Spatial Contingency: Digital Networks, James Hogg, and the Religious Politics of Space

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**Abstract:**

Written in the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, this essay probes the enthusiasm for virtual communication in higher education to consider the political ramifications of virtual versus physical spaces. Reading James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* in light of a resonant spatial politics, it argues that absent what the novel proposes are the moderating effects of shared space, religious fundamentalism becomes radically individualistic fanaticism. In demonstrating Hogg’s attention to the ways new technologies enabled new forms of “virtual” religious affiliation, the essay suggests that the novel proves a rumination on our current orderings of space, offering a prescient view of the problems that might accompany uncritical acceptance of a supposedly inevitable digitally networked future.

In the first months of the pandemic, a smattering of voices across higher education tried to find the situation’s silver lining. Seeing economic, logistical, and social hardships facing colleges as an opportunity to disrupt what they took to be an unsustainable business model, these optimists suggested that the transition to remote learning and Zoom conferencing represented a chance to “innovate” and “unbundle” the college experience.[[1]](#footnote-1) Thanks to improved digital technologies, so went this line of thinking, financially imperiled institutions could deliver education to more students without the inconveniences and costs that attend maintaining a physical infrastructure. What’s more, students, faculty and staff who otherwise might not possess the economic means to attend in-person courses and conferences could participate in digital alternatives at little to no expense to themselves (or their institutions).

This movement toward higher education’s despatialization—defined by John B. Thompson in light of tele-communication as “detach[ment] from the spatial condition of common locality”[[2]](#footnote-2)—preceded the pandemic, of course. But the pandemic hastened what some called the inevitable trend toward networked models of assembling. Hence the spring and summer of 2020 witnessed calls to “embrace this moment strategically,” to use the words of Hans Taparia, a professor of business at New York University, as “online education could expand access exponentially and drop its costs by magnitudes.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

On the one hand, it was easy to sympathize with these arguments. Before the pandemic, the privilege of possessing and accessing physical space was mostly relegated to academia’s elite. Adjuncts, for instance, were often denied physical offices on campus, let alone institutional “homes,” and contingent faculty (like my spouse) were overwhelmingly employed to teach online courses, while teaching in-person generally was the default position of tenured or tenure-track faculty (like me). Moreover, because contingent faculty are granted little to no research funding, they had little ability to physically attend academic conferences. As Jessie Daniels and Polly Thistlethwaite note, “What happens inside a conference meeting room rarely exists for anyone except those few who can afford to be physically present.”[[4]](#footnote-4) A similar dynamic applied to the student experience, as idyllic, residential campuses tend to attract a wealthier student body relative to online schools or commuter campuses. In these ways, physical space in higher education often has functioned as thedividing line separating the haves and have-nots, the privileged and everyone else. No wonder the push among some to diminish the centrality of academia’s physical spaces, to make them more contingent rather than central to the college experience.

But despatialization also exacerbates the very divides that its proponents argue it would overcome. Taparia’s op-ed in the *New York Times* is an interesting case in point. Even as he acknowledges that “no one doubts that the [online] student experience would not be as holistic” as the in-person one, he nevertheless reaches this ultimate takeaway: “But universities don’t need to abandon in-person teaching for students who see the value in it. They simply need to create ‘parallel’ online degrees for all their core degree programs.”[[5]](#footnote-5) In short, Taparia inadvertently ends up advocating for the further entrenchment of the two-tiered system in academia, one that offers affluent students a more “holistic” face-to-face, campus-based education while providing less affluent students a supposedly “parallel” but, by his own admission, less “holistic” online education.

Taparia’s argument illustrates one of the main claims of this essay: the role of higher education as an aspirationally-democratic enterprise partly hinges on its ability to maintain the existence, robustness, and accessibility of its *physical* shared spaces. No doubt the maintenance of such spaces with the threat of a pandemic resurgence is unprecedentedly complicated, expensive, and even, in some cases, impossible. Nevertheless, even as we improve digital communication, we must also keep front and center the importance of cultivating, investing in, and ensuring widespread access to academia’s shared physical spaces.

Somewhat understandably, there is a presentism that attends descriptions of remote learning, online conferencing, or “unbundled” education: these are “unprecedented” endeavors in “uncharted waters” only recently opened by recent strides in computing technologies (see, for instance, Russell). But while it’s true Zoom has only been around since 2011, nevertheless there are past resources for thinking through the political ramifications of this shift. Thinkers ranging from Manuel Castells to Wendy Brown, for example, have considered the politics that arise from shared, concrete spaces versus technologically-enabled networks, bringing into focus how “network society” might come at the expense of the social weal.

Romanticism, I believe, is also well poised to contribute to contemporary defenses of the political value of bounded, shared space. As Siobhan Carroll observes, “Scholars historicizing spatial concepts have, from Henri Lefebvre onward, tended to single out the Romantic era as a time in which urbanization, new technologies of measurement, and dramatic political revolutions collided to crystallize the modern construction of space.”[[6]](#footnote-6) As such, the early nineteenth century was forced to grapple with “imagined” versus concrete spaces in community formation.[[7]](#footnote-7) For instance, it witnessed the attempt to establish alternatives to face-to-face community via the medium of new print technologies, and confronted multiple efforts to develop “non-unified formulations of nationness” that strove to make coherent the idea of “Britain” and the British Empire.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Examining these historical developments, critics often have noted the enduringness and relative success of Romantic projects in substituting “imaginary” spaces and communities for more geographically bounded ones. Some of these scholars, influenced by the work of historians such as Marcus Rediker, have celebrated the relative boundlessness of the Romantic era as one that opened new opportunities for subject and community formation unhindered by national boundaries. But several critics also observe that the flipside of this success was an apprehension of the potential ill effects of such “unbounded” projects. As they point out, accompanying nineteenth-century endeavors to create imagined communities of shared culture was an acute sense of anomie—an anomie that fed Romantic texts’ preoccupation with the perils of social atomization.[[9]](#footnote-9)

To chart the relationship between such Romantic socio-political projects and contemporary discussions of higher education, I want to take these projects a step further than their authors perhaps wanted or imagined. As I understand it, part of the “purchase” of Romanticism “inside and outside academe” (in the words of this CFP) flows from one vein of thought in the period that interrogated the supposed social benefits of precisely what Brown terms “deterritorialized societies.” This channel of Romantic thinking questioned the supposed social good of such deterritorialized societies, as well as the “frenzied affirmation of individual freedom” that usually accompanied them.[[10]](#footnote-10) Furthermore, it dwelled on the potential political and social fallout that came of “imagined communities,” which were built on and valorized an ideal of imagined shared values, rather than norms of “reciprocity and accommodation” developed by repeated interaction and proximity.

James Hogg—who was pushed out of the *Blackwood’s Magazine* print community he had helped to establish in large part due to his working-class background and lack of formal education—was particularly attuned to the politics of “imagined communities.” As much as he subscribed to the promises of finding like-minded individuals via the networks of mass print culture (which had freed him from shepherding and put him on the path to literary success), he remained throughout his career fixated on the social, cultural, and political values generated by shared land and bounded space. His outsider status at *Blackwood’s*, perhaps, made him attuned as much to what was lost, as well as gained, by the replacement of physical space by “imagined communities.”

Hogg explored the politics of despatialization most prominently in his famous work, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Robert Wringhim, of course, is a religious fanatic. But Wringhim’s religious fanaticism, I argue, must be understood in the context of space. Wringhim recognizes that the politics arising from a “common locality” threaten the exercise of his “boundless” individualism:[[11]](#footnote-11) he never recounts attending (the bounded community of) church, and he pledges fealty to (who he takes to be) a foreign monarch openly hostile to traditional boundaries. Absent what the novel proposes are the moderating effects of shared space, Wringhim’s religious fundamentalism becomes fanaticism.

Hogg’s concern over despatialization, as represented by Wringhim, provides an unexpected resource as to why we should interrogate the rush to adopt permanently “digital” alternatives to academe’s lost spaces. In the modern academy, space is evermore at a premium, and it is tempting to view digital technologies as a means of providing virtual (and cheaper) replacements for the office, the classroom, the conference, or, even, the institution. Yet to heed Hogg is to see the very different politics that arise from bounded versus boundaryless spaces, to see the ways that concrete spaces perhaps are the irreplaceable foundation of an equitable, representative, and healthily pluralistic society. In the admittedly idiosyncratic way I bring together Hogg and today’s digitized society, then, I want to demonstrate that the novel is not simply about some distant, strife-ridden religious past. I suggest instead the novel explores the potential ill-effects of virtual “networks” on political subjectivity, perhaps cautioning us today to continue in the systematic investment and maintenance of our accessible, shared physical spaces.

A Politics of Space in the Digital Era

Political theorists from John Dewey to Wendy Brown have long noted that although xenophobes and tribalists exhibit an obsession with policing the boundaries of their spaces, bounded, shared space is nevertheless the precondition of those values necessary to free society. Put differently, what such political theorists recognize is that even if boundaries promote radical forms of exclusion, this doesn’tnecessarily mean that the condition of “boundarylessness” does the opposite. We might equate boundarylessness (such as that which commonly attends conceptions of digital spaces) with ultimate individual freedom, but this ideal of unhindered individual freedom is also at odds with the values necessary to free society.

Brown offers a compelling explanation as to why the politics arising from the precondition of concrete, shared space are anathema to neoliberal understandings of freedom. According to Brown, neoliberalism is a “moral-political project” aimed at “dismantling and disparaging the social state in the name of free, responsibilized individuals.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Pursuing an ideal of boundless individual freedom (supposedly) unfettered by “*any kind* of deliberate and state-administered social policy, planning, and justice,” neoliberalism promotes ideologies, technologies, and economic systems that atomize individuals.[[13]](#footnote-13) This atomization, Brown continues, bolsters neoliberal logic as it erodes social consciousness of and support for conditions of “political equality” upon which the capacity for democratic power-sharing and self-rule depend.[[14]](#footnote-14) Hence why the freedoms engendered by “digital space” has not been able to save us from profound feelings of isolation and alienation:[[15]](#footnote-15) “The rise of the digital,” Brown argues, “generates a novel, radically deterritorialized and dedemocratized sociality. This sociality features no clear protocols of power sharing, enfranchisement, or commitment to negotiating diverse views and needs, inclusion, or plurality. Whatever their merits, digitized ‘societies’ are detached from the challenge of sharing power equally in order to rule ourselves.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Such sentiments are differently expressed by political theorist Jennifer Forestal, who—drawing on John Dewey’s meditations on the “the role of space in facilitating democratic politics”—calls for the imposition of tangible “boundaries” on internet communities “to foster reciprocity and accommodation through repeated interactions.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

Brown draws on Carl Schmitt in particular to illustrate how boundarylessness produces a certain type of subjectivity antagonistic to the social weal. Pondering the differences between “land” and “seafaring” peoples, Schmitt notes that the “boundarylessness” of seafaring populations oriented them toward “use and consumption, rather than ownership and cultivation.”[[18]](#footnote-18) A key difference, then, between the move from an imaginary based on concrete, geographically-bounded space to one based on deterritorialized space was that the latter promoted a rapacious appetite to “extend sovereignty” without the moderating responsibilities that attend actual land—that is, the responsibility to make land more productive, to defend that land, or, most of all, to negotiate conditions of cohabitation. Applying such contexts to online discussion boards, Forestal looks to Dewey to argue that flexible but distinct “boundaries” on Internet communities foster “an openness to respond and adapt to new ideas and information” while discouraging trolls.[[19]](#footnote-19) What Dewey knew, she argues, is that “spaces are not value-neutral” but rather provide “cues as to how to behave … focus[ing] our attention on certain kinds of activities and organiz[ing] our relationships in certain ways.”[[20]](#footnote-20) For both thinkers, “boundarylessness” is linked to undemocratic tendencies. And for Brown in particular, concrete, shared space is the precondition of developing a social consciousness committed to “negotiating diverse views and needs, inclusion, or plurality.”

Yet because commonly conceived as the alternative to “hierarchical, vertically integrated structures located in fixed positions,” the rise of the modern “network society” has often been cast as flexible and horizontal in comparison.[[21]](#footnote-21) Granting actors more “relative autonomy,” it yields a “more flexible and decentered [form] of organization,” as Yoon Sun Lee observes.[[22]](#footnote-22) But as Castells reminds us, network society also reproduces—even ossifies—distinctions between privileged and unprivileged rather than “decentering” power. Networks depend on nodes, and the gatekeepers of such nodes are the new privileged class. And these gatekeepers gather in *geographic* spaces, even as they look to *un*space space and *un*time time. Such spaces are exclusionary: Castells gives luxury hotels and airport VIP lounges as examples, but Silicon Valley, Ivy League colleges, and prohibitively-expensive “cosmopolitan” cities also come to mind.[[23]](#footnote-23) In this sense, Castells suggests that geographic space becomes all the more rarefied in the modern network society. As the rest of society is increasingly atomized—the centrality of the school, office, shop, and other public places rendered disposable thanks to the expansion of the digital domain—physical space increasingly is transmuted into a luxury conferred on the privileged. One can consider how access to or ownership of bounded (or gate-kept) geographic “nodes” have become an expected part of the “benefits” granted to academic, economic, and political elites—a benefit whose desirability increases in direct proportion to its increased *in*accessibility to everyone else.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Luckily, the rest of us are told, there are alternatives. Consider the academic conference, for example. Because they are expensive and time-consuming, students, faculty, and independent scholars with limited funds and time often can’t attend them. Technology, however, renders geographic distance moot, and anyone with access to the Internet and a computer can (supposedly) take part in the lively exchange of ideas. In this vein, Daniels and Thistlethwaite note that “as an alternative to the expense (and environmental impact) of travel to conferences, some scholars are creating virtual conferences through digital video and web conferencing or following conferences from afar via Twitter hashtags.”[[25]](#footnote-25) They continue, “Scholars present at conferences can also share their work with the public, those attending the meetings, through open access repositories at their institutions or on commercial platforms like SlideShare.”[[26]](#footnote-26) More relative autonomy is granted to each scholar thanks to digital technologies—those who can’t make it can participate anyway, and in-person attendees can share their work with those off-site. Obviated is the need to advocate for time off or dedicated funds in order physically to attend what is implied to be the perhaps obsolete academic conference.

There are clear environmental benefits that come with online and hybrid conferencing (though, as a recent study in *Nature Communications* noted, the hub placement of the hybrid conference is critical to realize these benefits). [[27]](#footnote-27) But it is precisely because the environmental considerations are so urgent that the political ramifications of online conferencing perhaps receive less attention. For instance, there is rarely discussion about academe’s reliance on questionably democratic technological platforms. In December 2020, Zoom came under fire for “work[ing] with the Chinese government to terminate Americans’ accounts and disrupt video calls about the 1989 massacre of pro-democracy activists in Tiananmen Square,” and its past failures to protect users’ data from governments and law enforcement attracted the criticism of the human rights group Access Now (Zoom has since updated its privacy practices).[[28]](#footnote-28) Twitter has a history of silencing political dissent, failing to stem online harassment, and relative to traditional media outlets, disproportionately promoting state-sponsored propaganda and disseminating “fake news.” SlideShare is owned by LinkedIn, which in turn is owned by Microsoft—one of the “big five” tech companies that currently exercise a monopoly on Internet traffic. And, needless to say, Meta is facing a reckoning for its role in facilitating the spread of misinformation and toxic speech (an audit of the company warned that “its tools and algorithms” could drive “people toward self-reinforcing echo chambers of extremism.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Even setting aside the troubling political ramifications of big tech’s rise, a larger problem exists: arguments in favor of moving conferences online (or ending institutional support for physical participation in them) tend to instrumentalize the conveyance of information insofar as they assume “information sharing” for the sake of individual career and institutional development to be the fundamental purpose of these conferences.[[30]](#footnote-30)

This isn’t to criticize digital conversations or interactions, nor is it to say that digital platforms aren’t able to provide meaningful and more inclusive forms of horizontal community. It is only to reemphasize what the pandemic years have made obvious. Digital “alternatives” do not inherently resolve the problems that attend in-person meetings. Without proper attention paid to the underlying inequalities of higher education, such technologies in fact stand to deepen its existing two-tiered system, in which access to in-person communication is increasingly the domain of the privileged few while the rest ought to be satisfied with “virtual” forms of community or instruction. Some cash-strapped institutions, for instance, are considering not reimbursing faculty for in-person conferencing if a digital alternative is available.

This separation is reason for special concern at a moment when higher education is in crisis. For not only does fully online communication have a tendency to “fortify and confirm” people in their own opinions, creating a more polarized society (“Danger in the internet echo chamber”). The absence of the “rest” also creates an echo chamber at the *actual* academic conference, as attendees are less likely to engage with or feel beholden to digital participants than they are with fellow in-person participants. If we are to extrapolate Brown’s reasoning, the academic conference by virtue of being bounded isaplace where we better recognize who “cohabitates” disciplinary spaces and wherein the need for “protocols of power sharing, enfranchisement, or commitment to negotiating diverse views and needs, inclusion, or plurality” may come into sharper focus relative to digital “deterritorialized” spaces. Hence why digital platforms perhaps haven’t emerged as full-fledged “alternatives” to physical attendance at conferences. Digital participation might be cheaper for struggling institutions, but the long-term political costs for scholars and professional organizations could prove steeper. When (hopefully) we find ourselves fully on the other side of the global pandemic, we might do well to assess whether a new normal of “networked” conferencing has created the sorts of communities we wish to inhabit.

This is a necessarily reductive argument, I realize, one that oversimplifies complex debates regarding social media, academic conferences, and online education, as well as a robust critical literature on the politics of space in the fields of literary studies, geography, sociology, gender studies, and more. It also neglects finer-grained developments in Zoom and Google Meet technologies to create boundaries on virtual classroom and conference attendance and participation. But I focus on the contributions of Brown and Forestal (in conjunction with Castells), because they take such a comprehensive view of the potential political consequences of digital spaces precisely at a moment when technologies for virtual gathering are imagined to redress the inequalities and inconveniences associated with physical, bounded space. Their ultimate concern strikes me as fairly uncontroversial: rather than making people feel less alienated, digital gatherings can accelerate alienation.

Hogg’s novel probes the extent of this danger.[[31]](#footnote-31) Admittedly, it’s a stretch to link historical instances of “imagined communities” to the rise of digital networks of affiliation today. But I’m not the first to suggest connections of this kind. Social media, for instance, is often compared to Americana’s old town square, and the Internet is regularly likened to the nineteenth-century Western frontier. And these historical analogues are meant to do more than merely describe digital interactions. As law professor Alfred C. Yen notes in an essay arguing against the use of the “Western frontier metaphor” in relation to the legal regulation of cyberspace, such metaphors also determine the character of the Internet interactions: “The Western frontier metaphor operates as propaganda supporting the minimal regulation of the Internet,” he argues.[[32]](#footnote-32) Ultimately, he suggests that the “continued application of the unreformed metaphor creates an incomplete and misleading influence on policy and crowds out other metaphors that offer alternate perspectives on the Internet.”[[33]](#footnote-33) I take Yen’s call for “other metaphors” by which to speak of our contemporary era as inspiration to look to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Protestantism for new language to address the problem of deterritorialized academic space today.

The Politics of Religious Space

One significant development in the history of Protestantism was the reconceptualization of how it might expand in light of new technological advancements. From an older ideal of a formal, united, and trans-territorial Christendom (a concept “essentially linked to territory”[[34]](#footnote-34)), the evangelical revival of Protestantism instead “developed consciously international structures” that were conceived as deliberately separate from (increasingly secular) national governments and which eventually resulted in an “*informal* spiritual empire, a *network* of federated believers across increasingly distinct national boundaries.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Though the idea of “networked” Protestantism can be traced back to the Reformation, the structure and ramifications of this “network” became more pronounced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[[36]](#footnote-36) By the early nineteenth century, international Protestantism—that is, “networked” rather than territorially-defined Protestantism—dominated.[[37]](#footnote-37) Fascinatingly, the arguments in favor of this “networked” international Protestantism resemble those often given for the desirability of “network society” today, as both are assumed better to guarantee individual autonomy and more horizontal, decentered forms of social organization.

Though Christendom’s formal end often is dated to the start of World War I,[[38]](#footnote-38) Philip Jenkins argues that the beginning of the end of Christendom probably can be traced to an earlier event: the rise of secular nationalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[[39]](#footnote-39) According to perhaps the most prominent account of this historical development, the religious wars of the seventeenth century led to the growing conviction that peace could only be achieved if religious power were ceded to the secular nation-state. Religious belief would be divorced from government and instead relegated to the private domain.

Sometimes overlooked is the fact that several Protestant institutions and actors *also* enthusiastically participated in and contributed to the rise of secular nationalism. For one thing, a number of Dissenting denominations saw themselves existentially threatened by a closeunion between church and state. In the view of these Dissenters, anyform of state-enforced religious belief imposed from above was anathema, as it checked the exercise of one’s individual freedom of conscience, which, they felt, was one of the cornerstones of the Christian faith. Thus the Particular Baptist Robert Robinson declared in 1779 that “religious uniformity [was] an illegitimate brat of the mother of harlots,” and compared the various Protestant denominations to be properly akin to “little states, each governed by its own laws, and all independent [of] one another. Like confederate states they assembled by deputies in one large ecclesiastical body, and deliberated about the common interests of the whole.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Instead of unity built on force, confederacy would be facilitated by the “industrialization of communications;” thus “the international message [of Protestantism] grew in symbiosis with the technologies required to broadcast and receive it.”[[41]](#footnote-41) In this sense, the Enlightenment discourse of individual freedom, inalienable rights, and global federation ended up informing prominent eighteenth-century Protestant conceptions of how to establish cooperation across denominational differences. International Protestantism, in other words, was partly driven by an optimism and set of moral values that bears some resemblance to the values and beliefs propounded by early-2000s cyber-utopianism. By “network[ing] human beings,” new technology would “foster communication, collaboration, sharing, helpfulness, and community” and eventually help in establishing more “free” societies.[[42]](#footnote-42)

As the advent of the modern missionary movement in the 1790s demonstrates, by no means was this Protestant idealization of “freedom of conscience” at odds with Christian expansion. But the key difference between “modern” and past schemes of Christian expansion, at least in the minds of this subset of British evangelicals, was that *this* new international Protestantism would be emancipatory rather than oppressive, creating self-sufficient, self-governing Christian communities rather than grinding foreign peoples under the heels of an authoritarian political-religious power. That is, they saw and defined *their* Christian expansion as the antithesis of a crusading (and thus often Catholic) Christianity, whose *modus operandi*, as they perceived it, was to invade, conquer, and impose spiritual change by force. In the minds of these Protestants, missionaries wouldn’t invade or conquer—rather they would live “alongside” people in small communities, “touching” individual hearts, and thus provoking change from the ground up rather than the top down.[[43]](#footnote-43) Links between missionary stations and newly Christian communities would spring up organically as each realized the extent to which their values and interests coincided. As a result, individual and national sovereignty would be preserved, even as Christianity brought more people into its fold. Katherine Engel characterizes this idealized conception of Protestant unity as an international “network” that was both “expansive and intentionally vague,” one which valorized a vaguely-conceived “fellowship” by which “geographic and theological differences” would be surmounted.[[44]](#footnote-44) As Walls puts it, “The expansion of Christendom involved laying down terms for other people; its development in the missionary movement involved preparedness to live on terms set by other people.”[[45]](#footnote-45)

But if western Protestantism abandoned Christendom partly due to its associations with authoritarianism and failure to represent pluralities in thought and belief, it seems clear that international Protestantism—in the form of the nineteenth-century missionary movement and its collusion with European imperialism—didn’t necessarily supply a remedy. As Clark and Ledger-Lomas observe of international Protestantism’s progress over the long nineteenth century, “Hierarchy and enmity soon entered into the Protestant family.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Obviously, the fundamentalism underwriting evangelicalism is a reason why international Protestantism could never to live up to the emancipatory expectations placed upon it; whatever their differences regarding the secular state, the late eighteenth-century wave of international Protestants shared with Christendom’s adherents core beliefs in the absolute authority of the Bible and the absolute truth of Christianity.

That said, I want to suggest that the moral and democratic failure of international Protestantism in the nineteenth century can also be pegged to its one of its key differencesfrom Christendom. Attention to the spatial imagination of Protestant internationalism—its ideal of boundary-less “networks,” its valorization of individual freedom, and its accompanying suspicion of tradition and established hierarchies—could contribute to producing a certain type of *anti*-social personality, who viewed civil society as fundamentally at oddswith the exercise of individual freedom. We see this anxiety in nineteenth-century British evangelicalism. Within the movement, there was an emphasis on “self-interest and individualism” (as prominent evangelicals declared themselves able to read and interpret the Bible free of an “elite priesthood” or larger hermeneutical community).[[47]](#footnote-47) Tempering the most radical manifestations of this individualism was an adherence among some evangelicals to a Pietist-influenced “communal tradition of applied interpretation that valued contribution from those who were not educated and encouraged modes of thought that were not purely isolated attempts at theoretical reconstruction.”[[48]](#footnote-48) In other words, these evangelicals believed the in-person interactions of “sermons, group bible studies, family prayers, and other day-to-day activities”—communal interactions that necessarily took place within shared physical spaces—moderated and unchecked, pathological individualism.[[49]](#footnote-49)

It's tempting to think of digital space and its affordances as wholly unprecedented. But what the discussion above might demonstrate is that there are antecedents for considering the types of political subjectivities produced by “networked societies” versus face-to-face communities. What’s more, we may discover such past experiments in networked thinking to be less a testament to technological or social “progress” over the course of recent history, or, even, interesting analogues of our own times. Instead, they might alert us to blind spots in our current thinking in assessing the desirability and feasibility of substituting virtual for physical space.

What Hogg Knew

Ian Duncan’s important essay on *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* sees Robert Wringhim as the natural result and antagonist of civil society. Writing that the novel “allows us to … read fanaticism as the dialectical product of objective historical processes of modernization,” he concludes that Hogg ultimately “insists on the modernity of the Wringhim’s antinomian sect, cut off from a traditional society of customary or naturalized belief and founded on ‘abstract speculative principle’.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Importantly, Wringhim’s “modern” religion, which he models on the beliefs and commitments of the Scottish Covenanters, also resonates with the religiosity of the early nineteenth-century radical Scottish evangelicals. As Adrian Hunter reminds us, Hogg witnessed the growing power of “secessionist churches,” which “by 1820 … had consolidated in the form of the Evangelical movement.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Rejecting political quietism, the most radical Scottish evangelicals instead drew inspiration from the historical example of the Covenanters, whom they praised for their fierce defense of Scotland’s religious and political freedoms during the bloody “Killing Times” of 1679 to 1688. Thus “to many in the establishment, the [evangelical] movement represented a dangerous assault on the Presbyterian tradition by a potentially revolutionary constituency.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

Ironically, the radical evangelicals who admired the Convenanters’ fight for freedom “hastened the drift towards [Scotland’s] assimilation to England.”[[53]](#footnote-53) “The weakening of the established Presbyterian Church” by evangelical secessionists, Hunter observes, “further undermined the concerted institutional resistance in Scotland to English domination.”[[54]](#footnote-54) One imagines that it was to critique these developments that Hogg set his novel in the immediate wake of the “Killing Times” and made his homicidal “justified sinner” a Covenanter. A defender of Scottish nationalism, Hogg wished to draw attention to the ways that the attenuation of “traditional society” and its institutions in the pursuit of an “abstract” ideal of freedom (to use Duncan’s words) not only fostered dangerous forms of religious individualism; more forebodingly, the collapse of traditional institutions could also inadvertently lead to dangerous forms of political domination. Where radical evangelicalism tended to see in the Covenanters a straightforward morality tale of freedom fighters resisting an illegitimate, foreign power, Hogg drew from the same historical archive to sound a more cautious note.

Specifically, Hogg’s apprehension of the threat “modern” religion posed to “traditional society” must be understood within the larger context of Protestantism’s shift toward more “networked” forms of organization. In other words, Hogg associates Wringhim’s distinctly modern antagonism toward society to an abstract speculative notion of *religious space*—one tied to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century decline of the older idea of Christendom and, in its place, the rise of an “expansive and intentionally vague,” “network”-based model of international Protestantism.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Robert Wringhim, Hogg’s “justified sinner,” possesses a spatial imaginary strikingly akin to that yielded by the “decentered and flexible” network society of Yoon Sun Lee’s description insofar as he prizes the “relative autonomy” yielded by a “more flexible and decentered [form] of organization.” One could say that he is an adopter of what digital media scholar Heidi Campbell calls “pic-n-mix” religiosity: so sure is Wringhim in his own rectitude that he “mov[es] away from strict adherence to traditional forms of religiosity and institution to more fluid affiliations with religious beliefs and values.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Indeed, he is weirdly independent of the institution of the church—nowhere in the novel is he described as regularly attending church or taking part in church activities—and seems to anticipate the sort of religious subjectivity Campbell sees the Internet producing: one invested in “connecting to like-minded people” even as it loosens itself of “traditional boundaries and affiliations.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Campbell’s characterization of online religion, in fact, helps us understand how Wringhim’s independence of the bounded church and its attendant practices (“sermons, group bible studies, family prayers, and other day-to-day activities”) is linked to his friendship with the “like-minded” Gil-Martin (whom the reader knows is Satan probably, but whom Wringhim believes is Peter the Great in disguise).

Here, it’s important to understand how Peter the Great was regarded by eighteenth-century Britons. Duncan notes that Peter, “an archetype of sublime despotism haunting modern politics, foreshadows a post-Enlightenment, post-Napoleonic fantasy of totalitarian power and abjection.”[[58]](#footnote-58) Thus Peter/Gil-Martin is comparable to a “potentate of Christendom,” in his own words.[[59]](#footnote-59) But as the historian Anthony Cross observes, this was far from being the only—or even dominant—view of Czar Peter in the eighteenth century.[[60]](#footnote-60) By the time of Peter’s death in 1725, British views of Peter were fairly positive. In fact, many saw him as the embodiment of ideal Enlightenment rule. When James Thomson credits Peter with uniting disparate Russian communities not only with each other but Europe as a whole in his renowned poem *The Seasons*—writing, “far-distant Flood to Flood is social join’d”—he echoes a view popularized by Voltaire, which saw the czar less a despot and more the face of Enlightenment modernization, who sought to construct a civil society protected by fair governance and united in federation with the other states of Europe.[[61]](#footnote-61) Further boosting the Czar’s popularity was the belief that Peter harbored Protestant sympathies, which he was forced to conceal due to the pressures he faced from traditionalists at home.

Hogg was likely intimate with the bifurcated narratives regarding Peter—an authoritarian, aggressively-expansionist, religiously-intolerant despot on the one hand, and an exemplification of the new internationalist sensibilities of the Protestant Enlightenment on the other. Hence the repeated allusions to Peter in his story. Hogg suggests that the vogueish, modern, andseemingly relatively emancipatory internationalism embodied by Czar Peter is Janus-faced: Peter is an object-lesson in how the authoritarianism, militarism, and intolerance associated with the older ideal of Christendom can look something like Enlightenment-influenced international Protestantism.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Imagining Gil-Martin to be Peter appeals to Wringhim, then, because Peter seems to embody what Wringhim takes to be one of the primary aims of modern Protestantism: religious unification that is simultaneously individualistic. After all, his view of Peter/Gil-Martin is that he has sought knowledge not from institutions of learning or communities of people, but from Wringhim *individually*. Gil-Martin claims, “I have no parents save one, whom I do not acknowledge,” and continues, “though I have servants and subjects more than I can number, yet, … I have left them, and retired to this city, and for all the society it contains, you see I have attached myself only to you.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Turning away from “society” to befriend someone who (he says) he values because he is like a “second self,”[[64]](#footnote-64) Gil-Martin develops what network studies scholars call a homophilic friendship with Wringhim—a type of relationship strongly associated with and facilitated by social media.[[65]](#footnote-65) Casting themselves as out-of-step with their respective communities, they bond over their (fringe) antinomian beliefs and create a two-man ideological echo chamber that pushes these beliefs into fanaticism.[[66]](#footnote-66)

This individualistic, homophilic approach to friendship wouldappeal to someone like Wringhim, who is oddly uninvested in the in-person communities and physical space of the church. His disinterest is even stranger in light of the beginning of Robert’s memoir, in which he remarks that his “reverend father” “designed me for his assistant and successor in the holy office.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Despite his supposed preparation for the ministry, Robert never recounts worshipping at church. Indeed, the only scene in which Robert enters a church is when he goes to spy on Mr. Blanchard, the reverend who warns him to dissociate himself from Gil-Martin.[[68]](#footnote-68) Antagonistic to Mr. Blanchard’s preaching and ultimately the agent of his downfall, Wringhim attends church but as anoutsider rather than an established member of the community. The space of church and the sociality of a congregation are entirely absent in Robert’s religion.

This absence helps explain why Mr. Blanchard becomes a target of Robert’s enmity. In his recentreading of the novel*,* Christopher Herbert focuses on Blanchard, noting that Hogg “appears to recommend that spirit of temperate religious moderation” identified with the reverend.[[69]](#footnote-69) But Herbert also wonders where exactly the line is drawn between Blanchard’s “moderation” and Wringhim’s “zeal.” “Mr. Blanchard,” he continues, “does not exactly specify the point at which zealous belief in the doctrines of reformed Christianity … passes into ‘dangerous extremity.’”[[70]](#footnote-70)

The answer to Herbert’s query surely lies in the *spatial* metaphors by which Blanchard communicates the dangers of taking God’s decrees to their extreme. Blanchard, notably, subscribes to the notion of religion rooted in the idea of definite, human community. His doctrine is exemplified in his understanding of religion as “the bond of society on earth, and the connector of humanity with the Divine nature*.*”[[71]](#footnote-71) Moreover, there is “nothing so dangerous to man as the wresting of any of its principles, or forcing them beyond their due bounds.”[[72]](#footnote-72) In other words, he argues that true religion inheres as much in “the bond of society *on earth*” as it does between the individual and the divine, and “damnable” religion is the result of forcing religious principles “*beyond* due bounds.” Thus Blanchard ties his religious practice to a “shared earth,” a delimitedshared space. This commitment to the bond of society born of necessarily cohabited space, Hogg seems to suggest, is what makes his religion social*,* moral, and moderate.

No wonder, then, that of the various “divines” in the story, Blanchard is the only one who is ever depicted as preaching in a church. No wonder, too, why Wringhim and Gil-Martin dislike Blanchard. Where Blanchard sees true religion as proceeding in significant part from the social bonds that come of humanity sharing a common, finite earth, Wringhim and Gil-Martin both argue for the “boundlessness of the true Christian’s freedom,” a conviction they act on by disregarding spatialand moralbounds.[[73]](#footnote-73) Thus Wringhim neglects his physical church, as well as, increasingly, his immediate family and community in favor of an imagined “society of the just made perfect”—a society whose contours become somewhat more concrete to Wringhim when Gil-Martin describes how his “views of society” are carried out and enforced by “agents in every city, and every land, exerting their powers.”[[74]](#footnote-74) By becoming one of Gil-Martin’s/Peter’s “agents,” Wringhim effectively rejects the bounded ties of congregation and immediate family for this diffuse, imagined Christian society of the “just,” a decision exemplified when Gil-Martin urges him to reject the familial “bonds of carnal nature” in favor of the “the bond, and the vows of the Lord.”[[75]](#footnote-75) Never mind that Wringhim doesn’t know nor does he ever meet one of Gil-Martin’s other “agents” in-person or otherwise. He becomes part of this imagined “network” anyway, because he believes its members share his views. And, as Wringhim becomes more radical, he increasingly adopts a stratified way of thinking of society: there is the imagined “society of the just” whose views (he supposes) exactly accord with his own, and there is everyone else, whose differing opinions and practices make them “mildew,” “enemies,” “reprobates, cast-aways.”[[76]](#footnote-76) In these ways, Wringhim’s antisocial tendencies, as well as his belief in a two-tiered society composed of the deserving and the reprobate, are linked to a deterritorialized Protestantism—a Protestantism that doesn’t conceive itself as delimited by any definite space, a religious individualism unmoderated by “communal traditions” or practices.[[77]](#footnote-77)

For these reasons, Wringhim tries to effect change not from *within* but from *without* social structures. Despite occupying a leadership role within the church wherein he could consolidate and exercise his institutional authority, he instead focuses his efforts on exploding existing communities that he sees as inconsistent with his values. Strikingly, the modern internet troll helps illuminate Wringhim’s logic. According to Whitney Phillips, these trolls create and disseminate exaggerated or fake news stories, coopt online conversations, and harass and explode online communities, trying to stoke mob outrage, seemingly for no reason other than exposureand “owning the libs.”[[78]](#footnote-78) She may as well be creating laundry list of the tactics employed by Wringhim in the harassment of his brother and his brother’s friends. He disrupts their tennis game by intruding on the space of the court, mimicking and mocking their conversation and movements. And, the more he is met by “rude shocks and pushes, accompanied sometimes with hasty curses” in response to his interference, the more he “cling[s]” to his brother, keeping him from playing.[[79]](#footnote-79) Finally, when he is askedto “keep without the range of the ball” so the game can continue without him being harmed, Wringhim responds, “Is there any law or enactment that can compel me to do so?”[[80]](#footnote-80) Asserting his right to stay and say what he wants regardless of established boundaries and societal norms, he predictably ends up hurt—a turn of events that he interprets as violent suppression of his speech and beliefs. In Wringhim’s mind, of course, he has been victimized simply for exercising his individual freedoms, a narrative he disseminates publicly so as to fuel mob violence. And, for Wringhim and the modern troll alike, unleashing an extralegal mob on one’s targets has one significant benefit over using one’s institutional authority to effect change: the latter requires conversation and compromise, while the former, by design, bypasses both.

Thus Hogg establishes via Wringhim that religious “freedom” divorced from regard of shared spaceis individuating in the worst way possible. First, it valorizes a conception of individual freedom necessarily antagonistic to the moderating tendencies that come of one’s realization that human beings cohabitate a finite space. Second, it exacerbates societal divides, as the “more flexible and decentered” network promotes dangerous homophilic forms of association. Perhaps, then, it is unsurprising that in the digital, “networked” age, political theorists are reassessing the value of in-person spaces precisely in their capacity to “foster reciprocity and accommodation, through repeated interactions,” to use Forestal’s phrase. For, so long as the digital realm is associated with “boundlessness” it also harbors a dangerous, individuating conception of “freedom without society,” freedom wielded *only* as *“*a pure instrument of power, shorn of concern for others, the world, or the future.”[[81]](#footnote-81)

Reading the narratives like Hogg’s reminds us that space is neither value-neutral nor mere staging grounds for the more significant work of conversation and information-sharing. Rather, “human orderings of space and the meanings attributed to those orderings shape our conceptualizations of who and what we are, especially in life with others.”[[82]](#footnote-82) Here is where Hogg is particularly insightful. While Wringhim’s religiosity leads him to antisociality, Hogg—as Herbert notes—never reflexively equates *all* religious belief with antisocial intolerance. Rather, Wringhim’s fervent religiosity is channeled into extremism by an assemblage of forces that today tend to be associated with “the rise of the digital”: his sense of belonging to a “radically deterritorialized and dedemocratized sociality” (to return to Brown’s words), as well as his conviction that the exercise of true individual “freedom” is *inherently* constrained by conditions of cohabitation or what Blanchard calls the “bond of society on earth.”[[83]](#footnote-83) For Hogg, a particular ordering of space yields a particularly dangerous form of religious individualism.

Strange Times and Strange Essays

In this essay, I’ve tried to elucidate the ways that my personal experiences in higher education—the financial precariousness of my institution, the uncertain conditions of my spouse’s job, the alarmingly optimistic predictions about the long-term leveling properties of digital scholarly and pedagogic “networks”—are filtered through my research interests. My own published work has focused almost entirely on nineteenth-century literature and religion, but, as this essay demonstrates, I find resonances between this content and my more casual interests in digital communities and modern networked society. Inescapably, these resonances inflect how I see current issues.

There is some saying, I think, about how breadth comes at the expense of depth. Certainly in the eclecticism of this essay, the truth of this adage is self-evident. In the effort to be timely, as well as to move across centuries, different types of media, and vastly different topics to think through this moment, I’ve left issues unaddressed and oversimplified much of the historical material I study. This is an experimental piece for me, but my hope is that this approach might yield new constellations of thought that otherwise would have been missed.

After all, in an essay partly about the forces that engender ideological echo chambers, it perhaps is apt that this piece resists another type of “echo chamber,” specifically the insistently presentist orientation of most popular writings about higher education and the Internet. As mentioned above, there is so much emphasis on the *unprecedentedness* of digital technologies and communities, as though history and the narratives of the past (particularly fictional narratives) offer little to guide us forward in such “unprecedented” times. But such presentist rhetoric reinforces a certain myopia in how we conceive of higher education and the “disruptions” of digital technologies, for, whether we like it or not, we *already,* reflexively, rely on historical precedents to conceive of and justify the “virtual” networks of the present.

And these metaphors are not merely descriptive. Often, historical spaces—the Wild West, the town square, even the “super highway”—are invoked in relation to the Internet only insofar as they are assumed to mirror the present. But it is no new insight that the historical metaphors by which we conceive of the present shape what might come in the future. Indeed, as evinced in his criticism of the Covenanters despite his sympathy with the cause of Scottish nationalism, Hogg himself perceived that more savvy understandings and deployments of the past were needed to yield better futures (at least, better than those being brought to fruition by Scottish radical evangelicals). That is, he saw that the political dangers of past “network societies” demonstrated how “networks” were never *intrinsically* emancipatory, nor individual freedom ever an *inherent* political good.

Historian Joanne Meyerowitz’s essay on the difficulties of contemporary categories of sex and gender in capturing the “whole story” of “narratives of the past” gets at what I’m trying to say: “Historical texts are useful in this way because they pry us out of the familiar and thereby position us, in a sense, to anachronize the present … The past can show us that our own ways of seeing the world are contingent, curious, and changeable.”[[84]](#footnote-84) Meyerowitz’s optimism that the past empowers us to see the present as “contingent” returns me to the context of higher education. In higher education, we think of “contingency” in relation to one of the term’s definitions, as “conditional” or dependent for existence on something else (i.e., in using the phrase “contingent faculty”). This sense of “contingency” places academic labor and higher education institutions in a position of defensive responsiveness. Often—and especially lately—it feels that we have little choice but to adapt as quickly as possible to larger economic, political, and technological forces out of our control. But Meyerowitz points to the past to remind us that “contingency” isn’t just the passive acceptance of present circumstances. Rather, “contingency” alsocarries with it the recognition that our circumstances are changeable, can be “touched” (to return to the word’s etymological association with the Latin *tangere*) precisely by how we decide to engage with the past. Texts such as Hogg’s, then, maybe aren’t only artifacts of a distant time and culture. Attentive to the ways new technologies enabled new forms of “imagined communities,” the novel also proves a rumination on our current orderings of space, offering a prescient view of the problems that might accompany uncritical acceptance of a supposedly inevitable “digital” and networked future.

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5. Taparia, “The Future of College is Online.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Siobhan Carroll, *An Empire of Air and Water: Uncolonizable Space in the British Imagination, 1750-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Books, 1983); Zeynep Tufecki, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Esther Wohlgemut, *Romantic Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 1. On establishing “imagined” communities via print culture, see Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Princeton: Zone Books, 2005) and Joshua King, *Imagined Spiritual Communities in Britain’s Age of Print* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2015). For more on creating the imagined community of the nation at the turn of the century, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Frankenstein*, for instance, is often read as a modern parable on unchecked, dangerous individualism without the moderating effects of society. For more on nineteenth-century anomie, see Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991) and James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner,* edited by Adrian Hunter(Toronto: Broadview Press, 2001), 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Brown, *In the Ruins*, 13, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Brown, *In the Ruins*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
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15. See, also, Katherine Hobson, “Feeling Lonely? Too Much Time On Social Media May Be Why.” *National Public Radio*, March 6, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/03/06/518362255/feeling-lonely-too-much-time-on-social-media-may-be-why> and Jason Linkins, “The Death of the Good Internet Was an Inside Job.” *The New Republic*, December 31, 2019. <https://newrepublic.com/article/156096/death-good-internet-inside-job-decade-hell> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Brown, *In the Ruins,* 183-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Jennifer Forestal, “The Architecture of Political Spaces: Trolls, Digital Media, and Deweyan Democracy,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (2017), 151,154. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Qtd. in Brown, *In the Ruins*, 185-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Forestal, “Architecture,” 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Forestal, “Architecture,” 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Yoon Sun Lee, “Charlotte Smith’s Network Story,” in *Global Romanticism: Origins, Orientations, and Engagements, 1760-1920*, edited by Evan Gottlieb (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2015), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Lee, “Charlotte Smith’s Network Story,” 39, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Press, 1995), 415-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Covid-19 in some ways has accelerated these trends. In a March 2020 blog post for the “The Philosophical Salon,” Slavoj Žižek argues, “Who, today, will be able to afford shaking hands and embracing? The privileged. … The financial elite will withdraw into secluded zones and amuse themselves there telling stories in the *Decameron* style. (The ultra-rich are already flocking with private planes to exclusive small islands in the Caribbean).” See Slavoj Žižek, “Monitor and Punish? Yes, Please!” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, March 16. 2020, <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/monitor-and-punish-yes-please/> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Daniels and Thistlethwaite, *Being a Scholar,* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Daniels and Thistlethwaite, *Being a Scholar*,13. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Specifically, it cautions that without proper attention to hub placement, hybrid conferences risked having “higher carbon footprints than … even in-person scenarios.” Yanqiu Tao, Debbie Steckel, Jiří Jaromír Klemeš, and Fengqi You, “Trend towards virtual and hybrid conferences may be an effective climate change mitigation strategy,” *Nature Communications*, December 16, 2021, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-27251-2> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Drew Harwell and Ellen Nakashima, “Federal Prosecutors accuse Zoom executive of working with Chinese government to surveil users and suppress video calls,” *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/12/18/zoom-helped-china-surveillance> (accessed March 1, 2022). See, also, Micah Lee and Yael Grauer, “Zoom Meetings Aren’t End-to-End Encrypted, Despite Misleading Marketing,” *The Intercept*, March 31, 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/03/31/zoom-meeting-encryption/> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Greg Bensinger, “Does Zuckerberg Understand How the Right to Free Speech Works?” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/opinion/facebook-civil-rights-audit.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. An op-ed in *Inside Higher Ed* rehearsed this line of thinking in the context of Covid-19. Acknowledging the precarious state of higher education and faculty jobs, Interfolio CEO Andrew Rosen and professor Jaime Lester offer this recommendation:

    In addition to innovating around faculty’s access to data, colleges and universities need to provide professional development for faculty that is focused on individual career success and, as a result, their students’ successes. *The common use of professional development funds to attend disciplinary conferences does little to support individual career success*. Instead, opportunities for career counseling in the form of individualized development plans, mentoring, learning communities and grants to pursue research and teaching innovations are important to keep all faculty motivated, progressing and supporting institutional strategic goals. (emphasis mine)

    Never mind the vagueness of what is being suggested to take the place of disciplinary conferences (who is administering these “opportunities for career counseling”? What are the components of an “individualized development plan,” and how does this “plan” meaningfully differ from the self- and departmental assessments?). It’s enough to notice that the authors recommend the cessation of funding for disciplinary conferences to hire instead specialists to guide faculty toward advancing “institutional strategic goals.” I’m grateful to Mimi Winick for discussing with me the instrumentalization of knowledge that attends such conceptions of academic conferencing. See Andrew Rosen and Jaime Lester, “Supporting Faculty Careers Amid Uncertainty,” *Inside Higher Ed*, July 2, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/07/02/supporting-faculty-careers-amid-season-uncertainty-opinion> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. I risk anachronism, but I take my cue in part from Lee, who notes that while “the network that Castells describes is historically dependent on late-twentieth-century developments in information processing, communication, production, and transportation … the bourgeois public sphere and the emergence of the novel can be seen as contributing to [this] story of social reorganization,” in which “network” and individual autonomy takes precedence over “place” and “hierarchy.” Lee, “Charlotte Smith’s Network Story,” 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Alfred C. Yen, “Western Frontier or Feudal Society: Metaphors and Perceptions of Cyberspace,” *Berkeley Technology Law Journal,* 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002), 1225. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Yen, 1232. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Christopher Clark and Michael Ledger-Lomas, “The Protestant International,” in *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750*, edited by Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 23, 23-24. Emphasis mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Clark and Ledger-Lomas, “Protestant International,” 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Katherine Carté Engel, “The SPCK and the American Revolution: The Limits of International Protestantism,” *Church History* 81, no. 1 (2012), 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process*. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Qtd. in Daniel E. White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Clark and Ledger-Lomas, “Protestant International,” 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Douglas Rushkoff, *Team Human* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2019), 26. See, also, Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Perseus Books, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Winter Jade Werner, *Missionary Cosmopolitanism in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2020), 55-56, 89-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Engel, “SPCK,” 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Clark and Ledger Lomas, “Protestant International,” 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Mark Knight, *Good Words: Evangelicalism and the Victorian Novel* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2019), 135, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Knight, *Good Words*,135. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Knight, *Good Words*,135. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ian Duncan, “Fanaticism and Civil Society: Hogg’s *Justified Sinner*,” *Novel* 42, no. 2 (2009), 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Adrian Hunter, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, by James Hogg (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2001), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Hunter, Introduction, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Hunter, Introduction, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Hunter, Introduction, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Engel, “SPCK,” 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Heidi Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 4 (March 2012), 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Campbell, “Religion Online and Offline,” 73, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ian Duncan, “Fanaticism and Enlightenment in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*,” in *James Hogg and the Literary Marketplace: Scottish Romanticism and the Working-Class Author*, edited by Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson (New York: Routledge, 2009), Kindle. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,152. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Anthony Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes: Perceptions and Representation of the Tsar Since 1698* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. James Thomson, “The Seasons,” *The Works of James Thomson* (London: A. Millar, 1750), 222. In fact, Thomson amended *The Seasons* “to add thirty-eight lines in praise of the ‘matchless Prince,’” which reinforced the hagiographic perception of Peter as a border-crossing monarch “who left his native throne” for the sake of a more cosmopolitan knowledge. Cross, *Peter the Great,* 171. See, also, chapter four. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Duncan says Peter was considered both “brutal tyrant and modernizing reformer,” and he views Peter as embodying the tension between a pluralistic civil society and fanaticism’s “pure” politics. In other words, Duncan reads the novel in terms of secular versus religious tensions rather than in terms of intra-religious shifts. See Duncan, “Fanaticism and Enlightenment.” [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,132. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See, for instance, Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook, “Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (2001), 415-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Brown points to a similar dynamic within today’s anti-democratic right-wing. What had been a “potpourri of previously isolated movements—white nationalist, libertarian, antigovernment, and fascist—connected with each other via the internet.” Brown, *In the Ruins*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,117. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Christopher Herbert, *Evangelical Gothic: The English Novel and the Religious War on Virtue from Wesley to Dracula* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Herbert, *Evangelical Gothic*, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,142. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,142. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,111. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,130. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,152. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,146, 151, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Knight, *Good Words,* 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. See the introduction of Whitney Phillips, *This is Why We Can’t Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship Between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Hogg, *Private Memoirs,* 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Hogg, *Private Memoirs*,65. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Brown, *In the Ruins,* 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Brown, *In the Ruins,* 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Brown, *In the Ruins,* 183; Hogg, *Private Memoirs,* 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Joanne Meyerowitz, “Thinking Sex with an Androgyne,” *GLQ* 17, no. 1 (2011), 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)