

A COUP FROM ABOVE

*He shook with hate for things he'd never seen,
Pined for a love abstracted from its object,
And was oppressed as he had never been.*

—W. H. AUDEN

SONNETS FROM CHINA, III

Surveillance capitalism departs from the history of market capitalism in three startling ways. First, it insists on the privilege of unfettered freedom *and* knowledge. Second, it abandons long-standing organic reciprocities with people. Third, the specter of life in the hive betrays a collectivist social vision sustained by radical indifference and its material expression in Big Other. In this chapter we explore each of these departures from historical norms and then face the question that they raise: is surveillance capitalism merely “capitalism”?

I. *Freedom and Knowledge*

Surveillance capitalists are no different from other capitalists in demanding freedom from any sort of constraint. They insist upon the “freedom to” launch every novel practice while aggressively asserting the necessity of their “freedom from” law and regulation. This classic pattern reflects two bedrock assumptions about capitalism made by its own theorists: The first is that markets are intrinsically *unknowable*. The second is that the ignorance produced by this lack of knowledge requires wide-ranging *freedom* of action for market actors.

The notion that ignorance and freedom are essential characteristics of capitalism is rooted in the conditions of life before the advent of modern systems of communication and transportation, let alone global digital networks, the internet, or the ubiquitous computational, sensate, actuating architectures of Big Other. Until the last few moments of the human story, life was necessarily local, and the "whole" was necessarily invisible to the "part."

Adam Smith's famous metaphor of the "invisible hand" drew on these enduring realities of human life. Each individual, Smith reasoned, employs his capital locally in pursuit of immediate comforts and necessities. Each one attends to "his own security... his own gain... led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention." That end is the efficient employment of capital in the broader market: the wealth of nations. The individual actions that produce efficient markets add up to a staggeringly complex pattern, a mystery that no one person or entity could hope to know or understand, let alone to direct: "The statesman, who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever..."²¹

The neoliberal economist Friedrich Hayek, whose work we discussed briefly in Chapter 2 as the foundation for the market-privileging economic policies of the past half century, drew the most basic tenets of his arguments from Smith's assumptions about the whole and the part. "Adam Smith," Hayek wrote, "was the first to perceive that we have stumbled upon methods of ordering human economic cooperation that exceed the limits of our knowledge and perception. His 'invisible hand' had perhaps better have been described as an invisible or unsurveyable pattern."²²

As with Planck, Meyer, and Skinner, both Hayek and Smith unequivocally link freedom and ignorance. In Hayek's framing, the mystery of the market is that a great many people can behave effectively while remaining ignorant of the whole. Individuals not only *can* choose freely, but they *must* freely choose their own pursuits because there is no alternative, no source of total knowledge or conscious control to guide them. "Human design" is impossible, Hayek says, because the relevant information flows are "beyond the span of the control of any one mind." The market dynamic makes it possible

for people to operate in ignorance without "anyone having to tell them what to do."²³

Hayek chose the market over democracy, arguing that the market system enabled not only the division of labor but also "the coordinated utilization of resources based on *equally divided knowledge*." This system, he argued, is the only one compatible with freedom. Perhaps some other kind of civilization might have been devised, he reckoned, "like the 'state' of the termite ants," but it would not be compatible with human freedom.⁴ Something is awry. It is true that many capitalists, including surveillance capitalists, vigorously employ these centuries-old justifications for their freedom when they reject regulatory, legislative, judicial, societal, or any other form of public interference in their methods of operation. However, Big Other and the steady application of instrumentalitarian power challenge the classic *quid pro quo* of freedom for ignorance.

When it comes to surveillance capitalist operations, the "market" is no longer invisible, certainly not in the way that Smith or Hayek imagined. The competitive struggle among surveillance capitalists produces the compulsion toward totality. Total information tends toward certainty and the promise of guaranteed outcomes. These operations mean that the supply and demand of behavioral futures markets are rendered in infinite detail. Surveillance capitalism thus replaces mystery with certainty as it substitutes rendition, behavioral modification, and prediction for the old "unsurveyable pattern." This is a fundamental reversal of the classic ideal of the "market" as intrinsically unknowable.

Recall Mark Zuckerberg's boast that Facebook would know every book, film, and song a person had ever consumed and that its predictive models would tell you what bar to go to when you arrive in a strange city, where the bartender would have your favorite drink waiting.⁵ As the head of Facebook's data science team once reflected, "This is the first time the world has seen this scale and quality of data about human communication.... For the first time, we have a microscope that... lets us examine social behavior at a very fine level that we've never been able to see before...." ⁶ A top Facebook engineer put it succinctly: "We are trying to map out the graph of everything in the world and how it relates to each other."⁷

The same objectives are echoed in the other leading surveillance capitalist firms. As Google's Eric Schmidt observed in 2010, "You give us more information about you, about your friends, and we can improve the quality of our searches. We don't need you to type at all. We know where you are. We know where you've been. We can more or less know what you're thinking about." Satya Nadella of Microsoft understands all physical and institutional spaces, people, and social relationships as indexable and searchable: all of it subjected to machine reasoning, pattern recognition, prediction, preemption, interruption, and modification.⁹

Surveillance capitalism is not the old capitalism, and its leaders are not Smith's or even Hayek's capitalists. Under this regime, freedom and ignorance are no longer twin born, no longer two sides of the same coin called mystery. Surveillance capitalism is instead defined by an unprecedented convergence of freedom *and* knowledge. The degree of that convergence corresponds exactly to the scope of instrumental power. This unimpeded accumulation of power effectively hijacks the division of learning in society, instituting the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion upon which surveillance revenues depend. Surveillance capitalists claim the freedom to order knowledge, and then they leverage that knowledge advantage in order to protect and expand their freedom.

Although there is nothing unusual about the prospect of capitalist enterprises seeking every kind of knowledge advantage in a competitive marketplace, the surveillance capitalist capabilities that translate ignorance into knowledge are unprecedented because they rely on the one resource that distinguishes the surveillance capitalists from traditional utopianists: the financial and intellectual capital that permits the actual transformation of the world, materialized in the continuously expanding architectures of Big Other. More astonishing still is that surveillance capital derives from the disposition of human experience, operationalized in its unilateral and pervasive programs of rendition: *our lives are scraped and sold to fund their freedom and our subjugation, their knowledge and our ignorance about what they know.*

This new condition unravels the neoliberal justification for the evasion of the double movement and the triumph of raw capitalism: its free markets, free-market actors, and self-regulating enterprises. It suggests that surveillance capitalists mastered the rhetoric and political genius of the

neoliberal ideological defense while pursuing a novel logic of accumulation that belies the most fundamental postulates of the capitalist worldview. It's not just that the cards have been reshuffled; the rules of the game have been transformed into something that is both unprecedented and unimaginable outside the digital milieu and the vast resources of wealth and scientific prowess that the new applied utopianists bring to the table.

We have carefully examined surveillance capitalism's novel foundational mechanisms, economic imperatives, gathering power, and societal objectives. One conclusion of our investigations is that surveillance capitalism's command and control of the division of learning in society are the signature feature that breaks with the old justifications of the invisible hand and its entitlements. The combination of knowledge and freedom works to accelerate the asymmetry of power between surveillance capitalists and the societies in which they operate. This cycle will be broken only when we acknowledge as citizens, as societies, and indeed as a civilization that *surveillance capitalists know too much to qualify for freedom.*

III. After Reciprocity

In another decisive break with capitalism's past, surveillance capitalists abandon the organic reciprocities with people that have long been a mark of capitalism's endurance and adaptability. Symbolized in the twentieth century by Ford's five-dollar day, these reciprocities hearken back to Adam Smith's original insights into the productive social relations of capitalism, in which firms rely on people as employees and customers. Smith argued that price increases had to be balanced with wage increases "so that the labourer may still be able to purchase that quantity of those necessary articles which the state of the demand for labour... requires that he should have."¹⁰ The shareholder-value movement and globalization went a long way toward destroying this centuries-old social contract between capitalism and its communities, substituting formal indifference for reciprocity. Surveillance capitalism goes further. It not only jettisons Smith, but also formally rescinds any remaining reciprocities with its societies.

First, surveillance capitalists no longer rely on people as consumers. Instead, the axis of supply and demand orients the surveillance capitalist firm

to businesses intent on anticipating the behavior of populations, groups, and individuals. The result, as we have seen, is that "users" are sources of raw material for a digital-age production process aimed at a new business customer. Where individual consumers continue to exist in surveillance capitalist operations—purchasing Roomba vacuum cleaners, dolls that spy, smart vodka bottles, or behavior-based insurance policies, just to name a few examples—social relations are no longer founded on mutual exchange. In these and many other instances, products and services are merely hosts for surveillance capitalism's parasitic operations.

Second, by historical standards the large surveillance capitalists employ relatively few people compared to their unprecedented computational resources. This pattern, in which a small, highly educated workforce leverages the power of a massive capital-intensive infrastructure, is called "hyperscale." The historical discontinuity of the hyperscale business operation becomes apparent by comparing seven decades of GM employment levels and market capitalization to recent post-IPO data from Google and Facebook. (I have confined the comparison here to Google and Facebook because both were pure surveillance capitalist firms even before their public offerings.)

From the time they went public to 2016, Google and Facebook steadily climbed to the heights of market capitalization, with Google reaching \$52 billion by the end of 2016 and Facebook reaching \$332 billion, without Google ever employing more than 75,000 people or Facebook more than 18,000. General Motors took four decades to reach its highest market capitalization of \$225.15 billion in 1965, when it employed 735,000 women and men.¹¹ Most startling is that GM employed more people during the height of the Great Depression than either Google or Facebook employs at their heights of market capitalization.

The GM pattern is the iconic story of the United States in the twentieth century, before globalization, neoliberalism, the shareholder-value movement, and plutocracy unraveled the public corporation and the institutions of the double movement. Those institutions rationalized GM's employment policies with fair labor practices, unionization, and collective bargaining, emblematic of stable reciprocities during the pre-globalization decades of the twentieth century. In the 1950s, for example, 80 percent of adults said that

"big business" was a good thing for the country, 66 percent believed that business required little or no change, and 60 percent agreed that "the profits of large companies help make things better for everyone who buys their products or services."¹²

Although some critics blamed these reciprocities for GM's failure to adapt to global competition in the late 1980s, leading eventually to its bankruptcy in 2009, analyses have shown that chronic managerial complacency and doomed financial strategies bore the greatest share of responsibility for the firm's legendary decline, a conclusion that is fortified by the successes of the German automobile industry in the twenty-first century, where strong labor institutions formally share decision making authority.¹³

Hyperscale firms have become emblematic of modern digital capitalism, and as capitalist inventions they present significant social and economic challenges, including their impact on employment and wages, industry concentration, and monopoly.¹⁴ In 2017, 24 hyperscale firms operated 320 data centers with anywhere between thousands and millions of servers (Google and Facebook were among the largest).¹⁵

Not all hyperscale firms are surveillance capitalists, however, and our focus here is restricted to the convergence of these two domains. The surveillance capitalists that operate at hyperscale or outsource to hyperscale operations dramatically diminish any reliance on their societies as sources of employees, and the few for whom they do compete, as we have seen, are drawn from the most-rarefied strata of data science.

The absence of organic reciprocities with people as either sources of consumers or employees is a matter of exceptional importance in light of the historical relationship between market capitalism and democracy. In fact, the origins of democracy in both America and Britain have been traced to these very reciprocities. In America the violation of consumer reciprocities awakened an unstoppable march toward liberty as economic power translated into political power. A half century later in Britain, a grudging, practical, self-interested respect for the necessary interdependence of capital and labor translated into new patterns of political power, expressed in the gradual expansion of the franchise and the nonviolent shift to more-inclusive democratic institutions. Even a brief glance at these world-altering histories can

help us grasp the degree to which surveillance capitalism diverges from capitalism's past.

The American Revolution is the outstanding example of how the reciprocities of consumption contributed to the rise of democracy. Historian T. H. Breen argues in his pathbreaking study *The Marketplace of Revolution* that it was the violation of these reciprocities that set the Revolution into motion, uniting disparate provincial strangers into a radical new patriotic force. Breen explains that American colonists had come to depend upon the "empire of goods" imported from England and that this dependency instilled the sense of a reciprocal social contract: "For ordinary people, the palpable experience of participating in an expanding Anglo-American consumer market intensified their sense of a 'genuine partnership' with England.¹⁶ Eventually, the British Parliament famously misjudged the rights and obligations of this partnership, imposing a series of taxes that turned imported goods such as cloth and tea into "symbols of imperial oppression." Breen describes the originality of a political movement born in the shared experience of consumption, the outrage at the violation of essential producer-consumer interdependencies, and the determination to make "goods speak to power."

The translation of consumer expectations into democratic revolution occurred in three waves, beginning in 1765, when the Stamp Act triggered popular protests, riots, and organized resistance finally expressed in the "nonimportation movement" (today we would call it a consumer boycott). As Breen tells it, the details of the Stamp Act were less important than the colonists' realization that England did not perceive them as political or economic equals bound in mutually beneficial reciprocities: "By compromising the Americans' ability to purchase the goods they desired, Parliament had revealed an intention to treat the colonists like second-class subjects," levying a heavy price "on the pursuit of material happiness."¹⁷ The Stamp Act was experienced as a violation of the colonists' rights not only as subjects of the empire but also as consumers of the empire: it was the first translation of consumers' economic power into political power, a "radically new form of politics" in which the most ordinary members of colonial society experienced "an exhilarating surge of empowerment."¹⁸ Parliament withdrew the Stamp Act before the nonimportation movement could effectively spread across the

colonies, and it appeared that the principle of "no taxation without representation" had prevailed.

When the Townshend Acts were passed just two years later, in 1767, this time imposing taxes on a range of imported goods, a new wave of outrage mobilized people in every colony. Detailed nonimportation agreements formed consumer sacrifice into the front line of political resistance. The shared experience of violated expectations cut across regional, religious, and cultural differences, providing a new basis for social solidarity.¹⁹ By 1770, the Townshend Acts were also repealed, and once again it seemed that a full-blown rebellion would be avoided.

The 1773 Tea Act plunged the colonies into a new phase of resistance that shifted the political focus from nonimportation, which depended upon merchants holding the line, to *nonconsumption*, which demanded the participation of all individuals in the unique solidarity of their shared status as customers.²⁰ It was in this context that Samuel Adams proclaimed that the cause of liberty "depended on the ability of the American people to free themselves from 'the Baubles of Britain.'"²⁰

British goods had so thoroughly come to symbolize dependency and oppression that when the tiny impoverished community of Harvard, Massachusetts, gathered to discuss the merchant vessels arriving in Boston Harbor loaded with chests of tea, they deemed it "a matter of as interesting and important a nature when viewed in all its consequences not only to this Town and Province, but to America in general, and that for ages and generations to come, as ever came under the deliberation of this Town."²¹

A year later, in 1774, the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia and produced a "grand scheme" to abolish trade with England. It brought to fruition a brilliantly original strategy of consumer resistance to political oppression," Breen writes, "one that had invited Americans to think of themselves as Americans even before they entertained a thought of independence."²²

In early-nineteenth-century Britain, as Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson have shown, the rise of democracy was inextricably bound to industrial capitalism's dependency on the "masses" and their contribution to the prosperity necessitated by the new organization of production.²³ The rise

of volume production and its wage-earning labor force established British workers' economic power and led to a growing appreciation of their political legitimacy and power. This produced a new sense of interdependence between ordinary people and elites.

Acemoglu and Robinson conclude that the "dynamic positive feedback" between "inclusive economic institutions" (i.e., industrial firms defined by employment reciprocities) and political institutions was critical to Britain's substantial and nonviolent democratic reforms. Inclusive economic institutions, they argue, "level the playing field," especially when it comes to the fight for power, making it more difficult for elites to "crush the masses" rather than accede to their demands. Reciprocities in employment produced and sustained reciprocities in politics: "Clamping down on popular demands and undertaking a coup against inclusive political institutions would... destroy... [economic] gains, and the elites opposing greater democratization and greater inclusiveness might find themselves among those losing their fortunes from this destruction."²⁴ In sharp contrast to the pragmatic concessions of Britain's early industrial capitalists, surveillance capitalists' extreme structural independence from people breeds exclusion rather than inclusion and lays the foundation for the unique approach that we have called "radical indifference."

III. *The New Collectivism and Its Masters of Radical Indifference*

The accumulation of freedom *and* knowledge combines with the lack of organic reciprocities with people to shape a third unusual feature of surveillance capitalism: a collectivist orientation that diverges from the long-standing values of market capitalism and market democracy, while also sharply departing from surveillance capitalism's origins in the neoliberal worldview. For the sake of its own commercial success, surveillance capitalism aims us toward the hive collective. This privatized instrumental social order is a new form of collectivism in which it is the market, not the state, which concentrates both knowledge and freedom within its domain.

This collectivist orientation is an unexpected development in light of surveillance capitalism's origins in a neoliberal creed conceived sixty years ago

as a reaction to the collectivist totalitarian nightmares of the mid-twentieth century. Later, with the demise of the fascist and socialist threats, neoliberal ideology cunningly succeeded in redefining the modern democratic state as a fresh source of collectivism to be resisted by any and all means. Indeed, the visceration of the double movement has been prosecuted in the name of defeating the supposed collectivist hazards of "too much democracy."²⁵ Now the hive emulates the "termite state," which even the democracy-despising Hayek derided as incompatible with human freedom.

The convergence of freedom and knowledge transforms surveillance capitalists into society's self-appointed masters. From their high perch in the division of learning, a privileged priesthood of "tuners" rules the connected hive, cultivating it as a source of continuous raw-material supply: Just as early-twentieth-century managers were once taught the "administrative point of view" as the mode of knowledge required for the hierarchical complexities of the new large-scale corporation, today's high priests practice the applied arts of radical indifference, a fundamentally asocial mode of knowledge. With the application of radical indifference, content is judged by its volume, range, and depth of surplus as measured by the "anonymous" equivalence of clicks, likes, and dwell times, despite the obvious fact that its profoundly dissimilar meanings originate in distinct human situations.

Radical indifference is a response to economic imperatives, and only occasionally do we catch an unobstructed view of its strict application as a managerial discipline. One such occasion was a 2016 internal Facebook memo acquired by *BuzzFeed* in 2018. Written by one of the company's long-standing and most influential executives, Andrew Bosworth, it provided a window into radical indifference as an applied discipline. "We talk about the good and the bad of our work often. I want to talk about the ugly," Bosworth began. He went on to explain how equivalence wins out over equality in the worldview of "an organism among organisms" that is essential to the march toward totality and thus the growth of surveillance revenues:

We connect people. That can be good if they make it positive. Maybe someone finds love. Maybe it even saves the life of someone on the brink of suicide. So we connect more people. That can be bad if they make it negative. Maybe it costs a life by exposing someone to bullies.

Maybe someone dies in a terrorist attack coordinated on our tools. And still we connect people. The ugly truth is that... anything that allows us to connect more people more often is de facto good. It is perhaps the only area where the metrics do tell the true story as far as we are concerned... That's why all the work we do in growth is justified. All the questionable contact importing practices. All the subtle language that helps people stay searchable by friends. All of the work we do to bring more communication in... The best products don't win. The ones everyone uses win... make no mistake, growth tactics are how we got here.²⁶

As Bosworth makes clear, from the viewpoint of radical indifference the positives and negatives must be viewed as equivalent, despite their distinct moral meanings and human consequences. From this perspective the only rational objective is the pursuit of products that snare "everyone," not "the best products."

A significant result of the systematic application of radical indifference is that the public-facing "first text" is vulnerable to corruption with content that would normally be perceived as repugnant: lies, systematic disinformation, fraud, violence, hate speech, and so on. As long as content contributes to "growth tactics," Facebook "wins." This vulnerability can be an explosive problem on the demand side, the user side, but it breaks through the fortifications of radical indifference only when it threatens to interrupt the flow of surplus into the second "shadow" text: the one that is for them but not for us. The norm is that information corruption is not catalogued as problematic unless it poses an existential threat to supply operations—Bosworth's imperative of connection—either because it might trigger user disengagement or because it might attract regulatory scrutiny. This means that any efforts toward "content moderation" are best understood as defensive measures, not as acts of public responsibility.

So far, the greatest challenge to radical indifference has come from Facebook and Google's overreaching ambitions to supplant professional journalism on the internet. Both corporations inserted themselves between publishers and their populations, subjecting journalistic "content" to the

same categories of equivalence that dominate surveillance capitalism's other landscapes. In a formal sense, professional journalism is the precise opposite of radical indifference. The journalist's job is to produce news and analysis that separate truth from falsehood. This rejection of equivalence defines journalism's *raison d'être* as well as its organic reciprocities with its readers. Under surveillance capitalism, though, these reciprocities are erased. A consequential example was Facebook's decision to standardize the presentation of its News Feed content so that "all news stories looked roughly the same as each other... whether they were investigations in *The Washington Post*, gossip in the *New York Post*, or flat-out lies in the *Denver Guardian*, an entirely bogus newspaper."²⁷ This expression of equivalence without equality made Facebook's first text exceptionally vulnerable to corruption from what would come to be called "fake news."

This is the context in which Facebook and Google became the focus of international attention following the discovery of organized political disinformation campaigns and profit-driven "fake news" stories during the 2016 US presidential election and the UK Brexit vote earlier that year. Economists Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, who have studied these phenomena in detail, define "fake news" as "distorted signals uncorrelated with the truth" that impose "private and social costs by making it more difficult... to infer the true state of the world..." They found that in the lead-up to the 2016 US election there were 760 million instances of a user reading these intentionally orchestrated lies online, or about three such stories for each adult American.²⁸

As radical indifference would predict, however, "fake news" and other forms of information corruption have been perennial features of Google and Facebook's online environments. There are countless examples of disinformation that survived and even thrived because it fulfilled economic imperatives, and I point out just a few. In 2007 a prominent financial analyst worried that the subprime mortgage bust would harm Google's lucrative ad business. It seems a strange observation until you learn that in the years prior to the Great Recession, Google eagerly welcomed shady subprime lenders into its behavioral futures markets, anxious to net the lion's share of the \$200 million in monthly revenue that mortgage lenders were spending on online advertising.²⁹ A 2011 Consumer Watchdog report on Google's advertising

practices leading up to and during the Great Recession concluded that “Google has been a prominent beneficiary of the national home loan and foreclosure crisis . . . by accepting deceptive advertising from fraudulent operators who falsely promise unwary consumers that they can solve their mortgage and credit problems.” Despite these increasingly public facts, Google continued to serve its fraudulent business customers until 2011, when the US Treasury Department finally required the company to suspend advertising relationships with “more than 500 internet advertisers associated with the 85 alleged online mortgage fraud schemes and related deceptive advertising.”³⁰

Only a few months earlier, the Department of Justice had fined Google \$500 million, “one of the largest financial forfeiture penalties in history,” for accepting ads from online Canadian pharmacies that encouraged Google’s US users to illegally import controlled drugs, despite repeated warnings. As the US Deputy Attorney General told the press, “The Department of Justice will continue to hold accountable companies who in their bid for profits violate federal law and put at risk the health and safety of American consumers.”³¹

Information corruption has also been a continuous feature of the Facebook environment. The turmoil associated with the 2016 US and UK political disinformation campaigns on Facebook was a well-known problem that had disfigured elections and social discourse in Indonesia, the Philippines, Colombia, Germany, Spain, Italy, Chad, Uganda, Finland, Sweden, Holland, Estonia, and the Ukraine. Scholars and political analysts had called attention to the harmful consequences of online disinformation for years.³² One political analyst in the Philippines worried in 2017 that it might be too late to fix the problem: “We already saw the warning signs of this years ago . . . Voices that were lurking in the shadows are now at the center of the public discourse.”³³

The guiding principles of radical indifference are reflected in the operations of Facebook’s hidden low-wage labor force charged with limiting the perversion of the first text. Nowhere is surveillance capitalism’s outsized influence over the division of learning in society more concretely displayed than in this outcast function of “content moderation,” and nowhere is the nexus of economic imperatives and the division of learning more vividly exposed than in the daily banalities of these rationalized work flows where the world’s horrors and hate are assigned to life or death at a pace and volume

that leave just moments to point thumbs up or down. It is only thanks to the determined reporting of a handful of investigative journalists and research scholars that we even have a glimpse of these highly secretive procedures, which now spread across a range of call centers, boutique firms, and “micro-labor” sites around the world. As one account notes, “Facebook and Pinterest, along with Twitter, Reddit, and Google, all declined to provide copies of their past or current internal moderation policy guidelines.”³⁴

Among the few reports that have managed to assess Facebook’s operations, the theme is consistent. This secret workforce—some estimates reckon at least 100,000 “content moderators,” and others calculate the number to be much higher—operates at a distance from the corporation’s core functions, applying a combination of human judgment and machine learning tools.³⁵ Sometimes referred to as “janitors,” they review queues of content that users have flagged as problematic. Although some general rules apply across the board, such as eliminating pornography and images of child abuse, a detailed rulebook aims to reject as little content as possible in the context of a local assessment of the minimum threshold of user tolerance. The larger point of the exercise is to find the point of equilibrium between the ability to pull users and their surplus into the site and the risk of repelling them. This is a calculation of radical indifference that has nothing to do with assessing the truthfulness of content or respecting reciprocities with users.³⁶ This tension helps to explain why disinformation is not a priority. One investigative report quotes a Facebook insider: “They absolutely have the tools to shut down fake news. . . .”³⁷

That radical indifference produces equivalence without equality also affects the high science of targeted advertising. For example, journalist Julia Angwin and her colleagues at *ProPublica* discovered that Facebook “enabled advertisers to direct their pitches to the news feeds of almost 2,300 people who expressed interest in the topics of ‘Jew hater,’ ‘How to burn Jews,’ or ‘History of why Jews ruin the world.’”³⁸ As the journalists explained, “Facebook has long taken a hands-off approach to its advertising business. . . . Facebook generates its ad categories automatically based both on what users explicitly share with Facebook and what they implicitly convey through their online activity.” Similarly, reporters at *BuzzFeed* discovered that Google enables advertisers to target ads to people who type racist terms into the search

bar and even suggests ad placements next to searches for "evil jew" and "Jewish control of banks."³⁹

In the 2017 postelection environments in the United States and the United Kingdom, as "fake news" dominated the spotlight, journalists discovered hundreds of examples in which prediction products had placed ads from legitimate brands, such as Verizon, AT&T, and Walmart, alongside heinous material, including disinformation sites, hate speech, extreme political content, and terrorist, racist, and anti-Semitic publications and videos.⁴⁰

Most interesting was the assumed outrage and disbelief among surveillance capitalism's customers: the advertising agencies and their clients who long ago chose to sell their souls to radical indifference, turning Google and Facebook into the duopoly of the online ad market and driving the massive expansion of surveillance capitalism.⁴¹ It had been nearly two decades since Google invented the formula that ceded ad placement to the equivalency metrics of click-through rates, supplanting earlier approaches that sought to align advertising placements with content that reflected the advertiser's brand values. Customers forfeited those established reciprocities in favor of the "auto magic" of Google's secret algorithms trained on proprietary behavioral surplus culled from unwitting users. Indeed, it was the radical indifference of click metrics that bred online displays of extremism and sensationalism in the first place, as prediction products favor content designed to magnetize engagement.

The election scandals shined a harsh spotlight on these settled practices to which the world had already become accustomed. In the heat of controversy, many top brands made a show of suspending their ads on Google and Facebook until the companies eliminated corrupt content or guaranteed acceptable ad placements. Politicians in Europe and the United States accused Google and Facebook of profiting from hatred and of weakening democracy with corrupt information. Initially, both companies seemed to assume that the noise would quickly fade. Mark Zuckerberg said it was "crazy"⁴² to think that fake news had influenced the elections. Google responded to its advertising customers with vague platitudes, offering little in the way of change.

This was not the first time that the leading surveillance capitalists had been called to account by public and press.⁴³ In addition to the many cycles of

outrage generated by Street View, Beacon, Gmail, Google Glass, News Feed, and other incursions, Edward Snowden's 2013 revelations of the tech companies' collusion with state intelligence agencies triggered an international eruption of loathing toward the surveillance capitalists. Google and Facebook learned to weather these storms with what I have called the "dispossession cycle," and close observation of this new crisis suggested that a fresh cycle was in full throttle. As the threat of regulatory oversight grew, the adaptation phase of the cycle set in with a vengeance. There were public apologies, acts of contrition, attempts at mollification, and appearances before the US Congress and the EU Parliament.⁴⁴ Zuckerberg "regretted" his "dismissive" attitude and prayed for forgiveness on the Jewish Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.⁴⁵ Sheryl Sandberg told *ProPublica* that "we never intended or anticipated this functionality being used this way...."⁴⁶ Facebook conceded that it could do more to combat online extremism.⁴⁷ Google's European chief told customers, "We apologise. Whenever anything like that happens, we don't want it to happen and we take responsibility for it."⁴⁸

Consistent with the aims of the adaptation phase of the cycle, *Bloomberg Businessweek* observed of Google, "The company is trying to fight fake news without making sweeping changes."⁴⁹ Although both Google and Facebook made modest operational adjustments to try to diminish economic incentives for disinformation and instituted warning systems to alert users to probable corruption, Zuckerberg also used his super-voting power to reject a shareholder proposal that would have required the company to report on its management of disinformation and the societal consequences of its practices, and Google executives successfully fought back a similar shareholder proposal that year.⁵⁰ Time would tell whether the companies' users and customers would inflict financial punishment, and if so, how sustained that punishment might be.

By early 2018, a quiet shift from adaptation to redirection at Facebook was already poised to transform crisis into opportunity. "Despite facing important challenges... we also need to keep building new tools to help people connect, strengthen our communities, and bring the world closer together," Zuckerberg told investors.⁵¹ A Zuckerberg post followed up by a statement from the head of the company's News Feed declared that henceforth the

News Feed would favor posts from friends and family, especially posts that “spark conversations and meaningful interactions between people... we will predict which posts you might want to interact with your friends about... These are posts that inspire back-and-forth discussion... whether that’s a post from a friend seeking advice... a news article or video prompting lots of discussion.... Live videos often lead to discussion among viewers... six times as many interactions as regular videos.”⁵²

Radical indifference means that it doesn’t matter what is in the pipelines as long as they are full and flowing. Camouflaged as a retreat from corruption, the new strategy doubled down on activities rich in behavioral surplus, especially the live videos that Zuckerberg had long coveted. In a *New York Times* report, advertisers were quick to observe that the new rules would fuel Facebook’s “‘long-held’ video ambitions” and that the company had made clear its belief that its future lay in videos and video ads. One advertising executive commented that video content is “among the most shared and commented-upon content on the web.”⁵³

Beyond all the explanations for the scourge of disinformation in the surveillance capitalist online environment is a deeper and more intransigent fact: radical indifference is a permanent invitation to the corruption of the first text. It sustains the pathological division of learning in society by forfeiting the integrity of public knowledge for the sake of the volume and scope of the shadow text. Radical indifference leaves a void where reciprocities once thrived. For all their freedom and knowledge, this is one void that surveillance capitalists will not fill because doing so would violate their own logic of accumulation. It is obvious that the rogue forces of disinformation grasp this fact more crisply than do Facebook’s or Google’s genuine users and customers as those forces learn to exploit the blind eye of radical indifference and escalate the perversion of learning in an open society.

IV. What Is Surveillance Capitalism?

Surveillance capitalism’s successful claims to freedom and knowledge, its structural independence from people, its collectivist ambitions, and the radical indifference that is necessitated, enabled, and sustained by all three now

propel us toward a society in which capitalism does not function as a means to inclusive economic or political institutions. Instead, surveillance capitalism must be reckoned as a profoundly antidemocratic social force. The reasoning I employ is not mine alone. It echoes Thomas Paine’s unyielding defense of the democratic prospect in *The Rights of Man*, the polemical masterpiece in which he contested the defense of monarchy in Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Paine argued for the capabilities of the common person and against aristocratic privilege. Among his reasons to reject aristocratic rule was its lack of accountability to the needs of people, “because a body of men holding themselves accountable to nobody, ought not to be trusted by any body.”⁵⁴

Surveillance capitalism’s antidemocratic and antiegalitarian juggernaut is best described as a market-driven coup from above. It is not a coup d’état in the classic sense but rather a *coup de gens*: an overthrow of the people concealed as the technological Trojan horse that is Big Other. 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: the privatization of the central principle of social ordering in the twenty-first century. Like the *adelantados* and their silent incantations of the *Requirimiento*, surveillance capitalism operates in the declarative form and imposes the social relations of a premodern absolutist authority. It is a form of tyranny that feeds on people but is not of the people. In a surreal paradox, this coup is celebrated as “personalization,” although it defiles, ignores, overrides, and displaces everything about you and me that is personal.

“Tyranny” is not a word that I choose lightly. Like the instrumentalarian hive, tyranny is the obliteration of politics. It is founded on its own strain of radical indifference in which every person, except the tyrant, is understood as an organism among organisms in an equivalency of Other-Ones. Hannah Arendt observed that tyranny is a perversion of egalitarianism because it treats all others as equally insignificant: “The tyrant rules in accordance with his own will and interest... the ruler who rules one against all, and the ‘all’ he oppresses are all equal, namely equally powerless.” Arendt notes that classical political theory regarded the tyrant as “out of mankind altogether... a wolf in human shape....”⁵⁵

Surveillance capitalism rules by instrumental power through its materialization in Big Other, which, like the ancient tyrant, exists out of mankind while paradoxically assuming human shape. Surveillance capitalism's tyranny does not require the despot's whip any more than it requires totalitarianism's camps and gulags. All that is needed can be found in Big Other's reassuring messages and emoticons, the press of the others not in terror but in their irresistible inducements to confluence, the weave of your shirt saturated with sensors, the gentle voice that answers your queries, the TV that hears you, the house that knows you, the bed that welcomes your whispers, the book that reads you. . . . Big Other acts on behalf of an unprecedented assembly of commercial operations that must modify human behavior as a condition of commercial success. It replaces legitimate contract, the rule of law, politics, and social trust with a new form of sovereignty and its privately administered regime of reinforcements.

Surveillance capitalism is a boundary-less form that ignores older distinctions between market and society, market and world, or market and person. It is a profit-seeking form in which production is subordinated to extraction as surveillance capitalists unilaterally claim control over human, societal, and political territories extending far beyond the conventional institutional terrain of the private firm or the market. Using Karl Polanyi's lens, we see that surveillance capitalism annexes human experience to the market dynamic so that it is reborn as behavior: the fourth "fictional commodity." Polanyi's first three fictional commodities—land, labor, and money—were subjected to law. Although these laws have been imperfect, the institutions of labor law, environmental law, and banking law are regulatory frameworks intended to defend society (and nature, life, and exchange) from the worst excesses of raw capitalism's destructive power. Surveillance capitalism's expropriation of human experience has faced no such impediments.

The success of this *coup de gens* stands as sour testimony to the thwarted needs of the second modernity, which enabled surveillance capitalism to flourish and still remains its richest vein for extraction and exploitation. In this context it is not difficult to understand why Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg offers his social network as *the* solution to the third modernity. He envisions a totalizing instrumental order—he calls it the new global "church"—that

will connect the world's people to "something greater than ourselves." It will be Facebook, he says, that will address problems that are civilizational in scale and scope, building "the long-term infrastructure to bring humanity together" and keeping people safe with "artificial intelligence" that quickly understands "what is happening across our community."⁵⁶ Like Pentland, Zuckerberg imagines machine intelligence that can "identify risks that nobody would have flagged at all, including terrorists planning attacks using private channels, people bullying someone too afraid to report it themselves, and other issues both local and global."⁵⁷ When asked about his responsibility to shareholders, Zuckerberg told CNN, "That's why it helps to have control of the company."⁵⁸

For more than three centuries, industrial civilization aimed to exert control over nature for the sake of human betterment. Machines were our means of extending and overcoming the limits of the animal body so that we could accomplish this aim of domination. Only later did we begin to fathom the consequences: the Earth overwhelmed in peril as the delicate physical systems that once defined sea and sky gyrated out of control.

Right now we are at the beginning of a new arc that I have called information civilization, and it repeats the same dangerous arrogance. The aim now is not to dominate *nature* but rather *human nature*. The focus has shifted from machines that overcome the limits of bodies to machines that modify the behavior of individuals, groups, and populations in the service of market objectives. This global installation of instrumental power overcomes and replaces the human inwardness that feeds the will to will and gives sustenance to our voices in the first person, incapacitating democracy at its roots.

The rise of instrumental power is intended as a bloodless coup, of course. Instead of violence directed at our bodies, the instrumental third modernity operates more like a taming. Its solution to the increasingly clamorous demands for effective life pivots on the gradual elimination of chaos, uncertainty, conflict, abnormality, and discord in favor of predictability, automatic regularity, transparency, confluence, persuasion, and pacification. We are expected to cede our authority, relax our concerns, quiet our voices, go with the flow, and submit to the technological visionaries whose wealth and power stand as assurance of their

superior judgment. It is assumed that we will accede to a future of less personal control and more powerlessness, where new sources of inequality divide and subdue, where some of us are subjects and many are objects, some are stimulants and many are response.

The compulsions of this new vision threaten other delicate systems also many millennia in the making, but this time they are social and psychological. I am thinking here of the hard-won fruits of human suffering and conflict that we call the democratic prospect and the achievements of the individual as a source of autonomous moral judgment. Technological "inevitability" is the mantra on which we are trained, but it is an existential narcotic prescribed to induce resignation: a snuff dream of the spirit.

We've been alerted to the "sixth extinction" as vertebrate species disappear faster than at any time since the end of the dinosaurs. This cataclysm is the unintended consequence of the reckless and opportunistic methods, also exalted as inevitable, with which industrialization imposed itself on the natural world because its own market forms did not hold it to account. Now the rise of instrumental power as the signature expression of surveillance capitalism augurs a different kind of extinction. This "seventh extinction" will not be of nature but of what has been held most precious in human nature: the will to will, the sanctity of the individual, the ties of intimacy, the sociality that binds us together in promises, and the trust they breed. The dying off of this human future will be just as unintended as any other.

V. *Surveillance Capitalism and Democracy*

Instrumentarian power has gathered strength outside of mankind but also outside of democracy. There can be no law to protect us from the unprecedented, and democratic societies, like the innocent world of the Tainos, are vulnerable to unprecedented power. In this way, surveillance capitalism may be viewed as part of an alarming global drift toward what many political scientists now view as a softening of public attitudes toward the necessity and inviolability of democracy itself.

Many scholars point to a global "democratic recession" or a "deconsolidation" of Western democracies that were long considered impervious to

antidemocratic threats.⁵⁹ The extent and precise nature of this threat are being debated, but observers describe the bitter *saudade* associated with rapid social change and fear of the future conveyed in the lament "My children will not see the life that I lived."⁶⁰ Such feelings of alienation and unease were expressed by many people around the world in a thirty-eight-nation survey published by Pew Research in late 2017. The findings suggest that the democratic ideal is no longer a sacred imperative, even for citizens of mature democratic societies. Although 78 percent of respondents say that representative democracy is "good," 49 percent also say that "rule by experts" is good, 26 percent endorse "rule by a strong leader," and 24 percent prefer "rule by the military."⁶¹

The weakening attachment to democracy in the United States and many European countries is of serious concern.⁶² According to the Pew survey, only 40 percent of US respondents support democracy and *simultaneously* reject the alternatives. A full 46 percent find both democratic and nondemocratic alternatives to be acceptable, and 7 percent favor only the nondemocratic choice. The US sample trails Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Greece, and Canada in its depth of commitment to democracy, but other key Western democracies, including Italy, the UK, France, and Spain, along with Poland and Hungary, fall at or below the thirty-eight-country median of 37 percent that are exclusively committed to democracy.

Many have concluded from this turmoil that market democracy is no longer viable, despite the fact that the combination of markets and democracy has served humanity well, helping to lift much of humankind from millennia of ignorance, poverty, and pain. For some of these thinkers it is the markets that must go, and for others it is democracy that's slated for obsolescence. Repulsed by the social degradation and climate chaos produced by nearly four decades of neoliberal policy and practice, an important and varied group of scholars and activists argues that the era of capitalism is at end. Some propose more-humane economic alternatives,⁶³ some anticipate protracted decline,⁶⁴ and others, repelled by social complexity, favor a blend of elite power and authoritarian politics in closer emulation of China's authoritarian system.⁶⁵

These developments alert us to a deeper truth: just as capitalism cannot be eaten raw, people cannot live without the felt possibility of homecoming.

Hannah Arendt explored this territory more than sixty years ago in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where she traced the path from a thwarted individuality to a totalizing ideology. It was the individual's experience of insignificance, expendability, political isolation, and loneliness that stoked the fires of totalitarian terror. Such ideologies, Arendt observed, appear as "a last support in a world where nobody is reliable and nothing can be relied upon."⁶⁶ Years later, in his moving 1966 essay "Education after Auschwitz," social theorist Theodor Adorno attributed the success of German fascism to the ways in which the quest for effective life had become an overwhelming burden for too many people: "One must accept that fascism and the terror it caused are connected with the fact that the old established authorities... decayed and were toppled, while the people psychologically were not yet ready for self-determination. They proved to be unequal to the freedom that fell into their laps."⁶⁷

Should we grow weary of our own struggle for self-determination and surrender instead to the seductions of Big Other, we will inadvertently trade a future of homecoming for an arid prospect of muted, sanitized tyranny. A third modernity that solves our problems at the price of a human future is a cruel perversion of capitalism and of the digital capabilities it commands. It is also an unacceptable affront to democracy. I repeat Thomas Piketty's warning: "A market economy... if left to itself... contains powerful forces of divergence, which are potentially threatening to democratic societies and to the values of social justice on which they are based."⁶⁸ This is precisely the whirlwind that we will reap at the hands of surveillance capitalism, an unprecedented form of raw capitalism that is surely contributing to the tempering of commitment to the democratic prospect as it successfully bends populations to its soft-spoken will. It gives so much, but it takes even more.

Surveillance capitalism arrived on the scene with democracy already on the ropes, its early life sheltered and nourished by neoliberalism's claims to freedom that set it at a distance from the lives of people. Surveillance capitalists quickly learned to exploit the gathering momentum aimed at hollowing out democracy's meaning and muscle. Despite the democratic promise of its rhetoric and capabilities, it contributed to a new Gilded Age of extreme wealth inequality, as well as to once-unimaginable new forms of

economic exclusivity and new sources of social inequality that separate the tuners from the tuned. Among the many insults to democracy and democratic institutions imposed by this *coup des gens*, I count the unauthorized expropriation of human experience; the hijack of the division of learning in society; the structural independence from people; the stealthy imposition of the hive collective; the rise of instrumentalitarian power and the radical indifference that sustains its extractive logic; the construction, ownership, and operation of the means of behavior modification that is Big Other; the abrogation of the elemental right to the future tense and the elemental right to sanctuary; the degradation of the self-determining individual as the fulcrum of democratic life; and the insistence on psychic numbing as the answer to its illegitimate *quid pro quo*. We can now see that surveillance capitalism takes an even more expansive turn toward domination than its neoliberal source code would predict, claiming its right to freedom *and* knowledge, while setting its sights on a collectivist vision that claims the totality of society. Though still sounding like Hayek, and even Smith, its antidemocratic collectivist ambitions reveal it as an insatiable child devouring its aging fathers.

Cynicism is seductive and can blind us to the enduring fact that democracy remains our only channel for reformation. It is the one idea to have emerged from the long story of human oppression that insists upon a people's inalienable right to rule themselves. Democracy may be under siege, but we cannot allow its many injuries to deflect us from allegiance to its promise. It is precisely in recognition of this dilemma that Piketty refuses to concede defeat, arguing that even "abnormal" dynamics of accumulation have been—and can again be—mitigated by democratic institutions that produce durable and effective countermeasures: "If we are to regain control of capital, we must bet everything on democracy...."⁶⁹

Democracy is vulnerable to the unprecedented, but the strength of democratic institutions is the clock that determines the duration and destructiveness of that vulnerability. In a democratic society the debate and contest afforded by still-healthy institutions can shift the tide of public opinion against unexpected sources of oppression and injustice, with legislation and jurisprudence eventually to follow.

VI. Be the Friction

This promise of democracy reflects an enduring lesson that I absorbed from Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago as a nineteen-year-old undergraduate wedged in the back of a seminar room and straining to hear his instruction of the Chilean doctoral candidates who would soon lead their country to cataclysm, marching under the Friedman-Hayek flag. The professor was an optimist and a tireless educator who believed that legislative and judicial action invariably reflect the public opinion of twenty to thirty years earlier. It was an insight that he and Hayek—the two have been described as “soul mates and adversaries”—had crafted and transformed into systematic strategies and tactics.⁷⁰ As Hayek told Robert Bork in a 1978 interview, “I’m operating on public opinion. I don’t even believe that before public opinion has changed, a change in the law will do any good... the primary thing is to change opinion....”⁷¹ Friedman’s conviction oriented him toward the long game as he threw himself into the distinctly nonacademic project of neoliberal evangelism with a steady stream of popular articles, books, and television programs. He was always sensitive to the impact of local experience, from school textbooks to grassroots political campaigns.

The critical role of public opinion explains why even the most destructive “ages” do not last forever. I echo here what Edison said a century ago: that capitalism is “all wrong, out of gear.” The instability of Edison’s day threatened every promise of industrial civilization. It had to give way, he insisted, to a new synthesis that reunited capitalism and its populations. Edison was prophetic. Capitalism has survived the *longue durée* less because of any specific capability and more because of its plasticity. It survives and thrives by periodically renewing its roots in the social, finding new ways to generate new wealth by meeting new needs. Its evolution has been marked by a convergence of basic principles—private property, the profit motive, and growth—but with new forms, norms, and practices in each era.⁷² This is precisely the lesson of Ford’s discovery and the logic behind successive episodes of revitalization over many centuries. “There is no single variety of capitalism or organization of production,” Piketty writes. “This will continue to be true in the future, no doubt more than ever: New forms of organization and ownership remain to be

invented.”⁷³ Harvard philosopher Roberto Unger enlarges on this point, arguing that market forms can take any number of distinct legal and institutional directions, “each with dramatic consequences for every aspect of social life” and “immense importance for the future of humanity.”⁷⁴

When I speak to my children or an audience of young people, I try to alert them to the historically contingent nature of “the thing that has us” by calling attention to ordinary values and expectations before surveillance capitalism began its campaign of psychic numbing. “It is not OK to have to hide in your own life; it is not normal,” I tell them. “It is not OK to spend your lunchtime conversations comparing software that will camouflage you and protect you from continuous unwanted invasion.” *Five trackers blocked. Four trackers blocked. Fifty-nine trackers blocked, facial features scrambled, voice disguised...*

I tell them that the word “search” has meant a daring existential journey, not a finger tap to already existing answers; that “friend” is an embodied mystery that can be forged only face-to-face and heart-to-heart; and that “recognition” is the glimmer of homecoming we experience in our beloved’s face, not “facial recognition.” I say that it is not OK to have our best instincts for connection, empathy, and information exploited by a draconian quid pro quo that holds these goods hostage to the pervasive strip search of our lives. It is not OK for every move, emotion, utterance, and desire to be catalogued, manipulated, and then used to surreptitiously herd us through the future tense for the sake of someone else’s profit. “These things are brand-new,” I tell them. “They are unprecedented. You should not take them for granted because they are not OK.”

If democracy is to be replenished in the coming decades, it is up to us to rekindle the sense of outrage and loss over what is being taken from us. In this I do not mean only our “personal information.” What is at stake here is the human expectation of sovereignty over one’s own life and authorship of one’s own experience. What is at stake is the inward experience from which we form the will to will and the public spaces to act on that will. What is at stake is the dominant principle of social ordering in an information civilization and our rights as individuals and societies to answer the questions *Who knows? Who decides? Who decides who decides?* That surveillance capitalism

rights in these domains is a scandalous abuse of once grand promise to democratize knowledge for effective life. Let there be a digital future, first.

It is my hope that as a result of our journey to the beginning of this story, not the end. If we know, there is still time to take the reins and re-human future that we can call home. I turn once upon each generation to assert its will when future and we find ourselves hurled toward a sea: "The rights of men in society are neither de-annihilable, but are descendible only; and it is a nation to intercept finally and cut off the descent. Many other, are disposed to be slaves, it does not being generation to be free: wrongs cannot have a leg, the responsibility to right it is renewed with those who come next if we forfeit a human future and a rogue capitalism that fail to honor our interests. Worse still would be our own voiceless if inevitability that is power's velvet-gloved righting to her work on the origins of totalitarianism, a reaction to such conditions is one of anger and conditions are against the dignity of man. If I deem it permitting my indignation to interfere, then I am out of its context in human society and of its nature, deprived it of one of its important for you: the bare facts of surveillance capitalism because they demean human dignity. All depend upon the indignant citizens, journal-ist frontier project; indignant elected officials and that their authority originates in the foundations; and, especially, indignant young age that effectiveness without autonomy is not

effective, dependency-induced compliance is no social contract, a hive with no exit can never be a home, experience without sanctuary is but a shadow, a life that requires hiding is no life, touch without feel reveals no truth, and freedom from uncertainty is no freedom.

We return here to George Orwell, but perhaps not in the way you might imagine. In an indignant 1946 review of James Burnham's best seller, *The Managerial Revolution*, Orwell takes aim at Burnham for his cowardly attachment to power. The thesis of Burnham's 1940 book was that capitalism, democracy, and socialism would not survive World War II. All would be replaced by a new planned centralized society modeled on totalitarianism. A new "managerial" class composed of executives, technicians, bureaucrats, and soldiers would concentrate all power and privilege in their own hands: an aristocracy of talent built on a semi-slave society. Throughout the book, Burnham insisted on the "inevitability" of this future and extolled the managerial capabilities evident in German and Russian political leadership. Writing in 1940, Burnham prophesied a Germany victory and the "managed" society to follow. Later, as the war still raged and the Red Army scored key successes, Burnham wrote a series of supplemental notes to later editions of the book in which he asserted with equal certainty that Russia would dominate the world.

Orwell's disgust is palpable: "It will be seen that at each point Burnham is predicting a *continuation of the thing that is happening*. Now, the tendency to do this is not simply a bad habit, like inaccuracy or exaggeration, which one can correct by taking thought. It is a major mental disease, and its roots lie partly in cowardice and partly in the worship of power, which is not fully separable from cowardice." Burnham's "sensational" contradictions revealed his own enthralment with power and a complete failure to ascertain the creative principle in human history. "In each case," Orwell thundered, "he was obeying the same instinct: the instinct to bow down before the conqueror of the moment, to accept the existing trend as irreversible."⁷⁷

Orwell reviled Burnham for his absolute failure of "moral effort," expressed in his profound loss of bearings. Under these conditions, "literally anything can become right or wrong if the dominant class of the moment so wills it." Burnham's loss of bearings allowed him "to think of Nazism as something rather admirable, something that could and probably would build up a workable and durable social order."⁷⁸

Burnham's cowardice is a cautionary tale. We are living in a moment when surveillance capitalism and its instrumental power appear to be invincible. Orwell's courage demands that we refuse to cede the future to illegitimate power. He asks us to break the spell of enthrallment, helplessness, resignation, and numbing. We answer his call when we bend ourselves toward friction, rejecting the smooth flows of coercive confluence. Orwell's courage sets us against the relentless tides of dispossession that demean all human experience. Friction, courage, and bearings are the resources we require to begin the shared work of synthetic declarations that claim the digital future as a human place, demand that digital capitalism operate as an inclusive force bound to the people it must serve, and defend the division of learning in society as a source of genuine democratic renewal.

Arendt, like Orwell, asserts the possibility of new beginnings that do not cleave to already visible lines of power. She reminds us that every beginning, seen from the perspective of the framework that it interrupts, is a miracle. The capacity for performing such miracles is entirely human, she argues, because it is the source of all freedom: "What usually remains intact in the epochs of petrification and foreordained doom is the faculty of freedom itself, the sheer capacity to begin, which animates and inspires all human activities and is the hidden source... of all great and beautiful things."⁷⁹

The decades of economic injustice and immense concentrations of wealth that we call the Gilded Age succeeded in teaching people how they did not want to live. That knowledge empowered them to bring the Gilded Age to an end, wielding the armaments of progressive legislation and the New Deal. Even now, when we recall the lordly "barons" of the late nineteenth century, we call them "robbers."

Surely the Age of Surveillance Capitalism will meet the same fate as it teaches us how we do not want to live. It instructs us in the irreplaceable value of our greatest moral and political achievements by threatening to destroy them. It reminds us that shared trust is the only real protection from uncertainty. It demonstrates that power untamed by democracy can only lead to exile and despair. Friedman's cycle of public opinion and durable law now reverts to us: it is up to us to use our knowledge, to regain our bearings, to stir others to do the same, and to found a new beginning. In the conquest of nature, industrial capitalism's victims were mute. Those who would try to

conquer human nature will find their intended victims full of voice, ready to name danger and defeat it. This book is intended as a contribution to that collective effort.

The Berlin Wall fell for many reasons, but above all it was because the people of East Berlin said, "No more!" We too can be the authors of many "great and beautiful" new facts that reclaim the digital future as humanity's home. No more! Let this be *our* declaration.