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With great speed we are moving into a society that has been homogenised and wrapped up as a sound bite in a policy statement. In this new state the rights of the individual are squandered in the name of the masses.

Soon it looks like we will have identity cards and eventually a population wide DNA database.

Neighbours are employed to spy on each other. This is currently the case where a number of councils now employ members of the community to spy on their neighbours for financial reward. This can be for something as simple as putting your rubbish out on the wrong day.

Most of this information gathering, we are told, is for our own security and protection. But can that really be the case when so much of the data is lost and is potentially open to misuse? So much of this is redolent of the old Stalinist states of Russia, and I am thinking here of the East German Stasi, many of whose practices we seem now to be adopting and in some cases surpassing.

Many years ago I visited former Czechoslovakia when it was still under the communist control of Russia. I travelled there by train from Austria. Sitting in the dining car on the Austrian side, the tables were covered with fine white linen, cloth napkins and fresh flowers in small crystal vases on each table.

As we neared the border the waiter came and removed this finery and replaced it with plastic tablecloths and a plastic vase and flower for each table. Shortly after, we arrived at a barbed-wire border and the atmosphere changed from pleasant and relaxed to sinister.

During my stay in Prague I struck up a friendship with an East German guy who quietly and nervously gave me an account of life in East Berlin. On returning from my travels we continued to communicate through letters.

Living in the West and in my naivety it never occurred to me that I should be careful of the thoughts and opinions I expressed in my letters. I freely expressed my concerns for his living conditions under the regime.

I got a response to the first two letters.

The third was returned with a stamp across the envelope stating 'Person Unknown'. I sent another letter and again some weeks later the letter was returned with the same stamp 'Person Unknown' - and now with another stamp stating 'Invalid Address'. I remember feeling quite literally sick to the pit of my stomach. I also remember feeling frightened at the time for his safety but also powerless to enquire as to his well-being.

This happened some 30 years ago and to this day I still do not know what happened to Hans. Some years later, the Berlin wall would finally come down.

It is a sad fact that rather than seek social cohesions through consensus, we are becoming a more paranoid, fragmented and fearful society as a result of all these new measures of control.

This will eventually lead to a society governed by our systematic alienation to the environment in which we are forced to live.

A society ordered by the hubris of think tanks and social engineers in ivory towers with little empathy or understanding of the freedoms being squandered.

In turn, for large parts of the community, will this lead to further isolation, depression and marginalisation? ■

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The Last Word: SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME?

David Keegan discusses the 'Big Brother' effect.

The life we live is the life that seems normal. We are the modern, the arrived, and the true destiny of society. It would to us seem that evolution has arrived. We are in perfect place, just how we should be; to such an extent that previous societal custom is historically interesting but in other facets is truly alien and primitive.

Do our bright shiny steel and polished wooden finishes mean we are truly modern? I am sure the Romans and the Greeks considered their societies to be just as invincible and the height of civilized society.

As a city dweller I am probably 'captured' more than most. Walk, turn right or left - 'captured'.

Get in my car and drive the road out of the city - 'captured'. Once, twice, a dozen times? Who knows? Cameras peer down from grey housings watching my every move.

I could almost be in a movie, in a part for which I did not audition.

How is my acting? Do I walk naturally? With ease, grace, style or purpose?

I am guilty of taking part. I need to walk out my front door to get from a to b. Why am I watched? I don't remember being consulted or asked if it's ok.

How should I express my defiance? Should I stop and raise two fingers to the camera? To every camera? Would it be exhausting if I raised a finger to all the anonymous watchers of every camera I pass? Would it lead to a uniformed knock on the door? The fact that I have done nothing wrong is neither here nor there, they are watching you, me, all of us - every minute of every day as we step out the door or drive by in our cars.