

ON George Orwell's centenary -- he was born on June 25, 1903 -- the most telling sign of his influence is the words he left us with: not just ''thought police,'' ''doublethink'' and ''unperson,'' but also ''Orwellian'' itself, the most widely used adjective derived from the name of a modern writer.

In the press and on the Internet, it's more common than ''Kafkaesque,'' ''Hemingwayesque'' and ''Dickensian'' put together. It even noses out the rival political reproach ''Machiavellian,'' which had a 500-year head start.

Eponyms are always the narrowest sort of tribute, though. ''Orwellian'' doesn't have anything to do with Orwell as a socialist thinker, or for that matter, as a human being. People are always talking about Orwell's decency, but ''Orwellian decency'' would be an odd phrase indeed. And the adjective commemorates Orwell the writer only for three of his best known works: the novels ''Animal Farm'' and ''1984'' and the essay ''Politics and the English Language.''

''Orwellian'' reduces Orwell's palette to a single shade of noir. It brings to mind only sordid regimes of surveillance and thought control and the distortions of language that make them possible.

Orwell's views on language may outlive his political ideas. At least they seem to require no updating or apology, whereas his partisans feel the need to justify the continuing relevance of his politics. He wasn't the first writer to condemn political euphemisms. Edmund Burke was making the same points 150 years earlier about the language used by apologists for the French Revolution: ''Things are never called by their common names. Massacre is sometimes agitation, sometimes effervescence, sometimes excess.''

But Orwell is the writer most responsible for diffusing the modern view of political language as an active accomplice of tyranny. As he wrote in ''Politics and the English Language,'' ''Political language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.''

That was an appealing notion to an age that had learned to be suspicious of ideologies, and critics on all sides have found it useful to cite ''Politics and the English Language'' in condemning the equivocations of their opponents.

Critics on the left hear Orwellian resonances in phrase like ''weapons of mass protection,'' for nonlethal arms, or in names like the Patriot Act or the Homeland Security Department's Operation Liberty Shield, which authorizes indefinite detention of asylum-seekers from certain nations. Critics on the right hear them in phrases like ''reproductive health services,'' ''Office of Equality Assurance'' and ''English Plus,'' for bilingual education.

And just about everyone discerned an Orwellian note in the name of the Pentagon's Total Information Awareness project, which was aimed at mining a vast centralized database of personal information for patterns that might reveal terrorist activities. (The name was changed last month to

the Terrorist Information Awareness program, in an effort to reassure Americans who have nothing to hide.)

Which of those terms are deceptive packaging and which are merely effective branding is a matter of debate. But there's something troubling in the easy use of the label ''Orwellian,'' as if these phrases committed the same sorts of linguistic abuses that led to the gulags and the death camps.

The specters that ''Orwellian'' conjures aren't really the ones we have to worry about. Newspeak may have been a plausible invention in 1948, when totalitarian thought control still seemed an imminent possibility. But the collapse of Communism revealed the bankruptcy not just of the Stalinist social experiment, but of its linguistic experiments as well. After 75 years of incessant propaganda, ''socialist man'' turned out to be a cynic who didn't even believe the train schedules.

Political language is still something to be wary of, but it doesn't work as Orwell feared. In fact the modern language of control is more effective than Soviet Newspeak precisely because it's less bleak and intimidating.

Think of the way business has been re-engineering the language of ordinary interaction in the interest of creating ''high-performance corporate cultures.'' To a reanimated Winston Smith, there would be something wholly familiar in being told that he had to file an annual vision statement or that he should henceforth eliminate ''problems'' from his vocabulary in favor of ''issues.''

But the hero of ''1984'' would find the whole exercise much more convivial than the Two Minute Hate at the Ministry of Truth. And he'd be astonished that management allowed employees to post ''Dilbert'' strips on the walls of their cubicles.

For Orwell, the success of political jargon and euphemism required an uncritical or even unthinking audience: a ''reduced state of consciousness,'' as he put it, was ''favorable to political conformity.'' As things turned out, though, the political manipulation of language seems to thrive on the critical skepticism that Orwell encouraged.

In fact, there has never been an age that was so well-schooled in the perils of deceptive language or in decoding political and commercial messages, as seen in the official canonization of Orwell himself. Thanks to the schools, ''1984'' is probably the best-selling political novel of modern times (current Amazon sales rank: No. 93), and ''Politics and the English Language'' is the most widely read essay about the English language and very likely in it as well.

But as advertisers have known for a long time, no audience is easier to beguile than one that is smugly confident of its own sophistication. The word ''Orwellian'' contributes to that impression. Like ''propaganda,'' it implies an aesthetic judgment more than a moral one. Calling an expression Orwellian means not that it's deceptive but that it's crudely deceptive.

Today, the real damage isn't done by the euphemisms and circumlocutions that we're likely to describe as Orwellian. ''Ethnic cleansing,'' ''revenue enhancement,'' ''voluntary regulation,'' ''tree-density reduction,'' ''faith-based initiatives,'' ''extra affirmative action,'' ''single-payer plans'' -- these terms may be oblique, but at least they wear their obliquity on their sleeves.

Rather, the words that do the most political work are simple ones -- ''jobs and growth,'' ''family values'' and ''color-blind'' not to mention ''life'' and ''choice.'' But concrete words like these are the hardest ones to see through. They're opaque when you hold them up to the light.

Orwell knew that, of course. ''To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle'' -- not what you'd call an Orwellian sentiment, but very like the man.

Geoffrey Nunberg, a Stanford linguist, is heard regularly on NPR's ''Fresh Air'' and is the author of ''The Way We Talk Now.''

Wired Homes Keep Tabs On Aging Parents

by Jennifer Ludden

August 24, 2010

The boomer generation that has grown up with e-mail, cell phones and video cameras is now using all of these things to help care for their aging parents. That's leading to some odd dinnertime scenes, like the one that plays out every evening in the ranch house of Edward and Lavinia Fitzgerald in Savannah, Ga.

They settle at their small kitchen table as their daughter Colleen Henry dishes out the homemade meat loaf, mashed potatoes and green beans that she has brought over. Edward's health is failing now that he's 83, and his wife suffered brain damage from a stroke.

"Here's your ketchup," Colleen says, as she puts the bottle on the table along with the salt shaker.

It could be dinnertime anywhere, but for one thing: There's an extra guest at this meal.

"How's the weather down there?"

That voice comes from a woman who appears on a computer monitor next to the kitchen table.

"Oh, that's Denise," Edward explains. "That's our good friend!"

Actually, Denise Cady is what's called a "telecaregiver," and for two years she has been checking on the Fitzgeralds every evening from Lafayette, Ind. She joins in the mealtime chatter just like a friend who dropped by. Cady asks about the Fitzgeralds' family and neighbors, swaps jokes about the hot weather and chats with Colleen about the meal.

"Oooh, looks good," Cady says. "Are those fresh green beans?"

The scene may not seem so strange in the era of Skype, when many people use the computer to keep in touch with far-flung relatives. But Cady can see almost every move the Fitzgeralds make. Their house is wired with video cameras, like something out of a sci-fi movie, though, at first, you don’t notice it.

Seeing Everything

Edward points out a camera in the kitchen ceiling. It's enclosed in a dark-tinted bubble, but you can hear it swivel when it turns to scan the adjoining living room and dining room.

Another camera monitors who enters the front door. It can pan down a hall to show who goes into the bedroom and bathroom, though it can't see into those rooms. Colleen admits that the idea of video monitoring made her wary at first.

What's In A Wired Home?

In addition to camera monitoring, companies offer other kinds of services to help keep track of an elderly person's daily activities.

Some use motion sensors to monitor someone's movement around the house, and daily tasks like preparing coffee. If a sensor detects that, say, Grandpa has been in the bathroom too long, a relative can be notified by cell phone or text. Companies that specialize in this kind of monitoring — such as SimplyHome, QuietCare and BeClose — provide detailed activity information for loved ones to see on a private website.

Medical alert services like LifeStation and ActiveCare offer emergency help at the push of a button. A similar service offered by Philips Lifeline can also detect falls, instead of relying on the user to push the button.

Still other services like MedMinder and Philips Lifeline's ManageMyPills offer reminders to take medication or, in the case of FineThanx, provide automated daily check-in calls and will alert others when there's no answer.

"I was thinking all sorts of things," she says with a laugh. "My dad sitting around in his underwear. My mother — I just thought these people are going to see everything, you know. And it bothered me."

But after her mom broke her ankle two years ago, Colleen became overwhelmed with the duties of caring for her aging parents. And she worried constantly when she wasn't with them. What if her dad had a heart attack? What if her mom had another stroke?

"The burden's on me if something happened," she says.

Desperate for help, Colleen discovered a new video monitoring service and signed them up. It has turned out to be a huge relief for her dad, as well.

As with many elderly spouses, his wife's condition had thrown Edward into the exhausting role of full-time caregiver. Now, with the cameras on, he gets out of the house for daily mass and a gab session with his buddies at McDonald's.

"We go down there and sit around and talk," he says. "That telephone will ring, and I'm home in five minutes."

Cady or another telecaregiver calls Edward's cell phone if they worry that Lavinia is staying in the bathroom a bit too long. They've called a couple of times when she had fallen and couldn't get back up. They also alert Colleen and even call in the middle of the night if something seems wrong.

"They're diligent," Edward says. "They're on the ball. And I like it."

Zooming In

But what about this hi-tech invasion of Edward's privacy? He says he has no problem with it. He worries more about strangers coming into the house. A home health aide does come to get his wife bathed and dressed every day, and Colleen is grateful the cameras can monitor the quality of that care.

The company that's monitoring the Fitzgerald house is called ResCare. At its offices in Lafayette, Ind., telecaregiver Cady sits before two large computer screens. On one, you can see the Fitzgeralds in Savannah, eating their dinner as Cady chats with them.

There are also thumbnail video images of two-dozen other homes, which Cady will check in with over the course of her shift. If one client signals for help, that image pops up larger. Children of her clients can log into the same video Cady watches and monitor their parents themselves.

This long-distance care isn't cheap. ResCare's services start at $600 a month and can run well over $1,000 depending on how much active monitoring is needed. But that's still a lot less than the average nursing home.

"Primarily the people using this at this time are in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's or dementia," says Nel Taylor of ResCare.

She says a telecaregiver can remind people to take their medication at a certain time. They can alert a relative if someone appears confused or in distress. They can help with the simple tasks of daily life, like the time a client was about to sit down to breakfast.

"The telecaregiver zoomed in on the frying pan and said, 'Maybe you ought to cook the sausage and the eggs a little longer. The eggs look kind of runny and the sausage is pink,' " Taylor says.

A New Paradigm

No doubt, starring in your own daily reality show won't appeal to everyone. But there are all kinds of remote monitoring systems popping up to keep tabs on a fast-aging population. Most use sensors placed around the house and alert children to every mundane detail of their parents' day: when they get in and out of bed, sit on the sofa, open the refrigerator door or turn on the air conditioning. ResCare's Taylor says all of the research and startup companies are driven by this simple equation.

"At the same time that we have this huge population of aging folks, we have a shrinking population of caregivers, of younger people able to provide the care that these older people are going to need," she says. "If we don't find other ways [to do that], then we are really going to be in big trouble in the future."

Back in Savannah, Colleen scoops out some extra banana pudding for her parents as she chats with Cady on the monitor.

"I was going to leave the whole dish, but I thought better of it," Colleen says.

Cady laughs. "It would be gone by tomorrow morning, I'm telling ya!"

Colleen says she assumed video monitoring would help keep her parents healthy and at home. But she had no idea it would also provide her parents with a new friend.

"You see how old people are just lonely," she says. "This makes Momma and Daddy happy."

And Colleen admits that it relieves her own guilt at not being around even more.

As her parents keep talking with Cady, Colleen packs up the dishes, shouts out a goodbye and heads for the door. She leaves her parents for the night, reassured that they're not really alone.

University Attendance Scanners Make Some Uneasy

by Daniel Kraker

August 30, 2010

When classes begin on Monday, some students at Northern Arizona University will have a little extra incentive to roll out of bed for that 8 a.m. calculus class.

The school is installing electronic scanners outside some large lecture halls to track attendance. NAU may be the first American educational institution to try the technology.

"When I started here, I was of the mindset that this is college — students should decide for themselves whether they should show up or not," says associate professor Brandon Cruickshank, who has taught Chemistry 101 in a cavernous classroom at the university for 15 years. "This is no longer high school."

But over the years, he's seen that attending class does matter. So now he factors class participation into his students' grades. Most of his students are freshmen.

"We do have to say to a lot of those students that it really is important that you do show up to class — you are not going to do well if you're not there," he says.

Research suggests that missing even one class can result in a lower GPA for first-year students. And a freshman's grades, in particular, are really important, says Karen Pugliesi, NAU's vice provost for academic affairs.

"The stronger a student's grade performance in the first year, the far more likely they are to persist at NAU and graduate," she says.

Efforts To Boost Graduation Rates

Universities across the country are struggling to boost lagging graduation rates. At NAU, only about 30 percent of incoming freshmen will earn a degree in four years. About 3 in every 10 students drop out after the first year. And if something as simple as going to class could help turn that around, Pugliesi thinks it's appropriate to make it a priority.

"There's a lot of compelling things out there, there's a lot of competing choices that a student can make," she says. "We ought to do everything we can to make that choice the most likely."

The university received $85,000 in federal stimulus funds for its new "electronic attendance" pilot project. The school has installed scanners outside 20 large lecture halls — including Cruickshank's chemistry classroom — where it's not practical to take roll.

Getting A Green Light, Student Opposition

When students flash their ID cards near a scanner, a light turns green, and they get checked off on an attendance report.

"I don't see why we need to be told what to do anymore," says junior Rachel Brackett.

"I feel like it's a move toward that — treating us as though we were juveniles."

Brackett has mobilized student opposition to the project. She has launched a Facebook page, gathered 2,000 signatures and organized a rally against the plan. Brackett says part of the college experience is learning to make your own decisions, and living with the consequences.

"I really felt like NAU is not giving students enough initiative," Brackett says. "They coddle us — I almost feel like — in a lot of our classes."

She also doesn't like how the school could track where she is in a "Big Brother way." Linda DeAngelo, with the Higher Education Research institute at UCLA, shares those concerns.

"Rather than focusing on, 'Did students go?' — in other words, 'Did they scan their card?' — the more important thing to think about is what are they doing in the classroom; are they actively participating?" DeAngelo says.

Universities also have a strong financial incentive to retain their students. It costs about $400 to recruit a single student to a public school and nearly $2,000 to a private college. Every time a student drops out, that process starts all over again.

Look Out, Cleveland: Your Garbage Can Is Watching You!

By Salvatore Cardoni

August 23, 2010

Rock, Roll, and Recycling? If a new initiative works, could Cleveland be home to the Recycling Hall of Fame? (Photo: George Rose / Getty)

To promote recycling, Cleveland is banking on the deterrent powers of Big Brother and Ben Franklin.

Thanks to a $2.5 million order of garbage cans and recycle carts embedded with radio frequency identification chips and bar codes, Clevelanders who don't recycle could be fined $100.

"We're trying to automate our system to be a more efficient operation," Ronnie Owens, Waste Collection Commissioner, told the Cleveland Plain-Dealer. "This chip will assist us in doing our job better."

The chip Owens is talking about will snitch on residents whose landfill garbage contains too high a proportion of recyclable materials.

The Plain-Dealer breaks down the process that turns a bad trash mixture into a hefty fine:

The chips will allow city workers to monitor how often residents roll carts to the curb for collection. If a chip shows a recyclable cart hasn't been brought to the curb in weeks, a trash supervisor will sort through the trash for recyclables. Trash carts containing more than 10 percent recyclable material could lead to a $100 fine. Recyclables include glass, metal cans, plastic bottles, paper and cardboard.

For a city that's fallen face-first on hard economic times—Lorrain County, part of greater Cleveland, is ranked in the bottom 10 of U.S. cities for wage losses—the garbage cans are an expensive green bet.

Last week, Cleveland's city council signed off on the $2.5 million purchase of enough cans for 25,000 households across the city, reports the Plain-Dealer. This expanded a 2007 pilot program that outfitted 15,000 households.

Eventually, say officials, every Cleveland household will be supplied with a high-tech can.

Officials justified the expenditure by saying that the program will eventually yield the city a profit; Cleveland pays $30 a ton to dump garbage in landfills, but earns $26 a ton for recyclables.

High-tech recycle carts aren't solely a Cleveland venture.

The Plain-Dealer reports that earlier this year Alexanderia, Virginia, announced it would issue high-tech carts to ascertain if people were recycling.

Last year, MSNBC reported on Philadelphia's experiment with Big Belly Solar—trash compactors that use solar energy to condense trash and cut down on collection trips by 75 percent.

Richmond Preschool Outfits Students With Tracking Devices

RICHMOND, Calif. —

The Contra Costa County School District began introducing a new high tech tracking system for preschool students Tuesday that alert teachers when their students leave campus.

Embedded in what looks like a tiny basketball jersey that each student will wear when at school is a radio frequency tag that also uses Wi-Fi. The tag provides a signal to sensors planted throughout the school.

The information from those sensors is displayed in a map of the school, thereby allowing teachers and administrators to know exactly

Parents will digitally sign in and sign out a child, saving teachers from hand filing attendance records required by the state.

“Now, when we feed the children lunch we just have to push a button and it’s done,” said teacher Simone Beauford. “We don't have to check the papers, check the papers, check the papers…”

Sung Kim of the county's employment and human services department said 3,000 man hours could eventually be saved with this $50,000 system, which was paid for by a federal grant.

“Within a year we could completely pay off this system from the savings we have with the staffing,” said Kim. “We are the first child care center that is implementing with this technology, but it is already proven technology.”

Falsification of history

The Soviet Union

The most common examples of photograph alteration and falsification come from communist Russia. Unwanted persons, so-called "enemies of the people" were not only killed, but also removed from photographs where their presence was unwanted. Photographs were altered with the intent of changing the past.

Leon Trotsky was a close friend of Lenin, and shared his idealistic ideas about the communist state. In the following photographs he can be seen together with Lenin.

The next set of images are nearly identical, however Trotsky is removed from both photographs.

The historical reason for this alteration is that Stalin eventually began to see Trotsky as a threat and labeled him an "enemy of the people". After he was deported from the Soviet Union in 1929, Trotsky critisized Stalin's leadership, arguing that the dictatorship Stalin exercised was based on his own interests, rather than those of the people. This contributed substantially to Trotsky's removal from photographs and history.

Nikolai Yezhov, chief of the Soviet secret police, suffered a fate similar to that of Trotsky. For some time he was close to Stalin, staging the infamous Moscow frame-trials, where innocent people were forced to confess crimes against Stalin and the Soviet Union, and were consequently executed. In the photograph below, he can be seen walking together with Stalin.

In the modified photograph below, it is as though he had never existed

[all pictures above were taken from The Commissar Vanishes]

In 1998, Hoover Digest, a publication at Stanford University published an article entitled Inside Stalin's Darkroom. This is just another example of how history was altered by the Soviet Union.

The above examples illustrate how alteration of images can change history. Unwanted persons are removed from photographs and are thus also removed from history. Their connections to other historical persons(in this case Lenin and Stalin) are literally erased. Fortunately we have access to the original photographs, but who is to say that what we deem to be originals really are authentic? After all, if we had not known about the original photographs, we would have naturally assumed that the falsifications were authentic.

Manipulating Truth, Losing Credibility

By Frank Van Riper

Brian Walski, a Los Angeles Times reporter, combined two photographs into one used on the newspaper's front page Monday (above). Sharp-eyed journalists at another paper spotted Iraqis at left who were repeated in the picture.

It is a sad but unforgivable case coming in the midst of a sad but unavoidable war.

Brian Walski, a staff photographer for the Los Angeles Times working in Iraq, was fired April 1 immediately after his editors discovered that he had combined two of his Iraqi photographs into one to "improve" the composition.

The widely published image, of an armed British soldier and Iraqi civilians under hostile fire in Basra seems to show the soldier gesturing at the civilians – urging them to seek cover – as a standing man holding a young child in his arms seems to look at the soldier imploringly. It's the kind of picture that wins a Pulitzer.

Not surprisingly, it ran Page One, large and above the fold, in the Times, and across all six front-page columns of the Hartford Courant, which, like the LA Times, is a Tribune Company property.

But the picture is a fake – a computer-generated amalgam of two different photographs, made one after the other. In one (unmanipulated) picture, that prominently features the standing man and child, the British soldier is not gesturing and is looking away from them. In the second image (also unmanipulated), the soldier is gesturing dramatically, but the man and child are much less visible. The conclusion is inescapable: Walski deliberately combined two of his good legitimate photographs to make one superb illegitimate one. The bogusness of the picture was discovered at the Courant, after an employee noticed what appeared to be a duplication of elements and people in the image's background.

A 20-year veteran of the news business, Walski was confronted by his editors, confessed, and accepted his summary punishment. He called his action a "complete breakdown in judgment" that was caused in part by the stress of his assignment. [It should be noted, though, that Walski did not just push the wrong button and send the wrong picture in the exhausting heat of the moment. He had to consciously manipulate his two digital pictures in Photoshop – an action requiring both skill and intent. He had to create the separate, faked, image, and – again with intent – transmit it to his editors, saying nothing about the alteration.]

"This was after an extremely long, hot and stressful day," Walski maintained in a 214-word apology to his colleagues, "but I offer no excuses here..."

He conceded that "I have tarnished the reputation" of the Los Angeles Times, the Tribune company and "especially the very talented and extremely dedicated photographers and picture editors that have made my four-and-a half years at the Times a true quality experience."

"I have always maintained the highest ethical standards throughout my career," Walski insisted, "and cannot truly explain my complete breakdown in judgment at this time. That will only come in the many sleepless nights that are ahead."

As a journalist myself for more than 30 years, I have covered urban unrest, violent demonstrations and – during the 1968 Democratic convention – what investigators ultimately called "a police riot." I have been tear-gassed, manhandled, abused and arrested. I have traveled on assignment all over the country and to many parts of the world.

But I haven't a clue what it must be like to be in combat and I am damned if I am going to pile on Brian Walski, even if I never could excuse what he did.

Though he deserved the axe that he got, who in the business cannot feel pain and sympathy after reading Kenny F. Irby's superb analysis in Poynter Online, the website of the Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions at Indiana University. Several reactions to Irby's piece are reprinted here.

Irby quotes LA Times shooter Don Barletti, reached by satellite phone in Kuwait City, recalling seeing Walski just as everything was hitting the fan:

"When I saw him I really did not recognize him. He was sunburned, had not eaten in days, nor slept in 36 hours; his clothes were filthy, his beard – all over the place. And he smelled like a goat."

Barletti recalled asking Walski, 'How could you do this?'"

"I f–-ed up," Walski is said to have answered, "and now no one will touch me..."

What makes Walski's action so tragic has very little to do with what he did to his picture, but a hell of a lot to do with the fragile currency in which all reputable journalists trade: their credibility. In truth, what the photographer did had little, if any, effect on the content of the story he was telling – a point made by at least one critic, Pedro Meyer, who appears elsewhere on this website.

"We found that the photographer Brian Walski has been dismissed from the LA Times for no valid reason," Meyer intoned from his own website, Zone Zero. "It seems that the newspaper does not fully understand that the CONTENT of the image he sent in was not altered in its essence, even though he combined two consecutive images. The problem with this action by the LA Times news-organization, is that they use this sort of measure to cover up for what is in reality a much more profound issue, in particular in this war, and that has to do with the wholesale abdication of their responsibility in bringing to the public any news other than what the Pentagon or the White House wishes them to publish."

Meyer, an acclaimed fine art photographer and author who is not a daily journalist, goes on like this and manages to get it exactly wrong:

"They (the LA Times) have fired someone for doing a professional job in trying to come up with a better picture, the same way that any of their journalists polish a text so that it reads better and is succinct. (why should a photographer be deprived of doing exactly the same that other professionals are doing on a daily basis as long as the information is not distorted?). The only explanation I can find is that by accusing the photographer and attempting to portray themselves as publishing 'unmanipulated' news, they are seeking to conceal the factual reality of their biased and one-sided presentation of the overall news. That seems to be the more important issue at hand."

Hard though it is to stomach such fatuousness, I will try.

Leaving aside Meyer's obvious political bias and convenient myopia (he speaks about "war atrocities perpetrated [on civilians] by US bombs," and makes no mention at all of depredations by the other side, nor of the Herculean efforts by the allies to pinpoint their attacks and minimize such tragedy), Meyer and the few others who are like him are simply wrong to compare what Walski did to a reporter's composition of a story.

Any reporter worthy of the name would no sooner fiddle with direct quotes than a reputable photojournalist would alter his or her picture. Remember:news photographs are the equivalent of direct quotations and therefore are sacrosanct – the situational ethics of Walski's apologists notwithstanding. To be sure, just as a writer can, in the interest of brevity or impact, choose which quotes to use in a story, so can a news photographer or picture editor crop out dead space in a news photo, or use the electronic equivalent of dodging or burning in to make a picture reproduce better.

But the key elements of a news photograph, like the key words in a direct quote, simply are off limits to manipulation. In this, I am reminded of what a Washington Times shooter once told me. On a computer outside the paper's darkroom, she said, there was plastered this flat admonition and warning: "If you can't do it in the darkroom, don't do it here."

In fairness to Meyer and others, one can legitimately question the news judgment of a newspaper, magazine, network or website. For example, critics of the war have for weeks been dumping on the alleged jingoism of the coverage by Rupert Murdoch's Fox news network. But I find more fault with Fox's (and other outlets') gaudy, rah-rah packaging of the product than with the content itself. (Again, it should be remembered, no one is accusing Fox of manufacturing video or piping quotes.) I should add that, for this news junkie, the preference on TV is for the refreshingly in-depth (and dispassionate) coverage of PBS' "The News Hour with Jim Lehrer," as well as for Ted Koppel's Peabody-caliber reporting from the field for ABC's "Nightline."

Perhaps even more dangerous to the already fragile reputation of journalists is the fact that Brian Walski's action will call into question the work of any number of other reporters and photographers – a fact conveniently ignored by those who see nothing wrong with what he did.

It's what one respondent on the Poynter Institute website called "the 'cockroach theory of news.' If you see one, there are a hundred."

Noted Chicago Tribune (and former White House) shooter Pete Souza: "Isn't it ironic that in one of photojournalism's finest moments, one of our lowest moments has occurred. The photographs coming from Iraq are amazing in their power to convey the emotions and scenes of war....

"[But] this fiasco transcends...this one isolated incident. I believe our entire profession is now under a cloud of suspicion regarding our credibility..."

And, importantly, Souza declared, the blame is not just on one misguided shooter. "Photographers are given less time to produce more pictures. There is more competition for the limited space that exists in a newspaper. This pressure results in more temptation to manipulate the photographic situation: either by directing the subject or by digital manipulation. With digital cameras and wireless transmission, there is also less accountability."

"Finally, to save travel money, a picture editor often assigns a local freelancer to shoot an out-of-town assignment. Many times the picture editor has never even met the freelancer. A staffer may be obligated in [adhering] to a certain ethics policy but what about a freelancer?"

I only can echo Pete's unhappy view. Assuming Brian Walski's unforgivable action was the only mistake in an otherwise unblemished career – an assumption I am willing to make with no evidence to the contrary – the sad, tragic fact is that the cloud he has cast over the profession he loves is something all of us now will have to live with – and work to dispel.

Frank Van Riper is a Washington-based commercial and documentary photographer and author. His latest book is Talking Photography (Allworth Press), a collection of his Washington Post columns and other photography writing over the past decade. He can be reached through his website www.GVRphoto.com.

1984 Readings

Meet the Big Brother Screening Your Social Media for Employers

BY Austin Carr | 09-29-2010

Big Brother

Turn off your Twitter feed. Hide your Flickr photos. Remove your YouTube videos. And change your Facebook privacy settings (if you can figure out how).

With unemployment rates flying high, jobs are scarcer than ever, and applicants need every leg up they can get. What's one overlooked way of improving your chances of getting hired, after rewriting your cover letter or buying a new suit? Stop using social media.

Today, employers are no longer just searching Google for information on applicants--they're commissioning companies to do professional social media background checks. Posted some foul-mouthed tweets? Got pictures of yourself downing a beer bong in college? They may hurt your chances. Some 8% of companies have already fired social media miscreants.

Santa Barbara-based Social Intelligence Corp. is just one of the many companies that specializes in social media background checks of potential employees and active monitoring of existing employees. SIC scans the Internet for racy online activity and provocative photos unbecoming of an ideal job candidate. These new hiring standards are turning the job application process upside-down.

"I personally think we're moving away from the one-page résumé," explains CEO Max Drucker. "I think we're moving toward where your online history is your résumé."

Drucker says SIC only screens for user-generated "objectionable behavior" online, and that standards vary based on employer. Editors of High Times might be more lenient than, say, the HR department of the Wall Street Journal. The majority of the time, SIC takes screenshots of behavior that falls into the category of "poor judgment." These screenshots are then shown to employers for review. Does it typically ruin the chances for a new hire? "Yes," says Drucker. "The more risk-averse employers won't even look at the pictures."

Given the breadth of Google, it's a scary thought that our identities and character may soon be judged based on scraps of information collected online--there's no question it feels like an invasion of privacy. But not to Drucker, at least legally speaking. SIC only collects user-generated content (no third-party or hearsay data posted in obscure forums), and redacts any information that would violate federal law.

"Look, this is information that's in the public domain," he says. "We're not making fake friend requests, we're not being sneaky. We're simply taking information in the public domain, and structuring it in a fashion that's legal and relevant for the hiring process."

Social media has been a headache for employers. Though it may provide some insight into an applicant's history, it is just as likely to be taken out of context. Your behavior at home is obviously different from how you conduct yourself at work. Even online, many of us reserve different behaviors for different networks--we might be more professional on LinkedIn, more snarky on Twitter, and more open on Facebook.

Regardless, having no trace of information online means nothing about your character--it just means you are better at covering your tracks. Drucker admits that having no social media presence is a kind of leg-up, and points out that some companies now specialize in ensuring your privacy.

However, not everything SIC does is aimed at crushing the hopes of job applicants. Drucker says the company also reports any positive character traits: LinkedIn contacts and recommendations, industry expertise from blogs, or charitable work shown in photographs. So, if you want to get hired by Apple, say, it wouldn't hurt to create a Tumblr blog about your love for iPads, post some pictures of you handing out iPods at a soup kitchen, and arbitrarily inflate your LinkedIn popularity by friending anybody and everybody.

Drucker defends his job by comparing to that of the highway patrol. "People by-and-large stay within the speed limit because they know there is someone consequences if they get caught," he says. "Look, the employer is damned if they do, and damned if they don't. If they do the screening themselves, it's a legal landmine. If they don't, they open themselves up to negligent hiring."

But do we really want to live our lives under the constant watch of a highway patrol officer? That's a rather Orwellian future. Would Drucker even want to live in that world? Has he himself gone through this process? "Well no, I'm CEO," he says, chuckling. "I created the company!"

Computers That See You and Keep Watch Over You

By STEVE LOHR

Published: January 1, 2011

Hundreds of correctional officers from prisons across America descended last spring on a shuttered penitentiary in West Virginia for annual training exercises.

Some officers played the role of prisoners, acting like gang members and stirring up trouble, including a mock riot. The latest in prison gear got a workout — body armor, shields, riot helmets, smoke bombs, gas masks. And, at this year's drill, computers that could see the action.

Perched above the prison yard, five cameras tracked the play-acting prisoners, and artificial-intelligence software analyzed the images to recognize faces, gestures and patterns of group behavior. When two groups of inmates moved toward each other, the experimental computer system sent an alert — a text message — to a corrections officer that warned of a potential incident and gave the location.

The computers cannot do anything more than officers who constantly watch surveillance monitors under ideal conditions. But in practice, officers are often distracted. When shifts change, an observation that is worth passing along may be forgotten. But machines do not blink or forget. They are tireless assistants.

The enthusiasm for such systems extends well beyond the nation's prisons. High-resolution, low-cost cameras are proliferating, found in products like smartphones and laptop computers. The cost of storing images is dropping, and new software algorithms for mining, matching and scrutinizing the flood of visual data are progressing swiftly.

A computer-vision system can watch a hospital room and remind doctors and nurses to wash their hands, or warn of restless patients who are in danger of falling out of bed. It can, through a computer-equipped mirror, read a man's face to detect his heart rate and other vital signs. It can analyze a woman's expressions as she watches a movie trailer or shops online, and help marketers tailor their offerings accordingly. Computer vision can also be used at shopping malls, schoolyards, subway platforms, office complexes and stadiums.

All of which could be helpful — or alarming.

"Machines will definitely be able to observe us and understand us better," said Hartmut Neven, a computer scientist and vision expert at Google. "Where that leads is uncertain."

Google has been both at the forefront of the technology's development and a source of the anxiety surrounding it. Its Street View service, which lets Internet users zoom in from above on a particular location, faced privacy complaints. Google will blur out people's homes at their request.

Google has also introduced an application called Goggles, which allows people to take a picture with a smartphone and search the Internet for matching images. The company's executives decided to exclude a facial-recognition feature, which they feared might be used to find personal information on people who did not know that they were being photographed.

Despite such qualms, computer vision is moving into the mainstream. With this technological evolution, scientists predict, people will increasingly be surrounded by machines that can not only see but also reason about what they are seeing, in their own limited way.

The uses, noted Frances Scott, an expert in surveillance technologies at the National Institute of Justice, the Justice Department's research agency, could allow the authorities to spot a terrorist, identify a lost child or locate an Alzheimer's patient who has wandered off.

The future of law enforcement, national security and military operations will most likely rely on observant machines. A few months ago, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the Pentagon's research arm, awarded the first round of grants in a five-year research program called the Mind's Eye. Its goal is to develop machines that can recognize, analyze and communicate what they see. Mounted on small robots or drones, these smart machines could replace human scouts. "These things, in a sense, could be team members," said James Donlon, the program's manager.

Millions of people now use products that show the progress that has been made in computer vision. In the last two years, the major online photo-sharing services — Picasa by Google, Windows Live Photo Gallery by Microsoft, Flickr by Yahoo and iPhoto by Apple — have all started using face recognition. A user puts a name to a face, and the service finds matches in other photographs. It is a popular tool for finding and organizing pictures.

Kinect, an add-on to Microsoft's Xbox 360 gaming console, is a striking advance for computer vision in the marketplace. It uses a digital camera and sensors to recognize people and gestures; it also understands voice commands. Players control the computer with waves of the hand, and then move to make their on-screen animated stand-ins — known as avatars — run, jump, swing and dance. Since Kinect was introduced in November, game reviewers have applauded, and sales are surging.

To Microsoft, Kinect is not just a game, but a step toward the future of computing. "It's a world where technology more fundamentally understands you, so you don't have to understand it," said Alex Kipman, an engineer on the team that designed Kinect.

'Please Wash Your Hands'

A nurse walks into a hospital room while scanning a clipboard. She greets the patient and washes her hands. She checks and records his heart rate and blood pressure, adjusts the intravenous drip, turns him over to look for bed sores, then heads for the door but does not wash her hands again, as protocol requires. "Pardon the interruption," declares a recorded women's voice, with a slight British accent. "Please wash your hands."

Three months ago, Bassett Medical Center in Cooperstown, N.Y., began an experiment with computer vision in a single hospital room. Three small cameras, mounted inconspicuously on the ceiling, monitor movements in Room 542, in a special care unit (a notch below intensive care) where patients are treated for conditions like severe pneumonia, heart attacks and strokes. The cameras track people going in and out of the room as well as the patient's movements in bed.

The first applications of the system, designed by scientists at General Electric, are immediate reminders and alerts. Doctors and nurses are supposed to wash their hands before and after touching a patient; lapses contribute significantly to hospital-acquired infections, research shows.

The camera over the bed delivers images to software that is programmed to recognize movements that indicate when a patient is in danger of falling out of bed. The system would send an alert to a nearby nurse.

If the results at Bassett prove to be encouraging, more features can be added, like software that analyzes facial expressions for signs of severe pain, the onset of delirium or other hints of distress, said Kunter Akbay, a G.E. scientist.

Hospitals have an incentive to adopt tools that improve patient safety. Medicare and Medicaid are adjusting reimbursement rates to penalize hospitals that do not work to prevent falls and pressure ulcers, and whose doctors and nurses do not wash their hands enough. But it is too early to say whether computer vision, like the system being tried out at Bassett, will prove to be cost-effective.

Mirror, Mirror

Daniel J. McDuff, a graduate student, stood in front of a mirror at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab. After 20 seconds or so, a figure — 65, the number of times his heart was beating per minute — appeared at the mirror's bottom. Behind the two-way mirror was a Web camera, which fed images of Mr. McDuff to a computer whose software could track the blood flow in his face.

The software separates the video images into three channels — for the basic colors red, green and blue. Changes to the colors and to movements made by tiny contractions and expansions in blood vessels in the face are, of course, not apparent to the human eye, but the computer can see them.

"Your heart-rate signal is in your face," said Ming-zher Poh, an M.I.T. graduate student. Other vital signs, including breathing rate, blood-oxygen level and blood pressure, should leave similar color and movement clues.

The pulse-measuring project, described in research published in May by Mr. Poh, Mr. McDuff and Rosalind W. Picard, a professor at the lab, is just the beginning, Mr. Poh said. Computer vision and clever software, he said, make it possible to monitor humans' vital signs at a digital glance. Daily measurements can be analyzed to reveal that, for example, a person's risk of heart trouble is rising. "This can happen, and in the future it will be in mirrors," he said.

Faces can yield all sorts of information to watchful computers, and the M.I.T. students' adviser, Dr. Picard, is a pioneer in the field, especially in the use of computing to measure and communicate emotions. For years, she and a research scientist at the university, Rana el-Kaliouby, have applied facial-expression analysis software to help young people with autism better recognize the emotional signals from others that they have such a hard time understanding.

The two women are the co-founders of Affectiva, a company in Waltham, Mass., that is beginning to market its facial-expression analysis software to manufacturers of consumer products, retailers, marketers and movie studios. Its mission is to mine consumers' emotional responses to improve the designs and marketing campaigns of products.

John Ross, chief executive of Shopper Sciences, a marketing research company that is part of the Interpublic Group, said Affectiva's technology promises to give marketers an impartial reading of the

sequence of emotions that leads to a purchase, in a way that focus groups and customer surveys cannot. “You can see and analyze how people are reacting in real time, not what they are saying later, when they are often trying to be polite,” he said. The technology, he added, is more scientific and less costly than having humans look at store surveillance videos, which some retailers do.

The facial-analysis software, Mr. Ross said, could be used in store kiosks or with Webcams. Shopper Sciences, he said, is testing Affectiva’s software with a major retailer and an online dating service, neither of which he would name. The dating service, he said, was analyzing users’ expressions in search of “trigger words” in personal profiles that people found appealing or off-putting.

Watching the Watchers

Maria Sonin, 33, an office worker in Waltham, Mass., sat in front of a notebook computer looking at a movie trailer while Affectiva’s software, through the PC’s Webcam, calibrated her reaction. The trailer was for “Little Fockers,” starring Robert De Niro and Ben Stiller, which opened just before Christmas. The software measured her reactions by tracking movements on a couple of dozen points on her face — mostly along the eyes, eyebrows, nose and the perimeter of her lips.

To the human eye, Ms. Sonin appeared to be amused. The software agreed, said Dr. Kaliouby, though it used a finer-grained analysis, like recording that her smiles were symmetrical (signaling amusement, not embarrassment) and not smirks. The software, Ms. Kaliouby said, allows for continuous, objective measurement of viewers’ response to media, and in the future will do so in large numbers on the Web.

Ms. Sonin, an unpaid volunteer, said later that she did not think about being recorded by the Webcam. “It wasn’t as if it was a big camera in front of you,” she said.

Christopher Hamilton, a technical director of visual effects, has used specialized software to analyze facial expressions and recreate them on the screen. The films he has worked on include “King Kong,” “Charlotte’s Web” and “The Matrix Revolutions.” Using facial-expression analysis technology to gauge the reaction of viewers, who agree to be watched, may well become a valuable tool for movie makers, said Mr. Hamilton, who is not involved with Affectiva.

Today, sampling audience reaction before a movie is released typically means gathering a couple of hundred people at a preview screening. The audience members then answer questions and fill out surveys. Yet viewers, marketing experts say, are often inarticulate and imprecise about their emotional reactions.

The software “makes it possible to measure audience response with a scene-by-scene granularity that the current survey-and-questionnaire approach cannot,” Mr. Hamilton said. A director, he added, could find out, for example, that although audience members liked a movie over all, they did not like two or three scenes. Or he could learn that a particular character did not inspire the intended emotional response.

Emotion-sensing software, Mr. Hamilton said, might become part of the entertainment experience — especially as more people watch movies and programs on Internet-connected televisions, computers and portable devices. Viewers could share their emotional responses with friends using

recommendation systems based on what scene — say, the protagonists' dancing or a car chase — delivered the biggest emotional jolt.

Affectiva, Dr. Picard said, intends to offer its technology as "opt-in only," meaning consumers have to be notified and have to agree to be watched online or in stores. Affectiva, she added, has turned down companies, which she declined to name, that wanted to use its software without notifying customers.

Darker Possibilities

Dr. Picard enunciates a principled stance, but one that could become problematic in other hands.

The challenge arises from the prospect of the rapid spread of less-expensive yet powerful computer-vision technologies.

At work or school, the technology opens the door to a computerized supervisor that is always watching. Are you paying attention, goofing off or daydreaming? In stores and shopping malls, smart surveillance could bring behavioral tracking into the physical world.

More subtle could be the effect of a person knowing that he is being watched — and how that awareness changes his thinking and actions. It could be beneficial: a person thinks twice and a crime goes uncommitted. But might it also lead to a society that is less spontaneous, less creative, less innovative?

"With every technology, there is a dark side," said Hany Farid, a computer scientist at Dartmouth. "Sometimes you can predict it, but often you can't."

A decade ago, he noted, no one predicted that cellphones and text messaging would lead to traffic accidents caused by distracted drivers. And, he said, it was difficult to foresee that the rise of Facebook and Twitter and personal blogs would become troves of data to be collected and exploited in tracking people's online behavior.

Often, a technology that is benign in one setting can cause harm in a different context. Google confronted that problem this year with its face-recognition software. In its Picasa photo-storing and sharing service, face recognition helps people find and organize pictures of family and friends.

But the company took a different approach with Goggles, which lets a person snap a photograph with a smartphone, setting off an Internet search. Take a picture of the Eiffel Tower and links to Web pages with background information and articles about it appear on the phone's screen. Take a picture of a wine bottle and up come links to reviews of that vintage.

Google could have put face recognition into the Goggles application; indeed, many users have asked for it. But Google decided against it because smartphones can be used to take pictures of individuals without their knowledge, and a face match could retrieve all kinds of personal information — name, occupation, address, workplace.

"It was just too sensitive, and we didn't want to go there," said Eric E. Schmidt, the chief executive of Google. "You want to avoid enabling stalker behavior."

Little Brother Is Watching

By WALTER KIRN

October 15, 2010

In George Orwell's "1984," that novel of totalitarian politics whose great mistake was to emphasize the villainy of society's masters while playing down the mischief of the masses, the goal of communications technology was brutal and direct: to ensure the dominance of the state. The sinister "telescreens" placed in people's homes spewed propaganda and conducted surveillance, keeping the population passive and the leadership firmly in control. In the face of constant monitoring, all people could do was sterilize their behavior, conceal their thoughts and carry on like model citizens.

This was, it turns out, a quaint scenario, grossly simplistic and deeply melodramatic. As the Internet proves every day, it isn't some stern and monolithic Big Brother that we have to reckon with as we go about our daily lives, it's a vast cohort of prankish Little Brothers equipped with devices that Orwell, writing 60 years ago, never dreamed of and who are loyal to no organized authority. The invasion of privacy — of others' privacy but also our own, as we turn our lenses on ourselves in the quest for attention by any means — has been democratized.

For Tyler Clementi, the Rutgers University student who recently committed suicide after a live-stream video of an intimate encounter of his was played on the Web, Little Brother took the form of a prying roommate with a webcam. The snoop had no discernible agenda other than silly, juvenile troublemaking, which made his actions more disturbing in certain ways than the oppressive prying of a dictatorship. The roommate, it seems, was acting on impulse, at least initially, and his transgression couldn't be anticipated, let alone defended against. Clementi, unlike Orwell's Winston Smith, who hid from the telescreens whenever possible and understood that the price of personhood was ceaseless self-censorship and vigilance, had no way of knowing that the walls had eyes. Nor did his unseen observer anticipate the ultimate consequences of his intrusion.

In "1984," the abolition of personal space was part of an overarching government policy, but nowadays it's often nothing more than a side effect of wired high spirits. The era of the "viral video," when footage of some absorbing slice of life can spread overnight around the globe, is bringing out the anarchist in all of us. Sometimes the results are welcome, benign, and the intruder does his subject a favor. Take the young man who taped his girlfriend shimmying in front of a TV attached to a Wii Fit video game. He shot the clip without her knowledge, apparently, and in no time Google and YouTube made her famous. She capitalized on her high profile by appearing on "The Tyra Banks Show."

There are also times, of course, when Little Brother does a positive service to society by turning the tables on the state and watching the watchers. The other day a video emerged that seemed to show an Israeli soldier dancing in a mocking manner around a cowering Palestinian woman whom he appeared to have under his control. The viewer couldn't help but be reminded of more shocking pictures from Abu Ghraib — scenes of torture that might never have come to light if Little Brother hadn't been standing nearby. The irony is that these images, which caused a convulsion of national moral conscience, were taken — in some cases, at least — as photographic boasts or trophies. So

giddy with power and numb to its abuses were the camera-wielding prison guards that they indicted themselves with their own antics.

In the postideological YouTube-topia that Orwell couldn't have foreseen, information flows in all directions and does as it pleases, for better or for worse, serving no masters and obeying no party line. The telescreens, tiny, mobile and ubiquitous, at times seem to be working independently, for some mysterious purpose all their own. This morning, when I sat down to write, I was distracted by a story on my computer about a Google Street View camera that snapped pictures of a corpse lying on a bloody street in urban Brazil. I clicked on the link, unable to do otherwise, and up came the awful, disconcerting image. For a moment, I felt like a voyeur, spiritually dirtied by what I saw. A moment later I was checking the weather report and the status of my I.R.A.
Even Big Brother himself was not so cold. He, at least, had a motive for his peeping — to maintain order, to shore up his position and to put down possible rebellions — but I and the countless Little Brothers like me lack any clear notion of what we're after. A fleeting sensation of omnipotence? The gratification of idle curiosity? Our nonstop trafficking in stolen images, sometimes as consumers and sometimes as producers (is there any meaningful difference anymore?), adds up to a story without a plot. Is it a tragic story? On occasion. It was tragic for Tyler Clementi and for his roommate, who ruined his own life by spying on another's, but for those who are suddenly lofted to fame and riches by achieving viral visibility, it's closer to a feel-good comedy.

Ours is a fragmentarian society, infinitely divided against itself and endlessly disrupted from within by much the same technologies that, in Orwell's somber novel, assured a dull and deadening stability. In some ways, his nightmare vision of state control is cozy and reassuring by comparison. Big Brother may have stifled dissent by forcing conformity on his frightened subjects, but his trespasses were predictable and manageable. What's more, his assaults on citizens' privacy left the concept of privacy intact, allowing the possibility that with his overthrow people might live again as they once had.

Little Brother affords us no such luck, in part because he dwells inside us rather than in some remote and walled-off headquarters. In the new, chaotic regime of networked lenses and microphones that point every which way and rest in every hand, permitting us to train them on ourselves as easily as we aim them at one another, the private and public realms are so confused that it's best to treat them as identical. With nowhere to hide, you might as well perform, dispensing with old-fashioned notions of discretion and personal dignity. If Tyler Clementi had remembered to do this — to yield his personal life to the machine and acknowledge, with Shakespeare, that the world's a soundstage — he might have shrugged off the embarrassment he suffered and made a reality show of his existence. He might have asked Little Brother into his room instead of choosing, fatally, to keep him out in the only manner he must have thought possible.