

The McMaster Journal of Communication
Volume 7, Issue 1
2011

Participatory Culture and the Hidden Costs of Sharing

Christine Larabie

McMaster University

Copyright © 2011 by the authors.
The McMaster Journal of Communication is produced by
The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
<http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/mjc>

Participatory Culture and the Hidden Costs of Sharing

Christine Larabie

Abstract

Recent developments in web applications have drastically increased levels of participation on the Internet. This trend is characterized by the ability of users to actively share and create content. Henry Jenkins has conceptualized this shift as part of a participatory culture now shaping the Internet. This shift has also been referred to as Web 2.0, a term denoting an updated or improved version of the web, centred on interactivity and user-generated content. Given this restructured version of the Internet, much of the discourse surrounding its use entails accounts of agency and empowerment. Despite the beneficial, user-centred rhetoric surrounding participatory culture, the extent to which new mechanisms of power permeate this interactive environment continue to be under-investigated. Certain characteristics inherent in Web 2.0 open doors for power and control to operate in ways that need more attention. The willingness of individuals to divulge vast amounts of personal information is troublesome, particularly in light of those attempting to manipulate this free flow of information, essentially capitalizing on the participatory nature of the Internet. Thus, before embracing the benefits of participatory culture, it is necessary to consider the forces that threaten it.

Keywords: participatory culture, Henry Jenkins, Web 2.0, power, personal information flows, new media

The McMaster Journal of Communication
2011
Volume 7, Issue 1 ISSN 1710-257X

Participatory Culture and the Hidden Costs of Sharing

Christine Larabie
McMaster University

Introduction

Recent developments in web applications have drastically increased levels of participation on the Internet. This trend is characterized by the ability of users to actively create content, thereby establishing an environment that welcomes the sharing of information. Henry Jenkins has conceptualized this shift as part of a participatory culture now shaping the Internet. This shift has also been referred to as Web 2.0, a term denoting an updated or improved version of the web, centred on interactivity and user-generated content. Given this restructured version of the Internet, much of the discourse surrounding its use entails accounts of agency and user-empowerment. According to David Beer (2009), we can think of these attitudes as part of a larger rhetoric of democratization, in which user-generated knowledge can now be circulated freely on the Internet.

Despite the beneficial, user-centred rhetoric surrounding participatory culture, the extent to which mechanisms of power now permeate this interactive environment continue to be under-examined. Certain characteristics inherent in Web 2.0 open doors for new forms of power and control to operate in ways that have yet to be critically analyzed (Beer, 2009). The willingness of individuals to divulge vast amounts of personal information is troublesome, particularly in light of

those attempting to manipulate this free flow of information, essentially capitalizing on the participatory nature of the Internet. Before embracing the benefits of participatory culture, it is necessary to consider the forces that threaten it.

Thus, this paper will focus on exploring mechanisms of power within the participatory framework of the Internet. Henry Jenkins' theory of participatory culture will first be examined, with specific reference to the role of agency. This will shed light on the current interactive state of the Internet, and the integral part played by Internet users. Next, a discussion of the literature surrounding new media and participation will be provided in order to understand the context in which these new mechanisms of power have arisen. How has new media become a fundamental part of daily life, and how does this exacerbate the effects of participatory culture? Finally, an in-depth analysis of how these forms of power are manifest in Web 2.0 will be given, illuminating the potentially harmful downside of participatory culture.

Participatory Culture

The notion of participatory culture suggests a shift in the role of Internet users and the environment of the Internet. A more active and participatory role is being taken, whereby Internet users are increasingly creating content as well as consuming it. Jenkins, one of the first scholars to help conceptualize this shift, defines participatory culture as, "a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices" (Jenkins et al., 2006:3). From this, we see that a defining feature of participatory culture is the level of social involvement and interaction. Through creating and sharing content, social bonds are often formed, and as a corollary, various types of online communities. As such,

Jenkins groups participatory culture into four categories: affiliations, expressions, collaborative problem solving, and circulations. As we will see, these categories are largely intertwined and mutually dependent, and coalesce to form the foundation upon which participatory culture has been able to thrive.

Accordingly, what Jenkins refers to as *affiliations*, are formal and informal memberships in online communities (Jenkins et al., 2006). Common examples of this type of participatory culture include sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Friendster, in which members connect with one another through social networks. In these communities, the sharing of photographs, musical tastes, and other personal interests are common. Social networking plays a key role in participatory culture and is regarded as an essential skill to have, a cultural competency (Jenkins et al., 2006). Affiliations are such a core aspect of participatory culture that web applications often necessitate a social component. For instance, online games such as *EverQuest* and *Star Wars Galaxies* “cannot be mastered by single players,” rather, the design of the games requires “sociality and reliance on others” to defeat certain stages (Taylor, 2007:120). Thus, social components are deliberate, and crucial for effective participation.

Jenkins describes the second form of participatory culture as *expressions*, which involve the production of new creative forms (Jenkins et al., 2006). Examples of this type of participation include digital sampling, modding, and fan fiction¹. Not only is there a high demand within different online communities for this type of content, but many platforms exist to showcase these expressions. The user-generated video sharing website, YouTube, is a prime example of a distribution channel in which new creative

¹ For a more detailed discussion of modding and fan fiction, see Postigo (2007).

forms can be circulated. Through expressions, users are able to articulate personal interests, exchange ideas, and form bonds with those who have similar interests. This type of reciprocal relationship between users has become part of the social fabric of participatory culture.

According to Jenkins et al. (2006), *collaborative problem solving* occurs when individuals work together to build on and develop new knowledge. What Shay David (2007) refers to as online knowledge communities, these forms of collaborative problem solving challenge traditional modes of knowledge production, and enable user-generated information to form the basis of said communities. In other words, the goal of online knowledge communities is to be, in many ways, self-sufficient and free from accredited, expert knowledge as a form of authority. According to Aden Evens (2009), “with enough participation, content arises from out of culture at large, reflecting our collective beliefs, opinions, and ideas. Each user gets to assent to those expressions that suit her”. An example of this form of “collective intelligence” that Pierre Levy (1997) has closely studied is evident in the site, Wikipedia, where individuals collaboratively compile, edit, and omit pages of information. Online knowledge communities such as Wikipedia not only enable the free flow of information, but also allow information consumers to become information producers at a nominal cost (David, 2007).

Lastly, *circulations* involve shaping the flow of media and information through activities such as blogging, video blogging and podcasting. Simply put, blogs are used as spaces for individuals or groups to write for an online audience, described by some as frequently updated online diaries (Beer and Burrows, 2007). Similar to other forms of participatory culture, the importance of blogging is that it has become an established practice for creating user-generated content, while encouraging diverse opinions and the free flow of information. Often serving as a platform for dissenting views, blogging has significant social, economic, and political

implications. In short, much of the literature surrounding participatory culture and Web 2.0 focuses on the potential benefits of these forms of interaction. As Jenkins puts it, the participatory model includes, “opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, a changed attitude toward intellectual property, the diversification of cultural expression, the development of skills valued in the modern workplace, and a more empowered conception of citizenship” (Jenkins et al., 2006:3).

From this, we can see the notion of agency, the capacity and ability to exercise individual authority, is an important variable underpinning much of the discourse surrounding participatory culture. Discussions of agency occur primarily in light of the challenges participatory culture poses for traditional culture industries. As Kylie Jarrett (2008) argues, “research on interactivity has long noted the capacity of a renewed agency in media production to disrupt the knowledge/power nexus and the basic power relations of mass broadcast media”. In other words, Internet users are empowered by the ability to create and distribute content outside of traditional boundaries, often restricted by financial, political, and legal limitations. As Janet H. Murray (1998) states, “the more realized the immersive environment, the more active we want to be within it. When the things we do bring tangible results, we experience the second characteristic delight of electronic environments – the sense of agency” (126). These feelings of agency and self-actualization are certainly engaging users on many levels, and the Internet is becoming seen as an increasingly important tool in social and political realms. In addition, Web 2.0 may offer “access to and control over public space, and, through that, access to and control over the space of power” (Boyd, 2006). However, Boyd’s concept of “control over the space of power” is a point of contention, as growing attempts to capitalize on information flows provided in these “public” spaces are highly evident. It appears that the digital environment in which user-agency is able to grow is also one in which this

agency can be stunted, and in some instances, used against us. Against this backdrop, it is critical to examine how user-agency is being challenged.

New Media and Participation

There is a growing body of scholarship addressing the implications of participatory culture and the participatory-democratic nature of the Internet. Many different theoretical approaches exist, adding to a strong base of academic inquiry surrounding the future direction of the Internet given this participatory context:

Crucially, fantasies about the digital are effective: the computer's futurity inhabits our world, finding its expression in politics, advertising, budgeting, strategic planning, fiction, philosophy, and in the hopes and fears that infuse and define our culture. Conceptions of today's future are inevitably shaped by the digital, which appears in forward-looking images and texts from patent applications to novels and film (Evens, 2009).

In many ways, discussion of the political implications of Web 2.0 renews the debates about the democratizing nature of the Internet that began in the 1990s (Roberts, 2009). While this may be true, it is becoming clear that in today's context, a shift towards examining power dynamics in online spaces is becoming increasingly crucial to the very functioning of this democratizing effect. As mentioned earlier, many scholars emphasize the real and potential gains of participatory culture, but with a more pointed focus on the pervasiveness, magnitude, and dependency on digital culture, which is only exacerbated by participatory culture. As Peter Lunenfeld (2009) notes, "it is the capacity of the electronic computer to encode a vast variety of information digitally that has given it such a central place within contemporary culture" (16). Roger

Silverstone (2007) refers to this phenomenon as a ‘mediapolis’: a mediated public space where media underpin and overarch the experiences of everyday life (Silverstone in Deuze, 2008). Indeed, it is almost certain that the majority of Internet users take part in some form of participatory culture, and by routinely engaging in participatory activity online, Internet technologies and information generated by them begin to shape our lives. Thus, participatory culture encourages the integration of Internet technology beyond the realm of the Internet.

Scott Lash (2007) has attempted to conceptualize this pattern, describing it as part of a, ‘new new media ontology’. The basis of Lash’s framework is that information technologies now comprise rather than mediate our lives (Beer and Burrows, 2007). Lash builds on Silverstone’s idea of the ‘mediapolis’, suggesting that space is no longer simply mediated by technology, but rather, our lives are constituted by it. As Roger Burrows (2009) explains, “the stuff that makes up the social and urban fabric has changed – it is no longer just about emergent properties that derive from a complex of social associations and interactions. These associations and interactions are now not only mediated by software and code, they are becoming constituted by it” (Burrows in Beer, 2009:987).

Lash’s framework points to a turn in the array of theoretical approaches to new media. By emphasizing that our lives are now comprised of Internet technologies rather than mediated by them, a new level of investigation is necessary. Nigel Thrift (2005) alludes to this need for further inquiry when he explains, “software has come to intervene in nearly all aspects of everyday life and has begun to sink into its taken-for-granted background” (153). Indeed, this taken-for-granted background in which participatory culture is able to sustain itself necessitates further exploration. Many scholars have begun to consider this background, how it operates, and who is part of it. As Ben Roberts (2009) argues, “current accounts of the participatory aspects of web culture

tend to take a rather narrow view of what such participation might mean”. What Roberts is referring to is the fact that much of the rhetoric surrounding participatory culture does not take into consideration how these forms of participation encourage unforeseen behaviour and activity, constructive or not. He continues, “the argument about the democratizing aspects of web participation revolves, explicitly or otherwise, around a set of assumptions about the nature of political communication” (Roberts, 2009). This communication becomes politicized as participatory culture seemingly provides a new space for public conversation, serving as what many consider a public sphere.

However, as we will see, this becomes problematic when individuals lack awareness about issues of access, control, and power within these spaces. As William H. Dutton et al. (2004) explain, “the disclaimer on participatory media culture, Internet-enabled collective intelligence, and many-to-many as well as peer-to-peer dialogue is the fact, that access to Internet is not grounded in equality, and access is not randomly distributed” (Dutton et. al in Deuze, 2008). Here, Dutton identifies a very key issue when he notes that participation does not denote equality. Simply put, inequality lies in the fact that Internet users are in many ways, through discourses of democratization, encouraged to believe that they do have agency and power through the newfound freedoms offered by participatory culture. However, as many scholars point out, there are significant problems associated with this way of thinking. For example, Tiziana Terranova (2000) examines the idea of free labour inextricably linked with participatory culture:

In spite of the numerous, more or less disingenuous endorsements of the democratic potential of the Internet, the links between it and capitalism look a bit too tight for comfort to concerned political minds. It has been very tempting to counteract the naïve technological

utopianism by pointing out how computer networks are the material and ideological heart of informed capital” (39).

Although the labour issues that Terranova examines in her work are an important point of analysis, the crucial fact that she highlights is the inevitable inclusion of capital in participatory culture. The introduction to the role of capital in this discussion opens doors to control, power, and the manipulation of personal information that is so often encouraged through participation. What is more, many scholars argue that the involvement of capital leads to questions of corporatization, censorship and surveillance (Deuze 2008, Turow 2005). As Mark Deuze (2008) argues “considering the gradual shift towards co-creative media work and a corresponding industry-wide framing of the audience as collaborators or otherwise ‘active’ publics, the key issues moderating such corporate appropriation of participatory culture are notions of transparency (of all parties involved) and control (over all communications)” (10). From this, it becomes clear that participatory culture, and digital culture as a whole have become subject to considerable scrutiny.

Although many of these issues are not new in discussions of the Internet, in the context of participatory culture, they become much more critical to re-examine. As well, these theoretical approaches are useful in providing a context in which we can understand the establishment of new forms of power, particularly in Web 2.0 platforms. An environment in which Internet software is ingrained in our everyday lives provides ample opportunity for groups looking to take advantage of the free circulation of personal information. Thus, against this background, new forms of power are becoming increasingly threatening.

Mechanisms of Power in Web 2.0

Given the participatory nature of the Internet, and the increasingly ubiquitous nature of Web 2.0 software, examining new forms of power is essential to understanding the influences that threaten user-agency. This section will provide an overview of the new forms of power challenging participatory culture; this overview is by no means exhaustive. Instead, the examples chosen represent the most predominant forms of power, which may result in economic exploitation, invasion of privacy and latent forms of social control. As we will see, these groupings overlap, categorically stem from one another, and extend beyond the realm of issues discussed.

Personalized Marketing Power

Since its inception, the Internet has provided vast opportunity for companies to market their brands and services to target audiences. Clearly, this pattern still exists today. Despite social opposition to marketing tactics on the Internet, “marketers [have] learned to work around them, fitnessing government agencies with limited disclosures and protective rhetoric“ (Turow, 2006:96). Particularly, in light of Web 2.0, the Internet has become the primary means for gathering individual information and preferences, in turn allowing for marketers to group individuals based on their potential value as customers. Joseph Turow (2006) refers to this process as “marketing discrimination” in which customers are labeled desirable or undesirable based on their potential economic worth (1). Furthermore, marketing companies “try to use the enormous amount of data they have gathered about individual consumers to decide whether and how it is worth engaging them in relationships via customized email, ads, and other online presentations” (Turow, 2006:71). Web 2.0 applications and sites encourage users to personalize aspects of their online experience, and

this hyper-personalization allows for marketers and online companies to realize larger economic opportunities through target marketing and ad placement.

In particular, large Internet companies such as Google and Yahoo increasingly encourage users to personalize activity on their sites, from the appearance of the site to the types of news and information they receive (Zimmer, 2008). Internet companies utilize personalization features because it provides them with information that will enable customization of advertisements. For instance, as Michael Zimmer (2008) explains, when users indicate preferences, “websites employ contextual ads that reflect those interests of the lifestyles they imply”. Furthermore, other websites such as Flickr, MySpace.com, and Facebook, all encourage users to personalize their material so that they can reach out and connect to others with similar interests. Thus, the effects of marketing in the Web 2.0 era are twofold: not only are marketing companies exploiting unknowing Internet users, they are also, in turn, shaping the interests of users by feeding them advertisements based on assumptions derived from personal data. All of this is being done in a way that frames the process as either providing optimal search results or connecting users with likeminded individuals or ‘friends’. An element of deception lies in this process, whereby users are largely unaware of the extent to which personal information flows are used for marketing purposes.

There are obvious exploitive and economic motivations behind companies obtaining as much detailed information about users as possible. As Saul Hansell (2005) argues, “receiving personalized search results might contribute to a user’s allegiance to a particular search engine service, increasing exposure to that site’s advertising partners as well as improving chances the user would use fee-based services”. As such, search engines can charge higher advertising rates when ads are accurately placed before the eyes of users with relevant needs and interests (Hansell, 2005). More specifically, personalized Web 2.0 applications and sites profile and

categorize all personal information obtained, allowing for economic value to be attached to each individual user. This data is then mined and sold to specific companies and niche industries. Not unlike Terranova's (2000) theory of digital labour, Internet users are ostensibly being used as 'netslaves', "voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited" (33). As Google CEO Eric Schmidt aptly explains, targeted advertising will be "the growth engine of Google for a very long time" (Miller, 2006), and is part of what fuels the process of "the Googlization of everything" (Vaidhyanathan, 2007). From this, we can see how marketers and online companies are taking advantage of individuals by exploiting them unknowingly for economic gain.

From Marketing to Monitoring

In addition to marketers obtaining personalized information for profit gain, the constant gathering and monitoring of data from a variety of sources over the Internet raises serious questions about surveillance. Debates over Internet surveillance are not new. However, again, in the context of participatory culture, it is crucial to re-examine these issues in light of the growing amount of personal information flows. Central to issues of surveillance is the principal window through which we divulge our most private, personal information: the search engine. In his discussion of search engines, Zimmer (2008) argues, "in addition to expansive and diverse searchable indexes, today's search engines also obtain a 'perfect reach' by developing various tools and services to help users organize and use information in contexts not considered traditional web searching". The contexts that Zimmer is referring to are comprised of software afforded by Web 2.0. According to Zimmer (2008), these include "communication and social networking platforms, personal data management, financial data management, shopping and product research, computer file management, and enhanced Internet browsing". This has

created an infrastructure of Web 2.0 that creates a constant flow of personal information. As such, new Web 2.0 applications, including the newly improved search engines of Google and Yahoo, have been introduced in order to take advantage of this flow of information. More specifically, high levels of data surveillance allow Web 2.0 applications to mine huge pools of data in order to reveal preferences and provide personalized online experiences. The result is what Zimmer (2008) calls “search 2.0, a powerful web search information infrastructure that promises to provide more extensive and relevant search results and information management services to users”.

Not only do many websites track and utilize user preferences, but they also combine them with data obtained by tracking user movements through site pages, and sometimes even by purchasing information about them (Zimmer, 2008). Google, the leading personalized search engine, does not appear to buy third party information, but it certainly gathers and stores an enormous amount of information about what individual visitors do (Zimmer, 2008). Moreover, the company is increasingly linking all services for which users register, to the users gmail login account in order to further surveillance and personalization. However, recently, Google has altered its policies, and now users do not have to be logged in to generate personalized searches. What is taking place through this process is the transformation of individuals’ personal creations or relationships into a potential source for customized material. Facebook, as Thrift (2005) explains, “also collects information about you from other sources, such as newspapers and instant messaging services. This information is gathered regardless of your use of the web site”. What results, is a ‘knowing’ system that uses personalized data to search out potential customers, rather than users searching for products or services (Thrift, 2005). Or, in other words, data surveillance allows Web 2.0 applications and online

companies to target products and services to users, regardless of perceived need or solicitation.

Perhaps the most worrisome aspect of this process stems from its “relative invisibility, indispensability, and apparent inescapability” (Zimmer, 2008). The majority of Internet users are unaware that search engines have the ability to actively track their search behavior. As users continue to expand the amount and detail of information they include on Web 2.0 applications and sites, it becomes increasingly important for users to recognize the threats and interests involved in data collection. In order to decrease threats and limit exploitation, users must recognize that surveillance is part of Web 2.0, and take into consideration the consequences of providing personal information. Beyond this, users must seriously weigh the benefits of Web 2.0 applications and sites against the cost of loss of privacy and surveillance. Clearly, there is a concerted effort to combine information about users from as many sources as possible. To do this, Web 2.0 applications must engage in a high level of surveillance of users. However, an even more serious question is raised: how may this information be used in the context of control?

Monitoring Behaviour to Disciplinary Power

As we have seen, personal information flows are inherent in the participatory culture shaping the Internet. As the Web 2.0 era is still in its infancy, users have yet to see the full effects of divulging such vast amounts of personal information. However, in various instances, punitive action has been taken using evidence from a range of Internet sources in which revealing personal information is encouraged. Clive Norris (2003) argues how, what he describes as, “dataveillance” could be used for the basis of disciplinary social control. In other words, the exercise of disciplinary power is reaching beyond traditional areas of discipline and encroaching on public and private domains of

the Internet. More specifically, potentially every blog post, Facebook message or personal email is grounds for surveillance, censorship and discipline.

An example of the overarching disciplinary power and the social control mechanisms of Web 2.0 applications can be seen in the newly introduced Child Protection Act (CPA). The Canadian federal government introduced the Act in order to protect against online sexual exploitation. In particular, as Michael Geist (2009) explains, it creates “a mandatory disclosure requirement on Internet providers where they become aware of child pornography websites or have reason to believe a subscriber is using their service to violate child pornography laws”. Internet providers must submit a report to authorities and preserve the relevant computer data for twenty-one days. Failure to report or comply with any of the regulations of the Act may result in fines or imprisonment. Interestingly, and telling of the uneven relationship that exists between users and Web 2.0 operators, “providers are prohibited from disclosing the disclosure to the customer [...] and are granted immunity from liability for reporting the activity” (Geist, 2009). More importantly, the Act defines Internet provider very broadly and loosely, “extending beyond just ISPs to include those providing Internet access, hosting, or email services” (Geist, 2009). In other words, popular services such as Google, Hotmail, and Facebook are covered by this definition, ultimately encouraging and allowing these services to engage in surveillance and discipline of users.

Clearly, few groups or individuals would criticize a bill targeting child pornography. Most would agree that child pornography is abhorrent, and that laws need to be in place to deal with the problem of child exploitation on the Internet. However, it is hard to ignore the increasing amounts of power being given to Internet companies and providers in the name of public safety. This raises questions surrounding the extent to which Internet providers, and other regulatory bodies, have the right to control and censor the Internet. This

concern is echoed through debates surrounding net neutrality (see Anderson 2009, Wu 2003, Chester 2007), for instance, but have yet to be fully explored by policymakers on a large scale. As it stands, this Act can be seen as setting a precedent for further intervention in online activity. Beyond this, the CPA also raises ethical questions regarding social control. Although the notion of social control has strong connotations, seemingly inapplicable to the participatory-democratic nature of the Internet, it appears as though elements of control are in fact present on the Internet, albeit latent for the time being.

Examining these issues from a philosophical standpoint is a useful point of analysis. According to Immanuel Kant, “human beings have certain special rights and these rights always take precedence over other less fundamental rights and over policy that would violate these rights for some greater good for all” (Kant in Rosenberg, 2008:221). Further, Kant believes that treating people as “ends in themselves” entails not allowing the consequences for some or even many to influence our treatment of others, no matter how few (Kant in Rosenberg, 2008:221). The violation of privacy in this case is clearly an inferior issue to that of protecting against child pornography. However, where do we, as Internet users and as citizens, draw the line on censorship, surveillance and discipline on the Internet? If laws are passed on the basis of moral grounds, and individual rights are becoming less important, under what circumstances will users continue to divulge personal information? In the context of participatory culture, this is an area that must be explored further.

Discussion

Participatory culture has undoubtedly benefited Internet users in many ways; these must be acknowledged. Not only does participatory culture encourage the sharing and creation of content, it provides a space in which individuals can

become socially engaged with others who share the same interests. From a social perspective, participatory culture does not discriminate, and creates an environment that fosters creativity and innovation. Undoubtedly, users become empowered by the ability to circulate creative content freely on the Internet without restrictions that existed previously in traditional culture industries. Participatory culture has transformed the media landscape to a place where traditional barriers are slowly being broken down. This has had significant economic and political implications. Many scholars (see Jenkins 2006a, Jenkins 2006b, Lessig 2004, Karaganis 2007) have produced works that address participatory culture, and discuss the values associated with participatory culture: empowerment, freedom, and in many ways, trust. Indeed, it is this element of trust that places users in a precarious position.

Thus, we cannot ignore the potential threats associated with participatory culture. Web 2.0 encourages us to divulge detailed personal information through login requirements, preferences, and profiles, and more frequently, users are agreeing to do so. Although this may suggest a shift in the value of privacy, it does not reconcile the fact that vast amounts of personal information are, for the most part, being gathered and used in concealed ways. This information is, in turn, being used to shape our tastes, interests, and lifestyles, threatening the very ideals of participatory culture. In the context of Lash's 'new new media ontology' and other similar theoretical approaches, participatory culture is of growing concern. To reiterate, 'new new media ontology' views information technology as a part of one's being, inseparable from daily life. As such, "software is increasingly making a difference to the constitution and production of everyday life" (Dodge and Kitchin, 2008:2). Given this context, it is becoming increasingly important to examine how power mechanisms are manifest in these technologies, primarily Web 2.0 platforms.

Many debates exist between proponents and critics of participatory culture, as we have seen the juxtaposition of viewpoints. As Ganaele Langlois et al. (2009) puts it:

Major commercial Web 2.0 sites thus present us with a paradox that unfortunately neither position can fully resolve. On the one hand, such popular platforms allow users to express themselves to new audiences in ways they were not possible before. On the other hand, even though they are freely accessible and have come to act as seemingly quasi-public spaces, such platforms are designed to produce profits, mostly through the tracking of user behaviours, interests, and patterns of use to create new forms of customized advertising.

Therefore, as the shift towards Web 2.0 becomes even more prevalent, more scholarly work needs to be undertaken to examine how vast amounts of personal information are being used. Although some Internet users may have the skills to manipulate computer hardware and software to their own advantage, it is unlikely that this type of resistance will occur amongst the majority of individuals. As it stands, “there is a fear that the same power elite who formerly ‘moved atoms’ as they pursued a science without conscience will now ‘move bits’ that govern the computerized world” (Heim, 2000:33). Although this fear, or concern, exists among many media scholars, the extent to which users are worried about participatory culture is uncertain. It is important to recognize the new forms of power inherent in Web 2.0 to understand what is at stake through participating on the Internet. At the same time, discourses surrounding participatory culture and Web 2.0 need to adopt a more critical perspective, identifying and confronting power structures threatening the very livelihood of the Internet.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Steve. "Net neutrality: The view from Canada." *Media Development* 56.1 (2009): 8-11.
- Beer, David. "Power through the algorithm? Participatory web cultures and the technological unconscious." *New Media and Society* 11.6 (2009): 985-1002.
- Beer, David and Roger Burrows. "Sociology and, of and in Web 2.0: Some Initial Considerations." *Sociological Research Online* 12.5 (2007).
- Boyd, Danah. "Identity Production in a Networked Culture: Why Youth Heart MySpace." Presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, St. Louis, MO. February 19, 2006.
- Burrows, Roger. "Afterword: Urban Informatics and Social Ontology." *Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics*. Ed. Marcus Foth. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2009: 450-454.
- Chester, Jeff. "Net Neutrality and the Supermedia Monopolies." *Extra!* 20.2 (2007): 26-29.
- David, Shay. "Toward Participatory Expertise." *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture*. Ed. Joe Karaganis. New York, NY: Social Science Research Council, 2007: 176-196.
- Deuze, Mark. "Corporate Appropriation of Participatory Culture." *Participation and Media Production: Critical Reflections on Content Creation*. Eds. Nico Carpentier and Benjamin De Cleen. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2008: 27-40.

- Dodge, Martin and Rob Kitchin. "Software, Objects and Home Space." NIRSA Working Paper No. 35, NUI Maynooth (2008). URL accessed 12 December 2009
<http://www.nuim.ie/nirsa/research/documents/NIRSAWP35Software_objects_and_home_spaceDodge.pdf>
- Dutton, William H., Sharon E. Gillet, Lee W. McKnight and Malcolm Peltu. "Bridging broadband Internet divides: reconfiguring access to enhance communicative power." *Journal of Information Technology* 19.1 (2004): 28-38.
- Evens, Aden. "Dreams of a New Medium." *FibreCulture* [online] 14 (2000).
- Geist, Michael. "Government Introduces Mandatory Child Porn Reporting Law [weblog entry]." Michael Geist's Blog, November 27, 2009. URL accessed on 12 December 2009
<<http://www.michaelgeist.ca/content/blogsection/0/125/10/10/>>
- Hansell, Saul. "Microsoft pans to sell search ads of its own." *New York Times*, 26 September 2005: C1, C8.
- Heim, Michael. "The Cyberspace Dialectic." *The digital dialectic: new essays on new media*. Ed. Peter Lunenfeld. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000: 24-45.
- Jarrett, Kylie. "Interactivity is Evil! A critical investigation of Web 2.0." *First Monday* [online] 13.3 (2008).
- Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006a.

- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006b.
- Jenkins, H., Katie Clinton, Ravi Purushotma, Alice J. Robison and Margaret Weigel. "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century." *MacArthur Foundation: Building the Field of Digital Media and Learning*, An occasional paper on digital media and learning (2006).
- Karaganis, Joe. "Presentation." *Structures of Participation*. Ed. Joe Karaganis. New York, NY: Social Science Research Council, 2007: 8-20.
- Langlois, Ganaele., Fenwick McKelvey, Greg Elmer and Kenneth Werbin. "Mapping Commercial Web 2.0 Worlds: Towards a New Critical Ontogenesis." *Fibreculture* [online] 14 (2009).
- Lash, Scott. "New New Media Ontology." Presented at Toward a Social Science of Web 2.0, National Science Learning Centre, York, UK, September 5, 2007.
- Lessig, Lawrence. *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2004.
- Levy, Pierre. *Collective intelligence: mankind's emerging world in cyberspace*. New York, NY: Perseus Books, 1997.
- Lunenfeld, Peter. "Unfinished Business." *The digital dialectic: new essays on new media*. Ed. Peter Lunenfeld. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000: 6-23.

- Miller, Michael. (2006). "Google's Schmidt clears the air." PCMag.com 17 March 2006. URL accessed on 12 December 2009
<<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,1939257,00.asp>>
- Murray, Janet H. *Hamlet on the holodeck: the future of narrative in cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998.
- Noris, Clive. "From personal to digital: CCTV, the panopticon, and the technological mediation of suspicion and social control." *Surveillance as social sorting: Privacy, risk, and digital discrimination*. Ed. David Lyon. London, UK: Routledge, 2003: 249-81.
- Postigo, Hector. "Of Mods and Modders: Chasing Down the Value of Fan-Based Digital Game Modifications." *Games and Culture* 2.4 (2007): 300-313.
- Roberts, Ben. "Beyond the 'Networked Public Sphere': Politics, Participation and Technics in Web 2.0." *Fibreculture* [online] 14 (2009).
- Rosenberg, Alexander. *Philosophy of Social Science*. 3rd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008.
- Silverstone, Roger. *Media and Mortality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007.
- Taylor, T.L. "Pushing the Borders: Player Participation and Game Culture." *Structures of Participation*. Ed. Joe Karaganis. New York, NY: Social Science Research Council, 2007: 112-32.
- Terranova, Tiziana. "Free Labor: Producing Cultural for the Digital Economy." *Social Text* 18.2 (2000): 33-58.

Thrift, Nigel. *Knowing Capitalism*. London, UK: Sage Publications, 2005.

Turow, Joseph. "Audience construction and culture production: marketing surveillance in the digital age." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 597 (2005): 103-121.

Turow, Joseph. *Niche envy: marketing discrimination in the digital age*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006.

Vaidhyanathan, Siva. "The Googlization of Everything and the Future of Copyright." *University of California Davis Law Review* 40 (2007): 1207-1231.

Wu, Tim. "Network Neutrality, Broadband Discrimination." *Journal of Telecommunications and High Technology Law* 2 (2003): 141-179.

Zimmer, Michael. "The Externalities of Search 2.0: The Emerging Privacy Threats when the Drive for the Perfect Search Engine meets Web 2.0." *First Monday* [Online] 13.3 (2008).