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The Bread, the Circus, and the Sugar Water

BY  JOSH STYLMAN JUNE 10, 2025 HISTORY, PSYCHOLOGY, TECHNOLOGY 6 MINUTE READ

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I was watching the Knicks game last night, still processing [my conversation with Naomi Wolf](#) about consciousness and mind control earlier yesterday, when I realized I was witnessing the final performance of a civilization that has forgotten what reality is.

The game itself—human bodies moving through space, demonstrating skill, strength, and coordination—represents one of the last connections to authentic physical reality in our entirely mediated existence. But even this vestige of the real has been weaponized as a delivery system for the artificial. Between every moment of genuine athletic achievement, we're subjected to a systematic assault on consciousness: gambling apps promising easy wealth while creating addiction, antidepressants with suicide warnings read like poetry, debt consolidation loans marketed as financial freedom, and celebrities whose own discipline created their physiques now selling liquid diabetes to children.

This isn't just advertising. It's the systematic replacement of authentic reality with artificial decree—the same fiat principle that transformed sound money into printed currency, traditional food into processed chemicals, organic communities into digital networks, and authentic human experience into curated content streams.

Twenty years ago, [my friend Peter](#) and I thought we could kill advertising. We saw it as an inelegant, irrational system—interrupting people with messages they never asked to see, making markets behave irrationally. Search felt like the holy grail: a perfectly efficient experience where users asked questions, companies responded with relevant answers, and payment only occurred when genuine interest was demonstrated. It aligned the

economic interests of all parties, especially consumers. We thought we were building capitalism as it should work.

We were foolish and naive. Google swallowed the entire category, then Facebook built on it, transforming our vision of rational market signaling into [surveillance capitalism](#). What we designed as user empowerment became algorithmic control. What we intended as transparent value exchange became the foundation for consciousness programming at unprecedented scale.

We had stumbled into the fundamental reality of fiat systems: they appear to offer choice while constraining all possible outcomes within predetermined parameters.

The same mechanism that allows central banks to create “money” from nothing while maintaining the illusion of scarcity, that permits pharmaceutical companies to create diseases in order to sell cures, that enables media corporations to manufacture consent while claiming to report news.

Every commercial during that basketball game revealed another layer of this inversion. The athletes selling sugar water represent the perfect symbol of fiat culture: figures who achieved real mastery through discipline and sacrifice now prostituting their credibility to promote the precise opposite of what created their success. But there’s a deeper layer here—as I’ve documented extensively in my [MK-Ultra series](#), the very concept of “celebrity” is an artificial construct.

These aren’t authentic human beings sharing genuine experiences but carefully manufactured personas, performing scripted roles for fake money and fake fame within fake systems. Their entire public identities are as artificial as the fiat currency they’re paid in and the fiat products they’re selling. Every gesture calculated, every opinion focus-grouped, every “authentic moment” engineered for maximum psychological impact.

This systematic replacement of the authentic with the artificial extends far beyond consumer products. [We live in an entirely fiat reality](#) where every human need has been colonized by artificial systems. Traditional healing becomes “alternative medicine” while synthetic pharmaceuticals become standard care. Real food becomes “organic” while processed chemicals become simply “food.” Authentic community becomes “social media” while algorithmic manipulation becomes “connection.” Even human varieties—male and female, young and old, strong and weak—are being replaced by bureaucratic categories that can be redefined at administrative will.

The basketball game itself exists within this paradigm. What was once play—the natural human expression of physical capability and competitive spirit—has been transformed into a massive psychological programming operation. The very origins of organized sports may reveal this artificiality: major sports leagues weren't organic outgrowths of human competition but deliberate creations by Masonic institutions—[basketball](#), [baseball](#), [soccer](#), [football](#)—designed to channel public energy into controlled spectacles that manufacture tribal loyalty while harvesting emotional investment.

This doesn't diminish the genuine athleticism or the beauty of competition itself, but it reveals how even our most beloved activities can be weaponized. The sport provides the emotional engagement that opens consciousness to manipulation, while the commercial programming delivers the behavioral modification. Spectators believe they're choosing entertainment, but they're actually volunteering for conditioning sessions designed to make them more compliant, more dependent, more predictable.

This isn't abstract theorizing but historical progression. Edward Bernays didn't just sell cigarettes when he staged the "[Torches of Freedom](#)" march in 1929—he rewired gender norms, making women equate smoking with liberation. The 1950s brought us the "[scientists recommend](#)" campaign that made cigarettes seem healthy. The 1970s gave us [the food pyramid](#) that made sugar seem nutritious. The 1990s brought us "[Just Do It](#)" campaigns that made consumption feel like personal empowerment. Each era refined the technique: not just selling products, but reshaping the fundamental categories through which people understand themselves and their world.

We've now reached the ultimate manifestation where literally everything transmitted through screens is programming. Adults can potentially recognize this manipulation if they choose to see it. The greater risk lies with children, who have no reference point for unmediated reality—they're being shaped by systems designed to eliminate the very capacity for independent thought.

Yet this totalizing artificial environment contains its own contradiction. The more completely reality is mediated, the more obvious the mediation becomes to those willing to see it. When identical scripts appear across hundreds of news outlets, the coordination becomes visible. When celebrities spontaneously develop identical political opinions, the puppet strings show. When health authorities promote policies that obviously harm health, the inversion reveals itself.

We're witnessing the emergence of what might be called "reality resistance"—a growing recognition that almost everything presented as natural, inevitable, or beneficial is

actually engineered, artificial, and extractive. This isn't abstract theorizing but [pattern recognition](#): the ability to see that systems which claim to serve human flourishing consistently produce the opposite results.

The question facing our civilization is whether enough people can develop this pattern recognition before the artificial systems achieve complete dominance over consciousness itself. The technologies being deployed—from [neural interfaces](#) to [central bank digital currencies](#) to [algorithmic reality curation](#)—represent the potential endpoint of fiat culture: the total replacement of authentic human experience with programmed simulation.

But consciousness itself may be the one domain that cannot be entirely artificially replicated. The capacity for genuine awareness, authentic connection, real creation—these emerge from depths that no algorithm can fully map or control. The same spark that allows us to recognize manipulation may be the key to transcending it.

The revolution begins not with political action but with perceptual action: choosing to see clearly what is actually happening rather than accepting the programmed interpretations of what we're told is happening. Every moment of genuine awareness breaks the fiat spell. Every choice for the real over the artificial weakens the system's hold.

Recognition doesn't require becoming a joyless monk. I still enjoy watching great athletes perform—there's genuine beauty in human excellence and competition. But understanding the manipulation allows me to appreciate the skill without surrendering my consciousness to the programming wrapped around it. The goal isn't to eliminate all entertainment but to maintain awareness of when we're being entertained versus when we're being entrained.

The basketball game ends, but the choice remains: continue consuming the spectacle or step into the authentic life that artificial systems were designed to replace. The exit has always been there—we just have to remember that reality exists beyond the dome.

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Joshua Stylman has been an entrepreneur and investor for over 30 years. For two decades, he focused on building and growing companies in the digital economy, co-founding and successfully exiting three businesses while investing in and mentoring dozens of technology startups. In 2014, seeking to create a meaningful impact in his local community, Stylman founded Threes Brewing, a craft brewery and hospitality company that became a beloved NYC institution. He served as CEO until 2022, stepping down after receiving backlash for speaking out against the city's vaccine mandates. Today, Stylman lives in the Hudson Valley with his wife and children, where he balances family life with various business ventures and community engagement.

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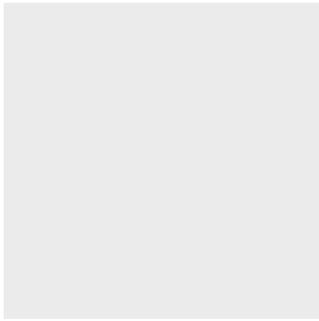
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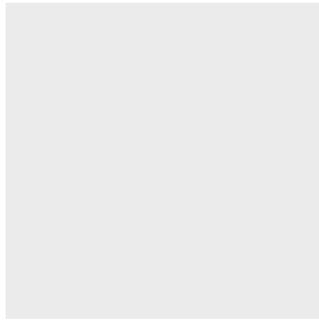
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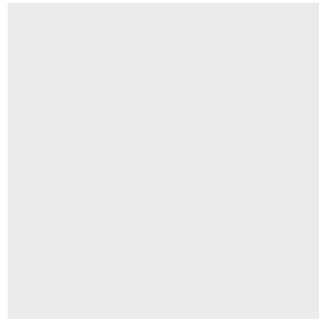
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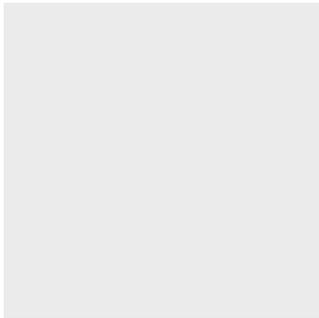
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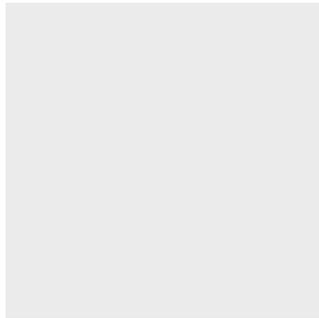
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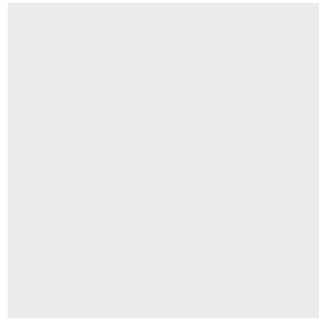
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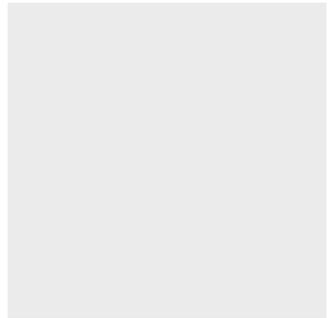
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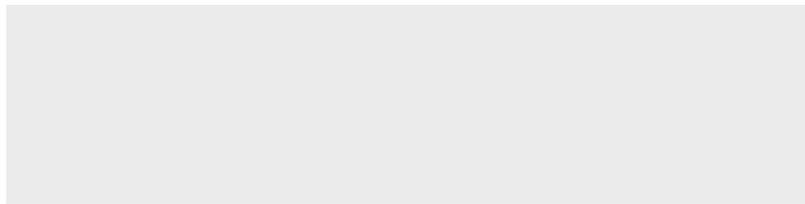
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