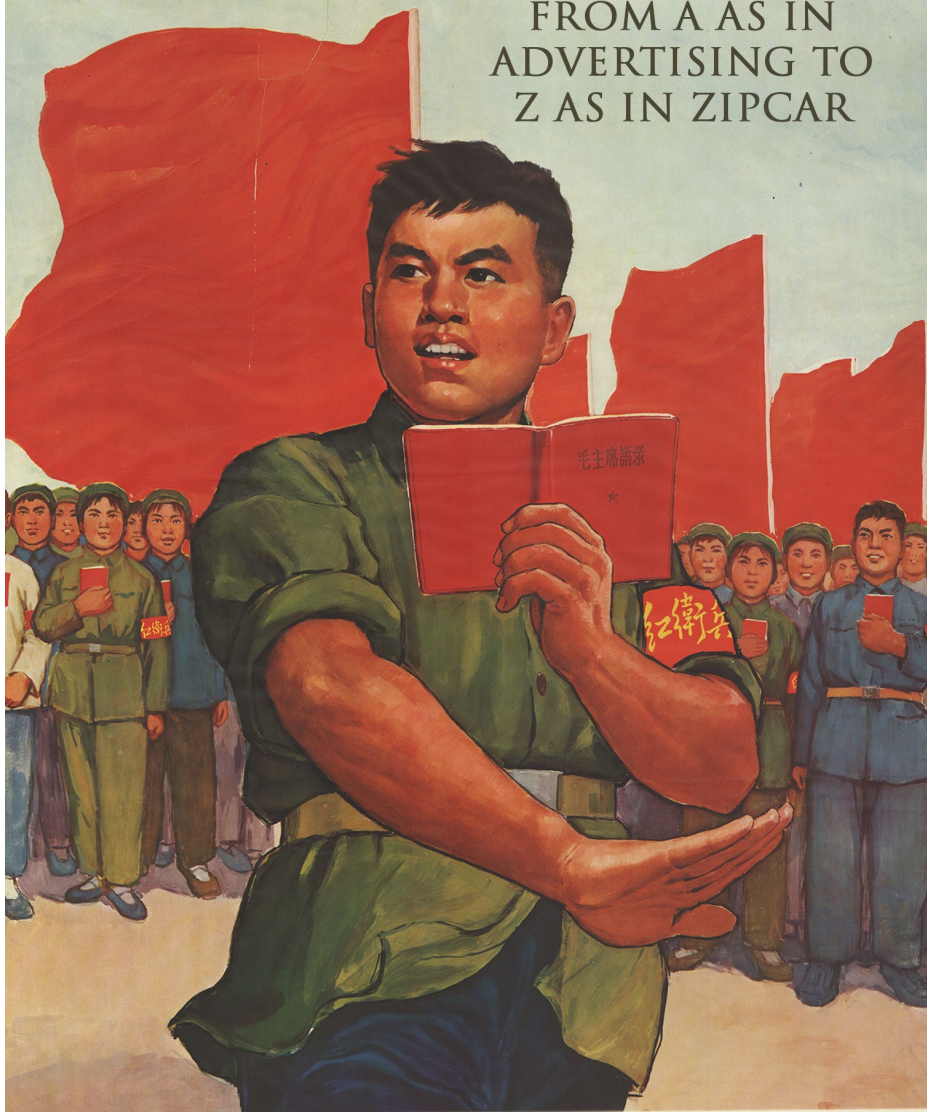# THE INTERNET IDEOLOGY

FROM A AS IN ADVERTISING TO Z AS IN ZIPCAR

MASSIMO MORUZZI

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The Internet Ideology

From A as in Advertising to Z as in Zipcar

From the same author:

What Happened To Advertising? What Would Gossage Do?

Cover based on:

Criticize the Old World and Build a New World with Mao Zedong. Thought as a Weapon, 1966.

BG E15/699 / Landsberger, Stefan R., International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Table of contents

This book is dedicated to the memory of
Wanda Deuso.

I miss you.

If thought corrupts language, language can
also corrupt thought.

– George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*

INTRO

Regardless of the question, the Internet is the answer. Or so we are told.

It seemed perfectly normal to Jeff Jarvis, a famous American journalist, to ask: "What Would Google Do?" if the company based in Mountain View were put in charge of the public sector. It apparently didn't occur to him that the rules and goals the public sector lives by are, or at least should be, different from those of a private company.

According to many, the Internet, this jumble of servers and communication protocols, is the greatest invention ever. But is it really so? And wasn't the same thing said of inventions such as the telegraph, the radio, movie pictures, television or nuclear energy?

Today the Internet is winning. To the point that it seems *natural* that it should win. But is it so? Does the Internet have to win? Is the Internet's impact positive for society?

Perhaps it's time to clear our minds and talk about the Ideology of the Internet. Because Orwell had it right: When language is not clear, it corrupts our thoughts.

ADVERTISING

The vast majority of the services we use on the web are backed by advertising.

Which is a bit like saying that you are the product being sold to advertisers.

Is it really advertising? Advertising is a public promise made to a large group of people. Which is not what happens on the Internet, where hyper-targeting means that we have no idea if the same message and promise is being made to other people or not. [1]

How does this "advertising" work? A long time ago, pundits talked about "interactive advertising". For reasons nobody ever cared to explain, the same consumers who went to the bathroom during commercials were supposed to want to "interact" with online ads.

It didn't happen. Hardly anybody clicked. [2]

With the advent of social media, the new gospel is about the "conversations" companies

are supposed to have with their clients. But not many clients seem interested. [3]

And even if they were, Facebook started charging companies for the privilege. [4]

[1] Ambler, Tim and Ann Hollier. *The Waste in Advertising Is the Part That Works.*

[2] Chaffey, Dave. *Average Display Advertising Clickthrough Rates.*

[3] Garfield, Bob and Doug Levy. *Can't Buy Me Like: How Authentic Customer Connections Drive Superior Results.*

[4] Baer, Jay. *This Chart Explains the Reachpocalypse and Why Facebook is Laughing All the Way to the Bank.*

APPS

There's an app for that!

There's an app to help you become more productive, one to tell everything about yourself to everybody (hint: It's the one with the blue "f"), one to share photos, another one to chat and more still that track how many times you run, what you eat, how many times you go to the loo or have sex, what you read, what you like, what you should buy etc.

Once you realise you can't live without your phone and check it 150 times a day, you can download an app that helps you curb your dependence from your phone. [1]

And another one to help you find yourself and meditate. There's an app for everything.

Except for brewing coffee, unfortunately.

Hence the idea that everything can be solved with an app. Poverty? Political apathy? Lack of community? Obesity? There's an app for that!

Milan created *Not2 4get* to geo-localise your dear ones at municipal graveyards. [2]

Barcelona has 30 different apps. Perhaps it's time to admit we have gone too far. [3]

[1] Eyal, Nir. *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products.*

[2] The worst name ever for an app.
https://appadvice.com/app/not2-4get/1049314604

[3] Aplicacions municipals. *Ajuntament.barcelona.cat/apps/ca*

BIG DATA

Silicon Valley has successfully imposed their own storytelling on *Big Data*.

Do *Big Pharma*, *Big Food* or *Big Oil* make you think about huge companies whose interests are seldom aligned with your own? Not so with Big Data. Big Data seems neutral. [1]

And yet, we are witnessing the largest collection of personal data ever.

Billions of people are being spied on every day by hundreds of *Ad Tech* companies, starting with two of the world's largest companies, Google and Facebook.

High on optimism, we seem to think that it's worth it, and that data will solve all sorts of problems. What kind of problems? For example those politics should take care of.

When a 25 year-old dude who looked like the singer of punk rock band *Green Day* killed 12 people in a movie theatre in Colorado, what

did newspapers do? Did they campaign to make it harder to buy assault weapons than to buy a can of beer in a supermarket?

Neah. The venerable Wall Street Journal asked: "Can data mining stop the killing?" [2]

[1] Morozov, Evgeny. *The Internet Ideology: Why We Are Allowed to Hate Silicon Valley.*

[2] Jenkins, Holman. *Can Data Mining Stop the Killing?*

BOB

On June 6, 1968, Robert Francis Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles.

Bob had been Attorney General and a key figure in his brother JFK's Administration, backing the Civil Rights Movement and the fight against organised crime.

November 22, 1963: President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. February 21, 1965: Malcolm X was assassinated in New York City.

On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. Robert Kennedy was campaigning in Indianapolis for the primaries of the Democratic party. He took to the streets and gave an impromptu speech, urging African Americans not to riot.

On June 5 he won the primaries in California, but was shot that night and died the day after.

A year earlier, Ronald Reagan, a former actor who was in favour of the war in Vietnam, had

become Governor of California.

The Sixties, the decade in which the United States were a young, prosperous and exceptional country brimming with energy and enthusiasm were coming to a close. [1]

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[1] "There are those who look at things the way they are and ask: Why? I dream of things that never were, and ask: Why not?" – Robert Francis Kennedy.

CLOUD

The Cloud is great, isn't it? But isn't it "somebody else's computer"?

And not your neighbour's computer, on whose hard disk you can keep an encrypted copy of your files with a service like Storj. [1]

No, the cloud is somebody else's computer – for example former Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice's, who is on Dropbox's board – on which you keep all your files.

Unencrypted.

In California.

Which may remind us of *California Dreaming* or *Surfin' USA*, but which is not a place where they care too much about your privacy.

The Cloud is much more. Nicholas Carr says it's the *World Wide Computer*. [2]

It's the infrastructure thanks to which Big Data

corporations can register on their servers your every move: where you are, what you search on Google, what you read, what you share on social media, and soon what is in your fridge or how you drive your car.

We never ask: Is this the future we want?

[1] Storj is the storage layer for the Internet. *Storj.io*

[2] Carr, Nicholas. *The Glass Cage: How Our Computers Are Changing Us.*

CROWD

According to the ideology of *web2.0*, anything written by the commoners, also called "user-generated content", is better than what is created by experts in their fields.

Book reviews, movie reviews, restaurant reviews.

Anything and everything, really. Remember the irrational crowds? Put them behind a computer, and you can trust them. [1]

Similarly, conferences are less interesting. Today we have Barcamps and Unconfs.

Even TED conferences have become more "democratic". But have they become better? [2]

We live in an age in which everybody should have their say. Except in politics, where any idea that goes against the mainstream, regardless if it's coming from the left or from the right, is immediately labelled "populism".

So, are "new voices" emerging? You bet.

But is what they have to say interesting? That's a different matter. Some seem sceptical. [3]

[1] Le Bon, Gustave. *Psychologie des foules.*

[2] Brown, Mick. *Meet Chris Anderson, The Man Behind TED Talks.*

[3] Bratton, Benjamin. *New Perspectives – What's Wrong with TED Talks?*

DEMOCRACY

How many times have we heard that the Internet is playing a positive role in helping democracy spread? But is there proof?

The Internet will spread direct democracy! [1]

In Switzerland, they have been running their country on direct democracy long before the Internet. Has any other country gone down the same path in the last 20 years?

We were told that social media would help free the world of nasty dictatorships. Especially in countries rich in oil.

Remember the protests that shook Iran in 2009? "It's happening thanks to Twitter!". Not true. Most of the accounts tweeting against the regime were based not in Iran, but in the US, in Switzerland and in Turkey. [2]

What about Trump? How many people use Twitter in Ohio or in rural Pennsylvania?

But if the New York Times or CNN give his wacky tweets undue coverage, that helps.

My personal heroes are a group of teenagers from a small city in Macedonia who dropped out of school to run pro-Trump fake news websites full time. Because it was easier to dupe and make money off Trump supporters than to dupe Clinton supporters. [3]

[1] Damiris, Niklas and Helga Wild. *The Internet: A New Agora?*

[2] Esfandiari, Golnaz. *The Twitter Devolution.*

[3] Silverman, Craig and Lawrence Alexander. *How Teens In The Balkans Are Duping Trump Supporters With Fake News.*

DISRUPTION

There's nothing Silicon Valley loves more than disruption.

If we were optimistic, we could say that disruption is akin to Schumpeter's creative destruction. [1]

Disruption is driven by technology; by deregulation; or by ignoring the rules.

Technology: If people start "informing" themselves using Facebook, the future will probably not look very bright for newspapers.

Deregulation: If the government loosens regulation in a given field, fewer rules will lead to more innovation. Sometimes it works.

The Far West: New companies enter a market, be it rooms for rent or urban transport, and simply ignore the rules, right, wrong or old-fashioned as they may be.

But what is left for the "disrupted"?

Nothing. The disrupted are little more than negative externalities of history. "Progress" cannot and will not be stopped.

William Gibson said: "The future is here – it's just not evenly distributed".

Nor is it distributed evenly. [2]

[1] Schumpeter, Joseph. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy.*

[2] Gibson was interested in saying that the future would arrive no matter what. Perhaps it is time to give some thought to how this *future* is affecting our societies.

ECOMMERCE

In the '90s, Al Gore "invented the Internet".

Well, not really. [1]

But the Clinton Administration did approve the "Internet Tax Freedom Act", which gave preferential treatment to online retailers. [2]

We can get products from the other side of the planet delivered right to our doorstep.

Nice! But what if local shops close down and our urban centres empty out?

Are we using more or less fuel to distribute products? What about traffic jams? [3]

Should we keep giving preferential tax treatment to companies that have become some of the largest retailers in the world?

Is distribution becoming too concentrated? Do these companies have too much control over what we buy, eat and read?

Lastly, are we creating quality jobs or mostly dreadful jobs in warehouses?

Apparently, none of this matters.

[1] O'Carroll, Eoin. *Political Misquotes: The 10 Most Famous Things Never Actually Said: I invented the Internet.*

[2] Fuller, John. *What is the Internet Tax Freedom Act?*

[3] Humes, Edward. *Online Shopping Was Supposed to Keep People Out of Traffic. It Only Made Things Worse*

EXTRACTION

"Data is the new oil", according to *The Economist*. [1]

Sounds perfectly normal, doesn't it?

But who is getting drilled so that this new oil can be extracted?

You.

Do they have your consent?

Shoshana Zuboff, a researcher from *Harvard Business School*, says that Big Data is not a natural process. Big Data are not generated, and much less stored, on their own.

We live in a new economic system, one that she calls *Surveillance Capitalism*. [2]

Everything we do online is registered and matched with data from other sources such as banks, payment systems, supermarkets, airlines, hospitals and security cameras.

Any time we talk about extraction, Zuboff says, it should be clear that there's no consent and no reciprocity. Someone is extracting other people's data and exploiting them.

And hardly anybody is worried about it.

[1] The Economist. *The World's Most Valuable Resource Is No Longer Oil, But Data.*

[2] Zuboff, Shoshana. *Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization.*

FAILURE

War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength.

And, of course: Failure is Success.

In many ways, Silicon Valley's attitude towards failure looks refreshing.

And it's hard not to agree with "fail fast".

But when very successful people try to find at all cost some failure they can talk about, one can't help but ask: Aren't they overdoing it? [1]

Silicon Valley is this century's Hollywood. [2]

Thousands of ambitious young people flock to California every year. The good-looking ones head to LA. Those who speak in *Python* to their girlfriends head to the Bay Area.

And just like Hollywood, Silicon Valley needs to accept and even glorify failure.

Because failure is part of life. If you don't make it, someone else will.

The bookies always win.

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[1] Do the small guys get to speak at *Fail-Con*, like at Barcamps? Or do only the big names and the big failures get their chance, like in "real" conferences? ;-)

[2] Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers, *Into The Great Wide Open*. Eddie waited till he finished high school / He went to Hollywood, got a tattoo / He met a girl out there with a tattoo too / The future was wide open...

GAMIFICATION

You can redesign just about anything to look like a videogame. [1]

And one of the rules of Silicon Valley is that if it can be done, it will be done.

You can give away points, prizes and badges to those who read about politics; to those who study a foreign language; and to those who exercise and eat in a healthy way.

But does it work? Or does it work only in the short term, when the game part seems fun, while actually hampering the establishment of the desired behaviour? [2]

Does it make sense? Why should everything be like a game? Can it become addictive? Is it acceptable to force those who work in a certain organisation to "play"?

Morozov says that if everything is a game, we become consumers rather than citizens. [3]

We go from "The starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" to "If I help that old lady cross the street, I will overtake my friend or colleague in the standings".

And lastly: What if gamification's goal were precisely to avoid an open discussion and a critique of the things that we gamify? [4]

[1] Bogost, Ian. *Gamification Is Bullshit.*

[2] Fleming, Nic. *Gamification: Is It Game Over?*

[3] Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*, Chapter 8.

[4] Smoleń, Michał. *Gamification As Creation of a Social System, in: Kopeć, Jarosław and Krzysztof Pacewicz. Gamification. Critical Approaches*, page 65.

HIPPIES

Between the mid-1960s and 1973, no fewer than a million Americans, most of them young, white, educated and relatively well-off, quit the cities and the class and racial war that was brewing there and headed not to a house in suburbia with a nice front yard, but to the countryside, for an experience in communal living and sex, drugs and rock'n'roll.

In 1968, Stewart Brand created *The Whole Earth Catalog* to make available to them the information about the technological tools needed to create independent and sustainable communities. This Amazon.com of the *Back to the Land Movement* carried a very American message: "With access to the info we need, we can make the world a better place". [1]

The Communes did't work out. They failed in the art of taking collective decisions, in politics, perhaps because they were more interested in a different and more personal change: "Why don't you free your mind instead?", as the Beatles were singing. [2]

As the dream came to a close, computers and cyberspace become the new Frontier.

But things ended up taking a different and more consumerist turn. The Hippie-van eventually made way to an app you can use to summon "Your Private Driver". [3]

[1] Turner, Fred. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, Chapter 3.

[2] The Beatles. *Revolution.*

[3] Uber. *Your Private Driver.*

IDEOLOGY

   The first person to give a negative connotation to the word "ideology" was Napoleon: The "idéologues" were abstract intellectuals, bereft of any sense of reality.

According to Karl Marx, instead, an ideology is the mix of ideas and doctrines imposed by a certain social class to justify a system of production that suits their interests.

Defeated in politics (see: Bob) and in their social experiment (see: Hippies), the dreamers of the American Left turned their eyes to cyberspace in the hope of a better world.

They started preaching "What the Internet wants", as if the Internet itself, and not certain groups of people and their economic interests, were rooting for certain policies. [1]

This peculiar mix of optimism, technological determinism and economic individualism is called the *Californian Ideology*: Thanks to the web, we will all be creative entrepreneurs! [2]

Except those who aren't.

The digital revolution is also TaskRabbit, where the "rabbits" are unqualified workers who survive by doing small chores for those who are part of the real creative class. [3]

[1] Kelly, Kevin. *What Technology Wants.*

[2] Barbrook and Cameron. *The Californian Ideology.*

[3] TaskRabbit is a marketplace that matches freelance labor with local demand, allowing consumers to find immediate help with everyday tasks, Wikipedia says.

INTERNET OF THINGS

Unsure of why your bread toaster should "speak" with your fridge?

You're not alone. But that's not the plan.

The plan is that your fridge should "speak" with the Cloud where they are gathering Big Data about you, and that your insurance company will be able to see what's in your fridge, if healthy food or junk food, so that they can adjust your premium accordingly.

Large corporations have understood that consumers won't fight back for their rights and will try to gather as much information about them as they can while they can.

In the private sphere, this hoarding of data is called the *Internet of Things*.

In the public sphere, it's called the *Smart City*.

How much data? In what Cisco now calls the *Internet of Everything*, the unit of measure is

the zettabyte, or a trillion gigabytes. [1]

Everything will send data about you. Your fridge, your vacuum cleaner, your running apps, your car, your "smart" TV etc. [2]

Bruce Sterling says we are facing "all-purpose electronic automation through digital surveillance by wireless broadband". [3]

[1] Cisco. *The Zettabyte Era: Trends and Analysis*.

[2] Hill, Kashmir and Surya Mattu. *The House That Spied on Me*.

[3] Sterling, Bruce. *The Epic Struggle of the Internet of Things*.

INVISIBLE HAND

Remember Adam Smith's invisible hand? We live under a new one today.

We live in a society dominated by a series of black boxes: "People worry that computers will get too smart and take over the world, but the real problem is that they're too stupid and they've already taken over the world". [1]

We are told that things are the way they are because the Internet wants them that way.

But the algorithm is a political choice! [2]

Algorithms determine the results we get back from a query on a search engine or the news we end up reading on social media.

Who decided how trending topics work on Twitter? Why is it harder for a topic that already made it to the top to get back there?

Does it make sense to push tweets that get traction outside of the cluster where they

were generated? There are no right and wrong answers to questions of this kind.

Which means these are political choices. [3]

[1] Domingos, Pedro. *The Master Algorithm.*

[2] Vannini, Walter. *DataKnightmare.eu*

[3] Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism, Chapter 5.*

JEFFERSON

Thomas, the third President of the United States. Not George, the African-American entrepreneur of *The Jeffersons*. [1]

Thomas Jefferson is a hero of the American Right because of his idea of a Republic of free and self-sufficient individuals.

In 1803, Jefferson bought Louisiana from France, doubled the extension of the United States and distributed 50 acres of land along the Frontier to anybody who asked for them.

But the American Right seldom mentions that Jefferson owned 5,000 acres. And not along the rugged Frontier, but in Virginia, where almost 200 slaves worked on his property. [2]

When computer enthusiasts started talking about cyberspace as the new Frontier, they loved to say that the Internet would allow everybody freedom of expression.

Today everybody can open their farm – I

mean, their blog or their Twitter account –
along the Frontier. Being read and heard,
however, is a different matter.

Or perhaps it's not a Frontier anymore. Just
take a look at the list of people who have the
most followers on Twitter. They are all
famous in the "real" world. [3]

[1] Jefferson, George. *En.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Jefferson*

[2] Barbrook and Cameron. *The Californian Ideology.*

[3] The 100 people with the most followers on Twitter.
Twittercounter.com/pages/100

LONG TAIL

The phrase *Long Tail* was coined by Chris Anderson to describe an economic model like those of Amazon and Netflix, in which revenues coming from selling only a few units of millions of *niche* products are supposedly as important as blockbuster revenues. [1]

Anderson seemed to imply that a new *Renaissance* for cultural production was behind the corner, as millions of people would be encouraged to come forward with their books, their songs etc. But will these people live off their creative work?

Not according to Anita Elberse, author of a book called *Blockbusters*, who reminds us that, in 2011, 94% of the songs on iTunes had fewer than a hundred downloads. [2]

Not according to Suzanne Moore, who says the digital economy is like *X Factor*, a terrible game in which someone may become famous, usually for a mere 15 minutes. [3]

Not according to Mark Mulligan, a founding analyst at *MIDiA Research*, who says that the top 1% of musicians take home 77% of the total revenues in the music industry. [4]

Not according to Jonny Geller, head of *Curtis Brown*, an editorial agency that discovers new authors in the UK, who tells us that 96% of book sales come from 4% of authors. [5]

[1] Anderson, Chris. *The Origins of "The Long Tail".*

[2] Elberse, Anita. *Blockbusters: Hit-making, Risk-taking, and the Big Business of Entertainment.*

[3] Moore, Suzanne. *In the Digital Economy, We'll Soon All Be Working for Free – and I Refuse.*

[4] Mulligan, Mark. *The Death of the Long Tail.*

[5] Levy, Judith. *J.K. Rowling and the Death of the Long Tail.*

LSD

LSD is one of the *enabling technologies* of hippie communes. Lysergic acid is used to free oneself from one's own body, in order to have a real communion with the world.

Or something like that.

With the advent of cyberspace, it's back to the hippies: we need to free ourselves from our bodies and from the material world. [1]

And politics is always considered the problem: "Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel...". [2]

John Perry Barlow's *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* is beautiful and poetic. But have we succeeded in making the world "more humane and fair than the world your governments have made before"?

Taking LSD is once again hip in the Bay Area. In small doses, or so we are told. [3]

Or did you really think that anyone could see over 100 "unicorns" without any help?

But the biggest irony of all is that mainstream America is now saying of Facebook what it used to say about LSD: "God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains". [4]

[1] Turner, Fred. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, Chapter 4.

[2] Barlow, John Perry. *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace.*

[3] Hogan, Emma. *Turn On, Tune In, Drop By the Office.*

[4] Ong, Thuy. *Sean Parker on Facebook: 'God Only Knows What It's Doing to Our Children's Brains'.*

MANIFEST DESTINY

When Texas became independent from Mexico in 1836, many in Washington thought they should annex it to the United States.

In *Manifest Destiny*, John O'Sullivan wrote: "It is the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of our great experiment of liberty and self government". [1]

In the '60s, Bob Dylan made fun of this idea with his song *With God On Our Side*.

But our current prophets are very serious about it. Marc Andreessen, co-founder of Netscape and a famous venture capitalist, said in 2011 that software is "eating the world". [2]

The prophets of the Internet of Things say that everything has to be connected.

Jeff Jarvis believes that we have *an insane obsession* towards privacy. [3]

Bruce Sterling is calling this line of thought "a Manifest Destiny for Silicon". [4]

We are told that we should not question anything because things are the way they are because our contemporary God, the Internet, has decided that they ought to be that way.

[1] Remini, Robert. *A Short History of the United States*, Chapter 4.

[2] Andreessen, Marc. *Why Software Is Eating the World.*

[3] Jarvis, Jeff. *Public Parts: How Sharing in the Digital Age Improves the Way We Work and Live.*

[4] Sterling, Bruce. *The Epic Struggle of the Internet of Things.*

MONOPOLIES

The laws that regulate monopolies in the United States date back to the end of the XIX Century and to the early XX Century. They were instrumental in breaking up monopolies in railways, oil, tobacco and canned meat.

According to the prevailing interpretation of anti-trust laws in America, a monopoly exists only if companies band together to raise prices or to keep prices artificially high.

If we adopt this view of the world, it's hard to think about monopolies on the Internet.

How much does Google charge you to use their search engine? And for Gmail?

For Google Maps? And how much does Facebook cost? What about Instagram?

But isn't it harder to compete with the leader if they give away their services for free?

And what will happen once retailers that are

forgoing margins, like Amazon, will have wiped away all their competitors? [1]

Lastly, isn't it a *de facto* duopoly when two companies, Google and Facebook, own 77% of the online advertising market in the US and are responsible for 99% of the year over year increase in expenditure in said market? [2]

Isn't it time for regulators to step in? [3]

[1] Fic, Audreyii. *The Entirely Unnecessary Demise of Barnes & Noble.*

[2] Heath, Alex. *Facebook and Google Completely Dominate the Digital Ad Industry.*

[3] Galloway, Scott. *Why Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google Need to Be Disrupted.*

MOORE'S LAW

In science, once researchers think they have understood how something works, they enunciate a law that should allow fellow researchers to predict future behaviour.

Moore's Law, however, is quite different.

It was enunciated for the first time in 1965 and later modified many a time. It spite of what everybody thinks, Moore's Law never said anything about the 18 months that are supposedly needed for manufacturers to double the speed of processors. [1]

Rather than a law, Moore's Law is a brilliant marketing statement: we at Intel will produce ever faster semi-conductors. Someone please stand up and find a way to use them, or we won't know whom to sell them to. [2]

Many people in Silicon Valley disagree. Ray Kurzweil, founder of the *Singularity Movement*, thinks that Moore's Law is a law of nature. [3]

Kevin Kelly thinks Moore's Law is a divine law by which technology is speaking to us.

And what technology has to say is always: Let me take care of everything. I'll fix the future.

[1] Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*, Chapter 6.

[2] Tuomi, Ilkka. *The Lives and Death of Moore's Law.*

[3] Vance, Ashlee. *Merely Human? That's So Yesterday.*

OPEN DATA

Everybody seems to love Open Data.

Some took the leap of faith and started to speak about *Open Government*. But would we approve of the ways of the government of North Korea if they decided to publish their train timetables in GTFS format? [1]

What if many local and national governments were hiding their usual and rather opaque decision-making ways behind a well-sounding adherence to Open Data? [2]

Take Barack Obama: Yes, he made a lot of government data available on Data.gov.

But would he have waged total war on Julian Assange and Edward Snowden had he been really interested in transparency?

And lastly: Who is taking advantage of Open Data? They are open to everybody.

Sure. But who has the tools to use them?

Aren't companies much better equipped to take advantage of Open Data than the average citizen is? Is this not yet another privatisation of a public good for private profit? [3]

[1] McHugh, Bibiana. *Pioneering Open Data Standards: The GTFS Story.*

[2] Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*, Chapter 3.

[3] Slee, Tom. *What's Yours Is Mine: Against the Sharing Economy*, Chapters 7 and 8.

OPEN WEB

Once upon a time there was the Open Web. Then the Enclosures started.

Online dating websites were among the first. All user profiles were on the servers of a single company. Want to exchange messages with other people? Sign up and pay.

Then somebody closed off a hosting service for photography enthusiasts; a bulletin board geared to university students; and then a microblogging platform, and so on.

The only difference is that these services were kept free of charge. You sign up, add friends and people you want to follow, and you exchange photos, ideas and messages. Everything you do is tracked. You are the product that will be sold to advertisers.

I never understood the widespread enthusiasm for social media. Aren't social media simply the enclosure and privatisation of the Open Web in the quest for profits?

Similarly, both Apple iOS and Google Android, with their vast ecosystems of apps, are walled gardens. It's especially bad in the case of Android: Publish news in Google's Accelerated Mobile Pages format, and you rank higher in Google's search results. [1]

[1] A Letter About Google AMP. *Ampletter.org*

PRIVACY

"You have zero privacy anyway. Get over it".

This is what Scott McNealy, back then CEO of Sun Microsystems, said in 1999. [1]

He was probably right. But is it acceptable?

Former Google CEO Eric Schmidt thinks along the same lines: If you have something that you don't want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn't be doing it in the first place. [2]

Very Puritan.

It's almost as if "trasparency" will sanitise and help eliminate vices or imperfections from the world. And very corporate, because we should not forget that Google prospers by gathering data on billions of people.

In this worldview, privacy is not a right, but a subterfuge for those who have something to hide. And you don't want to hide anything from Google and Facebook, do you?

But it's only thanks to privacy that we can truly choose to be who we want to be. Unfortunately, it's becoming harder and even awkward to have a private life. [3]

[1] Sprenger, Polly. *You Have Zero Privacy Anyway. Get Over It.*

[2] Esguerra, Richard. *Google CEO Eric Schmidt Dismisses the Importance of Privacy.*

[3] Anti Social. *A Modern Dating Horror Story* (YouTube).

REVOLUTION

What kind of a "revolution" remains possible in a country in which the progressives either decide they want to live in a hippie commune to experiment with drugs and sex (see: Hippies and: LSD) or are physically eliminated (see: Bob)?

On the one hand, a personal revolution: Yoga, Buddhism, meditation, good food and wine.

On the other hand, a technological revolution and a market revolution. Who champions this revolution? Wired and the American Right.

John Battelle wanted Wired to become hip – a Rolling Stone for the digital age. [1]

Kevin Kelly is absolutely sure that the invisible hand of the market and Darwinian evolution are one and the same. [2]

The Progress and Freedom Foundation is adamantly certain: Technological progress will wipe away established monopolies and

will result in increased competition. [3]

Unfortunately, the opposite seems to be true. The digital revolution has created perhaps the greatest concentration of power and wealth that the world has ever seen.

[1] Greenwald, Ted. *Step Behind the Scenes of the Frantic, Madcap Birth of Wired.*

[2] Barbrook, Richard and Andy Cameron. *The Californian Ideology.*

[3] Progress and Freedom Foundation. *Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age.*

SHARING ECONOMY

Sharing is another word Silicon Valley loves.

Especially if what is being "shared" is someone else's resources and not their own.

It is true that many so-called *Sharing Economy* platforms start as altruistic and non-commercial ways to share resources: a sofa on which you can sleep for a couple of nights; a car ride; or a drill you can borrow from a neighbour instead of buying it.

But more often than not, they morph into the exact opposite: ruthless commercial entreprises that become huge thanks to network effects and that care very little about the negative externalities they generate.

Airbnb was born when two students decided to offer a place to sleep on inflatable mattresses in their apartment to the participants to a design event in New York. [1]

Sounds nice, right?

But today entire areas of Paris are so choking full of tourists who rent a flat on Airbnb in the search of the perfect "real" Paris experience that it's not Paris anymore! [2]

[1] Slee, Tom. *What's Yours Is Mine: Against the Sharing Economy*, Chapter 3.

[2] French, Jason, Sam Schechner and Matthias Verbergt. *How Airbnb Is Taking Over Paris.*

SMART CITIES

Who invented the expression *Smart City*?

A philosopher? A progressive mayor? A famous urbanist? No. A private and for-profit American company: IBM. [1]

The idea of the Smart City is a generic, commercial and fashionable idea that says that a set of rather undefined "technologies" will improve cities for everybody.

There's plenty that is wrong and troubling.

First, private companies are offering cities "solutions" that allow them to hoard data that belongs to the citizens, who are considered mere objects of a transaction. [2]

Second, the solutions being offered are based on the false and worrisome idea that data is always correct, and that our interpretation of data is always right and univocal.

Lastly, the idea that we can reach the best

possible solution for everybody is not only technocratic, but false. A city is far tool large and complicated an entity to be governed by an algorithm. Cities need to accept politics as the art of balancing opposing interests.

Any time we deny the importance of politics, that's an authoritarian political act.

[1] Greenfield, Adam. *Against the Smart City.*

[2] Pisarello, Gerardo. *Les Dades Com A Bé Comú.*

TELEVISION

From the very start, the aim of the advertising-supported web was to beat television. A quarter of a century later, let's be honest about it – they failed.

The Internet, which really means Google and Facebook, has clearly won the battle with newspapers for classified ads of all types.

Television, however, is a different story. Television may be broadcasting via the Internet, like Netflix does. And it is watched on smaller screens, like those of an iPad.

But television is alive and kicking. While the web was getting flooded with low quality content, television was able to reinvent itself and now has two separate lines of business.

On the one hand, Pay TV. Free TV channels now broadcast fewer and mostly older films. Same for TV series and professional sports: If you're interested, you sign up and pay.

On the other hand, television's quality content enables them to attract quality advertisers, many of whom have come to have very serious doubts about online advertising. [1]

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[1] Wolff, Michael. *Television Is the New Television: The Unexpected Triumph of Old Media in the Digital Age.*

ZIPCAR

Car Sharing was born in Boston in the year 2000, when Zipcar was founded.

Zipcar received great press as an economic, social and environmental revolution. The company claims that for every shared car, fifteen private cars are eliminated. [1]

However, in some cities, car sharing is being used to greenwash serious problems.

In Milan, Italy, for example, City Hall has been very shy about tackling the problem of the hundreds of thousands of cars that are routinely parked on sidewalks. Instead, they prefer to congratulate themselves and pose as the self-proclaimed "capital of sharing". [2]

Many of these car sharing schemes are successful. But are they improving cities?

Oh, but one day they will all be electric. And one day they will all be self-driving. [3]

But nobody dares to ask the real question: Are we sure that cars are the solution?

There's an American city that is chocking full of *shared* cars, once yellow and today more of them black, that are constantly on the move. Are we sure that New York is the model we should be looking up to? [4]

[1] Slee, Tom. *What's Yours Is Mine: Against the Sharing Economy*, Chapter 4.

[2] In Milan we currently have 7 car sharing schemes (Car2go, Drive Now, E-vai, Enjoy, ReFeel, Share'ngo and Ubeeqo), 5 motorbike sharing schemes (Cityscoot, eCooltra, Govolt, Mimoto and Zigzagsharing) and 4 bike sharing schemes (BikeMi, Bitride, Mobike and Ofo). We also have anywhere between 100,000 and 200,000 (we don't even know) cars parked on our sidewalks.

[3] Sherwood-Jones, Brian. *Destroying the City to Save the Robocar.*

[4] Schneider, Todd. *Analyzing 1.1 Billion NYC Taxi and Uber Trips, with a Vengeance.*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS