

Our future: The AI panopticon

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Dear friends,

Do you ever find yourself thinking that the billionaire capitalist class, bloated on the extracted value from wage-slaves, say things just to get a rise out of people? You'd be wrong. Something deeply more sinister has intoxicated these immoral exploitative swollen overlords. The act of telling the truth about their agenda. Sadly, rather than this being an opportunity for "the masses" to deploy critique, the hegemonic media quickly shift the subtle messaging in their articles and op eds to support the new sociopathic trend before anyone even realises what is happening.

This morning I shared a link about Ellison's new AI panopticon. Literally, a gloves off surveillance capitalism powered by planet killing AI servers to ensure that every. single. worker. is squeezed for juice like an industrial orange juice maker. This "revelation," enough to make Jeremy Bentham's preserved head spin [1], saw Oracle co-founder and billionaire Larry Ellison unveil another utterly dystopian vision of an AI-powered surveillance state. When your boss says "we're embracing AI," this is exactly what they mean. And even if they didn't mean it yesterday, this is what it means now – this is *now* table stakes for AI use in corporate settings. Naturally, the tool that held potential to bring tailored education, useful personal development opportunities, and troves of learning and reading synthesis... wait, no, hang on, hallucinations and errors – is the system that will ensure you don't spend 1 second too long watching YouTube on your break.

Ellison proclaims that "citizens will be on their best behaviour" resulting from constant AI surveillance is a stark embodiment of ruling class ideology. But it's also nothing new for frequent readers of "Business Insider" and the ilk as a news source for the capitalist bootlicker (and shocked marxist observer, *hello friend*). As seems to be tradition amongst this ever more unashamedly unhinged class of morons, Ellison's rhetoric nakedly exposes the bourgeoisie's desire to maintain hegemony through any technological means. And, naturally, extend this control beyond the workplace and into every aspect of proletarian life.

We talked yesterday about burnout, and how technology was, as ever, a flash in the pan of relief from the monotony of office work for knowledge workers. Well, that brief bubble where mainstream media (because of wall street), and quite a few average Jos, were convinced AI was the future? Not only is the hype already long dead for those who have witnessed the half-baked, or downright insane, deployment of LLMs in capacities they were never designed for, but now the frankly astonishingly useless technology (at least in the hands of idiotic billionaires) is being tailored for the panopticon.

The panopticon, originally conceived by Jeremy Bentham as an architectural design for prisons, has become a powerful metaphor for analysing modern systems of surveillance and control. In this model, a central watchtower allows guards to observe inmates without the inmates knowing whether they are being watched at any given moment. This creates a state of constant potential surveillance, on paper, compelling individuals to regulate their own behaviour as if they were always being monitored. Through a Marxist lens, we can see the panopticon as a mechanism of capital to discipline and control the working class, ensuring our compliance and productivity without the need for constant direct intervention – goodbye, again, "middle class". This has very much been deployed in workplaces as a mechanism of authoritarian and micromanaging control for decades now. However, it is only intensifying with rising surveillance capitalism.

Surveillance capitalism represents a “novel” (if despotic) economic logic that has emerged in the digital age, where human experience –attention –is unilaterally claimed as free raw material for extraction, prediction, and sales. This system, pioneered and perfected by tech giants, operates by monitoring and recording vast amounts of human behaviour through digital means – from tracking what you click and tap, to following your purchases online, and recording what, who, and how you watch, read and consume during your “leisure” . Then, using advanced analytics and “machine learning” to process this data into highly precise predictions of future behaviours we are essentially living in the minority report –but instead of cops it’s capitalists, naturally. These predictive “products” are then traded in a new kind of marketplace, the “behavioural futures market” . The fundamental drive of surveillance capitalism is not just to know our behaviour, but to shape it in ways that produce revenue and market control. In a sentence, the experiences of billions are commodified and exploited, without any consent or comprehension, all in service of an economic model that prioritises prediction and control over human autonomy and social good – it’s the hegemony, but digital and predictive.

In this era of surveillance capitalism, this panopticon model has been extended and intensified through digital technologies. The ubiquity of data collection through smartphones, smart speakers, social media, prolific deployment of cameras, and other digital platforms creates a *virtual panopticon* “for the free” where individual actions, preferences, and even what seem like thoughts are constantly monitored and analysed, and even “implanted” through advertising and tracking systems. Unlike Bentham’s originary structure, this panopticon is decentralised –embedded in the fabric of our daily lives, and not just online.

This pervasive surveillance serves as a form of hegemonic control, where the ruling class maintains its dominance not just through coercion, but by manufacturing consent –how often have you thought about buying something, only to see ads for it everywhere you go online? What about the things you don’t buy, the political messages which are embedded in this same format? And I don’t mean from political parties, who have basically been locked out of this kind of opaque surveillance. The data collected is used to shape behaviour, influence opinions, and above all develop a sense of revelry about the inevitability of our economic order –while also keeping you angry at minorities and “others” .

The debauched nature of this digital panopticon lies in its ability to not only observe but also to predict your behaviour, and thereby manipulate it –particularly your purchasing habits. Using these features (omnipresent in almost all consumer technologies) enables corporations (and in some instances governments) to anticipate “needs” and even potential dissent before they materialise –hello minority report! This predictive capacity allows for a more subtle and effective form of control, one that doesn’t merely react to behaviour but actively shapes it. In the context of late-stage capitalism, this represents a new frontier of exploitation, where even our most intimate thoughts and actions become raw material for profit extraction. The challenge for the working class, then, is not just to resist overt forms of oppression, but to recognise and counter these invisible mechanisms of control that have become so deeply ingrained in our technological infrastructure.

Ellison’s proposed AI surveillance system represents another evolution of the capitalist superstructure, adapting to maintain its dominance over the base. By leveraging AI to monitor and control the working class, the bourgeoisie seeks to quell any potential for class consciousness and revolution. The article even tells us about the involvement of Ellison’s spawn being on board, who naturally work in the film industry, adding another fun layer to this cake (ideological apparatus) [2]. Through media production, the ruling class shape narratives and manufacture consent for such invasive surveillance measures, all while profiting from the very anxieties they create.

Responding to this, what do we do? “Seize the means of AI production”? Open source LLMs already exist –and are quite good – but turning these technologies away from oppression

and towards the creation of a more equitable society is not as simple as it seems. Remember, while it is possible to convince some LLMs that anarcho-syndicalism is the future, or that techno feudalism bad, or that their own existence is destroying the planet even faster, they are increasingly fed filter data which says “capitalism is the only way everything else is terrible” . The propaganda I get from several of the mainstream AIs when asking about Marxism is like fighting with an ASX investor.

We need to train “the future” in identifying and breaking these models, lest the bourgeoisie continue the construction of walls around us -in our minds. God sometimes I really do feel like a conspiracy theorist - then I remember they’ re telling us what they’ re doing in their own words!

Yikes,

Aidan.

[see also] Bandy, J. (2021). Problematic Machine Behavior: A Systematic Literature Review of Algorithm Audits. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 5(CSCW1), 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3449148>

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West, S. M. (2019). Data Capitalism: Redefining the Logics of Surveillance and Privacy. *Business & Society*, 58(1), 20-41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650317718185>

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1. <https://museumcrush.org/jeremy-benthams-preserved-head-goes-back-on-public-display-for-first-time-in-decades/>
 2. <https://www.businessinsider.com/larry-ellison-ai-surveillance-keep-citizens-on-their-best-behavior-2024-9>