Roger McNamee, **Zucked: Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe**, New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2019, 352 pp., $28 (hardcover).

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In 2016, Roger McNamee, a longtime tech insider and venture capitalist, began to notice something unusual happening on Facebook. He observed a rise in viral images and other fear- and anger-based content coming from political-oriented Facebook groups. His hunch was that "bad actors were exploiting Facebook's architecture and business model to inflict harm on innocent people" (p. 5). As a onetime mentor to Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg, McNamee felt he had to do something. Shortly before the 2016 U.S. election, McNamee reached out to Zuckerberg (whom he had advised not to sell Facebook back in 2006) and to COO Sheryl Sandberg (whom McNamee had suggested for the job) to alert them to his observations. **Zucked: Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe** tells the story of McNamee's efforts to convince Facebook to change tactics regarding some key aspects of its platform to be more socially responsible, and his subsequent, unlikely journey into anti-Facebook activism when his concerns went unanswered among Facebook's executives. A tech advocate, McNamee likens himself to Jimmy Stewart's character in the classic 1954 film *Rear Window*, unwittingly drawn into taking an active role in an ongoing crisis.
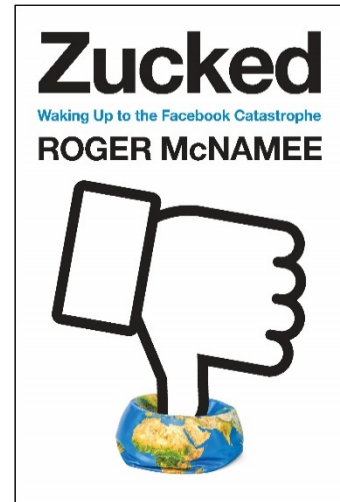
Zucked is part personal narrative, part doomsday prophecy, and part call to action. Its focus is also ultimately broader than a critique of Facebook alone, using McNamee's experience with Facebook as an entry point to examine the role of big tech companies in society more generally. In McNamee's view, the societal ills caused by technology are not so much the fault of the tech itself, but rather that of the business practices driving its implementation—creating good ideas gone terribly wrong:

> To a remarkable degree [Facebook] has made itself the public square in which countries share ideas, form opinions, and debate issues. . . . But Facebook is more than just a forum. It is a profit-maximizing business controlled by one person. . . . Even the smallest decisions at Facebook reverberate . . . with implications for every person it touches. (pp. 10–11)

Zucked outlines the author's gradual disillusionment with the marriage of big tech and unfettered capitalism—and his hope for a better, more human-centric integration of technology and society. Early on, McNamee takes care to trace his tech sector bona fides and experiences with Facebook to establish his credibility to speak on this topic. The first chapter serves as an outline of his career trajectory as a venture capitalist in the Internet and tech sectors, including his cofounding of private equity firm Elevation Partners with U2's Bono, among others. It is clear that McNamee wishes the reader to understand that ordinarily he would be the last person to criticize technology for its own sake. There is a sense that the author sees these as desperate times calling for desperate measures.

The book's main theoretical contextualization comes in chapters 2 through 4, in which the author situates recent events in the contexts of the early histories of both Silicon Valley and Facebook. Chapter 4, "The Children of Fogg," discusses the role of technology design and persuasive technology in the current media environment and advocates a need for humane design principles. Throughout this section, McNamee highlights the gradual intersection of libertarian business ideals with the design and implementation of technology to explain the trajectory that led to the current environment. The tensions between the needs of big tech companies, as businesses, and their individual users, as human beings, are vividly described. McNamee argues that the attention-based tech giants like Facebook and Google have put humans in service to technology, rather than technology in the service of humans, by eliminating friction in tech use through design and monetizing social networking.

Chapters 5–9 of *Zucked* return the focus to McNamee's gradual disillusionment with the Facebook behemoth and his subsequent efforts to convince the tech industry to change course and lawmakers to intervene. McNamee also offers an insider's description of the corporate decision-making process at Facebook, essentially in the hands of Zuckerberg alone, to highlight the problematic nature this corporate structure has for broader societal outcomes. The final section of the book weaves together these concerns with those of the monetization of user data, privacy, and industry regulation to drive home McNamee's point: Something must to be done to halt the current societal trajectory and bring society back from the brink of polarized self-implosion. Throughout this section, McNamee offers insightful description of collection practices for user data and related monetization techniques on the part of big social networking tech companies, of which average users may be unaware. Chapter 12, in particular, highlights the inherent conflicts between user privacy and the corporate bottom line in a world in which user data and attention are the ultimate commodity.

The book concludes with a description of a potential path forward to promote the beneficial aspects of big tech while mitigating the negatives—namely, implementation of humane technology design, governmental regulation, and active involvement on the parts of big tech companies to minimize the spread of misinformation at the algorithmic level. While Facebook's original mission of bringing the world together may have been a good one, McNamee argues that in the pursuit of growth and gains, this mission has been lost—and Zuckerberg and Sandberg are blind by their success to this fact. Indeed, he argues that the techniques used in pursuit of growth—such as persuasive technology that shapes user behaviors and the monetization of user data—are antithetical to Facebook's stated mission to bring the world together. Further, McNamee explains that the right thing for Facebook to do is to become more aware of how the features of their product and their business practices influence what is posted on its site:

> [Facebook] should also face an uncomfortable truth . . . it may have to abandon its current policy of openness to all voices, no matter how damaging. Being socially responsible may also require the company to compromise its growth targets. (p. 103)

Barring self-regulation by big tech companies, users of these sites should demand such action.

Zucked's stated goals are to serve as a warning about the unhealthy results of the marriage between big business and big tech in an unending pursuit of gains and growth: making readers aware of a crisis, explaining how it happened, and suggesting a path forward. In all, the book meets this purpose, though there

are some gaps. For example, *Zucked* argues that government oversight may be the only thing that can convince major tech companies to prioritize users over profits. Indeed, McNamee writes that he believes "a strong case can be made that Facebook and Google pose a threat to national security" (p. 282) and as such require governmental oversight. Focusing more on the regulation of the technology itself to make it more human centric, McNamee does not explicitly wrestle here with the related implications for freedom of speech and censorship in the use of that technology. As McNamee points out, Facebook has long claimed status as a tech platform, which under U.S. law offers the company some legal protections against liability for third-party content posted to the site (Garcia & Hoffmeister, 2017). Interestingly, shortly after *Zucked* was published, Facebook announced it was banning certain controversial figures from its platforms (Lima, 2019). This triggered related public debate on censorship and the role a private company ought to play as a forum for speech, a debate largely framed by polarized political views. Trump's White House even launched a tool for people to report with if they felt they were censored by a social media platform (Kelly, 2019).

While from the title and topic the book might seem to fit into the techno-pessimistic genre, it is clear that McNamee's view is not that technology or social networking is inherently bad. Rather, the cultural environment that favors business practices that drive such rapid growth and shape technology development and implementation, along with a failure to consider people over profits, is presented here as the real issue. The author's internal conflict surrounding the promise of technology alongside its evident failures is also clear, and readers with similar internal conflicts may find their internal dialog reflected. Of interest, McNamee still owns shares in Facebook. He uses this financial connection as a demonstration of his credibility—that his actions are motivated out of genuine concern and not potential personal profit. Still, the author's duality as a current Facebook critic and current Facebook investor highlights the difficulty in changing our societal approach to social networking technology (Snyder, 2019). McNamee wants these big tech companies to value people over profits, yet he has himself very literally profited from the existing business practices.

Written for a general audience as a cri de coeur, readers may or may not agree that all of the book's suggestions for forward progress are the right ones, but the book does provide a starting point for some important conversations about the intersections between technology, business, and democracy. The description of how user data feed artificial intelligence models to increase the time users spend on the site is likely to be an eye-opening one for the average reader. The book will be of interest to media and technology scholars of all kinds, including in the areas of media ethics, technology design, and participatory media, or anyone who seeks to reconcile technology with societal benefit by centering users' needs over business needs.

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