Developing a Data-Driven "Dysphorian" Digital Dystopia

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Electronics have completely reshaped the cultural, scientific and political landscape. Culturally, the Internet created a shift of human interaction from the face-to-face and visceral to the virtual and vapid. Intellectual life has also been moved; that is, it has been removed from the printed page to a glowing field of almost miraculous images found, among other places, in social media. Information technology (IT) is indeed "it" and has been for the past 60 years or so as a career priority. Meanwhile, traditional modes, methods and means of life are being discarded at an accelerating pace in an apparent race to *actual* rather than *virtual* oblivion.

Throughout the rapid passage through transitory states, no prospect has inspired as much mystique, critique, and wild speculation as what has now been "christened" *artificial intelligence* (AI). Theoretically, sensation and complex thought — the reasoning faculties that once defined the human mind — can now be enacted in silicon-based processors as well or better than in our biologically produced neurons. Furthermore, such artificial faculties are not hampered by our "human" emotions and other physical and mental failures hampering the production of these faculties in our imperfect human "machines." And, as might be expected, pure electronic cognition is far faster, (allegedly) unbiased, and more accurate than the cognition produced by any human brain. It is

also immune to human faults and foibles being based solely upon physics and mechanics,the ultimate modern criterion of reality and usefulness that presently defines"science." Having captured our perpetual gaze, the perp on a screen can now look back and turn us into robots apparently at our own desire.

However, AI is less than useful from the standpoint of the Left's many "loving concerns" and especially the worship of Gaia — Mother Earth — as found in the Green Movement where concern for "climate change" and "the environment" runs smack into attempts to make use of AI. The extraction of rare-earth minerals, especially lithium, is necessary to operate the massive data and call centers that are causing unattractive urban sprawl all across the landscape. "Carbon neutrality" and "sustainability" promised by big tech oligarchs cannot be sustained by these concrete constructs. Energy intensive operations like natural language processing, cloud computing, and mass data analysis consume ungodly amounts of carbon-based fuels. Google(Alphabet), Amazon, and Microsoft have "carbon footprints" more reminiscent of sauropods such as Brachiosaurus and Diplodocusthan the largest of today's elephants! Regardless of what one thinks of the climate change creed, "green tech" hypocrisy leads even politics in double standards and double-think. One can also frequently attach double-entendres to whatever libbers are trying to liberate the rest of us from — such as liberty itself.

In the age of AI, data is the new oil that greases the gears as well as the palms of hands looking for handouts. In order for AI systems to attain the necessary nuanced models of the world —and particularly human life — their learning algorithms must perforce consume massive amounts of data. Most of that data comes from the images and texts people freely share across the Internet; that is, endless social media posts, news articles, private messages et al. Among the first "data sets" utilized to launch the digital revolution were the mug shots and information portfolios released to the net by law

enforcement agencies and utilized to hone facial recognition software. We have to admit that today most of our faces are online having been recorded via closed-circuit TV and scarfed up to "teach" algorithms the nuances of facial recognition. These AI systems then "learn" to categorize and characterize our personalities and identities to go along with our faces.

Meanwhile, more advanced systems are "trained" to evaluate the emotional states of the subject being studied; that is, to recognize such "emotions" as happy vs. sad and benign vs. threatening. This ongoing unrestrained data extraction culminates in overt as well as de facto social credit scores. In our technocratic and automated society, everyone is considered a detainee of a nation-wide electronic institution and, as such, they are scanned, labelled, herded, and treated by machines according to the whims of those in charge of those machines. Right now, that amoral whimsy escapes the notice of most of its victims by cracking down on people arbitrarily labeled "racists," "haters," "antisemites," "right-wing extremists" and/or "white supremacists" definitions that have been enlarged from a handful of hostile people to include any member of the White population that doesn't call for his or her own demise at the hands of minorities!On the other hand, terrorists, illegals, and many categories of even violent criminals "slip through cracks" in databases designed to manipulate both the data and the masses they monitor so that those being intentionally "ignored" are not "captured" data-wise or physically.

The mass deployment of AI is not encumbered by serious government regulations or even a basic respect for personal autonomy — also known as human rights. Our private lives are routinely — and intentionally — invaded *by design* while our responses are increasingly constricted by alien algorithms. (Hmmmm . . . Was that a word created by Al Gore? As it has meaning, one thinks not.) The rapid advance of AI, robotics and the resultant digital saturation has momentum that is

being provided by a favorable moment and a strong positive movement within the society. Any actual — that is *successful* — resistance to our "computerization" would require mass rejection across almost all sectors of society and most probably, state intervention, something that is highly unlikely given the overwhelming desire by the State to put such a system into place everywhere for everyone and at all times.

Commercially, ongoing anti-trust efforts to stop the death of freedom via technology fall far short of any serious interdiction of the world shaking projects underway in Silicon Valley, Tel Aviv, Taiwan, China and elsewhere. Sufficient political consensus is highly unlikely in the diversified and fragmented West just as state intervention would be laughable in the overtly technocratic and despotic East. The only practical and realistic approach at present is to try to incorporate whatever elements of the new dispensation are necessary to carry on a life as close to normal as possible and given the ordinary person's "romance" with AI and other trendy digital diversions, this becomes less and less likely as older "ordinary" folks die off to be replaced by the present human-android mutants whose personal interactions all proceed from small, hand held electronic devices.

Now let us examine what is possibly the leading technology behemoth increasingly intruding into our lives and shaping it in new ways consonant with the new digital dystopia. This modern monster is known as Amazon.com, a companywhose operations affect nearly every aspect of modern life, radically changing cultural, social and commercial interaction in America and the rest of the world for the worse. The company has both ingratiated and integrated itself fully into American governments at every level — federal, state, and local. Even the US intelligence and security services have been co-opted in order to assist Amazon in its operations.

Amazon's massive scale, its monopolistic control of America's

retail and data services, its aggressive subversion of the government, albeit with the assistance of that same government, its abuse of its own workers, and its destructive effect on American cities exceed anything Standard Oil and other commercial cabals ever orchestrated. It's sheer size and monopolistic power should have brought down the hammer of the anti-trust regulators long ago, but one can't trust today's government to address any large concentration of power for the simple reason that such a "business" is easier to manipulate — and thus direct, corrupt and rob — than are large numbers of smaller individual corporations.

As for "size," Amazon brings in almost half a trillion dollars in revenue annually and employs 1.6 million people worldwide including nearly one million who live in the US (my source notably doesn't call them "Americans" — *Sid*). They work in over 200 massive delivery complexes and warehouses euphemistically labeled "fulfillment centers." Over 40% of all e-commerce in the US and 17% of all retail sales (excluding gasoline and vehicle purchases) are transacted through and by Amazon.

But focusing just on retail sales is to miss Amazon's insidious dominance of internet data services (the Amazon "Cloud") that handles the majority of the world's Internet traffic through more than 100 data centers. These massive concrete structures are typically 200,000 square feet in size and house $400 million worth of tech equipment. The biggest cluster of these data centers is in Northern Virginia and covers *over 9 million square feet of land!* Now notorious Loudoun County, Virginia had over 40 such data centers in 2013 with the ability to reach a total of 80 by 2023. Think of it! *Seventy percent of the world's internet traffic will flow through these data centers!*

Loudoun, a county that until quite recently was an exurb and rural retreat for the wealthy residing in Virginia, is geographically close to the Pentagon, the CIA and the National

Security Agency, all of whom are — you guessed it! — Amazon Cloud customers. This giant has a $600 million contract to handle the CIA's data and, with Microsoft, is in a $10 billion joint venture contract with the Pentagon! Each one of these data centers receives government tax credits besides the money received from government contracts themselves. A massive amount of electricity and water is used to cool the servers at the data centers. Each center consumes as much energy as it takes to run 5,000 homes. Isn't it amazing how little some folk's "carbon footprint" matters to our Green Movement. Jeff Bezos, Amazon's President, recently declared that that an uptick in space exploration would soon be necessary to acquire extra-planetary energy sources as there will not enough energy on Earth to power his servers! Parenthetically, one would think that solar energy absorbed by solar panels in orbit would be enough to do the trick but apparently that is not the case. This fact doesn't say much for the efficiency of solar power.

Despite being the world's richest or second richest person, depending upon Amazon's stock price that is hovering around $2,300 a share as of this writing (Bezos contends with Tesla CEO Elon Musk for top honors), Amazon's King is remarkably parsimonious. The relatively little money he parcels out goes to repulsive or ridiculous causes such as the $2.5 million given to support same-sex legislation in 2012, $350,000 donated to the campaign of ultra-libber Seattle mayor Jenny Durkan who supports the city's lawless "CHOP' protest and takeover in 2020 and the recently donated $100 million to the Obama Foundation. Bezos believes the main purpose of a corporation is to enrich those who run it to the exclusion of anything — and everyone! — else. Of course, his money allows him to devote much of his time in wining and dining the elites, keeping the "law makers" personally mollified and legislatively friendly while Amazon spends a stupendous $4 million quarterly on lobbying efforts. Such efforts include securing sweetheart tax credit deals with local governments

already primed to bend over backwards to entice the company to build its facilities in their communities. These "sweetheart" deals are consummated in complete privacy absent the participation of local groups and watchdogs who might want to provide input or criticism.

The incentives offered by major metropolitan areas to attract an Amazon facility run to ridiculous extremes. A Kansas City mayor gave 5-Star reviews to 1,000 Amazon products! Now, this doesn't mean that the products involved were not worth 5 stars, but the rating was given for reasons other than worthiness! Atlanta proposed adding an Amazon-only train car to the city's subway system to help distribute Amazon shipments around the city. The nearby Atlanta suburb of Stonecrest offered to rename itself "Amazon!" Of course, that would only work if the suburb was a better place to live than the city itself! Taking advantage of all of this municipal affection, the company conducted a "second headquarters" contest in 2018 in which the twenty finalist cities plied Amazon with similar outrageous gift offerings! In the end, the new Bezosville was determined to be Arlington, Virginia both for its fame and its proximity to the Pentagon and the rest of Washington's bureaucracy.

In 2013, Bezos scored another major coup when he acquired The Washington "Compost" for a pittance of $250 million, thus giving him an amplified media voice to promote Amazon to the paper's elite and loony leftist readership.

The company segments its work force into three classes and spreads them across the map for "tech" companies take "tech" threats seriously and do not put their valuable eggs all in the same geographic basket. For instance, there are the software and engineering facilities in high-tech oriented towns thus allowing the company to recruit the cream of the techie crop. Then there are the sprawling urban and suburban areas that vie for the massive data centers whose building codes do not interfere with the construction of facilities

necessary to house those centers. Then there are the warehouse and delivery bases dubbed fulfillment centers usually located in areas of high unemployment that provide a large supply of dispensable blue collar workers and likewise accommodate the turn-over rate. These facilities are tantamount to old-fashioned sweatshops and are as large (or larger) than anything in use during the era of the robber baron. Each of these contains 14 million items and 14 miles of conveyor belts that run at 600 feet per minute, at which workers assemble 100 packages per minute or 6,000 per hour. These "fulfillment centers" are run at breakneck speed with little time for what are the usually mandated breaks for American employees! But Amazon has little regard for their people's safety or well-being. Accidents that happen as the result of the violation of work safety rules and standards are swept under the rug with the "blessing" of OSHA. The rate of accidents at Amazon's warehouses is more than double the national average for the warehouse industry. Again, it is interesting to note that "the party of the Worker" supports and is supported by "Big Capital" such as Amazon.

As well, Amazon engages in ruthless and predatory trade practices. The company entices retailers to join its Marketplace service while demanding a cut of 15% of that company's profits gained through that relationship. Amazon then uses the data it collects from these retailers to compete directly against them by creating knock-off products of popular items under its own brand name and then putting its former partners — now competitors — out of business. Thus,Amazon has eliminated twice as many jobs as it creates through practices that should be — and probably *would* be — found illegal with any normal business. This loss is estimated at 76,000 jobs per year.

One of the consequences of Amazon's monopolistic tactics is the destruction of local businesses leading to the devastation of income for state and local governments normally arising

from property taxes. This matter is further compounded by the firm's success in avoiding paying state and local taxes except in a *very* few cases. Indeed, Amazon is very successful in its tax policies having paid a 12% effective tax rate between 2010 and 2018 vs. the usual 35% corporate rate applicable to other businesses during that same period. In the matter of tax avoidance, Amazon has surpassed all of its Silicon Valley "co-conspirators" and competitors!

The question then becomes, what is to be done? Unions are certainly not the answer, since they inevitably become corrupted and cease properly representing the interests of their workers in order to concentrate on the welfare of their "leaders," and that is the reason that however useless, they still collect their dues. They are also hand-in-glove with the socialists (and that means the Democrat Party!) invariably becoming pawns of the Left. Anti-trust action is a better solution as the company is a true monopoly benefitting from exclusive privileges granted by government at the expense of other corporations, workers and, of course, the American people. Amazon represents a far greater danger to the economy and the establishment than did U. S. Steel, Standard Oil or Bell Telephone even at the height of their power. Their data collection and data manipulation capabilities are utilized for nefarious and unethical ends not envisioned even a few short years ago.

The breakup of Amazon into competing regional divisions along the lines of what was done to Bell Telephone would be a good model for a virtuous Congress to follow, if a virtuous Congress was even possible under today's circumstances (it might be easier to make a virtuous Amazon!). A first step in this direction would be promotion of the proposed bill called *The American Innovation and Choice Online Act*(S.2992 — 117th Congress) introduced on October 21, 2021 by Senators Kennedy, Klobuchar and Grassley. This piece of legislation would make it illegal for Amazon to create and provide advantages for its

own products and services that are then in competition with businesses that rely upon Amazon as a retail platform. It is rather like preventing an executioner from selling the rope he uses to the man he will hang with it! That is, it's a no brainer! Unfortunately, however, at this time, Washington is just *filled* with "no brainers."

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