

Big Brother in Disguise: The Rise of a New, Technological World Order

By [John W. Whitehead](#)

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Theme: [Intelligence](#)

“You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.”—George Orwell, 1984

It had the potential for disaster.

Early in the morning of Monday, December 15, 2020, Google suffered a major worldwide outage in which [all of its internet-connected services crashed](#), including Nest, Google Calendar, Gmail, Docs, Hangouts, Maps, Meet and YouTube.

The outage only lasted an hour, but it was a chilling reminder of how reliant the world has become on internet-connected technologies to do everything from unlocking doors and turning up the heat to accessing work files, sending emails and making phone calls.

A year earlier, a Google outage resulted in Nest users being unable to access their Nest thermostats, Nest smart locks, and Nest cameras. As *Fast Company* reports, “This essentially meant that because of a cloud storage outage, [people were prevented from getting inside their homes, using their AC, and monitoring their babies.](#)”

Welcome to the Matrix.

Twenty-some years after the Wachowskis’ iconic 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 blue pill or a red 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 human beings 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 an artificial dream world.

Neo is given a choice: to take the red pill, wake up and join the resistance, or take the blue pill, remain asleep and serve as fodder for the powers-that-be.

Most people opt for the blue pill.

In our case, the blue 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.

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.

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

If ever Americans find themselves in bondage to technological tyrants, we will have only ourselves to blame for having forged the chains through our own lassitude, laziness and abject reliance on internet-connected gadgets and gizmos that render us wholly irrelevant.

Indeed, we're fast approaching Philip K. Dick's vision of the future as depicted in the film [Minority Report](#). There, police agencies apprehend criminals before they can commit a crime, driverless cars populate the highways, and a person's biometrics are constantly scanned and used to track their movements, target them for advertising, and keep them under perpetual surveillance.

Cue the dawning of the Age of the Internet of Things (IoT), in which internet-connected "things" 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, however, 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 the end of 2018, "there were an estimated 22 billion internet of things connected devices in use around the world... Forecasts suggest that by 2030 around 50 billion of these IoT devices will be in use around the world, creating a massive web of interconnected devices spanning everything from smartphones to kitchen appliances."

As the technologies powering these devices have become increasingly sophisticated, they have also become increasingly widespread, encompassing everything from toothbrushes and lightbulbs to cars, smart meters and medical equipment.

It is estimated that [127 new IoT devices are connected to the web every second](#).

This "connected" industry has become the next big societal transformation, [right up there with the Industrial Revolution](#), a watershed moment in technology and culture.

Between driverless cars that completely lacking 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.)

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

Nest, Google's suite of smart home products, 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.

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.

Yet 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—poised to take to the skies en masse this year—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?

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

Indeed, it is expected that by 2030, we will all experience The Internet of Senses (IoS), enabled by Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), 5G, and automation. The Internet of Senses relies on connected technology interacting with our senses of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch by way of the brain as the user interface. As journalist Susan Fournier explains:

Many predict that [by 2030, the lines between thinking and doing will blur](#). Fifty-nine percent of consumers believe that we will be able to see map routes on VR glasses by simply thinking of a destination... By 2030, technology is set to respond to our thoughts, and even share them with others... Using the brain as an interface could mean the end of keyboards, mice, game controllers, and ultimately user interfaces for any digital device. The user needs to only think about the commands, and they will just happen. Smartphones could even function without touch screens.

In other words, the IoS will rely on technology being able to access and act on your thoughts.

Fournier outlines [several trends related to the IoS](#) that are expected to become a reality by 2030:

- 1: [Thoughts become action](#): using the brain as the interface, for example, users will be able to see map routes on VR glasses by simply thinking of a destination.
- 2: Sounds will become an extension of the devised virtual reality: users could mimic anyone’s voice realistically enough to fool even family members.
- 3: Real food will become secondary to imagined tastes. A sensory device for your mouth could digitally enhance anything you eat, so that any food can taste like your favorite treat.
- 4: Smells will become a projection of this virtual reality so that virtual visits, to forests or the countryside for instance, would include experiencing all the natural smells of those places.
- 5: Total touch: Smartphones with screens will convey the shape and texture of the digital icons and buttons they are pressing.
- 6: Merged reality: VR game worlds will become indistinguishable from physical reality by 2030.

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 asking all the questions that need to be asked before unleashing such awesome technology on an unsuspecting populace?

For example, asks [Washington Post reporter Ariana Eunjung Cha](#):

What kind of warnings should users receive about the risks of implanting chip technology inside a body, for instance? 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 law enforcement obtain data that would reveal which individuals abuse drugs or sell them on the black market? 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? 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.

While President Trump signed the [Internet of Things Cybersecurity Improvement Act](#) into law on Dec. 4, 2020, in order to establish a baseline for security protection for the billions of IoT devices flooding homes and businesses, the law does little to protect the American people against corporate and governmental surveillance.

In fact, 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?

Control is the key here.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), 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.](#)

Orwell's 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 and its twin, the Internet of Senses, is just Big Brother in disguise.

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*Constitutional attorney and author **John W. Whitehead** is founder and president of [The Rutherford Institute](#). His new book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) is available at www.amazon.com. Whitehead can be contacted at johnw@rutherford.org.*

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