Is the Digital Revolution Sowing the Seeds of a Techno-Fascist Future?

Before criticizing the title of this piece as excessively alarmist, the guiding ideology of the digital revolution, as well as the cultural changes it has already introduced, need to be compared with the characteristics of fascism. It is also important to recognize that fascism differs between cultures. Italian fascism was different in several important ways from German fascism, and if Oswald Moseley had come to power in Great Britain his brand of hyper-nationalism would have differed - just as the fascism of France is distinctively French. The same holds for the early signs of techno-fascism, which has chief characteristics suggesting a more international and thus less distinctly American model.

Technologies were essential to the short-lived successes of both Italian and German fascism. Both were driven by the social unrest that followed World War I, by racial mythologies (especially for the Germans), by the lack of well-established democratic institutions and by the economic turmoil of the worldwide depression. Techno-fascism is characterized by the ways more aspects of daily life are becoming dependent upon digital technologies that lead to many benefits while at the same time reducing the diversity of cultural ways of knowing and by increasingly subordinating human thought and behaviors

to the dictates of machines.

Techno-fascism's level of efficiency and totalitarian potential can easily lead to repressive systems that will not tolerate dissent.

Unlike the racist mythologies of German fascism, the mythic dimensions of techno-fascism are rooted in ancient religious narratives about humans naming and taking control of the environment, and in the abstract thinking of philosophers who laid the conceptual and moral foundations for the modern myth of progress, including the idea that human life is mechanistic in nature and is driven by nature's law governing natural selection. While the moral foundations of techno-fascism align with the values of market capitalism and the progress-oriented ideology of science that easily slips into scientism, its level of efficiency and totalitarian potential can easily lead to repressive systems that will not tolerate dissent, especially on the part of those challenging how the colonizing nature of techno-fascism promotes consumerism that is destroying the environment and alternative cultural lifestyles such as the cultural commons.

The primary characteristic of all fascist modernizing movements is conformity of thinking and behavior, which is directed and controlled by total surveillance systems that track people's thoughts, behaviors and relationships. The latest in the emerging techno-fascist arsenal of surveillance technologies is the new facial

recognition system now being adopted by local police, which will shortly become part of the FBI's $1 billion Next Generation Identification program. Photos of people not suspected of criminal activities, as well as those who are, will be instantly available to 18,000 local, state, federal and international law enforcement agencies. The facial recognition technology can identify 16,000 distinct features of a person's face, and compare them at a rate of more than 1 million faces per second, with other photos held by police agencies.

Three of the most important threats to what remains of our civil liberties include how social unrest resulting from extreme environmental changes can easily lead to redefining what constitutes criminal behavior. A second major problem is that the facial recognition software has a 20 percent failure rate. And the third threat is the one now plaguing local police across the United States: namely, how their biases and misinterpretations lead to police actions that result in the death of innocent people.

The increased reliance upon computer-mediated learning at all levels of education contributes to the conformity of thinking needed in the techno-fascist state. Lost are the ethnically diverse, intergenerational narratives passed forward through face-to-face and mentoring relationships, which leave students exposed to the myths that serve the interests of the controlling elites of scientists, computer scientists and engineers, corporate heads and the military establishment. The guiding ideology and moral codes first articulated in the early 18th century by Johannes Kepler's suggestion that life processes should be understood as machine-like continue

to be reinforced both by the computer scientists who have announced the beginning of the post-biological world, and their followers who rely upon the values of efficiency, accountability, profits, data and purposive rationality to engineer machines that replicate human behaviors and thought processes.

Comparing Historical Fascism and Techno-Fascism

The questions that need to be asked about the parallels between the European varieties of fascism and American right-wing groups include the following: Is there a parallel between how the German National Socialists in the 1930s manipulated the democratic process to gain support of their totalitarian agenda and how the National Rifle Association (NRA), for example, uses the protection of the US Constitution and its ability to keep Congress supporting its agenda of arming right-wing, hyper-patriotic Americans? What about the parallels between the male-dominated fascist movements in Europe and the male-dominated fields of computer science, engineering, national security agencies, the military establishment and corporations whose future is tied to the digital revolution? Does the concern with data, efficiency and a vision of progress that is easily interpreted in the language of Social Darwinism reflect the West's deep assumptions that this is not only a human-centered universe but also one that should be guided by the scientific and culturally uninformed rationalism of men?

Fascism also relies upon the combination of conformity in thought and values, the loss of historical memory and

a perceived crisis or endpoint that requires the collective energy and loyalty of the young and old. In addition, there needs to be a significant percentage of the population that is hyper-patriotic, thinks in clichés and is willing to support the use of imprisonment and torture of those who challenge the rise of techno-fascism, especially those labeled as environmentalists who will be viewed, as like the Jews in Nazi Germany, as weakening the power of the state and impeding progress.

Digital technologies have introduced irreversible cultural changes, such as undermining local democracy.

Digitally mediated learning, which is heavily dependent upon print- and data-based accounts that encode the taken-for-granted cultural assumption (and ideology) of the people who write the programs, reinforces a mindset that responds to short explanations that do not lead to the experience of boredom associated with long-term memory, narratives and written accounts. The ways in which the social media reinforce the importance of the shifting sense of immediacy and instant responses to the anonymous Others ensure that the emergence of a fascist state will go unrecognized. The systems of local control involving a variety of democratic practices and traditions of ecological wisdom must first be lost to memory. Where in the digitally mediated curriculum will students learn about these traditions, when the ideology underlying the digital revolution represents traditions, including local decision-making, as sources of backwardness and as impediments to students creating their own ideas from the wealth of context free data available on the internet?

It must be recognized that digital technologies have indispensable uses that vary across a wide range of cultural activities, from medicine, scientific research, monitoring and maintaining the society's technological and economic infrastructure, education and nearly every facet of the industrial and consumer-dependent culture. But the digital technologies have also introduced irreversible cultural changes, such as undermining local democracy (did we vote for any of these technologies?), creating a new generation that is unaware of the political dangers and threats to personal security that accompany the loss of privacy, undermining the face-to-face intergenerational narratives essential to maintaining ethnic identities and the traditions of the cultural commons that strengthen patterns of mutual solidarity while reducing dependency upon consumerism, and further strengthening the longstanding traditions in the West of elevating abstract knowledge over ecologically informed ways of thinking.

Today, the internet is shortening people's attention spans to the point where little more than slogans and sound bites now serve as the basis of political decision-making. Masking disinformation as models of factual accuracy and objective reporting, Fox News has conditioned millions of Americans to accept ideologically driven propaganda, which further reduces the likelihood of mass resistance to the techno-fascist agenda.

Will We Resist?

The most critical question is whether there will be resistance to how everyday lives are being increasingly monitored, motivated to pursue the increasingly narrow economic agenda of the emerging techno-fascist culture

and stripped of historical values and identity. Will enough of the public recognize the dangers that lie ahead and will they be able to articulate the importance of what is being lost, including how what is being lost undermines the diversity of cultural commons experiences that are more ecologically sustainable? It is important to note that the computer scientists who play a central role in articulating the ideology that underlies the emerging techno-fascist culture totally ignore the cultural and linguistic roots of the deepening ecological crisis. The title of the book written by Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler, *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think* (2012), could serve as the anthem as we march into the future envisioned by the techno-fascists. The scientific justification for replacing humans and their diverse cultures with the culture created by super-intelligent computers, according to a number of computer scientists following the lead of Ray Kurzweil, is being controlled by nature's process of natural selection.

In order to understand the traditional defenses against totalitarian regimes now being lost, we need to focus more specifically upon the cultural transformations that occur as students spend more of their day in classrooms where computer-mediated learning increasingly displaces face-to-face interaction with teachers and professors who might spark their curiosity to explore beyond the orthodoxies of the day. The many hours of the day texting friends, playing video games and exploring the seemingly endless boundaries of cyberspace also shorten attention spans in ways that undermine long-term memory. Speed and context-free slogans have now

replaced depth of understanding and critical judgment. As surveillance systems are increasingly being used to anticipate acts of terrorism, where crime will occur next in communities, perhaps it is time to stop referring to surveillance and to call it what it is: a policing system. The next step will be to monitor potential sources of dissent - a problem that scientists are now working on as they study the connections between people's vocabularies and their patterns of thinking. Other scientists are making progress along the same pathway pioneered by Nazi scientists by developing facial recognition technologies that will be globally connected. Scientists are also working to discover the chemical changes needed to eliminate bad memories (as well as good memories such as privacy and a life free of commercialism). The next step is to adapt the genetic technologies (CRISPR) that now exist for engineering conceptually and morally compliant babies needed in the techno-fascist state.

The expansion of surveillance of people's lives adds another layer to the fascist political agenda of the American right-wing groups that mirror key characteristics of the fascism in European countries. Their social agenda includes placing barriers in people's ability to vote; the use of the prison system to control a large segment of the poor and non-white population; the intertwining of fundamentalist religions and segments of the government focused on national security, and using the military to globalize the American way; suppressing basic human rights, especially for women; undermining the rights of workers to organize for the purpose of opposing being exploited; and allowing fraudulent

elections in which the super-wealthy are able to control the outcome of state and federal elections.

The expansion of technological and corporate power involves greater reliance upon the use of context free metaphors such as "national security" and "terrorist" to justify using the power of the police against individuals and social groups engaged in demonstrations and acts of resistance against the environmentally destructive corporations. As the sources of protein become even more limited due to the warming and acidification of the oceans, and as many other scenarios play out as ecological systems collapse, greater social unrest will occur in response to a variety of issues that the money-controlled state and federal governments have not addressed. In short, a deepening ecological crisis and the increasing displacement of humans by machines will result, and techno-fascism will become the new normal. And just as the European varieties of fascism led to more violence in the world, techno-fascism is heading down the same lawless pathway with hackers and global cyberattacks becoming the new normal against which we have no protection.