



Virtual Culture

IDENTITY & COMMUNICATION
IN CYBERSOCIETY



Edited by Steven G. Jones

VIRTUAL CULTURE

For Jodi—the greatest IRL and everywhere

VIRTUAL CULTURE

Identity and Communication in Cybersociety

Edited by

STEVEN G. JONES



SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

Editorial selection and matter, Introduction, Chapter 1 © Steven G. Jones
Chapter 2 © Jan Fernback 1997
Chapter 3 © Ananda Mitra 1997
Chapter 4 © Joseph Schmitz 1997
Chapter 5 © Nessim Watson 1997
Chapter 6 © David F. Shaw 1997
Chapter 7 © Margaret L. McLaughlin, Kerry K. Osborne, and
Nicole B. Ellison 1997
Chapter 8 © Dawn Dietrich 1997
Chapter 9 © Susan Zickmund 1997
Chapter 10 © Richard C. MacKinnon 1997
Chapter 11 © Harris Breslow 1997

First published 1997 Reprinted 1998, 2002

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission in writing from the Publishers.

Permission to reproduce song lyrics from "Transmission", performed and recorded by Joy Division, granted by Fractured Music/Factory Comm. Ltd.



SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B-42, Panchsheel Enclave
Post Box 4109
New Delhi 110 017

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 13: 978-0-7619-5526-9

Library of Congress catalog record available

Contents

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
 Introduction <i>Steven G. Jones</i>	 1
 1 The Internet and its Social Landscape <i>Steven G. Jones</i>	 7
 2 The Individual within the Collective: Virtual Ideology and the Realization of Collective Principles <i>Jan Fernback</i>	 36
 3 Virtual Commonality: Looking for India on the Internet <i>Ananda Mitra</i>	 55
 4 Structural Relations, Electronic Media, and Social Change: The Public Electronic Network and the Homeless <i>Joseph Schmitz</i>	 80
 5 Why We Argue About Virtual Community: A Case Study of the Phish.Net Fan Community <i>Nessim Watson</i>	 102
 6 Gay Men and Computer Communication: A Discourse of Sex and Identity in Cyberspace <i>David F. Shaw</i>	 133

7	Virtual Community in a Telepresence Environment	146
	<i>Margaret L. McLaughlin, Kerry K. Osborne, and Nicole B. Ellison</i>	
8	(Re)-fashioning the Techno-Erotic Woman: Gender and Textuality in the Cybercultural Matrix	169
	<i>Dawn Dietrich</i>	
9	Approaching the Radical Other: The Discursive Culture of Cyberhate	185
	<i>Susan Zickmund</i>	
10	Punishing the Persona: Correctional Strategies for the Virtual Offender	206
	<i>Richard C. MacKinnon</i>	
11	Civil Society, Political Economy, and the Internet	236
	<i>Harris Breslow</i>	
	Index	258

Notes on contributors

Harris Breslow (harris@calumet.yorku.ca) received his doctorate from the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois. He currently teaches philosophy and cultural history in the Mass Communications Programme at York University, Toronto, Canada. He is completing a manuscript on the relationship between architectural and economic spaces.

Dawn Dietrich (dietrich@cc.wvu.edu) is Assistant Professor of English at Western Washington University. She has published articles on postmodern performance and electronic culture and is currently at work on a book-length manuscript about theater practitioner Robert Wilson and the politics of the postmodern stage.

Nicole B. Ellison is a doctoral student at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, focusing on the social aspects of computer-mediated communication. Before attending graduate school, she worked at the Voyager Co. and other software development companies in Los Angeles, California.

Jan Fernback (fernback@rintintin.colorado.edu) is a doctoral candidate at the Center for Mass Media Research, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Colorado. She is currently writing a dissertation on computer-mediated social relations which problematizes the concept of community as manifested in cyberspace. Her research interests include utopianism and new media technologies and the anthropology of cyberculture.

Steven G. Jones (steve-jones@utulsa.edu) is Professor and Chair of the Faculty of Communication at the University of Tulsa. A social historian of communication technology, his book *CyberSociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community* was published in 1995 and earned him critical acclaim. Jones has made presentations to scholarly and business groups about the Internet and social change and about the Internet's social and commercial uses. He also pursues research into popular music, youth culture, and communication. His first book, *Rock Formation: Technology, Music and Mass Communication*, was nominated for the BMI/Rolling Stone Gleason Award and the Association for Recorded Sound Collections Excellence in Historical Recorded Sound Research Award.

Richard C. MacKinnon (<http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~spartan/>) after spending several years in Silicon Valley is a political scientist in the Government Department and the Advanced Communication Technologies Laboratory (ACTLAB) at the University of Texas at Austin. As a former police officer, he is able to draw on his law enforcement background to inform his theories for addressing computer-mediated crime and virtual offenders. His research interests are in the political anthropology, cultural study, and governance of virtual environments. He spends most of his online time dwelling in a community called Cybermind.

Margaret L. McLaughlin (mmclaugh@rcf.usc.edu) is Professor of Communication, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, and a member of the Faculty of the Integrated Media Systems Center. She is Co-Editor of the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* and serves on the Editorial Boards of *Text, Communication Research*, and *Progress in Communication Science*. She has written, edited, and co-edited several books, including *Conversation: How Talk is Organized*; *The Psychology of Tactical Communication* and *Network and Net-Play: Virtual Groups on the Internet* (1996). Her interests include discourse analysis, group communication, and computer-mediated communication.

Ananda Mitra (ananda@wfu.edu) is an assistant professor of communication at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC. He has published in the areas of critical studies, popular culture, and technology, particularly about the conditions in South East Asia and about South East Asian immigrants. His interest in the Internet stems from his personal use of the Net and in teaching courses in communication, technology, and culture.

Kerry K. Osborne (osborne@rcf.usc.edu) is a doctoral candidate in the Annenberg School of Communication, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. She has coauthored a number of articles on electronic communities and is currently researching Internet participation among the elderly. Additional interests include pragmatics of computer-mediated conversation and impression management on the World Wide Web.

Joseph Schmitz (schmitzja@centum.utulsa.edu) received his PhD from the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California in 1990 and presently teaches at the University of Tulsa. His research interests include the uses and social consequences of new communication technology and the study of these technologies within organizations.

David F. Shaw (shawd@ucsu.colorado.edu) is a doctoral candidate at the Center for Mass Media Research, in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he is writing his dissertation on the AIDS Memorial Quilt. He has received fellowships from the Swedish Institute, Stockholm, and the International Media Centre at the University of Salford, England, where he studied Swedish, European, and international media responses to AIDS.

Nessim Watson (Nessim1@aol.com) is an adjunct professor in the Communication Department of Westfield State College. His interests in modern communication, cultural studies, and the functioning of mass media systems are paired with a desire to infuse media literacy into secondary school systems and to provide students with an awareness of how culture influences our thoughts, beliefs, and actions. His current research involves how CMC technologies can be used to democratize both the cultural and political spheres of American society.

Susan Zickmund is Assistant Professor of Speech Communication at Augustana College. Her research on American fascism appears in *The Shepherd of the Discontented: Religion, Radicalism, and Rhetoric in the Discourse of Father Charles Coughlin* and in contributions to *Religion and the Social Sciences*. She has ongoing collaborations with the Universität Bielefeld, Germany.

Preface

Since writing and editing *CyberSociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community* little time has passed according to the clock and calendar. On the Internet, though, ages have gone by. When *CyberSociety* was in press the World Wide Web was merely a cool application, an interesting way to use the network. Now it has become a full-blown medium of communication gaining widespread use, one on which we pin hopes, dreams, fortunes, and fantasies.

Still, *CyberSociety* is much more than a history of the Internet. I would like to believe its central themes and its examinations of social relationships online and their relationship, in turn, to ones offline remain relevant, and hopefully will continue to be so as long as we are interested in figuring out, as my colleague Joli Jensen might put it, what it means to live a valuable life.

Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety is by no means an update or revision to *CyberSociety*, and though it shares some of the concerns and methods of the earlier book, its focus is quite a bit different, and I hope as relevant. Whereas *CyberSociety* concentrated on the nature of online communities and social formations, *Virtual Culture* converges on the nature of social and civic life online, and asks (fairly begs) the question: what is it about life offline that makes us so intent on living online?

In both the online and offline realms I am grateful to a number of people who have enriched not only this work but my thinking. In particular James Carey, Clifford Christians, Joli Jensen, and Ted Peterson are an inspiration. Sophy Craze and Kiren Shoman provided guidance, good care, and communication while I wrote and edited the book, and I am grateful to them, as I am to Margaret Seawell and others at Sage, for, without their help, you would not be reading it. Peggy Bowers at St Louis University, too, was very helpful as I sought to understand Charles Taylor's work.

I particularly wish to thank colleagues on the Faculty of Communication at the University of Tulsa, and must single out Jan Reynolds for her support and hard work on behalf of the entire faculty. I also owe a special thanks to Lewis Duncan, Tom Horne, and Lars Engle. Joe Schmitz is all one could hope for in a friend and colleague, and I am fortunate to share an appointment in the same department as he. Frank Christel, Barbara Geffen, Reed Davis, the staff in Computing and Information Resources,

students at the university, and other faculty and staff there too numerous to mention, have made it a valuable and interesting learning environment, and have also provided serious fun. Al Soltow continues to provide wisdom and guidance—the next Leinie's is on me. Tom, Karla, Casey, Chris, and Abby White provided unserious fun, as did Rick Holzgrafe, Arthur Vandelay, the Utz family, Alan Smithee, and Milly and Lilly. A special hello and thanks goes to Laza, Sofia and Boris Sekulic, Elizabeth White, Mel Eberle, and Gary Szabo.

My parents, Sofia Jones and George Jones, have provided advice, comfort, and support in ever-greater quantity and quality, to the point where mere thanks are greatly inadequate.

Just as inadequate is any thanks I could give to Jodi White, who continues to bear with me and lift me up. I'll log off soon. Really. I promise.

Steven G. Jones
Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA
September 1996

Introduction

Steven G. Jones

Although the story of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the Internet is still being written, we already know that there are (at least) two sides to it. The side we most commonly hear about is of their development and implementation, and this has been historically what we have heard most. We also hear much about Internet engineering, its business and commercial applications, its potential for entertainment. The side we hear less about (sometimes we hear nothing at all) is of the consequences of that development and implementation, of the uses to which we mean to put the technology, and the social outcomes we desire, and hence this book, *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety*.

But daily we become more savvy about technology. For instance, it seems quite commonplace to us that every technology has two sides to its consequences; on the one hand for every technology we develop in an attempt to improve life, we believe we also will, on the other hand, find life impoverished in some way. Such has been our experience with a variety of technologies, from nuclear power, with its capacity for generating electricity and for destruction, to the written word, with its capacity for preservation and dissemination of information and for its origination of silent readers. Once we are accustomed to a new technology we accept both sides, preferring, one suspects, to assume that as the technology is refined its negative consequences will also be better engineered. But our impatience shows through while we wait for those refinements, as this excerpt from a 1929 magazine article demonstrates:

The average human being of to-day is not impressed by miracles. . . . He reads in a newspaper that plans are being made to connect New York with Tokio [*sic*] by telephone. "I doubt that it's practical," he may remark. But the next day he discovers that the thing has actually been accomplished. The day after that he himself calls up Tokio and, if there happens to be a few minutes' delay in putting the call through, he complains bitterly about the service. (Sherwood, 1929, p. 1)

It is likely that most people have had similar experiences. Once we see that something functions as it should, we believe it should function *even better*. And woe be if it does not function properly, as when a videocassette recorder mysteriously does not record a program for which we have set its timer, when we lose a connection while talking on our cellular telephone,

or when our computer freezes and crashes. Our attention at that instant is absolutely riveted on the technology that has done the unexpected, that has thwarted our attempts to blend it with our activities, and our attention is drawn toward the object and away from ourselves and our own expectations. We are, simply, more likely to restart the computer than to think of alternatives to it, or of how it shapes and defines the activities we like to believe we solely define, or of how *we* (and not its designers) think it should work.

Many of our everyday activities are dependent on the smooth functioning of our communication technologies (encompassing those from writing to satellite transmission), and interdependent on our ability to understand them, to be "literate" in their languages, be they ones with few letters and words and little syntax (a television remote control, perhaps) or ones with complex rule sets and grammars (a computer language). Irrespective of their complexity we are still required to learn about them or be left behind. What modern businessperson, for instance, does not have need or use of a business card, fax, e-mail, etc., now standard business tools? But we are impatient in this instance, too. As these tools develop we seek still other tools to better integrate them and manage them.

It could be claimed that our impatience with technology stems from our anxiety toward it, in which case one could trot out any number of anti-technology neo-Luddite platforms. And there is some truth to that claim, for there are those who are appropriately skeptical and worried of our new technologies and their impact on our lives and social relationships. The late Joy Division singer Ian Curtis (1980) sang, "We could go on as though nothing was wrong/And hide from the days to remain all alone/Staying in the same place, staring all the time/Touching from a distance, further all the time," words that have a sharp edge to them in this age of the Internet; but a key word to note is "could," for it denotes that its opposite, could *not*, is also possible: again, two sides to every story.

If we were truly able to trace the roots of our impatience when it comes to technology, I believe we would find that it has arisen not from anxiety, but rather from the expectation that technology will, almost naturally, become better, for, in the main, we believe that it has done so. In somewhat crass terms, one consequence of this expectation is consumer near-paralysis in the face of ongoing developments and inventions. Should we wait to buy a new computer because a newer, faster, bigger one is almost on the market, or do we buy one immediately and risk its obsolescence? (Little risk, really, as obsolescence is unavoidable eventually.) Or do we wait until the moment of the new one's introduction and purchase this one at a discount? Do we buy that videocassette recorder in VHS or Beta formats? And what is this new "DVD" thing that is supposed to come to market soon? We know that whatever we use today will be replaced by something better tomorrow.

In the case of communication technologies our expectations are focused primarily on three areas: transportation, communication, and storage.

Each of these plays a central role in the development of CMC and the Internet, too, and it is common to find the Internet considered a transportation device (witness Microsoft's "where do you want to go today?" advertising campaign¹), a communication device (e-mail, the "I-phone," etc.), and a storage device (a form of networked encyclopedia). Most all of our communication technologies have, at one time or another, been vested with similar (though generally less "sophisticated") abilities.

What has been the outcome of these investments? In regard to transportation, it is possible to move more information more quickly than before, in different media. As Carey (1989) has pointed out, communication and transportation are inextricably linked:

It is not an infrequent experience to be driving along an interstate highway and to become aware that the highway is paralleled by a river, a canal, a railroad track, or telegraph and telephone wires. (p. 203)

The grid system of streets and highways that gives North America its distinctively different (and, some say, homogeneous) look when compared to cities in other nations extends to grids of other kinds, to power and electrical grids, and communication networks. Though Carey claims that the telegraph broke the connection between communication and transportation, for it enabled messages "to move independently of and faster than transportation" (p. 204), that connection is still with us in some sense. And it threatens to expand as the Internet's particularly American qualities (the use of English, its technical development, its users' values) structure its use around the world.

With the invention of radio one might have thought that wireless communication would make the separation of communication and transportation clear and the grid obsolete, but not so. Our existing grids are used for new purposes, but ones related to communication and transportation nevertheless; telephone lines bring us not only voice but data (and thus sound and pictures—and the Internet), cable television lines do the same, power lines will likely do so as well, and these lines follow our roads, as those have structured the location of our buildings. Satellite communication has made us a little less dependent on these grids, but not sufficiently so that we may do away with them altogether, and given the size of our investment (both material and human) in their construction, is that a surprise? And is it thus a surprise that we consider the Internet an information "highway"? The grid is still with us, reminding us that William Gibson's "Matrix" is in the here and now (though maybe not perceptible in the ways he envisions it will be).

What has the grid done for us, what has been the return on our investment in it? John Brinckerhoff Jackson (1980) asks us to look at it not only in terms of that which has been built (the roads, the wires, etc.), its content, so to speak, but in terms of the landscape, its context. Jackson finds that the highway "is merely a symbol of how we have learned to organize space and movement" (p. 124), and that the spatial organization

it engenders is of greatest importance. His most telling comment is that the contemporary division of space brought about by highways is "seen as temporary, and communication . . . essential; the dwelling favors the open plan" (p. 125). I might add that the computer, its software and hardware, are seen in the same way, and perhaps we consider modern life less in terms of social mobility and more in terms of the "upgrade."

The grid systems we create, then, are structuring but not permanent, rigid but permeable; they flex. So it is with our attempts to map a grid of the Internet, the virtual, onto our existing grid of the non-virtual. We try to bend and twist both grids until they fit one on top of the other, but they always snap back into place and defy an easy interlock, perhaps like "smart" metals and plastics that regain their original shape on heating. Several essays in this book address the issue of the boundaries between the real and the virtual, assessing the shape and porousness of these grids, and we find that with the application of some intellectual heat they do not always spring back into old shapes but assume entirely new ones.

In regard to communication, we are, not surprisingly, also able to move more information more quickly than before, in different media (the link between communication and transportation is yet to be completely broken). Jackson (1985) is illuminating on this point too, as he notes that:

Communication can be defined in several ways: it means passage from one place to another, and it means the transmitting of a message. In terms of the highway, it means an unending flow of traffic—perhaps much of it essentially aimless, a kind of search for some place or person to help reinforce our identity; it also means the signs and billboards and lights and signals—a chorus of communication such as no generation has ever before seen. (p. 46)

His description of the highway is as good a one of the Internet as I have found. The contributors to this volume examine the flow of traffic, but not for its own sake. Rather they seek to discover and critique that "search for some place or person" about which Jackson writes. The use of CMC and the Internet is part of what Jackson, extrapolating from a study done in Holland, sees as "the need for sociability, the need to use one's own personal possessions . . . the need to collect experiences, and the need to run dangers" (pp. 47–48).

There is another need, and it is the third area of our collective focus on communication technologies: storage. As we collect experience we must find someplace to put it. It seems nigh on impossible to continually add objects, symbols, and processes to our lives without letting others go, so what we try to do instead of subtract is store them. Whether the space is real or virtual, our capacity to keep filling it is undiminished (such is the nature of imagination), but our capacity to encompass it, in the sense of embracing it, putting our arms around it figuratively, to understand it, does not grow at the same pace. Having information and knowing what it means are entirely separate domains. As Ebben & Kramarae (1993) noted in a slightly different context, we must set aside our "assumption about education [as] rooted in the notion that knowledge is an accumulation of

matter" (p. 21). What we sense is that we are *constituted* by information almost as much as we are constituted by blood, skin, and bone, and that, no matter the recording method we may use to externalize the memories and experiences we store, without us they would not make sense.

Conversely, without those memories and experiences our lives would not make sense either. Having "connections" does not simply mean hooking up a wire (or radio wave) from one place to another. In the old Eastern European sense of the term, "having connections" means having a thread that links us to others' thoughts, duties, rights, responsibilities, and obligations. It is, in truth, neither "who one knows" nor "what one knows" but the two combined. In its own way each essay in this book is concerned with connecting in that latter sense, and our collective concern should, by all means, focus there.

The present development of a global information infrastructure by way of the Internet brings these three strands (transportation, communication, storage) together in interesting ways. But what are the consequences for us as we invest them with those capacities? To invest in one area must mean that we disinvest in another. Richard Hoggart (1970) wrote that apart from the "expedient answers" technology may provide we are "in the area of value-judgments," for "every choice made opens *that* possibility to human beings or closes *that* one, makes *that* more likely or *that other* less likely" (p. 112). What do we choose to leave behind as we adopt and adapt to new media technology? What might we gain from our new investments? These are the questions raised in this book. They come from a variety of perspectives, engaging and joining theoretical work in sociology, political science, economics, communication, feminism, and history with observation and participation of the content and context of CMC and the Internet. The authors have kept a watchful eye on the landscape that we are forming with these technologies; sometimes that landscape is visible on our computer screens, and sometimes it is not. No matter where it may be visible it behooves us all to keep it in view, for it affects us all—and it promises to keep changing.

Note

1. Microsoft has in this advertising campaign asked a question that sounds like ones asked by myriad American college students and members of "Generation X" who can engage in a seemingly never-ending call-and-response round-robin based on two questions: "What do you want to do today?" followed by "I don't know, what do you want to do?" The dissipated *ennui* of these questions is similar to that of the Web surfer who, faced with an almost limitless array of sites to visit, is overwhelmed to boredom.

References

- Carey, J.W. (1989). *Communication as culture*. Boston: Unwin & Hyman.
 Curtiss, I. (1980). *Transmission. Fractured Music*.

- Ebben, M., & Kramarae, C. (1993). Women and information technologies: Creating a cyberspace of our own. In H.J. Taylor, C. Kramarae & M. Ebben (Eds), *Women, information technology, and scholarship* (pp. 15–27). Urbana: University of Illinois Center for Advanced Study.
- Hoggart, R. (1970). Two ways of looking. In R. Hoggart, *Speaking to each other* (pp. 106–113). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, J.B. (1980). *The necessity for ruins*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Jackson, J.B. (1985). The social landscape. In S. Yates (Ed.), *The essential landscape* (pp. 45–48). Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Sherwood, R.E. (1929, July). Beyond the talkies—television. *Scribner's*, 24, 1–8.

1

The Internet and its Social Landscape

Steven G. Jones

Whether it be film, television, radio, the Internet, virtually any medium of communication that relies on technology will at one time or another find itself deemed to be causing a "revolution." And just as quickly one will find some segments of society in opposition to that revolution.

Such is now the case with the evolution of technologies for computer-mediated communication (CMC), particularly the development of the Internet. Backlash toward these technologies has begun already and some decry the loss of personality that often accompanies the mediation of communication via computer; others lament the amount of time taken away from face-to-face interaction by technologies that require expertise, undivided attention, or even appear addictive. Clifford Stoll (1995) summarized the backlash best when he wrote, "bit by bit, my days dribble away, trickling out my modem" (p. 2).

Stoll's sense of life "dribbling away" is not surprising, for, to use James Carey's (1989) distinction between the "transmission" and "ritual" views of communication, transmission and transportation form the frame of reference for our thinking about communication. Most often we simply desire to know how much we can communicate, or "get across," most efficiently, economically, and rapidly. From that perspective Stoll's problem is that his life is but *dribbling* away and not speeding along his modem's connection. But from the point of view of "ritual," a perspective that claims communication "is the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality" (p. 18), Stoll's problem is that his days go by virtually without him, time passes through his modem without him noticing it.

In many, many ways, the transmission view dominates not only how the Western world thinks about communication but how it thinks about other aspects of life, and this may be most evident in the modern embrace of "progress," or what Carey characterized as "the mythos of the electronic revolution," the hope and belief that social ills will be overcome by advances in science and technology.

In *CyberSociety* (Jones, 1995) I sought to bring Carey's words to bear on our understanding of the historical roots and motivations for what had come to be known as the "information superhighway," the ongoing project of constructing the transportation infrastructure to maintain "progress" in industry. In this regard it is important that we do understand

the transmission view of communication. It not only permeates history, in terms of the development of Western society, it continues to exert influence on the socio-economic structure of our communication media. As John Brinckerhoff Jackson wrote (1972) about the development of the Illinois Central Railroad in America:

railroad-designed towns . . . represented an important development in our whole landscape. They and the new farms surrounding them were not, even in theory, part of a pattern of independent social spaces: they were integrated from the beginning into a well-designed economic process, into a linear system vividly symbolized by the lines of track and their accompanying telegraph wires. (p. 68)

The spread of railroads had sweeping consequences for social life even in areas that were not bisected by tracks. And now the Internet's development is similarly linear, though not symbolized by tracks and telegraph lines but by the personal computer, keyboard, and mouse. The Internet does not create independent social spaces *per se*, as it relies on an existing communication infrastructure and is integrated into current economic processes in the telecommunications industries. Is it any surprise that most people use the telephone system to access the Internet via modem, or that the promise of high-speed Internet connections comes via existing cable television installations? Like the telegraph wires that accompanied the railroad tracks, and the roads that followed the railroad tracks, *ad infinitum*, the Internet is a "piggy-backed" medium, one that follows paths we already know.

For the present analysis, it is most important to note that there was not only an industrial (and military) motivation for the creation of a communication infrastructure that has, in turn, led to the Internet's creation and growth, but a social one as well. Many of the technologies that are developed for business purposes are useful for social purposes (and vice versa), much to the chagrin of employers who find that the technology that was to have increased their workers' productivity has had the opposite effect and lowered it, while concomitantly increasing their socializing at work (Rice & Love, 1987; Schmitz & Fulk, 1991).

That the adoption of technology can have an effect opposite to the one intended should not be surprising, for we have become accustomed (perhaps from the very first time we must deal with the consequences of a thunderstorm that has cut power to our area and left us without refrigeration, lights, air conditioning, television, etc.) to the "trade-offs" that occur as we develop and implement technology. We may not realize the magnitude of those trade-offs until we lose access to the technologies to which we have become habituated. I raise these points not to argue that those trade-offs should necessarily prevent us from adopting technology, but rather to point out that, so long as technology works, we take the trade-offs for granted.

But when we are unable to avail ourselves of communication technology we are struck by the sudden intensity of the local, the immediate

apprehension that we are in the here, and now, and unable to attend to matters beyond our physical reach. Space is at that moment something we inhabit rather than something through which we move. To put it colloquially, we feel it "close in" around us. And what startles is that very physical presence of space, that feeling of something, or some absence, pressing against you when the lights go out.

Ordinarily, however, we "feel" space as a fish likely "feels" water. It is our own physical medium, a part of us to such an extent we do not even notice it, though we move through it and exist within its presence. It is part and parcel of our capacity for movement, so much so that the conjoining of space and motion, the very dependence of our sense of space on motion, has caused Richard Sennett (1978) to note that mobility is a *sine qua non* of modern life:

Today, we experience an ease of motion unknown to any prior urban civilization, and yet motion has become the most anxiety-laden of daily activities. The anxiety comes from the fact that we take unrestricted motion of the individual to be an absolute right. (p. 14)

One might well imagine, of course, that the term "auto-mobile" is derived from that sense that we believe we are granted the right of auto-mobility, irrespective of whether the medium is a highway or information super-highway . . . or social environment. For Carey's connection of the mythos of the electronic revolution to the Industrial Revolution connects not only the material aspects of those (essentially modern) stories, it connects their social and moral dimensions as well.

The Internet and Community

My own initial concerns about CMC, as I explained them in *CyberSociety* (Jones, 1995), were focused on issues of community. The concerns I had were centered on the question "Who are we when we are online?" and were oriented toward the communal, the social relationships we were seeking to foster via the Internet and CMC. In particular I wanted to examine emerging social formations online and determine whether they provide some of the things we desire offline, things like friendship, community, interaction, and public life, to determine whether the moral ideals we seek among one another, in community, are realized online.

Part of what motivated my interest and concern was that much was being made about the dual potentialities of the Internet. First, it could re-create community *as we had once known it*, rebuild for us the "great good place" (Oldenberg, 1991; Rheingold, 1993) we once knew but abandoned for "bowling alone" (Putnam, 1995). Second, it would not merely "get us all together," it would do so without our having to do expend much effort, since it would overcome space and time for us, and it would also enable us to communicate with one another. As J. MacGregor Wise points out in a forthcoming work, we have developed the belief that political, moral, and

social problems are the result of a lack of communication, and that if we improve communication we will also solve the various problems that plague modern life. The Internet would thus make community *better*. It was to result in a community free of the constraints of space and time, and so free us to engage with fellow humans irrespective of geographic proximity and the clock, and it would construct that community from *communication*, rather than inhabitation and being, which do not guarantee communication. As Douglas Schuler (1996) put it:

The old concept of community is obsolete in many ways and needs to be updated to meet today's challenges. The old or "traditional" community was often exclusive, inflexible, isolated, unchanging, monolithic, and homogeneous. A *new community*—one that is fundamentally devoted to democratic problem-solving—needs to be fashioned from the remnants of the old. (p. 9)

Schuler goes on to describe these new communities as having "a high degree of awareness . . . and principles and purpose" (p. 9), and focused around action, around "doing." In this conception, one growing in popularity, communities are not places to be, to engage in conversation (from the mundane to the momentous), they are groups of people seeking to achieve particular goals. This description is part of an older thread in conversations about computing. As Licklider and Taylor wrote in a 1968 essay that presaged much of computing's future:

life will be happier for the on-line individual because the people with whom one interacts most strongly will be selected more by commonality of interests and goals than by accidents of proximity . . . communication will be more effective and productive, and therefore more enjoyable. (p. 31)

Licklider and Taylor, and for that matter Schuler also, do not address whether communication that is not goal-oriented can be enjoyable too. And what happens to those "selected" groups once their goals are achieved is open to question. In general, Schuler's call for new communities seems more like a call to form committees, or at best teams, and democracy itself is defined as problem-solving and not as a way of life. It is conceived of as a means to a material end rather than a set of moral values.

A similar call is made by Howard Rheingold (1991, p. 377), who envisions virtual reality providing the "learning by doing" that, he claims, John Dewey espoused. But that characterization is a perversion of Dewey's expectations for education, expectations grounded in hopes for social being and not simply the learning of trade and skill. As Jensen (1990) summarized, "For Dewey, education should reflect the life of the larger society, cultivating students as full social citizens, lively and responsive" (p. 146). Furthering his twist on Dewey, Rheingold organized Electric Minds, Inc., a media company formed to create the Social Web. Its goal, according to Rheingold, "is to be *the* global brand for community" (cited in McCoy, 1996).

Such rhetoric puts a different spin on the modern nostalgia for community. Instead of merely criticizing the deterioration of communities in

modern life, it evokes a sense of lost opportunities that need to be again made available, if only we would work harder (or have more money with which to buy Rheingold's "brand" of community). It is therefore particularly responsive to the fragmentation of modern life along the lines of space and time, as it seeks to rally and reunite us in action and activity. But we should not overlook that it is we who, in our rush to overcome space and time, instead fragment them, and thus cause the ruptures we want healed. As Carey (1993) trenchantly points out in the title of an essay, "everything that rises must diverge." Both space and time are fragmented and divergent in the face of new technologies, made discontinuous by the very elements of control that we seek to utilize to make them less so, to make them, in fact, convergent. What Carey had observed was that:

Divergence is not some random and unfortunate occurrence, a snake in our idyll of convergence, but a necessary consequence of the technological change we so eagerly support. We are living, engineering and hardware notwithstanding, in a period of enormous disarray in all our institutions and in much of our personal life as well. We exist in a "verge" in the sense Daniel Boorstin gave that word: a moment between two different forms of social life in which technology has dislodged all human relations and nothing stable has as yet replaced them. Media may be converging. . . . Social convergence does not follow the technical convergence, however. (p. 173)

And so it is that our hopes for convergence are dominating our common sense. The creation of the convergence, and hence stability, we seek requires that we cease to attempt to "save" or "overcome" space and time through use of technology. They are not to be "overcome," we are, rather, to live in them.

It also requires that we move beyond simply observing whether things look as if they are converging to understanding the outcomes of our observations, or, to put it another way, understanding whether the perception of difference and similarity makes a difference. For example, though it may *seem* as if convergence is occurring and societies around the world share symbols, ideas, language, etc., a pervasive sense of divergence remains. Zelinsky (1992) noted that a research study conducted in 1967 "failed to disclose any convergence, and indeed suggested the opposite trend":

cultural distances seem to be shrinking; but modern man, torn loose from conventional bounds of place or social and biological descent, may well be feeling his way into a number of newly discovered dimensions. The opportunities for personal choice, more complete individuation, and the formation of new social and cultural entities may have been greatly enhanced. Thus although most places may have begun to look alike, in important ways not usually susceptible to casual visual observation they may have started down fundamentally different routes. In sharp contrast the communities of the premodern past may have displayed the greatest imaginable superficial differences, but the most striking isomorphisms are revealed to the persistent analyst. (pp. 87-88)

I would liken this to the present situation with the Internet, which, I believe, we have a tendency to understand mainly in spatial terms, observing it as if visually, through the use of visual metaphors, as if it were indeed a highway being constructed through our backyard. (It thankfully lacks the mess, trouble, and some of the disruption of roadwork, but it still employs eminent domain as our property is colonized.) We marvel at the sights and sounds brought into our homes and places of work and sometimes are dismayed at their intrusion into our lives, but we think less about the Internet's non-spatial features. We think more about its ability to "take us places" and less about its insertion into the mundane practices of our everyday life.

For us to change our thinking about the Internet, to gain a more critical awareness of it, we might turn toward Harold Innis's work concerning the social consequences of the fragmentation of modern society from what he termed the "bias" of communication, the structuring of space and time by communication. Now, of particular interest *vis-à-vis* the Internet is its bias toward time, and *not* space, though the Internet's principal and popular definition is as a "cyberspace." I believe the Internet does, in its way, have a bias toward space, as do other communication technologies. Yet it is a kind of "laissez-faire" bias, not one that structures space so much as one that entirely obliterates it as a sense-able construct and so renders it absurd. As Perkowitz (1996) noted in a review of E.M. Forster's *Howards End* and "The Machine Stops":

Forster . . . realizes that the quality of personal connection depends on the quantity—often inversely. "The more people one knows the easier it becomes to replace them," Margaret sighs. "It's one of the curses of London." Too many connections, in other words, devalues each one in a kind of emotional inflation. (p. 87)

It is not that distance is made meaningless, but once we are all connected in cyberspace we are then infinitely distant from one another when we are not communicating.

The Internet's bias toward time, on the other hand, marks it as the latest in a series of mechanical developments arising from "the demands of industry on time" (Innis, 1951, p. 74). It is part of a process that has intruded into everyday life, into the social (see Lewis Mumford's writing for poignant examples), that demands efficiency and results in fragmentation and what Innis termed an "obsession with present-mindedness" (p. 87) and what Jeremy Rifkin (1987) calls "the new nanosecond culture." Perhaps its best description, and one that links the Internet's bias toward time to computing generally, is that of a software engineer who stated, "real time [is] no longer compelling" (Ullman, 1995, p. 133).

Of great value toward making a connection between the Internet's time bias and its social consequences is Benedict Anderson's (1983) analysis of the evolution of "simultaneity":

Our own conception of simultaneity has been a long time in the making, and its emergence is certainly connected . . . with the development of the secular sciences. . . . What has come to take the place of the mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time is, to borrow again from Benjamin, an idea of "homogeneous, empty time," in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar. (p. 24)

Time is empty, according to Anderson, because we have less of a sense of its flow and a greater sense of its discontinuity—time is not a whole, it is a series of fragments that pass by, one to the other, in a serial lock-step. It is ours to fill and try to save rather than to experience and understand.

The Internet and Modern Life

Our sense of history and our imagination are necessarily related to the modern conception of time, for we see ourselves as moving through time, and to some extent outside of it, rather than living within it. It is well illustrated by the hold on our imagination of editing technologies, ones that allow us to manipulate images and sounds, space and time. As I stated in an earlier essay (Jones, 1994) on cyberpunk, hypertext, and symbolic process, "The point is not that art imitates life, life imitates art, and so on, but that *life itself can be edited*" (p. 86). Time is asynchronous, and nearly, perhaps only twenty minutes into the future, to borrow from Max Headroom, within our control.

Consequently, the Internet's insertion into modern life represents a further displacement, or divergence, between our sense of "lived" time (the time that passes according to our senses, the time of "being") and our sense of "social" or "functional" time (the time that we sense as a form of obligation, or as time for "doing," for "capturing," or what Stoll feels is being "dribbled away" against his wishes). Rifkin (1987) notes that:

The computer is a form of communication like script, print, and the telephone, but it is also a time tool, like the clock on the wall. . . . As a timepiece, the computer . . . establishes a new set of accelerated temporal demands on human behavior. . . . The ability to intuit the proper sequences of behavior, knowing how long things should take . . . becomes difficult and strained (pp. 27–28)

Computer makers continually speed up their machines, but few people I know find that accelerated central processing units save them much time, or, better, minimize their time for "doing" toward time for "being."

The Internet itself can, of course, provide some semblance of a place for "being," and lurking on mailing lists, Usenet newsgroups, Internet Relay Chat, etc., is evidence of at least that much. But these activities are biased toward an isolated form of being, for if one is lurking and not interacting, one is no more a part of the social than is a wallflower. "Being," in this sense, connotes a near-stasis in social terms. There is a remarkable parallel between lurking and reading (and, in fact, the primary activity of Internet use is reading, whether lurking or not). Reading, and print culture

generally, have been criticized for the ways they isolate individuals (think of the hapless airline passenger who opens a book or magazine to avoid speaking with the extra-gregarious fellow traveler seated nearby), promoting a sense of the imagined, the "read about," rather than engagement with the world (see Eisenstein, 1983; Goody, 1975; Ong, 1982).

A particularly vivid description of the social consequences of reading comes from Richard Hoggart (1957), who wrote about the "old men who fill the reading-rooms of the branch public libraries . . . eccentric[s] absorbed in the rituals of . . . monomania . . . exist[ing] on the periphery of life, seeing each other daily but with no contact" (pp. 60–61). Hoggart's "old men" did not become estranged from those around them *because* of the reading-room, or because of reading. They visit the reading-room because it is their refuge, a place to be among others of the same lot. It is, in a word, their consolation. But it is a place to be *among* and not *with*, in terms of interaction. What they seek is community within their environment. To again turn toward Innis (1951), the solution we seek, via the Internet, to the fragmentation of life along the lines of time is to commune with each other, or, as Innis wrote: "The general restiveness inherent in an obsession with time has led to various attempts to restore concepts of community such as have appeared in earlier civilizations" (p. 88).

But why restore community and the social? I believe the answer is related to C. Wright Mills' (1956) critique of "mass man," people "sunk in their routines," who "do not transcend, even by discussion," their lives (p. 320). To remedy this, Mills implies, is "the small-scale discussion . . . the chance for the reasonable and leisurely and human interchange of opinion" (p. 314). A key word in Mills' prescription is "leisurely," and it serves a dual purpose. First, it denotes the quickened pace of life that Mills (and other sociologists, like those at the Chicago School of Sociology) identified. Second, and more importantly, it refers to repose, intermission, without deliberate, purposive, action and activity, the time that allows for restoration and rejuvenation. As Lewis Mumford (1962) pointedly illustrates, the development of the clock and subsequent industrialization of life processes has meant that even at moments when we may feel we have "time on our hands," we find activities with which to use that time, or we feel guilty for "wasting" it.

John Perry Barlow (1996) noted that natural cycles provide such intermissions (a rancher, for instance, must patiently wait for a cow to give birth to a calf, or a farmer must wait for rain to end before working in the field) but those, too, are often filled with work. The fragmentation of modern life is felt not as simply a "filling up" or a "speeding up" of time, as Rifkin and others claim has occurred, it is felt as a loss of time with others, a lack of "being" with them. Instead of time as a continuity, as a movement with regularity that grows from and in turn builds up our sense of interaction, time is experienced as atomistic and discontinuous; time is not spent *with* others, it is spent *on* or *for* others, or even for ourselves. Anderson's "homogeneous, empty time" needs to be filled, for its passage

is precious and to waste it is profligate. But how do we fill it via our use of the Internet? And, once filled, how do we make space for more of it?

One way is to adopt Schuler's recommendation and create some form of "work group" and use our time for action and activity. There is little doubt that such activity can have positive practical rewards, but again, it is often difficult to distinguish from frenzy and busy-work—and what happens when one is done with it? Are we to simply move on to another "project," as if life were simply a series of them? To do so is to give in to the industrialization of which Mumford writes, and it is a sure way to narrow the options the Internet may bring for social relations. Though action and activity may bring their satisfactions, what of sustained, reflexive, personal intimacy? Internet users ought to shout this question loudly.

Another way to be "in" time, and the Internet excels at this, is to create narratives that do not simply mark time but fill it imaginatively. Anderson (1983) writes:

All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives. . . . The photograph, fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction, is only the most peremptory of a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence . . . which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity*.

These narratives, like . . . novels and newspapers . . . are set in homogeneous, empty time. Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of "forgetting" the experience of this continuity . . . engenders the need for a narrative of "identity." (pp. 204–205)

The Internet, if it is appropriate to call it any kind of space at all, is less some kind of futuristic "cyberspace" and more a discontinuous narrative space. Barlow described it as a "silent world, [where] all conversation is typed. To enter it, one forsakes both body and place and becomes a thing of words alone" (Rushkoff, 1994, p. 35). In that sense it is an imagined and imaginary space, and thus is a narrative both because it is an area of discursive interaction and because it contends, often very successfully, for our imagination. Narratives do not just occupy our time as we read, write, and imagine them, they determine the passage of time ("first this happened, then that happened . . .") and let us know that in fact time was not empty, it was abundant with activities and experiences we assigned to it. Such assignation is a profoundly political act, for it not only establishes what happened (according to the writer/thinker) but fixes an identity in time for those who are part of the narrative.

Narratives are not, of course, communities, though they may be artifacts of community and may represent a good portion of what communities do to maintain and reproduce themselves over time. Narratives may imagine communities, and we may imagine ourselves to be a part of a community based on our reading of a narrative, and it is likely that what we consider

as Internet communities are similar to the type of assemblage Anderson believes was brought about with the advent of the newspaper in America:

What were the characteristics of the first American newspapers, North or South? They began essentially as appendages of the market. Early gazettes contained—aside from news about the metropole—commercial news . . . as well as colonial political appointments, marriages of the wealthy, and so forth. In other words, what brought together, on the same page, *this* marriage with *that* ship, *this* price with *that* bishop, was the very structure of the colonial administration and market-system itself. In this way the newspaper . . . quite naturally, and even apolitically, created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers, to whom *these* ships, brides, bishops and prices belonged. (p. 62)

Similarly those who frequent Usenet newsgroups provide evidence that they feel the group and its messages “belong” to them (McLaughlin, Osborne, & Smith, 1995, p. 102), creating an inversion of traditional community power and possession. No longer do *we*, as members of the group, belong to the community, rather the community belongs to *us*. Our sense of identity is not only derived from our identification with the group, it is derived from our understanding of the group identity. In this sense the Internet continues a trend toward marketing initiated by the development of the printing press and sped forward by additional communication technologies, creating what Beniger (1987) has called “pseudo-communities,” the integration of diverse groups by means of mass communication and mass production. In conjunction with the development of the conception of “homogeneous, empty time,” the fractured narratives produced by the newspaper, and now the Internet, prove a powerful force for bringing people together:

This new synchronic novelty could arise historically only when substantial groups of people were in a position to think of themselves as living lives *parallel* to those of other substantial groups of people—if never meeting, yet certainly proceeding along the same trajectory. . . . One could be fully aware of sharing a language and a religious faith . . . customs and traditions, without any great expectation of ever meeting one’s partners. (Anderson, 1983, p. 188)

Though to some extent these narratives may feel like community, they are its opposite, at least as far as we have thus far known it in our history, for community relies on what I previously referred to as “inhabitation,” as being not just in the same place at the same time in interaction with others but as being *a part of* that place, as if one is a part of the landscape. But instead of inhabitation there is recognition, the understanding that, first, there are others like us, and, second, that others know we exist. Consequently, if we are to create a sense of community beyond mere recognition, we require far more than its construction, physical or virtual—we also require human occupancy, commitment, interaction, and living among and with others. We require a counterbalance to the spectacle that is created when one thing is juxtaposed among different others as in a newspaper or department store (Sennett, 1978, p. 144). Garrison Keillor (1996) acknowledges, for instance, that “it isn’t opinions that make people, it’s geography,”

and even if that is not so, it is important to note the desire for community and stability it makes clear.

But the sense of community that is created on the Internet is in large part incidental to activity that takes place therein, or, to put a different spin on a popular phrase, on the Internet community is what happens when one is making other plans. We are struck, as we use the Internet, by the sense that there are others out there *like us*. That sense is amplified by the coincidental increase, brought about by our consumption of other media, of the feeling that the world "out there" is growing ever stranger and is less likely to resemble us as time goes on. The Internet serendipitously brings to us, in our living-rooms and offices, a sense of connectedness, but it is an aimless connectedness, a kind which reassures that between "us" and "them" there may be some common ground after all. And, once reassured, anything more brings us too close to having to go "out there."

That aimless connectedness may make Internet communities no better or worse than offline ones, but it does make them different. As Anderson (1983) noted in *Imagined Communities*, "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (p. 6). The Internet's communities are imagined in two ways inimical to human communities. First, they thrive on the "meanwhile," they are forged from the sense that they exist, but we rarely directly apprehend them, and we see them only out of the corner of our eye. As my colleague Joe Schmitz has pointed out, in many instances they can be of great significance to people. Of course the popular press is fond of publishing reports of people whose personal lives crumble as a consequence of their life online. Naturally we understand online life only in relation to its offline counterpart, and so our comparisons are somewhat limiting, as is, therefore, our ability to measure "significance" in these terms. We think, and sometimes feel, we belong to Internet communities, but we are not sure quite how or in what ways, or whether belonging *matters* (beyond its capacity to have a negative effect on life offline).

Second, they are imagined as parallel, rather than serial, groupings of people, which is to say that they are not composed of people who are necessarily connected, even by interest, but are rather groupings of people headed in the same direction, for a time. They may read the same things, occupy the same chat rooms for a time, view the same World Wide Web pages, in fact have the same interests and imagine that they are part of larger groups, "Internet users" in the main and subgroups from that, but they are the "old men who fill the reading-rooms of the branch public libraries" in Hoggart's description. As one Internet user put it, being online "is a time to be alone and yet be with others" (Bennahum, 1994, p. 23).

Now, clearly, like Hoggart's characters, there are those who are finding at least some, if not all, of the community interaction and belonging that they are looking for in the interactions they experience online. If there is any doubt of that one need only examine some of the chapters in