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IN DIALOGUE WITH *THE AGE OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM*

A reconstruction and critique of the theory and its apocalyptic-dystopian narrative

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ABSTRACT

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Social scientific research has theorized utopia and utopianism as methods of imagining and theorizing alternative, desired futures. While various definitions of utopia and utopianism exist, most scholarship agrees that there is an inherent ideology to them. In both social theory and literary fiction, utopia and dystopia are often preceded by an apocalyptic event. Humanities scholars have researched the relationship between fictional dystopian and apocalyptic narratives and anxieties about societal change, such as rapid technological development, changing social relations of power, community, and individuality. Utopia and dystopia, whether social theory or fictional narratives, can be thought of as social diagnoses with a future-oriented temporality. This thesis partakes in these theoretical discussions by reconstructing The Age of Surveillance Capitalism (2019) by Shoshana Zuboff. The thesis engages in a critical dialogue with the surveillance capitalism theory/narrative from the perspective of its dystopian and utopian reality-making.

Second Rational reconstruction is used to analyze explicit and implicit theoretical arguments in the surveillance capitalism theory. The reconstruction is divided into two broad themes: narrativity, and personhood and society. Narrative analysis is employed to examine the type of knowledge and reality-producing through narrative choices made by the author. The term apocalyptic-dystopian narrative guides this analysis: the horror of the imagined end of the world and the following bad society reveals what is most feared and desired by the author. Additionally, the Janus-face of dystopia and utopia is considered, and the terms utopia and utopianism assist the analysis.

This thesis suggests that the theory presented in The Age of Surveillance Capitalism is a liberal social diagnosis with a dominating apocalyptic-dystopian narrative. Yet, despite its explicit antiutopianism, the theory also includes an implicit utopian vision. Personhood and society are interpreted by the author through a liberal lens, and consequently the theory emphasizes autonomy and individuality, society as public life organized by the principle of efficiency, and democratic capitalism. The theory, while critical of the surveillance capitalism phenomenon, is not a general critique of capitalism. Instead, the aim of the author is to open the door to the good society by saving capitalism, society, and the individual from the dystopian surveillance capitalism. These elements of the theory highlight its overarching paranoia and dualistic division of good and evil as knowledge practices.

This thesis joins a newly expanding group of scholarship on the surveillance capitalism theory. The reconstruction conducted in this thesis offers a long-form theoretical analysis and critique of the theory and its narrative and connects them to conversations about dystopian and utopian knowledge production.

Keywords: surveillance capitalism, apocalypse, dystopia, utopia, narrativity, rational reconstruction

Contents

1. Introduction

> Information and communications technologies are more widespread than electricity, reaching three billion of the world's seven billion people. The entangled dilemmas of knowledge, authority, and power are no longer confined to workplaces as they were in the 1980s. Now their roots run deep through the necessities of daily life, mediating nearly every form of social participation. (Zuboff 2019, 4).

The rapid change felt through societies globally calls for making sense of the times we are living through. Is this the age of the machine? The dominant discourse in contemporary social scientific communities, the information technology (IT) industry, and public discourse framed by media is that we are living through a historically exceptional period of unprecedently rapid development of information technology. The narrative follows that these ever-expanding capabilities and applications are changing our lives and societies. Some key terms for making sense of the digital and society as a phenomenon are "the Digital Revolution (see Elliot 2019; Hodson 2018), "the Information Age" (more often used in the late 1990s through early 2010s, see Baez 2014; Fuchs 2008), datafication, and digitalization. This narrative is such an obvious a truth to us that it raises few, if any, objections.

While the development of information technology has generally enjoyed support as a force of good for society and human development, reservations persist about the capacities and applications of these technologies. Concerns have been raised from diverse perspectives such as the biases and inequality present in applications of artificial intelligence (Howard & Borenstein 2017; Turner Lee 2018) and automation (Schlogl 2020), and advanced surveillance technologies (Andrejevic 2019) as well as the accumulation and mining of Big Data (van Dijck 2014). The question of the roles that information technologies play in our lives and societies (Conti et al. 2014; Dixon-Román, Nichols & Nyame-Mensah 2020), in governance and regarding state power and economic relations (Fuchs 2013; Degli Esposti 2014) rise to headlines and appear in art and literature periodically. One dimension of this discussion are the techno-utopias and dystopias – in fictional literature, films, art, and political philosophy – that are instantly recognizable to followers of these genres. They make explicit that much of what we do when we discuss the issue of technology and society is about *societal and political imagination.*

However, if we dare to challenge this grand narrative of the times for a moment, what questions might we pose? Are there alternative ways to abstract the relations and entities that we have collected into a perceivable, tellable phenomenon and time-period? Furthermore, what is the role of social theory in the imagining and fight for the future?

As Hans Joas (2008, in Finnish; see also Clarke 2019, 17) notes, tendencies in social sciences to diagnose current times as culminating under a single phenomenon or term (e.g., famously, Ulrich Beck's the Risk Society (Beck & Ritter 1992) or as the end of an old age and the beginning of a new historical period, risk being ahistorical and reductive ways to analyze social reality. At the same time, fast change and crises in society call for new reckonings of what is going on. Joas proposes that the gap between methodologically sustainable knowledge production and terms that capture the character of the times (and public attention) should be considered. (Joas 2008, 203–205.)

Diagnoses of the times (which as a notion stems from the German term *Zeitdiagnose*), that is, diagnoses of perceived social phenomena and realities are narratives about the times we live in. Due to their abundance, they compete for our attention and for relevancy; Their attempts to make sense of the social world are also attempts to set the rules of discourses, to become the grand narrative of a phenomenon or the whole of society. As such, they have the potential to greatly affect knowledge and ideas about the social world, or if failing to do that, to fall into obscurity. In this thesis, I analyze one such attempt to establish new rules of discourse, or the narrative of our times.

Social psychologist, scholar of management and work studies, and Harvard Business School Professor Emerita Shoshana Zuboff first stepped into the discussion on technology and society in the 1980s with her book *In the Age of the Smart Machine: The Future of Work and Power* (1988), a study on how work and workplace relations change with the introduction of information technology. The theme of work and a sketching of a new phase of the capitalist economy are visible also in *The Support Economy: Why Corporations Are Failing Individuals and the Next Episode of Capitalism* (Zuboff & Maxmin 2002). Zuboff expanded on her previous scholarship in the 2010s by developing a theory and language of *surveillance capitalism*: she first wrote an article called *The Surveillance Paradigm: Be the friction - Our Response to the New Lords of the Ring* (25 June 2013) in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* about an emerging "new social logic" of surveillance. Then, two years later, *Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization* (Zuboff 2015) published in the *Journal of Information technology* presented the beginning of a theoretical construction that culminated in the ambitious and epochal monography *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, published in early 2019.

In the 2015 article, Zuboff argued that our understanding of Big Data as technological – an object, effect, capability – inhibits our thinking and narrows its definition. Instead, we ought to think of Big Data as originating in the social. Big Data is "the foundational component in a deeply intentional and highly consequential new logic of accumulation [called] surveillance capitalism." (Zuboff 2015, 75).

Her 2019 book would later reconceptualize terms that described tools and infrastructure, such as Big Data and the Internet of things, to a language that shifted the focus to commercial surveillance technologies and economic action through surveillance. As the theory developed, its systematic elements and processes were highlighted: Zuboff now suggested that amidst the growing capacities and commercial applications of information technologies, we are now living through the age of surveillance capitalism. In this new system, everything from economic and societal relations to the obsoletion of politics and the erosion of individuality are simultaneously taking place.

While *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* takes a social scientific approach and develops a theory of its subject matter, the book was clearly also meant for the wider public, not only the academic communities that were already interested in issues such as surveillance, digitally mediated social relations, or capitalism. Zuboff constructed an explicitly normative theory instead of a mainly descriptive one because the project of constructing a theory of surveillance capitalism was to make sense of the system in order to resist and defeat it. Thus, Zuboff's project, through its critique of the times, poses questions about *the good and bad society*.

Indeed, Zuboff's attempt to lift consciousness and generate public discussion through her project was successful. Immediately after its reveal, mainstream media outlets in the Anglophone sphere published interviews, opinion pieces and reviews (e.g., The Guardian Jan 20 2019; The Guardian 2 Feb 2019; The Wall Street Journal Jan 14 2019; The Washington Post Jan 24 2019; The New York Times Jan 24 2020; The Harvard Gazette March 4 2019; Business Insider Nov 24 2019). The author made appearances in documentaries and news programs and gave talks at panels in universities and before politicians in the US and the United Kingdom.

The Age of Surveillance Capitalism was also noticed in academic contexts, generating debate especially in surveillance studies. The buzz that followed the book produced numerous book reviews and essays (e.g., Morozov 2019; Haggart 2019) and commentaries in academic journals, especially in the multidisciplinary journal *Surveillance & Society* (e.g., Evangelista 2019; Ball 2019; Cohen 2019; see also Packard 2018), yet lengthier theoretical analyses are not as numerous. Longer explorations of the theory and Zuboff's arguments are still somewhat sparse in number.

Cinnamon (2017) displays the potential of the surveillance capitalism theory for further use of analyzing surveillance practices by illustrating how surveillance practices described in the theory threaten privacy and social justice. Lauer (2020) agrees that Zuboff's theory "neatly captures the totalizing scale and exorable commercial logic of Big Data aggregators and platforms" but disputes

her narrative timing of the discovery of the value of "transactional data" in the 2000s, placing it much earlier to the 1920s (Lauer 2020, 2). Lauer's critique highlights the difficulty of pinpointing definitive points of time where a system, structure, practice, or relation transforms. Williams and Raekstad (2022) use the surveillance capitalism theory to explore and diagnose forms of domination and unfreedom further, noting that Zuboff does not delve into the specifics of freedom. The full picture of the impact and influence of Zuboff's theory of surveillance capitalism cannot yet be drawn, as this will take time and further research.

While *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* catapulted the term to the mainstream consciousness, surveillance capitalism has also been discussed outside of Zuboff's direct influence. In fact, as Ball (2019, 253) notes in her review, concepts introduced by Zuboff in the theory are far from new topics of interest in surveillance studies. Of interest to me is not so much a "gap" in research that needs to be fulfilled, but the substance matter itself: the surveillance capitalism theory and the story that it tells about the world, the time we live in, and the future that we are hurtling towards.

This thesis will proceed by, firstly, an overview of the research objective and questions in Chapter 1 Introduction. Secondly, I explicate the method of analysis of this thesis. I present my project and position on the type of knowledge production I engage in. This thesis is anchored in the social theory, which necessitates using analytic tools meant for analyzing theory. I present my use of rational reconstruction, narrativity, and the term apocalyptic-dystopian narrative, as tools of analysis. Chapter 2 is dedicated to a summary of the main points of the surveillance capitalism theory. To ensure clarity, the chapter is divided into three sections that focus on the history and operations of surveillance capitalism, the issue of power, and the future. In Chapter 3, I begin my reconstruction by analyzing the narrative built by Zuboff as apocalyptic and dystopian, with an ambiguous relationship to utopia and utopianism. I use scholarship from sociology, political philosophy, and humanities to present my reading of the narrative/theory. I delve into the features and type of knowledge production that show an apocalyptic and dystopian interpretation of current times. I examine the author's relationship with utopianism and utopia, the good society. Next, in Chapter 4, while carrying narrative analysis along, I turn my focus to the theoretical questions that are pertinent to understanding Zuboff's thinking, and the type of knowledge produced in the surveillance capitalism theory. I reconstruct the explicit and implicit claims made by the author and use them together to form a picture of the surveillance capitalism theory. First, I analyze personhood in the theory. Then, the focus moves to society. I suggest a reading of power in the theory as normatively dualistic and show the influence of totalitarianism on how instrumentarian power is constructed. Next, a reconstruction is conducted of

what society is and how to understand surveillance and capitalism. Finally, the thesis concludes with Chapter 5, where I reflect on the findings of my analysis and return the big question presented in Introduction; I conclude my thoughts on what the relevance and use of the surveillance capitalism may become for not only explaining our social reality through its narrative, but also in the fight for our future.

Research Objective

In this thesis, I reconstruct the surveillance capitalism theory presented in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Zuboff 2019, hereafter *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*) to examine its underlying, sometimes unarticulated logics, theoretical commitments, and assumptions about the world. Additionally, I analyze the type of knowledge production, mainly focusing on the construction of an apocalyptic-dystopian narrative and paranoid knowledge practices. I ask, what does the narrative/theory posit about our social reality – personhood, sociality, society, values, freedom, and the good society – and does it recognize the claims it makes.

I mentioned utopias and dystopias above in relation to knowledge production because they offer a window into how we tend to understand the possible social, societal, and political effects of technological development (or change, generally). They are narrative ways of understanding change and the desires, hopes, anxieties and fears that we feel. However, in social scientific scholarship – as in everyday thinking – utopia and dystopia are often used to signify impossibility and silly wistfulness (utopia) or imminent threat (dystopia). Yet, we engage in everyday utopian thinking (Levitas 2017; 2013) and live through events that in fiction would signify apocalyptic and dystopian transformation. I discuss this theme by conducting a rational reconstruction guided by the perspective of the narrative/theory's relationship – both explicit and implicit – to utopia and dystopia. I take seriously the Janus-faced concept utopia/dystopia as an explanatory narrative, as world-building and world-breaking narrative tools. I posit that the surveillance capitalism theory is one example of such knowing.

It then follows that the narrative and theoretical construction in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* are interesting from the perspective of what a good society is or could be. As with the necessary duality of utopia/dystopia – there is no ultimately desirable or ultimately horrific society, which we know based on our human diversity and the relationship of needs and desires to the social and material contexts– we can find claims about the good society and the bad society that are oppositional to each

other. It is my aim to lay these out analytically, examine them and form a critique as part of my reconstruction.

My critique is based in the ethics and methodological principle of "critical dialogue" (Clarke 2019). My objective is to highlight the implicit and unarticulated (perhaps even unconscious) elements, inconsistencies and disconnections in the narrative and theory by "thinking together" with *and against* Zuboff. This immanent critique is conducted to also highlight the accomplishments of the theory. I view it as respectful to the new theory to engage in critical dialogue with it.

The objective, then, is to:

1. reconstruct the theory with the additional help of narrative analysis
2. test the term apocalyptic-dystopian narrative as an applicable interpretation of the theory, and
3. form a critique.

Next, an exposition of the methodology of this thesis is in order.

Methodology

Rational Reconstruction in the framework of Critical Dialogue

How should one insert themself into a discussion? My immediate answer would be, thoughtfully. For this purpose, I have enlisted John Clarke's (2019) idea of critical dialogue and thinking together to ground my analysis. "Thinking together" is a dialogic process involving dialogic subjects, a nod to Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia (Clarke 2019, 18–20). Critical dialogue, for Clarke, signifies thinking as a social process that engages with power in a resistant manner. This type of critical is not defined in a hierarchical relationship with everyday forms of thinking, because it rejects a supposed superiority and distinction of the thinker from others. Instead, it underscores the centrality of conversation – whether an intersubjective one or with one's socially produced context of knowledge.

First, let me address the obvious fact that what I mean by dialogue in this thesis is not a two-way conversation in its most spontaneous or immediate form. Instead, the dialogue I mean is my conversation with Zuboff's intellectual work that has already been written, edited, and published in its entirety. I then reconstruct it in a thoughtful and critical manner. Although I have included in this thesis numerous references to and citations of Zuboff's own language, this necessitates that I interpret her thesis, theory, and narration to then present it to the reader – as honestly and earnestly as I can, of course. In a way, three parties are present: Zuboff as the author of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, myself, and my interpretation of Zuboff's thought, all engaging in lively and curious conversation

with each other. Just as the author, I have also gathered allies and references in the form of theory from various sources and disciplines.

While Clarke's use of thinking together in Critical Dialogues (2019) is more spontaneous and instantaneous than what I attempt in this thesis, I mean to employ the spirit of his concept in my work. I think of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* as a long, thought-out disquisition that I may react and respond to in a similar (although narrower) manner. One way I understand this is that my analysis and criticism is formed not as a struggle against Zuboff's narrative and theoretical construction, but by thinking together with it – having a slow, text-based conversation. This conversation is necessarily lopsided and in my favor as my voice acts as the narrator of Zuboff's thinking; My reconstruction, of which one dimension is interpretation, will highlight certain points and perspectives, it makes connections and "reads into" the text in a way that is not innocent "discovery" or "excavation" of "facts". It is knowledge production and as such, transformative. I am comforted by the knowledge that to bypass this and to make their own reading of the surveillance capitalism theory, the reader can go to the original source material. This process of knowledge as always in movement and transforming is an essential part of thinking together.

Although I present this dialogue as having some tension, my aim is not to be antagonistic. I did not set out to refute the surveillance capitalism theory that Zuboff carefully and diligently constructs in her book. The reader will notice, however, that I resist some key elements of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, especially in regard to its narrative dimensions. This is my thinking together – and against – with Zuboff.

Two conclusive statements drawn from the "process of thinking critically about critical thinking" are the social and political motivations of critical thinking – "redeeming the word for political purposes" – and the thesis that thinking is social in both its intersubjective and context-related meanings (Clarke 2019, 16). The reappropriation of "critical" signifies a desire for change and a challenge to power: "to unlock ways of knowing that obscure, deny or legitimate inequalities and injustices." (ibid., 16). Understood in this way, critical thinking is a social, communicative process that has a vested interest in resisting subjugation.

Clarke summarizes thinking together – with or against – and its relationship to engaging with theory as such:

> [T]he challenge of thinking critically is to work, creatively, carefully, collaboratively, with the tensions, possibilities and gaps that surround us. Thinking critically is, then, something other than taking down a much-loved theory and saying here's another example of how right it is.

> Such mechanical deployments engage in the problems of the moment (whatever that moment is or was) in only the thinnest sense, even if they are deeply satisfying to the ones doing the deploying. One result is the disconcerting intellectual oscillation between the desire to claim that everything is new (we have now arrived at an era of…) or that this is just another instance of what we already know. (Clarke 2019, 17)

Of thinking with or against, Clarke argues that the with is more important due to the implication of "commitment to maintaining an engagement" and rejecting a necessary closure (ibid., 17–18).

Healy discusses this from the perspective of nuance in theoretical sociology. Demanding nuance is not always constructive, as it may discourage taking intellectual risks while dealing in abstraction (Healy 2017). While one may be tempted to take a negative approach to assessing social theory by insisting on nuance – really by focusing on a dimension or aspect it or its critic has failed to consider – this can instead make analytically engaging with a theory's contributions difficult. Healy points to three nuance traps that one may fall into if they prioritize nuance in social theory: First, the nuance of the fine-grain: rejecting a theory but camouflaging this act as increasing accuracy. Next, the nuance of the conceptual framework, which works in an opposite way by expanding a theoretical framework to disallow any rejection of it. Finally, the nuance of the connoisseur signifies a self-congratulatory approach of which purpose is to signal the critic's abilities by insisting on nuance but does little else. (Healy 2017.)

The aim of this thesis is not to add nuance to the discussion on the surveillance capitalism theory by finding areas of social life that the surveillance capitalism theory has not touched upon. Neither is it paramount here to defend this theory by adding new perspectives through nuance. Instead, I aim to engage in a thoughtful dialogue with the theory by thinking together with and against Zuboff. My criticism, when deemed needed, will be transparent in its aim and perspective. This is to say that I will not attempt to conduct an objective analysis absent of its own views or influences, as this is a task doomed to fail. My analysis does, nevertheless, begin from a perspective of open curiosity. I ask what may a conversation with this theory reveal about it? How does it abstract reality and what consequences might this have for its application or relevance? And what kind of dialogue can we have about the good and bad society through this theory?

I borrow from philosophy and use *rational reconstruction* to analyze the surveillance capitalism theory. Methodologically, I first deconstruct or take into pieces the text to examine its elements. I engage with the text by resituating it from what the author wants to discuss into a new context by reassembling it to then discuss with it from the perspective of my research interests. Those interests are analyzing what the text posits about personhood, society, and our future. This resituating is done

with care to not ignore the author's intent but to understand it. Richard Rorty (1984) places historical and rational reconstruction into the canon of methodology of historical philosophy. Rorty presents that while historical reconstruction is interested in meaning (what the author really tried to say), rational reconstruction focuses on significance. Yet, he reminds the reader that these divisions are less stark in practice; methods are used side-by-side with one usually privileged as a primary tool of analysis.

My use of rational reconstruction leans partially on Pedersen's (2008) explication of Haberman's take on it, although I am opposed to the idea of any 'universal structures' (ibid., 458) that one may seek to find with this method. Specifically, rational reconstruction:

> [A]s opposed to hermeneutic approaches, which primarily deal with semantic structures that may be read, so to speak, from the surface structures of a language, rational reconstruction seeks to reveal deep structures, meaning a fundamental set of rules, such as the production of meaningful linguistic expressions. The aim is thus not a direct paraphrase or translation of an unclear meaning, but rather underlying rules and structures as conditions for any meaningful linguistic expression. (Pedersen 2008, 462)

Rational reconstruction, then, seeks to explicate what is implicit, to produce an interpretation of the "rules" that produce a particular piece of knowledge. I interpret this to mean both meta-level knowledge structures such as paranoid knowing (Sedgwick 2003) and deep epistemic commitments to theories and ideologies that affect one's way of constructing theory.

Rational reconstruction is a somewhat debated method (see Kuukkanen 2017 or Nanay 2010 for discussion on the controversies about Lakatosian rational reconstruction) owning to interpretations about its relationship to historical narratives. Rorty defends rational reconstruction from critics' claims of anachronism – the forcing of historical texts out of their original time into current conversations – as justified in cases where the reconstructor wishes to explore the significance of a text in the context of its use for a particular topic of interest (Rorty 1984). While this is certainly something to consider, I use rational reconstruction to study an author and a text which are contemporary, with a topic that is currently much debated. Therefore, I am not too worried about the threat of unfair anachronism, though it is important to keep in mind not to put unfair demands on the text, such as faulting it for not commenting on discussions that happened after its time of publishing.

To summarize, I have conveyed my aim to conduct a reading of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (Zuboff 2019) as a theory that argues certain things about personhood, society, and our complex relationship with the future. I noted that my reading shall make no attempt to claim a detached

objectivity in its analysis or critique. Instead, my interest is to find the theoretical foundations and commitments that together construct the surveillance capitalism theory and then engage in a discussion about their implications for the good or bad society. I use critical dialogue as the foundation of my method, rational reconstruction, which I complement with the use of narrative analysis.

Narrative Analysis

Because of the textual elements in the surveillance capitalism theory that have commonalities with fictional narratives, it is interesting to explore it as a narrative. After all, "theory" is a name for a type of story narrated by a scholar (Denzin 2000, xi). In the case of a political theorist, due to theory's relationship with the future, they become "a figure in the story of which he or she was originally just an observer" (Dienstag 2017, 496). This thesis uses narrativity as a framework for studying the textual dimensions of the surveillance capitalism theory sociologically. The method meant here by narrative analysis is principally the narrative framing provided by the term apocalyptic and dystopian/utopian narrative. My take on narrative analysis leans on studies of fictional apocalyptic and dystopian narratives in humanities, philosophical traditions interested in the relationship between narrative and the "real" that is constructed by that narrative, as well as narrative sociology.

In her monography Shaping History: Narratives of Political Change (2007), Molly Andrews writes:

> When we relate stories of our lives, we implicitly communicate to others something of our political worldviews, our *Weltanschauung*. But why are some stories selected and others ignored? Facts do not speak for themselves. We choose certain facts, and hope that they will speak for us, through us. But what do we think we will achieve by telling our stories in the way that we do, to the people we do? What is it that makes us interpret the events of our time in one way and not another? Who do we perceive ourselves as being in relation to those events? How actively are we engaged in trying to shape our political environment? What do we identify as being primary forces for change in our lives? To what group or groups do we feel we belong, and how, if at all, does this contribute to our understanding of the political universe? (Andrews 2007, 2)

I lean on these questions in my analysis of Zuboff's narrative in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. I ask, why does she tell the story of surveillance capitalism in this way. Why does she include some facts, yet omits others? How does her perceiving of reality and her role in it and her intellectual or ideological commitments affect the resulting theoretical construction? The answers to these questions are also answers to reconstructing the surveillance capitalism theory. There is no theory separate from the reality it attempts to narrate: in relation to each other, they form and transform each other. Therefore, I will at times in this thesis refer to the surveillance capitalism theory as both a theory and a narrative. I use the pairing of narrative/theory to emphasize the relational, mutually constructing

character of them. This choice is further justified because I wish to not separate the theoretical side to mean knowledge production that is implied to be somehow ontologically free from its narrative dimensions. In some cases, I use narrative and theory separately from each other. This choice was made to highlight my project in each chapter or section, as some chapters are more focused on reconstructing theoretical connections and others analyze the textual elements of the narrative. Regardless, narrative and theory are understood as mutually constructing and transforming in their tightly woven, inseparable relation.

As Andrews (2007, 11) notes, narratives open a window to exploring political identities. While I am not primarily interested in questions of identity here, looking at the intellectual background and practices of knowledge production by an author adds to an analysis of the narrative and its functions. Considering the author helps to see the motivations and the knowledge work at play in a narrative. At the same time, this thesis is not primarily an analysis of Zuboff as a thinker and theorist, but a reconstruction of the narrative/theory that is the result of the kind of theorist and narrator that she is. In other words, I approach the surveillance capitalism theory as a carefully narrated story about the author's stance on reality.

For the purposes of this thesis, I shall refer to this idea of narrative as telling. Narrative can be thought of as a performance of telling. This implies that narrative is thoroughly social. A story, told through the narrative, does not exist in a vacuum of infinite possible outcomes; it is the process and temporary result of the social, political, and material (which all transform in relation with each other), or rather, *beliefs about them*. Narrativization produces reality; it is a world-making act (Meretoja 2013, 105–106). Denzin (2000) writes on the overlapping and intertwining nature of narrative and story:

> A story and a narrative are nearly equivalent terms. A story has a beginning, a middle and an ending. Stories have certain basic structural features, including narrators, plots, settings, characters, crises and resolutions. Experience, if it is to be remembered, and represented, must be contained in a story which is narrated. We have no direct access to experience as such. We can only study experience through its representations, through the ways stories are told. (Denzin, in Andrews et al 2000 xi)

In other words, the way a story is told constructs to us the experience, the source material of that story, as coherent. Further, experience is of course not objective, which is what makes it interesting. Of course, this explication too is only one of many, and capturing the phenomena of narrativity into a definition is a difficult task. Attempts to do so have paradoxically cemented narrativity into a canon that has excluded non-typical narratives (Georgakopoulou 2007; Ochs & Capps 2001) such as "small stories" (Georgakopoulou 2007; Bamberg 2006). While this universalization constricts non-typical

narrativity, it is useful for the type of textual narrative that T*he Age of Surveillance Capitalism* has. These canonical features include most profoundly temporality: the telling of a story by a someone, heard by a listener, and involving a beginning, a middle, and an end (Ricoeur 1988; Georgakopoulou 2007, 31–33).

Narrativity is also a tool for constructing theory. Viewing narrativity as communication and interaction illustrates this perspective. Dienstag (2017) notes that a closer relationship and scholarly interaction with humanities has become more appealing for contemporary political theorists: "*When the writing of recondite texts is itself the crucial political act, then the tools of hermeneutics and other kinds of literary analysis become indispensable.*" (ibid., 496). This recalls Zuboff's use of dystopian texts as a reference point and is also a reason why I have opted to utilize scholarship on not just political but fictional (and religious, to an extent) dystopian and utopian narratives in my analysis. Utopia and dystopia exist in a relation of "the actual and the possible, dream and reality, spaces and temporalities, and competing versions of the ideal or the monstrous communities." (Banchi 2012, 5). They are "modes and resonances" that can be found everywhere in the world (ibid.). I combine terms that describe characteristics of fictional dystopian literature (Lisboa 2011) with the idea that modern dystopias mirror social anxieties (Barton 2016) to illustrate how fictional and non-fictional dystopian narratives have commonalities. I use Keith Booker's (2013) narration of the American dystopian literary tradition to make sense of how Zuboff's dystopianism compares to the fictional tradition. I also use Ruth Levitas' (1990) sociological and political concept of utopia, its division into form, content and function, and Mikko Mäntyniemi's (2021) apocalyptic narrativity, as well as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (2003) paranoid knowledge practices, to make sense of the narrative choices made by the author.

In my initial reading of Zuboff's work, I was struck by the elements of the theory that resembled those of fictional stories of the end of the world and of a new society that was about to arise from the ashes of the current one. The term apocalyptic-dystopian narrative – while a mouthful – helps to understand the narrative elements of the theory in a coherent way. Due to the Janus-face of dystopia and utopia (one's good society may well be another's nightmare), I also analyze the text for signs of utopia and utopianism. I use these terms to guide my reconstruction.

I have outlined here the framework of the narrative analysis employed in this thesis. I noted that narrativity is an integral part of theoretical work, and it is thus salient to study in conjunction with the reconstruction of theory. I use the term apocalyptic-dystopian narrative to analyze the narrative/theory and as dystopia and utopia are a Janus-faced concept, I also consider utopianism. Furthermore, interdisciplinary narrative studies, including scholarship on fictional narratives, are utilized in this

thesis, and this highlights the reality-producing function of narrative. I noted also that narrativity, especially in the case of political theory, can be thought of as intentionally interactive, albeit curated, and this is the perspective taken in my analysis.

Narrative analysis joins rational reconstruction of theory as the method of study this thesis. Next, I outline the main "story" of surveillance capitalism. I do this as faithfully to the original as possible. Analysis begins after the summary, in Chapter 3.

2. Summary of the Surveillance Capitalism theory

The blurb for *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power (2019) reads as such:

> The titanic power struggles of the twentieth century were between industrial capital and labor, but the twenty-first century finds surveillance capital pitted against the entirety of our societies in a bloodless battle for power and profit as violent as any the world has seen. (shoshanazuboff.com/book/about, retrieved 9.3.2022)

This summary is illustrative of Zuboff's claim that we have entered a new historical era both politically and especially economically. What follows is a theory that encompasses descriptions of economic systematics, political change, a theoretical foundation and claim about social life, human nature, and claims about power, freedom, and the effect of knowledge and surveillance in our lives. The theory is not only a description and analysis of present times but a claim about our shared future.

The theory is informed by Zuboff's background in economics and social psychology, especially its North American paradigm. This can be seen in the elements that are emphasized: the cognitive and the individual are units of analysis while society is given less focus despite the posited very sociologically significant dimensions and consequences of surveillance capitalism. The economic realm is especially and intentionally emphasized, while the political side of surveillance capitalism is not absent but minimally explored.

Zuboff takes the leader on a meandering journey of more than 500 pages of theoretical claims backed by empirical data. The book is as much a political tool meant to inform the general public as it is a research project that has spanned over a decade. This duality is visible in how Zuboff presents and interprets her data and connects it to social theory, yet she never delves deep into what these theoretical commitments do, and the use of data is also obscure. At most, it appears that the theory and data used in the book is a heterogenous collection of empirical case studies (but not political economic studies or surveillance studies), classical sociological and classical economic theory, interviews, speeches, news articles and other sources. Unfortunately, as Haggart (2019, 230) points

out, and I am inclined to agree, T*he Age of Surveillance Capitalism* falls short on presenting its evidence and framework of analysis. The enormous amount of data collected gives credence to the phenomena that Zuboff is examining but the reader has no meaningful access to how this data was collected, what was included and what omitted.

Another intresting point is the use of flowery, almost literary language. Clearly, this is a conscious choice that is meant to invoke a response in the reader. There is a clear narrative that is not only effective in conveying a certain affectivity to the reader but works in relation to the theory to construct it. What I mean by this is that the way Zuboff says things constructs what is said. All this means that there is much left unarticulated, which makes reconstructing the unarticulated and the emphasized, the unelaborated theoretical and epistemological commitments so meaningful. It is also interesting to analyze the narrative dimension of the book to understand the theory and Zuboff's project. Next, I summarize the main points of the surveillance capitalism theory.

Already in its title, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power, the book lays out three claims:
- First, that we are living in a new, distinct age: the age of *surveillance capitalism*.

- Second, that there is a type of conflict or struggle *for a human future*, and lastly that

- there is a *new frontier of power*.

Going over these three terms and the perspectives they open towards the theory will illustrate what the theory is about. First, a look at the term surveillance capitalism is in order. Zuboff presents that we are living in an age of structural change. Various political changes and the advancement in technological capabilities have together created an environment that is ripe for a new type of power to rise. Surveillance capitalism is a form of profit accumulation that was born of this historically specific opportunity. As an economic subsystem of capitalism, it follows the logic of pre-surveillance capitalism but is a harmful mutation that has predatory tendencies. According to the author, this is due to the shift in its target: the gaze of surveillance capitalism changes from seeing people as consumers and clients to regarding them as providers of raw material for its real customers, who in the beginning were advertisers. This means that the relationship of private corporations serving the needs and desires of consumers through their own logic of profit seeking is destroyed. Instead, a new system that extracts data from individuals' behavior, transforms this data into a product and sells it to others is expanding. The next logical step, Zuboff writes, is to transform surveilling to gather data

into surveilling to modify behavior to ensure more predictability in behavior that translates to certainty in profit accumulation.

The History and Operations of Surveillance Capitalism

What were the historically specific conditions that allowed for surveillance capitalism to develop and continue its operations? First, according to Zuboff, the development of capitalism, democracy and individuality are intimately linked together. With the development of information technologies, a new stage of modernity is knocking at the door. With that, consumer wants and needs have shifted so that services and platforms that allow for differentiation and expressions of individuality are desirable to consumers. The new information age is an opportunity for capitalist profit accumulation by ways of innovating new means of production (means of behavioral modification). At the same time, neoliberalism has spread in the West, shaping political attitudes about regulation and businesses' rights. It has become unfashionable to suggest or demand regulation that could hinder the freedom of corporations to act in the interest of profit. Zuboff distinguishes neoliberalism from its predecessor liberalism and underscores the demand for total freedom by the former. But the use of surveillance would not have been possible without certain events that ushered in an atmosphere of surveillance exceptionalism in the West. Zuboff notes changing social relations, the rise of individualized consumption, and the unrest and anxiety caused by these changes; there is an instability in the second modernity that we live in that caused a void for surveillance capitalism to fill.

In this environment, Google, an IT start-up company in Silicon Valley was looking for ways to turn investment money into profits. In the first years of the new Century, they pioneered a profit-making model that would spread rapidly across industries: collecting user-data and turning it into products to be sold to advertisers. This data, originally called data exhaust, is renamed *behavioral surplus* by Zuboff. Profit, she writes, is created of this surplus value that is extracted from our experience and turned into mass scale information about us.

Secrecy was designed into data extraction. It was paramount that users of information technology like search engines, social media services, smart home devices, and later anything from car insurance companies to toy makers and interactive virtual reality games were not aware of their data being massively collected to then be used to affect their decisions and movement. This *intentional bypassing of the consciousness* minimizes opposition, which Zuboff notes is crucial: the only way for surveillance capitalists to make a profit is to ensure that the raw material of their product – human experience that is rendered into depersonalized data streams and back into human behavior – is kept free of charge.

The flow of extracted experience (data as raw material from the perspective of the surveillance capitalists) is ensured by a process that Zuboff names dispossession. The four stages of dispossession, incursion, habituation, adaptation, and redirection psychologically direct us to accept the capturing of information about us that does not serve or profit us but is instead rendered into a product for the means of others. Alternatively, its used to modify our behavior, which we are to accept as a condition of having access to services and products. In fact, it is incredibly difficult to participate in the information society without agreeing to being surveilled, and thus this consent is coerced out of us.

Eventually, Zuboff warns, more and more corporations join in the race for surveillance profits and competition harshens. This signifies a move from prediction products for customers such as advertisers to a more diverse customer base. The author does not dwell on this point, but it is implicitly understood that these new clients could be any corporate, state or inter/transnational actors whose interests are repulsive to individual freedom and democratic life. This development is possible to see already: the change from surveilling to collect information to surveilling to use the collected information to modify behavior is being tested and happening. On a system level, surveillance capitalism strives for certainty to make profit. On a case-to-case basis, this means that more and more corporations will use either self-collected or bought user data to direct users' behavior on a mass scale. This is possible because there are many built shelters and fortifications that surveillance capitalists use for their benefit. Companies use neoliberal justifications to demand absolute freedom from regulation, and they use psychological tactics of distraction and normalization to dispossess us of our experience and to bypass knowledge so that questions of consent do not arise.

The individual is not the target of interest in this process, but mass-scale behavioral modification for profit is. Nudging us into a certain direction for reasons that are not directly meant to benefit us is what this behavioral modification is. But the logic of profit accumulation is not simply technocratic, according to Zuboff; one of the distinguishing qualities of the author's theory in comparison to many other theorists of economic surveillance technologies and techniques is the claim of deliberativeness that is based in techno-utopianism, with roots in behaviorist psychology. Besides common capitalist principles such as private ownership and profit accumulation by exploitation of the workforce and now the user-individual, which Zuboff does not find offensive, there is now an added ideological dimension of techno-utopianism. This utopianism is rooted in a belief of technological inevitability and the potential of technological development for human development. The information technology industry that draws inspiration from radical behaviorism is entrenched in a steadfast belief that technology will inevitably advance and that this is a net-good for society and the world. Techno-utopians go even further and argue that these technologies will lead us to a brighter future where silly

things such as our false belief in human freedom are replaced by a machine-mediated and directed way of life where IT applications will remove human error. This will be the death of freedom and individuality, Zuboff writes. She names this obsoletion of democratic politics and individuality as life in the hive.

A New Type of Power

Who are these techno utopians and what is their connection to the surveillance capitalists? The new priesthood, as Zuboff names them, is a non-organized group of researchers and Silicon Valley executives who create the ideological and technological foundations needed for surveillance capitalism to thrive. Some of them work in academia, developing new surveillance technologies and theories that praise the might of the machine, usually funded by surveillance capitalists. Others are in leading positions in surveillance capitalist corporations and spread the message of joy to their eager audience of IT professionals and journalists in addition to working behind the scenes.

Key here is knowledge and the distribution of it, or, to put it in Zuboff's terminology, the control over *the division of learning in society*. Knowledge of operations in full, of technological capabilities and the ways they are applied, and of the information gathered by plundering into our experience is in the hands of the few: the private corporation executives and major shareholders, the Silicon Valley business elite, and more and more the private corporation heads of previously unrelated industries that have hopped onto the wagon of surveillance capitalist profit accumulation. They have instrumentarian power: a new type of power that is used through the expanding network of sensing and computing. This de-centralized, ubiquitous gaze is a one-way mirror: while we are surveilled and excavated for information, even directed to act in certain ways by giving us punishments and rewards, there are those who, while invisible to us, have access to this information and to its applications. The machine network through which instrumentarian power is used is called the *Big Other*[1]. Reminiscent of the all-seeing Big Brother, the Big Other is no relative, no family member with even an illusion of human warmth: it is an othering, ubiquitously present gaze that breaks the individual into behaviors and tendencies to be exploited.

1 Despite similarities in terminology, Zuboff's Big Other is not a reference to the idea of the big Other, developed by Jacques Lacan. For Lacan, desire and subject formation are never detached from the social; it is necessarily reflective and "engendered by the desire of an Other" (Thomas-Olalde & Velho 2011, 2). There is no such desire in Zuboff's idea of the interaction between the Self and its other: the other is the alienated, and the Self can also become the other. The lacanian *big Other* symbolizes the social and linguistic structures that form the architectures of interaction. It is also the unnamed authority, a power or knowledge such as God, Party, Nature or History. The Other is an "enigma", an unknown that is always present albeit removed from direct contact. (Johnston 2018). Hook describes the Other as "social substance, as the amassed roles, traditions, understandings, and unwritten obligations that define a given societal situation", a system of "always already existing totality" that the subject must observe (Hook 2008, 55). Zuboff's *Big Other*, on the other hand, is a material outside force, a machinery of power and knowledge amassed by technological abilities: ubiquitous sensing and computing.

Two clear distinctions are made by Zuboff regarding power. First, power is different from authority: while power seeks totality and limitless rights to affect its subjects in the way that it prefers (instrumentarian power wants our behavior, totalitarianism wants our soul, etc.), authority is a legitimate hierarchical position founded on the consent of its knowing and choosing subjects. Authority is democratic and socially constructed, while power is violent and authoritarian. Zuboff's definition is explicitly normative: authority is good, power is dangerous and harmful. The second theoretically interesting point is the comparison to totalitarianism. It seems that for the author, power in its original sense means totalitarianism, an illegitimate authoritarian force used by the state in the realm of politics. Zuboff positions instrumentarian power as a contemporary equivalent to totalitarianism. Instrumentarian power is what totalitarianism would be if it worked in the realm of the economic – the market, and the social and political space that it needs to occupy to ensure the ability to continue making profit in the market – through a capitalist logic. Instrumentarian power and its use through the Big Other is fundamentally about "who knows, who decides, and who decides who knows" (Zuboff 2019, 326). It spires to own our behavior and our future.

Our Future

As this new elite use their newly acquired power, democratic decision-making and individual choice become sidelined. They turn unnecessary, as more operations and processes are automated, as systems and services are designed by using the information gathered about us on a mass-scale. Surveillance capitalism penetrates political life and aims to replace it by offering certainty and harmony, effectiveness and the bypassing of human vulnerability and error.
The surveillance capitalists do this to profit and succeed in competition. They do it to amass wealth by any means necessary. In its core, surveillance capitalism is hostile to democracy and individualism not because they are evil, but because they hinder profit accumulation.
Because of this, the projected future appears bleak. Zuboff states that the techno-utopian vision of an automated society and hive-like life inside it, the loss of individuality, and ubiquitous sensing and computing that directs and modifies our behavior would together create a dystopian world of no escape. There would be no sanctuary from the all-seeing dehumanizing gaze. To stop this, an alternate vision of the future is needed. Zuboff offers a vision that would save individuality and the political system that enables choice: democratic information capitalism, a society based on the social contract and a market that fulfills our needs and desires. A third modern based on regulated capitalism. This would be achieved by an awakening of individuals from their psychic numbing, to see how we have been deceived and to rediscover our astonishment and anger at the audacity of surveillance capitalists' greedy power grab. We would form a democratic double movement[1] of individuals who have found

1 A reference to Karl Polanyi's (2001) concept of the double movement (Zuboff 2019, 39–40)

their "moral bearings" and democratic institutions that would defeat surveillance capitalism. To achieve this goal, knowledge must be wrestled from the hands of the surveillance capitalists. They know far too much, more than any one individual would be capable of knowing. The right to the future tense starts with waking up to see what has been stolen and what is at stake: what happens after is left ambiguous with no clear road map. Zuboff offers us the knowledge, the language, and the theory: what happens next is our choice.

Now that we have established the basic arguments of the surveillance capitalism theory, it is possible to reconstruct its theoretical commitments. I start by considering narrativity.

3. The Surveillance Capitalism Narrative

In this chapter I conduct a reading and of the narrative that is constructed in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. I analyze the overarching theme of the text and the author's arguments about the world by using perspectives from studies of apocalyptic and dystopian literature and the concept of paranoid knowledge production as theorized by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003). First, I present an interpretation of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* as an apocalyptic narrative with the end point of dystopia. I use the term paranoid knowledge production to deconstruct the techniques that Zuboff uses to make a coherent apocalyptic-dystopian narrative. I also demonstrate how apocalyptic and especially dystopian thinking are paranoid knowledge practices. Next, I analyze how utopianism seeps into the narrative despite resistance from the author. I form a critique of the narrative in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* based on its anti-utopianism and epistemological commitment to a liberal capitalist worldview. I posit that these factors inhibit the author from exploring a political imagination that would be, if not more human, more humane.

The Apocalyptic-Dystopian Narrative

Before analyzing the utopian/dystopian and apocalyptic narrative elements in the Surveillance Capitalism theory, it is pertinent to sketch an outline of what these narratives do. What type of knowledge is produced using apocalyptic and utopian/dystopian narratives? Fitting here, I believe, is Sedgwick's (2003) idea of the paranoid imperative in knowledge production. I suggest that the surveillance capitalism theory/narrative is an example of such knowledge production or reality-making.

A paranoid knowledge practice has certain common characteristics that are compatible with the narrative elements of the surveillance capitalism theory. Interestingly, although not surprisingly, dystopia and utopia can be read through these practices, and this will inevitably affect their interpretation. I make two claims here: First, Zuboff constructs an apocalyptic-dystopian narrative in

The Age of Surveillance Capitalism; Second, this narrative is a consequence of a paranoid reading of utopia/dystopia.

First, let me establish that Sedgwick's (2003) terminology and use of paranoia does not describe a psychological state or a pathologic delusion about reality. Rather, it is a type of interpretation of the world that is currently common, even dominant in critical projects of knowledge production (Sedgwick 2003, 125). In fact, it is so dominant that "to theorize out of anything but a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious, or complaisant." (ibid., 125–126). Therefore, analyzing apocalyptic and utopian/dystopian thinking as paranoid knowledge practices requires having a critical eye for what is deemed as naïve or otherwise discredited in ways that strengthen the narrative credibility of the theory.

Sedgwick suggests that in paranoia, suspicion itself is the methodology (Sedgwick 2003, 125). In this approach, power is always hidden, which means that emancipatory power, or the possibility of resistance, lies in knowledge; in uncovering the truth. This suspicion is evident in Zuboff's narrative: In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, the idea of false consciousness, although not mentioned in relation to this term, is one of the foundations of the narrative. Surveillance capitalism is said to be taking over our lives and selves all the while we are purposefully made unaware. In fact, this false consciousness is the driving motivation for Zuboff's project. She seeks to inform the public so that we may rediscover our astonishment and spring into action. The method of deciphering is uncovering the secret logic and mechanisms of surveillance capitalism. This "faith in exposure" is also a characteristic of paranoid knowing, perhaps leading to its narrativity (Sedgwick 2003, 130; 138), a characteristic that is also typical of apocalypticism (Martin 2012, 342).

Another paranoid aspect, anticipation, is also evident in the narrative: there is a strong sense that surveillance capitalism is developing towards a point of no return and that surveillance capitalists are about to make a new move. This anticipation of doom and destruction in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is reminiscent of apocalyptic narratives. These narratives or "models of time" work as prophecies and narratives of transition (Mäntyniemi 2021, 7). The apocalypticism (Martin 2012, 324) of anticipatory paranoia creates a "complex relation to temporality that burrows backward and forward", ensuring that "bad news" is never truly a surprise. (Sedgwick 2003, 130.)

Uncovering the truth is connected by Zuboff with an affective awakening. Astonishment at the audacity of surveillance techniques and anger and grief are seen as motivation for building a wall between the individual and the metaphorical cliff's end beyond which lies a dystopian future. These emotions that stick and travel from subject to subject are characteristically negative, which is an

aspect of paranoid knowing (Sedgwick 2003). We are not expected to be delighted or curious at discovering what surveillance capitalism is and is doing, and there is no space for authentic joy or pleasure in a world of surveillance capitalism. Besides the negative affect expected by the author or the potential of negative affect tied to uncovering the truth, Zuboff also presents a future of negative affect as a common emotional state if surveillance capitalism manages to take over completely. As trust and empathy are said to crumble, they will be replaced by anxiety and apathy. This affective break achieved through world-breaking narrative work underlines the apocalypticism and dystopianism of the surveillance capitalism narrative/theory, as the reader is (at least invited to become) filled with dread and doom at having discovered this new world where we are living.

"Apocalypse" in the West has a strong connection to ancient Jewish and Christian scripture (Mäntyniemi 2021, 3–4; Barton 2016; Martin 2012, 342). In its religion-derived meaning, apocalypse signifies a "punishment or a final judgment for human sin and hubris" (Barton 2016, 7), whereas a common understanding defines it as world-changing "global scale destruction" (Mäntyniemi 2021, 3). After the apocalypse comes the post-apocalypse, the after-end-of-the-world, and finally the new beginning. Often, this following society is a desolate control or surveillance society, a dystopia. Barton suggests that our obsession with what happens after apocalypse – usually the dystopic future – is rooted in a recognition of the malaise of development over the last centuries. The individual and family are feared to become victims of a historical project of environmental, psychological, and sociological control (Barton 2016, 6). A growing trend in fictional dystopian narratives is the disassociation of the government and centering of private corporations as the authoritarian power in a dystopian society (Booker 2013, 12).

There is a cultural and political critique embedded in apocalyptic thinking. Apocalypticism works as a narrative worldview and as a "form of cultural and political resistance." (Martin 2012, 344). Because it is future-oriented, apocalyptic narrativity (and utopian and dystopian narrativity as closely related concepts) can be thought as imagining – daring to think about new possibilities – as a form of resistance. However, the apocalypse that leads to dystopia is a temporally ambiguous concept; it is difficult to locate the end of the world into a point in time. Where is the point in time where the end of the world ends, and dystopia begins? Despite the difficulty of dating a potential future event, some specificity exists. Utopia and dystopia are often set post-cataclysm, meaning the narrative begins after the cause(s) or event(s) that propels us toward utopia or dystopia (Lisboa 2011, 101). I have opted to use apocalypse and dystopia as two closely related, if not even intertwined concepts. I find it useful to not draw strict boundaries between the two, as they mutually construct each other. It is then not imperative to separate them into two distinct phenomena and choose one in this thesis, but rather to

consider them as slightly different temporalities that bleed into each other in the same narrative. As Mäntyniemi (2021, 11) notes, there are similarities between apocalypse and dystopia in secular fiction; the progression to an oppressive, authoritarian society is difficult to locate because this "societal movement" is not one rapid event.

The diverging point of apocalypse and dystopia is their focus. While the individual and their fraught relationship and dynamic with society are at the core of dystopian narratives, apocalyptic stories are focused on "the temporal experience of transition, a movement from one historical period to another". (Mäntyniemi 2021, 11.) Isomaa, Korpua and Teittinen go further and explicitly place the genres of apocalypse, post-apocalypse, and dystopia under the same metaphorical umbrella (2020, xi). I follow this and further use these terms as a method of thinking, as tools of analysis that transcend their use in fiction and slip into the real.

Dystopia is a useful analytical tool because it is never just fiction. Dystopia is a narrative we construct of ourselves and the world we live in. As much as dystopian storytelling is connected to the history of modernism and "Western" thought (although not exclusively or primarily a Western genre!), it is also a contemporary expression of collective anxiety. Technological developments and the desire to control and exploit nature and society have destroyed or threatened to destroy aspects of culture, our relationships with nature and living beings. The looming ever-present, shapeshifting threat to humanity – the loss of biodiversity, climate change, pollution, automatic weapon systems, surveillance technologies, governments that "know better" – itself causes anguish. Dystopian and post-apocalyptic narratives are a way to indulge in this "nightmarish fantasy" in the safety of fiction. (Barton 2016, 6.) In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, the nightmare is a thoroughly predictable hive of behaving subjects who have assimilated to the harmonious machine of surveillance capitalist profit making:

> [S]urveillance 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. […]
>
> Surveillance capitalism rules by instrumentarian 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. (Zuboff 2019, 504–506)

In the realm of science fiction, the 1980s and 1990s saw a boom in dystopian stories as a critial reaction to conservatism and corporate restructuring (Moylan 2000). The "dark turn" in American literature coincides with real events such as the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and continuing stagnant economic development (Booker 2012, 1–2). Interestingly, Zuboff locates the building materials of surveillance capitalism – neoliberal deregulation, surveillance exceptionalism, certain new technologies – to this era. The origin of "pessimism in modern culture" can however be traced back to the end of the 1800s, and later the beginning 20th century would bring with it changes in art and literature that are often attributed to modernism. Economic downturn and "colonial misadventures" led to a fear in the West of degeneration instead of an ever-continuing progression of history. Especially in the case of the United States becoming the most powerful state in the world system, "individuals came more and more to suspect that they were becoming little more than faceless cogs in a huge and impersonal corporate mechanism." (Booker 2013, 1–4.) All this would inspire the creation of fictional dystopias. More recently, Isomaa, Korpua and Teittinen (2020, x) have also connected the rapid rise of interest in classical dystopias to the blurring of lines between dystopian fiction and real events.

I find Booker's (2013) suggestion that "anxiety and warnings" about deleterious change in the early 20th century were greatly affected by the creators of "the intellectual background to modernism" – Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud – interesting from the perspective of paranoid knowledge production and apocalyptic-dystopianism. There is a common thread in all their works, that is, a vision for a new more glorious future shadowed by the warnings and possibility for dark days (ibid., 3). Zuboff positions her theory within this tradition of intellectual paranoia. She is convinced that we are at the cusp of a new age, noting the rise of an information capitalism before, in another breath, laying bare all the ways that it is destructive in its surveillance capitalist form. In fact, she sees her role as similar to that of these great thinkers. In VI. *The Outline, Themes, and Sources of this Book*, she lists her influences:

> As a social scientist, I have been drawn to earlier theorists who encountered the unprecedented in their time. Reading from this perspective, I developed a fresh appreciation for the intellectual courage and pioneering insights of classic texts, in

> which authors such as Durkheim, Marx, and Weber boldly theorized industrial capitalism and industrial society as it rapidly constructed itself in their midst during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My work here has also been inspired by mid-twentieth-century thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, Karl Polanyi, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Stanley Milgram, who struggled to name the unprecedented in their time as they faced the comprehension-defying phenomena of totalitarianism and labored to grasp their trail of consequence for the prospects of humanity. (Zuboff 2019, 22).

The theme that arises from looking at this collection of thinkers is their prominence and influence as theorists who, by creating or popularizing a new language to illustrate social and societal structures or systems, "discovered" something previously "hidden". It is also Zuboff's aim to uncover surveillance capitalism and address the systemic change that is currently happening to prevent the end of the world as we know it.

Narratives of apocalypse tend to have certain commonalities such as orphaned heroes, obtaining (perhaps forbidden) knowledge, the fight between good and evil, quest narratives, and falling (Lisboa 2011, xvi). The orphaned heroes of surveillance capitalism are us: individuals unwillingly and unwittingly thrust into a new reality, exemplified by a rhetoric of lost sanctuary, and yearning for a future to call home. As heroes we are called to action through rediscovering our astonishment and moral bearings, to return home.

> The sense of home slipping away provokes an unbearable yearning. The Portuguese have a name for this feeling: *saudade,* a word said to capture the homesickness and longing of separation from the homeland among emigrants across the centuries. Now the disruptions of the twenty-first century have turned these exquisite anxieties and longings of dislocation into a universal story that engulfs each one of us. (Zuboff 2019, 5)

This is Zuboff's grand project in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*; to acquire the purposefully obscured information of surveillance capitalist techniques that alienate us from ourselves to then resist it. The good are the ordinary people, users and citizens and consumers, who only need to be enlightened of current injustices to band together as individuals with a common cause – defeating the evil surveillance capitalists in a quest for freedom to return home. This is their/our quest and challenge.

The feeling that one becomes immersed in by reading *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is that of an approaching doom. Time appears ripe for the end of the world as we know it. This feeling arises because despite the meandering and circling narration style used by Zuboff to thoroughly convince the reader by repetition and numerous empirical examples, the narrative itself is structured as linear

with chronological points; the development of surveillance capitalism is written as contemporary history. Zuboff uses both apocalyptic and dystopian elements to construct a cohesive story of gradual developments toward an apocalypse that will inevitably – if not prevented – lead to dystopia. The downward spiral of society that is envisioned in the book is very dystopian in its relentless pessimism. But there is a sense of ambiguity and hope in the construction of an alternative to the dystopia that is more characteristic of apocalyptic narratives (Mäntyniemi 2021, 11).

Along with pessimism, another dystopian element is the anxious worry about the destruction of the individual. This destruction is said to be caused by the capturing of knowledge by surveillance capitalists. Zuboff describes this process as dispossession, the "original sin" of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019, 192). It is not death itself, or total destruction, but the death of individual identity that is "the ultimate tragedy for the modern, dystopian protagonist" (Barton 2016, 8).

> 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 instrumentarian 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. (Zuboff. 2019, 519)

This is indeed the threat that is emphasized over and over in the surveillance capitalism narrative. The greatest threat posed by surveillance capitalism, according to Zuboff, is not intensified economic inequality, the environmental impact of such an economic system or any other form of collective or shared suffering. Instead, a mass loss of individuality (and through individuality, freedom) takes center stage. This threat is on a planetary scale. Zuboff even suggests that there is a new wave of extinction happening:

> 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. (Zuboff 2019, 516).

This prediction of a seventh extinction is no less than a prediction of apocalypse, the irreversible transformation of the world through the destruction of existing social bonds and our very humanity. Interestingly, Zuboff's narrative excludes environmental destruction. This demonstrates how tightly the narrative of threat is focused on people as detached from their environment. The loss of individuality is positioned as equally grave an existential threat as the current climate crisis.

Recall that earlier it was established that apocalyptic narratives have an ambiguous relationship with time. Because the end of the world can and perhaps will inevitably happen, in a way it is already happening and has happened. In a narrative sense, however, there is a "tipping point" of no return (Lisboa 2011, 58). Zuboff locates this upcoming tipping point somewhere between the advancing of information technology capabilities to monitor and surveil and ubiquitous computing and sensing. The point of no return is situated between the pioneering of user generated data in the early 2000s and a new generation that grows to experience social life embedded in surveillance capitalism. Young people today are the guinea pigs: they will grow up knowing only a world where a computer mediated sociality is the normal, where one only exists if they are present in and on social media. In other worlds, the apocalypse is now.

This looming, gradual destruction in Zuboff's theory is the final developmental stage of the mutation that is surveillance capitalism: the overtaking of the social and material world by the surveillance capitalists by way of instrumentarian power and the Big Other. The narrative informs us that we are standing at the edge of apocalypse, about to step over the edge and fall head-first into a dystopic future:

> In one direction lies the possibility of a synthetic declaration for a third modernity based on the strengthening of democratic institutions and the creative construction of a double movement for our time. On this road we harness the digital to forms of information capitalism that reunite supply and demand in ways that are both genuinely productive of effective life and compatible with a flourishing democratic social order. […] If we follow the other road [--] we find our way to surveillance capitalism's antidemocratic vision for a third modernity fashioned by instrumentarian power. It is a future of certainty accomplished without violence. The price we pay is not with our bodies but with our freedom. This future does not yet exist, but like Scrooge's dream of Christmas future, the materials are all in place and ready for assembly. (Zuboff 2019, 395)

There is an alternative to the looming dystopia. The narrative presents that there is still time to change the current trajectory. Yet, the "materials are all in place" for a future of control and domination. The dystopian future appears bleak:

> In this future we are exiles from our own behavior, denied access to or control over knowledge derived from its dispossession for others by others. Knowledge, authority, and power rest with surveillance capital, for which we are merely "human natural resources." We are the native peoples now whose tacit claims to self-determination have vanished from the maps of our own experience. (Zuboff 2019, 100).

The appropriation of identity alongside industrialization is a theme portrayed throughout modern dystopias (Barton 2016, 9). Zuboff is of course familiar with fictional dystopias such as George Orwell's 1984 (see e.g., Zuboff 2019, 371) which she uses to illustrate and analyze surveillance capitalism's peculiarities. Arguably, there is self-awareness in her writing about the dystopian picture that she paints for the reader about the current state of matters. Referencing dystopian fiction, choosing to use dramatic and vivid (often literary in style) language, and underscoring urgency, danger and the "unprecedented" amassing of power by the surveillance capitalists all point to dystopian thinking. At times this becomes heavily underscored:

> In the dystopia of the uncontract, surveillance capitalism's drive toward certainty fills the space once occupied by all the human work of building and replenishing social trust, which is now reinterpreted as unnecessary friction in the march toward guaranteed outcomes. (Zuboff 2019, 335)

In concrete terms, the narrative of loss of individuality in Surveillance Capitalism means being exiled from one's experience through technology that bypasses the conscious self and transforms us into a hive of behaving animals. The othering gaze of surveillance dehumanizes us. It forces us to look at contemporary society and wonder how we got where we are. It compels us to look within and ask if we are free, if we exist in the ways that we thought we did. The idea of an all-encompassing ruling class is, in practice the digital priesthood who claim the right to know and the right to decide who knows. The ubiquitous network of sensing and computing – the Big Other – is envisioned as the wielder of social control. Zuboff predicts that the new despots of the digital age will rise to power through the replacement of the social contract and trust by information technology –mediated processes and through the obsoletion of politics when surveillance capitalists finally manage to totally obtain the means of behavioral modification with the assistance of the digital priesthood (command of the big other and hold of instrumentarian power) (Zuboff 2019, 430–435).

> 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. (Zuboff 2019, 505)

Zuboff points out the conditions that have given rise to surveillance capitalism: people's potential for evil and sin realized in mindsets and policies. At the turn of the century, "foundational mechanisms" of surveillance capitalism came together in "audacity, competitive cunning, dominance, and wealth" (Zuboff 2019, 41). If the apocalypse of the internet of things is to come about, it will be the result of hubristic greed and selfishness. But it is not ordinary people who are to blame, but the shadowy figures that are the surveillance capitalists who are aided by techno-utopians. This divide between good and evil is yet another aspect that connects the narrative in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* to the apocalyptic and utopian/dystopian narrative traditions. The apocalyptic imagination tends to be dualistic in ethical, spatial, and chronological ways. In religious apocalypticism, the spatial duality exists between the Earth and the truer dimension, heaven. (Martin 2012, 342–343.) Zuboff borrows this spatial duality narrative to her theory:

> Surveillance capitalism's command of the division of learning in society begins with what I call the problem of the two texts. The specific mechanisms of surveillance capitalism compel the production of two "electronic texts," not just one. When it comes to the first text, we are its authors and readers. This public-facing text is familiar and celebrated for the universe of information and connection it brings to our fingertips. […]
>
> Under the regime of surveillance capitalism, however, the first text does not stand alone; it trails a shadow close behind. The first text, full of promise, actually functions as the supply operation for the second text: the shadow text. […] This one is hidden from our view: "read only" for surveillance capitalists. In this text our experience is dragooned as raw material to be accumulated and analyzed as means to others' market ends. The shadow text is a burgeoning accumulation of behavioral surplus and its analyses, and it says more about us than we can know about ourselves. (Zuboff 2019, 185)

Spatial duality is not limited to the technical aspects but expand to the logic of surveillance capitalism and its operations. Surveillance and behavior modifying practices bypass consciousness:

> [Google economist] Varian awards surveillance capitalists the privilege of the experimenter's role, and this is presented as another casual fait accompli. In fact, it reflects the final critical step in surveillance capitalists' radical self-dealing of new rights. In this phase of the prediction imperative, surveillance capitalists declare their right to modify others' behavior for profit according to methods that bypass human awareness, individual decision rights, and the entire complex of self-regulatory processes that we summarize with terms such as *autonomy* and *self-determination*. (Zuboff 2019, 297)

According to this narrative, the hidden realms of the technology that we use, and the hidden operations of surveillance capitalists are more "real" than the illusion that we are immersed in. We experience this illusion in the present moment, and chronologically we are moving towards the apocalypse. I suggest that this narrative duality is problematic if we consider that what Zuboff is attempting to describe with the narrative is 'real'. It may be difficult to draw clear lines between good and evil. Sometimes even in apocalyptic narratives, the enemy is within (Lisboa 2011, 92).

Besides the issue of how knowledge is produced via narrativization, there is another issue: the normative gaze of the protagonist that is unable to perform self-critique. By distancing the surveillance capitalists from the rest of us, the protagonists of the apocalypse, Zuboff implicitly claims that the post-apocalyptic techno dystopia can be avoided without introspection. To be sure, the unequal distribution of power assures that surveillance capitalists (who we may think of as the elite capitalists in the IT sector) are an elite group distinct from the people they prey on. It is true that power and agency are not symmetric. However, as is recognized in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, there were certain historical reasons that helped to pave way for the rise of surveillance capitalism. Not only were there material reasons, such as a lack of enforced regulations, but many of these reasons were also ideological or having to do with beliefs and values (such as neoliberalism, see Zuboff 2019, 39–41). It is perhaps counterproductive to appoint blame to groups of individuals if a system allows such a development or shadowy operations to happen. Introspection may mean looking within to ask if there are aspects beyond the corporate greed of others or the political failures of others that have implications and consequences for the rise of surveillance capitalism.

Although different apocalyptic scenarios are numerous, every one apocalypse is understood as a one-time event and so it is difficult to fathom repeated ends-of-the-world (Lisboa 2011, 20). Perhaps for this reason, Surveillance Capitalism is also an abstraction that emphasized total control of the post-individual hive, total loss of freedom and society, ubiquity of instrumentarian power and the Big Other, and the exceptionality of surveillance capitalism. My issue with this is not necessarily the lack of nuance in the narrative, but the certainty about the systematic and distinct quality of surveillance capitalism and our future under it.

Surveillance Capitalism critiques the steadfast belief of the tech industry that an information technology revolution will thrust us into a new historical phase that will cure us of our ills (the "ideology of inevitabilism", the "new utopianism") (Zuboff 2019, 220-224), yet as I have demonstrated in this section, its own warnings of techno dystopia are also total in their belief. The future is depicted as either-or with no ambiguity or complexity. Either we succumb to a total

destruction of the world as we know it by surveillance capitalism and wake up in a dystopia, or we perform an apocalypse of our own and destroy surveillance capitalism.

It is important to note that an "unmystified view of systematic oppression" does not necessitate "any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences." (Sedgwick 2003, 127–128). In fact, paranoid ways of "seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge" open perspectives into some things, and make knowing some other things difficult (ibid., 130). To put it bluntly, being certain that a hidden, totalizing power exists, does not make said thing true. Instead, it creates the idea of inevitability, which is what Zuboff herself criticizes.

Another issue with paranoia is that its "trust in exposure" claims that the general public is unaware and even naïve to what is happening. In fact, the assumption that "it will surprise or disturb, never mind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmatic, or even violent" ignores that we are constantly aware of various instances of violence, inequality, and oppression – yet many times are unable or choose not to stop it from happening (Sedgwick 2003, 141.) Here I want to invite critical dialogues and the dialogical process back into the conversation. Clarke writes how Bakhtin's heteroglossia, the coexisting variation of voices and thoughts with each other, as a fundamental condition of sociality (Clarke 2019, 18–20), "raises the possibility of thinking about the multiple ways in which people live their subordination, sometimes consenting, sometimes refusing but more often finding accommodations and distancing devices and living with/in ambivalence." (Clarke 2019, 21). Zuboff's unwavering trust in the power of knowledge fits a heroic narrative but may create a simplified image of resistance.

The purpose of my analysis is not to insinuate in a derogatory manner that the theory presented in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is some fantastical narrative with no basis in reality. The work of "discovering" surveillance capitalism by unravelling its logic, operations and techniques is done by constructing a new theoretical language and presenting a narrative of reality through this new language. This work is real in the sense that according to Zuboff's empirical data, these processes are happening. The interpretation, or knowledge production, conducted by the author, is what I analyze in this section. working on the level of the narrative, the framing and conceptualizing of the phenomena as a story, is done to illustrate the tools that Zuboff uses to make her normative project comprehensible to the reader. As Mäntyniemi states, apocalyptic narratives organize the past to construct a desired future (2021, 7).

Despite its bleakness, the banal apocalypse and the predicted dystopic future, a hopeful desire for the future persist. Zuboff's narrative is an example of how, although apocalypse has come to mean

destruction, it also possesses the meanings of discovery and epiphany. Destruction is rarely total. Unfortunately, at least in theological apocalyptic narratives, often only a minority gets to enjoy salvation at the heavy charge of wretchedness. (Lisboa 2011, xviii, 20, 53; Martin 2012.) In Zuboff's vision, it is us in Western democratic capitalist societies who will inherit the Earth.According to Lisboa, the misery at the end of the world makes transgressions become possible. Indeed, there is hope in the articulation of Surveillance Capitalism. Despite the urgency and anxiety embedded in Zuboff's project, she retains a sense of optimism in our ability to defeat the beast, and in doing so presents to the reader the foundations of a future that they may call home:

> Surely the Age of Surveillance Capitalism will meet the same fate [as the Gilded Age] 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. (Zuboff 2019, 525).

This vision of a course correction is the utopian side of the utopia/dystopia awaiting behind the apocalyptic transformation. Curiously, it is not self-aware: Zuboff is an anti-utopian thinker. I will turn to this theme in the next section.

In this section I have argued that the narrative in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is apocalyptic and dystopian. I suggested that the ambiguity of its apocalypticism opens possibilities for utopianism in the narrative. I demonstrated these claims by analyzing the narrative as paranoid knowledge production and by showing the shared narrative characteristics of fictional and religious apocalyptic and dystopian narratives with the surveillance capitalism narrative. Finally, I critiqued the unproblematized role of paranoia as a practice that anticipates power to be hidden and dismisses less conspiratorial ways of interpreting the world as naïve. I also noted that the dualism embedded in the apocalyptic and dystopian narrative form a picture of clearly distinct sides of good and evil that are perhaps not consistent with the reality behind the story of that reality.

The Liberal Utopianism of the Human Future

In this section, I will demonstrate how the anti-utopianism in the narrative of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* enables Zuboff to strengthen the epistemic association between liberalism and "common sense" progress. This is followed by an analysis of Zuboff's own future vision, the "human future", as an (albeit ambiguous) utopia.

Apocalypse is not the same as a vacuum of nothingness; the end at the end of the world must have something for someone to experience it, and often in apocalyptic narratives that something is "the past repeated" due to our inability to release our imagination from "the vocabulary of what we already know" (Lisboa 2011, 63; 67). To be in any way meaningful in its destruction and annihilation, apocalypse must also create (Mäntyniemi 2021, 202). This idea of destruction enables us to imagine change, and fictional apocalyptic narratives can reflect experiences of reality and what the apocalypse should alter (ibid., 201). Thus, the end of the world signifies a break from the present, and functionally we can consider it as an opportunity for either dystopia or utopia to rise.

In the previous section, I showed that the narrative embedded in the surveillance capitalism theory is an apocalyptic one that leads to dystopia. A "human future" is Zuboff's alternative to the bleak days ahead if we do not rise against the predatory exploitation of human experience. Defining this human future is, however, much more difficult than observing Zuboff's more nightmarish prediction of the outcome of surveillance capitalism. This is a consequence of the author's decision to not fully flesh out either her theoretical commitments or the alternative for surveillance capitalism; her focus is firmly on exposing surveillance capitalism by constructing a theory of it and the power they use to operate. In the absence of a clear, easy to locate description, this vision must be reconstructed and assembled from fragments in the text.

First, the human future has a double meaning. On the one hand, it is Zuboff's vision of a democratic, individual agency-filled digital future, a "third modern" (Zuboff 2019, 46). Yet, on the other hand, it is also used to signify a principle at stake; an abstract "right to the future tense" that surveillance capitalism is currently eroding (ibid., 60). Just as the apocalypse and the dystopia following it are always already happening in potential, the utopia of the human future is simultaneously in peril and not yet (or anymore) here. The ambiguous utopia is both in reach and almost lost forever.

Despite its grand title, the human future has a simple premise: instead of surveillance capitalists overseeing and directing our lives, we should be in charge of ourselves with technology and capitalism serving our needs and desires. Already we are presented with the question of what those needs and desires are. An existentialist liberal thinker such as Zuboff argues that we decide our own needs independently, that our desires are "ours" – individual. This way of interpreting individuality as a space is to a great degree distinct from the subject's social and material relations with their surroundings. However, just as needs nor desires are completely universal, it is also difficult to suggest that they be completely individual either. Needs and desires are formed relationally[1] with our

1 This is not to argue that there is *no* universality, as of course things like shelter or sustenance are essential for surviving.

surrounding reality; they transform in time and space with the relations and consciousness we have with the world.

Levitas (1990, 185) notes that although human nature and needs are necessary criteria for measuring good from bad, any objective claim about them obscures how moral choice is essential in the constructing of societies and subjects. Utopias make these moral choices explicit, as utopian visions reveal how needs and desires are constructed. Indeed, even "human nature", the location of our desires and needs, is a construction – a fact that problematizes the notion of progress, which is the core of Zuboff's human future. After all, if our desires and needs differ, then progress cannot be understood universally either. Zuboff does not problematize this point, and instead assumes that in a capitalist democracy, all subjects share a liberal morality and that liberal ideals are objectively good for all subjects.

It is apparent that although the philosophical battle about human nature in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* points to it being an unstable and contested concept, Zuboff takes the position of objectivity.

> So it is for me and perhaps for you: the bare facts of surveillance capitalism necessarily arouse my indignation because they demean human dignity. The future of this narrative will depend upon the indignant citizens, journalists, and scholars drawn to this frontier project; indignant elected officials and policy makers who understand that their authority originates in the foundational values of democratic communities; and, especially, indignant young people who act in the knowledge 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. (Zuboff 2019, 522)

The juxtaposition of good and evil is clearly defined with little ambiguity. This leads to moral choice being left out of the equation, as the reader is not only expected to experience the expected emotions in surveillance capitalism's affective relations, but also find good and desirable that which is presented as obvious and objective. The suggestion is that because we have lost our way in the maze of digital services (or data-mining operations marketed to their userbase as services) and platforms and failed to see the kind of infrastructure that is being built around us to exploit and transform us, we must wake up and find our astonishment once again to see reality in order to do what is rational in the current system: work in the realm of existing institutions for progress. There is a tension here between the supposedly shared, objective morality and our individual will. We are to individually

awaken to ponder this question and come to the same conclusion that the current system is undesirable and immoral.

According to Zuboff, we need and desire individuality, freedom, and choice, three concepts that are undetachable. Of these three, individuality is presented as the condition that makes freedom and choice possible. In addition to their more abstract psychological dimensions, individuality, freedom, and choice are also understood as being realizable only in a democratic capitalist society. This is evident in how the author describes the harm of surveillance capitalism:

> 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 instrumentarian 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. (Zuboff 2019, 504)

For the author, democracy and capitalism have a strong bond, and they appear in the text together as "market democracy" (e.g., Zuboff 2019, 40). Another reason for the commitment to the idea of democratic capitalism as the enabler of individuality, freedom, and choice, is the assumption that we seek effectiveness in life. This effectiveness is thought to be compatible with autonomy:

> Social participation and individual effectiveness should not require the sacrifice of our right to the future tense, which comprises our will to will, our autonomy, our decision rights, our privacy, and, indeed, our human natures. (ibid., 343)

Since the pursuing of effective life is characteristic of human nature and societies according to Zuboff, then this is understood as one of our needs that should be fulfilled. Another aspect is that social and societal relations are understood as transactional:

> 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 […] 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 it also formally rescinds any remaining reciprocities with its societies. (ibid., 499)

We also need and desire sanctuary, a place to hide from surveillance in order to be authentic. In fact, this private space/place is tightly connected to freedom and humanity. (Ibid. 489.)

Now that we have established the legitimization of the human future and progress based on needs and desires, I present my argument that despite not regarding itself as such, Zuboff's human future is a utopia. This may be controversial: surely progress and utopia are different, as progress describes continuing change for the better while utopia seems to describe something more radical in its distance to the present. Ellen Meiksins Wood notes that the idea of progress, connected to modernity and an imagined universal history of the Enlightenment, is understood as "a very long-term cumulative process, projecting if not into infinity at least into the indefinite future" with implications that "certain truths can and will be discovered" and "any given knowledge is open to question, that all authority is subject to challenge, that no one has a monopoly on truth." (Wood 2012, 304–305). In contrast, many definitions – including the colloquial one – of utopia view it as a destination rather than a process.

Levitas (1990;2003;2013;2017) offers a reading of utopia that breaks from this conceptual marriage between utopia and destination. She presents an interpretation of utopia as a method instead of the endpoint. Following this, I describe Zuboff's progressive vision as *ambiguously utopian* for two reasons. First, as an anti-utopian work, the utopian qualities of the narration are not self-aware, and thus not defined as such. Second, I use ambiguous to illustrate the lack of clarity in content in the author's vision. By this I mean that the actual qualities of the human future are rather hazy; we are not explicitly told what that society or condition of human existence would look like. Instead, the utopian vision works as a critique of current conditions (Moylan 2000). Note however that the lack of a radical break from current conditions in Zuboff's vision is not itself a feature of its ambiguity as a utopia. This is a feature of Zuboff's liberalism and the demand for progress instead of revolution or travelling to an alternative world.

Levitas (1990; 2003) notes that despite the existing variance of definitions and "streams of studies" of utopia (including ones that accept only either literary or political theoretical utopias as true utopias), most attempts to form a theory of the concept are based on one or more of three dimensions: *form*, *function*, and *content*. Form signifies the structural or formal requirements that utopia must have for it to qualify as such. Function describes how utopia is used: as a critique, catalyst, or tool for change.

Content refers to the story that is narrated in a utopia. I shall now illustrate Zuboff's human future as framed by these three terms with a focus on function.

First, it is enough in this context to note that the *form* of the human future is that of a nonfictive narrative and a political theory that is a critique of current and possible future conditions. This thesis does not constrict the definition of utopia or utopianism formally to the realm of fiction or a type of political thinking but follows Levitas' (1990) open definition of utopia as desire for a better society and better life.

Addressing the *content* of the human future utopia necessitates a look at its practicalities. This is fruitful not only in framing the human future as a utopia, but also in reconstructing the theoretical claims and underlying assumptions in the surveillance capitalism theory and narrative through examining what is desirable; what is the goal. Above, we laid out the central claims about needs and desires: individuality, autonomous choice, and freedom; effectiveness and transaction; sanctuary. Zuboff's claims about human nature, and they form the basis of these needs and desires – in fact, they are synonymous in many cases. We need and desire individuality because we truly exist only as individuals. We need and desire sanctuary, because we truly only exist in our private world of meaning-making and autonomous decision-making. Now, the content of the human future utopia is a sequel to these claims. It is these principles as they are realized in the future.

The human future has a specific function, though it is not clearly articulated by Zuboff. That is to suggest an alternative way of living and being that more closely achieves the fulfilment of needs and desires according to our (supposed) human nature. It works together with Zuboff's claims about the systematic and concise logic of surveillance capitalism. By first constructing an apocalyptic narrative and painting a picture of a techno-dystopia, the groundwork is laid for a more preferred future. In other words, becoming conscious of how surveillance capitalism uses and manipulates us is the tool to achieving this vision. The human future vision then functions as the reward; it claims that this is how we could be living in the future, if only we first do what is necessary and "fight for a third modern that is first and foremost a human future". In practice, the preferred version of the future is an "inclusive democracy" that is "committed to the individual's right to effective life." (Zuboff 2019, 61.)

Essentially, the human future is a liberal utopia. It is an image of a future that is achieved not by a radical break from the present (although narratively, Zuboff does claim this) but by democratically guided progress that is rooted in the belief that uncovering power and focusing on education, and

democratic change is the rational route to achieving its utopic vision. But how is this utopian and not "common sense"? It is common sense because it is a widely held belief. Because it is embedded into the practices of political systems in the west, it "functions" and therefore strengthens the "common sense" quality of it. This steadfast belief reminds me of Mannheim's claim about historical liberal utopianism: "*Bourgeois liberalism was much too preoccupied with norms to concern itself with the actual situation as it really existed. Hence, it necessarily constructed for itself its own ideal world.*" (Mannheim 1954, 199). Mannheim argues that in liberal utopianism, there is a gap between the ideal and actual social and material conditions, with utopian thinkers privileging the former. Again, we do not need to bind the definition of utopia to either realism or the lack of it, but observationally Zuboff fits this idea of liberal utopianism.

Zuboff calls the new human future era *a third modern*. Modernity is of course not a simple and uncontested concept (see Joas 2008). Although there is a common understanding of modernity today as liberal and progressive, resulting from the formation of 'the West', its ideological and theoretical foundations were much more varied and produced competing philosophical traditions (Wood 2002, 289). Joas (2008) suggests that there are two main paradigms of knowledge under the umbrella of modernity: a Marxist theory of expanding economization in all spheres of life and a functionalist modernization theory that expects continuing differentiation and rationalization in society. While both paradigms have lost some of their relevance and support in recent decades (ibid.), Zuboff is still a believer in modernism as a historical process as a political philosophy.

When considered in its full context, Zuboff's third modern is clearly meant as a continuation of liberal capitalist practices after overcoming its post-neoliberal boogieman cousin, surveillance capitalism. I lean on Wood (2002) and suggest that the modernity that Zuboff envisions in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* as a human future is better understood as 'capitalist culture'. Zuboff's claims about what modernity is – as implied by equating the term third modernity with her utopian vision – are more in line with what Wood calls capitalist culture. Historically, this early modern transformation of "market mechanisms to moral imperatives" would in time come to shape how "rule and domination, […] liberty and equality" are understood in Western political thought (ibid., 312). To be sure, I want to be careful here not to replace Zuboff's liberal functionalism and idea of progressive modernization with its rival, totalizing economization. I merely suggest that as a liberal capitalist thinker, the author's vision of progression and utopia – although not self-aware of this quality – is informed by values and desires that fit with a capitalist economy.

The human future utopia is strongly committed to not only maintaining but cultivating capitalism. Despite scathing critique of surveillance capitalism, capitalist logic itself along with mega-scale corporations still have a role to play in the human future. In fact, they are central to the working of this utopian system. Zuboff connects democracy and capitalism intimately by claiming that historically, capitalist reciprocities essentially created the demand for democracy (2019, 495). It is then insinuated that without surveillance capitalism destroying these reciprocities and capturing the division of learning in society, this ideal form of capitalism that is compatible and even supportive to democracy will arise. This version of capitalism is benevolent and serves our needs. It works according to the idea of capitalist market logic, and the predatory tendencies of profit-seeking actors are curbed by regulation.

The individuality envisioned by Zuboff is one that fits well with capitalist markets. This is not surprising given that Zuboff believes strongly in the fair and needs-fulfilling functioning of capitalist markets as long as people are in charge of making decisions. This is well illustrated by an anecdote that she uses to show how automating this human factor away leads to dystopia. This is how the story begins:

> In November 2016 the experience of three people in the small Illinois town of Belleville was testimony to what we lose when we subordinate ourselves to the dystopian rule of the uncontract. Pat and Stanford Kipping owed their credit union $350 on their 1998 Buick. Once again, they could not make their monthly $95 payment. The Kippings' credit union enlisted a local repo man, Jim Ford, to take away their car. (Zuboff 2019, 334)

However, when Ford saw the "elderly couple who were forced to choose between buying medicine and making their car payments", he did not only waive his repossession fees but decided to do "the human thing" and offered to cover the Kipplings' debt to the credit union. This was resisted by the credit union manager who "insisted that Ford had to follow the 'process'", but the repo man was insistent in following the "ancient social principles of the contract" instead. The issue was finally solved after the manager relented and a group of strangers came to help: "*Within twenty-four hours, an online fund-raising appeal produced enough to pay off the Kippings' car, detail it, purchase a Thanksgiving turkey, and give the couple an additional gift of $1,000.*". (ibid., 334).

Let's put aside the question of – given that capitalism is a system that is embedded in almost all relations and especially our survivability – whether people are truly in charge even in the everyday transactions described in the above example. Supposing that Ford's supervisor was not under duress

because of financial survivability or other restrains cause by existing in a socio-material reality, he and Ford along with the kind internet strangers were the human factor that directly caused the elderly couple's relief. Their individual choices saved the elderly couple from financial destitution in this situation (but not in the long run – there is no room in the anecdote for pondering what happened to them after their $1000 dollar cash allowance was used up). Zuboff's interest is not in questions such as why a financial and political system allows vulnerable people like the poor and ailing elderly to suffer, but in how surveillance capitalist practices would destroy the "daily human thing" of negotiating humane solutions to everyday problems (Zuboff 2019, 335). Zuboff's preferred idea is not communal, structural or system based. This leads to vulnerabilities such as: What if the elderly couple, for whatever reason, did not strike the sympathies of Ford? What if others had no spare change to donate. What if Ford's supervisor was even tougher in his rejection of alternative payment plans. The anecdote shows that the "the most cherished requirements of a civilized life" (ibid., 334) are fundamentally transactional as well as compatible with the liberal capitalist idea of individual choice. But there was little agency and choice allocated to the elderly couple; they were mostly objects of charity. It is strange that Zuboff does not consider this. What this anecdote and Zuboff's takeaway from it shows, according to my interpretation, is that individuals should have agency to negotiate and decide on their actions within the structural reality they are in, but we ought not to question the system-mandated hierarchical relations and practices that structure the boundaries of our actions too much. This is what autonomous freedom means to Zuboff but is unsatisfactory because it restricts political imagining and social interaction to existing practices without challenging anything structural.

In any case, these ideas, now in peril, are tightly connected to individualism. This can be seen in how Zuboff (2019, 504) describes how techno-utopianism and surveillance capitalism merge into "-- 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.*"* Collectivism is so rejected by Zuboff that the idea of something other than liberal individualism becomes synonymous with the loss of freedom. The opposite of collectivism is freedom, or individuality, which are treated as impossible to separate. So connected are they that the name of Zuboff's utopia is *human* future: human in the singular, a choice that emphasizes the boundaries between human beings.

It is interesting that because surveillance capitalism is treated as a dystopian mutation, a "cruel perversion of capitalism and […] an unacceptable affront to democracy" (Zuboff 2019, 518) in the

narrative of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, the idea that capitalism itself and democracy under capitalism could/does function with the same logic and ideology is not considered. Instead, the exceptional evil of surveillance capitalism is emphasized:

> For the sake of its own commercial success, surveillance capitalism aims us toward the hive collective. This privatized instrumentarian 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. (Zuboff 2019, 504–505)

This distinction only makes sense if we understand that under the kind of liberal capitalism that Zuboff envisions in the human future utopia, this system is fundamentally exceptional in that only it offers the absence of restrictions of choice; any other political/economic system affects our ability to make meaningful choices and therefore affects our freedom negatively. It seems that the human future is Zuboff's attempt to save capitalism and liberalism by imagining them as free from their contemporary issues and failures. Mannheim traces this utopian claim of liberalism as liberator of the individual through destroying old social classes – not a controversial idea in the west – to its focus on the idea (instead of I.e., materialism):

> Liberal thought […] had a sense of indeterminism even though (as we have seen), through the idea of progress, it achieved relative nearness to the concrete historical process. The liberal's sense of indeterminism was based on faith in an immediate relationship to an absolute sphere of ethical imperatives—to the idea itself. (Mannheim 1954, 219)

Considering all these aspects – commitment to the traditions of modernism, liberal democratic capitalism, individuality, and anti-collectivity – together in relation to each other enables us to observe the apparent liberalism of the human future. I posit that despite its own self-identification as anti-utopian, Zuboff's idea of progress is in fact a contemporary liberal utopia. It is possible that were the interpretation of utopia in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* not so thoroughly influenced by both the Manuels' work and the colloquial definition of the term informed by anti-socialist attitudes (see Levitas 1990), the idea of the human future as a utopian vision might not be absolutely repulsive. As Levitas notes, not all utopias are thoroughly "social" in the sense that their focus is on the

relationship between a society and the subject and the fulfillment of needs and desires. Sometimes utopian imagination can withdraw from the social realm and enter the psychological or spiritual dimensions (Levitas 1990, 192). This more accurately describes the utopia in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*: the core idea of the human future is existential freedom, and every institutional arrangement is in service of and legitimated by this assumption of human nature and human need and desire for freedom.

Before closing this section, I want to address an aspect of Zuboff's utopia that I find worrisome: the omitting of some fundamental issues raising from the limited transformative power of the human future. Although the scale of the apocalypse is the whole human world, demonstrated by sensing-computing becoming ubiquitous and inescapable, Zuboff's human future is Western and liberal democratic (Zuboff 2019, 31; 55). This is not reflected on by the author – a short excursion into the Chinese case is made as if to pre-emptively answer critiques of a focus on market actors and the West. The conclusion made in the text is that the authoritarian, state-led case of Chinese surveillance works differently to private profit-lead surveillance capitalism (ibid., 338). I find it startling that the author is not interested in the danger posed by surveillance capitalism beyond the west. It seems clear that if the human future utopia is achieved in the liberal democratic context, this by itself will not prevent surveillance capitalists from moving their focus to other markets outside the west, including authoritarian contexts where collusion with governments may pose threats beyond (and already do) the use of our experience to manipulate our consumption.

Another concern is that this utopia does not address fundamental issues of survivability posed by current iterations of democratic market capitalism such as stark inequality and the ongoing climate catastrophe. These are not issues that can be put aside as irrelevant to the subject at hand. Zuboff is remarkably silent on the present conditions that may affect our post-surveillance capitalist survivability that are not immediately tied to market surveillance. I am convinced that yet again, this indifference is founded in the *idea* of democratic capitalism that the author is committed to saving. I note again that even a strong belief in the natural equality of human beings and democracy, exercised in the context of a system that identifies itself as the sole advocator of them, is not synonymous with the absence of dominance and hierarchical relations in practice. Rather, unequal and oppressive relations are obscured by "sticking to the idea" level at the expense of socio-material reality. I turn once again to Wood (2002, 312–316) to note the effect that the head start capitalism had on democracy, and its overall influence on political thought, caused the invention of a justification for domination in the West that has its basis in the idea of equality:

> The development of capitalism was making it possible for the first time in history to conceive of political rights as having little bearing on the distribution of social and economic power; and it was becoming possible to imagine a distinct political sphere in which all citizens were formally equal, a political sphere abstracted from the inequalities of wealth and economic power outside the political domain. Political progress, or even the progress of democracy, could be conceived in terms that were socially indifferent, with an emphasis on political and civil rights that regulated the relations between citizen and state, not the maldistribution of social and economic power among citizens, who in the abstract sphere of politics were equal. (ibid., 316).

We are all vulnerable, Zuboff insists. Yet, our vulnerability is not equally shared. Here again, I find Zuboff's suggestions for change lacking; it is difficult to accept a utopian vision that is not concerned with these immediate threats as utopia, as the good place.

Third, and relatedly, Zuboff has no answer for how these current challenges will not transfer to her surveillance-free information capitalism. The digital realm, even without market surveillance, is a place of inequality (see Ragnedda & Muschert 2015; Eubanks 2017; Benjamin 2019). As Nataliya Nedzhvetskaya notes in her review of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, some do not have the luxury to wait for the information society to right its course by the methods Zuboff suggests (Nedzhvetskaya 2019, 532).

For Zuboff, it appears that the answer to the question how radical an imagining is advisable, is *not very*. Her idea is that change is necessary and urgent to stop the advancement of surveillance capitalism before it is too late, before our society of individuals is destroyed. Change is also necessary to achieve the alternative, a human future. But there ought to be a limit to how much we expand our dreaming. One should desire and have hope for a better, more refined version of what already exists. In fact, dreaming for more is dangerous – it is utopian and thus laced with determinism. While Zuboff's own vision is an example of utopian thinking, the change it imagines is moderate, not fitting with what we colloquially imagine utopia to be. In a way it is a "return" to the idealized past that never was. In other words, trying to create nostalgic fantasies into reality.

Nostalgia describes an affective emotion felt in relation to thinking about the past, a painful longing. Nostalgia is quite common in political thought and can be found in various political leanings (Vihma 2021). It can be argued that nostalgia presents a kind of utopia, too; a conservative utopia that sees the past as the key to the future, as described by Mannheim (1954). The echoes of an idealized past in the human future make Zuboff's narrative take a nostalgic, conservative characteristic in addition

to its economic liberalism and anti-utopian, dystopian paranoia. However, it is difficult to describe Zuboff as conservative when taking into consideration that she is quite accepting – even welcoming – of change such as the development of information technologies *as long as they do not threaten democratic market capitalism*. The utopian imagination, even if moderate, ameliorates the totality of the dystopian narrative and introduces hope in a way that feels realistic to the reader. To be sure, despite its decidedly non-radical take on the utopian future, it cannot be said to lack ambition: there is much to do to achieve an information capitalism that serves the needs of people and a democratic state that does the same indiscriminately. However, the narrow focus of the human future reminds us of the inescapable duality, the Janus face of utopia and dystopia. What I desire may be someone else's nightmare.

Finally, a note is in order about the way Zuboff constructs the narrative of the surveillance capitalism theory. Generally, the use of examples to construct a dominating narrative in theoretical work has at times in history been the conventional way of making political theory, but this has changed in the post-second world war period (Dienstag 2017, 495). Viewing the surveillance capitalism theory against this notion is interesting because unlike the trend noted above, it leans heavily on examples driving the narrative: so much to, that I suggest that there is a dominating narrative in this contemporary political-economic theory. The issue of using exemplification as a tool to build a cohesive narrative of the social and political world is complicated and historically changing: "Political theory, as a fiction-that-might-become-fact, cannot be limited to historical examples" and instead ought to be open to potential futures (Dienstag 2017, 500). In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, historical and contemporary examples are tightly woven into the narrative. This is also noted by Haggart (2019): Zuboff's interpretations of diverse exemplars and the molding of them to fit the surveillance narrative is, at times, noticeable.

As Dienstag traces the history of political theory through its use of exemplars, unlike many earlier depictions of "natural law" in political theory, later theoretical constructions are clearly also political acts. This happens because "the theorist now occupies a space 'between past and future'"[1] (Dienstag 2017, 495–496). This space or place is of interest because it marries an interpretation or experience of fact (the past) with a yet fictional future (see ibid., 496). I present, then, a reading of the surveillance capitalism tnarrative as a political act that reflects the motivations for knowledge production and interpretations of the "real", the "factual", of its author: liberalism. This performance through telling is a type of simultaneous world-making and world-breaking: it first breaks the shared idea of the world, of the Gramscian common sense of the world and then constructs a new interpretation to

1 Dienstag is referring here to Arendt's book *Between Past and Future. Six Exercises in Political Thought*, 1954.

replace the previous one. This is done in a comprehensive way in that it acknowledges and includes the affective dimensions of this end-of-the-world and is a meta-feature of the narrative/theory:

the affective break works in favor of the apocalyptic narrative and its paranoid knowledge work.

In this section I have reconstructed the human future and suggested that despite Zuboff's own anti-utopianism, it is in fact a utopia. I expanded on this by showing that this utopia is based on liberal and existential claims about human nature and the needs and desires that follow from these claims and by analyzing its function of saving liberal market capitalism. I have further argued that Zuboff is a utopian thinker whose commitment to a moderate modern tradition, democratic market capitalism and individualism work together to create a utopianism that does not recognize itself as such. Finally, I offered a critique of the principle omittances in the human future and noted the building of a grand narrative by organizing historical and contemporary events under the concept of surveillance capitalism, at times by force. Next, I move on to analyzing the theoretical foundations of the theory.

4. Personhood and Society in the Theory

After analyzing how the surveillance capitalism theory is also a narrative, what this narrative is like, and what this narrative does, I now move on to reconstructing the theoretical implications and explications of Zuboff's theory. Narrativity is not forgotten and is used as a helpful companion in the dialogue. I will, however, focus more on examining what Zuboff says through this narrative/theory by way of committing to a particular theoretical world and framework. This analysis is critical for understanding why the future vision in Surveillance Capitalism is so bleak, and it further has consequences for theorizing resistance.

First, I reconstruct personhood in the theory. I analyze how human nature and subjectivity are constructed in the surveillance capitalism theory. I place Zuboff's idea of the ontology of the Self into context by introducing the two paradigms of social psychological knowledge that have dominated North American social psychology. I discuss how the author's commitment to one of these paradigms affects the construction of personhood in the theory. Next, I explore the philosophical scholarship and arguments that are used in the theory as well as their consequences for personhood and the relationship between the Self and the Other. I mostly focus on Zuboff's interpretation of early Sartrean existentialism before moving on to an argument that the liberal individualism of the theory stems from an idea of Modernism as the epistemological foundation of personhood. Finally, I return

briefly to narrativity to examine whether the construction of personhood in the context of surveillance capitalism fits the apocalyptic dystopianism of the overall narrative.

Then, I shift my focus to analyzing how Zuboff understands society. First, I examine the construction of power as morally dualistic. Next, I explore the founding principles of society according to the author: neoinstitutionalism and effectiveness. After that, I turn to analyzing surveillance and capitalism.

Personhood and Surveillance Capitalism at Odds

> Surveillance capitalism…depends… upon the exploitation and control of human nature. (Zuboff 2019, 470)

The Ontology of the Cognitive Self

Different theoretical approaches to personhood implicate "how we can and should live our lives, and (--) how much power we have to change ourselves and our society." (Burr 2002, 2). In fact, questions about personhood are consequential to understanding the foundations of the surveillance capitalism theory. The basic argument in the theory that surveillance capitalism is here and that it is a threat, is based on a particular idea of personhood. This idea directs the angle of approach to the threat: why the threat exists, and what is at stake.

According to Zuboff, unlike industrial capitalism which focused on the "exploitation and control of nature", surveillance capitalism depends on another target of exploitation and control: human nature (Zuboff 2019, 470). The comparison to pre-surveillance capitalist relations of exploitation is telling. Certainly, it can be argued that industrial capitalism was and is exploitative and controlling of people *through* the exploitation of nature (such as through the loss and destruction of soil and arable land, space for habitation, un-polluted air, food and water, and other effects inflicted on communities by industrial production), and certainly directly due to unequal labor-ownership relations. Whether the narrative exclusion of these facts is evidence of Zuboff's indifference towards these pre-surveillance capitalist economic relations or not is an issue of debate but nevertheless, it is an omission that continues throughout the book. Noting this guides us to ask more specific questions about the knowledge – theoretical and moral – that is produced in the theory.

One explanation for the division of non-human nature and human nature may be the desire to highlight the uniqueness in quality and scale of surveillance capitalism's targeting of people. But by arguing that operations that target people specifically on a psychological or cognitive level 'exploit human nature' as opposed to through labor relations, or through environmental destruction (including through relevant laws, norms, and practices), the author posits something fundamental about human

nature. Human nature, and specifically personhood, is located in the mind. First, let us look at how Zuboff defines the Self:

> [T]he inward space of lived experience from which […] meanings are created. In that creation I stand on the foundation of personal freedom: the "foundation" because I cannot live without making sense of my experience. (Zuboff 2019, 289).

Zuboff's interest and understanding of the ontology of the Self is a sociopsychological construction that draws boundaries between inner life and everything outside of it. This idea forms the basis of the fundamental functions and relations of subjects in the theory and will therefore frame the analysis in this section.

The author traces the foundation of the Self to autonomy, to self-awareness and self-regulation, citing primarily psychological literature and more ambivalently, "philosophers" (Zuboff 2019, 307). Further, autonomy is understood as a condition of freedom of will, the ability to decide for oneself. Freedom and autonomy are presented not primarily as a temporal state of conditions in our social and material environment and how they relate to us. Instead, they are understood as a pre-existing psychological capacity: somewhat proto-social, although not completely detached from the environment.

In contrast to this, Zuboff discusses another psychological tradition, that of behaviorist and experimental psychology. She traces an intellectual connection between contemporary IT research and behavioral psychologists such as B.F. Skinner (see Zuboff 2019, 321–322; 361–371) who envisioned a personhood constructed primarily through perceivable interaction with outside forces (Burr 2002, 14–15, 144; Skinner 1976, 1–9.). Drawing ideas from non-human animal experiments, the behaviorism of Skinner dispositioned the inner life of the individual from focus, instead centering observable behavior influenced by the environment. It is from this distanced, otherized point of view (the scientist observing the human-animals' behavior) that Zuboff begins to map out the depersonalizing metaphorical surveillance machine she will call the Big Other, which will be discussed further below.

Cognitive social psychology, which informs Zuboff's idea of personhood, rose as an answer to behaviorism (and psychoanalysis and sociology, but Zuboff is less concerned with these approaches to personhood) (see Hilton 2012, 45). The twofold paradigm of self-contained, cognitive individuality versus human animal behavior is representative of North American social psychology (Burr 2002, 22; 52), which is more psychological than its European cousin. Notably, both cognitive social psychology and behaviorism share an entity-based orientation to the world by focusing the gaze on

individual qualities. The privileging of the individual in the North American tradition (see Rizzoli 2018) underemphasizes social perspectives to personhood, with sociologically informed perspectives declining since the 1960s (Hilton 2012).

Zuboff is committed to an idea of the individual. Interestingly, at times descriptions of surveillance capitalist techniques on our behavior more closely resemble behaviorist thinking due to these techniques being framed as outside forces that affect our behavior. The key difference is the *focus on inner life* and boundaries between the Self and everything else. It is the manipulation of a person's awareness that is preventing autonomy from being exercised, and due to the circumstances of surveillance capitalism, autonomy and free will are now in peril. The psychological boundaries of the Self are being penetrated by an onslaught of efforts to affect our behavior (Zuboff 2019, 289). And thus, autonomy is compromised by a formidable outside force:

> In declaring the right to modify human action secretly and for profit, surveillance capitalism effectively exiles us from our own behavior, shifting the locus of control over the future tense from "I will" to "You will". Each one of us may follow a distinct path, but economies of action ensure that the path is already shaped by surveillance capitalism's economic imperatives. The struggle for power and control in society is no longer associated with the hidden facts of class and its relationship to production but rather by the hidden facts of automated engineered behavior modification. (Zuboff, 2019, 308).

For Zuboff, not knowing and being made unaware prevent autonomy and thus the exercise of freedom of choice. Surveillance capitalism is an *outside force* that tampers on our psychology, not a systemic arrangement of relations between the individual and economic-political-social processes with material dimensions.

I must mention that the drawing of boundaries between inner life and outside forces rips subjects quite violently from their material and social surroundings. Zuboff leaves unconsidered a third option, a malleable, social self that has agency through its relations (cf., Lowenhaupt Tsing 2015). Class here is also a point of intrigue, as the quote above shows. Class reveals hierarchical relationships that are profoundly material. It is interesting that Zuboff is essentially presenting that an idea of autonomy based on psychological, cognitive functions such as awareness and motivation (will, want) is adequate to understand choice and freedom. In the context of a society in which class structures and relations direct and restrict choice and freedom (such as having to work to get paid to then be able to feed oneself), it is difficult to concede that class society or production are insignificant enough to not warrant analysis. Yet, Zuboff locates class in the past and denotes its

importance to understanding how *this* form of capitalism interacts with the self, with freedom. Moreover, the significance put on secrecy – the denial of awareness – is interesting.

Zuboff's discussion and stark criticism of behaviorism, radical behaviorism (a term she coins for the academics working on developing IT capabilities based on a behaviorist view on their targets) and especially Skinner, is lengthy and detailed. The amount of space the author dedicates to examining behaviorist psychological ideas about personhood, combined with the use of examples and terminology closely associated with non-human animals (e.g., herding, the hive) demonstrates a profound concern that the behaviorists and their intellectual followers in the field of Information technology and experimental psychology are a threat that ought to be considered carefully. It showcases the author's message that while we are currently (or were before surveillance capitalism) autonomous, choice-making individuals, with the right tools of manipulation, the Self can become obsolete. The suspicion permeating the texts is that rational, cognitive individuality could be peeled away layer by layer until what is left is a behaving animal that is "to be monitored and telestimulated like [--] herds and flocks, [--] beavers and bees, and [--] machines" (Zuboff 2019, 470). Zuboff situates this potential destruction of selfhood to the near future.

Zuboff compares the post-Self person to non-human animals and machines, demonstrating the idea that there either exists a Self who is an individual of autonomous choice-making capabilities, or there is an othered-from-themself human-shaped animal whose behavior resembles machine functions: automated, reactive, and programmable. Of course, this argument implies a pre-surveillance capitalism society and personhood that is at least *almost* autonomous in the sense of cognitive function and behavior, which I find problematic.

Asking the text, what is the significance of the conviction that such a society and personhood did (do?) exist, I turn to evidence on the author's moral and ideological standing. In the narrative of the surveillance capitalism theory, the morally repugnant act of claiming human experience as raw material and rendering it into a means of behavioral modification appears to be the essence of Zuboff's critique. She writes:

> We have seen that the *dispossession of human experience is the original sin of surveillance capitalism*, but this dispossession is not mere abstraction. Rendition describes the concrete operational practices through which dispossession is accomplished, as human experience is claimed as raw material for datafication and all that follows, from manufacturing to sales. (Zuboff 2019, 232. Emphasis RD).

'Human experience' repeats throughout the text as that which is ripped from us without permission. I suggest that there are two sins here, according to Zuboff. First, that in accessing ourselves, the

surveillance capitalists shatter the idea of an autonomous, self-contained Self. This is indeed terrifying if we are originally separate, with strong psychological borders, and free of messy relations. It is, additionally, worrying that power and knowledge relations focus into the hands of the few, which is a concern Zuboff also has. There is, however, another dimension: that of transaction. In the dictionary definition of surveillance capitalism at the very beginning of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Zuboff writes:

> 1. A new economic order that claims human experience as *free* raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales (Zuboff 2019, The Definition. Emphasis RD).

It is this free-of-chargedness, the one-sided benefitting that seems to bother her. Instead of benefitting, of getting our needs and desires met by a third-modernity information capitalism (ibid. 2019, 46), surveillance capitalism is costly to the individual. Our 'felt needs for effective life' is exploited (ibid., 10). In other words, there is a failed transaction at play, failed because it is one-sided in both profit and cost and dishonest by design. Here, Zuboff moves from the ontological to the epistemological – specifically, her ideas about the social and political – and demonstrates that there is an explicit, as well as implicit, ethics involved in constructing personhood and the threat it faces in this particular way.

To summarize, personhood in the surveillance capitalism theory is primarily an inner experience including autonomous choice as the deciding measuring stick of its existence, separated from everything else, even its own body. If there is a body, then it is separate from the mind in a Cartesian dualist manner. My concern is that this way of conceptualizing the person rips them from their relations of transformation, of becoming in mutually constitutive processes. It rejects a culturally and discursively constructed subjectivity, never complete or whole, always materializing in processes that organize us into intelligible (or unintelligible) bodies (see Butler 2011). Zuboff's person or Self is in this way very humanist. It leaves little potential for rethinking personhood in relation to technologies and what we think of as non-human or not alive (see Shildrick 2018). Additionally, it is not concerned with the material dimensions of a subject's life, such as what living an embodied life in a capitalist society pre-surveillance capitalism is like. If we are essentially entities separate and autonomous of each other, then we are not leaky bodies (see Shildrick 1997) nor can parts of us be deconstructed or reconstructed in relation to others in a way that does not threaten the existence of the Self. Personhood understood in this way is but a historically unchanging psychological capacity, something that always existed but must be willed into consciousness. I find this quite lonely. Fortunately, Zuboff does enrich this restrictive ontology by adding a political philosophical dimension to it.

The Existential Self and Freedom

Evidently, Zuboff's individual is firmly in the idealist camp of the old idealism versus materialism philosophical debate; it is the mind and its meaning-making capacity that makes us human. Zuboff fixes the Self outside of materiality by drawing boundaries around it. Laniuk (2021) has analyzed how freedom is conceptualized in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. Although I do not share Laniuk's perspective on freedom (such as that freedom's purpose is to ensure "the power of man over nature and its beings" (2021, 80), which is contrary to my own thoughts), he raises an interesting interpretation of Zuboff's freedom – that it consists of three primary dimensions of privacy, autonomy, and authenticity. Laniuk's analysis traces the privacy in Zuboff's work to Kantian philosophy. This is agreeable, however, there is no mention of Kant in the text, so any influence is indirect. As for the triad of privacy, autonomy, and authenticity, I suggest that they are all related to enabling the functions of the Self and can be categorized under what Zuboff calls sanctuary: a place and space where one has privacy to practice authenticity and autonomy. Yet, of the three, autonomy is the core condition of freedom. This is because, again, freedom is primarily cognitive, not social or material to Zuboff. From autonomy springs the uncontaminated (authentic, distinct) choice-making Self, the free individual.

Showcasing Zuboff's idea of freedom primarily as autonomy, and self not as temporal material conditions or a socially forming relationship of becoming but as a proto-social psychological entity, is her citing of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. In fact, early Sartrean thought on consciousness and freedom form the basis of Zuboff's Self. Freedom is defined as *the will to will* (Zuboff 2019, 290); the ability to launch oneself into authentic existence through self-awareness. The fight against surveillance capitalism, or better, the fight over capitalism is a fight for the individual as "an existential reality, philosophical idea and political ideal" (Zuboff 2019, 440). It should be noted, though, that Zuboff's reading of early Sartre is strongly influenced by cognitive social psychology and her own moral investment in the idea of democratic market capitalism. As such, Sartrean existentialism is applied to the theory as an authoritative voice that emphasizes the importance of choice for the Self.

Sartrean consciousness is conscious of its existence; it possesses self-knowledge. It is also always consciousness of something, a "positional consciousness of the world". Additionally, it is autonomous. (Gardner 2009, 45–46; 48.) Zuboff has especially focused on this last point of autonomy, interpreting it as a freedom of the Self in a way that emphasizes consent (knowledge and choice) and underemphasizes connections and transformative relations between subjects and their environment.

Sartre's for-itself, a conscious being, exists separate from objects and lives through experiencing (Linsenbard 2010, 35). LaCapra (1978) calls this an "ultraphenomenological view of consciousness as an empty spontaneity" and notes how this perspective leads Sartre away from examining the relation of consciousness with tradition and institutions – or more abstractly, that which we are intertwined with in space and time in different intensities or distances, socially and materially. Sartre's philosophy is centered on the (hu)man, that who himself is of his consciousness and freedom. Man "defines the meaning of the situation through his intentional projects." Consciousness for early Sartre – and more so for Zuboff – is "pure and homogeneous within itself, split off from the 'other'" (LaCapra, 1978, 24). LaCapra strongly criticizes Sartre's notion of pure freedom as preventing him from recognizing the 'intertextuality' between consciousness, freedom, and the world (ibid., 30), and warns that this commitment allows for no ambiguity, no alterity of the self nor the other (ibid., 134–135). I find that Zuboff suffers from this, too. Following the logic, experience becomes tainted as non-authentic and contaminated by the environment as soon as the subject is not in possession of all knowledge available. This would be ameliorated if Zuboff held onto Sartre's idea of consciousness as positional and relational to itself and the other instead of focusing so strictly on the will to will.

There is a reason for why Sartrean existentialism is so useful to Zuboff. Sartre's ontology and philosophy of the Self answers the dilemma of the paradox caused by separating inner experience so clearly from the outer. After all, if we are not reactive human animals, but autonomous decision-makers, then how can surveillance capitalist operations turn us into a post-individual hive? Zuboff's reading of *Being and Nothingness* absolves this issue by situating knowledge and self-awareness at the center of the Self. Thus, if absolute self-awareness and access to knowledge are threatened, so is personhood.

For the author, freedom is intrinsic to personhood because it is dependent in our ability to make choices and "to make and remake ourselves" within the boundaries necessitated by our being embodied in this world (Linsenbard 2010, 29). This idea is quite compatible with liberal individualism and as such, quite useful for the surveillance capitalism theory. Consider Poellner's reading of early Sartrean theses on freedom:

> (i) [A]ll actual value depends existentially on the reasons-sensitive consciousness of myself and others, (ii) if I value anything (and I cannot not value anything) (iii) I cannot consistently not 'will' such consciousness in myself and others, hence (iv) I cannot consistently not will freedom universally; and therefore (v) I must take free subjectivity itself, in each of its instances, as the primary value for the sake of which I act—as my primary end. In fact, the formulation in the passage cited above does not capture Sartre's actual conclusion quite correctly. That conclusion is rather

> (v'): I must take authentic subjectivity, in each of its instances, as my primary end. (Poellner 2012, 238)

Zuboff's reading of Sartre follows the same lines as Poellner's explication of the philosopher's thought, although in the former's case, this is not explicated in the text to this degree. Zuboff could have wrote these passages about "authentic" individuality and the willing of oneself into consciousness, including the moral primacy of them.

Gardner notes that Sartre's concept of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness* does have a fundamentally relational quality, however, with both itself and the Other (Gardner 2009, 48; 139). This quality of Sartre's ontology of the Self ameliorates the distance between the cognitive individual and their environment but is underexamined by Zuboff. Instead, she uses the idea of "will to will" as a philosophical backer for an idea of an autonomous, self-contained personhood (Zuboff 2019, 329).

> [T]he will to will is the inner act that secures us as autonomous beings who project choice into the world and exercise the qualities of self-determining moral judgement that civilization's necessary and final bulwark. (Zuboff 2019, 290)

The will to will oneself into existence and to authentically desire and "project choice" are matters of moral importance for the author. Individual moral judgement is necessary for civilization, even, as freedom begins in the Self and extends to a social condition through relationships and interaction between autonomous individuals. Because of this projecting direction of freedom from the inner world to the outer, the contamination of the self and destruction of its freedom through an invasion of psychological boundaries is an existential threat:

> In the model of machine confluence, the "freedom" of each individual machine is subordinated to the knowledge of the system as a whole. Instrumentarian power aims to organize, herd, and tune society to achieve a similar *social confluence,* in which group pressure and computational certainty replace politics and democracy, extinguishing the felt reality and social function of an individualized existence. (Zuboff 2019, 20–21)

Here, the dystopian narrative of an oppressive new social order once again takes center stage. At the end of the quote, Zuboff explains what is at stake: our "felt reality" and "individualized existence". The hero, alienated from sanctuary (privacy, authenticity, autonomy) finds themselves in a machine-directed nightmare. The author uses a dystopian narrative to underline how fundamentally the existence of the Self and individual freedom are connected to "politics and democracy", thus finally placing the existential self into a social reality.

The Other

As part of reconstructing personhood in the surveillance capitalism theory, an excursion to the other is in order. The analysis above has already demonstrated that as the Self is a cognitively distinct, proto-social consciousness, the relation between the Self and the Other closely resembles that of two distinct entities. For Zuboff, a relationship to the other is always a potential threat of contamination. An alternative interpretation of Sartre's existential philosophy has the potential to amend this setting if the consciousness' positionality and relation to itself and the Other is emphasized, but Zuboff does not do this. Autonomy, and privacy and authenticity as related concepts, become precarious under the Other's gaze.

Therefore, in the theory, being watched disbalances the relationship of self to others (Zuboff 2019, 471). Using Erving Goffmans metaphors frontstage and backstage, Zuboff presents the social as a sphere of inauthenticity due to being visible. The real self is revealed and released from performance in the backstage, or in Zuboff's terms "sanctuary" (see e.g., 475). Briefly, a more relational and social take on individuality can be found in the author's discussion of developing individuality in relation to others during adolescence (Zuboff 2019, 453). It is, however, limited to this discussion, and presented in a negative light. Zuboff warns that generation Z, those born after the mid-1990s, are under special threat of developing a less-autonomous, less self-contained Self due to their early indoctrination to platforms and online services that operate according to logic of market surveillance and behavioral modification. The youth are the first generation to live through the apocalypse of surveillance capitalism, having their individuality ripped away.

In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, the dehumanization and loss of Self is a function and consequence of a machine gaze. While the architecture of a sensing-computing machine network is an Other to the Self, it is this Other that turns the Self an Other to both themself (through the bypassing of knowledge and loss of the will to will) and the Big Other itself. First, we become objects of information gathering, study, and behavioral nudging: othered from society by a system that gives no importance to our existence as part of it. We exist only as targets of information gathering. On the other hand, we become other to ourselves in the process of losing our self and individuality to surveillance capitalism:

> Instrumentarianism's radical indifference is operationalized in Big Other's dehumanized methods of evaluation that produce *equivalence without equality.* These methods reduce individuals to the lowest common denominator of sameness—an organism among organisms—despite all the vital ways in which we are not the same. From Big Other's point of view we are strictly Other-Ones: *organisms that behave.* Big Other encodes the viewpoint of the Other-One as a

> global presence. There is no brother here of any kind, big or little, evil or good; there are no family ties, however grim. (Zuboff 2019, 377)

We become objects for the machine gaze. When Zuboff mentions the domination of the soul, she is comparing the domination of surveillance capitalism to that of totalitarianism. But our souls need not to be taken over for the othering of the self to take place; the "crazed machine sex, an intimate closed-loop architecture of obsession, loss of self, and auto-gratification" (ibid., 450–451) is an interaction that replaces subjectivity in a process that is designed to do just that. The author is entirely convinced that this will happen because, as established above, the Self is an individual who is contained in the mind. Further, this self is founded in autonomous choice. It then follows that any threat of contamination of the self with outside forces without the informed decision to allow this contamination is a threat to personhood.

I mentioned above how there is a curious absurdity and seeming disconnectedness of cognitive, existential individuality as a core-feature of personhood and individuality as vulnerable to destruction-via-othering under surveillance capitalism. Zuboff uses existentialism as a philosophical explanation to mend this dilemma. However, the paradox becomes even more comprehendible when viewed through a lens of the historical consequences of liberal freedom. Svendsen (2017) reminds of the Nietzschean call to become oneself; Once liberated from the demands of tradition (kin and blood, as Zuboff puts it), the liberal individual must become who they are outside of those traditions (Svendsen 2017, 177). Othering, as described by Zuboff, alienates the individual from the self, disrupting this vital *process of becoming* an autonomous individual.

I have mentioned several times how liberalism influences Zuboff's view of personhood and its relation to the social. I shall make one final excursion to liberal individuality and its political philosophical basis in Modernity to close this section. Understanding Zuboff's liberal individualism helps to connect the scholar's idea of personhood and the threat to it to her construction of society, which I will proceed to in the next section of this chapter.

The Liberal Individual

> The new harms we face entail challenges to the sanctity of the individual, and chief among these challenges I count the elemental rights that bear on individual sovereignty, including *the right to the future tense* and t*he right to sanctuary*. Each of these rights invokes claims to individual agency and personal autonomy as essential prerequisites to freedom of will and to the very concept of democratic order. (Zuboff 2019, 54)

We have so far established the social psychological and philosophical bases of personhood in the surveillance capitalism theory. As much as personhood is a psychological capacity for meaning

making and an existential condition of autonomous consciousness, it is also a politically ideological statement. In fact, all these theoretical commitments, although coming from different (but not always distinct, i.e., there is overlap) disciplines, connect to form a theoretical foundation for the surveillance capitalism theory as a call for liberal, democratic market reform. The reason and justification for this call is the claim of inherent individuality of people that includes freedom of choice as an inseparable moral right. Writing about how modernization has affected the path of humanity, Zuboff narrates the story of the individual:

> The advent of the individual as the locus of moral agency and choice initially occurred in the West, where the conditions for this emergence first took hold. […] The sense of the human being as an individual emerged gradually over centuries, clawed from this ancient vise. Around two hundred years ago, we embarked upon the first modern road where life was no longer handed down one generation to the next according to the traditions of village and clan. This "first modernity" marks the time when life became "individualized" for great numbers of people as they separated from traditional norms, meanings, and rules. That meant each life became an open-ended reality to be discovered rather than a certainty to be enacted. Even where the traditional world remains intact for many people today, it can no longer be experienced as the only possible story. (Zuboff 2019, 33)

The individual became "the locus of moral agency and choice", and detaching from traditional meanings, norms and rules disrupted what was once certain fate. (Zuboff 2019, 32-33). This is, of course, a simplified take of history by Zuboff. To imagine not being bound and directed by one's social status but by one's choices can only be comprehensible if various oppressions and social hierarchies are ignored. One can be 'free' in imagination yet face social and material obstacles. I have circled this point above by mentioning class, but various forms of oppression and inequality apply. I will not explore this point here, but it is important to mention.

Zuboff's narrative is very much in line with a Western liberal understanding of history that universalizes an idea of civilizational development from savagery to barbarism and finally civilization and marries this concept with the idea of continuing progress and 'human perfectibility' (see Bowden 2014, 619; 622). This Kantian universalism (see Kant's essay *Idea for Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* trans. Allen Wood via Rorty & Schmidt 2009, 10–23) permeates a somewhat shared Western understanding of world history and is thus quite legible. It is also teleological, suggesting that history is moving towards a greater future. Another way to put it is that progressive change is assumed to be a feature of human development. Zuboff appears to share this way of thinking about history.

When narrating the story of the individual, she does not refer to any specific thinker besides Ulrich Beck, from who she adopts the idea of distinct ages of modern times, on modernity. I interpret this choice as a guiding the reader to understand this representation as factual and theoretically uncontestable. Thus, I feel safe to posit that Zuboff subscribes to a liberal worldview that will guide her theory from its conceptualizing of personhood to capitalism and our sociopolitical realities. In the background of it all, as a foundation, is an idea of modernity as the first stage of progressive human development. This fact also means that this section is necessarily much more explicitly social and political in content than the previous sections in Chapter 4.

Zuboff uses this historical idea as a counterargument for the concept of a malleable human animal presented by behavioral psychologists who she sees as the intellectual founders of the type of techno-utopianism that surveillance capitalism uses to fool people into giving up their autonomous freedom. Thus, what is at stake is the survival of Western individuality and indeed the continuation of progressive history.

> If we are to annihilate and bury the individual as an existential reality, philosophical idea, and political ideal, then this death should at least merit the gravitas of an ancient Greek funerary ritual. The existence of the individual is, after all, an achievement carved from millenia of human suffering and sacrifice. (Zuboff 2019, 440).

Here, the author sets individuality – and modernity, by implication – as the beacon of light for humanity: before it and beyond it lies only "human suffering and sacrifice". Sacrifice is an interesting term to use. I understand that the word is not used here in a literal sense of human sacrifice, but metaphorically to demonstrate how collectivity, communality, or other non-individualistic forms of existing socially in the world affect us; the non-individualistic person is a victim of sacrifice, they sacrifice something important that only individuality can help them to keep: autonomy, authenticity, privacy.

The quote above suggests a claim that individuality as "an existential reality, philosophical idea, and political ideal" connect in Zuboff's thought to the moral good of liberalism and how it has influenced especially Western thought. That is because for Zuboff, the individual is a liberal project. There is a reason for why the author mentions ancient Greek. Whether an intentional choice to suggest to the reader a historical connection between individualism and democracy, or not, it shows that she is invested in a narrative of Western development, a Western political and philosophical history. This is important, because it will later connect to democratic market capitalism, or a particular form of it, that she sees as the pinnacle of this development and

progression of history. It is also, yet again, in line with the apocalyptic and dystopian narrative that she constructs: Here we have a Great History of advancing toward the good society, but this progress, and with it the individual, the social ties, freedom, are all under duress because a dangerous machine is being operated to destroy the legacy of modernity for profit. This narrative also means that other contexts and ways of understanding personhood and the social are of little interest, unless they appear to directly threaten the liberal individual of the West, as surveillance capitalism does.

We see the apocalyptic-dystopian narrative link with the story of the individual when the author criticizes academics who collaborate with surveillance capitalists or otherwise advance the development of surveillance and behavioral modification techniques. This is especially evident in her discussion of moving towards 'the hive', the post-individual human animal:

> What we witness here is a bet-the-farm commitment to the socialization and normalization of instrumentarian power for the sake of surveillance revenues. […] In this process, the inwardness that is the necessary source of autonomous action and moral judgement suffers and suffocates. These are preparatory steps toward the death of individuality [--]. (Zuboff 2019, 469)

Nothing less than death; an annihilation of a centuries-old Great History that ought to continue progressing. There is an assumption by Zuboff that this is intentional, a project for profit that our individuality is unnecessary and counterproductive for. The author informs the reader of this history in more detail:

> In fact, this death devours centuries of individualities: (1) the eighteenth century's political ideal of the individual as the repository of inalienable dignity, rights, and obligations; (2) the early twentieth century's individualized human being called into existence by history, embarking on Machando's road because she must, destined to create "a life of one's own" in a world of ever-intensifying social complexity and receding traditions; and (3) the late twentieth century's psychologically autonomous individual whose inner resources and capacity for moral judgement rise to the challenges of self-authorship that history demands and act as a bulwark against the predations of power. (Zuboff 2019, 469)

In an essay written in the late 1990s, sociologist Bellah proposed that there is a common culture in America, driven by the co-influence of state and market (of which state is primary), with a basis in utilitarian individualism (Bellah 1998, 615–616). The historical, philosophical, and political idea of the liberal individual has had its hold on the public consciousness long into current times and influences liberal thinkers such as Zuboff. The social and political normativity of liberal individualism is so far reaching (see Svendsen 2017) that it might obscure its ideology-ness from

liberal thinkers. The liberal worldview and story of historical progression (understood as ever-continuing modernity), individualization, and the linking of freedom to the two former become facts and common sense. But we may look at the liberal individual as an explicit ideological project. Svendsen summarizes the liberal individual as such:

> [S]he is deeply concerned with or takes for granted liberal rights such as freedom of expression, the right to private property, the right to privacy etc. She demands a space of non-interference in which she herself can decide what give her life meaning and value. […] She feels violated if someone forces her to do something she would have done anyway. […] She not only wishes to pursue her goals in life, but also the right to make choices. She demands a sphere of non-interference, having her range of choices being restricted only by the equal rights of others for liberty. The liberal individual is not anti-social, but she wishes to decide for herself with whom to socialize. The liberal individual regards herself as unique, independent and self-governing. […] The liberal individual does not only want negative liberty, but also positive liberty, which in effect is synonymous with autonomy. Positive liberty consists in living in accordance with one' s own values. It is not about non-interference, but about taking charge of one's life, of shaping this life. (Svendsen 2017, 174–175)

This resonates with the surveillance capitalism theory, where this type of construction of personhood strongly directs what is seen as desirable and abhorrent socially and societally. However, a point of criticism that I want to make is that liberal individualism, while insisted on the idea of freedom and choice, does not guarantee the right or access to said conditions in practice. In fact, freedom imagined as individual choice is limited even in the human future, which I argued, in Chapter 3, is a liberal utopia. In a democratic information capitalist society, individual choices are limited. One cannot truly choose whatever they wish or can imagine possible as long as one lives in a law and norms-based society that also has scarcity. This is true despite, as Svendsen (2017) correctly notes, liberal democracy being understood as most desirable for the liberal individual, due to its enabling both negative and positive freedom. Freedom, I argue, is better understood as a continuum of conditions rather than primarily an idea of a psychological state.

For Zuboff, experience is universal and not a point of contention: our meaning-making is not problematized, and thus appears to some extent independent of the social. At the same time, it is permeated by the social, because all choices made in the construction of the individual are directed by existing in relation and through the social and material, now and historically, and they shape and break the borders (if there are such, besides imagined) of personhood. Zuboff's commitment to the individual instead of, say, subject, hides from her how our relational position in the world creates our experience. This universalism leads to a totalizing view of surveillance technologies' effect on us.

Instead, it is certain that surveillance capitalism's control of human nature (Zuboff 2029, 470) is not the only relation of control. In fact, the author's narrative building of the history of individualization ignores how in being constructed as intelligible or unintelligible, mechanisms of power and control such as race, gender, class, disability, coloniality etcetera already affect us in much of the way – and beyond – that Zuboff warns about surveillance capitalism. If our relationships and fitting-in in the human-machine relation is universal, designed to fit our individual but undifferentiated psychology, then it ought to follow that we are equally vulnerable to surveillance capitalist exploitation of human nature. But this is not true.

I present, instead, that regarding vulnerability of the subject to surveillance capitalist operations and the systemic harm resulting from them, there are two dimensions. First, that a subject's vulnerability forms in relation to how easily they may melt into the machine. There are differences in how well surveillance techniques influence subjects; Some subjects are more legible, more known to the 'machine', and this forms the user experience. I turn to affectivity for a moment to illustrate my point. Sara Ahmed (2014) theorizes affectivity as our social relations that construct our historically informed subjectivity and position and distance between bodies. She describes queer affectivity as relations of discomfort between a subject that fails the ideal of a heterosexual life and their environment. This social not-fitting-in is felt as a heightened awareness of the surfaces of one's body. To be relaxed, comfortable, is to feel as if the boundaries of the body and its environment melt into each other and disappear. (ibid. 193). This can be expanded to other relations as well.

This is the dimension of vulnerability that Zuboff is interested in, as for her, individual consciousness, and the authenticity of experience matter most. However, she fails to see how this dimension, too, forms through social relations, including bias, prejudice, and hierarchies. The second dimension consists of vulnerabilities related to the consequences of social and material inequalities, such as lack of access to knowledge, privacy, protection, political solidarity, or technology and infrastructure. Zuboff has little to say about this.

I will present a practical example to illustrate what I mean. Facial recognition software, for instance, may exhibit racial bias (see Noble 2018; Crawford & Paglen 2019). In this case, being illegible, difficult to pinpoint, is not an advantage. This, despite Zuboff's insistence that they get us by knowing us. From the perspective of the first dimension of vulnerability, a user may become uncomfortably aware of surveillance technologies due to the crack in their smoothness: one notices the separation between their self and the machine, because the technology fails to recognize the user in a properly sophisticated manner. Taking the second dimension of vulnerability into focus, the consequences of the use of facial recognition will be different for subjects dependent on relevant forms of oppression.

An illegible subject may be wrongly targeted, missed, not cared to be searched for, excessively monitored, profiled, or they might face other consequences.

Of course, these two dimensions are an abstraction I have made for the sake of clarity – the two dimensions of vulnerability are intrinsically connected, part of the same phenomena and mutually transformative and effective. I bring this up to point how, paradoxically, the construction of liberal individualism in the surveillance capitalism theory ignores differences in subject positions socially and materially, and how this leads to differing vulnerabilities. I argue that both of these dimensions of vulnerability mentioned above matter, and that taking them into account would both alleviate the totality of Zuboff's view as well as make clearer the techniques that the author warns us about. Differences, although they should not be essentialized, matter.

As such, her assertion that the ideals of liberal individualism make up individual freedom, combined with the lack of interest towards social and material inequalities, is counterintuitive with her notion that Big Data (her perspective to surveillance capitalism at the time) "originates in the social" (Zuboff 2015, 75). This claim situates surveillance technologies in the same realm where social hierarchies and power relations are reproduced and lived. As it is, this understanding of individuality, while socially formed, lacks the social: it exists on the level of idea and ideality.

This marks the end of the first section of Chapter 4, and at the same time the end of the reconstruction of personhood in the surveillance capitalism theory. I have demonstrated in this section the importance of the particular understanding of personhood by Zuboff, as it the key foundational aspect of the surveillance capitalism theory. The social and societal is always secondary to the personal; Understanding personhood enables us to answer the question of why society before and after surveillance capitalist takeover is constructed in the way that it is. This is because Zuboff has a worldview that is centered on individualism: First comes the person, then from them is the social and societal expanded from. I have presented here an interpretation of Zuboff's personhood as a proto-socially existing, autonomous meaning-making Self informed by Sartrean existentialism and the North American social psychological tradition. We have also analyzed what represents the other in Zuboff's theory and its relation to Zuboff's Self and noted the liberal universalist individualism that is presented as ideologically-free, and which directs the author to omit social and material inequalities that affect subjectivity and the human-machine relation. Now, let's move on to what Zuboff means by society.

Surveillance Capitalism and the Desired Society

The term surveillance capitalism consists of two concepts that are joined together to reveal a new phenomenon; *Surveillance* and *capitalism* come together to form a new economic (sub)system with sociological, political, and material consequences. There are many pre-existing implications and assumptions embedded in these terms, and many more that the author constructs. This section focuses on analyzing Zuboff's notion of society in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, examining the relationship between society and surveillance capitalism, and reconstructing surveillance capitalism as a normative theoretical claim about a desired society.

I do this by first, analyzing the duality of the definition of power through its democratic legitimacy. Then, I trace the claims made by the author about how society is constructed and how it functions. I suggest that for Zuboff, society is primarily a collection of state-coordinated institutions, or the organization of our individual lives with our democratic consent for the sake of efficiency and choice. I also claim that Zuboff's theory of society is primarily political-economic, with a normative interest in liberalism and the idea of the West as guiding principles. Next, I turn my focus to analyzing the role of surveillance and the (lack of) connections between the state and surveillance. I inquire to the possible reasons for this omission and posit that it is connected, possibly even caused by the staunch commitment of the author to liberal democracy. This segues us to the final section of this chapter, where I analyze how the surveillance capitalism theory is a normative claim about the desirability of a regulated capitalist economy. I further note that this is connected to the idea of individuality and liberal democracy as unique enablers of freedom and the meeting of our individual needs and desires. Thus, I suggest that *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is neither a fundamental critique of capitalism nor surveillance, just their historically specific configuration into the surveillance capitalism system.

Power and Authority

We have so far established some of the narrative qualities of the surveillance capitalism theory such as its apocalyptic and dystopian narrative and its complex relationship with utopia. These traits are related to the strong duality of good/evil found in the narrative. Additionally, I presented that the theory is an example of paranoid knowledge. Our understanding of the theory was then broadened by an examination of its claims about personhood ("human nature") that I interpret as strictly adhering to the Western canon of liberal individualism and existential freedom. This foundation enables us to understand what Zuboff means by power and its benevolent cousin, authority. The following excursion to power will lay a foundation for the next section, where an analysis of Zuboff's theory of society is made.

First, I show that Zuboff has two terms for power that work to divide it to two normative categories and logics. I, then, introduce and discuss the position and meaning of instrumentarian power in the theory.

The Duality of Legitimacy and Illegitimacy

Power is a fundamental question in the surveillance capitalism theory. It is the enabler of the surveillance capitalists' takeover of society and personhood to serve their purposes. This is clear by how Zuboff positions power in the center at the very beginning of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

> I recognized the oldest political questions: Home or exile? Lord or subject? Master or slave? These are eternal themes of knowledge, authority, and power that can never be settled for all time. [--] When we ask the oldest questions now, billions of people from every social strata, generation, and society must answer. [--] Just a moment ago, it still seemed reasonable to focus our concerns on the challenges of an information workplace or an information society. Now the oldest questions must be addressed to the widest possible frame, which is best defined as "civilization" or, more specifically, information civilization. Will this emerging civilization be a place that we can call home? (Zuboff, 2019, 3–4)

The string of three, power, authority, and knowledge are key terms that Zuboff circulates throughout the book but are treated as mostly self-explanatory. There are two sides fighting for different goals – one for power on the scale of civilization, and the other, "we" or us, for a "place we can call home". This conflict of interests has high stakes. As with many other dimensions in the surveillance capitalism narrative/theory, power too has a duality that is very clear-cut and oppositional to each other. Power and authority, the latter which Zuboff sees as a separate sociological and political force, are essential to understanding why surveillance capitalism exists and how it functions.

> The commodification of behavior under surveillance capitalism pivots us toward a societal future in which market power is protected by moats of secrecy, indecipherability, and expertise. Even when knowledge derived from our behavior is fed back to us as a quid pro quo for participation, as in the case of so-called "personalization," parallel secret operations pursue the conversion of surplus into sales that point far beyond our interests. We have no formal control because we are not essential to this market action.
>
> In this future we are exiles from our own behavior, denied access to or control over knowledge derived from its dispossession by others for others. Knowledge, authority, and power rest with surveillance capital, for which we are merely "human natural resources." We are the native peoples now whose tacit claims to self-determination have vanished from the maps of our own experience. (Zuboff 2019, 100).

Essentially, the issue is that surveillance capitalism does not follow the rulebook of democratic capitalism, but unilaterally declares the right to authority, which then transforms to power. This is presented as an unfair and dishonest act that refuses mutually beneficial transactions (see Zuboff 2019, 181; 186). Thus, what surveillance capitalists have is power – instrumentarian power – and it is illegitimate because it denies us of our freedom to decide and does not benefit our interests.

The differences between these two types are their legitimacy – a feature of democratic governance, their logic, and their relationship to knowledge. Stemming from the Latin auctoritas, the term authority has a long history in English and has encompassed many meanings throughout history. Its original Biblical meaning has over time shifted towards a close association with the state and a sense of power as legitimate. What has remained is its connection to knowledge. (Ginsberg 2016.) This understanding of authority is easily detectable in how Zuboff uses the term.

Like heroes and villains in a dystopian story, the surveillance capitalism theory treats authority and power as oppositional and in competition with each other. 'Illegitimate forces' declare, have, or use power, and they must be resisted by authority (Zuboff 2019, 522). Power pursues totality, which only authority can fight. A dualism of predatory illegitimate and righteous legitimate is made by Zuboff.

Authority, then, is separate from power, and unlike power, is widely accessible and thus 'good'. Concretely, this legitimate authority is, according to Zuboff,

> democratic institutions; laws; regulations; rights and obligations; private governance rules and contracts; the normal market constraints exercised by consumers, competitors, and employees; civil society; the political authority of the people; and the moral authority of individual human beings who have their bearings. (Zuboff 2019, 522).

Democratic actors, including individuals and the democratic state as the representative of individuals are authorities, and this is treated as natural; the position of legitimate authority is neither questioned nor explicitly justified. The assumption made by Zuboff is that these entities work in accordance with the logic of authority instead of power and that individuals in these contexts share a morality based on democratic values. All the entities or actors listed above in the quotation have authority instead of power because they are legitimate actors, and they are legitimate, because of their relationship to knowledge is in accordance with liberal democratic and capitalist market values. Authority, then, is political and economic, as well as exercised by individuals "who have their moral bearings" (ibid.) (although this is the last entity on the list).

Power and authority are in essence political in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. They are not discussed in the brief sections where the author mentions social or interpersonal relations, or as

differentiating mechanisms related to surveillance or economic relations outside of the specific context of surveillance capitalism. Power and authority come to view and under analysis explicitly as a question of democratic or antidemocratic politics. Zuboff as a liberal thinker rejects totalitarianism explicitly (2019, Chapter 12 section II), which she positions as the ultimate antidemocratic force before the rise of surveillance capitalism. Now, as surveillance capitalism trespasses supposedly previously non-economic spheres of life, the threat to democratic authority and the authority of the individual citizen-consumer comes from not political actors but economic ones.

The force that Zuboff calls authority is nevertheless often in sociological scholarship called power without the separation of terminology by legitimacy. Schäffner and Chilton (2002) note that there are two broad ways to define politics:

> "On the one hand, politics is viewed as a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it. […] On the other hand, politics is viewed as co-operation, as the practices and institutions a society has for resolving clashes of interest over money, power, liberty and the like." (Schäffner & Chilton 2002, 5)

Whether democracies fall under the first or the second definition is a debated topic (Schäffner & Chilton 2002, 5). Zuboff's stance on this is firmly on the second one, as long as politics are based in democracy. The issue of economic actors and authority or power in the realm of the economic system is, again, based on the logic of operations that they commit to. "[N]ormal market constraints exercised by consumers, competitors, and employees" (Zuboff 2019, 522) have authority, and these normal market constraints are evidently legitimate in the author's view. Yet, surveillance capitalism, an off-set subsystem, is parasitic and illegitimate – a wielder of power instead of authority. This is due to its logic of totality, its seeking of dominance over every dimension of society and personhood for its own gain, unlike authority which's logic is based on democratic values.

I have demonstrated above that he division of authority from power is a normative dualistic distinction. Authority and power are both 'power' in the conventional understanding of power, but the narrative demand for good and evil makes Zuboff differentiate these into two terms, perhaps for the sake of clarity regarding political desirability. I will now move on to an overview of instrumentalism, the specific new species of power introduced in the surveillance capitalism theory.

The Rise of Instrumentarian Power

In the surveillance capitalism theory, for power to start challenging authority in democratic times, it transferred to the economic realm. Confusingly, Zuboff claims that a "new surveillance capitalism determined to claim unilateral authority over the digital future." (Zuboff 2019, 59). It is clear,

however, that this unilateral authority is to be understood as power, as will become evident when the author names what she is referring to as unilateral authority as instrumentarian power.

The rise of instrumentarian power was a result of multiple factors, as established in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Politically, neoliberal politics were a significant enabler. Zuboff criticizes neoliberalism as undermining the state, and in so doing implies that authority was undermined as well:

> In the "crisis of democracy" zeitgeist, the neoliberal vision and its reversion to market metrics was deeply attractive to politicians and policy makers, both as the means to evade political ownership of tough economic choices and because it promised to impose a new kind of order where disorder was feared. The absolute authority of market forces would be enshrined as the ultimate source of imperative control, displacing democratic contest and deliberation with an ideology of atomized individuals sentenced to perpetual competition for scarce resources. The disciplines of competitive markets promised to quiet unruly individuals and even transform them back into subjects too preoccupied with survival to complain. (Zuboff 2019, 38)

Here we see the term authority again, this time as "absolute authority", which again undermines the legitimacy or the authority-ness of the term authority. I believe that this, while being terminologically confusing, is a deliberate choice to underscore how authority transforms into power. It becomes "unilateral" and "absolute", words that recall authoritarianism. As Zuboff uses totalitarianism as *the* contrasting example in Part III of the book where she discusses instrumentarian power in detail, we can think of this authoritarian quality as totalitarianism.

Neoliberalism "demanded radical freedom from all forms of state oversight" and worked to displace "the legitimate political authority vested in the state" (ibid., 38). Here we see again that under "normal" conditions, the state is an authority, not a power. But the author does not consider the above admission of complicity by politicians in transforming authority over into the economic realm (where it transformed into power) as implicating them or democratic institutions/state institutions as part of the sphere of power, as this is not analyzed. In the narrative, it is not the state that becomes corrupted by neoliberalism's perverse call for radical freedom from democracy. Instead, the economic realm becomes the playground of corrupted authority, as authority is captured and transformed into power. Ironically, radical freedom from regulation becomes the quality that pushes totalizing power onto others.

In the previous section, I suggested that the dualistic distinction between power and authority, and their relationships to knowledge are implicative of both paranoid knowing (hidden power, evil power lurking under the surface) and apocalyptic-dystopian narrativity (capture of knowledge by the elites,

the rise of evil, exclusive and dominating power against the good, accessible to individuals and community authority). Here, I posit that Zuboff's narrating and concept of instrumentarian power, an "unprecedented" new evil, is a significant characteristic of such a narrative and knowledge practice. it is also a narrative point of interest, as it completes the breaking of the world which we previously thought we knew and replaces it with a much scarier and threatening one:

> As to this species of power, I name it *instrumentarianism*, defined as *the instrumentation and instrumentalization of behavior for the purposes of modification, prediction, monetization, and control*. In this formulation, "instrumentation" refers to the puppet: the ubiquitous connected material architecture of sensate computation that renders, interprets, and actuates human experience. "Instrumentalization" denotes the social relations that orient the puppet masters to human experience as surveillance capital wields the machines to transform us into means to others' market ends. Surveillance capitalism forced us to reckon with an unprecedented form of capitalism. Now the instrumentarian power that sustains and enlarges the surveillance capitalist project compels a second confrontation with the unprecedented. (Zuboff 2019, 352)

In the surveillance capitalism narrative/theory, we lack power due to being made obsolete, unnecessary, and exiled from market relations, and further subjugated by being forced to participate as voiceless objects in these same market relations. Instrumentarian power is achieved through the expansion and intensification of the machine gaze(s) to form the conditions of and mediate these relations. This is quite persuasive, the economic analysis from the perspective of power and profit (who profits the most, who loses the most) is a sharp analysis of market relations (sans labor) in capitalism where information technological abilities serve the purpose of stock owners and business executives.

Although Zuboff distinguishes totalitarianism from the new power wielded in surveillance capitalism, instrumentarianism (see Zuboff 2019, 351–353), it is the most relevant and closest example of power used to help analyze instrumentarian power. While the author takes care to explicate that the new power at play is not a "digital totalitarianism" (ibid., 353), the close association through juxtaposition as well as elements of instrumentarian power that appear drawn from totalitarianism make instrumentarian power into an immense narrative threat to humanity and survival. Instrumentarian power, too, aims for totality, although its target is different:

> Totalitarianism operated through the means of violence, but instrumentarian power operates through the means of behavioral modification, and this is where our focus must shift. Instrumentarian power has no interest in our souls or any principle to instruct. There is no training or transformation for spiritual salvation, no ideology

> against which to judge our actions. […] It is profoundly and infinitely indifferent to our meanings and motives. Trained on measurable action, it only cares that whatever we do is *accessible* to its ever-evolving operations of rendition, calculation, modification, monetization, and control. (Zuboff 2019, 360)

Yet, instrumentarian power is also described as total in ambition to control (366–368) and dominating (ibid., 376–378). Although, unlike totalitarianism, instrumentarian power is not "bent on the reconstruction of the human species through the dual mechanisms of genocide and the 'engineering of the soul.'" (Zuboff 2019, 353), Zuboff appears unable to resist the temptation of a totalitarian narrative. Like totalitarianism, instrumentarian power also "aims to organize, herd, and tune society to achieve a similar social confluence, in which group pressure and computational certainty replace politics and democracy, extinguishing the felt reality and social function of an individualized existence." (Zuboff 2019, 20–21)

Due to this close connection of instumentarian power with totalitarianism, there is a confusing unclarity to the goals and wants of surveillance capitalists. At times, the indifferent evil of instrumentarian power appears closer to totalitarianism: it wants total control for certainty, it plunders and destroys our personhood and wants to automate us in a way that is presented as malicious and hostile:

> In an instrumentarian utopia, Big Other simulates the vortex of stimuli, transforming "natural selection" into the "unnatural selection" of variation and reinforcement authored by market players and the competition for surveillance revenues. We may confuse Big Other with the behaviorist god of the vortex, but only because it effectively conceals the machinations of surveillance capital that are the wizard behind the digital curtain. The seductive voice crafted on the yonder side of this veil—*Google, is that you?*—gently nudges us along the path that coughs up the maximum of behavioral surplus and the closest approximation to certainty. Do not slumber in this opiated fog at the network's edge. That knowing voice is underwritten by the aims and rules of the very place we once hoped to flee, with its commercialized rituals of competition, contempt, and humiliation. Take one wrong step, one deviation from the path of seamless frictionless predictability, and that same voice turns acid in an instant as it instructs "the vehicular monitoring system not to allow the car to be started." (Zuboff 2019, 378)

The focus on future and utopianism underscores the future-orientation of Zuboff's theoretical claims. Just as surveillance capitalism is projected to spread and intensify, so is instrumentarian power and its vehicle, the Big Other. The narrative style in combination with the theoretical claims enhance the apocalyptic-dystopian "feel" of the narrative/theory. They also reject a more banal, less titillating

interpretation where instrumentarianism is merely a new term for how new digital tools, technologies, and techniques for profit-making are appropriated for profit in a capitalist economy.

Aside from totalitarianism, imperialism is another 'species of power' that guides the author's understanding of power. This becomes apparent from the (quite offensive) comparison of indigenous victims of genocide (see Zuboff 2019, Chapter 6, section I) to how people are victimized by surveillance capitalists, the conquistadors of the third-modern (e.g., ibid., 192–193).

> These twenty-first-century invaders do not ask permission; they forge ahead, papering the scorched earth with faux-legitimation practices. Instead of cynically conveyed monarchical edicts, they offer cynically conveyed terms-of-service agreements whose stipulations are just as obscured and incomprehensible. They build their fortifications, fiercely defending their claimed territories, while gathering strength for the next incursion. Eventually, they build their towns in intricate ecosystems of commerce, politics, and culture that declare the legitimacy and inevitability of all that they have accomplished. (Zuboff 2019, 178–179)

I suggest, however, that the use of comparisons and metaphors that evoke imperialism or colonialism are more stylistically than theoretically oriented. Whereas totalitarianism is clearly an influence on how instrumentarian power is constructed, references to invaders, plundering, and empire are used to highlight the predatory, banal control and dominance inflicted by instrumentarian power and surveillance capitalism. In other words, it is a narrative tool to, once again, draw a stark distinction between the vulnerable good and the predatory evil that repeats throughout the book. In other parts, the author sympathizes with the same (of different nationality) colonists who, while fighting for freedom from the rule of the British Empire, were plundering and invading the lives of indigenous peoples (see Zuboff 2019, Chapter 18, Section II).

In this section, I have demonstrated the narrative duality of vulnerable, good authority and predatory, evil power constructed by Zuboff to message desirability and danger to the reader. I noted how these narrative features are world-breaking and world-making narrative techniques that enforce the apocalyptic-dystopian "feel" of the narrative and theory. The conceptual linking of power and authority to the sphere of politics and the tension between democratic and antidemocratic values was explicated. I then delved into instrumentarian power, showing that it borrows heavily from totalitarianism despite the author's distinction. The evoking of language associated with imperialism and colonialism is a narrative choice made for stylistic clarity and emotional impact, I suggested.

Zuboff's Theory of Society

Understanding how power and authority are defined helps to set the stage for reconstructing Zuboff's theory of society. With the perspective of legitimacy by informed consent, it is possible to trace the

theoretical foundations and intellectual commitments that construct Zuboff's theory. First, it must be stated that there is no cohesive argument about how to understand society in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. However, as with personhood in the previous section of this chapter, a clear idea can be unearthed through a comprehensive reconstruction of the text.

In this section, I first analyze how Zuboff understands society and societal relations. I suggest that Zuboff showcases neoinstitutional thinking, with an emphasis on "market democracy". I demonstrate that the author's unwavering commitment to the West and liberalism (however loose a concept) guide her to first, center the West, even as surveillance capitalism is said to be ubiquitous, and second, to see society pre-surveillance capitalism as unquestionably functioning and as the foundation of a desired society in the future. Both claims require the author to omit certain perspectives that shall be briefly touched upon in this section.

Neoinstitutionalism and Effective Life

In her dictionary-style definition of surveillance capitalism, the first five one-sentence definitions focus on explaining the individual and economic dimensions of the phenomenon. The final three definitions are of interest here: they summarize how surveillance capitalism relates to society and will, therefore, function as the starting point of our analysis. Consider the following definitions about surveillance capitalism:

> **6.** The origin of a new instrumentarian power that asserts dominance over society and presents startling challenges to market democracy;
>
> **7.** A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty;
>
> **8.** An expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above: an overthrow of the people's sovereignty. (Zuboff 2019, "The Definition". Added spacing RD).

The first of these three explanations is meant to introduce the new type of power in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, but in doing so it also introduces a new perspective in Zuboff's thinking. It is not only the individual that is controlled, but surveillance capitalism claims dominance over the whole of society (not only the social but society). Included in the same sentence is another clause that will be another hint – the addition of market democracy into the same definition. The seventh definition, second on our list here, mentions a "new collective order". This is a reference to the dystopian post-individualist future. In the eighth and last definition, we find an explicitly political articulation in the mentioning of human rights and the use of "coup" and "people's sovereignty".

The adjacency of "society" and "market democracy" in the above passage is not an accident. For Zuboff, these concepts are connected. Throughout the book, the picture drawn by Zuboff of society is that of a collection of institutions that organize the communal life of individuals. The capitalist market, legislated, regulated, and overseen by democratic institutions, form public and social life. The term society is used to mean a community of politically like-minded (those who value democracy and freedom of choice) but individual people, a "new society of individuals and their demand for individualized consumption" (Zuboff 2019, 30). To put it another way, society is the constellation of organizations that work inside democratic and capitalist logics.

Although not an explicit affiliation made by the author, she approaches society from a neoinstitutionalist perspective. Neoinstitutionalism emerged in the late 1970s as a social constructionist answer to "hyperrationalist theories of organization" (Pedersen & Dobbin 2006, 897). Zuboff, previously publishing her major works in the area of management and organization studies, seems to have adopted this approach to the whole of public life. To be sure, this is not discussed by Zuboff, but I believe it is an influencer to how she sees the construction of society. Neoinstitutionalism also constructs the organization as an actor (ibid., 898), as well as emphasizing the explanatory power of cognition and culture (Dimaggio & Powell 1991; DiMaggio 1997), which can be detected in how Zuboff gives agency that resembles that of a singular actor to institutions and systems, such as the "surveillance capitalists", "the priesthood", or "surveillance capitalism" (see e.g., the above definitions, Zuboff 2019 'The Definition'). These are presented as having a singular, agreed upon will and aim in their action. Additionally, the approach that established itself as a "particular tradition of American sociology" prioritizes the idea of efficiency (Abbot 1992, 755).

Efficiency is a core value for Zubof; She sees it as a foundational quality of organized social life, as well as an individual drive. Durkheim would agree with Zuboff that in modern society, individuality and strong social ties are not in confrontation with each other (Rueschemeyer 1994, 60). The author's reading of Durkheimian efficiency is in line with how she sees modern society through a functionalist modernization theory (see Joas 2008), which I mentioned in Chapter 3 when discussing Zuboff's liberal utopianism. The idea of an ever-progressing differentiation and rationalization in society is theoretically consistent with how Zuboff operationalizes Durkheim:

> The sociologist [Emil Durkheim] identified the perennial human quest to live effectively in our "conditions of existence" as the invisible causal power that summons the division of labor, technologies, work organization, capitalism, and ultimately civilization itself. Each is forged in the same crucible of human need that

> is produced by what Durkheim called the always intensifying "violence of the struggle" for effective life. (Zuboff 2019, 32)

This "invisible causal power" of striving for efficiency has produced all the morally good institutions and structures of modern society. The strive for "effective life" is naturalized, and it then works to implicitly explain the development and legitimacy of democracy and market capitalism as society-level extensions of this individual human drive. This idea represents how society ought to function – and how it would, presumedly – without surveillance capitalism.

In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1933), Durkheim argued that there are two types of solidarity that determine social order: mechanical solidarity forms through socialization and produces a "[L]ikeness of consciences and the lack of individuality" and organic solidarity that rises from the division of labor, allows individuality and encourages functional interdependencies while reducing collective conscience (Denham 2005). The scholar suspected that lack of regulation in the market challenges organic solidarity in society, forming a state of anomie (Denham 2005; Durkheim 1933, 367), which is consistent with Zuboff's own critique of neoliberalism and the rise of surveillance capitalism – the threat to this idea of the good society.

Durkheim's solidarities through the division of labor bear a resemblance to how the author theorizes society in a "normal" state and again under surveillance capitalism. For Zuboff, in a 'normal state, the binding agents between individuals and societal institutions are the social contract, trust, and human connection that leave the door open for empathy and choice – all things that surveillance capitalism will erode. For Durkheim, mechanical solidarity produced a morality that forced the individual to succumb to the will of the social (Denham 2005). For Zuboff, this would be pre-modern and pre-individualistic society, as I showed in the previous section of this chapter. The organic solidarity produced in a society with a "normal" division of labor, then, is in convergence with how Zuboff understands democratic market capitalism. Durkheim's anomie, the malformation of the division of labor, is where I believe Zuboff may take inspiration for surveillance capitalism.

Durkheim theorized social relations in industrial society as being in a state of anomie. This was because of the effect of moving from a society of mechanical solidarity to one of organic solidarity. However, the regression of morality typical to mechanical solidarity was not replaced quick enough, causing anomie to develop. There was not enough organization in society to produce the newfound moral goods of individual dignity, personality, and justice. (Denham 2005). This is strikingly similar to how Zuboff describes the transformation of society through the rise of surveillance capitalism.

Not everything boils down to capitalism, though. Examining the role of the state shows that here, too, are Zuboff and Durkheim in confluence. As a concept, Zuboff's normal and ideal society rests on the idea, which is shared by Durkheim (see 1933, 227) that the state benevolently cherishes and upholds solidarities between individuals. Zuboff does this by first, assuming that democratic institutions work for the people (see Zuboff 2019, 519), and second, by not seriously considering the democratic state as a possible collaborator of surveillance capitalism despite self-reported evidence. I will expand on the second point in the next section on surveillance.

While trust and empathy are used in the book to remind the reader about what surveillance capitalism is threatening – our human future and human connections to each other (or individuality and solidarity) – Zuboff is also quite invested in the concept of the social contract.

Yet, the author's use of the social contract is more focused on the reciprocal relations in a capitalist economy than it is on political organization. Indeed, the author appears to equate living in a capitalist political system with a sort of way of life. Capitalism itself becomes culture and society.

> 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. […] 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. (Zuboff 2019, 499)

Zuboff presents the historical relations "between capitalism and its communities" in a benign manner, connecting the history of capitalism shaping relations to a social principle of reciprocity and community life. Linking them to the term social contract has another important implication as well: consent. The social contract, as Rousseau conceptualized it, rejects force as legitimation for rule of one over the other (Rousseau & Betts 1994). The existing of a social contract in capitalism means that people accept the power-relations and the rules imposed by a capitalist political system over their lives. Therefore, Zuboff's understanding of society pre-surveillance capitalism is that of a benign capitalist society. Capitalism is if not completely synonymous, at least an integral part of the good society.

Zuboff, then, approaches society from a neoinstitutional perspective and has a Durkheimian reading of society as the effector of moral ties of solidarity, effectiveness as a principle, and individuality.

She extends Durkheim's idea on differentiation and efficiency and adds to it the idea of the social contract to mean that capitalist market democracy is the best possible society. She is resolute that democratic capitalism and the institutions working through these systemic and structural logics work normally to ensure the conditions for the good life, and exceptional circumstances disrupt them.

In fact, as Denham (2005) notes, the conditions of organic solidarity that make up "normal" conditions in Durkheim's analysis, never existed. I further suggest that the same applies to Zuboff: although society in its "normal" state is presented as an organized system of functioning institutions that ensure effectivity and the fulfilment of democratic market capitalism – including relevant moral values – what we see in practice is that there is always contention and complexity in societal relations. I again note that the position and experience of marginalized groups, as an example, in a liberal democratic state with a capitalist economy often differs from both the perspective of "shared values" and desires, as well as from the point of view of social and material equality. The climate crisis is another issue that debunks this idea of returning to normalcy, or even building a new normal founded on pre-surveillance capitalism conditions.

The Worthy Victims of Surveillane Capitalism

The Age of Surveillance Capitalism, in many ways, is a historical account. As a diagnosis of contemporary society, it draws comparisons to the past. Zuboff rarely cites contemporary social scientists and instead focuses on early classics: we have come to an end of the industrial age and are facing the "unprecedented" as Durkheim, Weber and Marx did in their time (Zuboff 2019, 22). Nevertheless, the author never quite strays far from the context of "Western" history, society, and the future of the West. One of the ways this presents itself is by how society is also viewed through the lens of historical phases of capitalist economies in the West.

Despite the authors claim that surveillance capitalism is (becoming) ubiquitous everywhere, the focus is unapologetically in the US. Although Zuboff uses Europe and specifically the European Union as a relevant contrast to the US to illustrate how law and regulations, court action and local social movements can inhibit predatory profit accumulation, her interest is analyzing and saving US society and its economic-political system.

The stakes are high, as for the author, defending the idea of the West is, at its core, defending that which is fundamental for enabling freedom of choice. Zuboff writes that "[t]he advent of the individual as the locus of moral agency and choice initially occurred in the West, where the conditions for this emergence first took hold." (Zuboff 2019, 33). She never strays from a commitment to

upholding this marriage of individuality and morality as the epitome of history and the basis of a good society.

Besides advocating and defending a concept of personhood and values based on a "Western tradition" of thought, this commitment to the idea of the West extends to Zuboff's understanding of society – its values, norms, and functions. I note this because the West and "Western" are not primarily geographical but historical constructions of a certain type of society (Hall 1999, 78–79). The term West carries with it various assumptions, not only that of individuality, which are present in Zuboff's theory. *Western*, naturalized into the "common sense"[1] in the West through knowledge practices, encompasses liberalism, democracy, and capitalism. For Zuboff, these systems and philosophies are results of progressive history towards individual freedom. Simultaneously, for her they represent the only realistic systems that enable the fulfilling of individual needs and desires. To be sure, this must be interpreted, as the text does not say in exact words that the liberal democratic capitalism of the West is the only good and desirable society. I suggest, however, that my interpretation is not unwarranted, as becomes clear from the omittance of any other possibility in the narrative of the surveillance capitalism theory; there are only two options. Either we defeat surveillance capitalism and remove the threat of a coup on society, the destruction of democracy and fair capitalist market relations, or we do not, which signifies the end of the West.

Due to the idea of democratic institutions as benevolent and functioning, the state is presented as an innocent victim of the surveillance capitalists. This is the case to the extent that Zuboff makes a metaphorical equation between democracies and indigenous people, ambushed by the conquistadors, a rather offensive comparison (Zuboff 2019, 516). Democracies are presented as well-meaning systems of governance that work for the benefit of society, but which have, due to their slowness, become vulnerable to predatory forms of capitalism. The slow turn of the democratic wheel has worked in favor of surveillance capitalism, creating a gap between legislation and the rapid development of new technologies (ibid., 103–105). It is a state of lawlessness that allows this form of capital accumulation to take place, instead of, say, active erosion of market regulations by state governments. I find this to be unagreeable. Although capitalist economic imperatives "outreach direct political rule and legal authority" (Wood 2002, 178), the support of these extra-market spheres are necessary for their survival and continuity; regulation and coercion by state institutions help keep the system of capital accumulation in action and the withdrawal of their support would inhibit capitalism's survival. The state provides this support by offering stability and regulation (ibid., 179).

The connection between the development of capitalism and democracy is finally made explicit at the end of the book in the final chapter (ibid., 516). Warning about the erosion of previous market relations between the firm and the worker-consumer, the author writes:

> 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. (Zuboff 2019, 501)

Zuboff goes on to explain how "market reciprocities" encouraged the Americans to see themselves as equals to the British, eventually leading to a revolution and the establishment of democratic institutions. The fact that these reciprocities and democratic institutions were explicitly exclusionist to anyone not considered as fitting the social class of able-bodied white men is ignored. This is a troubling omittance as it brings into question the pro-democracy and pro-equality force of capitalism (see Zuboff 2019, 504). Neither does this historical narrative consider itself with workers' rights or colonialism, including the indigenous peoples of America and the enslaved people of African descent who were brought to the European and American continents *by the same people who considered themselves as equal*. Hundreds of years of democracy and capitalism have not equalized us, but the author does not articulate such concerns.

1 In a Gramscian sense (Gramsci 1992)

In the final chapter of the book, Zuboff further writes that:

> The weakening attachment to democracy in the United States and many European countries is of serious concern. […] 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. (Zuboff 2019, 516)

Again, the dual historical development of democracy and capitalism are presented as progressive and ideal. This narrative, with its omittances mentioned above, demonstrate the ideological commitment of the author to the existence and continuation of the "Western" idea – liberal market democracy and its worldview and self-image. The author's commitment leads to the apocalyptic doom narrative presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis as well as the theoretical distinction of surveillance capitalism from what Zuboff theorizes as the good society in the past, present, and future. To do so, the author must separate neoliberalism from its predecessor, liberalism. Liberalism, or "Modernity", the term

which Zuboff uses to discuss liberalism, is presented as all good, and neoliberalism as all bad. Just as "modernity" is treated as synonymous with liberalism, so does the West signify the social and political location for liberalism. Here, I am not invested in arguing for or against connecting the values and historical narratives to liberalism. However, it is difficult to accept such a stark theoretical distinction between classical liberalism and neoliberalism; the relationship between state and market has not transformed in as significant a way as some social scientists suggest, and economic liberalism also views state regulation suspiciously (Stahl 2019, 473–474; 481).

Effectively, Zuboff's narrative of the West and its liberalism means that surveillance capitalism is a threat to the idea of the West and Western society and a liberal way of life. Surveillance capitalism's shaping of society towards collectivism, and capturing of knowledge (Zuboff 2019, 511), its eroding of the social contract and freedom of choice (for those who are of interest to the author) and its antidemocratic and antiegalitarian (ibid., 504) ambitions make it hostile to the idea of the liberal West. The issue is that the West and Western society understood in Zuboff's way, despite their popularity, have never existed as absolute and real, as we have established above. Furthermore, the values and norms that Zuboff upholds, naturalized in the surveillance capitalism theory as human nature and organic social, political, and economic reciprocities are not exclusive to the loosely definable boundaries of the West. Nor must these values and norms necessarily be the unique ingredients of the good society.

In this section, I have outlined a theory of society in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. through an analysis of its neoinstitutional approach that emphasizes economic-political institutions and practices. I have also presented a reading of the author's understanding of the function and purpose of society as an organized space for effective life, founded on the principle of the social contract. The distinction between society and state is blurry. Finally, an interpretation and a critique were made of the unwavering commitment to an idea of the liberal West as the past, present (under threat), and future good society. I noted that this unquestioned commitment has necessitated that the author omits historical and current-day oppression and inequalities either directly linked to or allowed under democratic and capitalist societies. From this perspective, it is difficult to accept Zuboff's view of the democratic, capitalist state as a vehicle for the equal benefit of society, or individual citizen-worker-consumers. This will become more apparent in the next section, where I turn to analyzing the meaning and significance of surveillance in surveillance capitalism.

The Issue with Surveillance

In the early 2000s, the term surveillance society was created by David Lyon (2001) as one of many social scientific diagnoses of the times. Since then, surveillance studies have offered various perspectives to surveillance and further developed surveillance theory (e.g., Newell 2020; Talvitie-Lamberg 2018; Pålmas 2011; Wood 2009). Even earlier – and a great influence on these theories – philosophers such as Foucault and Deleuze were invested in questions of surveillance and control. Even further, there is a rich literary tradition of surveillance dystopias such as George Orwell's famous 1984, that have produced scholarship and discussion about surveillance for decades.

This all to say that there is a rich theoretical tradition of surveillance studies that Zuboff carefully sidesteps[1]. in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. I find this surprising, as "surveillance" is deemed important enough for the theory to warrant its position in its title, yet the theory hardly communicates with earlier or competing theories of surveillance. I suggest that the reason for this omission is an act of distinction made to establish a new theoretical strand or paradigm. Zuboff argues that surveillance capitalism is unprecedented, and this claim hangs on the assumption that commercial market surveillance is fundamentally different from government surveillance. While positing this, Zuboff makes another, less explicit argument: that state surveillance in the West is an insignificant enough a phenomenon that it is of no concern to democratic politics, society, individuality, freedom, or the good society. The threat of apocalypse and the following dystopia is located in a new realm, as the influence of the state is understated and replaced by market actors.

In this section, I reconstruct the use of surveillance in the surveillance capitalism theory. I argue that the author's definition of market surveillance, while focused on what the theory aims to explain, is reduced to the point that the theory itself loses some of its analytical credibility. Furthermore, the author's suggestion for defeating surveillance capitalism is problematized through an analysis of its omittance of the state perspective to surveillance.

Briefly, a mention of privacy is in order. As surveillance technologies advance and proliferate, a parallel development of increasing transparency of the individual and decreasing transparency of state authorities and corporations has taken place. Especially in the US context, the growing power and reach of state intelligence, the institutionalization of surveillance on a mass-scale, and dwindling civil rights together (Silverman 2017, 149) form relationships of intensifying vulnerability.

Privacy is a widely analyzed subject in surveillance studies, owing to its salience in the tension between surveillance and individual or democratic rights (see e.g., Paache & Klauser 2015; Haggerty & Erickson 2006). Some even suggest that privacy no longer exists. Zuboff (2019, 90) constructs a

different view of privacy: it exists, but you are not in control of it. Privacy is redistributed to serve the interests of surveillance capital. The author finds that the term is not analytically adequate in the context of surveillance capitalism (ibid., 14; 194). There is much debate about the usefulness of the term in the context of surveillance (see e.g., Bennet 2011; Regan 2011; boyd 2011). However, since Zuboff chooses not to discuss surveillance from a privacy perspective, the limitations of space and focus of this thesis do not allow for a proper discussion of such matters. Instead, the focus in surveillance is on the one-sided relationship between the surveilling and the surveilled.

1 There is a mention of Lyon's work regarding the post 9/11 change in surveillance attitudes (Zuboff 2019, 114–115), but this is an exception.

As we have already discussed the sociopsychological threat and effect of surveillance operations on the targets of surveillance, individuals, this section highlights those who surveil.

Market Surveillance

First and foremost, surveillance capitalism is an exploitative form and logic of capital accumulation (Zuboff 2015, 75; 2019) and Zuboff's explicit aim is to examine capitalism (see Möllers et al. 2019). Consequently, despite it being a central theme in the monography and the language of surveillance capitalism, surveillance is left undertheorized. Zuboff neither considers earlier surveillance theories nor makes a comprehensive theory of surveillance as a phenomenon distinct from its use as a market tool.

As surveillance practices transform through time and place, specific theoretical constructions are needed to understand it. Looking at surveillance from the perspective of economics is valuable and gives insight into how markets work and how surveillance works in the economic realm. The economics perspective is also justified by Zuboff's project of exposing market surveillance. Surveillance as distinct phenomena is not the author's primary interest. However, Zuboff's focus begins to pose issues for the surveillance capitalism theory when the author starts to insist on the exceptionality of the system both in logic and in time. Surveillance is not as straight forward as its colloquial uses suggest; it is a "slippery concept" that encompasses "a huge range of historical and contemporary practices" (Van der Meulen & Heynen 2019, 5).

According to Zuboff (2019, 99), surveillance functions as a tool in the process of capital accumulation. The author takes care to present throughout the book that surveillance in the contemporary Western society is committed by market actors with dishonest aims. Surveillance is a way of gathering and later using data to first, make prediction products for clients such as advertisers, and in the later stages of surveillance capitalism, will be used to modify our behavior.

Zuboff's construction relies on an implicit but loud argument about market surveillance and state surveillance as distinct phenomena. To make this argument, certain aspects of surveillance are omitted by Zuboff. She makes a distinction between the economic and political to distance the state from surveillance that is inconsistent in an immanent manner: state politics are separate from the market, yet state politics and the market influence each other in a transformative manner. This distinction can be observed in the small role of the state and state intelligence and the nonexistence of international or transnational politics (where surveillance interests, capabilities and technologies enjoy endless relevancy) while Silicon Valley executives and certain academics' public speeches, business decisions and studies are given primacy.

Surveillance is always committed by them towards us in a one-way hierarchical relationship, where the perpetrators are corporations. Often, the focus is on single actors who are positioned as representatives of the motives and desires of all surveillance capitalists. In short, surveillance is reduced to a self-explanatory tool for surveillance capitalists to use to control us.

The curious consequence of surveillance (and behavioral modification through surveillance) combined with Zuboff's apocalyptic-dystopian narrative is that the surveillance capitalists become actors with complex motivations. On the one hand, surveillance capitalists care about nothing but profit, which makes surveillance itself merely a convenient tool:

> Technologies are always economic means, not ends in themselves: in modern times, technology's DNA comes already patterned by what the sociologist Max Weber called the "economic orientation." […] Surveillance capitalism employs many technologies, but it cannot be equated with any technology. Its operations may employ platforms, but these operations are not the same as platforms. It employs machine intelligence, but it cannot be reduced to those machines. It produces and relies on algorithms, but it is not the same as algorithms. Surveillance capitalism's unique economic imperatives are the puppet masters that hide behind the curtain orienting the machines and summoning them to action. (Zuboff 2019, 16)

In effect, surveillance does not need to be insidious in aim for it to be destructive to society and the individual. On the other hand, Zuboff does explicitly posit that surveillance capitalists aim to take over society, our behavior and politics to ensure the continuation of profit (ibid., 52–53). The subtle difference between the two is that the first stance is only indifferent to the possible harm done through surveillance while the latter stance actively pursues harm via surveillance so that it can profit through the consequences of this harm. There is also a third position, that of techno utopianism, however, this

too, poses questions (ibid., 371; 398). To be sure, techno utopianism as a motivator for surveillance is laid out in the theory: some, especially among researchers (the "priesthood"), believe in the power and potential for good that surveillance technologies have. They can remove human error and implement "harmony" (ibid., 468). Thus, the ideological basis for surveillance is established. Yet, Zuboff also insinuates that this utopianism is merely a tool to justify the use of surveillance technologies in order to establish control of our behavior (ibid., 398–404). The author never finally decides which attitude the surveillance capitalists have, or whether there is heterogeneity among them. To put it another way, the question of w*hy we are surveilled* by market actors is never answered in a satisfactory way.

The Innocence of the Democratic State

I will now raise a point that I hinted at above about state involvement. This point – the distinction between state politics and the market – in the case of surveillance is both important for upholding the narrative Zuboff constructs. It is also necessary for justifying a theoretical distinction from previous surveillance scholarship. The relationship – or more accurately, the lack of one – between state and surveillance is stark in the theory. It is especially noticeable due to how tightly state and surveillance are connected in previous surveillance scholarship and fictional depictions of dystopian surveillance societies. In fact, even Zuboff uses these fictional narratives to make sense of surveillance capitalism. However, as established above, she replaces the state with market actors.

This begs the question, why is the state almost completely absent from the picture? The state is not only presented as slow to react to threats of market surveillance due to the leisurely pace of democratic decision making, but also because market actors have duped the benevolent democratic actors who are "working for us". Yet, it is pertinent to ask, how were surveillance technologies and techniques developed, put to use, normalized, approved of, and allowed to gather and use data, autonomously from the state? If democracy is the only guarantee of individual freedom, then how come a democratic state could let a sophisticated and wide-spread surveillance system establish itself under its nose?

Zuboff explains the non-complicity of the state by citing two primary reasons: a state of surveillance exceptionalism caused by the September 11, 2001, attacks on the New York World Trade Centers and the Pentagon, combined with a broader trend of neoliberalism. First, the neoliberal turn would undermine democracy:

> 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. (Zuboff 2019, 511)

Economic actors pushed their way to politics and "hollowed out" democracy, thus preventing the state from doing what is morally right: protecting individual rights. In fact, it is even presented that this resulted in too-little state action, or "lawlessness" (ibid., 252, 281). Yet, the author accepts that there was political will to allow, if not even directly benefit from, surveillance technologies:

> The elective affinity between public intelligence agencies and the fledgling surveillance capitalist Google blossomed in the heat of emergency to produce a unique historical deformity: *surveillance exceptionalism*. The 9/11 attacks transformed the government's interest in Google, as practices that just hours earlier were careening toward legislative action were quickly recast as mission-critical necessities. Both institutions craved certainty and were determined to fulfill that craving in their respective domains at any price. These elective affinities sustained surveillance exceptionalism and contributed to the fertile habitat in which the surveillance capitalism mutation would be nurtured to prosperity. (Zuboff 2019, 115)

State organizations and agencies such as the CIA and NSA in the US installed programs to fund and develop surveillance technologies in cooperation with private market actors, such as surveillance capitalism pioneer Google. The author also briefly notes the use of surveillance expertise and technologies in democratic election campaigns (ibid., 123–124). The recognition of these facts is glossed over in the later parts of the book, and Zuboff never seriously analyses this connection of state security, democratically elected politicians and private corporations all using the same surveillance technologies and expertise. Instead, she fails to "acknowledge the vital role played by laws, legal institutions, and accounting standards—including developments in corporate law, securities law, commercial codes, the regulation of derivatives, intellectual property law, fair value accounting and so on […]" in shaping the conditions where surveillance capitalism rose (Johns 2020, 1050). The state's complicity is mentioned almost in an offhand manner: briefly and without returning to the subject.

Despite the author's reluctancy to analyze the relationship between the state and the market, there is an obvious connection between state and surveillance. This connection is presented as thin and insignificant by the author. The eradication of the historicity of surveillance as the state's tool of coercion and control enables the author to claim that surveillance capitalists are the ultimate evil, power hungry despots. Additionally, it flattens the complexity related to democratic politics and state surveillance, presenting democratic governance as "innocent" and thus helping the author to argue that democratic institutions are the right channel for resisting surveillance capitalism. I posit this

because Zuboff (500–501) offers a democratic double movement as the answer to fighting surveillance capitalism. This positions the state ("democratic institutions") as morally righteous instead of part of the problem, which is a must if one is to believe that surveillance capitalism can be regulated through a democratic double movement.

However, this does not change the fact that it was the state in the US that laid the groundwork and directly benefited from surveillance capitalism. Further, surveillance of citizens, "enemies of the state", minority groups and other subjects of interest to the state have by governments, state intelligence, and police predates the rise of surveillance capitalism, and is surely happening distinct from the motivations and systemacity of market surveillance.

Instead, I suggest that surveillance capitalism *could not exist* without state support and allowance. The state has not only provided the possibility for surveillance capitalism to grow by legislation and politics but funded the development and use of these technologies and supported the surveillance capitalists and their workforce to then benefit the state; the independence of the market from the state under liberalism and neoliberalism is but an idea (Stahl 2019; Wood 2002). The state and international system of states is embedded in the logic of surveillance capitalism and thoroughly complicit. This is possible to conclude by reading Zuboff's theory while rejecting the perspective of the narrative.

The issue with under-analyzing the role of the state is, first, that is makes the theory immanently inconsistent. All motivation and blame are given to market actors, while the state is presented as innocent. Yet, in another breath, the state is said to have surveillance interests and direct involvement. This fights against the notion of a liberal democratic state as the bastion of individual freedom, unless state surveillance has a fundamentally different sociopsychological effect on the individual – which Zuboff does not posit. Second, the author's suggestion of a democratic double movement (Zuboff 2019, 52, 182, 500–501) of citizens and democratic institutions comes into question, if the state is complicit in surveillance. The authority of democratic institutions resembles power in a way that is perhaps uncomfortable for the liberal individual who is invested in having endless goodwill towards the state. And finally, I return to narrativity to again note that a clear distinction between state and market surveillance is necessary to protect the integrity of the apocalyptic-dystopian narrative.

Narratively, apocalypse is a one-time event: the end of the world happens once. Acknowledging that surveillance is committed by the state, continuously, in relation and independently of the new surveillance capitalist operations threatens the unprecedentedness and uniqueness of the phenomenon. If surveillance is ongoing and inseparable from state action, then we have lived under

some degree of surveillance long before surveillance capitalism: a notion that dampens apocalypse into something quite less dramatic and total, making the following dystopia banal.

We have now established how Zuboff constructs surveillance in the surveillance capitalism theory and its narrative. First, I suggested that surveillance is primarily conceptualized as a one-way relation of the surveilled and surveilling. I then showed that surveillance is only interesting to the author when it is committed by market actors; state surveillance is underexamined. Finally, I suggested that this construction is only comprehensible if thought as an attempt to protect the integrity of surveillance capitalism as an unprecedented phenomenon and its narrative as apocalyptic and dystopian. As is, Zuboff's theory of surveillance is quite vulnerable to critique from surveillance perspectives. In the next section, I reconstruct the economic side of the theory.

Capitalism versus Surveillance Capitalism

Finally, we are ready to delve into the logic and operations of surveillance capitalism as an economic system. I begin by recounting the brief history of capitalism conducted by the author. Earlier in this chapter, we established that in Zuboff's theory, democracy and capitalism are benevolent systems that organize social life to be effective and free. This analysis is continued with a focus on the role of capitalism as oppositional to surveillance capitalism, its predatory mutation. Claims about the logic and function of capitalism pre-surveillance capitalism are examined in comparison with those of surveillance capitalism. The narrative duality of good and evil continues in the economic perspective to heighten the sense of looming dystopia, thus justifying the capitalism of the good society. Finally, I note the lack of critical analysis of pre-surveillance capitalism, and why this might be.

The Pre-Surveillance Capitalist Economy

Zuboff enlists the term surveillance capitalism to describe a sub-system of capital accumulation that has gone astray from the capitalism of the past. Like the robber barons of a past long gone (?), Silicon Valley chief executive officers use antidemocratic and antiegalitarian tactics to secure the flow of profit into their pockets at the expense of the unwitting and unwilling user (Zuboff 2019, 106–107). As narrated by the author, surveillance capitalism departs from the history of capitalism in both aim and operations.

I have chronicled the rise of surveillance capitalism according to Zuboff in Chapter 2. It is therefore not pertinent to repeat the same narration here in detail. Instead, I suggest that it is fruitful to analyze that which the author argues surveillance capitalism *is not* – capitalism in its "normal" state and functions – to illustrate the theoretical commitments and rejections made by the author. Thus, this section follows the history of capitalism as told by Zuboff.

In a general sense, Zuboff follows Joseph Schumpeter's conceptualization of change and rise of new market forms in capitalism as an *evolutionary process*, borrowing the language of biology and "creative destruction" (Zuboff 2019, 51–52). Schumpeter saw capitalism's perpetual change as its fundamental quality, not resulting from changes in the environment, whether social or natural, but from the creation of new markets, consumer goods, transportation, and methods of production (Schumpeter 2003, 82–83). Unlike Schumpeter, however, Zuboff does not foresee a crumpling of capitalism as a result of "excessive bureaucracy" coming in the way of the "entrepreneurial spirit", as Evgeni Molozov notes in his review of The Age of Surveillance Capitalism (2019). Instead, regulation and economic prosperity go hand in hand for Zuboff.

While Zuboff describes surveillance capitalism as an evolutionary continuation of capitalist history, narratively she makes a distinction between capitalism in a general sense and its surveillance capitalism mutation (see e.g., Zuboff 2019, 308). According to Zuboff, this new market form is unique because it has shifted its focus from providing consumer goods (remember Schumpeter) to rendering the used-to-be consumer for profit. This is a problem because it signifies a predatory turn: no longer are the rules that make capitalism benevolent and good followed:

> The very idea of a functional, effective, affordable product or service as a sufficient basis for economic exchange is dying. Where you might least expect it, products of every sort are remade by the new economic requirements of connection and rendition." (Zuboff 2019, 237)

Further, according to Zuboff, capitalism creates new prosperity, and with it, new consumer demand. This is described neutrally as a social economic "law":

> That the luxuries of one generation or class become the necessities of the next has been fundamental to the evolution of capitalism during the last five hundred years. Historians describe the "consumer boom" that ignited the first industrial revolution in late-eighteenth-century Britain, when, thanks to [--] the innovations of the early modern factory, families new to the middle class began to buy the china, furniture, and textiles that only the rich had previously enjoyed. (Zuboff 2019, 256)

In this process, the "once unattainable" becomes affordable to the masses. The author narrates, pointing to Google head economist Hal Varian's views, that personalization is the "twenty-first-century equivalent of these historical dynamics". People, users of information technologies, look for personalization in the services and products that they consume, making them vulnerable to the predatory aims of surveillance capitalists. But just as Zuboff demonstrates by citing Varian's words, users can be thought as accepting surveillance as a tradeoff for better, more personalized services.

(Ibid. 256.) Why, then, is surveillance capitalism so different from other forms of capitalism? Can it not be argued that there exists, in a more general sense, a vulnerability where a consumer must accept (acquiesce) certain terms in order to access products and services that they need?

As a liberal thinker, the author has a positive view of capitalism as a guarantor of freedom of choice. She is convinced that a capitalist economy is both morally right and functional: it creates organic reciprocities and is connected to democratic development (Zuboff 2019, 501–504). In its ideal state, "before globalization, neoliberalism, the shareholder-value movement, and plutocracy unraveled the public corporation and the institutions of the double movement", capitalism benefited the laborer and the consumer (ibid., 500–501). There existed an economic system with "productive social relations of capitalism" (ibid., 499). Capitalism, then, has a positive influence on the actualization of liberal democratic values. At this stage of our reconstruction, this is not the least surprising.

A tension exists, however, with how Zuboff uses the term in other sections throughout the book. This is especially the case when the author is advocating for regulation to curb 'raw capitalism'. Capitalism is presented as both benevolent in its organic reciprocity and consent-based organization of human relations and the markets, but also a system of which' logic and aspirations must be contained by regulation:

> The logic of industrial capitalism exempted the enterprise from responsibility for its destructive consequences, unleashing the destabilization of the climate system and the chaos it spells for all creatures. Polanyi understood that raw capitalism could not be cooked from within. He argued that it was up to society to impose those obligations on capitalism by insisting on measures that tether the capitalist project to the social, preserving and sustaining life and nature. (Zuboff 2019, 345)

Society must herd capitalism so that it does not take the lead and herd society and the individual. There are, then, predatory tendencies in capitalism, despite the good that it provides. Capitalism should, therefore, be regulated and contained so that these vulnerabilities in its system cannot be exploited by malicious actors. Even so, narratively these vulnerabilities are proposed as temporary troubles that can be overcome through progressive action. The argument seems to be that capitalism should not be exploitative, therefore it is not, and any evidence of exploitation means that there is a sudden leak in the machine; the machine itself is designed to function without fault.

> 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." (Zuboff 2019, 525)

Presumably, capitalism would then work as it should, enabling individualism and freedom of choice through consumption and labor practices (which are, again, more of an afterthought for the author). Any new or existing vulnerabilities or injustice in the market – any leaks in the machine – would be fixed by a democratic society by regulation. However, this progressive history is now under threat, Zuboff suggests, due to a new kind of capitalism on the rise.

The Departure

The difference between capitalism and surveillance capitalism as a specific system is born out of the latter's departure from the "historical norms of capitalist ambitions"; surveillance capitalism's claim over "terrain" that exceeds that of the private corporation and the market (Zuboff 2019, 21):

> 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 societal vision sustained by radical indifference and its material expression in Big Other. (Zuboff 2019, 495)

The predatory expansion to all areas of life and all relations is different from the logic of exchange of labor and goods that, according to Zuboff, did not seek dominance over the whole of life. This multidimensional departure makes surveillance capitalism an "utterly novel commercial project" (Zuboff 2019, 8), which allows the author to compare it to a more benevolent-appearing pre-surveillance capitalism, or democratic market capitalism, as it is called in the book:

> In one sense there is nothing remarkable in observing that capitalists would prefer individuals who agree to work and consume in ways that most advantage capital. […] However, it would be dangerous to nurse the notion that today's surveillance capitalists simply represent more of the same. This structural requirement of economies of action turns the means of behavioral modification into an engine of growth. At no other time in history have private corporations of unprecedented wealth and power enjoyed the free exercise of economies of action supported by a pervasive global architecture of ubiquitous computational knowledge and control constructed and maintained by all the advanced scientific know-how that money can buy. (Zuboff 2019, 306)

This new logic of capitalism is predatory and exploitative. It is not "more of the same". Unlike the more-benevolent democratic market capitalism, these features are presented not as repairable leaks

in the machine, but deliberate; the machine not only has the capacity to but was also designed to function in an exploitative manner.

> Digital connection is now a means to others' commercial ends. At its core, surveillance capitalism is parasitic and self-referential. It revives Karl Marx's old image of capitalism as a vampire that feeds on labor, but with an unexpected turn. Instead of labor, surveillance capitalism feeds on every aspect of every human's experience. (Zuboff 2019, 9)

Surveillance capitalism is a betrayal of the "early digital dream" (Zuboff 2019, 9). *Behavior surplus*, a nod to Marx and surplus value now shifts the focus from labor to the inner world of the individual. Surplus value refers to the "excess labor power" of workers that capitalists profit from by not compensating for, and surveillance has always had a role in creating surplus value via monitoring production (Haggerty & Erickson 2000, 615–616). Zuboff's term behavior surplus is clever and illustrative, but it also reveals what the author finds interesting. Despite referencing Marx's "vampire", the lack of a labor perspective when discussing capitalism, surveillance capitalism and their practices, is noticeable. Surplus value itself is not a concern for her: behavior surplus is. Therefore, I posit that for Zuboff, surveillance capitalism is uniquely exploitative. Yet again, a dualist good-evil relation is constructed into the narrative, forming the two capitalisms as distinct and in contrast with each other; one all good and one all bad.

Zuboff (2019, 93) underscores that in this new market form, serving people's needs and desires are not important. Organic reciprocities are broken. Instead, the profitable business of buying and selling predictions of behavior among surveillance capitalists takes primacy. The text suggests that catering to people's needs used to be lucrative, because the primary customer was the average consumer, and that these relations of organic reciprocities ensured that a capitalist economy functioned well as part of society. In addition to the consumer perspective, employees, or laborers, used to matter in a broad sense (ibid., 492). Again, labor is one reciprocity that Zuboff is not very interested in exploring, and the workers' perspective is all but absent from her economic analysis. The transformation of these reciprocal market relations came with the arrival of information technology that had the capacity to transform processes and behaviors into information:

> —what I've described as market forms that are inconceivable outside the digital, exploiting, leveraging the capabilities of the digital to do something that could not be done outside of that milieu, but also –-can't just be reduced to the technical (Zuboff in Möllers et al. 2019)

In a "decisive break with capitalism's past" organic reciprocities that "have long been a mark of capitalism's endurance and adaptability." are being destroyed (ibid., 491).

Besides abandoning reciprocities, surveillance capitalism also destroys the way knowledge – or lack of it – has guided capitalist markets. According to Zuboff, liberal and neoliberal theorists did not yet consider how information technological abilities would change the economic (and political) interplay of freedom and ignorance:

> […] 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. (Zuboff, 2019, 496)

Zuboff notes that Hayek's trust in the market and belief that ignorance, dispersed equally, would guarantee freedom, was based on Adam Smith's idea of "economic cooperation that exceeds the limits of our knowledge and perception" (Zuboff 2019, 496), the invisible hand. However, according to the author, this cooperation is disrupted and eventually shattered by surveillance capitalism:

> 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." (Zuboff 2019, 496)

Now, however, society is in trouble as surveillance capitalism breaks these rules of knowledge and freedom. Surveillance capitalism is a "boundary-less form" that destroys distinctions that the market has previously had with society and the individual (Ibid., 517). At the same time, secrecy as a practice has become institutionalized in surveillance capitalism (ibid., 89). There exists, then, an asymmetrical relation of power and knowledge. Awareness, knowledge, and consent are bypassed in a "one-way mirror" process of imposed social relations (Ibid., 81). Obscurity is the location where surveillance tactics operate, bypassing concerns for social norms, claims to rights or privacy (ibid., 81; 90). Zuboff notes that surveillance capitalism becomes harmful because of these breakdowns of reciprocity and symmetry of knowledge. This breakdown "unravels the neoliberal justification for the evisceration of the double movement and the triumph of raw capitalism" (ibid., 498), transforming surveillance capitalism into a beast of apocalyptic proportions.

The Capitalism of the Good Society

Lastly, before closing this section – and with it, the analysis of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* – I let us consider how the author envisions the economy of the future. Here, again, we must return to the narrative that Zuboff constructs; it is through the story it tells that the theory reveals itself to the reader.

Throughout the book, the author's nostalgia for the Fordist economy is easy to decipher (e.g., 16–17; 31; 335). Zuboff connects the legacy of Henry Ford to a rationalization of capitalism, to individualization and progressive modernity: Ford and industrial capitalism, despite their flaws admitted by the author, resemble a symbol of hope for capitalism, a mold to shape the structures of a third modernity. Zuboff notes that Apple, at one time, had the chance to become the new Ford or General Motors. It could have led the economy towards a more benevolent direction. From this idea, she begins to reveal what a desirable third modernity economy would look like:

> The Apple inversion implied trustworthy relationships of advocacy and reciprocity embedded in an alignment of commercial operations with consumers' genuine interests. It held out the promise of a new digital market form that might transcend the collision: an early intimation of a third-modernity capitalism summoned by the self-determining aspirations of individuals and indigenous to the digital milieu. The opportunity for "my life, my way, at a price I can afford" was the human promise that quickly lodged at the very heart of the commercial digital project, from iPhones to one-click ordering to massive open online courses to on-demand services to hundreds of thousands of web-based enterprises, apps, and devices. (Zuboff 2019, 46)

This alternative route for capitalism would be an economic system founded on trust, advocacy, and reciprocity. Consumers would reclaim their power as one side of the demand and supply chain. This would be an *information capitalism* that worked in the digital realm without turning to the *means of behavioral modification* for profit, and instead of mass consumption, it would continue the historical process of individualization by centering individual desires and needs. In other words, we would have personalized products and services without surveillance and behavioral modification. While Apple did not fill this promise, Zuboff does not abandon the concept. She rejects inevitability and envisions a human future, a third modernity that can replace surveillance capitalism:

> [The opportunity for a desirable third modernity is not] forever lost—far from it. We may yet see the founding of a new synthesis for a third modernity in which a genuine inversion and its social compact are institutionalized as principles of a new rational digital capitalism aligned with a society of individuals and supported by democratic institutions. The fact that Schumpeter reckoned the time line for such

> institutionalization in decades or even centuries lingers as a critical commentary on our larger story. (Zuboff 2019, 55)

Here, Zuboff constructs an alternative for the dystopian future of surveillance capitalism. A hopefulness for a future society that meets our human needs and desires is evident. Despite the author's strident rejection of utopianism, she creates a liberal utopia of her own. In the sense of Levitas' (2013) *utopia as a method* of political and social imagination, Zuboff is a utopian of great merit: she reconstructs surveillance capitalism in fine detail in order to imagine an alternative. For Zuboff, though, dreams of the good society are rooted in nostalgia. The ingredients of utopia are found in the Great History of liberal democratic governance and capitalism. Just as the term third modernity implies, a course correction instead of a revolution is in order:

> If there is to be a fight, let it be a fight over capitalism. Let it be an insistence that raw surveillance capitalism is as much a threat to society as it is to capitalism itself. This is not a technical undertaking, not a program for advanced encryption, improved data anonymity, or data ownership. Such strategies only acknowledge the inevitability of commercial surveillance. They leave us hiding in our own lives as we cede control to those who feast on our behavior for their own purposes. Surveillance capitalism depends on the social, and it is only in and through collective social action that the larger promise of an information capitalism aligned with a flourishing third modernity can be reclaimed. (Zuboff 2019, 195)

In this section, I have recounted the brief history of capitalism as narrated by Zuboff. I concluded that the author's view of capitalism is benevolent, with her recognition of problems or injustices such as the exploitation of labor and nature being more of a mention instead of serious critique. I noted that the author separates surveillance capitalism from the general history of capitalism, describing it as a distinct, unprecedented form instead of a continuation of capitalist market relations. While in democratic market capitalism, vulnerabilities such as the tendency to exploit resources if not regulated by an outside force are treated as exceptions to a working system, these same features are described as intentional in the case of surveillance capitalism. Zuboff's argument of uniqueness rests on a claim that, first, the exploitation committed in surveillance capitalism is different because it is after the inner world if the individual instead of labor or environmental resources. Second, surveillance capitalism destroys the relations of knowledge and freedom that are characteristic of capitalism in its "normal" state. Finally, I analyzed Zuboff's utopian vision of the alternative future of capitalism; I explored the narrative concept of the good society as a third modernity information capitalism. The author names this utopia a "human future" and positions it as the desirable alternative for the apocalyptic dystopia of surveillance capitalism.

This section closes the analysis of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis has illustrated how the surveillance capitalism narrative/theory has been constructed in the framework of its apocalyptic-dystopian narrativity. At the same time, the analysis conducted in this thesis also showed how a distinct liberal utopianism is retained throughout the theory. The analysis hat was done via engaging in a radical reconstruction, guided by a principle of critical dialogue and a focus on narrativity, found that the surveillance capitalism theory is a social diagnosis of contemporary times. The analysis further demonstrated that the theory is founded on an ideological commitment to liberalism, including democratic capitalism, individuality, and a worldview that emphasizes an understanding of Western history as a project of continuing modernity and progression towards the good society. The dystopian characteristic of surveillance capitalism is connected to its presumed breakoff and discontinuity from this tradition. Additionally, it was found that the liberal utopianism of the author is not self-recognized as such, but rather considered as progressiveness.

This thesis project began as a vague idea about applying the surveillance capitalism theory to study resistance movements and surveillance. Looking for insights from literature, I noticed the lack of long-form work related to the theory; due to the newness of the book in Fall 2020 when I began my thesis project (T*he Age of Surveillance Capitalism* was published in early 2019), there was not much research related to it. Excited that I would be trying something quite new in my thesis, I delved deeper to the theory to understand it better. Along the way, certain matters, including the perspective and tone of the work, began bothering me in a way that forced me to shift the focus of this thesis from an empirical project to a theoretical one. I felt that the nagging questions I had despite the obvious merits of the theory needed to be thoroughly analyzed, and I decided to reconstruct it using radical reconstruction and narrativity as research methods.

In Chapter 1, I introduced my research aim and questions, and detailed the chosen research method. The second chapter was dedicated to explaining the surveillance capitalism theory to the reader through a summary. Then, in Chapter 3, I began my analysis by reconstructing the narrative constructed by the author. Next, in Chapter 4, I explored the theoretical commitments made by Zuboff. The chapter was divided to two sections, with the first one focusing on Zuboff's views on personhood. The second part of the chapter was dedicated to analyzing the societal dimensions of the theory.

I engaged in a dialogue with Zuboff to uncover the unarticulated and half-articulated theoretical commitments and arguments that construct the surveillance capitalism theory. I followed the idea of

critical dialogue as a non-hierarchical, power-conscious method of thinking socially with and against another thinker. I took dialogue as a method and considered my rational reconstruction of the surveillance theory as a response to a prepared statement by the author. I asked, what did the author choose to narrate, which theories did she commit to, what was left out, omitted, or given little attention. What was highlighted, presented as fact, righteous, or common sense. What was posited to be naïve, dangerous, false, suspicious, or not worth considering.

As I expected, the perspective of dialogue was useful for the project. It guided the process by keeping the focus on the immanent matters of the theory. Rational reconstruction, although challenging, also proved fruitful in excavating implicit arguments and connecting fragments of information presented separately in the theory. Delving into narrativity helped me to analyze the multiple ways that telling as an act affects knowledge production.

I posited that *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is an exemplar of paranoid knowledge practices. I juxtaposed paranoid knowing – a conviction about the existence of a hidden power, a belief in the potential of revealing it, negative affectivity, and the dominance of paranoia through a rejection of any other type of knowledge as naïve - with the surveillance capitalism narrative. All these characteristics were traceable, even prominent in the narrative. I then suggested that the apocalyptic dystopianism and the suspicion towards utopianism so evident in the narrative/theory are a consequence of paranoid knowing.

I noted that dystopian and utopian narratives are common in political thought and fictional literature. Apocalypse, the end of the world, is the event that sets the utopian or dystopian development into progress. I explored this concept by positioning the surveillance capitalism narrative/theory into this framework and testing how it fit. I did this by reconstructing the dystopian and utopian elements of the narrative/theory. I used the term apocalyptic-dystopian narrative to analyze the elements of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* that read as a story that is constructed to explain social reality. The theory was interpreted as a narration of the end of the world and the dystopia that awaits us after the destruction. The utopian elements of the narrative/theory were considered both in relation to how the author understands utopianism and how this contrasts with her own thinking.

I leaned on Levitas' (1990) classification of utopias according to form, content, and function to trace the ways in which the human future can be revealed as utopian. I also used Levitas' (2013;2017) concept of utopia as a method to understand Zuboff's self-unaware utopianism, which directly contradicts her own idea of utopianism as a dangerous method of imagining politically. Utopianism, she argues, deals in inevitabilities, which limits free will. Against this, I offered a reading of her own

knowledge practices as a mix of utopianism and apocalyptic-dystopianism. I referred to her thinking as ambiguously utopian to highlight this complicated relationship.

The overall theory consistently follows the narrative constructed by Zuboff. In fact, certain immanent contradictions and unclarity due to omissions point to how the demand of the narrative draws boundaries for what the theory can "see" and what it cannot. Notable omissions were the lack of state surveillance and labor persepectives, which I found difficult to justify given the subject matter. The insistence on the distinctiveness and historical uniqueness of surveillance capitalism was inconsistent with how Zuboff described the basic logic of capitalism. Yet, capitalism was presented as ultimately good for society while surveillance capitalism was argued to be a threat of apocalyptic proportions. Following Joas (2008), I interpreted that Zuboff's project of forming a diagnosis of our times contributes to her collecting various phenomena and cases and interpreting them as a diagnostic theory and narrative that explains everything. This results in what Clarke (2008) calls "theoretical promiscuity", a conceptual haziness that negatively affects the explanatory force of a theory.

As a defense of liberalism, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is very topical. All throughout the 2000s and 2010s, liberalism has been a widely debated and contested topic in various disciplines (see e.g., on the eroding dominance of liberalism Fawcett, Edmund 2018). However, an analysis of the theory shows that there is a tone of cultural critique that resembles decades-old fears about the possible degeneration of historical liberal progression. Another issue is the deep Western-centeredness of the theory despite the posited ubiquity of surveillance capitalism. I critiqued this by noting how the author's focus conveys simultaneously a deep urgency for the freedom of a specific type of western subject – the non-laboring liberal individual who is not burdened by social inequalities – and an utter lack of interest in the lives of anyone else.

This thesis also illustrates the fact that there is a prominent duality present in almost all dimensions of the narrative/theory. From power and authority as illegitimate and legitimate types of power to surveillance capitalism and capitalism as harmful and desirable versions of economic systems, a total struggle of good and evil is present. As mirror images of the bad and good society (dystopia and utopia), the author presents surveillance capitalism and the human future. This duality continues to liberalism and neoliberalism as distinct desirable and harmful philosophies, to autonomy and the hive as interpretations of individuality and freedom, all the way to the democratic society and the Big Other as desirable and harmful types of social organization.

Anything outside of this setup of two opposite forces, one righteous, one evil, is largely absent. This was a more unexpected feature that took a long time to analyze and put together. This result also

poses the question of can the surveillance capitalism theory be applied to empirical cases without its narrative capturing knowledge production in a way that obscures shades of gray or dimensions that do not fit into it neatly. Dominating narrativity simplifies systems and structures into separate, non-relational concepts. This is most evident in the way the author handles democracy and democratic institutions. Shortcomings and vulnerabilities are brushed aside in order to present a worthy opponent for surveillance capitalism, which inevitably results in a view of democracy more as an ideal than as a multifaceted and complex system.

While the focus of this thesis was in reconstructing the theory comprehensively, there are yet many dimensions left unexplored due to limitations posed by the constraints of this project. One such dimension is the clear but mostly unarticulated influence of Hannah Arendt on the knowledge constructed in the surveillance capitalism theory. Another important dimension that this thesis could not give justice to is the complicated relationship the theory has with power. Future research is also needed to determine the analytic power of the rich theoretical language created by Zuboff. Researchers interested in further developing the theory might begin by exploring labor and state surveillance perspectives. Scholars researching privacy and data rights will find new arguments to debate with. Studies focusing on economic relations and systematic phenomena in the digital realm will also benefit from considering the surveillance capitalism theory. As for research on political dystopias and utopias, I posit that *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* can function as a relevant example of the genre.

This thesis gives a contribution to a new theoretical tradition rising from the surveillance capitalism theory. It makes explicit the implicit arguments made by Zuboff in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* and positions the theory into a paradigm of paranoid knowledge production. The argument in this thesis about the apocalyptic-dystopian narrative and rejected – but present – utopianism of the theory addresses the way which knowledge production can be messy and contradicting. It further illuminates how narrativity and theoretical commitments construct each other in a mutually transformative relationship.

At the time of writing this, I believe that despite its many issues, the surveillance capitalism theory can be a useful framework for theorizing the systematic functions and techniques used to generate profit from digital data. The language developed by Zuboff to spotlight the deleterious effects, dubious motives and harm done by surveillance capitalism is valuable because it shifts our perspective and allows us to think differently. The terminology of surveillance capitalism ties together phenomena in a way that helps to illuminate the systematic ways in which capitalism can influence social relations and behavior in the digital realm. However, further research ought to take into

consideration the many issues noted in this thesis and other commentaries. Furthermore, scholars concerned with the societal and environmental effects of current political economic structures should take notice that the primary motivation of the surveillance capitalism theory is to ensure the continuation of capitalism as the central condition of the good society.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is its unwavering belief in the transformative power of desire for change. However bleak the future appears, how dim and flickering the flame of hope at the face of banal destruction: desire, once awakened, can become a method, a motivation. Zuboff's narration is a roar of urgency for the future, and this sense of urgency is its gift to the reader.

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