**Artist:** Phillip Naessens

**Title of the Work:** Surfdom

**Analysis:**

The primary inspiration for this piece is not an artwork at all, but rather a book. ‘The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future and the New Frontier of Power’ by Shoshana Zuboff details the rise of surveillance capitalism from its neo-liberal roots right on through to the budding of the tech company, Google. Moving past its rise, Zuboff explores all the potential personal and social implications of Google’s conquering of the big data realm. As Google derives more than eighty percent of its profits from the production and sale of prediction based behavioural tools it is their number one imperative to extract as much personal data from its users as possible. This occasionally involves little more than simple data theft as seen in the controversy surrounding the Google Street View capture cars between the years 2007 and 2010.

Within the book she speaks of a ‘division of learning’ wherein only a select few people are in the know regarding surveillance capitalism and its methods and therefore only this select few can benefit from it. This system of knowledge distribution is reminiscent of the distribution of wealth and power present within the feudal system in fourteenth century Europe. This parallel is in part why this work is titled ‘Surfdom’, as serfdom was the state of peasants under feudalism.

As the surveillance capitalism market grows as does its player base. Since its rise both Facebook and Amazon as well as many others have taken to the practice data collection. If the market grows so to must the need for better prediction tools. In order to obtain an edge over their competitors surveillance capitalists must acquire as many data flowing routes as possible, such as web browsing, watching habits, GPS tracking, etc. These routes are finite, yet the need for improved prediction tools remain. This has led some surveillance capitalist to routing behaviour rather than predicting it. A practical application of this technique can be seen in the Google app ‘Pokemon Go’. The Pokemon Go app not only led its user’s to new digital creatures, but also toward businesses that were affiliated with Google.

Some new media artists have taken up arms against the pervasive nature of surveillance technology. James Bridel’s work ‘Citizen Ex’ informs the user of their ‘internet nationality’. This ‘nationality’ is derived from the locations from which the user’s data is being collected. The work itself is a web extension that anybody can install. Where this work succeeds is in its adaptation of surveillance capitalist’s technique toward something more informative. For Surfdom I wanted to incorporate this adoption of technique, but in the manner of a satirical website.

Another artist that inspired this piece was Kyriaki Goni and in particular her work ‘Deletion Process\_Only You Can See My History’. This piece inspired the creation of Surfdom as it underpins the nakedness of the personal data that we surrender daily. When observing the tickertape print off the artist’s browsing history the viewer is left with the feeling that they are infringing upon her privacy, yet when browsing the web in our personal lives this is the very same type of sensitive data that we forfeit to unknown corporations often in exchange for little more than a few hours entertainment.

Surfdom is a spoof created to poke fun at the domineering nature of Google’s data collection philosophy. In it the user is left with a choice; forfeit their personal data in exchange for the mindless content that the site has to offer or leave. It consists of three interactive webpages and was created using a combination of HTML, CSS and JavaScript.

**References**

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