

Bond University
Research Repository



The internet and privatism
Reconstructing the monitor space

Breen, Marcus

Published in:
Transformations

Licence:
CC BY-NC-SA

[Link to output in Bond University research repository.](#)

Recommended citation(APA):

Breen, M. (2013). The internet and privatism: Reconstructing the monitor space. *Transformations*, 2013(23), 1-12.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

For more information, or if you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact the Bond University research repository coordinator.

1-1-2013

The internet and privatism: Reconstructing the monitor space

Marcus Breen

Bond University, Marcus_Breen@bond.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs

Recommended Citation

Marcus Breen. (2013) "The internet and privatism: Reconstructing the monitor space"
Transformation: Region, Culture and Society, .

http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs/877



Issue No. 23 2013 — The Internet as Politicizing Instrument

The Internet and Privatism: Reconstructing the Monitor Space

By *Marcus Breen*

I would say you are not a subject or human being you become one. You become a subject to the extent to which you respond to events.

Alain Badiou (Jeffries)

Introduction

It is difficult to engage in self-criticism about Internet use because personal incorporation into the virtual world can involve challenges to established myths, such as the value of contemporary communication technologies for economic, personal and economic development (McChesney). And yet it is possible to see the world and its excesses in the monitor in such a way that the autoethnographic readings of and by Internet users advance Ellis's and Bochner's suggestions of the need for research that recognises the intensified "reflexive and dialogic texts," "personal experiential narratives," "narratives of the self," and co-constructed and performativity narratives that inevitably open up keen reflections on the private lives of users (qtd. in Denzen and Lincoln 51-52). For example, the always-on experience of everyday life in the advanced north allows for total immersion in Internet culture and a remaking of the nature of being and becoming. This ontology is defined by the privatised space of the monitor, where the private self seeks the prospect and the realisation of emancipation. Where human existence is revealed in pixilated, individuated detail like never before, it always already offers private revelations. Criticism of the Internet's revealed "self" must acknowledge the complicated reflections of personhood within the dominant culture of individual self-realisation as well as virtual communities. Indeed, one of the successes of neo-liberalism is the notion that the only way forward within global capitalism is the energized mobilization of privatism within the American imperial imagination. Against this, the increasing filtered singularity of the Internet narrative has been a part of the dystopian argument proposed by Jaron Lanier and others (2011). The Internet embodies and naturalises this ideology through the everyday structure of individual being. The following discussion visits the Internet's naturalisation of the concept of privatism, exploring how it generates new knowledge of the self.

The US Internet: Mathematical Value Sets

The Internet would not exist without the United States. Unpacking this claim leads inevitably into the uncertain waters of ideology. Those uncertainties lead in turn to a discussion of what constitutes ideology in the relationship between the US and the Internet. The embedded

values of everyday life in the US suggest that the Internet and its success as a communication tool are part and parcel of a complex of social forces that offer agency. [1] In fact, the agency of the Internet incorporates a kind of hegemonic American experience – convenience and access to information that flows from the deterministic structure of advanced capitalism (Slack and Wise 41-49). The deterministic nature of imperial American capitalism and its corporate priorities is constructed within the US political system. Every day it is supported and naturalised for expansion by the state, finding expression as the preferred global cultural sensibility. Of course, it is not “natural” at all. It is the result of a struggle for national domination over the domestic population as a programmatic and systemic plan for the world (Wallerstein). The Internet is and has been one of the tools in the arsenal to be used in the struggle for US supremacy, where Internet firms such as IBM, Microsoft, Intel and Google operate like centrifuges in the global network. This narrative leads to an examination of relationships at both the micro (domestic) and macro (global) levels and their interaction. In telling this story it is necessary to understand that the determinism behind the “self organized system” of the Internet is actually more of an expression of American interests that needs to be critically understood (Fuchs 23). A critical position such as this adds a “conscientious” note to the study of the Internet’s role in the American empire’s hegemony and the anti-Americanism that power has generated (Gienow-Hecht 1091).

Research presented in this paper about the Internet’s ideology is positioned within cultural and media studies, while drawing on other resources for critical analysis in a kind of interdisciplinary bricolage. Critical analysis in this instance means identifying what Louis Althusser referred to as the “overdetermination” of social and economic forces which manifest themselves in a “cumulative internalisation” (1962). According to Graeme Turner, cultural studies established a connection to Althusser’s approach to ideology through overdetermination because it was “able to acknowledge the importance and complexity of individual, ‘lived’ experience: ... as a way of understanding historically lived situations and the authentic complexities of practice” (54). The critical approach seeks to identify how the relative autonomy of social and economic forces allows them to move into and out of focus, along a continuum of force from resistance to submission to emerge as established and dominant interests: to accumulate and dominate consciousness.

The critical project sets a boundary that makes demands on the student of ideology, asking as it were, for a commitment to the intellectual, material and personal task of identifying where and at what conjunctures resistance and revolt can be identified and mobilised. This is not an easy task because as the Internet has become more fully embedded in everyday life, the complexity of individual lived experience has risen. The commensurate transformation of everyday life has seen the erasure *and* remaking of boundaries around the self, the personal, the individual, the private and the public, making it possible to see how Althusserian notions of overdetermination fit the changed circumstances. However, while the new, porous boundaries allow more fluid *cumulative internalisation*, they are solidly ideological. Indeed, this internalisation is marked by the global accumulation of American values, dominated by narratives about human rights, the individual and self-interest.

These topics have been contested within US polity, most notably by the historian Richard Hofstadter in the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s who railed against Social Darwinism’s “laissez-faire individualism” (39). Eric Foner noted that in the contemporary US, the Social Darwinist mentality includes the view “that government should not intervene to affect the natural workings of the economy, that the distribution of rewards within society reflects individual more than historical circumstances, and that the plight of the less fortunate, whether individuals or races, arises from their own failings” (39). All of these values accumulate as key

aspects of the prevailing ideological modalities of the Internet.

Against this view is the claim that the changed environment of the Internet offers a “polysemic reading;” the belief that “active meaning makers” are engaged with the production of culture as a “collective dialogue with itself” (Schroder and Phillips 893, 913). Certainties about the benefits of polysemic meaning making suggest that the Internet invokes collective knowledge and community. And yet while polysemic claims are appealing as a kind of liberal default, the dominating power of the Internet erases collective and community boundaries by speeding up and complicating relationships for individuals whose apparent agency at the monitor is reinforced, be it for claiming a sense of identity in communication with others, or as an employee who, like many academics, is constantly on line, individually reinforced through a kind of virtual professional isolation. Furthermore, despite what Schroder and Phillips note about polysemy, the idea of an Internet collective talking to itself, is a circumscribed relationship. Rather, it is capable of being as myopic as the worst closed societies, unable to engage with difference, diversity or deliberation. In such an environment can the individual flourish as a social being? Sherry Turkel’s recent research published in *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (2012) affirms this question, despite the optimism of polysemic and virtual community theorists.

Daniel Solove has noted with some understatement that “the very things that make new technologies preferable to older ones ironically become their greatest liabilities” (Solove 106). In other words, polysemy is all well and good, but too many voices – amplified – is not what was anticipated. At yet another level, contrary to the philosophical theory of pragmatism, there is no reason to believe that liberalism and its core constituent tolerance, is the dominant feature of the Internet, defined as a place and space where the full range of lived experience is mediated (Brown). Indeed, securitisation and surveillance within the militarised, warring context of contemporary life highlight liberal conceits underlying overdetermination and polysemy. The belief that progressive social forces will contest the hegemon cannot be assured. This is despite claims that the space the US dominates is multivariate. Andrew Feenberg has argued for example, that “the closure of the Internet . . . does not preclude the survival of the others [various versions of the Internet] in a subordinate role” (10). Contemporary Internet trends such as the organisation of jihadist terror, large scale financial misbehavior and the outsourcing of employment, make this claim less sustainable despite Feenberg’s optimism. As I have argued elsewhere, the Internet’s “selective essentialism” takes hold of the social world, cutting options, pushing an ideological line and increasing subordination while reducing agency (Breen, “The Internet, Gender, Identity”).

In this discussion of ideology and the Internet, questions about the efficacy of the Internet can be viewed as a move away from the fetish of utopianistic communication technology because the technology itself is viewed as the unhealthy product of antisocial relations, defined within US corporate culture (Adas). In fact, the excesses of the drivers of the Internet are becoming clearer with the recent rise of public confessionals about leaving Facebook by for example, *The New Yorker* writer Steve Coll. Given this, it is instructive to reflect on Alain Baudiou’s perspective identified in the epigram to this article, that our subjectivity is determined by events. Certainly the Internet is an “event,” where the continuity of its all-encompassing energy, its engagement, creates a structured subjectivity. Users are incorporated into the event’s pre-existing value set. As users we become subjects, contrary to the rhetoric of technology advocates, who preach a kind of digital emancipation. Rather, we become incorporated into the digital value sphere. The self is incorporated into the event known as the Internet. The digital value sphere embodies the self which as Michel Foucault noted, undergoes its formation “through techniques of living” (89). Ideology is constructed by the

Internet as the dominant contemporary communicative event and must be accepted in order for its use to occur. Subordination to the way it constructs the self becomes clear once the ideological foundations are appreciated.

To elaborate on the nature of this experience consider David Foster Wallace's description of the everyday consciousness of the self at the root of contemporary American life (59):

Everything in my own immediate experience supports my deep belief that I am the absolute center of the universe, the realest, most vivid and important person in existence. We rarely think about this sort of natural, basic self-centredness, because it's so socially repulsive, but it's pretty much the same for all of us, deep down. It's our *default setting*, hardwired into our boards at birth. Think about it. There is no experience you've had that you were not at the absolute center of. The world as you experience it is there in front of you, or behind you, to the left or right of you, on *your TV or your monitor or whatever*. (45, italics added).

Within self-interested consciousness, the Internet confirms the default setting of the self as central in the formation of day-to-day communication. This is increasingly the case in an era when the TV and the monitor converge, offering ubiquitous digital media, constantly meeting the centralised interests of the self. As I noted in *Uprising*, the shift from free-to-air television to cable to the Internet can be viewed as the construction of a logic that meets every individual interest and need (although in a resistive moment, Bruce Springsteen made his view of this choice culture clear in his 1992 song "57 Channels (And nothin' on)").

How then should the critical reading of ideology and the Internet progress? At least one answer is to investigate the constituents of ideology, in particular the historical foundations of the hegemon and its dominant values. Such an approach will allow the cultural studies project to continue as an optimistic plan to comprehend lived practices, especially the subterranean human desires that inform them. While this may appear to incorporate a strong Lacanian and psychosocial approach to the study of ideology, that is not my intention, as it is only in interdisciplinarity that the complexity of contemporary experience can approximate the truth. The research locates ideology within the material practices of everyday life, especially the prevailing assumptions of social life associated with the Internet. This approach involves navigation across an opaque experiential terrain, where ideology is known even while it is embedded within us, always open to multiple meanings at a personal level, even while the Internet shuts down consciousness of that knowledge through its speed, interactivity, personalization and utility. Moreover, this closure happens because the Internet produces the self within the limited horizon of capital: users seek what they already know and are familiar with. Knowledge is reproduced, rather than challenged and remade.

In *Uprising* the rise of irrationality and immaturity due to the Internet is traced to Immanuel Kant's proposition, that the Enlightened or mature individual had the ability to make reasoned decisions, based on a direct relationship with socially structured knowledge. To be mature was to realise oneself in this knowledge. A critical reading of the Internet is informed by acknowledging that computational structures (mathematical value sets) form a limited set of immature, affective responses to visual stimuli that produces the irrationality of the unEnlightened (proletarianisation in *Uprising*). Coming through the monitor, the stimuli are constructed by their pre-existing order – the algorithms produce their own interests and are organized visually. The particularity of this "visual turn" by the Internet can be understood by recognising the prearranged algorithms that dominate the monitors (Jay). The prevailing "optical experience" as proposed by W.J.T. Mitchell is privileged as a kind of perfected

pixilation within the rhetoric of consumerist capitalism (qtd. in Jay 183). These dominating visual interests achieve two things: they construct the ideological environment while limiting human experience to the visual. After all, what are most Internet applications, if not immediacy tools absorbed through the optical nerve aimed at emotionally defined responses presented as empowerment rewards for the self.

Given this critical perspective the self is valued within the new social configuration, relocated within the media space, to be powerfully embedded within the rhetoric and practice of the Internet. And it is this embeddedness that becomes the limiting environment even while claiming to offer “everything:” a constrained cornucopia that is more prone to mythologise self-realisation rather than liberate it (Coyne). It is the place where an imagined utopian consumerism is offered, where the default is the commonplace answer to “Where did you get that? The Internet.” This utopia is a private space in which the self is made, where the individual’s eyes are fully focused only on what already exists. It is the space where capitalism invites us into its “cybernetic ecology” through the “machines of loving grace,” as Richard Brautigan suggested in his poem “All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace.” We feel as if our value is esteemed, raised, magnified, uplifted, immortalised through that visual beam of communicative synchronicity that directs us at the pinnacle of human achievement: the realisation of individuality.

At this point the critic must intervene to bear witness to the ethical self, to resist, oppose and seek relief from the dominance of unsustainable consumerism and its global acolytes. Questions must be asked about the event where the individual seeks the self and where the self is the possibility of all things, and where the potential for realisation is offered. Clearly, the ideological analysis of the Internet’s visual turn has a negative consideration (as Horkheimer and Adorno’s essay “Dialectic of Enlightenment” suggests) because the dominance of its “totalizing gaze” closes off the knowledge bank of history and experience, denying the foundations for criticism (Jay 183). In the following sections, this perspective will be explored through the theory of privatism where the Internet is grounded in the material lived experience – the creation of the suburban self.

Privatism Theory

Recent debates about the sociality of the individual in his or her relationship with the computer terminal and unregulated Internet content indicate the cultural shift playing out. An anxiety literature of the Internet has emerged. Books by Sherry Turkle *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Eli Pariser *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from Us*, Evgeny Morozov *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, challenge assumptions about the way the Internet is articulated with US entrepreneurial technology and the self. The assumptions driving the Internet’s triumphalist narrative continue the American tradition of articulating personal value with the social construction of the increasing worth of the private individual in their relations with technology (exceptionalism by any other name). In effect, these assumptions about the Internet as a site of creative innovation embody a historically rendered belief in the way technology mobilises private structures of social life. The enculturation inherent in Internet technology is presented as always morally good. This is in line with any television advertisement for a website, computer product or mobile application. In this narrative, the impact of technology on the self is positive. Unsurprisingly then, the Internet has layered itself onto the imagination of the self, as a positive event. The self of the private individual was already known yet capable of dramatic change. The new anxiety literature about the Internet (noted above) suggests that the positive self-making benefits of the Internet are changing, as established ideas about sociality

(Enlightenment rationality) collide with unmediated self-interest at the monitor (the irrational, described in *Uprising* by proletarianisation).

This discussion is complicated by the political economy of the Internet which recognises the challenge of separating the value of self-worth through symbolic claims of agency and power from material claims based on economic value. During the Internet bubble of the late 1990s the conflation of these domains was incorporated into the term “boosterism” which described the one-sided conversation about users’ eye-balls, when what was really intended was the addition of share market value to Internet businesses. This was often a cynical *pure play* aimed at profit taking. The American preference was to position profitability within a public discourse that resulted from innovation, which was, in turn, the realisation of the worthy individual, the valued citizen and the ultimate extension of national exceptionalism. This interconnected set of beliefs became universalised within global capitalism, and globalisation. While the discussion of ideology suggests this universalisation happened as the result of hegemonic American ideas and ambition, it is worth recalling the larger questions of political economy, as described by Samuel Huntington: “The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion . . . but by its superiority in applying organized violence” (qtd. in Layne). The Internet plays a part in constructing ongoing claims for American-style ideas, by inscribing values of economy with the private individual (the self) and where necessary, violently insisting on the hegemony of those values. Debates about the military industrial complex and more recently Predator and Reaper Drone aircraft suggest an unwelcome convergence of the Internet and US technology with warfare to impose governments committed to individual rights (Breen, “Killing the Thing You Love”).

Networked interconnectivity gives the individual the promise of heightened interaction at the monitor and thus greater realisation of the self. What made this “promise” so appealing within the heavy marketing rhetoric that accompanied its commercialisation was the fact that the individual was already disconnected in the privatised cityscape. Here the family home had become both a refuge and a space removed from the organic wholeness of “the community” (Veblen 174; Little). The Internet came packaged with the promise that the isolation of the suburban individual could be overcome by being remade as a new being in the virtual community (Rheingold). At this point the promise was that “the private individual” could be realised in a kind of technological utopia. The question is, has the Internet moved more deeply into the family home to reinforce social constructions of the private while building even deeper meanings of the self? If so, how are the ideas of the self constructed within the privatised family home? Do these constructions differ from the workplace and elsewhere? These questions incorporate an examination of the Internet’s private space making. This analysis involves disarticulating then rearticulating new meanings of the individual from “private” and “space.” Few of these considerations can be fully considered in this analysis. Suffice to say, in seeking to identify the conflation of the private with new meanings of the self it is necessary to take an historical view of how the private has been constructed. This will be undertaken by using privatism theory.

Drawing notions of space into domestic and cityscape geography necessarily problematises the Internet. Nevertheless, it allows questions about the public to be viewed in relation to the private (Bender 264). More importantly the theory of privatism as proposed by Sam Bass Warner helps theorise the position of the Internet within the privatised domestic context of the American city. In the context of the American city, Protestantism informs individualism (Warner). Similarly, the Internet intensifies claims to the self within the Protestant orientation of the individual at work. Within the intensification of this relationship the theory of privatism can be extended to explain the way the Internet restructures social relations.

Sam Bas Warner's theory of privatism articulated economy with space in the realisation of the self. Warner's research detailed the rise of Philadelphia and the forces that led to its origination, growth and development. In tracing this settlement trajectory Warner established the ground rules for privatism. The key constituents on privatism were based in "the American urban tradition" which became the "cultural consensus" (Warner xi, xiii):

Privatism's essence lay in its concentration upon the individual and the individual's search for wealth. *Psychologically*, privatism meant that the individual should seek happiness in personal independence and in the search for wealth; socially privatism meant that the individual should see his first loyalty to his immediate family, and that a community should be a union of such money-making, accumulating families; politically privatism meant that the community should keep the peace among individual money makers and, if possible, help to create an open and thriving setting where each citizen would have some substantial opportunity to prosper (Warner 4, emphasis added).

The connection of wealth with the realisation of the individual somewhat replicates the shift in Internet's construction within the US political economy as a celebration of the exceptionalism of individual entrepreneurs like Bill Gates / Microsoft, Steve Jobs / Apple, Mark Zuckerberg / Facebook Mark Jeff Bezos / Amazon, in a rhetoric of individual self realisation every Personal Computer user gets to "share." Meanwhile Bass's mention of the psychology of the individual in pursuit of happiness (at the monitor) can be viewed as an affective trajectory which the Internet embodies. The rise of the information society-knowledge economy ultimately informs the continuation of these values through the Internet. How else can the appeal of the Internet as a unique American phenomenon be explained? When viewed through the lens of political economy it can be seen, as Warner reminds us, being about raising the individual to an equal level with money accumulation in a private setting. This "politics of privatism" suggests Warner, is freighted with attitudes and values that include those citizens committed to wealth within the urban environment while excluding others not incorporated within "men's private economic activities" (xxiii, 4). Warner suggests that these relationships were adapted within the urban American context, and point to the importance of change around the ideal of individual wealth as a double movement – to include and exclude others in one's self realisation.

Warner's theory of privatism adds an invocation to action through its commitment to "relabel liberal capitalism" (xi). The reason Warner took this approach was "to encourage my readers to start by examining their own personal values and commitments and then to think in outgoing circles of awareness of the many aspects of city life which that tradition has drawn upon and influenced" (xi). The connection between knowledge and self-criticism generates critical acts of engagement with the self which becomes more acute once it is recognised how our lives operate within the ideology of privatism; even more so through the Internet and its autoethnography.

Furthermore, the theory of privatism reinforces Badiou's comment that the self is always becoming a subject by one's response to events. As a new event, the Internet reinforces already existing privatism in the American urban landscape by layering over the space of the home the private space of the monitor. Within the computer-networked environment privatism theory suggests that privatism is the dominant value, reinforced in the home and office, work cubicles and the ownership of personal devices. Its renewed formation takes place against the anonymity of global interconnectedness. As such, the Internet has intensified American

privatism, propelling the ideology of the self into starker relief against global collective sociality. It is as if the intensified self of privatism is a bulwark against globalisation.

The Monitor Space as American Individualism

In *Uprising* the monitor space is presented as a concept that isolates and thus reduce sociality, even while it creates mediated interactions through interconnectivity. This is the central contradiction of the Internet, which has exercised communication technology researchers and theorists and was originally described by Manuel Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996). Disciplines like sociology, geography, history, philosophy, anthropology and their interdisciplinary offspring such as communication, media and cultural studies, ethnography and public policy studies, as well as Internet studies and critical Internet studies are replete with case studies, theoretical gestures, commitments and critiques that navigate the multileveled dialectical territory of the Internet. (That phrase “multileveled dialectical territory” is intended to suggest the ambiguities in discussions about the Internet.)

Despite the open endedness of the multidisciplinary approach to the study of the Internet and the self, the diversity of approaches signals a struggle to adequately map privatism as the prevailing experience at the monitor space. It is primarily a construction in which the individual connects directly with the technology and its content, where it is now nearly impossible to move outside of this direct relationship. Its intensity inscribes the monitor with the ideology of its being. This could be said to be a movement in which monitor users *become* as it were “Silicon Valley,” where users’ lives connect with neo-liberal expansion via micro computing to invoke a direct relationship with an American world view. This is despite the claims noted earlier, for overdetermination, where the relative autonomy of alternative ideological settings is shut down, reduced, truncated and closed off by the ideological constructions of the monitor space. Recently, Stuart Hall has suggested “an attenuation of the very idea of ‘the social’ . . .” by the Internet (723). Interdisciplinarity cannot rescue this pessimistic reading. In fact, the interdisciplinary methodology may itself be open to accusations that it is little more than an attempt to keep open the possibilities for relative autonomy, even though these relationships are being shut down by the monitor space. In what other way can the rise of Google and Facebook be seen? They exist for three reasons: to limit the social to their own interests; to capitalise share market value for a small group of owners and investors; and to sell audiences through advertising: the latter a critical position from which to understand commercial television, established by Dallas Smythe.

It is obvious that at every juncture the monitor space operates to construct the individual within a relationship to the market. The dominance of the American approach to the market can be seen in the US approach to domination (by violence as suggested by Huntington), and to the use of state power in positioning the central ordering logic around the individual. To acknowledge this relationship is to see how the political economy of the monitor space reiterates its inscription of what has recently been referred to as the “expansionist-individual rights complex” of the United States (Grandin 72). Seen in the light of the historical commitment to the “individual pursuit of private interests” (73) and to the detriment of “the public good” (73), the monitor space can be viewed as a continuation of an established ideology within privatism theory (Grandin 72-73). To more fully formulate this position, the monitor space can be considered as a device that takes “individual rights as inherent and inalienable,” symbolically and practically (70).

The user sits at the monitor, or uses the hand held device to establish a relationship with others – and is reinforced as an individual in that use by the “cumulative internalization” of

the mathematical value system. In other words, the Internet is primarily a relational tool for individuals who are remaking the self through the constraints of an individual rights value system. This emphasis reflects Sam Bass Warner's call to examine values and commitments within privatism in order to more fully realise one's own ideological preferences. More generally, the political question of long standing – noted above by Richard Hofstadter and Eric Foner – is how the shift from the collective to the individual operates (Little; Butcher et al.). The point is that the monitor space reinvents the individual within the prevailing image of inalienable US rights, reinforcing claims of the self against the sociality of the material community.

Conclusion: Professor Foucault's Last Word on Politics and the Self

The history of US priorities continues with the Internet. While it incorporates the continuation of the republican rights claim to an ideology of the self within the boundaries of the nation, it is also already an expression of self-interest through privatism. The Internet is imbricated within the history of American individualism, characterised by the successful struggle for individual rights over collective action. An effective outcome of US ideology applied through the Internet is the masking of the struggle between the privatised, valorised individual and collective interests. The continuation of the history of technology as a limiting force for collective concerns is nothing new. However, questions about the negative consequences of the theory of privatism have begun to gain public traction, not least in recent Internet anxiety literature.

As an event that constructs meanings, especially those of the self, the Internet's own "rights complex" includes a kind of essentialised individual. Is this its cultural default? From Robin Mansell's perspective there is no doubt that the choices involve "codifying and manipulating information" where decisions are "highly political and necessarily judgmental" (20). The challenge is to see the Internet for what it is: an ideological tool that extends yet limits the world and the possibilities within it. In "Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life" Michael Foucault suggested a way of unthinking individualism in order to imagine and act within a different, better event:

Do not demand of politics that it restore the "rights" of the individual, as philosophy had defined them. The individual is the product of power. What is needed is to "de-individualize" by means of multiplication and displacement, diverse combinations. The group must not be the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals, but a constant generator of deindividualization.

Marcus Breen is Professor of Communication and Creative Media in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Bond University, Gold Coast, Australia. He has worked as a journalist, consultant, analyst and academic. He has taught media and cultural studies at The University of Melbourne, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Northeastern University, Boston and Bond. His most recent book is *Uprising: The Internet's Unintended Consequences* (Common Ground Publishing 2011). In April 2013 he was appointed editor of *The International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society*.

Endnotes

1. Who could forget the *Time* magazine cover from 2006 which announced that “You” were the Person of the Year: “You – yes you! – are TIME’s Person of the Year” (Grossman). It was a cover that invoked a celebratory theory of democracy in which every republic would be realised. It made Web 2.0 into a continuing fantasy of mythologised personhood, a new Jerusalem of American self-realisation.

Works Cited

- Adas, Michael. *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America’s Civilizing Mission*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Althusser, Louis. “Contradiction and Overdetermination.” 1962. (6 August 2012) <www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1962/overdetermination.htm>
- Bender, Thomas. “Metropolitan Life and the Making of Public Culture.” *Power Culture and Race: Essays on New York City*. Ed. John Mollenkopf. New York: Sage, 1988. 261-272.
- Brautigan, Richard. “All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace.” 1964. 2 August 2012. <allpoetry.com/poem/8508991-All_Watched_Over_By_Machines_Of_Loving_Grace-by-Richard_Brautigan>
- Breen, Marcus. *Uprising: The Internet’s Unintended Consequences*. Champagne: Common Ground Publishers, 2011.
- . “The Internet, Gender and Identity: Proletarianization as Selective Essentialism.” *Emerging Spaces in Contemporary Society: Properties of Technology*. Eds. Phillip Kalantzis-Cope and Karim Gherab-Martin. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2011. 279-292.
- . “Killing the Thing You Love: Predator Drones, Willful Neglect and the End of the Internet.” *International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society*, 8.1(2013): 153-166.
- Brown, Wendy. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Butcher, Hugh, et al. *Critical Community Practice*. Bristol: The Polity Press, 2007.
- Coll, Steve. “Leaving Facebookistan.” *The New Yorker* (blog, May 24, 2012). July 28, 2012. <www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/comment/2012/05/leaving-facebookistan.html>
- Coyne, Richard. *Cornucopia Limited: Design and Dissent on the Internet*. Cambridge MA.: MIT Press, 2007.
- Denzen, Norman and Yvonna Lincoln. *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003.
- Feenberg, Andrew. “Towards a Critical theory of the Internet.” *(Re)Inventing the Internet: Critical Case Studies*. Eds. Andrew Feenberg and Norm Friesen. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011. 3-18.
- Foner, Eric. *Who Owns History? Rethinking the Past in a Changing World*. New York: Hill and

Wang, 2002.

Foucault, Michel. "Subjectivity and Truth." *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1994: 87-92.

---. "Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life." (Undated). 2 August, 2012.
<weblearn.ox.ac.uk/site/human/orient/sa/orin0077/dep/george/other/art/Foucault.pdf>

Fuchs, Christian. *Internet and Society: Social Theory and the Information Age*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Gienow-Hecht, Jessica. "Always Blame the Americans: Anti-Americanism in Europe in the Twentieth Century." *The American Historical Review* 111:4 (2006): 1067-1091.

Grandin, Greg. "The Liberal Traditions in the Americas: Rights, Sovereignty, and the Origins of Liberal Multilateralism." *The American Historical Review* 117:1 (2012): 68-91.

Grossman, Lev. "You – Yes You! – Are TIME's Person of the Year." *Time* (25 December, 2006). 10 May 2012. <http://www.time.com/tie/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>

Hall, Stuart. "The Neo-Liberal Revolution." *Cultural Studies* 25: 6 (2011): 705-728.

Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodore. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. <[www.tlu.ee/files/arts/10245/Adornd3361907653a3a67de497be2fb778 268.pdf](http://www.tlu.ee/files/arts/10245/Adornd3361907653a3a67de497be2fb778%20268.pdf)>

Jay, Martin. "That Visual Turn: The Advent of Visual Culture. Interview with Jay Martin." *Visual Cultural Studies*. Ed. M. Smith. Sage, 2008. 182-188.

Jeffries, Stuart. "Alain Badiou: A Life in Writing." (18 May, 2012). *The Guardian* 10 June, 2012. <www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2012/may/18/alain-badiou-life-in-writing?>

Lanier, Jaron. *You Are Not A Gadget: A Manifesto*. New York: First Vintage Books, 2011.

Layne, Christopher. "The End of Pax-Americana: How Western Decline Became Inevitable." (April 26, 2012). *The Atlantic*. 15 May 2012.
<www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/04/the-end-of-pax-americana-how-western-decline-became-inevitable/256388/2/>

Little, Adrian. *The Politics of Community: Theory and Practice*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002.

Mansell, Robin. "Technology, Innovation, Power and Social Consequence." *Emerging Spaces in Contemporary Society: Properties of Technology*. Eds. Phillip Kalantzis-Cope and Karim Gherab-Martin, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2011. 13-25.

McChesney, Robert. *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy*. New York: The New Press, 2013.

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, (1993) 2000.

- Schröder, K. C., & Phillips, L. "Complexifying Media Power: A Study of the Interplay between Media and Audience Discourses on Politics." *Media, Culture and Society* 29.6 (2007): 890-915, 1032.
- Slack, Jennifer Daryl and Wise, J. Macgregor. *Culture and Technology: A Primer*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
- Smythe, Dallas, W. "On the Audience Commodity and its Work." In *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981. 22–51.
- Solove, Daniel. *Nothing to Hide: The False Trade-off between Privacy and Security*, Yale University Press, Newhaven, 2011. In Benjamin Cramer, Review of Solove, *Journal of Information Policy* 2 (2012): 103-106.
- Turner, Graeme. *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, 3rd. edition. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. New York: Cosimo, (1904) 2005.
- Wallace, David Foster. *This is Water*, Koln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2012. (English version, David FosterWallace Literary Trust. New York: Little Brown, 2009.)
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. *The Modern World System 1. Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. (1974) Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011.
- Warner, Sam Bass. *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968.