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Scenes from Narcissistic and Dangerous “Alphas”: “Sovereign Individuals” and the Problem of Cultivating the “Civic” in Cyberspace

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by

Kym Thorne
Open Learning Program Director
The School of Accounting and Information Systems
City West Campus
University of South Australia, South Australia 5072
Telephone: +61 08 8302 0521
Facsimile: +61 08 8302 0102
Email: Kym.Thorne@unisa.edu.au

Julianne English
Head of the Arts
Pembroke School, South Australia 5068
Telephone: +61 08 83326111
Facsimile: +61 08 83666863
Email: JEnglish@pembroke.sa.edu.au

and

Alexander Kouzmin
Adjunct Professor
University of South Australia
and
Professor of Management
Graduate College of Management
Southern Cross University
Telephone: +61 07 5506 9322
Facsimile: +61 07 5506 9301
Email: akouzmin@scu.edu.au
Scenes from Narcissistic and Dangerous “Alphas”: “Sovereign Individuals” and the Problem of Cultivating the “Civic” in Cyberspace

This paper examines Davidson and Rees-Mogg’s (1997) notion of the “Sovereign Individual” as part of a continuing, integrated investigation into inter-locking approaches to free-market globalization, the virtual organization and individual agency shared by neo-liberal and post-modern thought. Particular attention is given to whether global markets and information technology establishes a new cyberspace realm which conditions the ability of governments to regulate economic and social activity and to cultivate individual actions.

The paper investigates whether it is possible for de-physicalized cyberspace to provide sufficient nourishment for any individual, sovereign or otherwise. This exploration questions the privileging of the Sovereign Individual discourse and practice which eliminates all alternative approaches to social capital, community and identity. This paper suggests that the challenge for public or civic administration is to escape the illusions and impractical schemes presented by those interests which benefit from elevating the Sovereign Individual above all other forms of sovereignty, making the visible invisible, communities non-communities and persons non persons.

**Keywords:** Community; Cyberspace; Globalization; Identity; Invisible; Neo-liberal; Public Administration; Post-modern; and Sovereign Individual

**INTRODUCTION**

Historical periods are supposedly notable for power/knowledge relationships which enjoin forms of state-based governance and individual socialization - indicating specific connections to time and place. For example, the qualities needed to establish, and then administer, the far-flung British Empire were supposedly forged on the playing fields of Eton. In recent years, many commentators (Ohmae 1991; Drucker 1993; Peters 1994; Hammer 1996; and Thurow 1997) have suggested that one has entered a turbo-charged, global and virtualizing world order. One has moved from a physical, Industrial Age to a de-physicalized, Information Age - the rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) has rendered time and space meaningless in an enveloping, instantaneous and dis-embodied cyberspace. According to Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997), this new playing field has “levelled” the tyranny of time and space, subordinated the state to the individual and made socialization and governance the providence of the Sovereign Individual, or the cyber-corporation of “one”.

This paper explores a number of inter-related issues concerning the context and cultivation of the Sovereign Individual. How do individuals bloom where there was no physical soil to support them? How do individuals and organizations orientate themselves without a specific home or physical location which roots, or anchors, their identity and sense of meaning? How does one cultivate individuals and communities when there is no time to “fallow” or for individual and communal reflection? How does a state, or society, cultivate individuals when it is powerless to command cyberspace
or regulate individuals acting like corporations? How do individuals develop the mastery of cyberspace and corporate skills fundamental to economic survival without the support of a state or the nourishment of a physical community?

It is proposed that what is needed is the prevention of Sovereign Individuals from developing parasitical relationships with each other and de-physicalized cyberspace communities from fostering. Instead, it is argued that individuals, sovereign or otherwise, require developing, symbiotic relationships with each other and other states, or communities, especially those empathetic connections which resist unequal, or inappropriate, outcomes and which reinforce tensed notions of separate, yet shared, destiny.

Following Rosenberg (2000) and Thorne (2003), this paper also questions whether the claimed negation of time and space is no more than an illusion. This paper examines the question as to who benefits from eliminating the state in favour of the market and the passing of economic and social responsibility to the Sovereign Individual. The paper concludes that if one does not resist the current trend which extends the rights of states and corporations to uncultivated individuals, no space - cyber or otherwise - may be available for popular or progressive resistance to the visible and invisible stratagems of Corporate Imperialism.

THE SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUAL

According to Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997), the fall of the Berlin Wall heralded the passage from the Industrial Age to the New Information Age. The “mega-politics” of the Information Age altered how ‘people organize their livelihoods and defend themselves’ (Davidson and Rees-Moog, 1997: 46). Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) proposed that simple shifts in the character of work could radically alter the organization of society. What has changed is that an individual, using personal computers and networks, now has the same computing and communication power as governments and multinational corporations. This capability eliminates the need for any sovereign intermediaries and allows for the dramatic extension of markets by transforming how assets are created.

ICT provided the productivity improvement which the medieval historian, Lane (1958), considered crucial in moving from one age to the next - by transporting markets and outmoding prevailing approaches to defending order via the monopolization of violence. Furthermore, ICT allowed the creation and protection of personal assets entirely outside the realm of any individual government or a nation state’s territorial jurisdiction. Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) agreed with Ohmae (1991) that, at the most fundamental level, ICT allowed Sovereign Individuals to ignore territorial borders. Sovereign, and other individuals, were now effectively responsible for their own success and welfare. ICT subverted and destroyed the nation-state, creating new forms of social organization subordinated to the dictates of Sovereign Individuals - characterized as the fusion of the Neo-Liberal, economic egoist with the Post-Modern proclivity to narcissism (Thorne and Kouzmin, 2004).

Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) portrayed Sovereign Individuals as the new “Global Meritocracy.” Their approach was much more restrictive than the classes of “Symbolic Analysts” proposed by Reich (1992) and “Creatives” proposed by Florida (2003). This new, cognitive elite consisted of a small number of highly-productive entrepreneurs, and workers in global enterprises, who identified more with each other than those in their immediate locality. These individuals exhibited tradable skills, including the talent to take advantage of ICT in constantly changing, global, free markets, to speak English, to educate themselves and to invent their own work.
Sovereign Individuals were directly involved in a ‘worldwide exchange and mart’ (Davidson and Rees-Moog, 1997: 60) in an ICT-based cyberspace where ideas were able to be formulated anywhere and transmitted, instantaneously, globally. According to Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997), these Sovereign Individuals exhibited a distinct advantage over those whose economic value was purely local or located within one jurisdiction. Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997: 25) envisioned Sovereign Individuals as updated medieval Knight Templars, able to ‘...control considerable wealth and military power without controlling any fixed territory.’ Indeed, Sovereign Individuals were really Gods of mythic proportions, able to master complexity and command de-physicalized, virtual reality where ‘almost anything that can be imagined seems real’ (Davidson and Rees-Moog, 1997: 16).

ICT lowered the cost of producing information and removed the nation state’s monopoly over knowledge. ICT removed the advantages of large firms with large transaction and information costs. Following Coase (1996), Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) considered that there was no superior return for bureaucracy and hierarchy in the age of the nimble, flexible, contracting and de-physicalized, virtual organization. Permanent jobs and life-time, tenured careers also belonged to the past. Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) outlined the example of a movie production company constantly contracting, internally and externally, lowering capital costs; shortening product cycles; and reducing organizational scale while striving to leverage returns. Intriguingly, Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) overlooked the continually marginal existence of most movie production companies in a global industry dominated by major entertainment conglomerates which, not only controlled the production cycle, but also regulated access to multiple distribution channels.

Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) also ignored the high unemployment rates among producers, actors, technicians and others involved in the creative industries. They minimized the danger for individuals of abandoning regular income for the irregular payments associated with project work. Equally minimized was the continuing difficulty of commercializing ideas and retaining control over any intellectual property. Perhaps, even more importantly, Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) never acknowledged the difficulties in setting up, or even locating, any actual networked, empowered, “fused-mind” virtual organization which existed only within cyberspace (Thorne, 2003).

Computerized information exists in cyberspace and cyberspace is the natural “home” for Sovereign Individuals. The World-Wide-Web and the Internet represented a new social space which forever changed how people interacted. In conjunction with free, global markets, ICT generated a constant sense of urgency. Cyberspace replaced the physical world with a new ‘real world... [consisting] of billions of messages running over billion of routes, each requiring hundreds of hours of computing time’ (Davidson and Rees-Moog, 1997: 7). The form of cyberspace proposed by Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) was essentially empty without any distinguishing physical characteristic. Cyberspace was a political vacuum devoid of anything that might be contested (see Crampton, 2003). The cyber-economy was not linked to specific location. Cyberspace transcended locality and the tyranny of place. Sovereign Individuals were just as important as nation states in cyberspace. Cyberspace was the new realm of economic activity. It was not hostage to any physical violence which might emerge outside of cyberspace. The benefits of cyberspace flow to the Sovereign Individual and the “cognitive elite” operating outside of political boundaries.

Davidson and Rees-Moog (1997) emphasized the lure of the Information Society in cyberspace for Sovereign Individuals. There was no contesting or complicating
physical existence. Cyberspace is not subject to monopolization by any violence-using agency or enterprise. Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) considered that enveloping cyberspace was now the world's largest economy with no cyber welfare, no cyber taxes, no cyber government but with democracy of choice based on a sustained cyber-market. Cyberspace was, essentially, about rendering transactions invisible. Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997:15) embraced a fantasy of frictionless transactions and fictionless existence which echoes with how these Neo-Liberal, utopian, cyber fantasies resonate so deeply with the Post-Modern:

In the Information Society, no one who is truly able will be detained by the ill-formed opinions of others. It will not matter what most of the people on earth might think of your race, your looks, your age, your sexual proclivities, or the way you wear your hair. In the global, cyber-economy, they will never see you. The ugly, the fat, the old, the disabled will vie with the young and the beautiful on equal terms in utterly colour-blind anonymity on the new frontiers of cyberspace.

But do the meek and the mighty really meet on equal terms in cyberspace? Bauman (2003; 2004) realized that contemporary individuals existed in a “liquid culture of disengagement and discontinuity,” forgetting that this liquid culture is inherently unstable. This physical space and cyberspace is dominated by the latest flux in the continuing game of inclusion and exclusion used by elites and vested interests to configure time and space to their own ends (see Bauman, 2004:127-133). Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) accepted the dangerous possibility of a de-stabilizing anarchy within physical and cyber worlds due to the increasing inequality between Sovereign and non-Sovereign individuals and the breakdown of governmental authority. Yet, they still thought individuals were safer in cyberspace. Although wealth, especially cyber-wealth, may be difficult to locate, how difficult will it be to locate the wealthy if they no longer must reside in the same locale as the poor? Additionally, how safe and secure is cyberspace? The required, powerful encryption technology does not exist and may never be completely foolproof or invulnerable. Furthermore, the advantages which ICT gives Sovereign Individuals seem quite limited, if not insubstantial. ‘The new ICT brings within the reach of anyone, with a computer hook-up, information about commerce, investment and current events previously available to actors at the pinnacle of government and corporate hierarchies (Davidson and Rees-Mogg, 1997: 259). How useful this information is to Sovereign Individuals in everyday life, or even in commercial life, must be regarded as contentious, especially as it appears that all Sovereign Individuals have simultaneous and equal access to scarce information.

In this Information Age, when governments are unable to command global markets or global resources, Sovereign Individuals are able to dictate locational, economic activities, amounts of income tax due or other transfer payments which are payable. Governments without any means to monopolize the welfare or the protection of Sovereign Individuals compete to satisfy their every whim: when technology is mobile, and transactions occur in cyberspace, as they increasingly will do, governments will no longer be able to charge more for their services than they are worth to the people who pay for them, (Davidson and Rees-Mogg, 1997:17). Apart from a general conviction that sovereignty will be eventually commercialized, Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) were uncertain about what would exactly and eventually replace the nation state. They suggested various micro jurisdictions, including family-based arrangements; Swiss-like cantons; Venetian city-states and tax havens, such as Hong Kong and the Seychelles. However, Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) were much more certain that there would be some eventual confrontation between Sovereign Individuals, their privatized military forces and a
coalition of what Freidman (1999) termed the “left behinds” and desperate governments.

CULTIVATING THE SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUAL

Davidson and Rees-Mogg’s (1997) formulation of the context and cultivation of the Sovereign Individual was somewhat contradictory and problematic. Sovereign Individuals are constantly on the move, contemplating exit strategies or manipulating cyberspace and, yet, had one or more specific geographic domiciles. Most interestingly, Sovereign Individuals thrive on threatening to move and, yet, rely on a technology which makes moving unnecessary. This suggests that Sovereign Individuals do develop and “bloom” because there is enough physical “soil” to support what they require to stake out in global cyberspace. Sovereign Individuals and virtual organizations do not need to orientate themselves without a specific home or physical location anchoring their identity and sense of meanings. Sovereign Individuals flourish inside “gated communities” and within supportive, geographic “bubbles” which are indistinguishable and inter-changeable. These geographically-and/or electronically-connected Sovereign Individuals engage in “cooperative competition” based on ‘genuine affinities, shared beliefs, shared interests and shared genes’ (Davidson and Rees-Mogg, 1997: 253) not the “bogus” affinities of patriotic nationalism. These active relationships are mostly between Sovereign Individuals able to engage in the bracing Darwinian morality of the pervasive “high-trust” community of those able to generate “ideas” and manipulate virtual organizations in the cyber-economy.

Any connection with physical existence, or non-sovereign individuals, is rendered invisible or presented as meaningless. Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) continually stressed that Sovereign Individuals were effectively detached from other humans in any specific location. This detachment merged the “digital divide” into forms of physically co-located, but inherently separated and unequal, approaches to achieving economic well-being. Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) also extolled the benefits of a transient, multicultural (where everyone speaks English and techno-geek!), consumption-driven, cosmopolitan, cyberspace existence. However, Albrow (1996) demonstrates that individuals inter-connected by such weak instrumental ties easily revert to more traditional sources of communal and personal identity - such as the religious, national, ethnic and familial. Handy (2001) also noted that the instrumental, virtual links favoured by Sovereign Individuals involved only the ‘illusion of intimacy and a pretence of community’ (See Bauman, 2004:130). Bauman (2004: 130) went even further: ‘[H]umans have perhaps been recycled into consumables, but consumables cannot be made into humans - not into the kinds of humans who inspire our desperate search for roots, kinship, friendship and love’.

According to Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997), it is extremely difficult for states or any social organization to resist Sovereign Individuals when these agencies are powerless to command cyberspace or regulate individuals acting like unregulated corporations. In effect, governments, nation states and other jurisdictions are now life-style providers for the footloose, super rich. Within their impoverished, fiscal circumstances they are required to set up tolerable law and order regimes which protect, but do not impinge upon, Sovereign Individuals. Additionally, they are required to assist Sovereign Individual access to advanced, and highly-individualized, educational and technological services. The competition to satisfy and cultivate these Sovereign Individuals has to transpire without the professed preference for maintaining “reciprocal,” symbiotic, communal relationships among people in electronically-mediated, geographic proximity, descending into destabilizing, parasitic relationships. In order to accomplish this task, jurisdictions have to develop policy
“bundles” which attracts these highly sought-after “customers” and to devise new mechanisms for providing and financing public goods and services.

Existing as a Sovereign Individual is not easy. Sovereign Individuals are motivated by the constant struggle to maintain their position in the information elite and the need to avoid slipping into the digital “underclass.” The Sovereign Individual is in a constant state of tension. The Sovereign Individual is supposedly in charge of everything. Yet, even with the support of the most perfect information systems, it is impossible for any one individual to know everything. Global markets and technological innovation means that cyberspace is notable for constant “emergency time” which leaves little time for rest or for individual and communal reflection. The Sovereign Individual is consumed by the constant struggle to maintain mastery of cyberspace and the corporate skills fundamental to economic survival, seemingly, without the nourishment of a physical community.

At the same time, Sovereign Individuals are supposed to keep an on-going, manipulative relationship with those effectively privatized and commercialized jurisdictions competing to meet the requirements of Sovereign Individuals. The Sovereign Individual is constantly engaged in a high-wire act without a safety net. Every moment and every choice is heavy with portent and consequence, especially when such matters as education, pensions and protection are being transferred to invisible, commercial agents. Sovereign Individuals are constantly being confronted by uncertainty when putting assets into the “Bank of Nowhere” (see Davidson and Rees-Mogg, 1997: 275). Additionally, the underlying emphasis on Post-Modern conceptions of consumption, risks a life-style crisis of authenticity for Sovereign Individuals.

Strangely, although Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) developed a regime for competing jurisdictions cultivating existing Sovereign Individuals, there was scant attention given to assisting/socializing other individuals to become Sovereign Individuals. There was no suggestion of any politically-informed, physical and moral education, or socializing regime, to cultivate Sovereign Individuals which was the Information Age equivalent of the “playing fields of Eton”. The existing, very limited, number of Sovereign Individuals seemed to use the educational and technological resources provided to them, or purchased by their own wealth, to pass their position on to their children or, perhaps, to clone themselves.

Other individuals, especially those in the extensive underclass, are kept in the dark and/or tantalized by the remote prospect of becoming part of the new aristocracy. The prospects for this underclass are bleak. The universal certainty of access to public goods and infrastructure provided in exchange for allegiance to the state and military service was no more. As Giroux (2003) eloquently indicated, the previous “ladder to success,” universal, free education, had been dismantled and what passed for education, even in the most advanced nations, was no more than a customer-driven, instrumental shadow of past glories. What remained entrenched powerlessness and fear within a denuded, physical world and helped create an “abandoned generation” without faith in governments, or education, as a means of protection, let alone any notion of personal or communal advancement.

Similarly, the welfare state safety net could not be extended by impoverished nation states captivated and captured by Sovereign Individuals. For most of the world’s population, cyberspace is not connected to realities of their everyday existence. The middle-ranking administrative and management positions crucial to commanding and controlling the Industrial Age have been supposedly devastated by the advent of the Information Age. At the bottom, agricultural, manufacturing and service positions
were destroyed by robots, other machines and global markets. Given the poor employment possibilities and the capture of educational and social welfare infrastructure by Sovereign Individuals, the majority of humanity is faced with a struggle of epic proportions - to master invisible cyberspace and become Sovereign Individuals. What is left is an almost universal remoteness from the hidden, cyberspace world accompanied by a comforting fantasy that one can obtain entry to the Sovereign Individual “in crowd” by possession of secret knowledge. But this revelation would, essentially, depend on relentless effort, opportunistic networking and the ability to construct a personal relationship with instrumental information technology and global free-markets. For the most part, any crossover between Sovereign Individuals and the global majority involved empty, scripted interactions.

Certainly, Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997: 380) sought to meet the needs of those individuals who most aspired to become Sovereign Individuals before it was too late. Their proposals had an inherent attraction to those who were, or aspired to be, self-made entrepreneurs, easily enticed in joining a global fraternity of knowledgeable investors accumulating private, independent wealth which was ‘…not held hostage by taxes, government interference, litigation, inflation or popular prejudices.’ However, the secret knowledge that Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) sought to sell for commercial gain was not clearly based on any direct connection to cyberspace or ICT but to offshore banking, investment opportunities in emerging equity and real-estate markets and “lifestyle” tours. While it was possible that such secret knowledge might improve the wealth of clients, such “inside” knowledge was also the bailiwick of carpetbaggers and other swindlers who delight in separating the greedy and the gullible from their money. After all, allowing too many individuals into the “real”-knowledge would, eventually, mean that there would no longer be any Sovereign Individuals.

Perhaps this also explains why so many advocates of global, free markets, virtual organizations and unbridled individualism do not present a program which would assist all individuals to improve their situation in the new Information Age. Why, for example, are mortgages not re-structured to help people survive the flexible, job market; why are individuals not given tax credits for information technology purchases and why are the advantages of corporate taxation not extended to individuals. Instead, as Ballard (2000) acidly observed, the fantasy of reciprocal, sympathetic support between Sovereign Individuals and lesser mortals so often descends into the new “Gods” exploiting those in the immediate, physical hinterland for their own amusement.

WHAT IS GOING ON?

What is going on in this putative, new, global order, where the Sovereign Individual reigns, is best understood by asking who benefits from convincing one that compliance is unavoidable and that this is the only pathway to the future. Opportunistic governments and politicians; financial wizards; media barons; Corporate Imperialism; the Military Industrial Complex or the Military Industrial and Administration Complex (Eisenhower’s original formulation) and ideological supporters and free riders such as conservative, religious groups exhibit the requisite vested interests. These interests revolve around what Ritzer (2003) identified as the “globalization” growth dynamic which operates through three, inter-related, processes - Capitalism, Americanization and McDonaldization - concerned with the production of the material and dreams of super-abundance. This dynamic is not a neutral process but…‘actively eats up places, people, things and services, replacing them with centrally- conceived and controlled forms largely lacking in distinctive content’
and is destructive to the conduct of everyday life (Beilharz, 2003:106). Despite Ohmae’s (1991), Reich’s (1992), Davidson and Rees-Mogg’s (1997) and Freidman’s (1999) “faith” in a borderless, consumer-driven globalization from below, which unleashed the Sovereign Individual, much more prominent is the globalization from above, in which global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (Kouzmin and Dixon, 2003) (not to mention American and allied, military institutions) ’directed with minimal public scrutiny or accountability via a small, elite conclave of capitalist cardinals’ (Wheen, 2004: 239).

As demonstrated in Thorne (2003) and Thorne and Kouzmin (2004), these period-shifting ruptures in what was invisible and invisible, from what was impossible to what is now possible, from a non-sovereign to a Sovereign Individual, from nation state-based identities and communities to globalized identities and communities, do reveal the contours of the strategies elites contend over and use to shape favourable circumstances. This provides the possibility to glimpse not only the machinations and mechanisms of the clash, but, also, more commonly, of the accommodation of these self interests. Examining this flux presents the opportunity to expose the contradictory, irrational and dangerous, even threatening, nature of what now appears as visible and what now was invisible. This is an especially important activity given Ritzer’s (2003) recent proposal that all the feverish activity within the global world was an empty “globalization of nothing”. The pervasive, global market merely allowed consumers, including the superior Sovereign Individual, to select goods and services devoid of distinctive, substantive content.

Dicken (1992) and Perraton (2001) demonstrated that, at best, economic globalization was uneven. Among others, even Ohmae (1991:262) was scornful of the view that ‘the ideal global company [the virtual organization] has no plant, no facilities, no overhead - just one person [the Sovereign Individual] in a room overseeing billions of dollars invested with a bunch of portfolio managers’. As Gerlach and Hamilton (2000) observed, physical actuality can only be stretched so far before it becomes a fiction. There is great danger when such fantasies, economic or otherwise, are the basis for the amelioration of social and political arenas which force individuals, sovereign or otherwise, to fashion hybrid, or false cosmopolitan, identities to exist in permanently-tensed “emergency” time and to find new elective communities without some sustaining involvement with the proximate, physical terrain. This is especially so when so much of the activity in the global economy, performed by Sovereign Individuals and others is, according to cyber-pundit Paulina Borsook, boring - not actually creative, engaging only our instrumental intelligence, “[a]t best, people being reduced to cyber-kindergardeners, cutting and pasting bits of information, collage like, with their computers supplying the virtual equivalent of library paste (Borsook, cited in Boyle, 2003: 8).

Equally evident is that some locations are more attractive for production and consumption than other places. Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) considered that Sovereign Individuals should be domiciled in the world’s most favourable locations in order to maintain their lifestyles and to protect their assets. Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1997) emphasized the attractions of New Zealand and Argentina - with their high standards of public health, status as low cost producers of foods and renewable products and low public sector debt. No digital code or electronic connection to global cyberspace could help southern Sudan have more allure than the south of France.

The exposure of the purposeful, Sovereign Individual, strategy also demonstrated the problematic nature of the basic premise of the Information Age - “Information has empowered Consumers”. When information does not directly create anything new it
is not clear how it can ever become the basis for a completely new world order or replace the sovereign government of the nation state. This reliance on information in commercial and human affairs is not new or unique. As Faviers (1998: 5) indicated in his magisterial study of the rise of commerce in the middle age, "[I]ntelligence, experience and information, were the basis of commercial life but were never able to completely remove the risk involved" [emphasis added] in speculation - the essence of Capitalism, global or otherwise. As Keegan (2004) conveyed in his extensive study of the role of information (intelligence) in military conflict, information by itself, even the right information, is not sufficient.

The capacity to use information meaningfully and the ability to act decisively in one’s own interests are much more important. What fate awaits individuals, sovereign or not, of the “New World Order” in which the individual is the agent of economic transformation. The ability to locate, interpret and act on information depends on individual ability to command costly training and equipment and where the economic infrastructure they must master is stretched beyond the physical horizon? How shall these Sovereign Individuals thrive when the New World Order also requires them to detach themselves from the ruins of the immediate physical environment and to seek advancement through a series of weak ties or instrumental contacts with other, similarly, physically-dispossessed cosmopolitans? How viable is it to have any social order based upon the decomposition of loosely-related individuals who have, at best, an exploitative connection with their immediate surroundings and are more likely to exhibit a parasitical connection with whatever surrounds them?

**THE CHALLENGE FOR CIVIC SOCIETY**

It is possible that these concerns could be dismissed as part of a genre of meaningless, utopian, business writings or speculations. Yet, these inter-linked proposals concerning globalization, the virtual organization, technology, especially ICT, and the Sovereign Individual are pervasive. Even more important, they inform an enveloping mantra about free-markets which delights Neo-Liberals and seduces those of the Post-Modern persuasion. These shared, free-market fantasies obscure the tendency which free, or unregulated, markets exhibit towards monopolies and/or oligopolies inherently instability or manifesting extreme outcomes. The flow of information directly to consumers does not inevitably erode the ability of governments to “pretend” that their national economic interests are synonymous with those of their people. Sovereignty persists, history matters and the past does not need to be removed in order for the future to flourish.

The challenge for cultivating a Civic Society is not to surrender sovereignty, visible or invisible, to punitive market or technological forces - let alone any Sovereign Individual. Nomadic individuals and capital is not unprecedented. There are many pathways to the future. One must comprehend and resist the visible and invisible strategies used by elites, particularly in association with seemingly benign notions of libertarian, market capitalism and enlightened individualism. Big governments and big corporations with economies of scale and ability to command resources still command the global economy. World domination was still the main game. The rewards for rare skills may have increased but ICT skills can still be commodified via demand and supply. It is not impossible to regulate, or tax, internet-based transactions within geographic and regulatory jurisdictions.

Just as General Motors closes its Saturn factories, those original, “greenfield” symbols of overthrowing existing, rooted notions of identify and community to serve free-market globalization, it is vital to interrogate the purpose(s) of those who want to ignore history and devastate notions of community and identity. One should be more
careful in accepting those who propagate a rupturing with the past. One must establish to what extent must everything change and how irresistible is irresistible change? For example, were the old, pyramidal organizations just restricted to using “brute force” to ensure the blind compliance of managers and employees? Is trust and empowerment the sole preserve of Sovereign Individuals commanding genuinely global cyberspace organizations? Do not all forms of organizations have the capacity for both aggression and restraint? Do not all individuals strive to be sovereign to one degree or another? History seems to be littered by those who think that they are Ozymandias King of Kings. Does one not need a sense of community and identity capable of dealing with all these possibilities?

Civic Society must not fall for the confidence trick that cyberspace is off limits and non-governable by any conventional means. Spar (2001: 21) distinguished, in her overview of technological frontiers, that the ‘central irony of politics along the technological frontier [was that] when a technology first arrives:

there is a rush away from governments and a surge of individualism. Pioneers want to live along the cutting edge… building empires in the sky. … Over time…the rebels tend to return to the state, not because they change their minds or lose their nerve, but simply because the state can secure the empires that they have built. … Many of the original pirates, eventually, jump to the side of order, prospering from the same rules they once distained, and, [i]n the end, power doesn't flow necessarily to those who stake their claims or guard their turf - it goes to those who make the rules.

Cyberspace, despite its proclaimed and actual revolutionary potential, is not immune to this process. Given this technological innovation cycle, Civic Society must not accept that cyberspace is completely detached from physical existence and physical-based regulation. In a similar manner, Tiffen and Terashima (2001:156), who were highly involved in pushing the most extreme form of digitally-enabled, virtual existence - hyper-reality, accepted that ‘[t]he virtual worlds of HR (hyper-reality) are always … linked to physical context and real time.’

Clayton (2003: 201), drawing upon Lessig (1999), indicates that ‘there is nothing in the Internet that makes it inherently “un-regulable” or a completely ruptured cyberspace from the past. Some power has passed to the engineers who designed the digital code determining the architecture of cyberspace but this would be supplanted by an alliance of those who use, and benefit from, cyberspace, working together to ensure that their needs/desires are meet in a orderly and predictable manner. Civic Society must ensure that this “alliance,” which makes new rules, does not represent another flux in cyberspace visibility and invisibility, continuing unwarranted privilege for Corporate Imperialism and its sovereign individual surrogates.

Civic Society must resist what Crampton (2003) referred to as the Virilio (1995) position - a position highly evident in Davidson and Rees-Mogg’s (1997) justification for the Sovereign Individual - that instantaneous information produced by ICT involves transcendence of physical reality and that cyberspace is a dis-placement of physical, spatial existence. Crampton (2003:11) rejected this view. Any meaningful activity in cyberspace is folded in ‘the physical part of our world.’ Furthermore, cyberspace should not be treated, transcendentally, as a replacement of the real ‘but as a mutual process of production between physical space and abstract or virtual space’ (Crampton, 2003:12) not empty of material and political content.
Cyberspace is not, then, a passive, if anarchic, space but, using Lefebre's (1991) analytics, is formed by spatial relations which are ‘the material and social outcome of capital’ (see Crampton, 2003:14). Far from being about dis-placement, the new, digital technologies and cyberspace may be relied upon to ‘assist our being-in-the-world’ (Crampton, 2003:166). The “digital divide” is not in any sense about any “digital divide” at all: other physical divides are of more fundamental concern. As with Clayton’s (2003) acute insight, the social criticism of Charles Dickens, so representative of the Industrial Age, has an after-life in Information Age cyberspace.

How should one react when one discovers that networked organizations, directed by Sovereign Individuals, supposedly operating throughout the globe and connected everywhere in instantaneous, “fused” time, are more like geographically-precise, simple and direct connections, re-creating “home” inequities and infrastructures in non-domestic locations? Perhaps, even more pressingly, how should one act when a “Greenback Empire,” not afraid of resorting to gunboat diplomacy, dominates the chessboard of international networks despite the private, military forces commanded by Sovereign Individuals (See Johnson, 2004)? Despite Davidson and Rees-Mogg’s (1997) faith in privatization, Cyber-soldiers (including those for hire) are even more effectively deployed by larger governments (see Singer, 2003). The return to violence is not falling. ‘The success and survival of systems [still] depend upon the capacity to marshal military effort in times of conflict and crisis’ (Davidson and Rees-Mogg, 1997: 88) and violence is not losing its leverage. Government is not powerless in cyberspace. Distributed networks of Sovereign Individuals are not beyond the reach of governments. After all, why should one be so afraid of a technology which, fundamentally, is about databases and recordkeeping and is not independent of the physical world?

Civic Society must establish the extent to which it is useful, for the common interest, that Sovereign Individuals accept the imposition of a stateless, ‘do it yourself welfare’ (Elliott, 2004: 37) and the acceptance of a complete responsibility for individual destiny? It would seem that such an acceptance reinforces detachment from settled communities and traditional forms of personal identity, without any corresponding examination of the difficulties of such detachment.

More significantly, this self-reliance further exposes those unable to operate successfully within the new world order and those more attuned to settled communities and traditional forms of personal identity being consigned to the global backwaters and the status of invisible “non-persons.” Civic Society must respond to the neglect of physical infrastructure. Perhaps, even more importantly, it must speak for the non-person, the new outsider, the invisible individual. Civic Society must not just protect individuals from the “new barbarians” involved in random crime and violence but the even more dangerous, purposeful and insidious promotion of free-market globalization, virtual organizations and the celebration of Sovereign Individuals.

For Civic Society, a requisite response would require more than the current acceptance of what Truss (2003: 7) terms the ‘polite acceptance of invisibility’. Perhaps, the ultimate challenge for Civic Society is to emerge from the shadows and revoke the license for presumptive action and unacceptable behaviour given to Sovereign Individuals, and other elites, within rampaging Corporate Imperialism. Following Sennett (1998; 2004), such action is essential to prevent economic globalization devastating the moral fabric of settled places, to re-build mutual respect between citizens and nations and to prevent the acceptance that individuals can be made visible persons or invisible non-persons simply based on a lack of economic success and/or their dis-interest in hybrid identities and fragmented communities.
Extending Selznick (1957; 2000: 281), one must not allow any fear of bureaucracy, any yearning for individual transcendence, to mislead one into believing that it is possible to have “democracy without government” or without an inclusive, “collective intelligence.” Even in a “restless world,” Beilharz (2003) warns that one must not neglect Bauman’s (2003; 2004) injunction that ‘place-making is a pre-condition of politics’ (see Beilharz, 2003:104). It is possible that our world is increasingly a flux of visibility and invisibility, place and non-place, product and non-product, service and non-service and sovereign persons and non-persons and this is not ‘a threat to human sociality as its very expression’ (Hogan, 2003: 105). What one must resist, is what Hogan (2003: 105), echoing Ritzer (2003), terms, the embrace of being in nothing, being invisible in our own place and having our world emptied by ‘the very means by which we are living it.’

REFERENCES


