

Social Ecology
of
The Post-Internet
Landscape

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Table of Contents

3 - Declaration of Authenticity

4 - Introduction

6 - Contextualising 'Postinternet'

9 - Organic Society

15 - Anti-Diversity in The Network

21 - Conclusion

24 - Bibliography

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed: HUGH O'FLAHERTY.

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Date: Saturday, the 26th of February, 2022.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'HUGH O'FLAHERTY', written in a stylized, cursive script.

Introduction

The term 'postinternet' was first coined by critic Marissa Olson as early as 2006, and is no longer just exclusive to artistic criticism. It initially served as an umbrella term for art and image culture after the internet, in the years following it would proliferate. Our cultural, physical, social, and political landscape has been dramatically re-shaped by the presence of new media technologies and the internet. In 1982, eco-socialist theorist Murray Bookchin drew wider attention to the concept of Social Ecology. New digital landscapes, virtual worlds, or the more colloquial concept of "Cyber-Space", have been in development in tandem with IT and the net itself. Bookchin's theory suggests there's a clear correlation between social and ecological issues. The post internet condition has been compared that of the post-modern, in that it was initially a novelty, and has evolved into a banality (McHugh, 2018). In this essay, a hypothesis of the ensuing 'postinternet' age and the emergence of Neo-colonial hierarchies and their disruption to social ecology will be investigated.

Despite its original intended use, whether by the militaries, the universities, the state, even the biggest financial institutions, the internet in the 21st century has given rise to private power structures that are oligarchical and dangerously volatile. Web 3 imposes a new organisational superstructure that undermines previous global economic forces. My rationale is that the emergence of online hierarchies and their subsequent colonisation of virtual spaces will bring further destitution to human development within the network, and continue to regress against diversity. By disrupting the social eco-system within the virtual, the increased gamification of the digital economy will allow this transgression to have physical economic consequences in real life. Decentralised powers that make up the top global corporations have staked their empires within a very short space of time. We cannot succeed in creating a distributed network as long as there are tiers and premiums blocking equitable distribution. We cannot designate a machine authority as a control mechanism if minorities' data is technologically redlined within the network. Big Tech undermines democracy, and has subverted the power of democratic technology by abusing the principles or tendencies of new media. Commercial software development and increasingly financialised web services no longer allude to building a better world. Were

witnessing the colonisation of the virtual. The physical world has been more or less entirely divided, bought, sold, discovered, and disregarded. As we're becoming increasingly aware of this, that there's no fast acting substitute or easy exit strategy from the multiple crisis we face - environmental, social, and economic, electronic escapism serves as an antidote for most of the population.

Digital Materialism (Manovich, 2001) is how we perceive the power or value contained within information technologies. The unraveling post-internet era will see a popular re-evaluation or new understanding of digital materiality or - immateriality. The private sector has infused the model of the stock market trading, using artificially scarce digital goods with no real world equivalent. It is a perversion of the immaterial. Web 3 intends to subvert our current relationship with virtual environments, and establish a neo-liberal free market existing entirely within the network. We've constructed a high functioning, and ubiquitous infrastructure within the west, that's reached a point of abstraction beyond the limits of any one individual's comprehension. The internet and personal computing are products of militant world conquest, or colonisation. The electrical grids that line the our world were laid by the proletariat. Computational sciences are a collective practice that our species and no one corporation or individual should have any right to claim.

Contextualising 'Postinternet'

In 2014, the publication of Omar Kholeif's *You are here: Art after the Internet* was a milestone for contemporary art criticism, and digital cultures in general. In addition to having brought recognition to the concept of the post-internet, it formalised the idea. Anyone who's used the internet and also experienced pre-digital media, will be inherently aware of this term without knowing it exists in most cases. Within the debate, the advent of the beginning and end of the Post-Internet Epoch remains unclear -

With the exception of 9/11, there is no degree-zero for this or any other post-epoch, only a categorical here-and-now that will persist until it doesn't; until it becomes stale and the air smells of another mode.

(Olson, 2011)

This affirmation was reinforced by Michael Connor, arguing that [the post-internet time period] "has come to stand less for a clear demarcation of 'before' and 'after' than to represent a continuously evolving critical dialogue." (Connor, 2018) The conversation is widening, and continues to influence emergent theories. In cultural, political, economic phenomena and their adjoining conversations, not merely exclusive to Art, but in a wider social context, lies boundless evidence to support older theories which predate the digital turn. Despite that, the idea was originally propagated from art criticism. Naturally, it was devised as or in association with an image philosophy from its point of conception. Olson would clarify this later on.

In practice, the revolution in IT and communications revolutionised art, and design. We could consider the history of computer programming as the fundamental digital art practice. Until the internet became a tool/medium/venue/vehicle for art, this prompted a new hybridisation of art and technology. It began with the original Net-Artists, Pro-Surfers, Role-Players, Musicians, Found-Footage Artists, Indie Game Developers, bloggers, and hackers, who engaged early on with the medium. They initially posed as a challenge to art, and the early online sphere, through engaging in networked culture. They are deserving of pedagogic status, yet their legacies remain niche. Without being dogmatically revisionist, Contemporary digital practitioners, especially those who call themselves artists, shouldn't

be alien to the ground breaking foundations that were made by the first Net artists. Public Resources such as Rhizome (a digital platform) in partnership with the New Museum of New York City have gone to great lengths to preserve the earlier visions of the fore-running creators. Digital Natives can now look back in awe of the van-guard, who operated without a specific locality, or identity. Arguably they engaged in a discourse that wasn't strictly concerned with the internet as a medium - a distinction which Olson would drive home years after the conversation began. "We could call it a post-ekphrastic image philosophy – one that comes after the understanding that images are capable of not only illustrating and describing, but also theorising themselves." (Olson) 'Remediatisierung' to use the Germanic term, which ironically translates directly to 'remediation' in English. In lieu of the pandemic, art's relationship to the digital hasn't evolved much further. The potential to make art powered by the network wanes, as the internet is gradually overrun with corporatised services. Meanwhile, the emphasis on DIY online culture dissipates, as Guthrie Lonergan mused "I think it's hilarious to hear that phrase – 'DIY' – all the time now, because it makes me think of Punk, and the web is so mild and boring..." (Lonergan 2018). The dream of cyberspace utopianism will be put to sleep, as the post-internet condition transpires, unless we provide counter-remediation.

Consider the 5 principles of New Media according to Manovich: Numerical Representation, Modularity, Automation, Variability, and the most novel of all - Transcoding. They do not provide an in depth taxonomy for new media, but rather a systematic overview of it's machinations. The 3rd - Automation, has rendered whole chunks of online space inscrutable. Take for instance, a most obvious example - web design. Companies such as Squarespace or Wix have proven "human intentionality can be removed from the creative process, at least in part" (Manovich) so as to reduce the learning curve for consumers who are willing to stake their web spaces, but lack the enthusiasm to hire a developer or develop it themselves. We live in a time now where 'custom' web applications and software is considered a luxury service as opposed to a necessity. Collaborating with software, rather than building it is the mode of the 21st century. It's exemplary in any artist's online presence and activity especially following the global social upheaval of Covid-19. Post-internet, and post-pandemic, appears more to be "Mirroring globalisation as reflected in the tone of online collaboration" (Olson 2018) than it is concerned with newness, new ideas, or the development of 'new new media'. Olson's resolution again claims that we're beyond, or above "the heavy burden of representing representing the medium itself, and now asserts that we're ready to move on and say something more with

the internet, not just talk about it.” This may be the one contradiction or loose end to a flawless aphorism for our times - this cannot develop overnight, and precisely cannot find its course within a system that rewards accelerated growth. This essay questions if it can happen within the tech-capitalist mode of production at all. Web 3.0 moves to embed this paradoxical agenda - represent something that is privatised and fully intangible. The illusion of ‘decentralisation’ through crypto trading resembles a Darwinian system more so than a socially viable option.

Online communities in principle, like global entities, defy locality. So where exactly do we situate these emergent online cultural identities? “From this feeling of unity between the individual and the community emerges a feeling of unity between the community and its environment” (Boockin 1982) all the while, what is this environment? How long does it take to build and for how long will it last? Whether this is good or bad, it’s certain that they’ve taken the concept of cultural odourlessness to its inevitable, final destination. ‘Culturally “odorless” commodities’ according to Koichi Iwabuchi, are products that appear to come from an unknown place. They follow streamlined standards by design, that appeal to a post-global consumer market. Iwabuchi defines the concept of cultural odour as

“the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated positively with a particular product in the consumption process”. (Iwabuchi, 2002)

We must question what kind of cultural narrative is at play in these spaces. Iwabuchi and his readership are often quick to dismiss the notion of the ‘americanism’ being associated with the conquest of global capitalism. Despite that in the age of big Data, in which we are the product (Sera, 1973), there’s almost a deep irony at play regarding identity politics, and the conquest to optimise one’s self. It’s possibly still too early to say whether the digital native culture has the power to remediate a sense of belonging in a traditional sense. Older generations seem to deem their practices an ersatz lifestyle. To some digital natives, it appears the other way around. The different contexts, and disparity between a young or old user demographic is inconsequential, considering Richard Sera and Carlota Fay Schoolman already elucidated us with their 1973 video work - *Television Delivers People*. Cookies and big data have carried on where mass media left off, “you are delivered to the advertiser who is the customer. He consumes you.” Unsurprisingly, most digital natives have become fully immersed within new social orders. We express notions of belonging to

a group of internet friends, our favourite server lobbies, or even specific landscapes or spaces within immersive digital environments - a longing for an artificial natural habitat. Hate it or Love it, it is nearly impossible now to avoid even the most minimal implication.

Organic Society

Earlier online communities were able to operate the medium holistically, as opposed to the heavily atomised society at present. Investigating virtual spaces, or the intangible, The first ever digital virtual world was known as MUD (1978). MUD was an acronym for Multi-User-Dungeon. It was entirely text based. Role Players would congregate inside a world of interactive text, as well as outside, to share actual experiences, and create concept renderings of their in game characters and experiences.

Cybernetic Fantasies: Extensions of Selfhood In a Multi-User Dungeon was written and presented by Anthropologist Mizuki Ito in 1994, and provides an overview of early online role playing cultures - when the limits of bandwidth were at their all time most scarce, making text the optimum tool/medium. Interestingly, the entire post-internet concept may have been foreseen by Ito - "I am not positing the Internet as a radical break with previous media technologies, Rather, I see it as an intriguing permutation that accentuates certain tendencies in other forms of media." An overview that is indeed concurrent with essentially everything mentioned in Kholeif's anthology of the post-internet conversation, and Walter Benjamin's theories. Ito also mentions various other patterns of online behaviour that were revealed within the early Mudder communities such as "opportunities for anonymous lurking, enabling freedom from a socially recognizable virtual body." The definition given today by the Oxford English dictionary for *Lurker - a person who lurks, in particular a user of an internet message board or chat room who does not participate*. She mentions another interesting aspect towards the conclusion of the essay, concerning MUD's mortality -

In August, the machine that Farside was living in experienced a system failure, and all player files and interface elements were lost. There were no backups. Soon after, the university that Farside was residing at announced a ban on mudding. Farsidians immigrated en masse to, among other muds, Kerovnia, a mud that many Farsidians also had characters on, and Marius, the administrator of Farside, would post

occasional notes on Kerovnia as to his efforts at reconstructing files, or trying to find a new site. (Ito)

When the mudders were forced to migrate from Farside to Kerovnia, many of them kept their original identities. The new MUD had new features, but the principle was the same.

Looking at the origins of the term organic society, Emile Durkheim talked about how industrial societies emerged from the idea of mechanical solidarity - wherein a culture or society becomes homogenised or connected through it's collective relationship to machinery. From mechanical solidarity, the ruling class subverts this sensibility through controlling the machinery or means of production in the exact same fashion. Similarly the MUD community managed to overcome scrutiny and bans from the universities, as well as the adversities of the early internet's limitations, through the same principles of mechanical solidarity.

“if "savages" had to perform heroic technical feats to extricate themselves from the "claw-and-fang"world of the jungle and arrive at a sense of their humanity, then modern consumers of market society will have to perform equally heroic ethical feats to extricate themselves from the shopping malls and recover their own sense of humanity. so we must look within the primordial community to find the early embryonic structures that transformed organic society into class society. These structures must be regarded as more fundamental than classes. They were hierarchies rooted in age, sex, and quasi-religious and quasi-political needs that created the power and the material relationships from which classes were formed. Given organic society's emphasis on usufruct, complementarity, and the irreducible minimum, it is difficult to believe that class rule, private property, and the State could have emerged, fully accoutred and omnipresent, largely because surpluses rendered their existence possible.” (Bookchin)

Bookchin's theory in Principle, cites the emergence of organic societies, and how the rise of hierarchies have disrupted this. It's concurrent with the myth of endless growth, of a cyber Fantasy world, a place where you can be “free”. Looking at the shift towards the post-internet condition, emergent online communities that came about before Olson could be considered, early digital organic societies. Despite the means of production in this

instance being somewhat - inorganic by design, early users were still hopeful that it would change our relationship with information rather than nullify it. As with the previous point regarding digital natives, the internet's first diaspora are trying to navigate an inflating economy. Being pre-conditioned to believe that the world is as easy as the game-like immaterial lifestyle seems, during childhood or adolescence, has created serious disillusionment. Rising anxieties are symptomatic of gamification. Furthermore, it is the fault of the free market that so many services have been sold to us, instead of users truly accounting for our own needs through our own direct implementation/contribution to digital infrastructure. I would elaborate on bookchin's point that "the material relationships from which classes were formed" are now immaterial - hence, web 3. The idea of economic expansion has become so thinly spread, and detached that many misinformed youths will actively pursue the purchase and sale of artificially scarce, intangible goods, believing this to be progressive. Banks are currently experimenting with said goods - crypto currencies and the like. There's no way that this can be considered remotely socialist. Various psy-ops, or social media driven lifestyle marketing, are aimed at the youth. Take the controversy with recording artist Grimes, staging photos of herself reading marxist literature and stating her partial interest on the subject, but ultimately refining her position over twitter saying "Personally I'm more interested in a radical decentralized ubi that I think could potentially be achieved thru crypto and gaming but I haven't ironed that idea out enough yet to explain it,". It's far more likely that this was an endorsement for crypto. Impressionable people who are sold on the myth of decentralisation, will believe it better when there's celebrity relationship drama to carry out this endorsement.

It is true however, that virtual spaces can teach us a great deal about our actual civilisation. Artist and Online Political Commentator Joshua Citarella uses a popularly favoured economic model from World of Warcraft to explain the concept of Market Socialism - The means of production performatively distributed within the frameworks of a free market commodity. "In game player spaces are socialist in their design." When we come to these spaces, in order for the game to continually stimulate it's player community, there's artificial scarcity built into the item systems. "You're fighting raid bosses that have too much health or deal too much damage for any individual to kill on their own. To accomplish this players form guilds." The guild must decide on how to distribute the items it acquires collectively, amongst its members. By differentiating between the different models and their real world political equivalents i.e. Totalitarianism, Casual Lottery style distribution, the most egalitarian being through a socialist mode of distribution. In practice

this is the favoured choice of WOW players. However what's more intriguing about this virtual economic model, is that the developers did not directly implement these models, they opted for a more anarchic, systematic approach to player interactions and commodities. It proved that even a community such as those who play WOW, perceived even within the hardcore gamer community to be typically hermetic, escapist, and deluded culture of addicts, that they could participate in this model, which proved to be the most effective over all others. Citarella affirms this, by calling upon 15+ years worth of case studies of the game's virtual economy.

This calls to question - have utopian ideals been appropriated by the entertainment industry? The developers have harnessed the potential to profit off of a market for electronic escapism, but have they achieved something beyond this, by giving the consumer an illusion of empowerment through collectivised in-game initiatives? This certainly makes one wonder, if a symbiosis between users could form without relying on the free market as an organisational system. We know the developers didn't intend to make a collaborative model intentionally more rewarding than an individualistic guild model.

Looking at other formats, we see the trend has now spread to previously offline environments. Following the global lockdown, there was a push to revive the arts sector by making it virtually accessible via immersive VR and screen-based technologies. Collaborative art-forms being subjugated by the broadcasting or hosting software services will ultimately create additional costs for the arts sector. (gonna put some examples here soon)

New simulation technologies are colonising our lived spaces, promising a form of digital utopia, where we can change the illusion of reality. The cultural expectations of VR and AR, regarding the purchase of an apparent utopian event, experienced in the moment, conflicts paradoxically with the cultural ideologies of capitalism. By this I mean, it has the desire to create dissatisfaction, shortly after the moment of experiencing a product, in order to fuel the need for more consumption; therefore, maximising the continued profit margins of companies that operate within these dominant paradigms of rampant consumerism. (Taiwo, O, 2020)

Olufemi Taiwo has been awarded the Frantz Fanon Book Award of the Caribbean Philosophical Association in 2015, for his 2010 publication “how colonialism Preempted modernity”. He currently lectures at the university of Winchester in performing arts and street performance. Someone with a background in performance should be considered an authority in speaking against the commodification of experience. Disrupting “the media ecologies under scrutiny here are also the site of a vast array of commercial, political, libidinal, economic, and rhetorical functions.” (Olson 2011) The idea of media-ecologies are somewhat central to this essay. Throughout it’s dissemination, new media has been condemned as illusory. We know many of the theorists previously mentioned in this essay - Ito, Olson, Vierkant, all confirmed that the conversation around new media was always overly concerned with it’s aesthetic and not at all with it’s applications.

In 1977, The Satellite Arts Project demonstrated that performances could be brought together using broadcast media. ‘Telecollaborative research’ was pioneered by artists Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, to try and create works that went beyond the confines of geographical boundaries. It was an important milestone, proving it was possible for an outsider group to perform on a multinational level, without the assistance of any major state or corporate broadcasting networks (There was initial funding provided by National Endowment for the Arts, and corporation for public broadcasting).

Later on in 1987, “The Max Headroom Incident” would become etched into the lore of alternative media history. At the independent WGN-TV network in Chicago, there was a sudden interruption. The content of the disruption/performance was secondary to the technical feats that were accomplished by the hackers.

Later again in 1989, the Romanian TV Revolution was a demonstration of both semi-organised violence, and a very sophisticated endeavour of tele-activism. Unlike the prior two examples, this obviously took seed in Eastern Europe, and involved thousands of participants, signifying the end of the Ceausescu regimen. “In the 1980s, tele-revolution became a modern revolutionary form.” (Dana Mustata, 2012) This was a triumph of what could be considered media solidarity. Mustata explains this as such:

“This notion indicates that dominant media representations conceal their constructed nature, conflate the variety of agencies at work and thus advance a view on the media as if they were «the society» itself. Watching television, reading the newspaper or using

the internet have become such integral parts of society that these media have gained the status of what Latour would call a «black-box», referring to successful social networks that have stabilised and endured over time, becoming a natural part of everyday life.” (Mustata)

Since the Protestant reformation, reality has been governed by mass media. Reality can therefore be considered a social construct. If one party or corporation dominates the mass media, we have no discourse or amnesty. In reaching this point of ‘reality’, we’ve extrapolated our natural conditions or norms to an inorganic stage. “The notion that man is destined to dominate nature is by no means a universal feature of human culture. If anything, this notion is almost completely alien to the outlook of so called primitive or preliterate communities.” (Bookchin) The facile argument that a so called “Human-Nature” is a universally affective trait, and thereby accountable for our reality, must be re-evaluated.

Anti-Diversity in The Network

The post-internet discourse came to a grinding halt after Kholeif's publication. Many of the earlier socially engaged digital artworks were later eclipsed by counter-social, monolithic developments backed by the blue chip art establishments. High culture came to a delayed realisation of digital art's potential. They seemed to reward these works on their aesthetic merits, but failed to acknowledge the overall role of the network in the conversation. Web 2.0 began reaching it's climax. They critically overlooked the idea of municipality in the network. Artie Vierkant's work is a manifestation of the turn, "image objects" was seen at the time to be an invasion of digital image within the physical art space, prompting galleries to adapt to new parameters, celebrating a new medium. Now looking back, remediation arguably did not take place. This gesture may have been ironic, considering Vierkant still played a role in the discourse.

"New Media is here denounced as a mode too narrowly focused on the specific workings of novel technologies, rather than a sincere exploration of cultural shifts in which that technology plays only a small role." (Vierkant)

The Art market eventually came around to the digital. Software engineering is supposedly one of our species' greatest triumphs. It transcends geo-geographical boundaries and enables machines to perform beyond human limitations. It can be privately developed, but ultimately, anything programable/decrypt-able will influence the next generation of coders. In theory, it is a sustainable and egalitarian process, but in actuality, software engineering teams do not uphold these ideals, and arguably lack any agency to support initiatives that exist outside of the free-market's demands, which has undoubtedly pre-empted investment in vital infrastructure and welfare. In the U.S., the top 'earners' have seen a 40% increase in their wealth during the pandemic.

Disparity within this industry as of 2021 shows, when the stats reveal that it's made up of 91% cis-male workers, 5% cis-females, and less than 5% of people from the queer spectrum ([statista.com](https://www.statista.com)). On grounds of race, the industry hires 52.3% white, 33% Asian, 7% Latinx, and 5% Black workers. This is obviously no natural coincidence, when evidence

accounts for male software workers to “openly promote racism, sexism, and false notions of meritocracy, which is well documented in studies of Silicon Valley and other tech corridors.” (Safiya Umoja Noble, 2018).

Further evidence shows that having such a homogeneously masculine institution creates so called “community smells”. A somewhat bizarre term, seemingly specific to software development (an industry term, as opposed to an academic concept), the term represents various organisational issues within a project team. These can include the “Organisational Silo”, “Lone Wolf”, and “Bottleneck”, (all relating to communication deficit) and supposedly create a sub-optimal production out-put. This reveals a level of consciousness within the market that deliberately ignores or avoids addressing gender and racial insensitivities. The approach within the industry to solving this problem actually involves mathematical calculations, and designated predictive algorithms, one example being the study *Predicting Community Smells’ Occurrence on Individual Developers by Sentiments* conducted at Shanghai Normal University. Their conclusion of validity found that “The mix of manually labeled emotions and automatically detected sentiments in the dataset may hinder the practical value of our model, as the evaluation of sentiments is not fully automatic.”

The immaterial world that that exists in itself, thrives on it’s capacity to immerse the user. The term “immersion” when used in a gaming context implies how effectively the user can engage with an encompassing reality or consciousness. This now overflows into social, and corporate contexts. These immersive worlds have become dominated by a male, Eurocentric, heteronormative user basis. There are unprecedented dangers surrounding this.

the model that articulates the architectonics of Westernised social environments, imposed particular knowledge frames in order to organise the construction and production of space; which was never initially designed for women, enslaved and colonised people to be free. It is no wonder that racial profiling persists as unconscious bias in our institutions. They are embedded in the DNA of its construction during Europe’s age of reason. (Taiwo)

The case made by Olufemi Taiwo, uses the historical example of the European enlightenment to show how previous Eurocentric cultural triumphs such as law and

democracy, still undermined the sovereignty of women and POC (and I would include that queer people were also neglected and even targeted by these institutions). In the case of Women in gaming, one could argue it regresses as far back as the dawn of christianity until the end of the inquisitor's trials. An analysis of the work of Margaret Alice Murray, namely *God of Witches* and *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* will show that women in tech do not resemble a Neo-pagan sect of any kind, however they seem to share the same age old predicament. In 2018, one of Google's software engineers, in a similar style to the inquisitors, James Dalmore's "anti diversity" memo/manifesto was put forward and backed by several members of staff. This controversy highlighted that anti-social bigotry characteristic of the relatively recent web-neurosis wasn't only exclusive to unregulated/casual online spaces, but in fact present within the professional environment of a leading tech corporation.

"Humankind does not submit passively to the power of nature. It takes control over this power. This process is not an internal or subjective one. It takes place objectively in practice, once women cease to be viewed as mere sexual beings, once we look beyond their biological functions and become conscious of their weight as an active social force. What's more, woman's consciousness of herself is not only a product of her sexuality. It reflects her position as determined by the economic structure of society, which in turn expresses the level reached by humankind in technological development and the relations between classes." (Thomas Sankara, 1988)

All the while we've enabled a biased system to transfer its tendencies and fortunes into the next great technological epoch. You couldn't rationally fathom such an absurd course of development, and yet you wouldn't be surprised by how cyclic the predicament is - an endlessly unraveling dialogue between art, society, and technology. Yet we depend on this medium as much as we are distrustful - "the first thing that humanity has built that humanity doesn't understand, the largest experiment in anarchy that we have ever had" (Eric Schmidt). Ironically this statement came from a former CEO of Google. Bookchin said it was the goal of social ecology to oust such abuses.

social ecology must demonstrate that modern systems of production, distribution, and promotion of goods and needs are grossly irrational as well as anti-ecological.

Whosoever sidesteps the conflicting alternatives between a potentially bountiful nature and an exploitive use of technics serves merely as an apologist for the prevailing irrationality. (Bookchin)

Looking back at the 2000s, and 2010s, we can unearth thousands of examples of reactionary digital bigotry. It's characterised by a mood or motion coming from within a broken system that attracts a repressed and regressive type of user. The works of Nietzsche amounted to being one of the founding philosophies of the third reich, not by their reason for being, but by the co-option of the school of Nihilism from 'liberal hands'. Highly controversial author Angela Nagel has described Nietzsche as "one of the main thinkers being channeled by rightist chan culture knowingly or otherwise" To verify this, Whyte's *Uses and Abuses of Nietzsche in the Third Reich* accounts for how a reactionary hive mind such as this becomes emergent:

"National Socialism evolved from an image of Nietzsche created by a generation of right-wing thinkers in the inter-war period. Baumeier's *Nietzsche: The Philosopher and Politician*, which set the tone for the politicisation of Nietzsche during the 1930s and 1940s, had several historical precedents." (Whyte, 2008)

Baumeier, a key figure in the design of third reich ideology and propaganda, forged the dubious justification of Nazism using ideas appropriated from Nietzsche's school. Among his other principles, Baumeier also held the ethos that Racialisms should be a grounding constituent of the educational sciences. By eliminating the German Communist movement, and through subsequent destruction of literature, arts, and cultures, Fascism was locally impossible to oppose. Wilhelm Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism* has renewed relevance today. Nagel's account of 4chan's /b persona, one of the founding ideal's of the contemporary alt-right, perfectly fits within the imbalanced entity of the freudian 'unconscious'. A fetishisation of the animal in man is a dominant characteristic of the contemporary right. The lexicon of pre-internet literature, music, and film chan culture tends to co-opt and reference will often hone in on this persona - like the antagonist Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (2000), or the work of Hunter S. Thompson (or allot more commonly alluded to is the film version with Johnny Depp) opening with the quote from the Duke himself "He who makes a beast of himself, gets rid of the pains of being a man". Equivocally this brings an aura of the transgression of the 60s counter culture,

through to the present day alternative right, which is concurrent with Nagle's views on the use of such aesthetics in their politics. Either way, they seem to have missed the point.

This liberalism lays stress upon its ethics for the purpose of holding in suppression the 'monster in man', our layer of 'secondary drives', the Freudian 'unconscious'. The natural sociability of the deepest third layer, the core layer, is foreign to the liberal. He deplores the perversion of the human character and seeks to overcome it by means of ethical norms, but the social catastrophes of the twentieth century show that he did not get very far with this approach. (Reich, 1933)

Pop-Psychologist Jordan B. Peterson is arguably today's Beumler. Fronting as an academic within mainstream entertainment channels (namely YouTube and Reddit), he embezzles 'theories' with principles borrowed from self-help literature, and criticises the left, tending to draw from what Reich describes as the liberal's ethics - "perversion of human character". As an antidote he implores to his followers to 'clean their rooms'. One can see clearly, that his most popular publication *12 Rules for Life* bears eerily similar resemblance to Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson's 1938 *12 Step Program*. The archetypal structure of a self help network can often become blurred with that of a cult.

"the degenerate and the nihilistic, is not being challenged by the emergence of this new online right. Instead, the emergence of this new online right is the full coming to fruition of the transgressive anti-moral style, its final detachment from any egalitarian philosophy of the left or Christian morality of the right" (Nagle, 2017)

Some examples from the 2010s will reveal the misapprehensions of liberal identity politics, and how they constitute as abuses of solidarity. In 2012, The social media driven campaign "Kony 2012", generated mass hysteria over the supposed missing children, drafted as mercenaries fighting for Ugandan warmonger Joseph Kony. The campaign was a viral success, despite being fuelled by misinformation, and profit driven. In 2015, "Pray for Paris" was a campaign for the victims of a Jihadi bombing, working at the offices of reactionary publication "Charlie Hebdo". It prompted users on social media to post "je suis Charlie". This appeared as a solidarity movement on the surface, when in fact only promoted Islamaphobia, following on from France's anti-muslim policy making, such as banning hijab wear, and other symbols associated with Islam. Last but not least, the 'Black

out Tuesday' campaign. In lieu of the riots after George Floyd's death was documented over social media, during the hysteria of 2020, many users, from celebrities to ordinary people, posted a black square on their instagram. It arguably obfuscated critical content from the people - vital evidence against the excessive forces of corrupt law enforcers, and factual coverage of overall community damages. This widened the racial schism within the US arguably, further marginalising black victims, bearing insufferable witness to white saviours, and their performative charitable gestures in a time of community crisis. These three examples reveal critical abuses or misappropriations of Digital solidarity.

Conclusion

The Post-Internet, a once exciting conversation, has dimmed. Art once had the potential to instigate conversations and rupture social norms. The role of the artist in an increasingly networked world, seems to have fallen behind as of late. The artist can only express a synopsis of the conversation after the contemporary moment has taken place. Technology is now so vast and pervasive in all sectors, that it seems nearly impossible for an artist to pre-suppose any essence of the future, or the now. The liberal voter majority denies human intervention in human behaviour. This is now determined by algorithmic sorting mechanisms - Allot of our decisions, individual, and on a mass level, over the past few years has been instructed to us, partially or entirely by the internet. The people's professional and personal lives are powered by exchanges of information. Ideas are continually recycled, originality doesn't matter, the more we become estranged to depending on one another.

If organic society has evolved into mechanical society and ultimately resulted in such a claustrophobic digital society, is there a possible resolve to our predicament? Decidedly, without excessive private ownership. Without environmental abuses, western decadence and all the underserved excesses and subsequent abuses of western hegemony. We must compensate the proletariat, for labouring over the development of the grid. The very same infrastructure that has been privatised, bought and sold. We must standardise network infrastructure across the global south and increase regulations. By de-privatising the internet and targeting exploitative online services. Demonetising virtual spaces would be a first step. Virtual land ownership and crypto trading should be outlawed - lest we allow neo-colonial powers to molest the physical and visual world.

Responding to recent discussions regarding resource based economies for the future - divulgence of eco-socialism would make a sensible intervention. A utilitarian outlook on climate change and the economy reveals links between the class struggle and the exploitation of the earth. There must be reparations for the damage the euro-centric

patriarchal hierarchies of statesmen and corporate elites have inflicted. Art and life after the internet have reached infirm states of affairs. To prevent further abuses, it must be asserted that money is no digital object if money already has digital value. The race between the corporate take on web 3, versus the small time crypto libertarian won't endow any good for our species collectively. The alternative right and mainstream conservative body have always worked hand in hand, despite their surface level differences. The grounding point that the post-internet critics argued is that a digital object shouldn't be fetishised for it's reason for being. The fluidity between the digital and the actual is a mirage. Our society's utilities - Light and Electricity are requisite in our lives and even still, are a privilege. They'll become weaponised, against us if we allocate them imaginary values, and to the adjudicator of these values go the spoils.

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