

# GOOGLING BIG BROTHER

During the past two decades surveillance capitalists have had a pretty free run, with hardly any interference from laws and regulations. Democracy has slept while surveillance capitalists amassed unprecedented concentrations of knowledge and power. These dangerous asymmetries are institutionalized in their **monopolies** of data science, their **dominance** of machine intelligence, which is surveillance capitalism's "means of production." This continues with their **ecosystems** of suppliers and customers, their **lucrative** prediction markets, their **ability to shape** the behavior of individuals and populations, their **ownership and control** of our channels for social participation, and their **vast capital reserves**. We enter the 21st century marked by this stark inequality in the division of learning: they know more about us than we know about ourselves or than we know about them. These new forms of social inequality are inherently **antidemocratic**. At the same time, surveillance capitalism **diverges** from the history of market capitalism in key ways, and this has inhibited democracy's normal response mechanisms. One of these is that surveillance capitalism **abandons** the organic reciprocities with people that in the past have helped to embed capitalism in society and tether it, however imperfectly, to society's interests. First, surveillance capitalists **no longer rely on people** as consumers. Instead, supply and demand orients the surveillance capitalist firm to businesses intent on anticipating the behavior of populations, groups and individuals. Second, by historical standards the large surveillance capitalists **employ relatively few people** compared with their unprecedented computational resources. General Motors employed more people during the height of the Great Depression than either Google or Facebook employs at their heights of market capitalization. Finally, surveillance capitalism depends upon undermining individual self-determination, autonomy and decision rights for the sake of an **unobstructed flow of behavioral data** to feed markets that are about us but not for us.

This antidemocratic and anti-egalitarian **juggernaut** is best described as a market-driven coup from above: an overthrow of the people concealed as the **technological Trojan horse** of digital technology. On the strength of its annexation of human experience, this coup achieves exclusive concentrations of knowledge and power that sustain privileged influence over the division of learning in society. It is a form of tyranny that feeds on people but is not of the people. Paradoxically, this coup is celebrated as "personalization", although it defiles, ignores, overrides, and displaces everything about you and me that is personal.

Despite surveillance capitalism's domination of the digital milieu and its illegitimate power to take private experience and to shape human behavior, most people find it **difficult to withdraw**, and many ponder if it is even possible. **We are trapped** in an involuntary merger of personal necessity and economic extraction, as the same channels that we rely upon for daily logistics, social interaction, work, education, healthcare, access to products and services, and much more, now double as supply chain operations for surveillance capitalism's surplus flows. The result is that the **choice** mechanisms we have traditionally associated with the private realm are **eroded** or vitiated. There can be no exit from processes that are intentionally designed to bypass individual awareness and produce ignorance, especially when these are the very same processes upon which we must depend for effective daily life. So our participation is best explained in terms of **necessity**,

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**dependency, the foreclosure of alternatives, and enforced ignorance.**

The tech leaders desperately want us to believe that technology is the inevitable force here, and their hands are tied. But there is a rich history of digital applications before surveillance capitalism that really were empowering and consistent with democratic values. Technology is the puppet, but **surveillance capitalism is the puppet master**. Surveillance capitalism is a human-made phenomenon and it is in the **realm of politics** that it must be confronted. The resources of our democratic institutions must be mobilized, including our elected officials. While there is no simple five-year action plan, much as we yearn for that, there are some things we know. Despite existing economic, legal and collective-action models such as antitrust, privacy laws and trade unions, surveillance capitalism has had a relatively unimpeded two decades to root and flourish. We need new paradigms born of a close understanding of surveillance capitalism's economic imperatives and foundational mechanisms.

For example, the idea of "data ownership" is often championed as a solution. But what is the point of owning data that **should not exist** in the first place? All that does is further institutionalize and legitimate data capture. It's like negotiating how many hours a day a seven-year-old should be allowed to work, rather than contesting the fundamental legitimacy of child labor.

*Data ownership* also fails to reckon with the realities of behavioral surplus. Surveillance capitalists extract predictive value from the exclamation points in your post, not merely the content of what you write, or from how you walk and not merely where you walk. Users might get "ownership" of the data that they give to surveillance capitalists in the first place, but they will not get **ownership of the surplus** or the predictions gleaned from it – not without new legal concepts built on an understanding of these operations. There may be



sound antitrust reasons to break up the largest tech firms, but this alone will not eliminate surveillance capitalism. Instead it will produce smaller surveillance capitalist firms and open the field for more surveillance capitalist competitors.

So what is to be done? In any confrontation with the unprecedented, the first work begins with **naming**. Speaking for myself, this is why I've devoted the past seven years to this work... to move forward the project of naming as the first necessary step toward taming. My hope is that careful naming will give us all a better understanding of the true nature of this **rogue mutation** of capitalism and contribute to a sea change in public opinion, most of all among the young.

**Shoshana Zuboff**

from part 2 of her book

*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*

## MEDICAL IDENTIFICATION FOR THE UNIQUE PATIENT

Recently the House of Representatives voted in favor of a Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill amendment to repeal the prohibition on the use of federal funds to create a "unique patient identifier." The federal government will have the authority to assign every American a medical ID used to store and track every American's medical history.

A unique patient identifier would allow federal bureaucrats and government-favored special interests to access health information simply by entering an individual's unique patient ID into a database. This system would also facilitate the collection of health information without a warrant by surveillance state operatives.

Unscrupulous government officials could use medical information to harass those whose political activities challenge the status quo. Anyone who doubts this should ask themselves what a future J. Edgar Hoover or Lois Lerner would do with access to the medical information of those involved in political movements he wishes to silence.

The unique patient identifier undermines one of the foundations of quality health care: the doctor-patient relationship. Accurate diagnosis requires that patients share intimate details about their lives -- ranging from details about their **diet** and **exercise** habits to their sexual history and **alcohol** and drug use -- with their physicians. If patients legitimately fear information shared will be compromised, they will be unwilling to be completely honest with their physicians, making it impossible for physicians to effectively treat their patients.

Proponents of the unique patient identifier claim it will improve efficiency. But, in a free society, the government should never endanger privacy or liberty for efficiency.

Thanks to Ron Paul via local healer courtesy of  
**GreenMedInfo.com**

**Editor's note:** one of the primary reasons mandatory vaccination can not be practically instituted is because there is, at present, no objective way to verify a citizen's vaccine record. This medical ID system would change that, making it entirely possible to require a citizen to provide authorities the digital equivalent of their "vaccine papers," and those who fall short forced to comply with the ever-expanding vaccine schedule, or face fines, imprisonment or quarantine.

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