

A dark teal rectangular logo with white text. The text reads "ME AND EARL" on the first line, "AND THE DYING" on the second line, and "GIRL" on the third line.

The New York Times | <http://nyti.ms/1djmnf1>

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Hillary, Jeb, Facebook and Disorder

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Thomas L. Friedman

For a presidential campaign that has started so early, it's striking how little most of the candidates want to engage with major issues of the day, let alone the future. Hillary Clinton won't take a clear stand on two big issues she helped to negotiate as secretary of state: the free-trade deal with Pacific nations and the nuclear deal with Iran. Jeb Bush's campaign seems stuck on whether he is or is not his brother's keeper. Marco Rubio was for comprehensive immigration reform before he was against it. While Senators Rand Paul and Bernie Sanders are motivated by clear ideologies, the others, so far, evince much more compelling ambitions to be president than compelling reasons for why they should be.

That can't last. Just follow the headlines. We're in the middle of some huge disruptive inflections in technology, the labor market and geopolitics that will raise fundamental questions about the future of work and the social contracts between governments and their people and employers and employees. These will all erupt in the next presidency.

What are the signs of that? Well, my candidate for best lead paragraph on a news article so far this year goes to Tom Goodwin, an executive at Havas Media, whose essay [March 3 on Techcrunch.com](#) began: "Uber, the world's largest taxi company, owns no vehicles. Facebook, the world's most popular

media owner, creates no content. Alibaba, the most valuable retailer, has no inventory. And Airbnb, the world's largest accommodation provider, owns no real estate. Something interesting is happening.”

There sure is. We're at the start of a major shift on the question of what's worth owning. What all of the above companies have in common is that they have either created trust platforms that match supply and demand for things people never thought of supplying: a spare bedroom in their home or a seat in their car or a commercial link between a small retailer in North Dakota and a small manufacturer in China. Or they are behavioral platforms that spin off extremely valuable data for retailers and advertisers or they are behavioral platforms on which ordinary people can generate reputations — for driving, hosting or any skill you can imagine — and then market themselves globally.

This is a result of the exponential growth in computing power, storage, networking, sensors and software generation and interoperability, which is allowing us to both gather massive amounts of data and apply software to that data to see patterns at a speed and scope unknown before. And it is taking friction out of so many things at once: from hailing a cab to reserving a room in someone's home in Timbuktu to buying groceries to learning from anyone anywhere to designing an airplane part on a 3-D printer in a week instead of six months. Complexity is becoming free.

A recent study by the Oxford Martin School concluded that 47 percent of U.S. jobs are at high risk of being taken by smart machines and software in the next two decades. And what is interesting, notes James Manyika, a director of the McKinsey Global Institute and co-author of “No Ordinary Disruption,” is that, contrary to expectations, “knowledge workers at the middle and the top” may be more threatened than those doing physical work. For example, The Associated Press now uses computers, not reporters, to generate more than 3,000 financial reports per quarter. This can free up workers to do more creative work, but they have to be trained for it.

On geopolitics, we still have great power rivalries, but the most relevant divide in the world will no longer be East-West, capitalist-communist. It will be the World of Order versus the World of Disorder, as environmental,