then singing 'The Red Flag'? It was precisely the farcical nature of such grandiosity that turned
many people off the movement, the word and the
idea, and the refusal in Badiou's work to tarry with
such that made it such an attractive point to many.

They could not have expected that circumstances
would render the communist heritage even more
exposed as irrelevant. For while the very crisis
was occurring, those who had predicted it — the
remnant Trotskyist groups — were continuing
their long, slow decline. If anything suggested
that the era of class politics was passed, it was
surely that those who had been forecasting crisis
for years literally couldn't get arrested.

Ultimately, any re-incantation of 'communism', no matter how
austere, could not help but be drawn back into the nostalgia for a
politics of clearer lineaments. That Badiou's work has led to a
revelation of the possibility of radical imagination is all to the good;
yet its refusal to offer any material interpretation of the nature of the
world, or the historical situation, makes the point at which the
imagination ends for the moment. One could suggest that it is
ultimately a philosophers' praxis, which forestalls a full reflection
on the conditions of production of philosophy. That was possibly
why Zizek could not help but fall into an older mode of bringing
people together — a dissolution into song. Or why, months later,
the event lingers in the mind as more uncanny than uprising, less
a spectre than a ghost.

The emerging grammar of
first-person talk

In emphatic script the billboard told
me: 'Put yourself first'. So familiar has
this message become its presence very
nearly slipped by unnoticed; after the
merest toggle, it had receded three-
quarters into the background of aware-
ness. Such calls may be craven, and
designed to be bold, yet they are also so
glib and so repetitively pitched in
advertising — the whole 'you are worth
it'; you deserve it' trope is so ubiquitously
used to incite the subject's recruitment
— that one more example subliminally
pales into the swelling junk
nothingness one passively consumes.

Yet, hang on, isn't there something
strange going on: what exactly is the
commodity being spruiked here? It's
about Deakin University I then read, a
realisation that prompts pause for
thought. However naïve it may have
been, I initially found myself saying
'Wow, I know it's a hyper-competitive
world out there, but aren't universities
expected to be, at least to some degree,
above the fray of brute commercialism?
Aren't these bodies meant to behave in
a seemingly way, to have at least a patina
of decorum, a semblance of gravitas?'
Then, more interesting than the attack
of nostalgia this initial reaction
represented, a further line of thought
began to form.

Rather than exhorting the intrinsic
value of education or, even more
unlikely, that of community service, it
became apparent that in the peak
period before consumers finally
nominate their tertiary preferences,
Deakin University's publicity campaign
was attempting to leverage itself with
respect to a deeply warranted
contemporary refrain. By simply urging
potential enrollees to 'Put yourself first';
Deakin's public relations experts were
asking window shoppers to become
customers through a process of
mirroring, by constructing a recursive
loop of mutual identification.

Our institution, these advertisements
were saying, is not merely a conveyance
that will vigorously take you to the
ends you desire. More than this, you
can trust us as you recognise in us just
what you are meant to be — a
predatory entity who is at home
adventuring in the twenty-first century
candy store. In this lolly shop the
incantation of the I, the me and the
mine is the pattern language that
connects those who are like-minded. Far
from being unique, Deakin's PR push
rides on a tide that sharply references,
and also contributes to, this self-
intoxicated rush.

Perhaps there is no better example of
the looping of 'smart' with 'commerce'
than is presented by Apple's marketing
approach, especially its iPhone. This
focal device, to use Albert Borgmann's
critically analytic term, combines
function, leading-edge design and
brilliant advertising to produce a
formation which has swept-up
millions of people aspiring to
identify with the excitement of the
new. In this campaign the
omenclature of Apple's products
have been crucial in creating the
right semiology. Understanding how
the politics of the key pronoun —
the royal I — potentiate the features
of design and function helps you
grasp how the iPhone has become a
cynosure. And, it gets better: as well
as looking great, and in addition to
offering access to songs stored in
iTunes, the about to be released
market-leading iPhone 3GS has a
state-of-the-art interface that
integrates email with other desktop
functions through the use of Apple's
MobileMe 'cloud' computing system.
Just how many me-me-me references
can you get in the one pitch? It's so
cool to be me-and-have-it.

Its no wonder an avid 'brand
community' has sprung up centring
on this device. This spontaneous,
freely chosen assembly of
fashionable, self-defined cool
enthusiasts is a marketer's dream,
but there is more. A host of more or
less auspiced signifiers steepen the
appeal of the iPhone. For example,
not only does this elective
community primp itself up as cool, a
recent by-invitation only, semi-international conference
supported by the Australian Research Council — an academic
event whose total intellectual locus was the cultural
significance of the iPhone — confirmed its elite status.
Whereas the traditional view of cool would categorically always
distinguish those that know from the them who are the sheep,
these cattle, shepherded into the iPhone fold, think they are
the in-crowd at exactly the same moment they are branded.

It is shocking how the personal pronoun — the iterations of I-
me—my — has taken dominion in our period. There is the iPod
and the iPhone; one spends time on MySpace or YouTube;
universities simulate small group interactions using i-peer; you
stand in a queue while those behind you haptically engage in
parallel play swapping more i-referenced talk than seems
possible. You can even buy My Dog food. From product to
person, the 1980s me-decade has narcotically morphed into an
i aeon. Today, the I is a fortress at the same time as it is a temple.

But surely these two levels have not simply converged; neither
are we techno-determined, nor are we wholly discourse-
determined. Moreover, it can be argued that the rise in the use
of first person speech has progressive elements. For example,
the fraudulent use of the third person, passive voice of science
and received authority is exposed when the speaker is
identified. More personally, what was once the preserve of the
aristocrat has now become democratized: ordinary citizens are
now licensed to own and to speak from their particular vantage
points in lived experience.

Yet as a thought experiment, what
would come to pass if the whole
content of the subject’s consciousness
was referenced to the I: what are my
intentions? how do I feel? what does
this person, this event, this
circumstance, endlessly, mean for
me? Such a fenced-in conceptual
landscape would engineer an aware-
ness so partial, and partial in a very
particular way, the consequences
would be deeply worrying.

Firstly, this is a matter of language.
As the philosopher Wittgenstein
noted, when people speak different
languages this creates different
realities: if you don’t language the
relational, to some extent you don’t
experience relationships. In so far as
this is true, i-referenced self-talk
denotes a different consciousness,
an awareness that is of a different
register to the larger realm
constructed when consciousness
was indexed to other references:
proprieties, good manners, other-
orientedness, honour, obligation,
and so forth. In such ways the i-

reference co-constructs the
experienced world.

Yet what of that which lurks
beyond, beneath and between
words? Specifically, how would
both the intimately interpersonal
and the sphere of our
connections with larger social
groupings fare?

The condition of relational
amnesia both provokes a
disregard for relationships (with
the other, with the group,
between groups) just as it makes
the workings of our groupness
more unpredictable. This
produces a vicious cycle: the
more I do not reference the
workings of sociality, the more I
find myself a ‘victim’ of its
unpredictable workings. I feel
dissatisfied, fall out of
relationships, get snookered,
blindsided: this landscape is a
feeling that leads me to intensify
my attempt to be in control.
In this enemy terrain the more I try
to control how sociality works
for me, the more I produce blow-
back and sociality seems to work
worse for me. This subject
becomes cynical, resigned to
being alone, and is more likely to
directly satisfy his/her social and
sexual needs via commodifying
relationships.

The personal
pronoun has
taken dominion
in our period:
there is the
iPod and
the iPhone; one
spends time on
MySpace or
YouTube;
universities
simulate
small group
interactions
using
i-peer; you can
even
buy My Dog
food.