14 Ethnic Diversity, "Race," and the Cultural Political Economy of Cyberspace

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Introduction

Although cyberspace is a virtual space, its cultural politics are no less real than those in other more traditionally comprehended locales. As with cultural analysis of any mediascape, cyberspace needs to be understood as a realm within which political economy, textual analyses, and audience analyses all need to be integrated. This chapter addresses the particular issue of cultural diversity and race relations within cyberia. Cyberia should be understood as worldwide phenomena exuded from within processes of globalization that involve regimes of power seeking to expand and impose themselves on previously uncolonized social and cultural spaces. It is a realm within which cultures and communities are formed, deformed, and transformed in these emerging fields of power.

'Race' is one critical parameter in these processes, where "race" is understood as the social manifestation of cultural differences based on broadly ascribed characteristics. 'Race' is often placed within single quotation marks to indicate that it is a term of social usage but without scientific specificity—that is, that it is a political, not a biosocial, concept. In this discussion, the use of the term reflects its different meanings in different cultural environments: It can allude to apparent physical characteristics (skin color, eye shape, hair forms, physical size), to cultural elements (belief systems, social mores, values), and to social practices (family marriage patterns, gender hierarchies).

Although race has entered the lexicon of cyberanalysts,[1] much of the focus has been on the domestic politics of race within North America, the creation of virtual identity communities,[2] or the activities of racist organizations on the Internet.[3] Although these analyses offer valuable counterpoints to the dominance of white masculinity as the lingua franca of cyberdiscourse, they fall short of an analysis that links race practices in cyberspace to the wider race issues of globalization. This chapter then seeks to locate race in cyberspace within a global political economy of new media, teasing out the numerous

dimensions of conflict, superordination, and subordination that this economy allows and enshrines.

If we think of cyberspace as a zone in which competing cyberia (the plural of cyberium and a neologism based on the concept of the imperium) are extending their Webby fingers, then we have the metaphor for approaching what happens when cyberialism (imperialism in cyberspace) reaches the takeoff point. In many ways the contemporary moment is an electronic re-creation of the globe in the sixteenth century, the early phase of European expansionism into the rest of the world. Large dot.com corporations mirror the marauding and self-justifying chauvinism of the early trading companies that sought to carve up the physical planet among themselves,[4] employing or allowing privateers to raid the competitors for the spoils to be taken on the high seas. As imperialism brought about the creation of 'race' as a social category and racial hierarchies as a then-global ideology of imperialism, so cyberialism creates its own racially marked categories, which reflect racial hierarchies and power struggles within the globalizing electronic world. Cyberia present themselves as the terrain in which a globalizing inevitability marks new media as the apex of cultural and economic development.

To grasp the ramifications of the processes involved in the constitution of race in cyberspace, we need to move systematically through a number of spheres of analysis, examining the internal dynamics in each case, and then exploring the linkages among the spheres (rather like the string-of-pearls metaphor used in multimedia design). The broadest picture is presented by the political economy of cyberspace, which encompasses the overarching globalization of communication and locational consequences of these processes. We then must move to an examination of the cultures and cultural hierarchies in cyberspace and the value of the concept of 'multiculturalism.' Globalization is tested by the role of nation-states, and cyberspace has been seen to leap-frog national governments and their desires for control of intranational dialogue; for instance, protection of national cultures (and national power hierarchies) has merged as a critical issue in cyberia. Texts produced in cyberia take various notice of cultural difference, ranging from denial to celebration and commodification. Cyberaudiences, meanwhile, are fashioned by the power of the media to which they are exposed, yet at the same time develop local responses that appropriate and refashion the global into locally meaningful experiences. Ranging across this extraordinarily complex scene are the raptors of racialized cyberia: the racist organizations that have found a new avenue for reaching those whom globalization terrifies and for whom simplistic racial hierarchies of power offer succor.

Approaching the Cultural Political Economy of Cyberia

Political economy as an approach in media studies tends to identify two related elements: the economic interests of the main participants and their expression in political practice, and the attempts by states to regulate both the economic and political operations. In areas of cultural production, the cultural political economy requires an understanding both of these economic interests and of the cultural power embedded in and promulgated through the media environment within and between nation-states (and now apart from or beyond nation-states). In terms of cyberia, culture is produced through the relations of production and is conveyed, contested, and transformed in myriads of interchanges and "glocalizations."[5] Thus the economic factors are revealed in questions of commodification of culture and its processing to extract commercial value from its exchange and use, and in contradistinction, attempts to create a culture that transgresses and subverts the economic rationale. This political economy also has consequences for the nature of civil society, particularly in complex societies in which it may contribute to the deconstitution of social relations of community and their replacement by atomized and despatialized market relations.[6]

The early period of cyberia was characterized by the appearance of innovatory enterprises and innovations in government agencies (e.g., the concept of the Internet as an indestructible defense resource in the United States, the interuniversity links designed to facilitate government-sponsored research, and the development of the idea of the World Wide Web in labs supported by European governments). The U.S. National Science Foundation took over the running of the U.S. side of the Internet, from where it was passed to major private telecommunications carriers, such as Sprint and Pacific Bell.[7] The mass development of cyberia as zones of economic exploitation awaited the emergence of the supercorporations with their capacity to imagine what cyberia might become and the resources to push them in those directions. Most of these corporations were based in the United States (most famously the software—i.e., "language"—giant Microsoft, with its motto of "Where do you want to go today?") and assumed American English as their primary communication milieu.

As with previous periods of explosive capitalism on a global scale, entrepreneurs sought out new markets, developed new products, and sought to capture market segments through innovation and strategies of exclusion focused on competitors (most obviously with Microsoft and the legal battles over the Web software *Explorer*). At the

same time, the focus was placed on sectors that could maximize profit and minimize costs. While the design teams for the system were concentrated in First World brain sinks such as Palo Alto, California, and Seattle, Washington, most production of the hardware was moved to lower-cost locations in the Third World (Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, etc.). Thus the classic pyramid of power in production was reinforced by cultural hierarchy, mainly white, English-speaking men determining the priorities and directions of an industry that employed vast numbers of low-paid Third World workers, usually women. Even when non-Anglo innovators wanted to enter the industry, they were drawn into the same sort of cultural relations of production, a situation that really began to change only three decades into the cyberian adventure, at the end of the twentieth century.

One country that sought to move past this nexus, Malaysia, developed a strategy for 2020, in the expectation that it could seduce the creative and innovative corporations to its cybercity outside Kuala Lumpur. It found, however, that most of the innovation remained "at home," whereas assembly and low-wage production came to the archipelago in pursuit of the low-tax and high-incentive environment the government had engineered.

Cyberspace has been described as the "darker side of the West," where "the hunger for new conquests stems from the insatiable desire to acquire new wealth and riches which in turn provides impetus for the development of new 'technologies of subjugation.'" In this Manichaeistic imaginary, cyberspace, "with its techno-Utopian ideology, is an instrument for distracting Western society from its increasing spiritual poverty, utter meaninglessness, and grinding misery and inhumanity of everyday lives."[8] Although such a view dredges the colonial metaphor for all it is worth, it does show up the lines of power that are embedded in cyberia and that have reverberations throughout the multidimensional universe.

To take this line of argument a step further, Jay Kinney quotes a Global Business Network cofounder in support of the end-of-nationalism argument: "Just as during the Enlightenment the 'nation-state' took over from 'the church' to become the dominant seat of action, so the nation-state is now receding, yielding centre stage to the 'marketplace'; the action in the marketplace is interestingly everywhere; local, global, wherever."[9] Cyberia become increasingly global, ingesting smaller corporations and zones of cultural development, to exude huge conglomerates that have no particular national base but reflect their history in the West and North.

Multiculturalism in Cyberia

How might we use the ideas generated by the concept of "multiculturalism" to provide an analytical take on cyberia? It is important to note that "multiculturalism" is a highly politicized term in every context in which it is used. Given that, we should also note that its North American meanings (including the divergence between Canada and the United States) are rather different from the way the term is used in the United Kingdom and Europe, or again in Australia or New Zealand.

"Multicultural" can be taken to refer to a statement about demographic differences among groups, based on some idea of culture distinctiveness (national history, country or region of origin, shared family history, language, religion, cultural practices, etc.). Yet to speak of a multicultural world is to take a further step, to require an equivalence of the respect for different cultures as a political ideal. This may entail an implicit challenge to hierarchies based on "the discursive residue or precipitate of colonialism . . . and its imperative mode, its attempted submission of the world to a single 'universal' regime of truth and power."[10] In this sense multiculturalism can offer a radical critique of Eurocentric hierarchies and stands in opposition to other possible multiculturalisms, such as those distinguished as "conservative"/corporate, liberal, and left/"liberal."[11] Critical multiculturalism questions essentialist conceptualizations of culture and instead posits culture as a process of struggles over signs and meanings in a constantly changing "ethnoscape." Culture and meaning are constituted as relationships within and between groups, so that cyberspace has become a field in which those relationships are negotiated and re-created.

Cyberia already inhabit a multicultural landscape, one that reflects the relative power of cultural economies across the globe. Thus the majority of the exchanges currently in cyberspace use English as the assumed language (often in its cybervariations), while at the same time reflecting the economic and cultural assumptions of the major transnational corporations that control the Internet and generate its 'production' resources (software, etc.) (In September 2000, BBC World reported that whereas half the number of Internet users at that time were from non-English-speaking countries, something like 80 percent of interactions over the Internet were in English). Although these global corporations might appear to have no need to be culturally specific, their growth out of North American culture is reflected in the style, language, and habitus[12] of their products and the processes they engender. Perhaps this is best exemplified by the world impact of CNN, the

Time Warner company that publishes on the Internet, on cable and by satellite, interchangeably between broadcast television and cyberspace. Although it is available almost everywhere that there is a satellite dish to receive it, what it makes available speaks to those who view Los Angeles, Seattle, and New York as the legs of the cybertripod on which their reality rests. Although CNN provides some portals for non-U.S.-generated local news, the structure of news values and the style of presentation has an anodyne Eurocentric and North American quality.

The policy discourses of multiculturalism and cyberspace reflect the different cultural politics referred to by McLaren.[13] In general a corporate form of multiculturalism retains the overarching control of cultural diversity. It assumes the dominance of Western/ Northern cultural forms, language, and modes of being and mobilizes images and meanings associated with modernity and ever-expanding capitalism. It seeks to commodify all relationships and transform them from associations based on traditional forms of interaction into relationships mediated in all ways by the market. A self-consciously elaborate version of this approach can be found in the Internet marketing and related strategies of the Italian-based lifestyle corporation Benetton.

Benetton is renowned for its innovative marketing programs and its hard-copy magazine *Colors,* with its emphasis on the erotic aesthetics of skin and physical features and the "universal" attraction of youth and vitality irrespective of cultural origin. In the presentation of the "Benetton lifestyle," consumers are interwoven with a world of racing cars (Benetton sponsors a Formula One team), high-cheeked, gaunt models, often black African, and smiling Asian children. In mid-2000, Benetton published a Web version of the Milan Colors exhibition, with a virtual-reality display and access to "color" commodities, from black African–faced playing cards to chocolate-colored "flesh tone" Band-Aids. Associated with the site is a museum of culture, established in southern Chile, exploring the relationship between indigenous Americans and the waves of invaders and immigrants who first stole, then settled on their land. The site has a curious quality, as it both mourns the past and celebrates its incorporation into a "multicultural" future——one built, however, on the assumptions and worldviews of the descendants of the invaders. Difference becomes a commodity to be consumed by the more powerful, especially those located in the "north."[14]

Liberal discourses of multiculturalism posit an egalitarian ethos, yet still within a hierarchical model of cultural practices derived from Western "market" models of individual consumer preference. Thus different ethnic groups or cultures are validated as having equally "worthwhile" cultures, but the hierarchy of social values against which this is

placed remains implacably Western/Northern. For instance, rights to individual social mobility and choice are placed above communal rights to set constraints for social behavior. Thus arranged marriages are seen as culturally located and respected but have to play a subordinate role if a young person whose marriage has been arranged decides not to follow her parents' wishes and instead to make a choice based on personal desire. Multicultural policy discourses here seek to ensure "equal access" and find their clearest expression in projects such as those concerned with "the digital divide." A study by Novak et al.[15] concentrated on issues of race and access to and usage of the Internet, operationalizing race under the headings of Native American, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and white. These categories are socially derived but are based on very different attributes: region of origin, culture and language, and skin color. In fact they represent hierarchies of social power, and Internet usage may reflect not cultural attributes of the groups, but their access to social power and their representation in various media. I will return to the findings of this study later in this chapter.

Left/liberal perspectives on multiculturalism move into a different space again, working from more "essentialist" positions that seek to sanctify subordinated groups' cultures separate from the value set of the West/North. From this perspective, individuals are seen as carriers of their group's culture, a biological vector for cultural performance. Cultures are presented not as relationships, but rather as fixed entities bumping into each other. From this perspective the highest value is authenticity, as though there exist cultural cores that can be discerned as yet untainted by other "cultures." This reification of culture has implications for analyses of Internet cultural politics, in which politically subordinated groups are defended irrespective of their internal cultural practices (for instance, the right of groups to project their prejudices without reference to the impact of their values on other groups offended by them).

Given the specific limitations of each of the foregoing approaches to multiculturalism, the value of the critical multiculturalist approach lies in its capacity to explain social phenomena as at all times the momentary outcome of the relationships between groups and their unequal power relations, resting in this case in the political economy of culture. To understand multiculturalism as a terrain of interaction, conflict, struggle, and transformation allows us to examine the local and relate it to global processes of change. Nation-states seem to be potentially vulnerable entities when confronted with transborder cultural flows through global communication channels. We can move then to an examination of how the conflicts between national and international cultural forms may be conceived and experienced in cyberspace.

States and Cyberpluralism

Challenges to the cultural and economic domination of transnational corporations have emerged rapidly, not only through the numbers of antihegemonic groups that litter cyberspace, but also in the explosion of key non-English networks, including Hispanic, Arabic, Hindu, and most importantly, Chinese. Yet each of these are occurring within their own micropolitical economies, in which tensions rub at the boundaries between language and nation, between individual, civil society, and the state.

One example of this can be found in the People's Republic of China. The Chinese government has made a major commitment to getting its population "online," though with constraints that reflect central-government fears of "anarchic" communication. An example of this relationship, which also demonstrates the role of English language as the lingua franca of cyberia, can be found in a hotel in SuZhou outside Shanghai. The hotel offers Internet services to guests; they are warned, however, in a leaflet left in their rooms that "[Y]ou must keep the law, the rules and the executive by law and institution of the PRC about it . . . [It is] forbidden being engaged in endangering the security of the PRC, disclosing our country secret and other criminal act . . . [Y]ou should obey international rules of Internet. Forbidden sending spiteful and provocative files . . . and forbidden sending business advertisement to the unknown's mail box at will [i.e., spamming]."

The link between cultural and social diversity and cyberspace can be seen in the major cyberwar being waged by the Chinese government against the Falun Gong movement. The movement was banned in China in July 1999 and has been castigated by the government as a dangerous cult and a destabilizing political formation. The Falun Gong (or Falun Dafa) challenges the dominant role of the Communist Party in Chinese society through its active recruitment of members into the practices of the movement based on principles of "truth, compassion, forbearance." The Falun Gong movement claims it has been attacked because it has recruited far more members than the Communist Party and was threatening to become the single largest civil-society institution inside the country. Whatever the truth of these claims, the organization has been hunted down and its cyberspace existence harassed as systematically as its human membership. Sophisticated hacking and wrecking strategies have been used to knock out the electronic networks the movement has established internationally, a much more elaborate and well-resourced exercise than the low-intensity cyberengagements between the democracy movement and the regime in a country like Myanmar.

This sort of contradiction, between the urge to use the Net and the urge to control populations, does not overcome the necessity felt by governments in countries such as China to ensure that their populations are readied for the wider struggles of economic and cultural survival that will eventuate in cyberspace in coming decades. With a major program of introducing computers and the Internet into schools, the recognition has emerged that older citizens may need to know about the technology, if not become expert in its use. Thus CCTV (the main national government channel in China) has developed a weekly broadcast that explains computers and the Internet to its viewers. In order to "sell" the program, there are two presenters—both men, one of them a Mandarin-speaking Caucasian. It is as though the importance of understanding the technology requires a "Westerner" to legitimate the exercise, even though the Westerner in question was already a well-known television personality.

Meanwhile Chinese authorities were also pushing at the global level for the recognition of Chinese ideograms as address labels for Internet traffic. In November 2000, the international regulatory body for Internet standards agreed that e-mail addresses that carried Chinese characters to the left and right of the @ sign could be used, though the category characters (.com, etc.) would remain in English for the moment.[16] This would still restrict Web site categories to roman characters, however and require user facility in reading Roman characters in general. While the romanization of Mandarin has progressed with the use of PinYin transliteration (and is widely understood by young Chinese who have been exposed to standard Chinese—Mandarin), PinYin represents only the vocalization of characters in the Mandarin language of Beijing and does not adequately deal with the many varied pronunciations of the characters in other regional languages (e.g., Shanghaiese or Cantonese). To open up the Internet to widespread use (possibly to many hundreds of millions of users), Chinese authorities pressed for the international community to accept full Chinese character sets for Web and e-mail addresses, a goal they realized in 2001. In one step, of course, this would create a huge internal market in the Chinese diaspora, while locking out Internet users unable to understand or use Chinese characters.

The design that created cyberia as part of an anarchic web with no center and enormous multidirectional flows of information, although originally conceived to protect the state (the U.S. government in the event of attack), has confronted states with major issues of control and regulation. The most publicly debated of these have to do with sex, especially violent or exploitative sex, in which vulnerable innocents might be captured and abused by electronic predators. The sharper edges of cyberspace, however, tend to

cut at cultural conflicts of a different kind, in which national governments built on ethnic hierarchies of power seek to maintain their dominance over ethnic minorities in their own societies and see the dissident voice in the cyberwilderness as dangerous. Groups that have found themselves constrained by controls on hate speech or demands for ethnic or racial independence/purity in the past, however these are conceptualized, have found in cyberspace as well pathways through which they may evade governmental surveillance.

Cybertexts of Difference

Cybertexts can be subjected to the same type of analysis offered for hard-copy materials, though ideas of audience need to be extended and loosened for the former. Texts are themselves locales for the working through of relationships between authors and audiences. These power relations are given form through the production of texts that encapsulate the intent of the producers as either proponents and reproducers of dominant discourses or as antagonists to the realms of control they are seeking to challenge or evade. If we selectively examine some of these texts (Web sites, list-servs, CD-ROMs, computer games, DVDs, etc.), it is possible to discern within them the dynamics of cultural creation, control, appropriation and resistance. Although feminist scholars have examined cyberia for evidence of such works as gendered artifacts,[17] far less attention had been paid to the subtleties of race and ethnicity.

In his discussion of the "locations" of arguments about the virtual worlds created by new technology, Harris Breslow has suggested that the Internet (which is only one arena of new media communication) has generated three intellectual/political spaces.[18] These can be summarized as the "anarchist" space of unmediated communication, the postmodernist space of multiple subjectivities, and the moral space of state control of both of these components.[19]

Many commentators have seen in cyberspace the chance for a new form of relationship in which when people can become whatever they wish and in which race may become a "skin" to be slipped into or shed as desired.[20] An example of this perception can be found in Peder Norlund's 2000 short Norwegian film *Sorthvit* (*Black and White*). In contemporary Oslo a neo-Nazi skinhead pecks away at his keyboard, seeking a partner for chat. He is repulsed by offers of kiddie porn and the other rubbish dumped by his network of contacts. One night, as he chain-drinks Coca Cola (the symbol of globalization sine qua non), a woman comes on and asks him to join her in a multiuser domain (MUD), where he can choose his avatar. By mistake he chooses Othello (he had wanted to be Romeo),

and his correspondent takes on the role of Desdemona. Neither can see the bodies that appear on screen of themselves, only that of the other. The woman, who is a black separatist activist feminist, sees this black man (Othello); he sees a beautiful white woman. And so the comedy of errors develops with the real-world Catherine-wheeling into conflict and violence, while in the cyberforest there is love and passion. The two agree to meet in person, then fail to do so, but each realizes s/he has in fact seen the other and that s/he is their most potent hate. They put this to one side, however, and marry in a cyberchapel, falling passionately into each other's animated arms. The End. We never discover whether their cyberromance cools out the real-world conflict; the suggestion is that the cathode ray tube is now the place where reality exists and that broken heads and racist hatred will dissipate as though the power had been turned off at the powerpoint of the corporeal world.

Most metropolitan First World societies face considerable difficulties in coming to terms with their own histories, in ways that both reinforce social values of cooperation and cultural pride and recognize and deal with pasts (and presents) that are intolerant, racist, and violent. In a world where "ethnic cleansing" has become a crude neologism for extermination and where "new racism" has emerged as a serious ideology justifying cultural and material genocide, issues of cultural respect and mutual cooperation between ethnically diverse populations confront governments as possibly the most challenging issue for the third millennium.

If we bring together cyberspace and cultural conflict, we can begin to see a space where communities can take greater control of the representation of their own histories, and in so doing, move toward a future that is infused with a greater awareness of the necessity, but also the fragility, of cultural collaboration. In some circles, such collaboration has been identified with the emergence of hybrid cultures through a postmodernist fusion in which the edges of cultures (which ethnic purists have sought to freeze and sharpen) are instead softened, melded, and dissolved into something new and inclusive. There is pain in such dissolution, and the fear of loss marks the politics of ethnic conflict with a particular anger and viciousness.

Yet if we start to spell out the elements that may be necessary to move through this pain, we can see that the new media can provide an avenue for building multifocal narratives. Such approaches can, if used creatively and in ways that recognize the power relations embedded in new media practices, empower audiences to build their own stories of the past and their own analyses of the present, by offering them a range of materials and competing interpretations.

Evidence from the United States suggests that new media associated with education are in fact coming under tighter corporate control, with the strategies of major textbook and information software suppliers geared toward market dominance.[21] Commenting on the U.S. scene, Sewall and Emberling have noted that "[e]ducational publishing is a business, and it is a business increasingly linked to global communications corporations. These media giants see school textbooks as one product among many other media that must make money or else." They go on to note that "[t]he mass-market textbooks that succeed in the market beyond the next few years will have vast influence on social studies. . . . [T]hey will reveal the kinds of civic knowledge and the literacy skills that educators expect of younger citizens. They will reflect how the nation intends to represent itself and its ideals to the youth of the twenty-first century. They will be important indicators of 'who we are' and 'what we are' as a nation and a people after a decade of exposure to multiculturalism."[22]

Although Sewall and Emberling refer primarily to textbooks, their commentary is clearly relevant to new media in education. In addition it is important to recognize that they are hostile to what they see as a dangerous California-ization of curriculum (spreading to other states, and they refer in particular to Texas) with its associated multiculturalism and orientation to world cultures. They are also hostile to new media, which they claim "dumb down" the quality of education, and are unaware of the development of cyberliteracy and its associated multimedia skills.

The most significant U.S. creation in relation to cultural diversity has been the proliferation of various anthropological encyclopedias on CD-ROM, in which again large corporations have sought to provide authoritative accounts of ethnicities and their content. Jasco's review of three of these (by the Gale Corporation, Macmillan, and Microsoft in conjunction with Brigham Young University's Culturgram project) indicates that they offer little if any scope to interrogate or question the interpretations offered and provide no sense that culture is a contested space in which conflict and change is characteristic rather than deviant.[23]

Within the United States there are now multitudes of CD-ROMs that attempt to address the national history of invasion and occupation, two of which give a sense of how the position of indigenous people and other minorities have been addressed. In Microsoft's *500 Nations: Stories of the North American Indian Experience,* produced in 1995, Kevin Costner hosts a CD-ROM version of a book and film of the same name. The project offers the authoritative narrator introducing a variety of locales, from Mexico to Canada, and offers both a celebration of precontact societies and a memorial to the history of the

Indian peoples after European contact. It pays little attention to the contemporary situation and the processes of de- and retribalization.

As well as the database and encyclopedic approaches, there are many simulation games, the most heralded of which have been the succeeding versions of *The Oregon Trail*. In his review of these CDs, Bigelow undertakes a detailed deconstruction of the content, examining the highly individualized subjectivities the simulation requires of its participants.[24] He concludes by asking, "Which social groups are students not invited to identify with in the simulation? For example, Native Americans, African Americans, women and Latinos are superficially represented in The Oregon Trail, but the 'stuff' of their lives is missing."

The new media, with CD-ROMs linking through the Internet to World Wide Web sites and other online databases and update sources, are becoming a central element in educational strategies in advanced capitalist societies. Holzberg notes, in her brief discussion of historical narratives on CD-ROM, the increasingly important role they were playing even in 1995.[25] In the United States nearly all schools have multimedia-capable machines and access to the Internet (and are gearing up for the broadband revolution associated with Internet 2), whereas in other technologically sophisticated societies such as Singapore, all schools and most residential locations will have direct access to high-speed Internet connections within two to three years. In New South Wales, Australia, the state government has committed to every school's having multiple computers and Internet access by 2002 and has demanded that all teachers, irrespective of discipline, be computer literate.

In new media projects about national histories, we have already seen how little room is given to controversy and how much energy is spent on producing anodyne and non-confrontational material. Perlmutter concludes that "the visual depiction of history and society . . . is a construction derived from industrial, commercial, and social influences . . . [and] undermines the assumption that visual or verbal educational messages are neutral transmissions of self-evident, naturally arising, unstructured or objective content."[26]

Thus we need to be aware of the processes through which new media national imaginings are produced (such as *Vital Links*, produced by Davidson and Associates and published by Addison Wesley, to support the U.S. history curriculum *Vital Issues: Reshaping and Industrializing the Nation*).[27] These products provide very carefully programmed learning environments that help students build cyberliteracy skills but may not facilitate alternative interpretations of events and skills in critical thinking.

When the new technologies are used specifically with the aim of empowering the traditionally "silenced" elements of society, however, voices emerge that have a resonance and authority that might otherwise not be available. Although most histories are written by the victors and tell the stories of the powerful and victorious, popular history can move beyond these versions to more subtle, multilayered, and complex pictures of the past and the present. This is Thomson's conclusion in his discussion of oral history practices, in which he sees in new media "the potential to expand such possibilities. Multimedia formats can include a massive amount of textual, oral, visual, and video material. They facilitate the simultaneous juxtaposition of diverse forms of evidence, including both complementary and contradictory accounts."[28]

The Washington-based Smithsonian Institution offers an African culture and history exhibition online. This exhibition seems to have been designed for two audiences, both North American. The first are those non–African Americans with an interest in African history as it affected the conditions under which black slaves were transported to the Americas. That is, it offers a cultural archeology of contemporary America by opening up sites of African experience and suggesting trajectories of cultural continuities. The second audience directly addressed is African Americans, for whom African heritage is validated and African culture celebrated. Such cultural anthropological theorizing of the African experiences underplays, however, the impact of colonialism on African society (though not that of the slave traders, who were directly relevant to the United States). Thus many of the contemporary problems of Africa that permeate the global media do not receive any sustained consideration in the exhibition, and yet the ambiguities of African American experience resonate with the conflicts and traumas of postcolonial Africa. The potential for a critical multiculturalism has not been realized, with a liberal and sociocentric view—an essentially anthropological account from outside Africa—having to suffice.

One attempt to develop a cyberian history from within a multicultural society occurred with the CD-ROM project *Making Multicultural Australia* (MMA)[29] and its development as a Web site through "Remarking Multicultural Australia" in 2001.[30] Ethnic and racial conflict have played a critical part in the development of Australian society, from the suppression and attempted extermination of the indigenous peoples by the invading colonists through to the exclusion of Asian and other immigrants of color as part of the establishment of the nation in 1901. It was not until the mid-1970s that 'multiculturalism' was adopted as national policy in relation to settlement of immigrants, race was removed as a criterion for their selection, and indigenous rights were asserted. Yet as these changes worked their way through the body politic, they were also resisted, with race

issues (in relation to Asian immigration and indigenous land and political rights) re-emerging as points of great political division from 1996. The MMA project sought to narrate a nation.[31] from the perspective of those subordinated communities that had experienced exclusion. It was also designed to fit closely with the emerging revisionist curricula in schools, which recognizes the multiplicity of histories in the society and addresses the progressive agenda of reconciliation between indigenous and settler communities. The project adopted the metaphor of an earlier technology, the filmed documentary, but positioned the audience as active participants in the construction of the narrative, offering additional research materials, alternative voices, and critical commentaries on the "mainstream" versions of the histories.

Cybertexts of difference are given meaning by the audiences who use them and who invest their experience in the negotiation of useful meanings. Audiences are called into existence through joining the virtual community formed by those who use the particular text. Access, then, is a critical issue in joining such communities.

Cyberaudiences and Cultural Diversity

Access to cyberia requires permission: knowledge about how to gain access, a point through which the neural web can be opened, and resources to pay for the process. The potential pattern of audiences does not match the actual avenues of access, for many of those least equipped to walk in the new world are cultural minorities. These dimensions of inequality can be understood on a global scale—North/South—and inside nations, where gender, disability status, ethnicity, race, class, age, education, and language skills affect the power to generate or even consume new media discourses.

Some of the consequences of this pattern were made evident in a number of U.S. studies carried out from the mid-1990s. The Clinton administration, especially under the U.S. economy to take advantage of new computer-based technologies. As part of this process, the federal Department of Commerce became involved in a series of studies around the concept of the digital divide. Although a variety of dimensions were given consideration—regional variations, gender, education, income, age, disability, family status—the characteristic most resistant to government policy initiatives remained that associated with race and poverty combined.

Novak, Hoffmann, and Venkatesh, in their 1997 study (based on the first U.S. national survey of Internet usage that recorded race) found that race (meaning African American) combined with poverty provided the best predictor of low Internet access and usage.[32] A key finding of the report was that black Americans wanted to use the Net and intended

to, but the Internet industry had abandoned them because it felt that they were unlikely to use the Net and would therefore not be a commercial proposition.[33]

The U.S. Department of Commerce, in the first "Falling through the Net" digital divide report[34] (see <http://digitaldivide.gov>), found that wealthy Asian American households had thirty-four times the access to new technology available to poorer African Americans. In the debate around this work, and in the wake of the Novak/Hoffmann studies, *Business Week* in 1999 noted that "[b]lack children living with one parent are less than one-fourth as likely to have Net access as those in two-parent households."[35]

When the Commerce Department reported its findings in terms of Internet take-up as of August 2000, it was claiming a "tremendous growth rate" for Hispanic Americans over twenty months, from a household access rate of 12.6 percent in December 1998 to 23.6 percent. Similarly, black households had risen from 11.2 percent to 23.5 percent. Overall, though, for all households, the rate had risen from 26.2 percent to reach 41.5 percent, with a projected access of over 50 percent by July 2001. The "gap" between black and all and Hispanic and all had become wider—by 3 percent for blacks and 4.3 percent for Hispanics. On the other hand, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders had the highest rate of access of any ethnic groups: 56.8 percent.[36]

A February 2002 report by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, called "A Nation Online" (available online at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/>), found that White and Asian American access to the Internet had risen to 60 percent, while Black access was 39.8 percent and Hispanic 31.6 percent, while in Spanish-language only households access rates were 14 percent. While the publicity from the Bush administration celebrated progress, in key areas the racial divide continued.

One of the underlying questions about "racial differences" and access and usage of the Net remains what the meaning of the differences might be. There clearly are differences that correlate with race, yet in what sense does race explain the differences? Are we seeing race here as a shorthand for cultural practices/cultural capital and therefore characteristics of the groups, or as a shorthand for race relations, that is, relative social power? The detailed data do indicate that cultural orientations toward Internet use may be a function of racialized power structures and the individual's place within them. Thus middle-class blacks are only marginally distinguishable from middle-class whites in relation to access and use: Black women use the Internet at work in exactly the same ratio as white women. But black youth use the Internet less in homes in which there is no computer than do white youth without a home computer. This suggests patterns of access to public places in which Internet computers are available that restrict black youth more than

white, perhaps coupled with lack of meaningful sites on the Net to attract black youth at the same intensity as sites that are available and attract white youths.

The various U.S. studies demonstrate that the racialization of cyberspace is occurring among audiences not simply in terms of virtual ethnic communities (of which there are many), but also in terms of access and potential to become part of such a community and thus play a role in constructing the discursive zones that make up cyberia. Evidence exists of similar issues (though not necessarily the same patterns) in other countries such as Australia. A study of some 54,000 media consumers in that country over a year, from September 1998 to September 1999, indicated that Internet access figures (34 percent of sample in the last month) could be usefully differentiated along ethnic grounds, with highest usage among groups born in the United States (185) and Canada (184) and lowest among those born in Italy (70) and Greece (71) (where 100 is average).[37]

Cyberaudiences enter a terrain that is politically loaded, and they are often seen as targets by racial marauders, eager to advance a racial agenda unrestrained by national legal systems or truncated by limited means of distributing propaganda or organizing linkages.

Cyberracism

The widespread diffusion of the Internet has meant that many organizations devoted to the promotion of racist views have found it invaluable for their work. Addressing a United Nations seminar, "Racism and Racial Discrimination on Internet," in 1997, Debra Guzman, executive director of the Human Rights Information Network, asked whether if "racism is this fearsome instrument, and we agree the Internet is a powerful instrument for global communication, then is not the combination of the two something to be concerned with?"[38] The UN seminar marked a formalization at the international level of a debate running widely within the Internet community. As early as 1995 there were calls for some sort of regulation of hate sites, with a variety of strategies being proposed.

Hatewatch, the U.S.-based body that documents the emergence of organized hate actions around the world, has concluded that there are five broad types of hate sites that mobilize concepts of race (or racially marked religion): white power sites (with neo-Nazi ideological orientations), Holocaust denial sites (which are primarily anti-Semitic), anti-Arab and anti-Moslem sites, black power sites, and white Christian sites. Probably the best known of the white power sites, Stormfront, was established in 1995 by a former leader of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. It has now grown to be a center for links

throughout the white power world, mirrored widely, and offering everything from rally dates to t-shirts.

The 1997 UN seminar documented the growth of the issues associated with cyber-hate, but with the failure before the U.S. Supreme Court of the Communications Decency Act in 1995, government control of hate sites based in the United States came to an effective halt. Indeed the capacity of any authority to censor the Internet seems very limited, primarily as the ability to move locations and servers is so simple. This has resulted in a situation that Michael Whine has characterized as being akin to terrorism, quoting a writer in the white supremacist U.K. National Front journal *The Nationalist:* "The Internet will be the main political campaigning tool of the next decade and beyond."[39]

Commenting on the expansion of hate groups in cyberspace, Kim has reported that in the United States alone in 1998, there were some 537 active hate groups, with over half sponsoring Web sites.[40] For three obvious reasons—the global reach of the Net, its comparative cheapness as a means of distributing information, and its untrammeled capacity to operate outside the control of states (especially in relation to the United States), Web sites have become the new version of the agitator's printing press, but with potentially far greater impact (at least among those who want to access the material or fall across it while surfing). Kim comments that this rise in race hate sites on the Internet seems to run against the assumption that rising educational levels in the West should be correlated with a decline in irrational sentiments and a reduction in the acceptability of racist speech.

There is broad evidence, however, of the role of racial hate in the ideological armory of right-wing and nationalist groups concerned to defend an ethnocentric space against the forces of globalization, however defined. This model of racialized prejudice fits closely with the orientation of alienated and economically marginalized groups seeking scapegoats for their perceived problems. Thus it is to be expected that hate groups will expand to fill the vacuum left by declining capacities of national states to manage the local impacts of globalization and offer psychologically meaningful strategies of valorization of the marginalized and damaged sectors of a society. As the Internet becomes an increasingly prevalent element in the lives of populations in industrialized countries, so the number and reach of hate sites will increase.

There are a number of options that have been advanced by groups seeking to stem the impact of hate propaganda, on the one hand, and undermine the organizing capacity the Internet provides for racist groups, on the other. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of the B'nai Brith, a Jewish antihate group in this case based in the United States, has devel-

oped a range of proposals to confront the impact of and expansion of hate groups.[41] Its primary strategy is educational: providing materials to teachers and parents about the dangers of hate sites. It also provides a free downloadable HateFilter that contains lists of hate site URLs and automatically redirects attempts to access those sites to the ADL itself. The ADL has noted, however, that whereas private institutions in the United States can mandate the use of such filters in any Internet access they provide, public institutions probably cannot act to limit the access of adults to the Internet in any way.

Cyberia have therefore become an arena for constant political struggles over racialized hate speech, with antihate groups engaging in hacking, blocking, filtering, and varieties of legal action (only the United States has freedom-of-speech parameters that prevent government controls). In France, Yahoo.fr banned the use of its auction site for the sale of Nazi memorabilia (as a preemptive move to avoid triggering government action that might regulate Internet service providers more widely), and in Australia the Human Rights Commission sought to have the Adelaide Institute's Holocaust denial site taken down under racial vilification laws (a tortuous process requiring many rounds of court action with no certainty of final effective success: the site could always move to the United States).

Conclusion

Cyberia are very much phenomena of globalization, which is itself about the accelerated movement and interaction of capital, culture, and populations. Cultural pluralism in new media is both an expression of and a fundamental contribution to how globalization operates. The category of 'race' remains highly problematic, carrying connotations of cultural difference, enforced cultural hierarchies, and racialized political economies of information. Governments have sought to develop strategies to regulate activities in cyberspace, yet across racial boundaries and in ethnic diasporic communities, nation-states seem often to have even less purchase than they do in the physical world.

Cyberspace provides many dimensions in which cultural alternatives can be explored, evoked, and manipulated, so that hybridity and coalescence and refashioning of meanings can occur almost instantaneously. In cyberia, freedom takes on new possibilities, both in terms of creativity and in terms of malicious and destructive intent. Often it depends on from where you view the multidimensional space as to what "take" you see and how you make sense of it. The potential exists for a deepening and solidifying of divisions on the one hand, and/or a dissolving of historic conflicts on another.

In October 1999 a group of survivors of the ethnic cleansing of Yugoslavia set up a new site, Cyber Yugoslavia. It had no place, no space, but soon thousands of citizens. Its goal was to reach five million members; then it would petition the United Nations to become a nation and would scan the earth for twenty square meters of land for itself. On that land it would place its server. And thus it might seek to end the madness that had plagued the physical country that had torn itself apart for the previous decade. In August 2001, it had reached 15,000 members; and as of October 2002, it counted 16,000 members.

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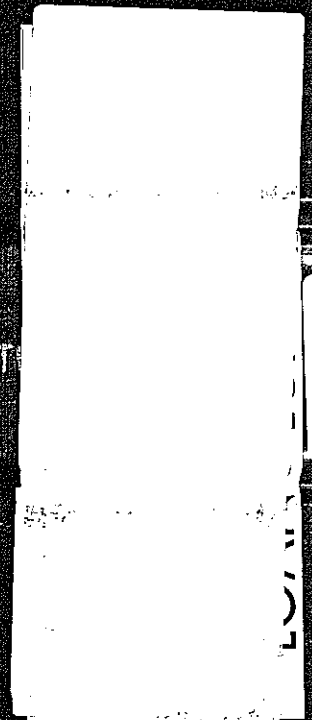
Democracy and New Media

Edited by Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn
Associate Editor: Brad Seawell

Contents

Series Foreword

David Thorburn, *editor*
Edward Barrett, Henry Jenkins, *associate editors*

New media technologies and new linkages and alliances across older media are generating profound changes in our political, social, and aesthetic experience. But the media systems of our own era are unique neither in their instability nor in their complex, ongoing transformations. The Media in Transition series will explore older periods of media change as well as our own digital age. The series hopes to nourish a pragmatic, historically informed discourse that maps a middle ground between the extremes of euphoria and panic that define so much current discussion about emerging media—a discourse that recognizes the place of economic, political, legal, social, and cultural institutions in mediating and partly shaping technological change.

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Democracy and New Media
edited by Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn

The essays in this volume capture something of the complexity and disagreement in current discourse about the politics of cyberspace. Some contributors offer us front-line

perspectives on the impact of emerging technologies on politics, journalism, and civic experience. What happens when we reduce the transaction costs for civic participation, or increase access to information, or expand the arena of free speech? Other contributors place our shifting understanding of citizenship in historical context, suggesting that notions of cyberdemocracy and online community must grow out of older models of civic life. Still others expand this conversation to consider the global flow of information and to test our American conceptions of cyberdemocracy against developments in other parts of the world. How, for example, do new media operate in Castro's Cuba, or in post-apartheid South Africa, or in the context of multicultural debates on the Pacific Rim? Some contributors examine specific sites and practices, describing new forms of journalism or community organizing. Some voices here are deeply skeptical; others are optimistic. For some writers the new technologies endanger our political culture; for others, they promise civic renewal.

Most of the papers on which these chapters are based originated in series of public forums and conferences hosted at MIT from 1998 to 2000 under the title "Media in Transition." Funded by the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation and organized by the MIT Communications Forum, these events aimed to nourish a broad civic conversation about the political impact of new media technologies. The essays have been revised for this book.

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