Big Tech: The law of power?

Eurozine Editorial, Simon Garnett
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The technoliberationism that accompanied the early days of the web now belongs to myth. Deleting Facebook is the new rebellion. Surveillance capitalism is the buzzword. Regulating is radical. Introducing the new Eurozine focal point ‘Big Tech: The law of power?’

The technoliberationism that accompanied the early days of the web and that resurfaced with the Twitter revolutions a decade ago now belongs to myth. Deleting Facebook is the new rebellion. Surveillance capitalism is the buzzword. Regulating is radical.

Postmodern technology critique, which saw technology in the abstract, as pure medium, is no less dated. Today, the ‘black box’ has been demystified. Algorithms have programmers, platforms have designers, and tech companies have shareholders.

Technology critique today starts with Big Tech’s power. Evgeny Morozov’s 2011 book The Net Delusion was a landmark in this shift. Today, Morozov has turned his attention to what an alternative technological infrastructure might look like – and how to achieve it. In order to channel technological development towards the common good, Morozov argues, technology must be placed in the public hand.

He is one of many thinking beyond Big Tech. As Marietje Schaake writes, ‘the question as to who controls information flows has always been political’. Unless democracies lead the way in regulating tech, Schaake argues, authoritarians will get there first.

Even the Tech companies agree. But mere regulatory tinkering won’t alter the neoliberal status quo, warns Matt Stoller. The only genuinely democratic course of action, he argues, is to break up tech monopolies and regulate the resulting markets.

Caroline Molloy writes that Big Tech is eroding the bonds of solidarity that underlie the welfare state. Take healthcare, where a huge range of apps and other technologies are transforming how services are delivered. But the effect is not to democratize health. On the contrary: healthcare is privatized and made unaccountable. It is the social impacts of
the new technologies that we need to be discussing, says Molloy.

Daniel Leisegang discusses the democratic risks posed by facial recognition technologies: the Clearview hack has revealed just how little we know about their use by state and private companies. So why does the recent EU white paper on AI ignore the issue entirely?

These and the other articles in the focal point Big Tech: The law of power? are published in collaboration with the Eurozine network. If you find them interesting, spread the word!

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