



When It Comes To Intelligent Protests, They Live

How an AI glasses protest poster held more genius than people are seeing

"I have come here to chew bubblegum and kick ass...

...and I'm all out of bubblegum."

John Nada

John put on the glasses, and suddenly the real world revealed itself to him. One of submission, subservience and control. Humanity was unwittingly dominated.

Signs that were once radiant and drenched in appealing colours, offering dreams of satisfaction – like a holiday billboard showing the Bahamas or some other paradise – disappeared and revealed commands to us from our hidden overlords; them.

OBEY

CONSUME

WATCH T.V

CONFORM

These adverts that once seemed innocent and mere visual background noise were now on display in their truest form.

With the sunglasses in John Nada's hands and the truth revealed, it was time to kick ass and save humanity from its masters, but also, from its complicit self.

The movie by John Carpenter '*They Live*' is not a masterpiece. It is one hell of an enjoyable fever dream though - and one I would recommend to anyone who appreciates a little irony.

Because for a film that was never considered one of cinema's great works, it has become unnervingly and unexpectedly a fairly decent lens through which we can explain this new world we have built for ourselves.

Carpenter imagined a world where humanity needed technology to reveal the manipulation all around them. Yet, in our very real timeline - one where science-fiction and invention collide on the frontier - we seem to have built the same technology. Life parodying art, but we have inverted it's purpose.

Nowadays, the glasses powered by AI that could aid in exposing hidden persuasive propaganda and coercive techniques, doesn't sound like a movie pitch, instead it sounds a lot like a tech demo. One that would easily find its way onto our TV screens and billboards, hoping our consumerist nature will take the bait.

And it does...

Every, damn, time.

In Carpenter's world, the glasses expose the design of the wider machine. The glasses, such as those designed by Meta, are a part of the machine.

Back in 1988, the exposure in the movie happened first when looking at the advertising, but the glasses on sale today are the advertisement. Constant input to drive us to consume and share more personal data than ever before. Our digital selves converging more and more with our real world counterparts.

In exchange for surrendering another layer of our privacy to Silicon Valley's newest overseers, we receive personalised feeds, effortless convenience and recommendations so accurate they begin to feel like our own thoughts.

In the not too distant future, it will be hard to distinguish between the products we thought of buying before the recommend algorithm got to us. Odds are, we will have homes filled with commodities that add no value at all, and we probably would have lived perfectly fine without them.

The messages may not be as obvious as 'OBEY', due to the subtle change of the overlords approaches. Instead it will be, 'You might also like...' Different phrasing. Same Control.

These systems are indeed clever at how they achieve possession of our time. Through the genius and also dangerous methods of modern persuasion, it now no longer feels like coercion at all. Because it *learns* you, there is no need to force you into the machine. You go willingly. All it has to do, is simply give you more and more of what will keep you where they want you.

All of this pretext now demonstrates the nuanced brilliance of vandalised Kylie Jenner Meta AI Glasses posters in London. An activist group by the name of **Everyone Hates Elon (EHE)** added a layer to the existing artwork, which created a lenticular effect.

Stand in one position, you see Kylie, stand in another, and you see her as one of the Aliens from Carpenter's movie, with the message:

"Meta

WE'RE ALWAYS WATCHING"



The posters in the age of smart phones, of course, went viral. Social media platforms regularly had what I thought was a shameful pattern, where many talked about the ad, but failed

to reference the movie that inspired it - meaning the point had been lost on so many. Referencing Carpenters classic is an absolute must when discussing this protest.

Of course Reddit spotted it immediately. Redditors generally do.

The fake ad itself isn't just clever due to the film connection, it's clever due to the sophisticated technique employed that shows the same reveal in real life, as it once did to Roddy Piper's John Nada in the movie.

This is quite simply effective and brilliant protest.

Mostly because it doesn't demand attention through disruption; it instead changes the way we look at something we already have appeared to have accepted.

It certainly doesn't stink of the grandiose behaviour of such groups as **Just Stop Oil** - who I would argue do more harm than good with their techniques. Annoying the public and being a menace is rarely a clever way to encourage anyone to care about your cause. Nor is it inviting. There is also something rather ill-conceived to protest a raw material that their high-vis jackets are primarily made from.

Effective protest such as this poster example does far more for this cause because it reveals a layer beneath the system that some may not until this point have considered nefarious.

And nefarious these glasses very well can be.

Tech companies have not only now built surveillance systems that can keep members of society safe - such as CCTV cameras - now they've built a tool and governance platform that has the ability to learn *everything* about us. Not only that, it will begin to know everything too about everyone we speak with, interact with, brush past on the street, glance at and just about anything else that catches our eye...

This technology is evolving and releasing so rapidly that our choices of whether we interact with it or not, are passing us as swiftly as consumers buy them up. Tapping into another matrix - one that does not care if we consent to it or not.

Privacy becoming another commodity in this fourth industrial revolution.

Perhaps that's why the London billboard resonates so beautifully in public consciousness - and especially for those that have seen this movie. Although the poster may be parodying Meta's latest product, it drives home Carpenter's original concept and central idea of '*They Live*', as well as it's warning, making it relevant again thirty eight years on.

Everyone Hates Elon understood the assignment here perfectly. Protests can simply be a case of offering a different perspective - one that exposes the systems that are truly shaping our lives.

From the position I am standing, I am getting the distinct impression that these activists are certainly not pro this new technological advancement - but they aren't appearing to fully condemn and fear it either.

They are asking instead for us to look at this new invention *differently*.

With that in mind, I can't help but ponder one uncomfortable question:

What happens to a society when the very tech that could help it expose the corruption within our system ends up being another extension of it?

I shudder at the thought, but I do know one thing..

I don't think I'll be picking up a pair of these new spectacles anytime soon. Regardless of how well Kylie may wear them. Because I have seen this movie before, and I know how it all ends.

For those that are about to trade a little more of their privacy - and a little more of those around them - to this new machine, I guess I'll see you in due time.

At least, I hope so.

For when you wake up and realise what you've slept walked into and decide it is time to fight back against your new rulers, I'll be there...

And when that day arrives...

I'll bring the bubblegum too.

Doc

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