

Details and Citations

The myth of “digital wellbeing”

- Digital wellbeing is a myth that serves the interests of Silicon Valley. Most large technology companies promote digital wellbeing as part of the service they offer to customers (Dennis, 2021). The word ‘wellbeing’ conjures up images of happy people relaxing in meadows, and this is the aesthetic behind key silicon valley design icons such as the Steve Jobs Theater at Apple Park (Donkin, 2017). The concept of “digital wellbeing” is claimed to originate from the Google corporation itself (Pardes, 2010); certainly Google was an early adoptor and promoter of the term (Parry et al., 2023).
- Existing in digital spaces, particularly social media, is well known to have negative impacts on mental health especially for young people (Cunningham et al., 2021; He, 2022; Keles et al., 2020; O’Keeffe et al., 2011; Thapa & Subedi, 2018).
- The media is full of articles lauding social media use in teenagers (Foulkes, 2024; Spargo-Ryan, 2024).
- The implicit ideology based around ‘revealed preference models’, which is an economics concept that the true preferences of an agent can be inferred from their behaviour (Aprem & Krishnamurthy, 2017). Essentially the conclusion is that because teenagers *use* social media, they must *like* it.

The delusion of privacy

- The ACARA standards ask students to manage their privacy online. This is an impossible challenge: the privacy of technology users is completely in the hands of the State and technology corporations. The State can freely access individual communications and web activity (Schultz, 2019), including whether someone is in a romantic relationship (Biggs, 2023). The Australian Government made over 300,000 ‘data authorisations’ during the 2017/18 reporting period (Schultz, 2019) so it is not a rare activity.
- Companies like Google and Facebook read emails, personal messages, and track browsing activity for the purpose of building a complete picture of the user even if they don’t even have an account (Baser, 2018).
- A famous study from 2008 found that it would take an average internet user 76 full work days to read all of the privacy policies they would encounter in a year (McDonald & Cranor, 2008), and the situation is worse today. This theoretical result is backed up by empirical evidence (Obar & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2020).
- West’s three ‘narratives of technological utopianism’ (2019, p. 17): that the free and open network is inherently valuable, that web 2.0¹ is personal, and that data can be used for the benefit of those without power. Of course, the reality is that web 2.0 puts users face to face with an algorithm and the power of data is only valuable to a small number of actors

¹ ‘web 2.0’ is a shorthand for the kinds of websites that have come to dominate the internet since the early to mid 2000s based around user-generated content. It includes social media, online marketplaces such as eBay, and content hosting sites like YouTube.

(wealthy states and transnational corporations) who have the ability to collect, interpret, and use the vast amounts of data generated by consumers of digital tools. ACARA's participation in these narratives includes insisting up to level 5 imply that students' data is something that they can choose whether or not to give away, rather than something that is constantly being harvested at all moments that they are online.

Enforcing intellectual property propaganda

- The term 'Intellectual Property' is misleading, because it is not 'property' in any reasonable sense of the term, but is simply a restriction on other people's behaviour (Lemley, 2015), perhaps best understood as a religious belief.
- Even strong supporters of IP acknowledge that it serves no utilitarian purpose, but is a 'moral right', thus admitting that their attachment to IP is not rational but emotional (Merges, 2011).
- Copyright law in fact limits creativity, especially in the 'age of remix' (Brøvig-Hanssen & Jones, 2023).

Digital Serfs

- That we are, or are being trained to be, 'Digital Serfs' comes from Yanis Varoufakis (Varoufakis, 2023)
- The concept that the myth of the digital frontier acts to obscure the fact that the digital space actually colonises our one wild and precious life is from Anna Krien's recent article in the monthly (Krien, 2024) . The quotes in the section on Oliver Sacks also come from this article.
- I am indebted to Mary Oliver for "Tell me, what is it you plan to do // with your one wild and precious life?" which comes from her poem "The Summer Day"
- Heidegger on Dread (translated in this article as "Anxiety" but can be considered dread, anxiety, angst or anguish). See section 2.3.1 "Death" (Wheeler, 2020)

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