7.0   STORIES

Urban Idler
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> *Humans think they make history, but history actually revolves around the web of stories. The basic abilities of humans have not changed much since the Stone Age. But the web of stories has grown from strength to strength, thereby pushing history from the Stone Age to the Silicon Age.*
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> - *Yuval Noah Harari, <u>Homo Deus</u>*

A PERSONAL STORY

When I was eight years old, my dad stayed up late and in his role as Santa Claus, built a desk and installed an Apple 2+, disk drives, a dot matrix printer and a color monitor – but where the only color was green. My brother and I spent endless hours playing on that device – creating worlds.

Now I have children and we have computers everywhere – phones, tablets, laptops and desktops. We can cast screens, and stream movies and music. But I can't just let my daughters play and explore the way I could in 1980.

When on any of these devices, my children are tracked, monitored and manipulated. The network connects them with many good things but also to everything else – and just as we would not let them wander out into a crowd alone, we cannot let them go online alone – it is irresponsible to do so.

This is the world the men of technology genius have created for us – one where we and our children are the product to be treated as a commodity to be sold. Tagged and tracked like digital livestock. This is a disgusting state, and I refuse to accept it.

So I started to look for a place and a way that my children can be safe and free to explore in the same way that I did as a child. This search brought me to the crypto community and ultimately Crown.

My vision is simply for technology to "grow-up" and offer something which gives the next generation the same opportunities to explore and learn that existed before. All the opportunities that existed before the children too young to understand Orwell or remember the Cold War thought they grew up, but actually only created the building blocks of surveillance state as an instrument to fast money.

CHEKHOV'S LAW

In his book Homo Deus, Harari hopefully asserts that human civilization appears to have repealed Chekhov's law – an axiom of the playwright stating that any gun appearing in the first act of a play goes off by the third act. We may have dodged Chekhov's law by avoiding nuclear war, so far. But now there is another gun – pervasive technology enabled surveillance. The sort of surveillance which those of us who grew up

before the Berlin Wall fell down were taught was the root of the evil -- the evil of the communists who must be defeated.

Now this surveillance is the mainstay of the most valuable technology companies in the world. Companies based in the country that thought it had defeated the "communists." My guess is that Harari is wrong about Chekhov's law – and that he is actually just unclear about what act of the play we are really in. Once the gun is there it only needs to go off once. And now there are two guns out, waiting to go off.

PLATFORMS AND PROFITS

When did the short-term profit motive become a license for companies to treat children as their property to manipulate in exchange for their access to modern computing?

In Camus' classic <u>The Rebel</u>, he equates our existence, our lives to the time we have. He then makes the leap to argue, testing us, that wasting a person's time is a form of murder. Camus was being dramatic, but had the seed of an idea.   In out information economy, this seed grows into the assertion that the purchase and sale of attention and manipulation of a free person's time is a theft and assault with the same moral legitimacy as murder. And the trade in attention is a trade in human lives.

There is no license to trade in human lives. This how I see it. I see the technologist as capturing and trading in human lives rather than truly enabling them. They are dealers of the little death, killing our days – turning an infinite landscape of possibility into a walled garden with nothing to see but what they offer for sale. It is not a great leap to see how the algorithms and AI which these leading minds would foresee would not enable mankind, but would enslave it. Enslavement is the path that they themselves have followed in pursuit of profit.

If we freely chose to sell ourselves on an informed basis, that would at least introduce a degree of moral ambiguity. But our technologists have left us no real choice – no platform, which doesn't involve the evil compromise – the sale of our freedom for access to the technology platform which operates modern society.

Absence of choice is the signature of evil. I could call it a moral problem – but stronger language is appropriate. Trillions of dollars of wealth have been generated from an activity which has been institutionalized and systematized in such a way to abuse and influence an entire generation. I'm sticking with evil. At some point this short-term oriented corporate sociopathy became the norm, and is strangely systematized in fiduciary codes of all things.

But is a better way?

STARTING OVER

When you can't see any way out, you go back to the beginning. We have amazing technologies, but we need to start all over and build a new technology stack from the ground up – beginning with a different set of assumptions.

The ground, or the set of assumptions which we begin from in this case is a social contract anchored on a respect for humanity, individual freedom

and the awesome beauty and ingenuity which could emerge from each and every person if they were given the opportunity – just given the space. In the case of Crown, this contract is The Knowledge.

Rather than beginning with a trick, hidden defaults or the removal of options – we start with a simple statement of beliefs and values. This first step is informed affirmative assent to the goals of the community and the platform.

After consent, the next step is security and this is the purpose of the cryptographic protocols. But the security is also offered through a peer-to-peer networking structure which might support limited connections with defined addressed. A sandbox network of peer-to-peer connections where children can play – and create their own worlds just like I could do as a child – on a platform where they aren't simultaneously "owned" as the price of play. This would be one of the capabilities embedded in the Journal application, but not the core. The Journal is the space for play which we had discussed in other papers.

My goal is for Crown to be a platform for freedom – but not in a libertine and lawless fashion. My goal is for Crown to offer the sort of freedom and shared space that you could experience as a child on the playground. No one owns it, or you. Different games are played in different places, and not everything is peaceful but there is an order and logic.

To build a new digital world will take more than a village. The existing team will need help – partners, allies, developers, and businesses working with them. The goal is to create a new digital world and way of interacting online. We will need pioneers.

So that is my story – my part of the web of stories which Harari imagines history to be driven by. What is yours?