

“Technotyranny”: The Iron-Fisted Authoritarianism of the Surveillance State

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Theme: [Intelligence](#)

“There will come a time when it isn’t ‘They’re spying on me through my phone’ anymore. Eventually, it will be ‘My phone is spying on me.’” — Philip K. Dick

Red pill or blue pill? You decide.

Twenty years after the Wachowskis’ iconic 1999 film, *The Matrix*, introduced us to [a futuristic world in which humans exist in a computer-simulated non-reality powered by authoritarian machines](#)—a world where the choice between existing in a denial-ridden virtual dream-state or facing up to the harsh, difficult realities of life comes down to a red pill or a blue pill—we stand at the precipice of a technologically-dominated matrix of our own making.

We are living the prequel to *The Matrix* with each passing day, falling further under the spell of technologically-driven virtual communities, virtual realities and virtual conveniences managed by artificially intelligent machines that are on a fast track to replacing us and eventually dominating every aspect of our lives.

Science fiction has become fact.

In *The Matrix*, [computer programmer Thomas Anderson a.k.a. hacker Neo is wakened from a virtual slumber by Morpheus](#), a freedom fighter seeking to liberate humanity from a lifelong hibernation state imposed by hyper-advanced artificial intelligence machines that rely on humans as an organic power source. With their minds plugged into a perfectly crafted virtual reality, few humans ever realize they are living in a dream world.

Neo is given a choice: to wake up and join the resistance, or remain asleep and serve as fodder for the powers-that-be. “You take the blue pill and the story ends. You wake in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe,” Morpheus says to Neo in *The Matrix*. “[You take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.](#)”

Most people opt for the red pill.

In our case, the red pill—a one-way ticket to a life sentence in an electronic concentration camp—has been honey-coated to hide the bitter aftertaste, sold to us in the name of expediency and delivered by way of blazingly fast Internet, cell phone signals that never drop a call, thermostats that keep us at the perfect temperature without our having to raise a finger, and entertainment that can be simultaneously streamed to our TVs, tablets and cell phones.

Yet we are not merely in thrall with these technologies that were intended to make our lives easier. We have become enslaved by them.

Look around you. Everywhere you turn, people are so addicted to their internet-connected screen devices—smart phones, tablets, computers, televisions—that they can go for hours at a time submerged in a virtual world where human interaction is filtered through the medium of technology.

This is not freedom.

This is not even progress.

This is technological tyranny and iron-fisted control delivered by way of the surveillance state, corporate giants such as Google and Facebook, and government spy agencies such as the National Security Agency.

We are living in a virtual world carefully crafted to resemble a representative government, while in reality we are little more than slaves in thrall to an authoritarian regime, with its constant surveillance, manufactured media spectacles, secret courts, inverted justice, and violent repression of dissent.

So consumed are we with availing ourselves of all the latest technologies that we have spared barely a thought for the ramifications of our heedless, headlong stumble towards a world in which our abject reliance on internet-connected gadgets and gizmos is grooming us for a future in which freedom is an illusion.

It's not just freedom that hangs in the balance. Humanity itself is on the line.

Indeed, while most people are busily taking selfies, Google has been busily partnering with the [NSA](#), the [Pentagon](#), and other governmental agencies to develop a new “human” species.

Essentially, Google—a neural network that approximates a global brain—is fusing with the human mind in a phenomenon that is called “singularity.” Google will know the answer to your question before you have asked it, said transhumanist scientist Ray Kurzweil. [“It will have read every email you will ever have written, every document, every idle thought you’ve ever tapped into a search-engine box. It will know you better than your intimate partner does. Better, perhaps, than even yourself.”](#)

But here’s the catch: the NSA and all other government agencies will also know you better than yourself. As William Binney, one of the highest-level whistleblowers to ever emerge from the NSA said, [“The ultimate goal of the NSA is total population control.”](#)

Cue the dawning of the Age of the Internet of Things, in which internet-connected “things” will monitor your home, your health and your habits in order to keep your pantry stocked, your utilities regulated and your life under control and relatively worry-free.

The key word here is *control*.

In the not-too-distant future, [“just about every device you have — and even products like chairs, that you don’t normally expect to see technology in — will be connected and talking to each other.”](#)

By 2020, there will be [152 million cars connected to the Internet](#) and [100 million Internet-connected bulbs and lamps](#). By 2021, it is estimated there will be [240 million wearable devices](#) such as smartwatches, keeping users connected in real time to their phones, emails, text messages and the Internet. By 2022, there will be [1.1 billion smart meters](#) installed in homes, reporting real-time usage to utility companies and other interested parties.

This “connected” industry—estimated to add more than [\\$14 trillion](#) to the economy by 2020—is about to be the next big thing in terms of societal transformations, [right up there with the Industrial Revolution](#), a watershed moment in technology and culture.

Between driverless cars that completely lack a steering wheel, accelerator, or brake pedal and smart pills embedded with computer chips, sensors, cameras and robots, we are poised to outpace the imaginations of science fiction writers such as Philip K. Dick and Isaac Asimov. (By the way, there is no such thing as a driverless car. Someone or something will be driving, but it won’t be you.)

The aim of these internet-connected devices, as Nest proclaims, is to make “[your house a more thoughtful and conscious home](#).” For example, your car can signal ahead that you’re on your way home, while Hue lights can flash on and off to get your attention if Nest Protect senses something’s wrong. Your coffeemaker, relying on data from fitness and sleep sensors, will [brew a stronger pot of coffee](#) for you if you’ve had a restless night.

Internet-connected techno gadgets as [smart light bulbs](#) can discourage burglars by making your house look occupied, [smart thermostats](#) will regulate the temperature of your home based on your activities, and [smart doorbells](#) will let you see who is at your front door without leaving the comfort of your couch.

Nest, Google’s \$3 billion acquisition, has been at the forefront of the “connected” industry, with such [technologically savvy conveniences](#) as a smart lock that tells your thermostat who is home, what temperatures they like, and when your home is unoccupied; a home phone service system that interacts with your connected devices to “learn when you come and go” and alert you if your kids don’t come home; and a sleep system that will monitor when you fall asleep, when you wake up, and keep the house noises and temperature in a sleep-conducive state.

It’s not just our homes that are being reordered and reimagined in this connected age: it’s our workplaces, our health systems, our government and our very bodies that are being plugged into a matrix over which we have no real control.

Moreover, given the speed and trajectory at which these technologies are developing, it won’t be long before these devices are operating entirely independent of their human creators, which poses a whole new set of worries.

As technology expert Nicholas Carr [notes](#),

“As soon as you allow robots, or software programs, to act freely in the world, they’re going to run up against ethically fraught situations and face hard choices that can’t be resolved through statistical models. That will be true of self-driving cars, self-flying drones, and battlefield robots, just as it’s already true, on a lesser scale, with automated vacuum cleaners and lawnmowers.”

For instance, just as the robotic vacuum, Roomba, “[makes no distinction between a dust bunny and an insect](#),” weaponized drones will be incapable of distinguishing between a fleeing criminal and someone merely jogging down a street.

For that matter, how do you defend yourself against a robotic cop—[such as the Atlas android being developed by the Pentagon](#)—that has been programmed to respond to any perceived threat with violence?

Unfortunately, in our race to the future, we have failed to consider what such dependence on technology might mean for our humanity, not to mention our freedoms.

[Ingestible or implantable chips](#) are a good example of how unprepared we are, morally and otherwise, to navigate this uncharted terrain. Hailed as revolutionary for their ability to access, analyze and manipulate your body from the inside, these smart pills can remind you to take your medication, search for cancer, and even send an alert to your doctor warning of an impending heart attack.

Sure, the technology could save lives, but is that all we need to know? Have we done our due diligence in dealing with the ramifications of giving the government and its cronies access to such intrusive programs? For example, asks reporter Ariana Eunjung Cha, “How will patients be assured that the technology won’t be used to compel them to take medications they don’t really want to take? [Could what started as a voluntary experiment be turned into a compulsory government identification program that could erode civil liberties?](#)”

Let me put it another way.

If you were shocked by [Edward Snowden’s revelations](#) about how NSA agents have used surveillance to spy on Americans’ phone calls, emails and text messages, can you imagine what unscrupulous government agents could do with access to your internet-connected car, home and medications?

All of those internet-connected gadgets we just have to have (*Forbes* refers to them as “[\(data\) pipelines to our intimate bodily processes](#)”)—the smart watches that can monitor our blood pressure and the smart phones that let us [pay for purchases with our fingerprints and iris scans](#)—are setting us up for a brave new world where there is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

Imagine what a SWAT team could do with the ability to access, monitor and control your internet-connected home: locking you in, turning off the lights, activating alarms, etc.

Thus far, the [public response to concerns about government surveillance has amounted to a collective shrug](#).

After all, who cares if the [government can track your whereabouts on your GPS-enabled device](#) so long as it helps you find the fastest route from Point A to Point B? Who cares if the [NSA is listening in on your phone calls and downloading your emails](#) so long as you can get your phone calls and emails on the go and get lightning fast Internet on the fly? Who cares if the government can monitor your activities in your home by tapping into your internet-connected devices—thermostat, water, lights—so long as you can control those things with the flick of a finger, whether you’re across the house or across the country?

It's hard to truly appreciate the intangible menace of technology-enabled government surveillance in the face of the all-too-tangible menace of police shootings of unarmed citizens, SWAT team raids, and government violence and corruption.

However, both dangers are just as lethal to our freedoms if left unchecked.

Consider that on any given day, the average American going about his daily business is monitored, surveilled, spied on and tracked in virtually every way by both government and corporate eyes and ears.

Whether you're walking through a store, driving your car, checking email, or talking to friends and family on the phone, you can be sure that some government agency, whether the NSA or some other entity, will be listening in and tracking your behavior.

This doesn't even begin to touch on the corporate trackers that monitor your purchases, web browsing, Facebook posts and other activities taking place in the cyber sphere.

In other words, there is no form of digital communication that the government cannot and does not monitor: phone calls, emails, text messages, tweets, Facebook posts, internet video chats, etc., are all *accessible, trackable and downloadable* by federal agents.

The government and its corporate partners-in-crime have been bypassing the Fourth Amendment's prohibitions for so long that this constitutional bulwark against warrantless searches and seizures has largely been rendered antiquated and irrelevant.

We are now in the final stage of the transition from a police state to a surveillance state.

Having already transformed local police into extensions of the military, the Department of Homeland Security, the Justice Department and the FBI are in the process of turning the nation's police officers into techno-warriors, complete with iris scanners, body scanners, thermal imaging Doppler radar devices, facial recognition programs, license plate readers, cell phone Stingray devices and so much more.

Add in the fusion centers and real-time crime centers, city-wide surveillance networks, [data clouds conveniently hosted overseas by Amazon and Microsoft](#), drones equipped with thermal imaging cameras, and biometric databases, and you've got the makings of a world in which "privacy" is reserved exclusively for government agencies.

In other words, the surveillance state that came into being with the 9/11 attacks is alive and well and kicking privacy to shreds in America. Having been persuaded to trade freedom for a phantom promise of security, Americans now find themselves imprisoned in a virtual cage of cameras, wiretaps, sensors and watchful government eyes.

Just about every branch of the government—from the Postal Service to the Treasury Department and every agency in between—[now has its own surveillance sector](#), authorized to spy on the American people.

And of course that doesn't even begin to touch on the complicity of the corporate sector, which buys and sells us from cradle to grave, until we have no more data left to mine. Indeed, [Facebook, Amazon and Google are among the government's closest competitors](#) when it comes to carrying out surveillance on Americans, monitoring the content of your emails, tracking your purchases and exploiting your social media posts.

“Few consumers understand what data are being shared, with whom, or how the information is being used,” [reports the Los Angeles Times](#). “Most Americans emit a stream of personal digital exhaust — what they search for, what they buy, who they communicate with, where they are — that is captured and exploited in a largely unregulated fashion.”

It's not just what we say, where we go and what we buy that is being tracked.

We're being surveilled right down to our genes, thanks to a potent combination of hardware, software and data collection that scans our biometrics—our faces, irises, voices, genetics, even our gait—runs them through computer programs that can break the data down into unique “identifiers,” and then offers them up to the government and its corporate allies for their respective uses.

For instance, imagine what the NSA could do (and is likely already doing) with voiceprint technology, which has been likened to a fingerprint. Described as “the next frontline in the battle against overweening public surveillance,” the collection of voiceprints is a booming industry for governments and businesses alike. As *The Guardian* reports,

[“voice biometrics could be used to pinpoint the location of individuals](#). There is already discussion about placing voice sensors in public spaces, and ... multiple sensors could be triangulated to identify individuals and specify their location within very small areas.”

The NSA is merely one small part of a shadowy permanent government comprised of unelected bureaucrats who march in lockstep with profit-driven corporations that actually runs Washington, DC, and works to keep us under surveillance and, thus, under control. For example, [Google openly works with the NSA](#), Amazon has built a massive [\\$600 million intelligence database](#) for CIA, and the [telecommunications industry is making a fat profit by spying on us](#) for the government.

In other words, [Corporate America is making a hefty profit](#) by aiding and abetting the government in its domestic surveillance efforts.

Control is the key here.

Total control over every aspect of our lives, right down to our inner thoughts, is the objective of any totalitarian regime.

[George Orwell understood this](#). His masterpiece, *1984*, portrays a global society of total control in which people are not allowed to have thoughts that in any way disagree with the corporate state. There is no personal freedom, and advanced technology has become the driving force behind a surveillance-driven society. Snitches and cameras are everywhere. And people are subject to the Thought Police, who deal with anyone guilty of thought crimes. The government, or “Party,” is headed by Big Brother, who appears on posters everywhere with the words: “Big Brother is watching you.”

Make no mistake: the Internet of Things is just Big Brother in a more appealing disguise.

Now there are still those who insist that they have nothing to hide from the surveillance state and nothing to fear from the police state because they have done nothing wrong. To

those sanctimonious few, secure in their delusions, let this be a warning: the danger posed by the American police state applies equally to all of us, lawbreaker and law-abider alike.

In an age of too many laws, too many prisons, too many government spies, and too many corporations eager to make a fast buck at the expense of the American taxpayer, there is no safe place and no watertight alibi.

We are *all* guilty of some transgression or other.

Eventually, as I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), we will all be made to suffer the same consequences in the electronic concentration camp that surrounds us.

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