Alone Together in an Age of Social Distancing: What Becomes of Humanity When Most of Life Transpires Online?

Lecture III: What Drives the Unbridled Spread of Technology Into Every Corner of Late-Modern Life? The Political Economy of Surveillance Capitalism

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Review and Preview

Review of Lecture II: What Digital Technology and Social Media Are Doing To Our Minds, Psychology and Relationship
I. Theoretic Background to Sherry Turkle’s *Alone Together*
II. What’s Driving Human Interaction On-Line: How Technology Conditions Its Use, Plus Social Factor and the Pandemic
III. New Technologies, New Subjectivities and Their Discontents
IV. The Transformation of Self and Society: Growing Up Tethered and the New Adolescence
V. Nicholas Carr’s Examination of What Digital Technology is Doing to Our Relationship to Knowledge—Especially Reading and Writing [Leftover]

Preview of Lecture III: The Political Economy of Surveillance Capitalism
I. Introducing Shoshana Zuboff and *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*
II. The Central Concepts of Zuboff’s Critical Political Economy of Technology
III. A Very Brief History of Surveillance Capitalism
IV. What Happens to Privacy and Autonomy When the Economy Depends for Profit on Surveilling and Manipulating Your Behavior
Introducing Nicholas Carr and the Evolution of his Work
What the Internet is Doing to Our Relationship to Knowledge—Especially to Reading

A. The Importance of the Process of Knowledge Acquisition
B. The Lost Arts of Conversation (Turkle) and Reading (Carr)
C. An Earlier Example: How Writing and Reading Change When the Mode of Engaging with the Book Changed From Reading Aloud to Reading in Private
D. Are We Witnessing A Transition Between Two Modes of Thinking: Linear vs. Networked
A Central Example: What Happens to Writing and Reading in the Digital Age

A. The Dialectic Between Silent Reading and Private Writing: How the Novel and the Essay Take Hold in the Age of the Attentive Reader—and the Affects this Has on Our Culture (Modernity II—Ulrich Beck)

B. The Shift to the Communal Screen: Writing for the Sake of Feeling or Belonging on a Medium that Permits Infinite Revision, Networked Reading as a Social Act Performed with Constantly Fractured Attention: Scuba Diving vs. Jet-Skiing

C. The Culture Constituting Power of Media of Communication: Is A Post-Modern Age Inevitable Once We Enter the Era of Digitally Mediated Communication?
Two Main Concluding Concerns

A. Are Digital Media Reconfiguring Human Attention From Sustained and Self-Directed to Transitory, Automatic and Distracted? (see Tim Wu, *Attention Merchants*)

B. The Implications for the Kinds of Public Culture and Politics Address

C. In Defense of Difficulty: The Significance of Alterity and Repositories of Knowledge that Reflect the Thought Process of the Intelligent Mind (see Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*)
Introducing Shoshana Zuboff
The Central Concepts of Zuboff’s Critical Political Economy of Surveillance Capitalism

I. Surveillance Capitalism: Accumulation of Profit from the Extraction of Information About--and the Consequent Capacity to Control--Human Behavior (A New Logic or Regime of Accumulation)

II. The Extraction Imperative

III. The Dispossession Cycle

IV. Prediction Products

V. The Behavioral Futures Market

VI. Instrumentarian Power and the Ownership of the Means of Behavioral Modification
A Very Brief History of Surveillance Capitalism

I. Google’s Need to Turn a Profit to Satisfy Venture Capitalists and In Light of it IPO
II. The Discovery of Surplus Data as a Profitable Asset
III. The Advantage of Operating in Uncharted Territory
IV. The Advantage of Coming of Age in the Era of Neoliberal Skepticism About Regulation
V. The Advantage of Coming of Age During the War on Terror
Google’s Original, Benign Data Use Business Model

Behavioral Value Reinvestment Cycle

In this cycle, only behavioral data needed for service improvements are rendered. These are reinvested in the user experience.

Users → Behavioral Data → Analytics → Service Improvements → Rendered Behavior → Data Exhaust

Shoshana Zuboff, The Age of Surveillance Capitalism

Figure 1: The Behavioral Value Reinvestment Cycle
Google’s Evolved Surveillance Capital Model

The Discovery of Behavioral Surplus

Surveillance capitalism begins with the discovery of behavioral surplus. More behavioral data are rendered than required for service improvements. This surplus feeds machine intelligence - the new means of production - that fabricates predictions of user behavior. These products are sold to business customers in new behavioral futures markets. The Behavioral Value Reinvestment Cycle is subordinated to this new logic.

Figure 2: The Discovery of Behavioral Surplus
What Happens to Privacy and Autonomy When the Economy Depends for Profit On Surveilling and Manipulating Your Behavior

I. The Philosophical Underpinnings of the Concept of Privacy: Sheltering the Intimate Sphere and Allowing for the Autonomy Over the Personal

II. Surveillance Capitalism Seizure of Decision Rights and Claim on Personal Data through the Click Cover Contract (Margaret Radin)

III. A Notorious Example: Google’s Use of Street View to Capture Private Data

IV. Why the Invasive Collection of Data is Not a Bug but the Feature

V. The Choice Between Abandoning or Reconceiving Autonomy

VI. The Threat to Autonomy from Technologically Enhanced, Data Rich Behavior Manipulation

VII. The Imperative of Asserting Democratic Control as we Anticipate the Age of Ubiquitous Computing
How the Surveillance Model Drives Technology

The Dynamic of Behavioral Surplus Accumulation

Surveillance capitalism’s master motion is the accumulation of new sources of behavioral surplus with more predictive power. The goal is predictions comparable to guaranteed outcomes in real-life behavior. Extraction begins online, but the prediction imperative increases the momentum, driving extraction toward new sources in the real world.

Figure 3: The Dynamic of Behavioral Surplus Accumulation
Surveillance Capitalism also Drives 21st Century Mergers and Acquisition

Alphabet
- $3.1B acquisition of DoubleClick
- $1.7B acquisition of YouTube
- $830B market cap
- Google's purchase of Nest signaled their shift towards smart home products.

Microsoft
- $6.3B acquisition of aQuantive
- $8.5B acquisition of Skype
- $7.2B acquisition of Nokia
- $26.2B acquisition of LinkedIn
- The Microsoft acquisition of LinkedIn is the largest of the Big Five, followed by Facebook's WhatsApp acquisition.

(source: https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-big-five-largest-acquisitions-by-tech-company/)
Apple as the Outlier

Apple has the least amount of acquisitions over $1 billion.

Dialog Semiconductor
Manufacturer of semiconductor-based system solutions
The takeover of Dialog Semiconductor brought more of Apple's product design in-house and expanded the company's European footprint.

Shazam
Music discovery app
Adding Shazam to the fold boosted Apple's music industry prowess by merging the music discovery app with Apple's streaming service.

Beats Electronics
Audio software and music streaming service
The Beats acquisition amplified Apple's services by expanding their product offerings and leveraging the experience of Beats Electronics executives.

NeXT
Software development company
The NeXT takeover was a strategic move to bring Steve Jobs back onto Apple's leadership team, also allowing Apple to access the NeXTSTEP operating system.

Anobit
Flash memory controller design
By leveraging Anobit's flash memory components, Apple was able to bring another crucial part of their product manufacturing process in-house.

(source: https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-big-five-largest-acquisitions-by-tech-company/)