poster

living as cyborgs:

trapped in a subjugatory computer-mediated reality that extends to all hours of our day-to-day lives

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Abstract

We describe the unfair and inhumane working conditions that we face as Assistant Mailroom Clerks of EXISTech Corporation. Through compulsory wearing of computer-enhanced ``smart'' uniforms, we are forced to live in a Computer-Mediated Mixed Reality where our every interaction with other people is mediated and managed by EXISTech. Firstly we describe the degrading, humiliating, and downright dehumanizing decontamination process we must undergo every time we enter our Local Branch Office at 80 Spadina Avenue, in Toronto.

The mandatory wearing of uniforms is a degrading practice very much like what prisoners undergo. Worse yet, our uniforms track our every movement with electrodes monitoring our bodies. We can't take off our uniforms even when we're away from our Branch Office, whether we're at lunch, shopping, or just passing through Canada Customs. Our Laser EyeTap eyeglasses are fitted with two metal bands that go around the backs of our heads to ensure we can't take the glasses off. This forces us to photograph and videotape any of our business clients and contacts, or anyone else we might meet, from lowly fellow mail-room clerks all the way up to a judge. We are not even allowed (or able) to open our briefcases for routine searches by police, without first fingerprinting the police or other officials. Our managers have such little trust in us, that our fingerprint scanning briefcases are programmed so that only persons not employed by EXISTech Corporation can open the cases.

This action by our management suggests that we're trusted even less than randomly selected persons whether homeless or law enforcement. Clearly, as Cyborgs, we are the lowest members of society. In this paper we warn you that it's no fun being at the very bottom of the Corporate hierarchy.

KEYWORDS Decontamination, Subjugation, Humiliation, Comparametric Equations, Mediated Reality, Mandatory Automated Strip Searches Under the Guise of Decontamination, Employee Disease Screening and Mandatory Medical Exams, Employee Tracking, Recipient Biometrics, Sender Screening.

Figure 1: Here we are, delivering packages to the University identification card office, where we are required, by EXISTech policy, to fingerprint and photograph the recipients of the packages. Pictured here are package recipients who are also staff responsible for issuing identification cards.

Technically, being employees of EXISTech Corporation forbids us from submitting this paper to this conference. Because we are bound by Terms and Conditions of the cancerous GNU General Public License [4], we are prevented from accepting the fair and just Terms and Conditions of state-of-the-art software such as Microsoft Word and Adobe's PDF writer. For these reasons our corporate policy forbids us from reading the submission instructions for the CAST 01 conference.

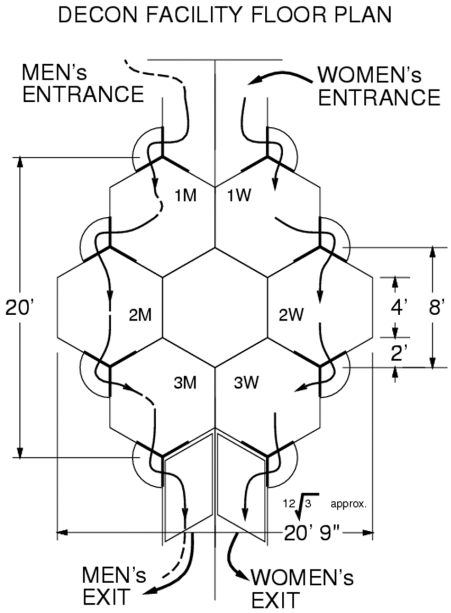
Rather than being allowed to use the excellent closed source programs provided by Adobe and Microsoft, we are forced to use poorly written pieces of cobbled together operating system fragments, collectively known as GNU Linux. These programs, written by hackers, bind us to the malignant terms of the GNU General Public License, as foretold by computer science visionary Steve Ballmer: "Linux is not in the public domain. Linux is a cancer that attaches itself in an intellectual property sense to everything it touches." [5] EXISTech's policies against Microsoft's fair market practices force us to endorse the work of a syndicate of misguided GNU Linux hackers.

Ouijagreement

Without breaking company policy regarding software licensing, we obtained a Adobe PDF reader license by Ouijagreeing to Adobe's Terms and Conditions [6] so that we could then read the submission instructions of this CAST 01 conference. Four of us sat around the computer mouse which we used as a planchette. Since we are under constant surveillance by way of our smart uniforms, we thought it would be better if no one of us actually clicked on the agreement. Thus, we collectively made it unclear which, if any, of us agreed to the Terms and Conditions our management so strongly disapproves of. Fortunately, we were able to summon spirits to be bound by the agreement, since no member of the group had any recollection of ever moving the mouse or clicking on "Agree". Through this process, we were able to obtain the submission instructions for this CAST 01 conference.

We call this act of corporate disobedience Ouijagreement ("Oui" and "ja" both meaning "yes" in French and German, respectively: yes, we the spirits of the dead agree!).

The Decontamination Facility



For economy of construction, all panels are standard 4 by 8 foot plywood. Therefore, the 7 rooms fit inside an approx. 420 square foot (20 by 21 foot) rectangle, and all walls are 8 feet high.

In this figure, 1M and 1W denote the men's and women's bagging rooms where all clothing, jewellery, and other personal effects must be bagged. 2M and 2W denote the shower rooms. 3M and 3W denote the uniform issue areas. Note the turn stiles integrated into the hexagonal room structure. The central guard room features smoked lexan panels so that the guard can see out into the six rooms, but we cannot see into the central guard room. See http://wearcam.org/tpw.htm and http://wearcam.org/torontodecon/index.htm for more details.

Each time we enter our local branch office at 80 Spadina Avenue, we must go through the Decontamination Facility [1] [2], where we are exposed to a humiliating and degrading cleansing process. Management at EXISTech fears anthrax like the plague and we suffer as a result (on our own time!). We must undress completely, in a "clothing bagging room", and then proceed to a decontamination shower to be sprayed with a 5% bleach solution, then dry off and get smeared with electrode paste. Finally we receive our uniforms and cyberwear. The punch clocks are located at the exit of the facility. We don't get paid unless we comply.

Generally, we as EXISTech employees don't mind the decontamination procedure but we find this practice particularly humiliating when we bring guests to EXISTech. We're required to take them in through decon.

Subjugation that extends beyond our hours of employment

EXISTech's strict company policy makes blending into the social fabric next to impossible. The physical and mental restrictions that come along with being an assistant mail-room clerk at EXISTech make it difficult to do anything without causing a major disturbance. Even when we're off duty, we experience complications in business establishments. These problem occur most frequently when dealing with government officials or administrative staff who demand to see papers, documents, authorization and personal identification. These complications arise because, as EXISTech employees, we are not allowed to disclose personal information without authorization from our head office. As an

EXISTech employee, we must send such requests to our head office for Level 4 security clearance and documented approval. This need to get permission from EXISTech creates tension and unease when interacting with administrative staff of non-EXISTech organizations, who are accustomed to quick and unquestioned compliance to their requests.

We wish that we could be like normal humans and comply with these simple requests, but unfortunately we are bound by our employer.

Assistant mail-room clerks don't have much of a say as individuals. We are merely vehicles for EXISTech's corporate needs. Our managers are moving towards total control of our minds. It's as if the neural pathways in our brains have been re-routed through the EXISTech head office. Nerve impulses no longer travel directly to the muscles of the body, but must first get security clearance for muscle movement, speech or action to take place. Our spoken responses can even be bypassed when the tonality and sincerity of spoken words are deemed important, as per managerial judgement. (This is ensured through the use of a biometric device with eight nerve trigger transformers which provides electrical stimuli directly to our bodies.) The audio system built into our uniforms allows our managers to speak directly through us from remote locations.

Sicherheit Zuerst

Our management is paranoid to the extent that all we hear is Anthrax, Anthrax, Anthrax! They constantly talk about how terrorists can strike at any time of day, and are so paranoid that they won't even let us trust people wearing law enforcement uniforms; they make us ask law enforcement officers to show us their badges and submit to being photographed. Supposedly, this is for our own protection, since as the management tells us, "employee safety comes first!"

EXISTech management doesn't even trust the video surveillance cameras in department stores, banks, libraries, and public bathing facilities such as North Toronto Memorial Community Centre (where cameras are nicely placed both above and below the waterline). Yet, these are the very cameras which we as employees find so wonderfully safe and comforting. Although we cyborgs, just like any other normal people, like to know that there are cameras constantly watching over us while we are trying on clothes in the fitting rooms, going to a football game, or splashing around in the local pool, our management explicitly forbids us from being photographed by others, especially when we are not fully clothed. Indeed, despite our desire to remain under constant government surveillance in change rooms, showers, and in public baths, our management is paranoid that competitors might learn of our proprietary ECG electrode placement strategies (discernible from the patches of shaved chest hair). For this reason we are forbidden from revealing our bodies to these foreign surveillance systems.

Management likes to keep us in the dark, so that we never have enough information to jeopardize EXISTech's corporate security. When asked by security guards of other organizations if our shirts conceal cameras, we can only answer: "I do not know, sir. I have answered your question.

I do not know."

Moreover, as EXISTech employees, we are required to photograph anybody who photographs us without explicit permission from Head Office. As a result of complying with these unreasonable requests EXISTech employees are detained in a variety of situations. It is not unusual for us to be held against our will, due to taking photographs in, for example, gas stations or airports. It is particularly difficult for us to avoid taking photographs in restricted areas when one considers that almost all commercial premises are "restricted areas", where photography is forbidden. As EXISTech employees we have no control over the camera which taps our visual field of view, and have no way of not photographing anything we look at. These are called our EyeTap [3] eyeglasses, and cannot be removed. In addition to a policy that requires us to wear the glasses at all times, seven days a week, for up to 3 years beyond the time we stop working at EXISTech, there is also a physically binding constraint that accompanies the legally binding constraint against taking off the glasses. Dermabondor with metal bands that go behind our heads make it impossible for us to remove our eyeglasses, as shown in Fig 3(a).

Figure 3: (a) A close-up of the proprietary security screws and copper comfort bands.
(b) An EXISTech employee shown in uniform, from the back.

These metal comfort bands (so-called because we are told that it is comforting to be secure) are held with set screws that need a special key to be removed. These are called security screws, as shown in Fig 3(a).

Fortunately our comfort bands are made of copper, so that at least they match our hair colour, so that our subjugation is not evident to others until they try to remove our eyewear. Thus the bands are referred to as Copper Comfort Bands.

Safety domes

The EXISTech uniforms have uncomfortable and mysterious domes, as shown in Fig 3(b). We do not know what the domes have inside them, because the plexiglass from which they are made has a very dark smoked tint, so we cannot see inside. We noticed that our smoked plexiglass domes look very similar to the domes mounted on the ceilings of many department stores, gambling casinos, etc., so we asked some of the department store security guards what was in these domes. We got various answers. A record store in Boston told us that the domes were light fixtures, even though they were quite dark. Sears department store told us the domes were temperature sensors to adjust the heating and cooling.

When asked by department store security guards, police, customs officials, or the like, what is in the domes, we are required to reply with our standard answer ``I do not know. I've answered your question, I do not know''. The origin of this answer to the frequently asked question may be found by watching a short movie at http://wearcam.org/shootingback/sears.mpg.

EXISTech "Griefcases"

Restricted areas, such as airport customs where baggage contents are examined, cause extreme tension with security officials. In particular, the briefcases which we carry and must deliver to company clients cannot be opened by us mere employees. The briefcases have fingerprint scanners therefore causing the kind, warm, security officials to be fingerprinted and processed simply to open the case. This gives us so much grief going through customs (or even just exiting from a public library where they demand to search everyone's bags on the way out) that we call it the Griefcase. We wish we could just be free human beings so we could passively submit to being searched, and therefore live normal, happy, free lives. Instead, we're destined to a life of conflict and slavery as cyborgs. Even when off-duty our briefcases that are handcuffed to our wrists are held shut with fingerprint scanning locks that can only be opened by people who are not EXISTech employees. The flat screen video displays that we wear on our chests turn us into information kiosks, that make us subservient to our corporate mission statement, as shown in Fig 4.

Figure 4: We're handcuffed to the briefcases. The keys to the handcuffs are inside. We cannot open the briefcases ourselves. Only people who are not EXISTech employees can open these briefcases. This is extremely humiliating when we're stopped to be searched at department stores where security guards demands to look inside everyone's bags.

Figure 5(a) which we covertly scanned from our annual report, shows a closeup view of this awful dehumanizing briefcase.

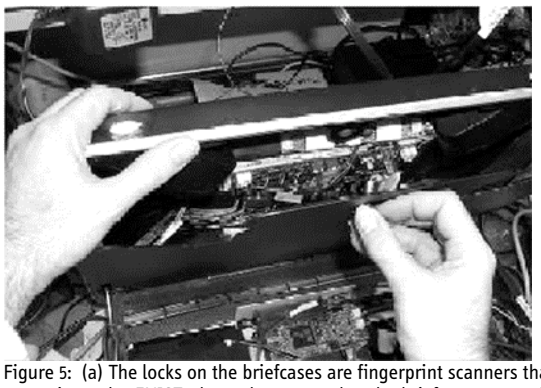


Figure 5: (a) The locks on the briefcases are fingerprint scanners that recognize we're EXISTech employees, so that the briefcases can only be opened by persons who are NOT EXISTech employees. (b) A picture which we covertly scanned from our annual report, a closeup view of this awful dehumanizing briefcase. (c) What the Griefcase looks like, as seen by our managerial staff, looking into our eyetaps, and remotely seeing through our eyes for quality control and training purposes. As well trained

Assistant Mailroom Clerks, we design, build, and test our briefcases to ensure that we cannot open the cases.

It's humiliating enough to be handcuffed to a briefcase we cannot open ourselves, but to make matters even worse for us, there is a video display built into the briefcase, as shown in the closeup picture from the shareholder propaganda in our annual report Fig 5(b).

As assistant mailroom clerks, we're required to build briefcases we can't open ourselves. While we build these briefcases, our managers watch through our eyes, as shown in Fig 5(c).

RFD: Request For Deletion

To make matters worse, if any person coming into contact with an EXISTech employee wants their photographs deleted from the corporate database, they must fill out lengthy forms, with correspondingly lengthy processing times. Giving out such complicated, over-blown forms is

humiliating for ordinary civilians such as us, who detest unnecessary beauracracy just as much as anybody else. This much-dreaded form is known as a "Request For Deletion", or simply an "RFD" (http://wearcam.org/rfd.htm). When a verbal RFD is made, and the official form is presented, the typical response involves many obscene words and gestures; this abuse is hurled upon us who are unfairly bound by our employer to these onerous practices. Unfortunately, they do not seem to understand we are merely doing our jobs and following directives from head-office.

Subjectrights, the Media and Smart Cards

We're not allowed to wear or use other computers, smart cards, or any forms of electronic identification or tracking, even when we're off-duty. EXISTech's monopoly on our bodies means that we can't carry most identification cards from other organizations with us, because such cards often contain a so-called smart chip that is not approved by EXISTech Corporation.

Moreover, we cannot conduct interviews with the media and popular press without first obtaining permission from EXISTech. This is best demonstrated in the Subjectrights form http://www.wearcam.org/subjectrights.htm. Their "World Subjectrights Foundation" propaganda is really just a thin disguise for our managers to subjugate us in all manner of our day-to-day lives.

We must obtain permission from our Corporate Head Office to enter certain rooms. Rooms that require entry with encoded door cards require prior approval, which is rarely granted. Our employer claims that these door cards have smart chips or magnetic strips on them that contain certain personal information and possession of these cards is against company policy. The policy has been designed so that only our employer is allowed to store any personal information about us, such as photographs, thus showing that our employer is intent on controlling us whether we are on or off duty.

Figure 6: A sample of identification from an EXISTech employee

Our unfair and disgraceful management office prohibits us from being photographed without permission from management, even when we're on our own time. Disgustingly, we're not even allowed to get ID card pictures taken to use the Public Library without first requiring library staff to get permission from our Corporate Head Office. The bureaucrats there insist that the officials at the Public Library not be allowed to keep a picture of us in their records.

Clearly EXISTech does not trust the security conscious staff at the library. After all they are just doing their jobs and trying to protect us by contributing to face recognition databases [9] [8]. Like any other normal humans, we cyborgs would like to have our pictures taken and stored in large automatic face recognition criminal tracking databases [7] to help reduce crime. However, because we are EXISTech employees, we are forbidden to be part of this wonderful government crime reduction initiative.

Conclusion

In summary, EXISTech's subjugatory and downright dehumanizing treatment of its employees prevents us from living normal lives. Without being allowed to carry identification or tell people such as public officials our names, we're reduced to the level of anonymous nothings. Without being allowed to even open our briefcases ourselves, we're unable to live independent lives, and must constantly ask others, such as public officials wishing to search our briefcases, for assistance. The awkward eyeglasses we can't take off make it impossible to submit to being searched, or processed in a nice human off-the-record way by customs officials or security guards. Without the freedom to agree to fair contracts such as Adobe's Terms and Conditions of Use, we're not even allowed to write this paper. We as cyborgs now merely provide a physical shell for EXISTech Central Intelligence to control and mediate our every interaction. We're detached observers trapped within our own bodies. The invasion of our personal space is deeply penetrating and our humanity is suffering as a consequence. There is only enough room for one operating system (i.e. one authority) in the human brain, which one will it be? Please don't tell our management we wrote this paper or we could lose our much needed futures as Associate Mailroom Clerks for EXISTech Corporation.

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