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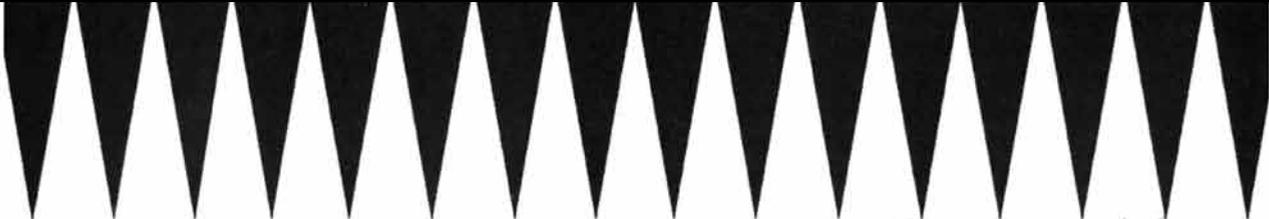


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# AMASS

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JOHN O'KANE



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# VERIZON, AT&T TURN CUSTOMERS INTO PRODUCTS

JOSHUA KOPSTEIN

**W**hen it comes to using Internet services such as Google and Facebook, the general rule of thumb is that you are giving up privacy in exchange for free stuff. You have probably heard the adage that if you aren't a paying customer, you're the product being sold. It's a reminder of the Faustian bargain we make whenever we accept the terms of service agreements for "free" social networks and apps that allow companies to collect intimate data, from the websites we frequent to the contents of our emails. The implication is that the inverse is also true: If you are paying for something, you're a customer, not the product. Right?

Disturbingly, this is not always the case. Last week security researchers revealed that the two largest telecommunications providers in the U.S., Verizon and AT&T, are tracking and monetizing their customers' Web browsing habits and app usage in the same way you'd expect Facebook or Google to. Even worse, they are doing so by modifying customers' Internet traffic to attach a persistent, unblockable tracking ID to every Web request. It's part of a troubling trend in which consumers are effectively charged twice: once in the form of a hefty monthly bill and again by accessing their private data.

In other words, even when you're the paying customer, sometimes you're still the product.

## A new, dangerous paradigm

According to security researchers, Verizon and AT&T have been quietly manipulating Internet traffic on their networks, injecting tracking beacons into every packet of unencrypted data its customers send and receive.

These bits of code, which Verizon calls unique identifier headers (UIDH), operate much like the tracking cookies that websites place on your computer to target you with ads. The big difference is that Verizon and AT&T's are persistent and permanent. They follow you across every page you visit and monitor which apps you use, and you can't block them by simply adjusting browser settings. Verizon says it has been using the trackers since 2012, the same year it began an initiative called Precision Market Insights, which collects data about the online habits of its paying customers and sells it to advertisers in the form of periodic trend reports. Its main competitor, AT&T, has a similar program that subjects customers to the same kind of tracking, though the company claims it's only in a testing phase.

Both companies are well aware of how intrusive their tracking schemes are. At an industry conference two years ago, the chief executive of Verizon's U.S. advertising initiative bragged about the company's ability to spy on customers, saying, "We're able to view just everything that they do" on the company's network. Incredibly, this was just four years after both Verizon and AT&T pledged before Congress to refrain from tracking users. Verizon's executive vice president said during that session that any company capturing user data "should obtain meaningful, affirmative consent from consumers"--the polar opposite of the company's current posturing. AT&T's chief privacy officer agreed and even wagged a finger at Google while articulating her company's supposed commitment to customer

privacy, saying, "We encourage all companies that engage in online behavioral advertising...likewise to adopt this affirmative advance consent paradigm."

Ironically, the fact that Verizon and AT&T are leveraging their nearly total control over the country's telecommunications infrastructure to track customers is due in large part to the success of companies like Google. It's no wonder Silicon Valley's now ubiquitous business model of corporate surveillance--offering free services that spy on users and monetize their information--has led more traditional businesses, such as Internet service providers, to be tempted by the untapped data flowing through their systems.

**According to security researchers, Verizon and AT&T have been quietly manipulating Internet traffic on their networks, injecting tracking beacons into every packet of unencrypted data its customers send and receive.**

— Joshua Kopstein

The new paradigm has opened a Pandora's Box of dangers and opportunities. The idea of companies' offering deals and discounts in exchange for sensitive user data is not only becoming mainstream but widely accepted. Google offers its Nexus devices at dramatically reduced prices not because the company has somehow managed to reduce supply costs but because it is selling subsidized products whose primary objective is to help you provide Google with more of your data. Online retail giant Amazon has similar subsidies on its Kindles and Fire phones, devices that not only collect incredibly intimate data about your media consumption habits but also are captive portals created to help you buy more stuff on--you got it--Amazon.

At least in these cases, you're getting something--free software, discounted devices--out of the deal. Verizon and AT&T customers are being automatically opted in to invasive tracking schemes that offer them no tangible benefits. The companies claim that the collected data is anonymized and reassure customers that they can opt out of the tracking at any time. Both of these claims are dubious. First, researchers have shown that supposedly anonymous data is often anything but and that individuals can be identified within large data sets with relative ease. In one 2013 study, Harvard researchers were able to identify more than 40 percent of the people who participated in a human genetics experiment, linking their names to highly sensitive records regarding medical conditions, drug use, abortions and sexually transmitted diseases.

The claim that customers can opt out of tracking programs is also misleading. Security researcher Ken

White, who built a site that checks if your device is being tracked, found that both Verizon's and AT&T's tracking beacons are added to Web traffic even after users opt out. Verizon later admitted there is no way to prevent the trackers from being sent; opting out merely stops the company from using them to target you with ads. The only way to avoid the trackers entirely is by visiting websites that support encrypted connections or by connecting to the Internet through a virtual private network. (AT&T anticipated the former, and it has a patent that proposes actually downgrading users to insecure connections so tracking codes can go through.) And since the trackers are being sent over unencrypted channels, any third party--including stalkers, criminals and other companies--can still use them to track and build profiles on customers as they move across the Web.

ProPublica's Julia Angwin and Jeff Larson have discovered that Twitter's mobile advertising arm, MoPub, is already using the Verizon identifiers for user tracking of its own. Cybercriminals who frequently target ad networks for the troves of data they store would also undoubtedly benefit from having access to unique customer IDs. And we can safely assume the persistent beacons are an enormous boon to intelligence services such the National Security Agency, which is known to use browser cookies and advertising IDs to track surveillance targets and infect devices with spyware, according to documents leaked by former NSA contractor-turned-whistleblower Edward Snowden.

Tracking schemes like Verizon's and AT&T's should serve as a warning, even to those who aren't worried about their privacy. Whether guided by advertisers or the NSA, we are sleepwalking into a world of default mass

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# NET TRACKING

surveillance, in which even paying customers are quarries of data to be mined by the very companies that are supposed to serve them. Trading our data for free stuff is tempting, but it's also a gateway to greater inequality. As the practice becomes normalized, data simply becomes another commodity that companies demand from us. The result is an aggregate loss of security and consumer rights, benefiting no one but the corporate Internet gatekeepers that already stand to profit.

Joshua Kopstein is a cyberculture journalist and researcher from New York City. His work focuses on Internet law and disorder, surveillance and government secrecy.



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# U.S. ELECTION: DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN

SHAMUS COOKE

**E**ventually the tired game will exhaust itself. Beneath the billions of dollars U.S. elections are lifeless events, with the predictable flopping from democrat to republican and back again, voters given no real choice but to punish the party in power—by electing the party that was punished previously. This endless, irrational dynamic is the foundation of the U.S. electoral system. The motor force pushing this logic is money, billions worth per cycle. The richest 1% threw nearly \$4 billion to influence voters and to prepay for political favors from the winning candidates.

U.S. Elections have become corporate PR campaigns, with corporations doling money out equally to both parties. This bi-partisan vote buying guarantees that, aside from a couple of fervently debated social issues, a consistent, core economic agenda is firmly in place that favors the 1%.

This is why voters always punish the party in power. The ruling party earns the hatred of working-class voters by proving their love for the corporations and billionaires. The economy, and specifically jobs, has always been a priority for voters, but the economy is used by politicians to enrich the already-rich, who under Obama have received 95% of the wealth created since he began as president. Such brazen inequality doesn't happen by accident, but by policy, and no politicians are complaining about it.

During the “heated” debates of the midterm election, there was virtually no discussion of the economy. The two parties have nothing to debate about on this issue; they're in total agreement. The same is true about foreign policy and the \$700 billion dollars annually spent on the military.

Neither party complains that U.S. taxpayers have spent, according to a reputable study, \$4-6 trillion dollars on the ongoing wars of Afghanistan and Iraq. Bi-partisan consensus prevented the topic from reaching the campaign trail, while guaranteeing that the insane and completely

futile war policy continues.

Most Americans understand that U.S. politics equals legalized corruption. And consequently voter turnout sank to a new historic low of 38 percent. But even this number is highly misleading. One need only imagine if national congressional elections were voted on separately, instead of sharing the ballot with state elections and local ballot initiatives that voters actually care about. If this happened voter turnout would plummet to the teens, or lower, and could not be mislabeled “democracy.” The popularity of the U.S. Congress hovers around 10 percent, which means that the remainder of the population consistently views this body as an alien entity, serving the interests of the super-rich.

The money that has stolen U.S. elections still provokes quite the fight between the Democrats and Republicans, who have their individual self-interests to protect. This is because the election winners get to reward their party campaigners with government positions and their donors with for-profit legislation. And after “following through” with passing legislation, the politician is rewarded yet again.

For example, when the politician inevitably becomes hated by everyone except the rich, the big money injects millions into the politician's reelection campaign. And if the politician ends up losing he is rewarded for being loyal and is hired and paid millions as a “consultant” for the corporation, in effect a glamorized lobbyist.

What can we expect from the new Republican-controlled Congress? Many people will likely be surprised at the high level of cooperation between Obama and the Republicans, who have much in common. Most likely, a quick bi-partisan consensus will be reached on continuing and expanding the

wars in the Middle East, with the ultimate and insane goal of toppling the Syrian and Iranian governments.

A new consensus will be reached regarding the U.S. economy, as both parties will “work together” to lower the U.S. corporate tax rate and give other “incentives” to the corporations and rich investors to actually invest their money in something productive other than their Wall Street gambling.

Obama and the Republicans will continue to work on their bi-partisan public school agenda, which aims to privatize the public schools through charters schools, an idea first proposed by the Reagan administration.

**Ironically, as  
Obama  
continues to  
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very wealthy, the  
Republican-  
controlled  
congress will  
give the president  
a chance to  
regain his lost  
popularity among  
Democrats.**

—Shamus Cooke

And while Republicans moan about Obamacare, they agree with its central feature, that “the market” should determine who gets health care and of what quality, based on what you can afford. The Republicans will loudly crow about this or that aspect of Obamacare they want eliminated, but the central logic is bi-partisan.

Ironically, as Obama continues to act in favor of the very wealthy, the Republican-controlled congress will give the president a chance to regain his lost popularity among Democrats. The Republicans are likely to use their control of the House and Senate to put forward legislation to appease their Christian fundamentalist base, targeting abortions, immigrants, gays, etc.

Obama will then get a chance to act as a “progressive” by using his veto power. After doing nothing for working people during his six years as president, Obama can become a “hero” again over a couple of social issues, just in time to re-energize Democratic voters for the 2016 election, which will falsely be labeled “the most important election of our lifetime.”

The veins of the U.S. body politic are too clogged with cash to be cleansed. Many progressive activists are demanding the repeal of the Supreme Court decision *Citizens vs. United*, which opened the floodgates for corporate cash into elections. But in reality this problem already existed. This case merely legalized what was happening on a hundred different levels. Massive accumulation of money will find its way into politics, one way or another.

Labor unions have an unfortunate role in propping up this two party dynamic of corporate cancer, since unions give undeserved legitimacy to this process by funding Democrats and telling their millions of union members to campaign and vote for a party that has participated along with the Republicans in attacking unionized and non-unionized working people for the last 30 years.

Third parties don’t spring out of the air. They are built by organizations with pre-existing resources and large memberships, like labor unions and other large community organizations. The various failed attempts at creating third parties in the U.S. can be blamed on the lack of any large national working class organization investing in them.

A workers’ party financed and co-organized by the unions has that ability to smash the two-party system. Such a party can’t compete with the Wall Street cash, but it

can use its resources and membership to rally the broader country around a progressive platform of green job creation to fight climate change, raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and tax the rich and big corporations to pay for better schools and other vital social programs. Such demands would reverberate across the country in a political landscape where the people’s aspirations are complete ignored.

Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist, and writer for Workers Action ([www.workerscompass.org](http://www.workerscompass.org)). He can be reached at [shamuscooke@gmail.com](mailto:shamuscooke@gmail.com).



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# GENETIC ENGINEERING WORTH DEBATING

LAUREN ELLIS

**W**hether you call them transgenic, genetically engineered or GMO crops, the fever-pitched debate about Monsanto misses the bigger picture by a long shot, according to Professor Paul Gepts of the University of California, Riverside. As a plant geneticist with a global understanding of seed varieties, Gepts supports public breeding programs and developing new varieties that benefit the public at large. (He does not receive any funding or compensation from private seed companies, including Monsanto.) I talked to Gepts about the broader implications of innovative plant breeding technologies, from the lab to the soil.

**Lauren Ellis:** Let's settle the semantics right off the bat. Is the term "GMO" scientifically correct?

**Paul Gepts:** I think "genetically modified" is terrible because we are all genetically modified. Otherwise we would look all alike. I prefer the term "genetically engineered." Genetic engineering points to a specific and purposeful action done by humans.

**Do you think the discussion around genetically engineered crops is too polarized?**

Absolutely. I think it's just unbelievable. There is no middle ground. You are either completely for it or completely against it. Way too much energy is wasted on a technique that is useful. But it's by no means the answer to everything.

**How did you get into plant breeding?**

I've always been interested in plants and nature conservation. I'm originally from Belgium and moved to South America to study crop biodiversity at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture. I did my fellowship and Ph.D. studies in plant breeding and plant genetics in the U.S. Then I continued with my post-doc at the University of California, Riverside. That's where I've been ever since.

**What exactly is plant breeding? How does this differ**

**from DNA-marker-assisted breeding?**

The basic principle of plant breeding is that [a breeder] will make a selection. The breeder will select the best plants and eliminate the bad ones in order to come up with a new variety that has a series of traits like higher yield, a resistance to diseases, improved quality and improved taste. The idea of using DNA markers is that you can select more desired traits and make those selections faster.

**By faster, what kind of time frame are we talking about here?**

Typically, to get a new seed variety, it'll take seven to eight years. With marker-assisted breeding, you can shave off one or two years.

**How long have scientists been using DNA-marker-assisted breeding techniques to create new breeds?**

The idea of using markers started in the early '80s. But it really began in practice during the early '90s. That's when you started seeing individual genes marked and selected. Now we've reached a point where every seed variety will be sequenced in some fashion.

**Sequencing and gene selection sounds an awful lot like genetic engineering to an average person. How do genetic engineering techniques differ from this DNA-marker-assisted breeding?**

Marker-assisted breeding uses the variation that exists within the species or in neighboring species. So there is a tremendous amount of diversity. With transgenics, you take a gene from another, unrelated organism and introduce it in one way or the other into an organism, like a crop plant. The source of DNA is quite different now.

**My concern with the discussion that we have right now over plant genetics and GMOs is that it's either all bad or all good. There is NO in-between.**

—Lauren Ellis

**Can you give us an example of a genetically engineered crop?**

One main example for large crops is BT, a toxin used by a soil bacterium. The gene for that toxin has been introduced into crops to make them resistant to certain classes of insects. The other one is also a genome of a microorganism that makes the plant resistant to herbicide. A farmer can spray a crop without negative consequences for the crop, and it'll kill the weeds, theoretically.

**Is marker-assisted cross-breeding safer than genetic engineering?**

The way to judge any technology is to look at it on

a case-by-case basis. Take radioisotopes. They can be used to make bombs, and they are also used in medicine. So the issue is, which application are we talking about?

**Are there any concerns about genetic engineering, then?**

Let's take corn that's genetically engineered for insect resistance with this BT toxin in the U.S. There we decide that it's OK to grow. But what about the same corn variety in Mexico? In Mexico, the difference with the U.S. is that you have wild corn. And you have a possibility of gene flow between domesticated corn, the hybrid corn and these wild populations of corn in Mexico. So the question becomes, is that an issue or not? You will see transgenes being transferred into this wild population.

**What happens when transgenic crops and wild crops exchange genes?**

It could make the wild corn weedier, because you removed the insect pressure. So you would have to look at what the effect of this transgene on local insect species is. Are they going to be affected or not? Is it going to confer additional resistance of corn against these local species of insects?

**Like an invasive species?**

Yes, exactly. My concern with the discussion that we have right now over plant genetics and GMOs is that it's either all bad or all good. There is no in-between. Transgenic crops might be quite useful, especially in those cases where you don't have enough native genetic variation of a species. On the other hand, transgenic approaches are not the answer to everything.

**Monsanto's marker-assisted cross-breeding is a different approach from its transgenic research, which has received a fair amount of bad press. Do you think it's justified?**

It is kind of interesting that other companies who engage in genetic engineering haven't received that bad press. So I don't know, maybe Monsanto has a corporate culture that lends itself to criticism. They have been fairly aggressive in enforcing their intellectual property rights over their varieties. I think one of the things that has happened in the last decade is that you can obtain patents.

They have been very aggressive suing farmers to enforce those rights, at least in the U.S.

**Is Monsanto the only company that protects its seeds as intellectual property, or is it an industry standard among the big seed companies?**

In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled that living organisms can be patented. In a sense [patenting seed varieties] is part of the normal way of doing things. But it's almost like we have lost balance. We have to get back to what is in the interest of society as a whole in the country. There are issues like, who owns the food production and the agricultural production systems? Is it in the hands of a few large companies? There has been a strong concentration of seeds and seed production that's developed into new varieties. So you have a few large companies that account for maybe 60, 70 percent of varieties. An important issue that I think our society has not really come to grips



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agricultural production, but it's not going to depend only on genetics. These are tools. They are not the goal in itself.

Lauren Ellis writes for Aljazeera and other publications.



Photo by John O'Kane

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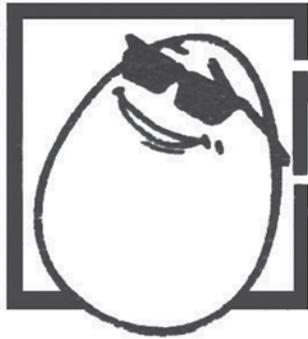
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# CLIMATE CAPPING GLOBAL WARMING

RENEE LEWIS

Scientists, environmentalists and world leaders alike have generally agreed that capping Earth's temperature rise at 2 degrees Celsius would prevent the worst effects of climate change--a cutoff touted again in the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

But many experts in the field, including former IPCC leaders, have said that even if global warming is kept to that limit, such a rise could nevertheless devastate the environment and endanger humanity--the very effects that the latest study warns will happen if the 2 C ceiling is breached.

"There is no such thing as a safe rise," said Bob Watson, who was the chair of the IPCC from 1997 to 2002. "You will see food and water insecurity, human health problems, and sea level rise even with a 2 C rise."

Global temperatures have risen 0.85 C on average since the Industrial Revolution--a change most scientists blame on human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels. Scientists have said that at the current levels of emissions, the world is on track for as much as a 5 C rise by the middle of this century.

"Since the start of the Industrial Revolution, in the late 19th century, we've had about 1 C of warming, and even with that, we've already seen big changes in frequency of extreme events and big societal impacts," said Radley Horton, a scientist at the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and Columbia University professor.

"We've seen more frequently deadly heat wave events as temperatures rise and more frequent coastal flooding as sea levels rise," he added. "These are not just more frequent or longer lasting, but when they happen they're more severe."

Residents of Pacific Island nations like the Marshall Islands say they are already feeling the effects of rising sea levels, citing the largest ever king tides, which swept through the capital Majuro earlier this year. At the same time, the nation's northeastern atolls were hit with

severe drought.

More frequent extreme weather is already hitting many parts of the world and in the U.S. The Pentagon has warned that climate change poses a national security threat as competition for resources increases. If the Earth reaches a 2 C rise, positive feedback cycles--which refers to effects from warming that lead to even more warming--would likely be triggered.

"If we start to push the climate system to that stage, all bets are off. No one can tell us exactly what would happen next," Horton said.

One example of a positive feedback cycle is the melting of Arctic ice sheets, which, scientists have said, could lead to an ice-free Arctic in the summer within a few years.

"Removing the white surface ice in the Arctic that is so effective at reflecting sunlight will mean replacing it with a dark surface, which absorbs and leads to more warming," Horton explained.

This could have far-reaching effects. Heating is exacerbated at the poles, analysts have said. This could change the location of the jet stream, which regulates weather patterns worldwide--thereby influencing heat waves, cold air outbreaks, rain patterns, flooding and drought.

Though no one knows for sure what will happen if we cross the 2 C temperature increase, paleoclimatologists believe some of those changes can be predicted by looking at ancient climate records.

"The thing people need to appreciate is that a warmer world doesn't just mean a warmer world," said Rhawn Denniston, professor of Geology at Cornell College with a focus on paleoenvironmental records. "There

might be this misconception that, 'I can handle a couple more hot days in the summer' ... But we're talking about changes in rainfall patterns, snow pack in the mountains."

In one study, stalagmites--cave formations--found in Asia were used by an international team of scientists to research ancient monsoon patterns over 100,000 years. They found that Chinese monsoons intensified and weakened over that period, which coincided with warming and cooling cycles in Greenland during its ice age. According to Denniston's research, wetter monsoon seasons in Australia also coincided with millennial-scale cold periods in Greenland.

Scientists also use the ancient climate record to

**Though no one knows  
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changes can be predicted  
by looking at ancient  
climate records.**

— Renee Lewis

predict a 2 C rise's effect on sea level rise.

"We know from the past 20,000 years ago, during the ice age, when it was 4 to 5 degrees Celsius cooler and sea levels were 100 meters lower, you can look back and see that each one degree [Celsius] of warming contributed about 20 meters in sea level rise," said David Spratt, an Australia-based climate blogger who analyzes the growing gap between science and politics.

"If we are restricted to 2 C rise, that means we will see sea level rise in the tens of meters--that's not in dispute, it's just a question of how fast."

Analysts say the reason most world leaders along with the IPCC have agreed on the 2 C target is more political than scientific. The recommendations published in the IPCC climate reports are negotiated by over 100 nations, including oil-producing nations like Saudi Arabia.

Despite IPCC's reports saying the worst effects of climate change could be avoided by capping global temperature rise at 2 C, some scientists believe the Earth's climate has already been pushed beyond its tipping point. One reason is that most of the effects from the greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere are delayed.

Another reason for the schism between IPCC recommendations and other scientists' beliefs is that the panel's report is based on science that is already several years old.

"The cutoff date is three to four years before it's published, meaning this report is the extent of climate science in 2010--and a number of things have happened since then," Spratt said.

He cited predictions of an ice-free Arctic within a decade or two, the "unstoppable" melting of West Antarctic ice sheets and faster melting in Greenland's glaciers. All of these are examples of interconnected systems that could feed off of each other--resulting in climate disruption. "We now have evidence saying if we get to 2 C we'll pass the tipping point to irreversible changes ... which policymakers simply ignore," Spratt said.

Renee Lewis writes for Aljazeera and other publications.

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the right kind of eyes to catch  
your falling star inside  
their wonder

then the light breaks thru  
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long live the song of yourself  
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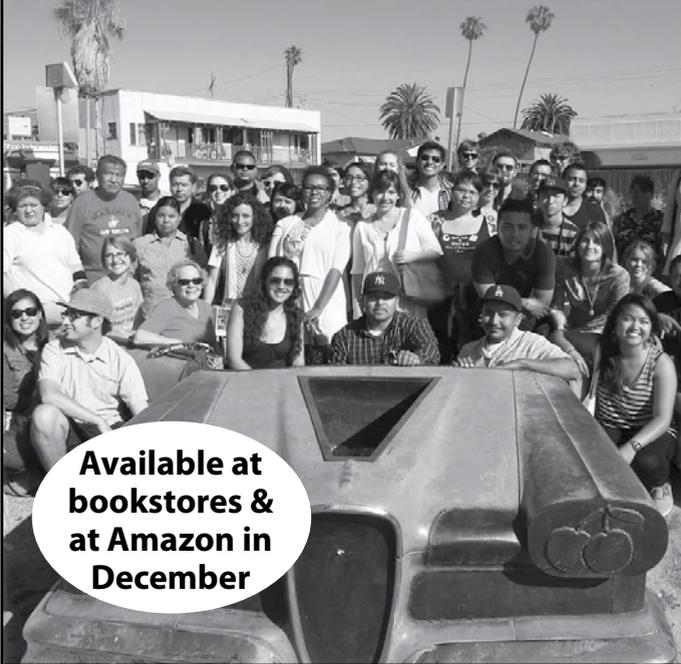
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# FICTION HALFWAY HOUSE

JOHN O'KANE

**W**yatt sees the outlines of a human form become gradually clearer, like he's in the process of regaining consciousness after surgery. It's saying something to him but not in real time. Another form suddenly appears

in the frame from the left and he recognizes one of the voices. It's Yram's.

"Hey, where you been neighbor?"

He realizes now where he is, and wonders how long he's been off into other worlds. "Not sure," he manages, as he recognizes the other person. It's Evol.

They both reach out to lift him up, but pull back as he begins to get up from the chair on his own. He checks his momentum as he becomes aware of his surroundings, still weak from his mental meanderings. He remembers the house. It's what set his reflections in motion. He wonders why.

"Where ya goin?" Yram asks.

"Not sure of that either!"

"You're in a real pickle! You okay? Need some meds to get back to reality...a massage?"

"We've got a full service medical plan down on the strip," Evol interjects, "universal health care with no copays or deducts... can have as many preexisting conditions as imaginable and we'll never cancel ya!"

"Staying too long on the street on this side can do that to you," Yram adds. "There are few support groups to fall back on... most everyone's at odds with each other on the street...that society is not much different from the dog-eat-dog one we're all tryin to get away from...need to make a final break and..."

"...I need to make a break but wanna get free from all of the traps, get above and find independence so that..."

"...it doesn't exist above!" Evol interrupts. "The traps bring more traps and you don't even see 'em."

"I wanna learn how to trap the traps in peace!"

"Come on in the house and we might be able to get you some quick outpatient help," Evol responds.

Wyatt feebly protests, saying he has to meet someone, but the two together capture his initiative and nearly turn him into a willing guest. The longer he's in this space the more familiar it seems. But the inside is much different from what he remembers, a spacious and decently furnished multi-bedroom, A-frame house. It's now sparsely furnished and needs paint and repairs. There are several occupants passing through the rooms oblivious to his presence, more

apparently than can be accommodated by the bedrooms since there are mattresses lying in a few corners. Evol diverts him into a room before he can get a complete picture of the place and asks a woman, introduced as Aurelia, who slips out of the attached bathroom, to give him a massage. Before he can ask what's happening, she goes to work on him. While Aurelia continues, weakening his resistance further, a young bearded male appears through the door with a large black bag and plops down in a chair, fixated on Aurelia's artistry. Evol introduces him as Doc, who immediately explains that he had worked as a nurse's assistant at a local hospital for a while before deciding to do "some real healing."

When Aurelia finishes, Doc opens his bag to a cache of supplies and tools, pulling out a syringe and a blood pressure kit, along with some pills wrapped up in a napkin. Wyatt, though extremely relaxed and lacking much incentive to disagree, protests what he assumes Doc has in mind. He accepts the taking of his pressure, despite Evol's assurance

that the pills are only a mild tranquilizer.

Yram comes through the door as Doc proceeds, radiant and talkative, pulling Evol aside for a moment to whisper something in his ear, and disappears through another

**Well, beauty  
can surface in the  
unlikeliest of...we have  
to keep our senses  
cleansed and our  
faculties pitched to  
recognize it. The  
conditions we  
live in now might be  
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body leads.**

— John O'Kane

er door to the sound of joyful laughter. As Doc pronounces Wyatt's condition "normal," Evol urges the latter from the mattress with Doc's help, and they escort him out the door and into the living room where a meeting appears to be taking place. A couple of males and three females are discussing something that happened earlier that day on the beach. Evol introduces Wyatt to the group, which welcomes him with sympathetic eye contact.

"This is our processing pad," Evol intones.

"We meet new members here and give them a workshop on what to expect and how to cope and survive on the strip once they cross over. And we debrief those transitioning back to regular society for whatever reasons, temporarily because of family issues or permanently because they just can't hack it any longer. Some who haven't fully immersed into our world occasionally need time out, and that's virtually all of us at some point since it's not easy to perfect a better society. And sometimes we have to hook up with our legal liaisons to deal with cops and other issues."

Wyatt doesn't seem to recognize anyone from the beach strip, but it was very dark and he was not in the best mental state. As he pans the room to get a better fix on the faces, he avoids their eye contact at first, which unsettles him, but not because it's intrusive. It's like they already know him. What are they thinking? The exchange of glances in these few seconds seems to take several minutes, and he wants to leave the room. A tall, angular figure with the dress of a warrior and the eyes of a shaman, breaks the ice as Yram enters.

"You wanna be one of us? We've got some connections on the other side and there's no way you could be a cop! We know your story, or at least a good chunk of it. Arf was being overly protective at the strip yesterday. We've had some close calls lately. People around here want us cleared out even more than they want to get rid of the street people. They're easy to control since they battle each other and the system punishes them. The cops can point to them as problems and scapegoat them. They've even been known to set up the homeless to get rid of them. Residents resent all the eyesores that to them are simply sanitation problems. They only feel secure when everything is squeaky clean and orderly. They want to get rid of all those who don't fit. But they really resent us because we have them figured out. We've been on and off the street and have developed an insight into what's going on. We've seen through the illusions of above and below!"

"Yeah," Evol cuts in, giving this speaker, Raz, a glance that's the equivalent of a high five. These two are the charismatic force of the group. "Above and below are mirrors of each other. The idea is to master the language of how to relate freely and equally and replace all the others we've learned, especially that of competition."

"We need to reverse all the brainwashing we grew up with, the formulas and rules and doctrines that messed us up," Yram chimes in. "There's no half way. Once you compromise a little to get along you're finished. My parents were the biggest sellouts on the planet. They named me Mary because their church told them that virginity was the best value a girl could grow up with. It would help build

character and give her insight into what matters in the spiritual universe, getting her closer to god, free from the limits of the material world. But this was just the formula for slavery. That's why I changed my name, reversed the one those patriarchs passed down through my parents. I completely divorced myself from that mental trap. I've been trying to purge purity from my conscience and behavior ever since."

"And it can't be partial. The only way to get healthy is to taste and smell and witness everything they deny, experience what they censored from your world," a soothing voice wafts from the edge of the group. It's that of Oros, whose presence evokes a beaten supermodel morphing into an erotic angel. She glows with a born-again confidence devoted to the here and now. "Their code represses life. They associate living with sin. It's right in the words. Lived is the reverse of devil. We need to bust through language and experience at the same time, get rid of the false morality in our heads."

"The only solution is to expose all the false links and break free from their habits," Evol interjects. "We need to unlearn every gram of their codes by pushing experiences to the edge and finding true alternatives. And yes, avoid the temptations to blend in above. Victims are created from trying to satisfy their codes. Brothers and sisters on the street are casualties of the system because they can't compete. So we need to build a new one where we can freely fulfill our special potential. Don't be seduced by rhetoric, the liberal do-gooding about the injustices that street folk suffer. We

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have to take charge and force ourselves to live at the edge, as far outside the norm as possible to learn what civilization means, what it does to people, its repression and exclusions. Is it really barbaric with only the veneer of progress? We see the current condition of civilization as something to be transcended, replaced with the results of our experiment. We want to create our own institutions in different spaces, away from the city.”

“Can you do that? Is that possible?” Wyatt blurts, now wakened from his semi-hypnotic state. “Won’t you take too much of it with you and let barbarism surface unknowingly, but with a changed appearance?”

“Not if we root it out with...”

“...but not everything in civilization is bad...so how do you know what to include and exclude?”

“But the whole way that society is set up now affects how we see and understand what is good or bad...it mixes up good and bad and makes it hard for anyone trying to get along to know what’s morally right.”

“Maybe that’s the problem, knowing for sure or trying to be sure.”

“Not absolutes...final answers are the problem...but society has a stake in keeping things murky...relativism is the cloak of barbarism.”

“I’m hip to that!...have always been sympathetic with different ways of doing things. But do we need a big bust out?”

“We need to start over and create a new way of seeing and experiencing, then we’ll have a better grasp of what’s good, and possibly get closer to perfection.”

“Don’t know about starting over...maybe some sort of rebooting program to get things going in the right direction?”

“Whose program? Who will develop it?”

“Find a reliable programmer with the right stuff!...I’m for the trial and error method, developing a low-level local code of behavior, finding quality communities within communities that say what’s moral.”

“Do, or can these communities exist? If so, can we rely on them? If not then we get too much error...and who’s going to find the reliable...”

“...someone has to give it a try!”

“But the current society’s values will doom the effort!...competition, domination and commercial relations poison everything we do!”

“Poison for sure, but who’s to say we’ll be doomed?”

“Just look at the record so far!”

“Which one? Who’s the author?”

“Take your pick, they’re all bad!”

“I’m hip, but what scares me is coming up with a blueprint in advance...what will the unknown alternative look like? Will it be no better than what it replaced?”

“Trial and error!”

“I just wanna find a good hood to hang in and some good folks to do the hangin with...and together we might get a better flow and seek out some beauty in a world where it appears to be vanishing!”

Evol appears poised to offer a coda, some parting wisdom to Wyatt that makes him a believer, or at least an eager simpatico open to further negotiations. While Wyatt seems to feel he has beat him to the punch and polished off his narrative with appropriate irony. Silence deflates to grins.

“Well, beauty can surface in the unlikeliest of...we have to keep our senses cleansed and our faculties pitched to recognize it. The conditions we live in now might be transforming it. It’s possible that it could be evolving into something purer, more honest, where neither the spirit nor the body leads.”

“I saw a real beauty earlier today in the park and...well, she wasn’t hiding anything, and purity was the farthest thing from my...it seems to go with a partial covering. Once it’s all there in your face, and so open, purity vanishes from the dictionary.”

“That’s not beauty, only...”

“...but I could definitely see how some time with her could put me in a higher spiritual state!”

“The spirit would probably have little to do with it!”

“Oh, something...but I’m not sure she was really there anyway. In the last few days I’ve started to do double takes...have to pinch myself to make sure I’m...”

“...that’s a sign that you’re refusing to accept the way it has been and are advancing to a higher state.”

The look on Wyatt’s face seems to say he’ll think about it for a while, as the group begins to disperse. Evol whispers something to Raz on his way out of the room, and turns to Arf and Oros who suggest that Wyatt can stay the night with them in the attic since a couple of their mates are heading back to the strip for a few days. He accepts.

“I’ll see how far I’ve advanced once I can sort a few things out...someone’s after me and I gotta hide out til that’s...you know Willow? She’s a friend who I haven’t seen for a few days and she’ll know what’s going on...hope so at least.”

“Don’t think so...why is someone after you?” Evol asks.

“Well...not really sure, or at least haven’t figured out the situation yet so am gonna keep a low profile for...lots a crazy wackos round here, especially at night on the streets...things can happen you can’t believe...sometimes you end up doin stuff to survive that you don’t even understand, and you walk around in a daze trying to...”

“...that’s the problem with the street...it’s like a dissolving society.”

Wyatt suddenly becomes woozy and has difficulty formulating words. Evol’s image, looming flush against his face, bulges and then narrows to a slither before disappearing. The next thing he remembers is looking at a smudgy series of colorful patterns that he discovers are the timely result of the play of light through a window on the ceiling beams in the attic. He feels the presence of other bodies around him, afraid to move...

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MALCOLM HARRIS

**N**ext Valentine's Day weekend, when it hits theaters nationwide, the film adaption of the BDSM erotica best-seller "50 Shades of Grey" will be rated R. Despite the movie's being pornographic, thanks to distribution by Universal and a \$40 million budget, there's no doubt that it will play at every megaplex in the U.S. The Motion Picture Association of America and its rating system isn't just rigged in favor of the major studios; the MPAA is the major studios, and it likes control just as much as Christian Grey does.

I don't have anything against "50 Shades," but it's hard to imagine that a similarly prurient project without the same backing would pass muster with the rating board. The MPAA is an interest group that represents the big six studios (20th Century Fox, Disney, Paramount, Sony, Universal and Warner Bros.) in their common ventures such as crafting anti-piracy public service announcements, lobbying Congress, and rating movies. These ratings carry no legal weight--it is not against any law to sell a 13-year-old a ticket to an R-rated movie--filmmakers don't need to submit their films for ratings, and theaters can show whatever they want. But the reality isn't so simple.

In the 2006 documentary "This Film Is Not Yet Rated," filmmaker Kirby Dick makes a compelling case that abiding by the MPAA rating system is effectively mandatory if a filmmaker wants his or her movie to reach the public. If a film doesn't receive a rating of G, PG, PG-13 or R, distributors won't take it on, and neither will Walmart. Without a rating, films are limited to screening at the few persisting independent theaters that don't rely on the big studios. Being slapped with an NC-17 rating is a commercial death sentence, but there's no right to due process or to confront your accuser. The 10-member rating board is 90 per-

cent anonymous.

Occasionally we see a conflict between the rating board and a movie with industry pull, but such fights are rare and reveal whose interests the MPAA serves. Last year the film "Philomena," starring Judi Dench as an Irish grandmother looking for her long lost son, at first received an R rating because Dame Dench says "f--" twice. "Blue Valentine," a 2010 romantic dramedy starring A-listers Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams, got a

**Occasionally we see a conflict between the rating board and a movie with industry pull, but such fights are rare and reveal whose interests the MPAA serves.**

— Malcolm Harris

preliminary NC-17 rating, for oral sex that Gosling performs on Williams, before the MPAA changed its mind. What these films share besides getting the rating they wanted is distribution by Hollywood heavy hitter the Weinstein Co. Films without the Weinstains that get an NC-17 can keep it or surrender and go unrated. Either way, only about one NC-17 or unrated movie a year (recently, "Blue Is the Warmest Color," "Nymphomaniac," "Shame") makes any kind of splash.

As "This Film Is Not Yet Rated" makes clear, the shadowy rating board has particular hang-ups related to gay sex, women's sexual pleasure and

foul language. This leads to absurdities such as PG-13 movies conspicuously exercising their one allotted F-word or advanced press coverage for every movie that contains cunnilingus (like "Blue Valentine" and "The Cooler"). The few queer movies that manage to get made have to fight extra hard to pass, and they're often asked to make serious cuts to please what is then by definition a board of censors. Violence is much less controversial, as is sex when it appeals to boys and men--the movies of Judd Apatow and Michael Bay, for example. For filmmakers trying to sneak past the MPAA, it's easier to show the end of the world than a woman's face while she has an orgasm.

None of this is to say content warnings of all sorts are worthless. Consumers have more information at the ready than ever before, and it's easy to imagine an app that does ratings better than an MPAA system implemented in 1968. One obvious weakness in the current system: It focuses on restricting children's access. The national debate over trigger warnings--as well as consternation over awkward first dates--suggests that there's a demand for separate alerts for sexual violence. As a 13-year-old, I certainly could have used a heads-up that although "Austin Powers in Goldmember" was PG-13, it was not safe to see with my dad. The MPAA's system is overtly parental, which is very presumptuous of it; I don't know a lot of parents

who are otherwise happy to substitute the judgment of 10 faceless strangers in Hollywood for their own.

The MPAA isn't satisfied with dominating the market for movies. It wants to totally control American access to film as a medium. But we don't have to live like that. Video on demand is fast changing the way the public sees film content, and it's creating spaces where the rating system is largely irrelevant. On Netflix, unrated movies appear right next to the regular ones--a big change from the Blockbusters of yesteryear which stocked according to MPAA norms. Popular premium TV serials such as

HBO's "Game of Thrones" and "True Detective" and Netflix's "Orange Is the New Black" could be NC-17, but that hasn't left them culturally marginalized. Small commercial theaters have shut down, but high-definition projectors are cheap. Nandan Rao is trying to make his site Simple Machine an Airbnb for movie theaters, letting anyone set up a backyard cinema and connect with indie filmmakers (like Rao) for screening licenses.

In order to displace the MPAA, what these diverse elements need is a brand. Luckily, the MPAA already created one. Studios have been using unrated cuts to sell DVDs since at least "American Pie," and it's time for the truly unrated to take it back. An unrated film movement could define and develop an alternative distribution pipeline while offering a visibility boost to riskier projects. Given the choice between rated and unrated

theaters, maybe some of the industry's coveted teen demographic will opt for the latter--especially if they're cheaper. If a few cult Hollywood players with enough attitude and money to buck the system defect for greater artistic freedom--which some already have--then the industry might just have to drop the whip

Malcolm Harris is an editor at *The New Inquiry* and a writer based in Brooklyn.

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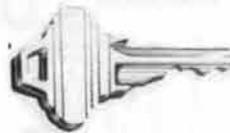
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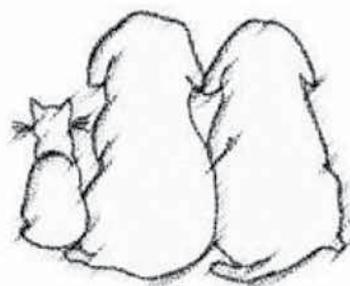
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# WHY WE ALLOW BIG PHARMA TO RIP US OFF

ROBERT B. REICH

According to a new federal database recently put online, pharmaceutical companies and device makers paid doctors some \$380 million in speaking and consulting fees over a five-month period in 2013. Some doctors received over half a million dollars each, and others got millions of dollars in royalties from products they helped develop. They claim these payments have no effect on what they prescribe. But why would drug companies shell out all this money if it didn't provide them a healthy return on their investment?

America spends a fortune on drugs, more per person than any other nation on earth, even though Americans are no healthier than the citizens of other advanced nations. Of the estimated \$2.7 trillion America spends annually on health care, drugs account for 10 percent of the total. Government pays some of this tab through Medicare, Medicaid, and subsidies under the Affordable Care Act. But we pick up the tab indirectly through our taxes. We pay the rest of it directly, through higher co-payments, deductibles, and premiums. Drug company payments to doctors are a small part of a much larger strategy by Big Pharma to clean our pockets.

Another technique is called "product hopping"--making small and insignificant changes in a drug whose patent is about to expire, so it's technically new.

For example, last February, before its patent expired on Namenda XR, Forest Laboratories announced it would stop selling the existing tablet form of it in favor of new extended-release capsules called Namenda XR. The capsules were just a reformulated version of the tablet. But even the minor change prevented pharmacists from substituting generic versions of the tablet. Result: Higher profits for Forest Labs and higher costs for you and me.

Another technique is for drug companies to continue to aggressively advertise prescription brands long after their twenty-year patents have expired, so patients ask their doctors for them. Many doctors will comply.

**America spends a fortune on drugs, more per person than any other nation on earth, even though Americans are no healthier than the citizens of other advanced nations.**

— Robert B. Reich

America is one of few advanced nations that allow direct advertising of prescription drugs.

A fourth tactic is for drug companies to pay the makers of generic drugs to delay their cheaper versions. These so-called "pay-for-delay" agreements generate big profits for both the proprietary manufacturers and the generics. But here again, you and I pay. The tactic costs us an estimated \$3.5 billion a year. Europe doesn't allow these sorts of payoffs, but they're legal in the United States because the major drug makers and generics have fought off

any legislative attempts to stop them.

Finally, while other nations set wholesale drug prices, the law prohibits the U.S. government from using its considerable bargaining power under Medicare and Medicaid to negotiate lower drug prices. This was part of the deal Big Pharma extracted for its support of the Affordable Care Act of 2010. The drug companies say they need the additional profits to pay for researching and developing new drugs. But the government supplies much of the research Big Pharma relies on, through the National Institutes of Health.

Meanwhile, Big Pharma is spending more on advertising and marketing than on research and development--often tens of millions to promote a single drug. And it's spending hundreds of millions more every year lobbying. Last year alone, the lobbying tab came to \$225 million, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. That's more than the formidable lobbying expenditures of America's military contractors.

In addition, Big Pharma is spending heavily on political campaigns. In 2012, it shelled out over \$36 million, making it the biggest political contributor of all American industries.

Why do we put up with this? It's too facile to say we have no choice given how much the industry is spending on politics. If the public were sufficiently outraged, politicians and regulatory agencies wouldn't allow this giant ripoff. But the public isn't outraged. That's partly because much of this strategy is hidden from public view. But I think it's also because we've bought the ideological claptrap of the "free market" being separate from and superior to government. And since private property and freedom of contract are the core of the free market, we assume drug companies have every right to charge

what they want for the property they sell. Yet in reality the "free market" can't be separated from government because government determines the rules of the game.

It determines, for example, what can be patented and for how long, what side payoffs create unlawful conflicts of interest, what basic research should be subsidized, and when government can negotiate low prices.

The critical question is not

whether government should play a role in the market. Without such government decisions there would be no market, and no new drugs. The issue is how government organizes the market. So long as big drug makers have a disproportionate say in these decisions, the rest of us pay through the nose.

Robert Reich, Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley, was Secretary of Labor in the Clinton administration. He is also a founding editor of the *American Prospect* magazine and chairman of Common Cause.

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# INHERITED WEALTH WORLD'S RICHEST MAN TRIES TO DEFEND WEALTH INEQUALITY

DEAN BAKER

**A** review of French economist Thomas Piketty's best-selling book *Capital in the 21st Century* by the world's richest man is too delicious to ignore. The main take-away from Piketty's book, of course, is that we need to worry about the growing concentration of capital, in which people like Microsoft co-founder turned mega-philanthropist Bill Gates and his children will control the bulk of society's wealth. Gates, however, doesn't quite see it this way.

From his evidence, he actually has a good case. If the issue is the superrich passing their wealth to their children, who will become the next generation's superrich, he is right to point out that the biographies of the Forbes 400--the richest 400 Americans--don't seem to support this concern. We find many people like Gates, who started life as the merely wealthy (his father was a prosperous corporate lawyer), who parlayed their advantages in life into enormous fortunes. The ones who inherited their vast wealth are the exception, not the rule.

Gates tells readers of his plans to give away the bulk of his fortune. His children will have to get by with the advantages that accrue to the children of the ultrarich, along with whatever fraction of his estate he opts to give them. That will undoubtedly ensure that Gates' kids enjoy a far more comfortable life than the bottom 99 percent can expect, but it likely will not guarantee a place among the Forbes 400.

As he points out, many of his fellow billionaires feel the same way about passing on their wealth. This means that we may not need to fear the perpetuation of great fortunes

through generations as Piketty warns. However, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't fear rising inequality. Gates gives us a textbook example of the problems. While he is undoubtedly smart and hardworking, the key to his incredible wealth was the decision by the Justice Department largely to ignore antitrust law. Gates used classic anti-competitive practices to gain and protect a near monopoly in the market for personal computer operating systems.

When the Justice Department finally brought suit in 1998, Bill Gates

**Gates gives us a textbook example of the problems. While he is undoubtedly smart and hardworking, the key to his incredible wealth was the decision by the Justice Department largely to ignore antitrust law.**

— Dean Baker

and the Microsoft team were so arrogant and dishonest that they managed to turn the presiding judge, an appointee of President Ronald Reagan, into an enemy. An appellate court later removed him from the case for bias.

While Gates wants us to believe that his software innovations were a great service to the world, most users of his software would probably not agree. His efforts to corner the market may have made him rich, but they slowed down the process of software development.

Unfortunately, he is not the only one who got rich largely at the expense of the economy and society. The Forbes 400 is full of Wall Street investment bankers who make their money by trading a few minutes or milliseconds ahead of everyone else.

This means that they pocket profits that otherwise might have gone to long-term investors. And of course, the Wall Street gang also includes those who made money on the mortgage-backed securities that nearly destroyed the world economy in 2008.

The fortune of the Walton family--Walmart's largest shareholders and heirs to the wealth the company created--came in large part from being able to hire supercheap labor both in the United States and the rest of the world. Suppose that we had full employment policies that gave people a choice of jobs or that workers' right to unionize was taken more seriously by legislators and courts. It's unlikely that many workers would have then opted for low pay and few benefits as a Walmart "associate."

And then there is Jeff Bezos, who made Amazon into one of the largest companies in the world in large part by avoiding state sales taxes.

To be sure, there are people in the Forbes 400 who had great innovations that provided a genuine service to humanity, but they are the exception. As the old saying goes, behind every great fortune lies a great crime.

Gates further defends wealth inequality by pointing out his philanthropy. Interestingly, the philanthropy that he says makes the situation better could actually make it worse.

Take patent monopolies, one of the largest distortions in the market today. Each year they redistribute hundreds of billions of dollars upward while making lifesaving drugs very expensive. (Think of the hepatitis C drug Sovaldi, which is being sold for \$84,000 for a 12-week course of treatment. The generic version sells for \$900.)

A program officer at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation once told me in unambiguous terms that people there don't talk about patents. When I expressed surprise, she explained the reason was the nature of its founder's fortune.

Bill Gates may do much to

make drugs available to the developing world. But if his foundation obstructs the development of more efficient mechanisms than patents for financing drug research, he may well end up making the situation worse rather than better. After all, it's nice that he is making it easier for poor people to get expensive drugs, but the real problem is that the drugs are expensive in the first place. That would not be the case without patent protection.

While philanthropy may prevent the direct inheritance of most multibillion-dollar fortunes, the charitable giving of billionaires is unlikely to go to efforts that could undermine

the basis of their wealth or their peers'. We may not need to fear that the next generations' Forbes 400 will all be descendants of this generation's billionaires, but we do have to fear that the rules will continue to be rigged so that this group and its lackeys in the 1 percent continue to control the bulk of the country's wealth. That is not a pretty picture, even if it is not the nightmare Piketty warns of.

Dean Baker is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research and author, most recently, of *The End of Loser Liberalism: Making Markets Progressive*.



Photo by John O'Kane

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**R**enee Delisle was one of over 3,500 homeless people in Santa Cruz when she found out she was pregnant. The Santa Cruz Sentinel reported she was turned away from a shelter because they did not have space for her. While other homeless people slept in cars or under culverts, Renee ended up living in an abandoned elevator shaft until her water broke.

Jerome Murdough, 56, a homeless former Marine, was arrested for trespass in New York because he was found sleeping in a public housing stairwell on a cold night. The New York Times reported that one week later, Jerome died of hypothermia in a jail cell heated to over 100 degrees.

Paula Corb and her two daughters lost their home and have lived in their minivan for four years. They did laundry in a church annex, went to the bathroom at gas stations, and did their studies under street lamps, according to America Tonight.

**Fact 1: Over half a million people are homeless.**

On any given night, there are over 600,000 homeless people in the U.S., according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Most people are spending the night either in homeless shelters or in some sort of short-term transitional housing. Slightly more than a third are living in cars or under bridges or are in some other way living unsheltered.

**Fact 2: One quarter of homeless people are children.**

HUD reports that on any given night, over 138,000 of the homeless in the U.S. are children under the age of 18. Thousands of these homeless children are unaccompanied, according to HUD. Another federal program, No Child Left Behind, defines "homeless children" more broadly and includes not just those living in shelters or transitional housing but those who are sharing the housing of other persons due to economic hardship; living

in cars, parks, bus or train stations; or awaiting foster-care placement. Under this definition, the National Center for Homeless Education reported in September 2014 that local school districts reported there are over 1 million homeless children in public schools.

**Fact 3: Tens of thousands of veterans are homeless.**

Over 57,000 veterans are homeless each night, according to HUD. Sixty percent of them are in shelters, the rest unsheltered. Nearly 5,000 are female.

**Fact 4: Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness among women.**

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP), more than 90 percent of homeless women are victims of severe physical or sexual abuse, and escaping that abuse is a leading cause of their homelessness.

**Fact 5: Many people are homeless because they cannot afford rent.**

The lack of affordable housing is a primary cause of homelessness, according to the NLCHP. HUD has seen its budget slashed by over 50 percent in recent decades, resulting in the loss of 10,000 units of subsidized low-income housing each and every year.

**Fact 6: There are fewer places for poor people to rent than before.**

According to the NLCHP, one eighth of the nation's supply of low-income housing has been permanently lost since 2001. The U.S. needs at least 7 million more affordable apartments for low-income families, and as a result, millions of families spend more than half of their monthly income on rent.

**Fact 7: In the last few years millions have lost their homes.**

Over 5 million homes have been foreclosed on since 2008; that's one out of every 10 homes with a mortgage. This has caused even more people to search for affordable rental property.

**Fact 8: The government does not**

**help as much as you think.**

There is enough public rental assistance to help about one out of every four extremely low-income households. Those who do not receive help are on multi-year waiting lists. For example, Charlotte just opened up their applications for public housing assistance for the first time in 14 years, and over 10,000 people applied.

**Fact 9: One in five homeless people suffers from untreated severe mental illness.**

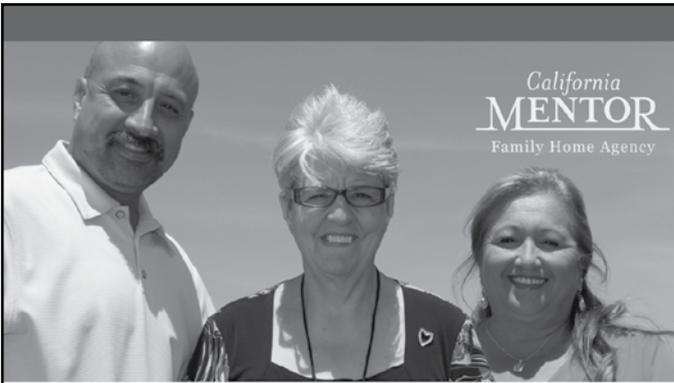
While about 6 percent of the general population suffers from severe mental illness, 20 to 25 percent of the homeless suffer from severe mental illness, according to government studies. Half of this population self-medicate and are at further risk for addiction and poor physical health. A University of Pennsylvania study tracking nearly 5,000 homeless people for two years discovered that investing in comprehensive health support and treatment of physical and mental illnesses is less costly than incarceration, shelter and hospital services for the untreated homeless.

**Fact 10: Cities are increasingly making homelessness a crime.**

A 2014 survey of 187 cities by the NLCHP found that 24 percent of cities make it a city-wide crime to beg in public, 33 percent make it illegal to stand around or loiter anywhere in the city, 18 percent make it a crime to sleep anywhere in public, 43 percent make it illegal to sleep in your car, and 53 percent make it illegal to sit or lie down in particular public places. And the number of cities criminalizing homelessness is steadily increasing.

Bill Quigley is a Law Professor at Loyola University New Orleans, and CCR Associate Legal Director.

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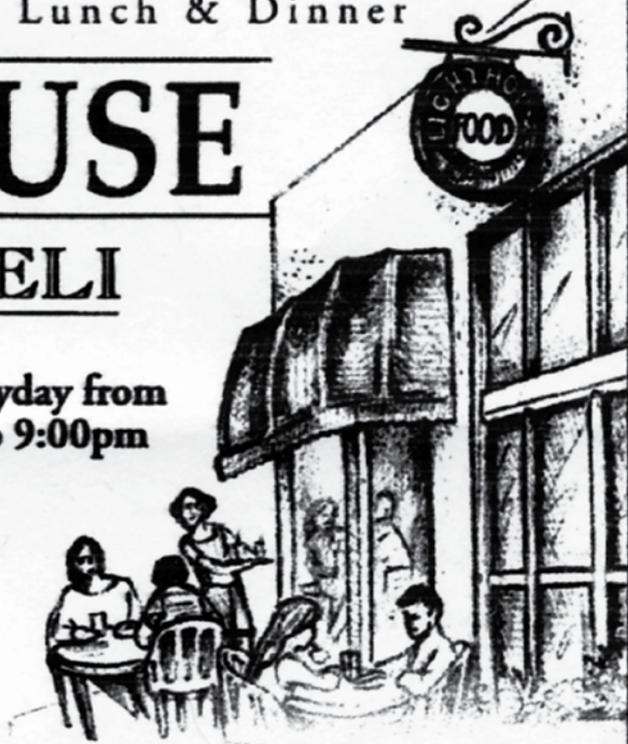
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