

Zuckerberg and the Untouchables

or, Surveillance Capitalism

by G. Murphy Donovan (June 2018)



Transparence, Francis Picabia, 1929

There was a time when reflection, philosophy or common sense, preceded science. Indeed, what we know today as science used to be a subset of philosophy called “natural sciences.” Traditional tools like evidence, observation, experimentation, and ethics were once relevant.

The subjection of science to philosophical, moral, or common sense concerns is now just a memory. Questions like “should”

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.

—Andrew Bosworth, Facebook Executive

seldom hobble the raging bulls of cyber culture today. Yes, young bulls-boys with bollocks.

Digital oligarchs are mostly youngsters, if not in fact, then surely in world view, the proprietors of exclusive adolescent tree houses. A hipster cast cultivates other joiners who beg approval where “likes,” “up-votes,” “tools,” “apps,” and “followers” are measures of merit; indeed. The internet is a universe where adolescent ego and short attention spans seem to be cultural norms.

Moral or adult referents used to constrain or restrict innovation. Those days are gone, with two possible demographic exceptions. Science has yet to completely replace the old gods in Islamic or Communist realms. Apparently, Mohamed and Deng Xiaoping, of all people, are now the cautionary voices of scientific restraint.

For the West, the new idols are technical; specifically, a kind of digital atheism. Some might say autism. Historically, radical innovation was sponsored by government and wrapped in secrecy. Nuclear bombs, intercontinental ballistic missiles, chemical/biological weapons, and DARPA's internet are examples.

Today, an agile information technician or engineer might redefine global praxis or cyber memes before traditional philosophers, priests, or adults can brush their teeth. Cyber science now defies and defines culture. God is digital. The new clergy are dot.com oligarchs entrepreneurs like Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Tim Cook, or Eric Schmitt.



Zuckerberg, an iconic nerd, recently appeared before Congress on Capitol Hill. Apparently the Senate and House of Representatives were alarmed that Facebook might be a monopoly, mining and monetizing personal behaviors, if not weaponizing data for financial gain, political manipulation, or worse.

The "Top Secret" relationship between Uncle Sam and the

telecoms (see [manner](#)" of speaking.

Clapper and Zuckerberg are in the same business for different purposes. One collects data to surveil, the other collects to profit. With billions of voluntary followers and billions of dollars in the pot, Facebook casts a much wider net than the National Security Agency.

Congress seemed to take a knee recently when MZ spoke *ex cathedra*.

Nation of sheep doesn't quite capture this 21st Century American surveillance phenomenon. Guys like Zuckerberg or Bezos don't just have the cash and power to cook the political and cultural books. They now own the books—and the kitchen.

Tax-free commerce on the net is not Hobby Lobby.

For NSA and Facebook, personal privacy is a very selective concern. Shortly, before he used the dorm room shuffle on Congress, Zuckerberg bought all the homes in his immediate Crescent Park neighborhood to demolish and create a *zone sanitare*. Bezos accomplished the same end by buying five homes in separate locales. Oligarch privacy doesn't influence their business models, however. Data is an open door, sometimes a back door, with government help—the road to the end of their rainbow, the pot of gold that data represents.

If hypocrisy were hash, Zuckerberg and Bezos would be Cheech

and Chong.

Jeff Bezos underlines his political clout by buying the largest mansion and the largest newspaper in the nation's capital. Surely Jeffrey does not come to Washington, DC just for the Cherry Blossom Festival. We are told that Amazon and the *Washington Post* are separate enterprises. Bezos toys are independent of each other in the same sense that Facebook and Instagram are separate or independent "tools" under Zuckerberg.

Literal and figurative "bots" now infest cyberspace and the social networks. In the biological world, a bot is a parasite that infests a host and pupates in excrement. The internet bot is a software application, a robot, which apes similar repetitive functions. At the merge, bio-digital analogy is a social semantic marriage made in heaven. Bots, trollers, hackers, and scammers inhabit the same dung heap—the same cyberspace.



Internet bots replicate memes faster than any human could. Reiteration may not be truth, but repetition is still the godfather of belief. Hat tip to J. B. Goebbels.

The Zuckerberg testimony may have been a *Eureka!* moment for politicians, but the drift towards behavior control, exploitation, and cultural adolescence has been a thing for decades, starting with [More](#) by G. Murphy Donovan.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)