



Whitehead: We Are All Prisoners Of The Surveillance State

Whitehead clearly makes the case that government eyes are watching us, but he misses the Technocrats who are doing the watching and why they are watching. Technocracy is the Utopian goal, technology is the means to get there and data is the grease that covers the skids. □ TN Editor

“We’re run by the Pentagon, we’re run by Madison Avenue, we’re run by television, and as long as we accept those things and don’t revolt we’ll have to go along with the stream to the eventual avalanche.... As long as we go out and buy stuff, we’re at their mercy... We all live in a little Village. Your Village may be different from other people’s Villages, but we are all prisoners.”— Patrick McGoohan

First broadcast in America 50 years ago, *The Prisoner*—a dystopian television series described as “James Bond meets George Orwell filtered through Franz Kafka”—confronted societal themes that are still relevant today: the rise of a police state, the freedom of the individual, round-the-clock surveillance, the corruption of government, totalitarianism, weaponization, group think, mass marketing, and the tendency of humankind to meekly accept their lot in life as a prisoner in a prison of their own making.

Perhaps the best visual debate ever on individuality and freedom, *The Prisoner* (17 episodes in all) centers around a British secret agent who abruptly resigns only to find himself imprisoned and interrogated in a mysterious, self-contained, cosmopolitan, seemingly tranquil retirement community known only as the Village. The Village is an idyllic setting with parks and green fields, recreational activities and even a butler.

While luxurious and resort-like, the Village is a virtual prison disguised as a seaside paradise: its inhabitants have no true freedom, they cannot leave the Village, they are under constant surveillance, their movements are tracked by surveillance drones, and they are stripped of their individuality and identified only by numbers.

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The series’ protagonist, played by Patrick McGoohan, is Number Six.

Number Two, the Village administrator, acts as an agent for the unseen and all-powerful Number One, whose identity is not revealed until the final episode.

“I am not a number. I am a free man,” was the mantra chanted on each episode of *The Prisoner*, which was largely written and directed by McGoohan.

In the opening episode (“The Arrival”), Number Six meets Number Two, who explains to him that he is in The Village because information stored “inside” his head has made him too valuable to be allowed to roam free “outside.”

Throughout the series, Number Six is subjected to interrogation tactics, torture, hallucinogenic drugs, identity theft, mind control, dream manipulation, and various forms of social indoctrination and physical coercion in order to “persuade” him to comply, give up, give in and subjugate himself to the will of the powers-that-be.

Number Six refuses to comply.

In every episode, Number Six resists the Village’s indoctrination methods, struggles to maintain his own identity, and attempts to escape his captors. “I will not make any deals with you,” he pointedly remarks to Number Two. “I’ve resigned. I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, debriefed or numbered. My life is my own.”

Yet no matter how far Number Six manages to get in his efforts to escape, it’s never far enough.

Watched by surveillance cameras and other devices, Number Six’s getaways are continuously thwarted by ominous white balloon-like spheres known as “rovers.” Still, he refuses to give up. “Unlike me,” he says to his fellow prisoners, “many of you have accepted the situation of your imprisonment, and will die here like rotten cabbages.”

Number Six’s escapes become a surreal exercise in futility, each episode an unsettling, reoccurring nightmare that builds to the same frustrating denouement: *there is no escape*.

As journalist Scott Thill concludes for *Wired*, “Rebellion always comes at a price. During the acclaimed run of *The Prisoner*, Number Six is tortured, battered and even body-snatched: In the episode ‘Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling,’ his mind is transplanted to another man’s body. Number Six repeatedly escapes The Village only to be returned to it in the end, trapped like an animal, overcome by a restless energy he cannot expend, and betrayed by nearly everyone around him.”

The series is a chilling lesson about how difficult it is to gain one’s freedom in a society in which prison walls are disguised within the trappings of technological and scientific progress, national security and so-called democracy.

As Thill noted when McGoohan died in 2009, "*The Prisoner* was an allegory of the individual, aiming to find peace and freedom in a dystopia masquerading as a utopia."

The Prisoner's Village is also an apt allegory for the American Police State: it gives the illusion of freedom while functioning all the while like a prison: controlled, watchful, inflexible, punitive, deadly and inescapable.

The American Police State, much like *The Prisoner's Village*, is a metaphorical panopticon, a circular prison in which the inmates are monitored by a single watchman situated in a central tower. Because the inmates cannot see the watchman, they are unable to tell whether or not they are being watched at any given time and must proceed under the assumption that they are always being watched.

Eighteenth century social theorist Jeremy Bentham envisioned the panopticon prison to be a cheaper and more effective means of "obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example."

Bentham's panopticon, in which the prisoners are used as a source of cheap, menial labor, has become a model for the modern surveillance state in which the populace is constantly being watched, controlled and managed by the powers-that-be and funding its existence.

Nowhere to run and nowhere to hide: this is the new mantra of the architects of the police state and their corporate collaborators (Facebook, Amazon, Netflix, Google, YouTube, Instagram, etc.).

Government eyes are watching you.

They see your every move: what you read, how much you spend, where you go, with whom you interact, when you wake up in the morning, what you're watching on television and reading on the internet.

Every move you make is being monitored, mined for data, crunched, and tabulated in order to form a picture of who you are, what makes you tick, and how best to control you when and if it becomes necessary to bring

you in line.

When the government sees all and knows all and has an abundance of laws to render even the most seemingly upstanding citizen a criminal and lawbreaker, then the old adage that you've got nothing to worry about if you've got nothing to hide no longer applies.

Apart from the obvious dangers posed by a government that feels justified and empowered to spy on its people and use its ever-expanding arsenal of weapons and technology to monitor and control them, we're approaching a time in which we will be forced to choose between obeying the dictates of the government—i.e., the law, or whatever a government official deems the law to be—and maintaining our individuality, integrity and independence.

When people talk about privacy, they mistakenly assume it protects only that which is hidden behind a wall or under one's clothing. The courts have fostered this misunderstanding with their constantly shifting delineation of what constitutes an "expectation of privacy." And technology has furthered muddied the waters.

However, privacy is so much more than what you do or say behind locked doors. It is a way of living one's life firm in the belief that you are the master of your life, and barring any immediate danger to another person (which is far different from the carefully crafted threats to national security the government uses to justify its actions), it's no one's business what you read, what you say, where you go, whom you spend your time with, and how you spend your money.

Unfortunately, George Orwell's *1984*—where "you had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized"—has now become our reality.

We now find ourselves in the unenviable position of being monitored, managed and controlled by our technology, which answers not to us but to our government and corporate rulers.

Consider that on any given day, the average American going about his

daily business will be monitored, surveilled, spied on and tracked in more than 20 different ways, by both government and corporate eyes and ears.

A byproduct of this new age in which we live, whether you're walking through a store, driving your car, checking email, or talking to friends and family on the phone, you can be sure that some government agency, whether the NSA or some other entity, is listening in and tracking your behavior.

This doesn't even begin to touch on the corporate trackers that monitor your purchases, web browsing, Facebook posts and other activities taking place in the cyber sphere.

Stingray devices mounted on police cars to warrantlessly track cell phones, Doppler radar devices that can detect human breathing and movement within in a home, license plate readers that can record up to 1800 license plates *per minute*, sidewalk and "public space" cameras coupled with facial recognition and behavior-sensing technology that lay the groundwork for police "pre-crime" programs, police body cameras that turn police officers into roving surveillance cameras, the internet of things: all of these technologies add up to a society in which there's little room for indiscretions, imperfections, or acts of independence—especially not when the government can listen in on your phone calls, monitor your driving habits, track your movements, scrutinize your purchases and peer through the walls of your home.

As French philosopher Michel Foucault concluded in his 1975 book *Discipline and Punish*, "Visibility is a trap."

This is the electronic concentration camp—the panopticon prison—the Village—in which we are now caged.

It is a prison from which there will be no escape if the government gets it way.

As Glenn Greenwald notes:

“The way things are supposed to work is that we’re supposed to know virtually everything about what [government officials] do: that’s why they’re called public servants. They’re supposed to know virtually nothing about what we do: that’s why we’re called private individuals. This dynamic – the hallmark of a healthy and free society – has been radically reversed. Now, they know everything about what we do, and are constantly building systems to know more. Meanwhile, we know less and less about what they do, as they build walls of secrecy behind which they function. That’s the imbalance that needs to come to an end. No democracy can be healthy and functional if the most consequential acts of those who wield political power are completely unknown to those to whom they are supposed to be accountable.”

Unfortunately, we seem to be trapped in the Village with no hope of escape.

That we are prisoners—and, in fact, never stopped being prisoners—should come as no surprise to those who haven’t been taking the escapist blue pill, who haven’t fallen for the Deep State’s phony rhetoric, and who haven’t been lured in by the promise of a political savior.

So how do we break out?

For starters, wake up. Resist the urge to comply.

The struggle to remain “oneself in a society increasingly obsessed with conformity to mass consumerism,” writes Steven Paul Davies, means that superficiality and image trump truth and the individual. The result is the group mind and the tyranny of mob-think—especially in a day and age when most people are addicted to screen devices controlled and administered by the government and its corporate allies.

Think for yourself. Be an individual. As McGoohan commented in 1968, “At this moment individuals are being drained of their personalities and being brainwashed into slaves... As long as people feel something, that’s the great thing. It’s when they are walking around not thinking and not feeling, that’s tough. When you get a mob like that, you can turn them

into the sort of gang that Hitler had.”

In a media-dominated age in which the lines between entertainment, politics and news reporting are blurred, it is extremely difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. We are so bombarded with images, dictates, rules and punishments and stamped with numbers from the day we are born that it is a wonder we ever ponder a concept such as freedom. As McGoohan declared, “Freedom is a myth.”

In the end, as I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, we are all prisoners of our own mind.

In fact, it is in the mind that prisons are created for us. And in the lockdown of political correctness, it becomes extremely difficult to speak or act individually without being ostracized. Thus, so often we are forced to retreat inwardly into our minds, a prison without bars from which we cannot escape, and into the world of video games and television and the Internet.

We have come full circle from Bentham’s Panopticon to McGoohan’s *Village* to Huxley’s *Brave New World*.

As cultural theorist Neil Postman observed:

*What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared we would become a captive audience. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared that we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny “failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.” In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short,*

Orwell feared that what we hate would ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

You want to be free? Break out of the circle.

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