

## The internet, the cyberspace and the dog

The cyberspace, a democratised and popularised territory, seemed to be a place of equality, social and racial balance, according to the early internet depictions. A bastion of free expression, a great level playing field where those who previously did not have a voice, could find one.

The 1997 commercial of MCI network repeatedly states how the internet is a place where only the brain matters. “**there is no race, no age, no gender**”, proposing that body and mind can be severed, and suggests that the “internet” systemically erases the somatic part and focuses only on the intangible idea of the “mind”.<sup>3</sup>

This separation was depicted partially because at that point, going online was defined by a default state of anonymity, that was consisted by a whimsical variety of usernames and alter-egos referring to a fictional persona with no connection to one’s offline identity.

This promise of connection, regardless of the physical differences inequalities, the anticipation of the utopian place, lead to a rather dystopia, and the creation of the illusion of connection, as I will argue later.

The understanding of Internet was a combination of chatrooms facilitating conversation without any societal utility between people who would almost certainly never meet in real life, personal websites helping international communities to form around unusual hobbies and new narrative and discursive frameworks, from celebrity fan-fiction to gossip forums, and file-sharing software distributing unfathomable quantities of film and music.<sup>4</sup>

In the same respect, Evgeny Morozov, a researcher on technological implications, tweeted: “1990s tech utopianism posited that networks weaken or replace hierarchies. In reality, networks amplify hierarchies and make them less visible.”<sup>5</sup>

In 2002 Adam Curtis produced a series of documentaries “The Century of the self” that evolves around Edward

Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud, who was the first person to put Freud’s ideas on practice to manipulate the masses, and invented the public relations profession in the 1920s. Reviewing the series Tim Adams forecasted “The internet, solipsism incarnate, is our fastest growing leisure pursuit, and the fastest growing sector of it is pornography: your wish is its command key. In the near future (by 2010), it seems, the Self will enjoy its own unencumbered space.”

<sup>6</sup> Even though internet was presented as a place of connection, it’s noteworthy how a decade later it was already associated with the “self”, and the personal limitless joy.

Indeed the image of the internet has shifted radically from the mid 1990s “cyberspace”, an anonymous and empowering space of freedom in which “no one knew if you were a dog”<sup>7</sup>, to the mid 2010s space of total surveillance or a privatised space of social media.

---

<sup>3</sup> The dualism of body and mind has been central in Descartes’ philosophy. This distinction can have negative connotations as Lisa Blackman puts it in her book *The Body*, “the mind is subject to voluntary control, usually characterised as will and the body is subject to laws which govern and regulate processes which do not require conscious effort or attention. This distinction between what is taken to be involuntary ( and therefore fixed), and what is taken to be voluntary (and therefore subject to change) produces the mind and body as distinct entities.”

<sup>4</sup> Shafir, T., 2020. *The Monstrous Intimacy of the Online Self*. *Nxs*, (5).

<sup>5</sup> Molozov, E., 2017. Available at : <<https://twitter.com/evgenymorozov/status/884733724633509888>>

<sup>6</sup> Adams, T., 2002. *How Freud Got Under Our Skin*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2002/mar/10/medicalscience.highereducation>>.

<sup>7</sup> Chun, W., 2016. *Updating To Remain The Same*, The MIT Press, p. ix