

WHAT IS SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM?

- How Silicon Valley And The Palo Alto Mafia Rape Society For Profit

Surveillance capitalism is a [novel](#) market form and a specific logic of [capitalist](#) accumulation that was popularised in a 2014 essay by business theorist and social scientist [Shoshana Zuboff](#). She characterized it as a "radically disembedded and extractive variant of information capitalism" based on the [commodification](#) of "reality" and its transformation into behavioral data for analysis and sales. [\[1\]\[2\]\[3\]\[4\]](#)

In a subsequent 2015 scholarly article, Zuboff analyzed the societal implications of this [mutation](#) of capitalism. She differentiated "surveillance assets", "surveillance capital", and "surveillance capitalism" and their dependence on a global architecture of computer mediation that she calls "Big Other", a distributed and largely uncontested new expression of power which constitutes hidden mechanisms of extraction, commodification, and control that threatens core values such as [freedom](#), [democracy](#), and [privacy](#). [\[5\]\[6\]](#)

According to Zuboff, surveillance capitalism was pioneered at [Google](#) and later [Facebook](#), in much the same way that [mass-production](#) and managerial capitalism were pioneered at [Ford](#) and [General Motors](#) a century earlier, and has now become the dominant form of information capitalism. [\[7\]](#)

In her Oxford University lecture published in 2016, Zuboff identified surveillance capitalism's mechanisms and practices, including the manufacture of "prediction products" for sale in new "behavioral futures markets". She introduced the concept "dispossession by [surveillance](#)" and argued that it challenges the psychological and political bases of [self-determination](#) as it concentrates rights in the surveillance regime. This is described as a "coup from above".^[8]

Contents

- [1 Background](#)
- [2 Key features](#)
- [3 Countermeasures and solutions](#)
- [4 See also](#)
- [5 References](#)
- [6 Further reading](#)
- [7 External links](#)

Background

Economic pressures of capitalism are driving the intensification of connection and monitoring online with spaces of social life becoming open to saturation by corporate actors, directed at the making of profit and/or the regulation of action.^[6] Relevantly, Turow writes that "centrality of [corporate power](#) is a direct reality at the very heart of the [digital age](#)".^{[6][9]:17} [Capitalism](#) has become focused on expanding the proportion of social life that is open to [data collection](#) and data processing.^[6] This may come with significant implications for vulnerability and control of society as well as for privacy. However, increased data collection may also have various advantages for individuals and society such as self-optimization ([Quantified Self](#)),^[6] societal optimizations (such as by [smart cities](#)) and new or optimized services (such as various Google applications). Still, collecting and processing data in the context of capitalism's core [profit-making motive](#) might present an inherent danger.

Zuboff contrasts [mass production](#) of [industrial capitalism](#) with surveillance capitalism with the former being interdependent with its populations who were its consumers and employees and the latter preying on dependent populations who are neither its consumers nor its employees and largely ignorant of its procedures.^[7]

She notes that surveillance capitalism reaches beyond the conventional institutional terrain of the private firm and accumulates not only surveillance assets and capital, but also rights and operates without meaningful mechanisms of consent.^[7] Surveillance has been changing power structures in the

information economy.^[10] This might present a further power shift beyond the nation-state and towards a form of [corporatocracy](#).^[citation needed]

[Oliver Stone](#), creator of the film [Snowden](#) pointed to the [location-based game Pokémon Go](#) as the "latest sign of the emerging phenomenon of surveillance capitalism".^{[11][12][13]}

In 2014 Vincent Mosco referred to the marketing of information about customers and subscribers to advertisers *surveillance capitalism* and makes note of the [surveillance state](#) alongside it.^[14] Christian Fuchs found that the surveillance state fuses with surveillance capitalism.^[15] Similarly Zuboff informs that the issue is further complicated by highly invisible collaborative arrangements with state security apparatuses.^[16] According to Trebor Scholz, companies recruit people as informants for this type of capitalism.^[17]

The term "surveillance capitalism" has also been used by [political economists John Bellamy Foster](#) and [Robert W. McChesney](#), though with a different meaning. In an article published in [Monthly Review](#) in 2014, they apply it to describe the manifestation of the "insatiable need for data" of [financialization](#), which they explain is "the long-term growth speculation on financial assets relative to [GDP](#)" introduced in the United States by industry and government in the 1980s that evolved out of the [military-industrial complex](#) and the [advertising](#) industry.^[18]

Key features

Zuboff identifies four key features in the logic of surveillance capitalism and explicitly follows the four key features identified by Google's chief economist, [Hal Varian](#):^[19]*[better source needed]*

1. The drive toward more and more data extraction and analysis.
2. The development of new contractual forms using computer-monitoring and automation.
3. The desire to personalize and customize the services offered to users of digital platforms.
4. The use of the technological infrastructure to carry out continual experiments on its users and consumers.

Countermeasures and solutions

Numerous organizations have been struggling for [free speech](#) and [privacy rights](#) in the new surveillance capitalism^[20] and various national governments have enacted [privacy laws](#). It is also conceivable that new capabilities and uses for mass-surveillance require structural changes towards a new system to prevent misuse.

Zuboff compares demanding privacy from surveillance capitalists or lobbying for an end to commercial surveillance on the Internet to asking [Henry Ford](#) to make each [Model T](#) by hand and states that such demands are existential threats that violate the basic mechanisms of the entity's survival.^[7]

Zuboff warns that principles of self-determination might be forfeit due to "ignorance, learned helplessness, inattention, inconvenience, habituation, or drift" and states that "we tend to rely on mental models, vocabularies, and tools distilled from past catastrophes", referring to the twentieth century's [totalitarian](#) nightmares or the [monopolistic](#) predations of [Gilded Age](#) capitalism with countermeasures that have been developed to fight those earlier threats not being sufficient or even appropriate for the novel challenges.^[7]

She also poses the question: "will we be the masters of information, or will we be its slaves?" and states that "if the digital future is to be our home, then it is we who must make it so".^[21]

See also

- [2017 Broadband Consumer Privacy Proposal repeal](#)
- [Commercialization of the Internet](#)
- [*Who Owns the Future?*](#)
- [Mass surveillance](#)
- [Mass surveillance industry](#)
- [Market for zero-day exploits](#)
- [PRISM \(surveillance program\)](#)
- [Surveillance § Corporate](#)
- [Employee monitoring](#)
- [Computer and network surveillance § Corporate surveillance](#)
- [*The Wealth of Networks*](#)
- [*Consent of the Networked*](#)
- [Behavioral analysis of markets](#)
- [Capital accumulation](#)
- [Technocapitalism](#)
- [Silicon Valley](#)
- [The Californian Ideology](#)
- [Targeted advertising](#)
- [Personalized marketing](#)
- [Privacy concerns with social networking services](#)
- [Google Search History](#)
- [Web analytics](#)
- [*Daemon*](#)
- [*Syndicate*](#)
- [Data mining](#)
- [Big data](#)
- [Virtual reality](#)
- [Consumtariat](#)

- [Big Brother](#)
- [Panopticism](#)
- [Internet of things](#)
- [Information economics](#)
- [Hawthorne effect](#)
- [Neuromarketing](#)
- [A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace](#), an Internet manifesto for independence from governments but not corporations
- [Data breach](#)
- [Ethically disputed business practices \(category\)](#)
- [Information Age](#)
- [Information society](#)
- [Fourth Industrial Revolution](#)
- [Anonymous](#)
- [Post-capitalism](#)
- [Numerati](#)
- [HTTP/2](#)

References

1.

- Zuboff, Shoshana (15 September 2014). "[A Digital Declaration: Big Data as Surveillance Capitalism](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/the-digital-debate/shoshan-zuboff-on-big-data-as-surveillance-capitalism-13152525.html)". FAZ.NET (in German). ISSN 0174-4909. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/the-digital-debate/shoshan-zuboff-on-big-data-as-surveillance-capitalism-13152525.html>. Retrieved 2018-08-28.

-

- Powles, Julia (2 May 2016). "[Google and Microsoft have made a pact to protect surveillance capitalism](#)". The Guardian. Retrieved 9 February 2017.

-

- Sterling, Bruce (March 2016). "[Shoshanna Zuboff condemning Google 'surveillance capitalism'](#)". WIRED.

-

- "[The Unlikely Activists Who Took On Silicon Valley — and Won](#)". New York Times. 14 August 2018. Retrieved 2018-08-28.

-

- Zuboff, Shoshana (4 April 2015). "[Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization](#)". Journal of Information Technology. **30** (1): 75–89. doi:10.1057/jit.2015.5. ISSN 0268-3962. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2594754 – via SSRN.

-

- Couldry, Nick (23 September 2016). "[The price of connection: 'surveillance capitalism'](#)". The Conversation.

-

- Zuboff, Shoshana (5 March 2016). "[Google as a Fortune Teller: The Secrets of Surveillance Capitalism](#)". Frankfurter Allgemeine

Zeitung. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/the-digital-debate/shoshana-zuboff-secrets-of-surveillance-capitalism-14103616.html?printPagedArticle=true>. Retrieved 9 February 2017.

•

• Zuboff, Shoshana (5 March 2016). "[Google as a Fortune Teller: The Secrets of Surveillance Capitalism](#)". FAZ.NET (in German). [ISSN 0174-4909](#). Retrieved 2018-08-28.

•

• Turow, Joseph (10 January 2012). [The Daily You: How the New Advertising Industry Is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth](#). Yale University Press. p. 256. [ISBN 0300165013](#). Retrieved 9 February 2017.

•

• Galič, Maša; Timan, Tjerk; Koops, Bert-Jaap (13 May 2016). "Bentham, Deleuze and Beyond: An Overview of Surveillance Theories from the Panopticon to Participation". *Philosophy & Technology*. [doi:10.1007/s13347-016-0219-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-016-0219-1).

•

• "[Comic-Con 2016: Marvel turns focus away from the Avengers, 'Game of Thrones' cosplay proposals, and more](#)". *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved 9 February 2017.

•

• "[Oliver Stone Calls Pokémon Go 'Totalitarian'](#)". *Fortune*. 23 July 2016.

•

• "[Surveillance capitalism, robot totalitarianism': Oliver Stone lashes out at Pokemon Go](#)". *RT International*. 22 July 2016.

•

• Mosco, Vincent. [To the Cloud: Big Data in a Turbulent World](#). Routledge. [ISBN 9781317250388](#). Retrieved 9 February 2017.

•

- Fuchs, Christian. [Social Media: A Critical Introduction](#). SAGE. ISBN 9781473987494. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
 -
 - ["Shoshana Zuboff / Keynote: Reality is the Next Big Thing - Elevate Festival 2014"](#). YouTube. 2 May 2016. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
 -
 - Scholz, Trebor. [Uberworked and Underpaid: How Workers Are Disrupting the Digital Economy](#). John Wiley & Sons. ISBN 9781509508181. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
 -
 - ["Surveillance Capitalism | John Bellamy Foster | Monthly Review"](#). Monthly Review. 2014-07-01. Retrieved 2018-02-12.
 -
 - Danaher, John (21 March 2016). ["The Logic of Surveillance Capitalism"](#). Algocracy and the Transhumanist Project. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
 -
 - Foster, John Bellamy; McChesney, Robert W. (1 July 2014). ["Surveillance Capitalism by John Bellamy Foster"](#). Monthly Review. Retrieved 9 February 2017.
 -
21. Zuboff, Shoshana (15 September 2014). ["Shoshana Zuboff: A Digital Declaration"](#). Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Retrieved 9 February 2017.

Further reading

- Zuboff, Shoshana (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs. [ISBN 9781610395694](#).
- Zuboff, Shoshana (2018). *Das Zeitalter des Überwachungskapitalismus*. Berlin: Campus Verlag. [ISBN 9783593509303](#).

External links

- [Shoshana Zuboff Keynote: Reality is the Next Big Thing, YouTube, Elevate Festival, 2014](#)
- [Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization, Shoshana Zuboff](#)