

Repurposing the Workplace: Hegemony and the Contested Spaces of the Internet

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To monitor people doing an intellectual job is an attempt to treat them as if they're robots on an assembly line.

-- Emily Coleman, Coleman & Associates,
a market research firm (Stuller, 1987)

Referring to a 1995 study which attempted to measure the extent to which workers with access to computers and the Internet used this technology for non-work purposes (i.e., playing games, surfing the web, email, etc.), Emily Coleman's assertion marks the site at which productive and consumptive tendencies in capitalism converge around the use of information technologies in the workplace. My goal in this paper is to map the discursive constellation that has arisen in relation to this convergence and to give an accounting of the contradictions inherent to the implementation of information technologies in the workplace, specifically the Internet. This tour through the discourse on information technology will have three stops. Beginning with Albert Gore's National Information Infrastructure, I will provide an analytical context within which to understand the utopian impulse of the discourse on information technology. I will then

continue with an analysis of the discourse on productivity that has accompanied the implementation of information technology in the workplace. Finally, I will utilize work in Marxist cultural studies to provide a reading of worker subjectivities in relation to information technology and the contradictions inherent to the discourse informing worker access to the Internet. Ultimately, I will argue that employee repurposing of Internet technology for their own use is a function of the discursive topology of the Internet itself, a space that does not distinguish between the practice of business and the practice of leisure, which is to say, between production and consumption.

The Impossible Dream

Capitalism is, then, surely entering a new phase -- a phase guided by the magical notion of globalization, but which equally proceeds as if that dream were already a reality revealed or about to be revealed.

-- Paul Smith

That original expression, *haves and have-nots*, comes from Cervantes.

-- Albert Gore

Beginning in earnest with Albert Gore's 1993 National Information Infrastructure initiative, the government, the media, education, and the propaganda machines of high-tech industry have worked in tandem to manufacture a discourse whose major thematic is the pending ubiquity of information technology in the everyday lives of the citizenry, not the least space of which is the workplace. From Wall Street's and the media's obsession with so-called "Internet stocks" to the URL at the end of every television commercial and on every road sign, high-tech cultural signifiers are quite literally everywhere, and, as can be seen in Microsoft's 1997 "Thank Goodness It's Monday" ad campaign, have even found purchase in the moral codes of our society, specifically, and notably, in our conception of work.

This discourse is one characterized by a constellation of truisms and metaphors all of which are utopian in their trajectory. In what is perhaps its most inflated permutation, Nicholas Negroponte (1995) has proclaimed that "Computing is not about computers anymore. It is about living" (p. 6). The utopian impulse of such a statement is obvious: Negroponte understands technology as more than an appliance to make certain tasks easier or more efficient. Rather, technology has given birth to a new realm of subjectivity. Hayles (1999) calls this "posthuman" subjectivity, writing, "the posthuman implies not only a coupling with intelligent machines but a coupling so intense and multifaceted that it is no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the informational circuits in which the organism is enmeshed"

(p. 35). As an expression of a desire for a social space rendered noncontradictory by network technology, posthuman subjectivity as articulated by Negroponte and others is, for the moment at least, a dream. Indeed, *Being Digital* is primarily about *not* being digital, a polemic against the social, political, and economic roadblocks which stand in the way of fulfilling the dream. Nevertheless, Negroponte's language is important because it informs the dissemination of information technology throughout our culture, while providing the *discursive* connection between the individual subject and a whole regime of ideologies. These articulations are necessary in order for the individual to become interpellated as a subject within dynamic relations of dominance (Pêcheux, 1982, p. 111). Some of the ideologies inherent to this discourse are the technophilic presumption of increased worker productivity, the importance of electronic commerce in the information age, the inherent value of internal and external connectedness, the mobile office and its requisite telecommuter and the role of information technology in global competition, all of which have become part of the social imaginary through the utopian discourse of information technology.

Such utopianism is possible only if contradiction is ignored, or at least held at bay by the hegemonic system whose interests are at stake in the perpetuation of these ideas. In this sense, the disjuncture between the discursive regime prescribing the social and economic use of information technology and the actual practice of workers assumed to have been interpellated by the ideologies subtending this discourse must be understood within the broader context of the changing nature of capitalist discourse in general. For as articulated in cultural texts and through the limitless cultural practices that comprise our everyday life, such instances of discursive production are themselves part of a cultural web that seeks to promote a seamless image of itself, an image nonetheless shot through with inconsistency and contradiction.

In *Millennial Dreams: Contemporary Culture and Capital in the North*, Paul Smith (1997) argues that while the economic imperative of capitalism, the realization of profit through the expropriation of surplus value from the worker, is no different than in Marx's time, what has changed is the "rhetorical and ideological situation" within which capitalism operates (p. 13). Smith's historical demarcation is the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe, the moment at which capitalism in the North has seemingly achieved its centuries long struggle for complete hegemony. According to Smith, the ideological and political institutions of post-Soviet capitalism function as having reached the apex of economic development, culminating finally with the domination of time and space, what Smith calls the "isochronism" of present-day capitalism (p. 13). The discursive structures emanating from isochronic capitalism are the result of a historical awareness of its post-Soviet hegemony and a more amorphous, optimistic feeling that technological advances have effectively erased all the remaining spatial and temporal barriers standing in the way of an economic system without limits.

Smith's analysis does not adhere to those theories of postmodernity which, for various reasons and to various ends, proclaim the end of industrial capitalism, but rather argues for a thoroughly *modern* capitalism predicated upon an embracement of a semiotic

mythos with no connection to historical and material reality. "Magical notions," Smith argues,

such as that of fully global space replete with an ecstatic buzz of cyber communication, or of an instantaneous mobility of people, goods, and services, or of a global market place hooked up by immaterial money that flashes around the globe many times a minute: these are the kinds of images that are regularly projected in the opening phase of millennial capitalism (p. 13).

This analysis recalls Horkheimer's and Adorno's (1988) retelling of the Circe myth in which the pig represents the ease with which the institutions of modernity are seduced by its own logic, thereby descending, animal-like, into a miasma of uncontrollable, *preterrational* drives and desires: "But in the image of the pig the pleasure of smell is already reduced to the unfree snuffling of one who has his nose to the ground and renounces his upright carriage" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1988, p. 71). In Smith's analysis, the institutions of capitalism move through an awareness of their own material hegemony to a cultural and discursive apotheosis based upon shifting geopolitical arrangements and technological advances. This *preterrational* movement signals a return to myth and a seduction by myth, a reinvestment in the discourse of supernaturalism, which, as Smith points out, can only ever be symptomatic of how capitalism misrepresents the historical-material makeup of the world. For within this dream of isochronism lurks a disavowal of the reality of "alochronism," of real material relations, which in Smith's analysis, is registered in the geopolitical binary North/South (p. 13) or to use Albert Gore's language, the "haves and the have-nots."

While Smith is concerned with large geopolitical structures and the ways in which the "millennial dream" of isochronic capitalism is belied by actual material realities, we can, with little difficulty, apply Smith's general arguments to the specific instance of information technology and to the discursive production of the Internet in particular. During a March, 1999 interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer, United States vice-president Albert Gore claimed to have created the Internet (McCullagh, 1999). Although met with scathing ridicule from the digerati, Gore's remarks were not altogether wrong. Arguably, for those outside the university-government research matrix, which is to say most everyone, the Internet came to life in 1993 through a vast propaganda effort aimed mainly at business and education. That Gore's panel on the so-called National Information Infrastructure succeeded in creating an awareness of the Internet is clearly born out by its tremendous growth. In 1993, with the Internet at over 20 years old, conservative estimates put the number of active hosts at approximately 1.3 million (Internet Software Consortium [ISC], 1999).¹ By 1995 this number had reached almost 6 million (ISC, 1999); and between 1995 and 1996, the number of hosts rose by 8.4 million, garnering more hosts in a single year than in all the years leading up to 1995 combined (ISC, 1999). While measuring Internet use is difficult at best, recent statistics from the United States Department of Commerce (1999) claim that over 171 million people have access to the Internet worldwide, roughly 56 percent of those in the United States and Canada (p.3). We cannot, of course, attribute this growth to a function of any

single government or corporate or government entity. However, the Clinton administration's efforts in this area cannot be underestimated, especially with regard to the construction of the Internet as a site for popular discourse.²

Perhaps because the esoteric language of communication technology did not readily lend itself to ideological discourse, the Clinton administration's construction of the Internet as an object of discourse was rooted in a series of metaphors and proclamations designed to highlight its potentialities, especially as they applied to the economy. While the most obvious and cliched of these is the *Information Superhighway*, an analysis of the term's deployment nevertheless yields the general trajectory of the discourse as a whole. One of Gore's most complete articulations of the Information Superhighway occurred in December 1993 in a speech given before the National Press Club:

To understand what new systems we must create, though, we must first understand how the information marketplace of the future will operate. One helpful way is to think of the national information infrastructure as a network of highways, much like the interstates of the 1950s. These are highways carrying information rather than people or goods. And it's not just one eight-lane turnpike, but a collection of interstates and feeder roads made of different materials in the same way that highways are concrete or macadam or gravel. Some highways will be made of fiberoptics, others of coaxial cable, others will be wireless. But this is the key point: they must and will be two-way highways so that each person will be able to send information in video form as well as just words, as well as receiving information (Gore, 1993).

While the purpose of this long and somewhat belabored metaphor is to create a rhetorical schema within which new communication technology can be understood, the metaphor itself is characterized by a temporal liquidity that understands history not as a series of events on a timeline but rather as a number of random points in space. Gore's thoughts move from the past ("the interstates of the 1950s"), in order to situate the information super-highway both in the present ("These are highways carrying information") and in the future ("Some highways will be . . ."). The ideological effect of this traversing of temporalities is nothing less than the reproduction of capitalist hegemony as constituted within the new discourse of information technology. Just as highways and turnpikes can be understood as representations of a fully mature industrial capitalist economy whose dominant factor is the distribution of goods, so too does Gore's information superhighway represent the dream of an economy that destroys the temporal barriers inherent to industrial capitalism.³ Indeed, Tapscott (1996) concludes that the highway metaphor is not strong enough, writing, "If anything, the hyperbole is low key compared to not only the potential but what has already occurred" (p. 13).

More than mere political hype, Gore's reinvention of the Internet as a utopian space in which products and ideas move at light-speed forms the background against which adoption of information technology in the workplace occurs. To the extent that this discourse describes a situation that has already occurred (without having really occurred),

it is also prescriptive in nature, leading to a technological imperative that trickles down to individual businesses via a sophisticated network of discourse articulated mainly by cheerleaders of the system who uncritically accept the precepts of the argument. For example, Davis and Meyer (1998) encourage companies to "make speed your mind-set" (p.214), arguing that in order to retain a competitive edge in a "connected economy," all aspects of business practice must mirror the attributes of information technology (pp. 20-76). Using vague psychological language, Kelly (1998) takes this thought a step further, asserting that the "network economy" exacts a change on the very identities of organizations: "The vital distinction between the self (us) and the nonself (them) -- once exemplified by the fierce loyalty of the organization man in the industrial era -- becomes less meaningful in a network economy. The only "inside" now is whether you are on the network or off" (p. 65). More generally, Cairncross (1997) and Tapscott (1996) see new communication technologies as the motivating factor toward an interconnected global economy. Cairncross is especially emphatic in his articulation of the ability of communication technologies to transcend the barriers of time and space which constrained previous economic structures: "As the world moves toward virtually limitless and almost free electronic communications capacity, trade and investment flows will transform patterns of economic activity around the world" (p. 209). Common to these writings, and to the volumes of paper expended on the economic impact of communication technology in the popular press, is a utopianism suggesting that such technologies will afford businesses the opportunity to experience almost limitless growth, and by extension, limitless profit. And therein lies its seductive power.

Information Technology, Production, and Class

In a revision of the famous Microsoft slogan, "Where do you want to go today?", a white paper describing "SurfControl" corporate Internet monitoring software begins ominously, "Where are my surfers GOING Today?" (JSB Software Technologies, n.d., p. 1). The paper goes on to describe a typical morning in a hypothetical corporate office. "Sally from Sales" is using the web to plan a vacation to the Caribbean; "Mark in production" is analyzing the weekend's scorecard; "Mary from finance" is writing email to her sister in Australia"; and "Dave from production" is stalking "Andrew from marketing" with a virtual shotgun in a virtual maze (p. 1). The office manager peers from behind his door and is pleased to see his workers "focusing hard on their computer screens" (p. 1).

The development of software technologies to monitor worker's access to the Internet is symptomatic of a perceived corporate anxiety over the adoption of Internet technologies in the workplace. In this scenario, the Internet represents a corporate work-space in which traditional forms of panoptic surveillance predicated upon the connection between work and the body are rendered obsolete by the externalizing of work *from* the body. Related to Hayles' thesis that in the posthuman, "information has lost its body," there is a disconnect between the tasks dictated to information workers (digital/posthuman) and the ability to actively surveil the accomplishment of those tasks (analog/human). Monitoring software

attempts to reconnect the task with the ability to have its completion surveilled. All monitoring software have two main functions. First, they allow an organization to filter access to specific Websites through the utilization of "positive" or "negative" databases, both of which set up virtual lines of demarcation between an organization and the Internet.⁴ Positive filtering uses a database of sites deemed appropriate to visit; negative filtering is just the opposite, a database of sites deemed inappropriate. Because it is far easier for an organization to describe those sites that fall outside the perceived duties of its workers (gaming, shopping and pornography sites being the most obvious), negative filtering is more widespread. But because negative filters typically use databases of specific sites, they are inherently flawed given the dynamics of change that characterize the World Wide Web. Thus in addition to the active filtering of sites surveillance software is engineered to generate a wealth of data describing the surfing practices of its workers. For example, SuperScout, the latest product in the SurfControl line, is able to generate 60 reports, ranging from a general tally of all sites visited by every worker to "user cost analysis," a datapoint that describes a worker's surfing practices as a function of labor cost.⁴

Alarmist promotional literature notwithstanding, the corporate anxiety accompanying the adoption of information technologies, which products like SuperScout are designed to assuage, seems to have some basis in fact. Nineteen-ninety-six U.S. Department of Commerce statistics show that corporate investment in information technology represents 45 percent of all business equipment expenditures, up from 3 percent in the 1960s (Commerce, 1998, p.6). Furthermore, this study suggests that decisions regarding investment in information technology were based largely upon a perception that such technologies increase productivity (Commerce, 1998, p. 6). Recent statistics show, however, that of the approximately 40 million people accessing the World Wide Web everyday, over 30% are doing so from work (Graphics Visualization Usability Center, 1997). In addition, the most recent Gvu survey of WWW users shows that almost 40% of web users perceive their organization's use of web technology as ineffective in streamlining operations (Graphics Visualization Usability Center, 1998). These statistics suggest that the utopian discourse fueling the corporate adoption of Internet technologies is in part belied by actual material relations. Running precisely counter to the ideas expressed by Albert Gore and others in his camp, these material relations include worker ambivalence to information technology, worker ambivalence to productivity in general, spaces of consumption versus spaces of production, work versus play, and the moral efficacy of panoptic surveillance.

Nevertheless, it should come as no surprise that much of the literature on the unintended consequences of the implementation of information technology in corporate settings has focused upon the extent to which investments in technology pay off in terms of increased worker productivity, centering on what has come to be known as the *productivity paradox*. A paradox precisely because technology is perceived as boosting efficiency, this term is used to describe the stagnation of productivity, wages, and profits in corporate sectors investing billions of dollars in information technology (Keyes, 1995, p. 4). Although much of the empirical data suggest corporate investment in information technology has no necessary corollary to increased worker productivity, and may actually

hinder it, others have questioned the validity of such data by emphasizing the difficulty of separating IT processes from all other possible variables (Brynjolfsson, 1993 p. 70; Cairncross, 1997 pp. 228-229). Notable in this regard is the work of Erik Brynjolfsson and Lorin Hitt, whose interpretation of data from similar studies suggests a radical *increase* in productivity in corporate sectors implementing IT (as cited in Keyes, 1995, p. 5). From a related perspective, Jessica Keyes has argued that most of the research into the productivity paradox is based upon a misguided assumption regarding the nature of technology itself. Keyes would rather understand technology as a neutral factor, neither helping nor hindering productivity and arguing that the problem lies in the *management* of a workforce increasingly dependent upon IT (Keyes, 1995, pp. 15-16).

I mention this research, and Keyes especially, not because I necessarily think it sheds much light on the issue of worker repurposing of Internet technology, but because it foregrounds the class processes of the white-collar workplace. Unquestioned, presumably because it is so obvious, so self-evident from a management perspective, is precisely the concept of productivity and why a whole body of research is situated around it.

A quick analysis of these class processes shows clearly why productivity is such a crucial issue in the discussion of corporate uses of IT. Resnick and Wolff (1987) distinguish between two types of class processes: fundamental and subsumed (p. 118). Simply put, fundamental class processes, the focus of Marx's analysis of capitalism, involve those myriad of situations in which a worker is working to produce commodities for exchange on the market and through whose labor profit is realized by the expropriation of a portion of the worker's output. This surplus is disseminated throughout society in order to "provide specific conditions of existence of the capitalist fundamental class process" (p. 119). Those who benefit from the distribution of surplus value are party to the subsumed classes. Included in this group are those who occupy the profusion of managerial positions supporting commodity production. Understood in these terms, it is obvious why the productivity paradox is such a pressing issue. It is because workers in support and managerial positions produce absolutely nothing, or at least nothing of value. Thus, to the extent that their positions are made possible through the expropriation of surplus from the direct producer, money that capitalists would much rather use to line their own pockets, productivity is crucial. From the Marxist perspective it is evident that the productivity paradox, as articulated by economists and managerial consultants, is always a hegemonic discourse destined finally to *prescribe* managerial processes in an effort to realize a positive return on investment in information technology, with "positive" being a measure of total worker output.

Repurposing Subjectivity

The discourse on productivity understands worker access to information technologies as a problem situated within the abstract sphere of management processes. George Gilder (1989) argues that the system fails not because of contradictions inherent to it but because traditional management systems are out of step with a technology-based economy (p. 11).

Echoing the main tenants of Total Quality Management, Gilder uses the language of connectivity to argue that we must conceptualize "the new enterprise" as "a network of distributed teams that act as clients and servers for each other" (p. 12). Lurking within this metaphor is yet again the utopian trajectory of information technology, effortlessly transforming a workforce overdetermined by historical processes into unhistorical, abstract machinery. In my epigraph, Emily Coleman seems to counter this impulse by appealing to a liberal-humanist ideology of the subject, understanding the moral efficacy of office surveillance relative to the worker, or in her words, "people." However, because it imbues the subject with trans-historical qualities, Coleman also misses the mark. Those who do not work in these spaces are less than human, "robots on an assembly line." Like Gilder, Coleman's appeal to the cybernetic metaphor, which she marshals to distinguish the "intellectual work" of the secretary from the mindless repetition of the Chaplinesque line-worker, is representative of capitalism's failure to understand the intricacies of the very subjectivities upon which it depends. Once programmed, the cyborg, a production-machine, need only be maintained. In the words of Herbert Marcuse, "The machine is indifferent toward the social uses to which it is put, provided those uses remain within its technical capabilities" (1966, p. 155). Unlike the human worker, the cyborg does not loaf, goof-off, or chat at the coffee machine. Thus, the perceived need for workplace surveillance and the technology employed to accomplish this task is precisely a measure of the subject position to which Coleman addresses her remark. Like all subject-positions, this is one in which the creation of a working subject, the secretary or the manager, is absolutely a historical and cultural process, in this case impacted and overdetermined by the discourse prescribing the use of technology in the workplace. And because of these material qualities, this is also a site that throws into high relief many of the contradictions inherent to the cultural discourse of information technology.

To fully understand the class processes involved in corporate monitoring of worker access to the Internet and the ambivalence with which workers themselves engage information technologies, it is necessary to discern the workplace environment as manifest through the worker subject position. To the extent that this critical stance is completely opposite to the research on the productivity paradox, we find a different picture emerges, one in which the Internet forms the site of a hegemonic contest between *econo-spatial configurations*: the traditional space of production within which the individual is interpellated as worker and the space of consumption, which forms the background against which all other aspects of everyday life are practiced by the subject.

The so-called "post-Marxist" strand of cultural studies, exemplified by the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), understands the formation of subjectivity as a result of the plurality of discourses being articulated at any given historical moment. It rejects outright the liberal humanist social agent capable of acting in a way "both rational and transparent to itself" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 115). Instead, subjectivity is determined at any historical moment according to a historically constituted set of social variables in the middle of which the subject functions as a point of condensation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 115). Subject positions are produced when discourse is articulated, which is to say when elements within a discursive formation become historical moments. In this model, subject positions mirror the multifarious set of discursive determinations

characteristic of the social terrain. Individuals are not individual subjects but rather move within and without any number of mutually exclusive, even contradictory, subject positions. For example, while a class-conscious male worker may find himself a subject in relation to the discourse of the labor movement (he might, for instance, walk a picket line or recruit new union members), during "off hours" this same worker may occupy a contradictory subject position as husband or father, unselfconsciously reproducing gender-based hierarchies. To a large degree therefore, the experience of subjectivity and the limits of agency are determined by cultural and historical constructs external to the individual, and, it must be pointed out, over which any one person has little control.⁵

Similarly, the production of subjectivity in office spaces where information technology has become ubiquitous is a function of both the general characteristics of capitalist discourse and the local discursive formation particular to the set of occupations operative within this space. In general, all capitalist class processes frame a subjective space in which the individual understands his or her economic role to be the relinquishment of body and mind to an employer, occupying a very specific subject position for a very specific period of time (Marx, 1990a, p. 271). However, within each individual space of production is a subset of capitalist discourse oriented toward the production of a working subject doing specific tasks. Workers in office spaces find themselves interpellated by a prescriptive discourse which inheres in the very objects that fill it: the desk, the coffee machine, the Rolodex, and most certainly the computer, objects that are overdetermined by a discourse that not only manages their use, but actually manages the subjectivity of the user. The worker's subjective orientation to this space is determined in large part by these objects -- one becomes a worker not only in relation to one's contractual obligations, the tasks upon which one expends labor power, but in relation to the instruments of production, the pens, pads, and computers. It is an ingenious system, for this same worker seamlessly and constantly reproduces the hegemony of capitalist discourse through their use. Recalling the scenario with which I began, the terms, "Sally from Sales," "Mary from Finance" and "Dave from Production" are telling in this regard. The geographical surnames suggest the extent to which the worker actually becomes the job itself, becomes as much a fixture in the cubicle as the stapler and the fax machine.

While the seamlessness with which hegemonic discourse is reproduced in the work-space can be understood as a function of its use, this space, like all discursive formations, is certainly not without contradiction. Recalling for a moment Anita Hill's harrowing testimony and the subsequent flood of lawsuits from many hundreds of women throughout the United States, it is not difficult to see that the history of sexual harassment is testimony to the tenuousness of the discourse undergirding this particular subject position. More related to our discussion is the proclivity of certain types of information technology to reduce productivity by affording the user limitless options in terms of product output, what managers have come to call "futzing."⁶ It seems that futzing is especially a problem with employees' use of desktop publishing and presentation software and is why at least one corporation, Sun Microsystems, has banned the use of PowerPoint by its workers (McNealy, 1997). The point is that the hegemony of class processes is as much a function of its ability (or inability) to fend off incursions from

discursive systems that threaten its hold over subjectivity as it is a function of its ability to reproduce the power it already wields.

The evolution of the World Wide Web shows clearly that the hegemonic contest waged everyday in cubicles around the world revolves around the discourses of production and consumption. The WWW was conceived originally as a space to allow efficient and intuitive transfer of information across a variety of proprietary networks. Tim Berners-Lee (1996), who engineered the World Wide Web in 1990, writes,

a goal of the Web was that, if the interaction between person and hypertext could be so intuitive that the machine-readable information space gave an accurate representation of the state of people's thoughts, interactions, and work patterns, then machine analysis could become a very powerful management tool, seeing patterns in our work and facilitating our working together through the typical problems which beset the management of large organizations.

It is clear that one of the motivating factors behind the creation of the World Wide Web was productivity. For Berners-Lee, productivity, facilitation, and management form the discursive background against which the technology of the World Wide Web developed. And within the esoteric world of government-funded research, the Web probably fulfilled this vision. However, with the privatization of the Internet backbone in 1991 and the one-millionth .com registration in 1997, the Web has become something altogether different - a marketplace, not of information as Albert Gore conceived of it in 1993, but of product pure and simple.

Although the institutions of capitalism created both, the space of Tim Berners-Lee's World Wide Web, produced in discourse through the language of productivity, is fundamentally contradictory to the *space* of production/consumption that in large part characterizes the Internet today. This discourse is predicated upon a denial of consumption as constitutive of production that, as Baudrillard (1995) has argued, is untenable within a social system that constructs subjectivity precisely on the basis of consumption, or in his more specific terminology, "need" (p. 202). In "On Consumer Society" Baudrillard collapses the traditional dichotomy of production and consumption, arguing:

The truth is not that 'needs are the fruits of production,' by that the system of needs is the product of the system of production, which is a quite different matter. By a system of needs we mean to imply that needs are not produced one at a time, in relation to their respective objects. Needs are produced as a force of consumption, and as a general potential reserve within the larger framework of productive forces. (p. 201)

By formulating consumption within the more general rubric of need and then positioning this as fundamental to the reproduction of a single economic system, Baudrillard makes it all but impossible to understand production and consumption as diametrically opposed

and consumption as being the localized fulfillment of a single need by the consuming subject (Kellner, 1989, p. 17). Need, the desire to consume, is the built-in subjective response of capitalism. Foreshadowing the World Wide Web, Baudrillard explicates a specific space of consumption, the drugstore, to argue for the utopian impulse of modern capitalism within which the subject is interpellated as consumer:

The drugstore is the synthesis of profusion and calculation. The drugstore (or the new shopping malls) makes possible the synthesis of all consumer activities, not least of which are shopping, flirting with objects, idle wandering, and all the permutations of these (p. 193).

Baudrillard suggests that in the transformation of commodities from objects of monetary exchange to objects of semiotic exchange, these spaces of consumption integrate aspects of consuming subjectivity that were once peripheral, perhaps even resistant to, the normal activities of consumption (p. 194). In effect, Baudrillard argues that the subjective experience of consumption cannot be separated from the general experience of everyday life, which as Henri Lefebvre (1984) maintains is nothing less than the reproduction of capitalist relations of production (p. 86).

In the age of the Internet, Baudrillard's comments find a direct link to the subjective experience of the World Wide Web. As one research study suggests, "recreational uses of the medium, manifested in the form of nondirected search behavior, can be an important benefit to consumers intrinsically motivated to use the medium" (Hoffman, Novak, Chatterjee, 1995). Arguably, the differences inherent to a consumer's subjective experience of a shopping mall or a drug-store and that of the World Wide Web are minimal. The "browsing" metaphor ubiquitous to the software used to access the Web suggests this to be the case.

Thus, arguing from Baudrillard's analysis we find that the discourse of production informing both the analysis of the productivity paradox and Berners-Lee's description of the World Wide Web is founded upon an institutional attempt to reorient this subjective response in the direction of a puritanical self-denial of consumption through the enforcement of a mythical binary. The history of capitalist production shows that such reorientations worked previously because the actual spaces within which production and consumption were traditionally to have taken place were themselves differentiated spaces -- individual consumption was held at bay by the very architecture of capitalist production. As Marx (1990b) so adamantly points out, one of the primary motivations of capitalist production is the consumption of the individual worker's labor-power, the only commodity whose "use creates value, a greater value than it costs" (p. 342). Subsequently, to the extent that consumption occurs at all within the space of capitalist production, it occurs as a result of the contractual obligation each individual worker enters into at the point of sale of his or her labor-power, again, in Marx's (1990b) words, "If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist" (p. 342).⁷

Coming back, finally, to the implementation of Internet technologies in the workplace, we find that the utopian imperative which acts as the motivating factor in business

adoption of these technologies stands in contradiction to those class processes which seek to regulate the worker's access to the system of consumption. It must be pointed out, however, that the system of consumption is itself utopian, erasing the class processes so fundamental to commodity production (Marx, 1990a, pp. 163-164). To the extent that hegemonic discourse creates both of these systems, the worker who has access to the World Wide Web in his/her cubicle experiences a profoundly fractured space that at one level preaches the work ethic, but at the same time beckons to the consumer with the power of a drug dealer peddling junk. There is no contest.

And thus we experience the limits of agency in this context. In his famous essay, "Popular Cultures: Ordinary Language" Michel DeCerteau (1984) speaks of *la perruque*, which means, literally, "the wig," but which signifies the practice by which a worker diverts a portion of his work time for his own personal ends. Decerteau defines *la perruque* as "the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer" and uses as an example "a cabinetmaker's borrowing a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room" (p. 25). *La perruque* is a mode of popular critique and resistance; it is predicated upon the ability of the worker to understand the nature of exploitation within the capitalist system. Although seemingly a nice fit, I believe it would be wrong to simply map a worker's repurposing of Internet technology onto DeCerteau's model. In writing her sister in Australia, "Mary from Finance" does indeed renegotiate her work day, but only within the parameters already set by capitalist relations of production, however contradictory they may be. In a sense, "Mary from Finance" simply allows this space to run its due course -- to unravel on its own accord.

Because the landscape of information technology cannot be pinned down for any length of time, I would like to end with a brief postscript outlining areas for further research. Perhaps the most important issue to be investigated is the extent to which worker repurposing of the Internet actually impinges on productivity. Regardless of how many workers use their corporate accounts for personal use, it may very well be that corporations have been hoodwinked into believing productivity is an issue, hoodwinked as much by their own anxiety as by alarmist whitepapers extolling the virtues of monitoring software. As existing empirical research remains inconclusive, the only real way to measure such activities is through the collection of data from corporate web logs, server statistics, and best, the reports generated from surveillance software. An analysis of IP addresses generated from peer-to-peer file sharing clients may also yield fruitful data. Additionally, this essay provides a starting point for a more pointed discussion of official corporate policies regarding Internet usage. Because they address such issues as corporate philosophy relative to information technology, worker responsibilities, and potential retribution, usage policies are an important discursive component that begs consideration. Finally, one cannot discount the voice of the worker in all of this. I have indicated that repurposing the Internet in the workplace is not an act of anti-capitalist resistance because the Internet itself is overdetermined by the logic of consumption. This is not to say, however, that workers must *necessarily* inhabit these spaces as consumers. Collecting the stories of workers in these situations may prove, in William Gibson's words, that "the street finds its own uses for things."

Notes

1 According to Gray (1996) the number of websites in June, 1993 was approximately 130, only 2 of those having the .com registration.

2 We can point to the URL as a case in point. A metaphor, the URL has become symbolic of the pervasiveness of Internet discourse. Even those without access to the WWW understand that URLs *mean* the Internet.

3 More forceful in this regard is the rhetoric contained within the U.S. Department of Commerce 1998 report on "The Emerging Digital Economy": "The harnessing of light for nearly instantaneous communications and the ability to use microscopic circuits to process and store huge amounts of information are enabling this current economic transformation."

4 For a complete rundown on the various types of data retrievable using SuperScout, see http://www.surfcontrol.com/products/superscout_for_business/super_scout/reports.html.

5 I am speaking here of fully interpellated subjects, as I will be throughout the essay. The main thrust of this piece is to discern an important contradiction within present-day capitalist discourse. The question of social agency is certainly important, however. After all, one of the ultimate aims of Marxist critique is precisely a renegotiation of subject-positions such that the subject subordinated by capitalist relations of production realizes social agency through the exploitation of fractures within the dominant discursive system.

6 There is a fine line between "futzing" and using information technology for personal ends, the subject of this essay. Although the media tend to conflate the two, futzing usually designates worker time spent doing tasks defensible within the contractual obligations of the work-day, for example, touching up a newsletter or presentation, tackling minor software/hardware glitches or doing "research" on the Internet. For managers, however, the end result is the same -- lost productivity. One estimate puts the number of hours workers spend futzing with information technology at 5 hours per week (Tarsala).

7 Relatedly, Marx (1990b) also speaks of the literal spaces of capitalist production -- the factories, work-houses and mines. Although Marx here is more concerned with the ways in which the capitalist cuts costs (thereby decreasing his investment in capital per se), it is not so far fetched to suggest that intolerable working conditions and their effect on the physical and mental health of the worker is yet another way of keeping the system of consumption at bay during the production process (pp. 181-190).

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