AFTER AI

Draft

Michel Biezunski, Brooklyn, New York
February 6, 2026

Contents

1 Introduction

A bad trip hangover

Long after 2025, people will have finally come to realize that machines are still machines and humans are still humans. The hype around machines being smarter than humans will be over. Technology is supposed to make the word a better place. At the very beginning, computers were invented to provide data that humans could not produce.

Databases were storing huge quantities of information, and software was able to let programmers query that information in filtered ways that would provide listings of data that were useful, at first for military purposes, and later to big corporations that could afford these giant machinery.

Computers became personal, and anybody could benefit from using spreadsheets and word processing in ways that ease the office workflows, and were making it easier for individuals to deal with the burden of keeping their files up-to-date. The Web became a world-wide publishing platforms, allowing us to communicate with each other, and provided commercial platforms that transformed shopping, government interaction with citizens, and created ways for people to connect with each other using social media. Micro-computers became even smaller, from the lap to the hand, with the advent of smartphones, which gave everyone the power of computing in handheld devices, constantly connected to the Internet. This innovation spread like fire, and are used by kids as well as seasoned professionals.

It took a little more than two decades for the powerful to get control of the extra powers that became available. The dream of a humanity that would make a giant leap by accessing knowledge and being interconnected across geographic and linguistic borders evolved into commercial dominance of the mighty companies that were able to occupy the territory before anybody else, and as an opportunity for authoritarian regimes to consoiidate their power before democratic reforms would take place to tame this unhearded tsunami of information drowning everybody before they learned how to swim in it.

The Faustian pact between the United States intelligence and the nascent search technology companies, which was motivated by the need to gather information about terrorist activities after 9/11, 2001, was magistrally exposed by Shoshana Zuboff in her master piece, The Age of Surveillance Capitalism. The deal was that companies which collected data by gathering personal information using means that potentially violated personal freedoms, including the right to a private sphere, would be authorized to continue to do so, in an unregulated fashion, provided they would share useful information with intelligence agencies that were tracking terrorist activities.

Authoritarians saw an incredible opportunity there. By using simple hacking techniques, they would be able to get as much information as they wanted on citizens who were using these technologies, which soon turned out to be most humans on the planet. Alliances between authoritarian countries and would-be authoritarians in democratic countries, made information transfers even more fluid.

Artificial intelligence these days is based on "large language models" that gather all information available online and spit it back in a well-articulated, documented, assertive, written form that provides authoritative answers that tell us what to say when asked specific questions. These answers are characterized by the fact that they tell us what people want to hear. In other words, artificial intelligence used this way amounts to the industrialization of dictatorship propaganda. What we need to do is to get past the hype, use technology for what it is best fit for, and denounce its abuse for endeavors that have nothing to do with technology itself, but are solely motivated to consolidate power of a small minority of people who think they will dominate the world for ever and get all the wealth produced for themselves.

Other version of the introduction (probably to be deleted)

> This book is going to be useful in a number of years from now, when people will re-emerge as humans, after the AI hype is over.
>
> As part of the desire to make the world a better place, I saw technology as a way to improve the human condition. Where computers became available as personal devices, I helped convincing people that they should adopt these tools, as they were designed to liberate them from repetitive, boring tasks. Soon after, when the Web emerged, I got involved into designing international standards to handle electronic forms of communication.
>
> It didn't take very long for big corporations to realize that there was a lot of money to be made in e-commerce. The innovators became giants. It took me 15 years to realize exactly what was happening when I read Shoshana Zuboff's masterpiece, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.
>
> Technology became a tool to track what everybody was doing, writing, thinking, feeling, including our readings, daily activities, and contacts. Social media, which initially appeared to make friends and families closer, and create common interest groups, became a place where gossips, false rumors, and political propaganda were flourishing. The absence of any significant regulatory requirement which was at the foundation of the publishing ecosystem, during the printing era, facilitated the quick rise of a handful companies which provided social media services.
>
> It took a little more than a decade for authoritarians to figure out how to leverage these incredibly powerful tools to their benefits and to destroy the boundary between fact and fiction, by eliminating the guard rails that ensure that information can be trusted.
>
> During the same time, the IT industry concentrated. Big Tech companies acquired enough power to crush the smaller startups that were providing innovations, starting with one or two individuals in a garage. Most of the tools were dealing with "Big Data". If the number of data were under trillions, they were considered irrelevant, or at best negligible.
>
> Every technique that was building knowledge systems based on manual assignment of semantics, for example library catalogs, was replaced by powerful algorithms, which were able to capture all data available on the Internet, in multiple languages. Artificial "intelligence" as it is dubbed has the ability to produce compiled data -- analysis --, multiple language translations, and therefore is aiming at replacing a number of activities performed by humans.
>
> As information sources are not vetted, there is no way to differentiate in what is returned by AI what is valuable from what is garbage.
>
> This book is about waking up after the hyper of Artificial "Intelligence" has faded. People will have then realized that the fact that computers are smarter than humans is fundamentally a baseless myth, although there are cases where some tasks can be better performed by automated processes.*

2 Tech as an Engine of Progress

Computers became accessible to the masses circa 1980, with the emergence of personal computers.

The innovative character of personal computers was the fact that instead of being designed as passive terminals connected to an enterprise network, they were standalone machines, with which individuals could become more efficient. Individual users suddenly gained access to powerful tools such as databases, word processors and spreadsheets that greatly facilitated their work.

Computers became pervasive at the office, as it became possible to streamline the handling of text with evolving versions, accounting data, customer data, etc. Soon after, the emergence of graphic user interfaces allowed artists, photographers, graphic designers, printers, to embark on the train, providing them with clear productivity gains in their creative work.

Computers get connected together through various means, through telephone lines and more robust Ethernet networks and wireless networks appear. The enterprise network, rather than emanating from a top-down architecture, were built from the bottom up, connecting computers that were able to be fully operational as standalone machines.

In the early 1990s, the World Wide Web emerged, and it changed the whole game. Now it was possible not only sending emails, but also publishing pages online, interconnect them through hyperlinks, and soon after interactivity was added to the pages via Javascript, opening the world of automated interactions via the Web. The fax machines were quite popular in the 1980s thanks to their ability to transmit paper copies instantaneously through the phone lines, but became quickly obsolete. The Cd-Roms, which appeared also during the 1980s, became progressively less and less useful, as remote storage provided by servers connected through the Internet was providing a similar service. The need to send Cd-Roms through regular mail or to buy them in stores became an obstacle as information storage started to "dematerialize".

In its early stage, the information provided over the Internet was free of charge, and anybody equipped with a personal computer and a subscription to the Internet could access a lot of information free of charge.

Alongside commercial software provided by the big technology companies, the open source community developed alternative solutions, including operating systems such as Linux.

During this golden age of progress, there was a general understanding that technology was going to change the world and make it a better place. Silicon Valley was booming, and investors were available to fund bold, disruptive ventures. America, and more specifically Northern California, was regarded as the envy of the world.

3 eCommerce and the dot-com Bubble

Irrational Exuberance

The ability to create good-looking web pages that can be seen anywhere in the world by an ever growing population of users was an opportunity to sell products online. New companies were created, devoted to that activity. One of the most notable was Amazon, which started as a gigantic library offering new books as well as used books. Ebay specialized in offering bids on products that had a fun aspect to it, as nobody was ever sure that they could buy a product at the price they offered, as someone else could bid more on it. Many other companies started at the same time, and even companies that had brick and mortar stores decided to join and be participants to the online market.

The Web became a gigantic mall, and the proportion of goods sold online kept growing until it surpassed the products stored in stores. During the pandemic of 2020, online sales were the only way to buy most products.

Any products that could be digitized replaced the physical products. Music web stores selling records or Cd-Roms were forced to close, or to transfer their activity online exclusively. The DVD rental stores were also forced out of business. The distribution of ebooks, cheaper than their printed counterparts, also took a toll on the bookstores, including the big chains.

It took less than ten years to disrupt radically the way commerce operated, world-wide. The Web was not only a formidable technical invention, but also created a gigantic new marketplace that would significantly increase the revenue of companies that joined the party. This evolution was slowed down when the big players occupied most of the markets, and the dot-com bubble that happened in 2000 marked the end of this period that promised infinite growth for ever. Investors became more cautious, and prevented companies to burn their cash before they became profitable.

- What follows is not written. It is just notes that may be partially used to write.

---

4 Surveillance

As applications migrated to the cloud, and the emergence of smartphones after 2007, the proportion of personal data that only resided on personal devices shrank to non-existing. For users, the benefit was clear. They could change their device and still access their data. But the reason they were able to do that was because to third parties, such as Google, as well.

Google emergence as a Tech Baron

Google is a success story that embodies tech capitalism gone wild.

It started with the realization that small traces involuntary left by users on their computers was providing some knowledge of their intimate behavior. Google had this search engine scraping the whole World Wide Web and providing a free service to millions of users, and this service was invaluable for its users, but not providing revenue for the company that was doing it. Google realized that by collecting the search queries, as well as some other information such as cookies on all users, they acquired an intimate knowledge that nobody else had. That knowledge had an enormous commercial potential, because the advertising industry dream was to do targeting ads. If they knew what their users were thinking, they would consequently know the products they could likely be interested by, and purchase.

The advertisement industry relies on sophisticated psychological underpinning that predict behavior based on individual features. It was a dream come true for the advertisers to know on a very large scale who the people who would buy products were. That is what Google, for the first time, provided them.

Google did not stop to search. They offered a free, highly reliable, email service. Reading the correspondence of the users was even more precise than just looking at what they searched. The calendar provided with the email software allowed Google to know what people were doing.

Knowing both the search queries and the contents of the correspondence of a critical mass of users secured Google takeover of the advertisement industry. They achieved an unprecedented success and became a de facto monopoly.

Google got a solid position in the smartphone market by creating Android, that is installed on all smart phones that are not from Apple. Google was in position to add to their intimate knowledge of users the fact that now they knew who they were speaking with and what they were speaking about.

There was a thorny ethical problem though. Google was sneaking into individual's private data, looking at what they searched, what they wrote, what they did, where they were. That was done without the explicit consent of the users. Yes, some of what Google did was explicitly written in terms of service that they knew nobody would be reading. Apart from a handful of privacy nerds that refused to buy into it, and a handful of criminals who couldn't afford to share any information about their activities, everybody went on board. After all, most people had nothing to hide. Who cared about saveguarding privacy at a time where the digital world was offering wonderful new possibilities, for free?

No regulation was in place to protect individual rights to privacy, the rights to anonymity. Google made a deal with the American government after 9/11. They would share their data on individual with the government in order to track terrorist activity, and in exchange the government would protect Google's ability to acquire private information without any regulatory or statutory limitations. What could go wrong with this?

The protests against Google monopolistic appetite focused on a small subset of Google empire: the fact that their search engine was getting a privileged position, by default, on computers and smart phones. But that legal action did not address all other sectors where Google became a monopoly. Google domination would not suffer significantly, even if they are forced to become a search option among multiple other choices.

5 Confiscating the world knowledge

Google didn't stop there. They started to seize human accumulated knowledge. They helped academics and libraries to digitize tons of printed materials, with the "Google Books" and "Google Scholar" services. What used to be public property suddenly became private property. But Google was generous, threw a lot of money into academic projects, and became very popular among the academic world. They owned it.

Google mapped the world, not just figuratively, but for real. And they took photos of every single house in every single street in the world, got live traffic information, providing an innovative GPS service that helped anybody where to go.

Precursor to what AI Large Language Models would be doing two decades later.

6 Propaganda, Rumors, Fake News, Hate speeches

During a period, several tech giants instituted an "ethical" department inside their companies that would remove content considered offensive, or containing false information or lies.

However, malevolent actors specialized in mass manipulation, they understood the opportunity they had to invade the social media and search companies with fake information. They organized "troll farms" where people were paid to create wrong information, artificially increase the number of "likes" on social media platforms.

The Russian-based propaganda machine understood the incredible potential they had to manipulate public opinion. In the initial phase, their attempts to attack the US were easily detectable because they were writing in an approximate English.

But they got inside help, and were able to intervene in aggravating dissensions between local communities.

7 Attention

Distraction, notifications, constant interruptions, TV ad breaks, background noise: Impossibility to focus, or stay concentrated more than a few minutes.

Difficulty to read a book.

Need interruptions to fight boredom.

Depression symptoms

Illusion of being busy (= business)

8 Addiction

- Social media
- Smart phones
- Also in professional settings.
- Need to get tracked in order to exist
- Side effects of addiction
- Comparison with junk food, drugs and cigarettes
- Everybody does it, therefore I must do it.
- Text vs Email vs Phone vs Instant Messaging vs Emojis vs Abbreviations

9 Consolidation / Concentration

- Concentration of capital
- Big firms buying smaller ones, sometimes to kill them.
- Research capabilities confined to big corp's business models.
- Societies renounce to distributing benefits, social good, public interest, etc.
- When they do, e.g. the EU on GDPR, it creates extra burdens that raise the barrier of entry for innovation by adding red tape.
- Dismantling of the innovation/start-up ecosystem.
- No research allowed unless immediate ROI.
- Only remaining exceptions: US Government funded R&D, killed under Trump 2.
- Impacts not just tech, but also medical, biotech, environment, etc.
- Billionaires, on their way to become trillionaires, are the ones in charge. They are addicted to money and just want more of it.
- No significant (i.e. powerful) counter-organizations able to fight against it.
- New form of slavery. Maintaining a significant group of workers undocumented, to rip them off from the benefit they would be entitled to get otherwise (medical, retirement, etc.)
- No way to talk or innovate outside of the carcans that serve the concentrated billionaire class.
- Oppression and self-inflicted damage
- Deportations, arrests that impact the economy.

10 The Big Hype

- TV. Ads, Cable news. Rise & Fall of TV
- Apps everywhere. E.g., wellness. Everything becomes fragmented, away from the unifying web platform.
- Internet of Things. House appliances, cars, etc.
- Big data. Overwhelming production of data. Loss of control over data that matters. Knowledge graphs.
- Data science everywhere, then nowhere. Rise and fall of data science.
- Changes in people's ability to think

11 Tabular Brain Damage

12 Artifical "Intelligence?". Seriously?

Neuroscience work on human intelligence and its relation with work on AI.

13 What will digital democracy look like?

14 Waking up from lethargy

15 Conclusion