



Surveillance capitalism is a human creation. It lives in history, not in technological inevitability. It was pioneered and elaborated through trial and error at Google in much the same way that the Ford Motor Company discovered the new economics of mass production or General Motors discovered the logic of managerial capitalism.

Surveillance capitalism was invented around 2001 as the solution to financial emergency in the teeth of the dotcom bust when the fledgling company faced the loss of investor confidence. As investor pressure mounted, Google's leaders abandoned their declared antipathy toward advertising. Instead they decided to boost ad revenue by using their exclusive access to user data logs ("data exhaust") in combination with their already substantial analytical capabilities and computational power to signal an ad's relevance.

**The company developed new methods of secret surplus capture that could uncover data that users intentionally opted to keep private, as well as to infer extensive personal information that users did not or would not provide. And this surplus would then be analyzed for hidden meanings that could predict behaviour. The surplus data became the basis for new predictions markets called targeted advertising.**

Here we find the origin of surveillance capitalism in an unprecedented and lucrative brew - behavioral surplus, data science, material infrastructure, computational power, algorithmic systems, and automated platforms. As click-through rates skyrocketed, advertising quickly became as important as search. Eventually it became the cornerstone of a new kind of commerce that depended upon online surveillance. **The success of these new mechanisms only became visible when Google went public in 2004. That's when it finally revealed that between 2001 and its 2004 IPO, revenues increased by 3,590%.**

Surveillance capitalism is no more limited to advertising than mass production was limited to the fabrication of the Ford Model T. It quickly became the default model for capital accumulation in Silicon Valley, embraced by nearly every startup and app. And it was a Google executive, Sheryl Sandberg, who played the role of Typhoid Mary, bringing surveillance capitalism from Google to Facebook, when she signed on as Mark

Zuckerberg's number two in 2008. By now it's no longer restricted to individual companies or even to the internet sector. It has spread across a wide range of products, services, and economic sectors, including insurance, retail, healthcare, finance, entertainment, education, transportation, and more, birthing whole new ecosystems of suppliers, producers, customers, market-makers and market players. **Nearly every product or service that begins with the word "smart" or "personalized," every internet-enabled device, every "digital assistant," is simply a supply-chain interface for the unobstructed flow of behavioral data on its way to predicting our futures in a surveillance economy.**

I am fascinated by the structure of colonial conquest, especially the first Spaniards who stumbled into the Caribbean islands. The "conquest pattern" unfolds in three phases: legalistic measures to provide the invasion with a gloss of justification, a declaration of territorial claims, and the founding of a town to legitimate the declaration. Back then Columbus simply declared the islands as the territory of the Spanish monarchy and the pope.

The first surveillance capitalists also conquered by declaration. They simply declared our private experience to be theirs for the taking, for translation into data for their private ownership and their proprietary knowledge. They relied on misdirection and rhetorical camouflage, with secret declarations that we could neither understand nor contest. Surveillance capitalism originated in a second declaration that claimed our private experience for its revenues that flow from telling and selling our fortunes to other businesses. In both cases, it took without asking.

Larry Page, Google co-founder, foresaw that surplus operations would move the online milieu to the real world, where data on human experience would be free for the taking. As it turns out, Page's vision perfectly reflected the history of capitalism, marked by taking things that live outside the market sphere and declaring their new life as market commodities. **Once we searched Google, but now Google searches us. Once we thought of digital services as free, but now surveillance capitalists think of us as free.**

We were caught off guard by surveillance capitalism because there was no way that we could have imagined

its action, any more than the early peoples of the Caribbean could have foreseen the rivers of blood that would flow from their hospitality toward the sailors who appeared out of thin air waving the banner of the Spanish monarchs. Like the Caribbean people, we faced something truly unprecedented.

In my early fieldwork in the computerizing offices and factories of the late 1970s and 80s, I discovered the duality of information technology: its capacity to automate but also to "informate," which I use to mean to translate things, processes, behaviors and so forth into information. This duality set information technology apart from earlier generations of technology:

**information technology produces new knowledge territories by virtue of its informing capability, always turning the world into information.**

The result is that these new knowledge territories become the subject of political conflict. The first conflict is over the distribution of knowledge: "Who knows?" The second is about authority: "Who decides who knows?" The third is about power: "Who decides who decides who knows?" **Surveillance capitalists declared their right to know, to decide who knows, and to decide who decides. In this way they have come to dominate what I call "the division of learning in society", which is now the central organizing principle of the 21st-century social order, just as the division of labor was the key organizing principle of society in the industrial age.**

Larry Page grasped that human experience could be Google's virgin wood, that it could be extracted at no extra cost online and at very low cost out in the real world. For today's owners of surveillance capital the experiential realities of bodies, thoughts and feelings are as virgin and blameless as nature's once-plentiful meadows, rivers, oceans and forests before they fell to the market dynamic. We have no formal control over these processes because we are not essential to the new market action. Instead we are exiles from our own behavior, denied access to or control over knowledge derived from its dispossession by others for others.

Knowledge, authority and power rest with surveillance capitalism, for which we are merely "human natural resources." **We are the native peoples now whose claims to self-determination have vanished from the maps of our own experience. The point cannot be emphasized enough: surveillance capitalism is not technology. Digital technologies can take many forms and have many effects. Surveillance capitalism relies on algorithms and sensors, machine intelligence and platforms, but it is not the same as any of those.**

Surveillance capitalism moves from a focus on individual users to a focus on populations, like cities, and eventually on society as a whole. Think of the capital that can be attracted to future markets in which population predictions evolve to approximate certainty. This has been a learning curve for surveillance capitalists, driven by competition over prediction products. First they learned that the more surplus the better the prediction, which led to economies of scale in supply efforts. Then they learned that the more varied the surplus the higher its predictive value. This new drive toward economies of scope sent them from the desktop to mobile, out into the world: your drive, run, shopping, search for a parking space, your blood and face, and always...location, location, location.

The evolution did not stop there. Ultimately they understood that the most predictive behavioral data comes from what I call "economies of action," as systems are designed to intervene in the state of play and actually modify behavior, shaping it toward desired commercial outcomes. We saw the experimental development of this new "means of behavioral modification" in the Google-incubated augmented reality game Pokémon Go.

**It is no longer enough to automate information flows about us; the goal now is to automate us.** These processes are meticulously designed to produce ignorance by circumventing individual awareness and thus eliminate any possibility of self-determination. As one data scientist explained to me, "We can engineer the context around a particular behavior and force change that way....We are learning how to write the music, and then we let the music make them dance."

This power to shape behavior for others' profit or power is entirely self-authorizing. It has no foundation in democratic or moral legitimacy, as it usurps decision rights and erodes the processes of individual autonomy that are essential to the function of a democratic society. The message here is simple: Once I was mine. Now I am theirs.

**This radical remix is based around excerpts from articles featuring Shoshana Zuboff's expressions in interview and writing. Published January 2019 on The Guardian and The Washington Post.**

## STOP SHOOTING THE MESSENGER

"I grew up in a Queensland country town where people spoke their minds bluntly. They distrusted big government as something that could be corrupted if not watched carefully. WikiLeaks was created around these core values. The idea, conceived in Australia, was to use internet technologies in new ways to report the truth.

WikiLeaks coined a new type of journalism: scientific journalism. We work with other media outlets to bring people the news, but also to prove it is true. Scientific journalism allows you to read a news story, then to click online to see the original document it is based on. That way you can judge for yourself: Is the story true? Did the journalist report it accurately?

Democratic societies need a strong media and WikiLeaks is part of that media. The media helps keep government honest. WikiLeaks has revealed some hard truths about the Iraq and Afghan wars, and broken stories about corporate corruption. If you have read any of the Afghan or Iraq war logs, any of the U.S. embassy cables or any of the stories about the things WikiLeaks has reported, consider how important it is for all media to be able to report these things freely.

WikiLeaks is not the only publisher of the US embassy cables. Other media outlets, including Britain's The Guardian, The New York Times, El Pais in Spain and Der Spiegel in Germany have published the same redacted cables. Yet it is WikiLeaks, as the coordinator of these other groups, that has copped the most vicious attacks and accusations from the U.S. government and its acolytes. I have been accused of treason, even though I am an Australian, not a U.S. citizen.

WikiLeaks has a relatively short publishing history. During that time we have changed whole governments, but not a single person, as far as anyone is aware, has been harmed. But the U.S., with Australian government connivance, has killed thousands in the past few months alone. Ex-U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates admitted in a letter to the U.S. congress that no sensitive intelligence sources or methods had been compromised by the Afghan war logs disclosure. The Pentagon stated there was no evidence the WikiLeaks reports had led to anyone being harmed in Afghanistan. NATO in Kabul told CNN it couldn't find a single person who needed protecting.

But our publications have been far from unimportant. In its landmark ruling in the Pentagon Papers case, the U.S. Supreme Court said "only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government." The swirling storm around WikiLeaks today reinforces the need to defend the right of all media to reveal the truth."

- Julian Assange

Excerpted from a public statement made in 2010.

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