

The Disruptors

(Part 1 of 2)

Intelligent computer

Right now, every click and post we make on our computers or handphones, we leave traces of our interests and tendencies which are being monitored by “intelligent” computers somewhere in the city. These are, in turn, connected with Silicon Valley, California, USA, and people connected with Silicon Valley.

Such information can, have and are being used for business and political decisions—and more significantly—in manipulating us in how we think and vote for the benefit of those who use this technology. We can even pay for such a service to trump our way into the US presidency, as disastrously seen in January 2017.

Silicon Valley, as a location, covers Santa Clara County, CA and as a metaphor, refers to all high-tech businesses in the Bay Area or even in the United States itself. The term is now generally used as a short-hand for the US high-technology economic sector. The name is also a global synonym for leading high-tech researches and enterprises all around the world that profoundly affect public and personal lives—that affect us personally.

Disruption

In 2017, Jamie Bartlett (BBC Two) produced a two-parter on “The Secrets of Silicon Valley.” The episodes titles are telling. Episode 1, THE DISRUPTORS, uncovers the dark reality behind Silicon Valley's glittering promise to build a better world. The tech gods believe progress is powered by technology tearing up the world as it is—a process they proudly call “disruption.”

In Uber's lavish offices in San Francisco, we hear of how the company believes it is improving our cities. In Hyderabad, India, on the other hand, debts and falling earnings drove numerous Uber drivers out of job – and to suicide. In today's newspapers (Straits Times, 23 Sep 2017), we read of London planning to ban Uber.¹

Persuasion

In episode 2, THE PERSUASION MACHINE, we see how Silicon Valley's mission to connect the world is disrupting democracy, helping to plunge us into an age of political turbulence. Facebook's vast power to persuade was first built for advertisers, combining data about our internet use and psychological insights into how we think.

A leading psychologist shows how Facebook's hoard of data about us can be used to predict our personalities and other psychological traits. All this can be used by the elite or those able to pay for it—to manipulate our lives for their benefit.²

¹ Episode 1 of 2: The Disruptors <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0916ghz>

² Episode 2 of 2: The Persuasion Machine <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b091zhtk>

Such a documentary reveals to us the state of the world under the influence of social media, and how our online activity is about to erupt into another form of industrial revolution. Regrettably, much of it is built on manipulation of our beliefs, making smart half-truths, even posting fake facts.

We may think that we are getting better informed about almost anything, but the dark reality is that we are simply reaching a new level of "**intelligent ignorance**" as we work and play in the shadows of our "knowledge"—basically, our lust, hate, delusion and fear.

We think we know a lot of things, that we are open to many choices, and have control over our actions. Are we no more than puppets on the strings of the Silicon Valley Gods? Are we not mere statistics at the click of remote controls in the hands of technology Titans?

Class and caste

For informed Buddhists, all this sounds too familiar. In important ways, the Buddha recognized the dangers and falsity of the "Gods of religious technology" – the brahmins and their theology of caste. They tried to control and run society by creating a Mother-board of a God-centred world, where they claimed to be born from God's mouth and so they were His spokesmen. Other classes were God's arms, thighs and feet, to respectively protect, enrich and serve the brahmins, the elite, and the upper classes.

The Buddha tried to disrupt this manipulative and exploitative Class Technology. Socially, even the Buddha's influence was limited, as the brahminical priesthood and politicians were considerably successful in sucking Buddhism back into their superstructure called Hinduism: the Buddha is just a link – an avatar, an incarnation – in the brahminical Religious Technology.

Profit

Although the Buddha introduced phenomenal reforms in religious social re-structuring by allowing any one from any class or the classless outcastes to "go forth" as renunciants in the Buddhist sangha, the monastic community quickly degenerated into sectarian churches and conglomerates that are profoundly money-centred and insidiously this-worldly despite their doctrines of compassion. Organized Buddhism was defined by money and worldly profits pandering promises of good karma and paradises.

Historically, this was THE 1ST BUDDHIST DISRUPTION – the significant support and sponsorship of the Business Class, especially the merchants of the Silk Road – who helped spread Buddhism throughout India and beyond to China, the rest of Asia, and to Europe. This last diaspora – the Buddhist diaspora to Europe – was significantly defeated, or at least diluted by Christianity and Islam, both of which were strongly political and militaristic in their heydays.

R526 Revisioning Buddhism 196

[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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