UNPICKING THE SEMES: POWER, RESISTANCE, AND THE INTERNET

by

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LIST OF FIGURES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The Internet was a catalyst for refiguring the previous models of media relationships. For many, the Internet is a medium that liberates individuals from the centralised and asymmetrical power structures of traditional mass media and other social institutions in particular, the boundaries set by the nation and the state. For other people, the Internet increases the capacity for surveillance and control. This dissertation argues for a fluid conception of the operations of power and resistance on the Internet that takes into account the various discourses which play a part in determining agency and subjectivity. It examines and balances the narratives of liberation and oppression against each other: for, just as the developments in Internet technology contribute to changes in discourse, so too existing or prior discursive limits and relations of power affect Internet culture and technology.

In the process of analysing the interplay of different discourses on the Internet, this dissertation takes into account transnational and national cultural flows and the insights that conceptual work on globalisation, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism can provide. The case studies are concerned with change and centre on the use of the Internet to effect this change; they include: the Singaporean Internet, a 'thread' about Asian culture and Australia, the representation of oppression and the formation of Chinese diasporic collectivities, and anti-capitalist networks. Through these case studies, the dissertation examines the degree to which the nation-state can regulate and affect the discourses at play on the Internet as well as the agency of participants in countering and maintaining these discourses. This dissertation also analyses activists' use of the Internet to form transnational networks. It discusses the limitations of their work including problems with representation.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Elaine Tay

INTRODUCTION

Discourse, Power, Resistance, and the Internet

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1. Introduction

1.1 Getting Wired Up

Internet technology, in its simplest forms, has been around since the nineteen-seventies, however, its use and deployment was confined to educational, research and military institutions. It was only in the nineteen-nineties that it became more of a household technology. In 1996, when I began this inquiry into the Internet and power, Australian people were using it in their homes. This was an optimistic time, and the Internet was viewed as an emerging industry that would offer new work opportunities, recreation possibilities, 'information at your fingertips,' and so forth. There was also a public sense of redundancy, that is, if you did not log on, you would be left behind. The main means of access, at least from home, was through a dial-up modem at what would seem like extremely sluggish speeds today. Then, just getting connected felt to me like an admission into some sort of global theme park. The Netscape icon spinning as I loaded up my first page was a sign of connectedness to a global network of information. My email address was a sign of membership and positioning in the socio-cultural sphere of the Internet.

The sense of novelty faded away, and there is now a generation of adults who have grown up with the Internet in existence in most, if not all, of their conscious recollection. This account of my experience of the Internet partly explains why this thesis is very much concerned with the introduction and development of the Internet and the extent to which this has changed things. Watching the introduction and

popularisation of the Internet placed its newness in the foreground, highlighting the sense of ongoing historical development and change. This thesis is dedicated to examining the sorts of claims made about the possibilities of this media around the time of its introduction to mainstream society and the subsequent questioning, explicitly or implicitly, of these initial assumptions. The most interesting aspect of the Internet, to me, was the question of power and agency, especially whether and how this media would affect groups that hitherto had to struggle for a voice in the public arena, and the extent it challenged, reaffirmed, and, constructed existing or new hierarchical structures.

1.2 Power and Dominant Discourses of the Internet

Jordan's book, *Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet*, explores and then critiques the Weberian concept of power as something possessed and wielded by individuals, a concept that underpins some of the perspectives which assume that cyberspace and the Internet provide an ideal democratic space for individuals to experiment with fluid and multiple identities (1999). These perspectives tend to see the Internet as a medium that escapes social hierarchies where power was something possessed by one group and exercised over another. It was supposed to make this power accessible to all participating in online interaction. If structures of power did exist (for instance, in text-based virtual environments), they were supposedly more fluid and open. Jordan moves away from this conception of power towards a more Foucauldian notion where power in cyberspace, rather than something possessed, is embedded in its technology, which is shaped by a corporate and technological elite. While the developments of cyberspace technology serve the interests and enhance the power of this elite, these developments also empower the grassroots.

However, Jordan's conclusion is a bleak one. He argues that: "creating greater complexity in the underlying technology of cyberspace distances individual users from

cyberspace's fundamental fabric and transfers control of that fabric to an expertise-based elite" (Jordan 1999: 130). Nevertheless, Foucault asserts that:

> Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere … Power comes from below; that is there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between ruler and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix—no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body (Foucault, 1979a: 93-4, cited in McHoul and Grace 1997: 39).

Power, in this sense, is not something possessed and wielded by a group or individual but operates through social discourses, and the dominant discourses in society are those working through and on behalf of its institutions. I understand and use the word, 'discourses,' not in its traditional linguistic sense describing utterances greater than a sentence, but as Foucault uses it, that is, "as bodies of knowledge … away from something to do with language … and closer towards the concept of discipline … scholarly disciplines … and disciplinary institutions of social control" (McHoul and Grace 1997: 26). These "bodies of knowledge" express and maintain the major truths within certain social contexts, and the more powerful, universal, or pervasive, discourses likewise govern the reigning truths in society. While I agree with Jordan's view that the expertise-based elite control the direction of technological change somewhat, with major repercussions on the nature of power in cyberspace, his conclusion seems to negate a more fluid concept of power suggested by Foucault's work and prematurely suggests a reification of the social relations of the Internet.

This dissertation examines the dominant discourses that affect power, agency and resistance on the Internet within national and transnational contexts, and explores how the medium of the Internet, its habitus, have shaped these discourses. These discourses include: the liberal discourse of the Internet as a medium that will free humanity from past constraints; and the discourse of governance and regulation, where

the Internet is seen as a technology in need of control. In addition, I also discuss the development and impact of the discourses of diaspora, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism. In my view, a critical analysis of these discourses that circumscribe the Internet will reveal a shifting terrain where it is just as likely that new structures of domination and control have and will develop, along with new methods of resistance.

The aim of the analysis is to examine how discourses multiply and change with technology, specifically, of course, the technology of the Internet, and how this affects the structure(s) of power that implicate the subjects of Internet technology. In so doing, I want to avoid adopting a techno-deterministic position, which assumes that a change in technology (or introduction of a new technology) simply results in social change. By this, I mean that the reverse is also true: social and historical forces work on the technology and its development. Discourse interpellates people in society, and people possess frames of reference that affect their engagement with Internet technology. Discourses and the relations of power that accompany them limit and frame new technologies, in as much as the latter introduces discursive changes.

In Section Two, I discuss the Internet as a technology with the potential to open up discourse, which will allow people to challenge dominant institutional discourses. This view reflects the desire for openness and transparency, while demonstrating that the institution and its controls do not go away simply because this medium has emerged. As Foucault points out, just because the obvious manifestations of control seem absent (though less so today than in early cyberculture), this does not equate with the absence of hierarchies, of structures of power: "In general terms, [Foucault] would say that the interdiction, the refusal, the prohibition, far from being essential forms of power, are only its limits, power in its frustrated or extreme forms" (1988: 105). I include a discussion of the more explicit forms of control, in this case, state regulation, and also

explore the underlying discourses that affect subjectivity and agency, which influence the development of this medium and its socio-cultural formations.

The media and other institutions (such as government and education) had a significant role in framing this technology and contributing to the construction and maintenance of its discursive formations. Politicians, journalists, scholars, and industrialists discussed the Internet as something that would bring in great changes and affect our social reality. The Internet was seen as having the potential to challenge traditional notions of control and governance. Debates surrounding crime and pornography, that is, the quality and type of information available on the Internet and who should have access to it, highlighted these changes and challenges. These contribute towards an archive of secondary discourses that "repeat, gloss, and comment," that is, performing the function Foucault describes as "commentary" (Foucault 1981: 57). Commentary "limits the chance-element in discourse by the play of an identity which would take the form of repetition and sameness" (Foucault 1981: 59). In this sense, the literature on the Internet helped frame the types of meaning, subjectivities, and practices, ensuring their reproduction and recycling with the entry of new participants, interactions, and texts.

David Silver identifies three stages of cyberculture studies over the last decade. The first of these, popular cyberculture, began in the early 1990s, and "is marked by its journalistic origins and characterized by its descriptive nature, limited dualism, and use of the Internet-as-frontier metaphor" (Silver 2000). The other two stages described by Silver are cyberculture studies and critical cyberculture studies:

> The second stage, cyberculture studies, focuses largely on virtual communities and online identities and benefits from an influx of academic scholars. The third stage, critical cyberculture studies, expands the notion of cyberculture to include four areas of study – online interactions, digital discourses, access and denial to the Internet, and interface design of cyberspace – and explores the intersections and interdependencies between any and all four domains (Silver 2000).

All of these stages play important roles in describing and repeating Internet discourses. The first of these, popular cyberculture studies, is arguably the most obviously influential in terms of the take-up and use of the technology by people outside academia by virtue of its accessibility and primacy. Newspaper articles, introductory instructional books on using the Internet, the speculative dystopian or utopian writing of Internet gurus such as John Perry Barlow, documentation of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), the comments of politicians and government figures, all form people's introduction to the medium and its cultural formations. These texts formed a significant part of the discourse of cyberculture.

The development of cyberculture studies, and the associated disciplines of computer-mediated communication (CMC), thus has repercussions for a study of the development of Internet discourses. Over the preceding decade, a canon of cyberculture studies has emerged, a canon expressed in anthologies (Bell and Kennedy 2000; Jones 1997; Porter 1997; Sardar and Ravetz 1996; Vitanza 1999), in university course readings, and in bibliographic lists compiled by academics and non-academics alike. Such collections are a form of organizing the discourse, of establishing the basis for discussion and thinking about this medium and the emerging cultural patterns. Some of the texts included in the canon reinforce the theme that the Internet is a space which escapes traditional forms of power and control. However, as Silver points out, a dualism of utopian and dystopian perspectives of the Internet was developing even in the early popular cyberculture stage (2000).

While "[s]uch dualism can be provisionally useful, to change the perspective from time to time and move from *pro* to *contra*" (Foucault 1988: 120), it can also lead to a repetitive recycling of positions that leads to stagnation. Foucault advocates "a reversal of values and truths … [that] does not stop with simple cheers (long live insanity, delinquency, sex) but allows for new strategies" (1988: 120). This involves a

dismantling of binaries "by trying to turn off these mechanisms which cause the appearance of two separate sides, by dissolving the false unity, the illusory 'nature' of this other side which we have taken sides." In a sense, this describes the aims of the current work, to explore and then move beyond the dualisms of techno- versus social-determinism, of utopian celebrations of the Internet versus dystopian perspectives, in order to discover strategies and tactics for progressive social change.

2. The View of the Internet as an Emancipatory Space

2.1 The Possibility for a Democratic Public Sphere

Amongst others, Kellner suggested in 1999 that it was possible for the Internet to assist in the revitalisation of politics, for a "technopolitics" that would reflect the interests of not just the elite in politics and business, but would also allow access and participation by the marginalised and oppressed. This would, in this perspective, lead to the type of ideal public sphere conceptualised by Habermas, one that allows participation of various groups and individuals and an electorate which would be informed, able to debate and make decisions based on reason.[1] Kellner does not suggest that media technology 'fixes' communication patterns and structures,[2] or that the Internet would necessarily lead to the ideal political environment through inherent technological features. Against what he calls an essentialising and freezing of the media and its patterns, he reminds us that the "media can be reconstructed, refunctioned, and constantly changed" (Kellner 1999: 110).

The communication patterns of broadcast media and CMC, nevertheless, differ markedly, with broadcast media communication being 'top-down,' dominated by media

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[1] This is in contrast to the development of the mass media. Habermas is scathing of the mass media, which he regards as offering cultural consumption to the public, rather than debate, 'The world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only. By the same token the integrity of the public sphere which they promise to their consumers is also an illusion' (Habermas 1989: 171).
[2] For instance, Kellner discusses forms of broadcasting that work against the centralised 'one to many' model, for instance, community television and radio.

corporations, the state, and major political parties, and, centralised in control (reflecting advertiser, state, and/or media corporation interests). This has worked against the creation of a genuine Habermasian public sphere: "[m]ainstream media on the whole has under informed the public by limiting the range of views, privileging establishment views, and more recently engaging in tabloidisation of politics and public discourse" (Kellner 1999: 105).

In contrast to broadcast media, CMC is decentralised, involves a more pluralistic mode of access and a 'many to many' form of communication between producers and consumers. CMC communication can be synchronous (like broadcast media), but also is easily stored and accessed at different times. The overall effect, as Kellner says, is that CMC political communication is "more decentred and varied in its origins, scope, and effects" than broadcast media (Kellner 1999: 103):

> … computers are a potentially democratic technology. While broadcast communication tends to be one-way and unidirectional, computer communication is bi- or omni-directional. Where television-watching is often passive, computer involvement can be interactive and participatory. Individuals can use computers to send email to communicate with other individuals or can directly communicate via modems which use the telephone to link individuals with each other in interactive networks (Kellner 1999: 105).

To Kellner, in the 'overdeveloped' world, cyberspace is decommodified, and within the reach of ethnic minorities, women, and so forth. Kellner sees cyberspace as a domain of contestation where it is possible to resist and advance the interests of the oppressed. He cites examples of the way resistance groups have used cyberspace, including the Zapatistas, anti-NAFTA struggle, and the McLibel campaign. The place of the intellectual, thus is to critique as well as to familiarise themselves with the possibilities and limits of this new technology:

> It is therefore the responsibility of the intellectual to engage creatively with these new technologies, as well as to analyse critically the diverse developments of the cyberculture. This requires dialectical thinking that

discriminates between the costs and the benefits, the upsides and downsides, of new technologies, and devising ways that they can be used to promote positive values like education, democracy and Enlightenment (Kellner 1999: 110).

The popular imagination regards the Internet as a technology that shifts power from the media institutions to its audiences, one that destabilises the boundaries between audience and producer of texts, and, in this way, threatens previous hierarchies, especially in circumstances where the state can be somewhat confident that the media institutions would not challenge its authority or policies. Other technologies, such as video-recorders, cable television, and satellite television, also placed some measure of control in the hands of audiences, however, this feature was not highlighted in as dramatic a fashion as the Internet.

An example of the belief that the Internet transfers power from producers to audiences is in the document, *Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age* (Progress and Freedom Foundation 1994). This document calls the process "demassification," reflecting a general distrust and disillusionment with the traditional 'mass' media of broadcast television and radio. Well-known and influential in the discourse of the free Internet, this manifesto proclaims the onset of the "Third Wave," that is, an economy based upon knowledge (Progress and Freedom Foundation 1994). According to the authors of this document, this Third Wave economy will bring with it certain political, cultural, and social changes:

> The Third Wave has profound implications for the nature and meaning of property, of the marketplace, of community and of individual freedom. As it emerges, it shapes new codes of behavior that move each organism and institution – family, neighborhood, church group, company, government, *nation* – inexorably *beyond standardisation and centralization*, as well as beyond the *materialist's* obsession with energy, money and control (Progress and Freedom Foundation 1994).

Credited to Esther Dyson, George Gilder, George Keyworth and Alvin Toffler, the document is filled with clichés and buzzwords like "bioelectronic frontier" (again the

frontier metaphor, invoking imperial conquest). Besides the obvious ethnocentric bias of this article, the document is indicative of the kinds of predictions people have been making about cyberspace and the Internet and how these technologies would affect everyday social and political life, that is, processes of decentralisation, dematerialisation and fragmentation.

The notion that the Internet had a technological bias which displaced traditional boundaries between different types of communicative relationships was complemented by assumptions regarding the content and geographical distribution of the users of the Internet. James Boyle, in his work, *Foucault in Cyberspace*, neatly summarises and categorises these assumptions using three equally renowned phrases. He calls these assumptions the "trinity of digital libertarianism," a trinity that would make it impossible to regulate the Internet because of the "*technology of the medium*, the *geographical distribution of its users* and the *nature of its content*" (1997). The religious (Christian) connotations of the word, 'trinity,' perhaps accurately reflects the degree to which these principles are held as fundamental to the Internet.

The first of the trinity, "The Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it," refers to how the Internet emerged from the desire to develop a means of sharing computer resources and data in a reliable fashion.[3] The idea was to connect the computers in a seemingly redundant fashion so that if one link had a fault and went down, the data could travel a different route (Hauben 1993; Hafner and Lyon 1996). The Internet today is a distributed network system using packet switching[4] to transfer

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[3] This was one result of the launch of Sputnik by the Russians in 1957, the American government wanted to develop a system of command and control that would be reliable and the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) was appointed to conduct research towards this goal. Joseph Carl Robnett Linklider shifted the emphasis from command and control systems to methods of information processing (Hauben 1993; Hafner and Lyon 1996).

[4] Packet switching is a method of splitting data into 'packets' and sending them to their destination through the network.

data, apparently a censor's nightmare, because closing off one connection to a source of material does not prevent access to that data through a different connection.

The second 'truism,' a little more American in orientation in keeping with the tendency of its author, John Perry Barlow, is this: "In Cyberspace, the First Amendment is a local ordinance." Boyle uses this phrase to sum up how content on a server can be obtained a great geographical distance away. Barlow on his home page, says that Yahoo called him "the Thomas Jefferson of Cyberspace" (Barlow 1996). The reference to the First Amendment may be specific to the United States, however, this idea can be applied to the Singapore case in the following sense: regulations protecting the primacy of certain discourses have a limited effect because of this disjuncture between the location of the content and access to it.

The third of the trinity, "Information Wants to be Free," was popularly adopted as a motto by open source software programmers,[5] hackers, and many online activists. Roger Clarke researched the genealogy of this aphorism, confirming that Stewart Brand most famously used it at the first Hacker's Conference.[6] It is interesting to note that the phrase has been applied differently over time. In this instance, Brand used it to refer to information as intellectual property, as a good:

> On the one hand information wants to be expensive, because it's so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life. On the other hand, information wants to be free, because the cost of getting it out is getting lower and lower all the time. So you have these two fighting against each other (cited in Clarke 1999).

While Brand occasionally used this phrase to refer to political freedom, John Perry Barlow, quoting Thomas Jefferson, combined the economic meanings of this phrase with libertarian ideals in a palpably ethnocentric manner. Boyle suggests that Barlow

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[5] Software provided in a form whereby the codes and scripts are readily accessible to fellow programmers. Because of this, they are easily copied, modified and shared with other programmers.
[6] 'Hacker' here refers to programmers who modify (bootstrap) software, not to today's sense with its connotations of criminality.

combines Enlightenment ideals with the spread of ideas. Also obvious, especially with the phrasing of the second of the 'trinity,' is the American roots of these phrases, which is not surprising as Americans were the pioneers in developing and using the technology. Equally palpable is the criticism that these assumptions reflect the culture and ideology of the United States and lend weight to fears of Americanisation through global media, fears that are exploited by the state through the pollution trope.

Modernist ideals about consensual politics as a foundation for a public sphere form the basis of these approaches to the Internet. In turn, the goal of 'consensus' implies that it is possible to identify a universal reason which should underlie this consensus. Mark Poster argues that the Habermasian model cannot be applied usefully to analyse the political aspects of the Internet. This, according to Poster, is partly due to the general confusion of meanings associated with the terms, 'public' and 'private', and distinguishing the private from the public realm. The Internet adds to the confusion, as it is a medium where the private and the public overlap. He writes:

> Now the question of 'talk,' of meeting face-to-face, of 'public' discourse is confused and complicated by the electronic form of exchange of symbols. If 'public' discourse exists as pixels on screens generated at remote locations by individuals one has never and probably will never meet, as it is in the case of the Internet with its 'virtual communities,' 'electronic cafÈs,' [sic] bulletin boards, e-mail, computer conferencing and even video conferencing, then how is it to be distinguished from 'private' letters, printface and so forth. The age of the public sphere as face-to-face talk is clearly over: the question of democracy must henceforth take into account new forms of electronically mediated discourse (Poster 1995a: n.p.).

Rather than applying the modernist Habermasian model, according to Poster, the Internet is a postmodern technology with a democratising potential in its capability to decentralise the control and production of communication:

> The "magic" of the Internet is that it is a technology that puts cultural acts, symbolizations in all forms, in the hands of all participants; it radically decentralizes the positions of speech, publishing, filmmaking,

radio and television broadcasting, in short the apparatuses of cultural production (Poster 1995a: n.p.).

In the next section, I discuss the views of others that, like Poster, emphasise the Internet's liberatory potential, yet reflect a more postmodern epistemology, and are more concerned with the way the Internet allows the play of multiple subjectivities and realities.

2.2 Postmodernism and Multiple Realities and Subjectivities

Literature about the Internet is heavily influenced by postmodern and cyberspace theory,[7] wherein MUDs (multi-user domains), Usenet, email, and other elements of the Internet are hypothesised as different kinds of cyberspace. This is within the continuum of prior analyses of developments in the media, particularly in the rise of electronic media. For instance, in *The Second Media Age*, Mark Poster analysed the relationship between electronic media, in particular Virtual Reality systems and the Internet, and the emergence of a postmodern age (Poster 1995b). Such media technologies had profound implications for subjectivity, the role of the nation, approaches to reality, and to the metanarratives that constitute this reality; according to Poster, computer-mediated technology, along with the other new technologies of that time, had the potential to usher in a postmodern age.

Others have also asserted the connection between the technologies of the Internet and postmodernity. Sherry Turkle asserts that cyberspace[8] lends itself to the postmodern imagination through the development of personal computing, decentred psychology, and the influence of emergent models of artificial intelligence where

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[7] I use this term to refer to the body of writing on cyberspace, tracing its genealogy back to William Gibson, distinguishing cyberspace theory from studies on CMC.

[8] The Electronic Frontiers Foundation, credited one of its co-founders, John Perry Barlow, as the first person to apply 'cyberspace' to the Internet (Barlow 1996). While it is important not to conflate or confuse cyberspace with the Internet, the print and broadcast media tend to use the terms synonymously: '[s]ome use it as a synonym for virtual reality, others as a synonym for the World-Wide Web hypermedia network, or for the Internet as a whole (sometimes including the telephone, TV, and other communication networks)' (Heylighen 1994).

"[i]ntelligence did not reside in an isolated thinking subject, but in the interaction of multiple fragments of mind, figuratively speaking, in a society of mind" (Turkle 1995:130). Returning to Turkle, computers, she argues, are "a second self," particularly with the availability of operating systems based on simulation that encourage experimentation and reflect the multiple facets of the self. Turkle suggests that:

> in the daily practice of many computer users, windows have become a powerful metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple, distributed system. … The life practice of windows is that of a decentered self that exists in many worlds and plays many roles at the same time (Turkle 1995:130).

With the Internet, she continues, this personal connection with the computer has been expanded to include communication and interaction with other computers, and other selves in cyberspaces that allow the performance of whatever roles and selves the individual may choose.

I have found Roseanne Stone's work is particularly influential, wherein she states that most of us live in cyberspace in part, communicating through the network and "negotiating the tensions between individual subjects, virtual collectivities" (Stone 1995: 35). As with much early work on the Internet, a strong 'pioneer' theme emerges in her work; she speaks of these new collectivities as risking themselves in a space apart from real life.[9]

Much has been made of the use of hypertext on the Web, how the distinctions between readers and writers, the producers and consumers of texts, have blurred. Likewise, in newsgroups, the institutional and commercial constraints of 'one-to-many' media like television and newspapers appear to disappear. The Usenet newsgroups are

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[9] This notion of the Internet as a space to be colonised is examined by Judith Tabron, who contrasts the Internet today with her experiences of it in its early days and concludes that the Internet has become less an area where identity is explored and contested and more one in which users accept the default options made available to them in a more and more restrictive fashion by web and software designers (Tabron 1997). To Tabron, the flood of new users unfamiliar with netiquette and the technology below the surface is like an invasion, a colonisation of an existing community by people unfamiliar with the culture of the original inhabitants.

apparently open to anyone with access to online resources to post and read material. Lastly, in text-driven virtual reality 'spaces' like MUDs, users can construct identities through language, setting descriptions of themselves and relating to other participants without the constraints of physical 'real-life' presence.[10] The upshot of all these resources is that the discourse of cyberculture is infused with postmodernist notions of displacement of centres, boundary transgression, fluidity, and the like.

How have people characterised Internet subjectivity? Postmodernist ideas of decentred self as opposed to the unitary and consistent subject of modernism are borrowed from various sources. Psychoanalysis is also used. For instance, Sherry Turkle compares the move away from 'top-down' approaches in computers and programming with changes in theories of the human mind (1995). Others apply Deleuze and Guattari's notion of rhizomic subjectivity and relate Internet subjectivity to postmodernism and late capitalism (Everard 1996).

As in Turkle's work, the motif of non-unitary identity recurs in Stone's writing. She writes that:

> the identities that emerge from these interactions – fragmented, complex, diffracted through the lenses of technology, culture, and new technocultural formations – seem to me to be, for better or worse, more visible as the critters we ourselves are becoming, here at the close of the mechanical age (Stone 1995: 36).

In the formation of these new identities, Stone uses the concepts of the "technosocial," "location technology," and "warranting." The technosocial is an implosion of the categories of the technological and the natural. "Nature" is conceptualised as an active agent, resisting representation, and the idea is to look for nature in the technological. I make the point that the constitution of these subjectivities is through both machine code and language and therefore not transparent and free from representation. Stone defines

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[10] The subject of disembodiment is not without contention as it could be argued that, rather than being disembodied, what is happening is that the boundary between 'real' and 'virtual' bodies is less distinct.

'warranting' as the production and renewal of the join between physical and discursive space. She uses the concept of warranting to connect the physical and discursive aspects of identity, and thus suggests that the discursive body is produced through texts. Online subjectivity is partly made up of a textually-mediated physicality.[11]

The Internet, in this perspective, reflects the postmodern approach to knowledge, as something that is not autonomous from social reality, rather, that knowledge, indeed, is constituted by discourse. For instance, in her work on gender issues, pedagogy and the Internet, Dale Spender speaks of the Internet as ushering in a new age and new approach to knowledge. Spender argues:

> We assume that knowledge exists as an entity: that it is stable enough to be divided into disciplines; that it can be arranged in hierarchical order, and systematically taught … But this conceptualisation of knowledge is increasingly inadequate in an electronic age in which knowledge is also information which *flows* in cyberspace; it can be *public*, it *resists boundaries*, it is almost *impossible to rank*, and it is *available twenty-four hours* a day (Spender 1995).

To sum up, much of the writing on the Internet claims it is highly suitable to a postmodern praxis, its sheer size and design allowing fluid, multiple and hybrid identities that challenge homogeneity and fixed binaries. Such claims are often accompanied by the assumption that the state and the transnational community have a relationship marked by tension, a tension between the state's control of national identity and the Internet as a medium for unrestrained transcultural flows. The Internet, like other communication technologies, has the ability to compress distances, to refigure time and space, but to a much greater extent than before. The infrastructure of the Internet, by design, is fluid and modular, its inventors, after all, designed it so that the blocking or closure of one node on the network would not bring the whole system down. Thus, we see why so many people now speak of 'virtual communities' that

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[11] How much can the idea of warranting be applied and contested by theorists and related to the notion of identity as dependant on alterity (Bhabha 1994)?

transcend national boundaries. However much these assumptions are actualised, they are a popular vision of virtual community that is part of a bundle of concepts associated with cyberspace and CMC, thus, these other concepts are, consciously or unconsciously, an important element in the libertarian discourse that pervades the Internet.

2.3 Cyberspace and Virtual Community

The notion of virtual community accompanies the idea that the Internet allows the expression of a more postmodern form of subjectivity; the virtual communities of cyberspace become the space for the performance of individual identities. The idea of virtual community is made up of influential concepts such as the notion of a 'global village.' The phrase, 'global village,' is, in turn, attributed to a line in Wyndham Lewis essay, 'America and Cosmic Man,' "now that the world has become one big village with telephones laid on from one end to the other and air transport both speedy and safe" (Lewis 1948: 21). Cultural theorists, including Marshall McLuhan follow suit, writing, "The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village" (McLuhan 1962: 31).[12]

Alongside 'global village', the notion of a 'virtual community' has similarly emerged and is likewise in popular usage on web pages. Well-known writer and Internet enthusiast, Howard Rheingold, describes virtual community as formations arising out of the interaction of people via CMC. This idea of virtual community has spread to the extent that activist groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation refer to Internet users as "netizens" (Inter*net* and ci*tizen*) and make appeals for action based on this sense of community and involvement. Denying the notion of a hegemonic discourse organising this community, reasoning the diversity of its participants prevents such uniformity from taking hold, Rheingold says of the community with which he aligns himself, "we

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[12] The origins of the phrase was pieced together over a couple of posts in the *Computer Mediated Culture* electronic mailing list (December, Wark *et al*. 1995).

who populate cyberspace deliberately experiment with fracturing traditional notions of identity by living as multiple simultaneous personae in different virtual neighborhoods" (Rheingold 1992).

Post-McLuhan, and before the writers of *Cyberspace* speak of a "Third Wave" economy and society, Stone traced the creation of virtual communities and the evolution of ways of thinking about presence and communality through four epochs, each with its associated mode of communication and community-formation:

> Epoch One: Texts [from the mid-1600s]
> Epoch Two: Electronic communication and entertainment media [1900+]
> Epoch Three: Information technology [1960+]
> Epoch Four: Virtual reality and cyberspace (Stone 1994: 85)

This 'periodisation' is interesting in itself, in the implied (if not taken up or even agreed on by the various authors) evolutionary mode of approaching technology and social change. However, the main concern here is with her discussion of changes in the development of virtual communities, with a focus on the relationship between technology and the body.

In her history, Stone describes how, with each new technology of communication, we have witnessed social changes culminating in the formations of today. In Epoch One, which she locates as starting in the mid-1600s, communities formed around written texts, for instance, novels, where "texts became ways of creating and later of controlling, new kinds of communities" (Stone 1994: 85). In Epoch Two, the notion of 'presence' was starting to change, the radio listener, for instance, "was in two places at once—the body at home, but the delegate, the 'I' that belonged to the body, in an imagined space with another person" (Stone 1994: 85). This was achieved via a technological interface, "that which mediate[s] between the human body (or bodies) and an associated 'I' (or 'I's')". Most significantly, she remarks that it is around this time that those in marketing began exploring the possibility of commercial use of

this virtual community, where items were sold or given that identified fellow members of a community, for instance, Star Trek buttons. In this way, we can see how the growth of virtual communality was already accompanied in its earlier inception by commodification of community, a development that has now reached global proportions.

Views of the Internet as a technology that offers potential for liberating people include those that emphasise the effects of technology on cultural practices and the social environment (see, for instance, Lévy 1997; Johnson 1997; Benedikt 1991). This is not to suggest that all views of the Internet as emancipatory tend towards technological determinism or that technology does not play a major role in underlying social transformations. Rather, some of these views, most particularly the earlier ones, in exploring the potential of the technology, understandably left relatively uncharted the question of how the discursive patterns, the social environment within which this technology and incipient culture was operating, would affect the development and utilisation of this medium.

Within the field of Internet and CMC studies, researchers more guarded about the direction of the Internet have already dissected and critiqued the earlier perspectives of the Internet as a liberalising medium (see, for instance, Shapiro 1999; Porter 1997). Their points of criticisms have included the inevitable recurring issue of access to the technology and the skills, and the danger that participation in Internet culture could end up closing off individual exploration and political progress (Shapiro 1999; Kellner 1999). Kellner, for instance, speaks of the possibility that "Internet democracy will become a closed world in itself in which individuals delude themselves that they are active politically merely through exchanging messages or circulating information" (Kellner 1999: 105).

Vivian Sobchack critiques the idea of the Internet as a democratising medium. She argues the Internet repeats a fundamental contradiction in Western and capitalist societies, which she expresses in the phrase "democratic franchise", that is, "franchise as individual freedom and political participation on the one hand, and exclusive corporate privilege on the other" (Sobchack 1996: 77). Addressing *Mondo 2000*, the influential hacker/cracker/cyperpunk magazine, she identifies a range of hacker maxims (of which 'information wants to be free' is one) that this magazine participates in popularising, saying:

> This bumper-sticker libertarianism is neither progressive nor democratic … Their [electronic guerrillas] ideolect is one that 'winners' in the modern world adopt and speaks to a belief in personal freedom and a faith in self-help that are grounded in privilege and the status quo: male privilege, white privilege (Sobchack 1996: 85).

A particularly telling remark of hers, in the light of the previous discussion, relates to *Mondo 2000*'s conflation of commercialism, the 'information wants to be free' ethic, and democracy. She asserts that:

> Here, the dream of democratic enfranchisement is grounded not only in the desire for free access to information and free interactive communication and social participation, but also in the desire for the freedom to buy and the freedom to sell, for a freely interactive and capitalist commerce. There is no such thing, however, as 'pure' information and 'free' access on the electronic frontier. And there is no such ting as 'free' competition in capitalist commerce (Sobchack 1996: 86).

My discussion may appear to typecast all those who view the Internet as actually or potentially assisting in the creation of a more pluralistic, liberalised public sphere as unrealistic or, worse, naïve idealists. However, this description is not meant to characterise all such views, and, indeed, is aimed at uncritical popular representations of the Internet that usually face the first-time user of the Internet. These, along with the more negative views, for instance, of the Internet as introducing new forms of surveillance, crime, commercialisation, and so forth, are still relevant today. Turning to

my next topic, this development of the Internet and its discourses occurs within the context of an arguably increasingly globalised world, where many of these ideas, that is, decentralised authority, deterritorialisation and so forth, have a significance that includes and goes beyond Internet culture and communication.

3. Globalisation and the Nation State

The phenomenon of globalisation is a significant aspect of assumptions and discussions about the types of power relations that the Internet engenders and which affect Internet culture and discourse. Many ideas about the Internet are also common elements in globalisation discourse, for instance, that the Internet disrupts the sovereignty of the nation-state and frees individuals and communities from being bound geographically, and in other senses, to local, regional or national limits. Globalisation, however, has many different meanings for different people. I will therefore clarify my understanding of it before discussing its relationship to the Internet.

Globalisation is "a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power" (Held, McGrew *et al*. 1999: 16, italics removed). These "transcontinental or interregional flows" include the temporal and spatial movement of objects, people, signs, and information.

This conceptualisation of globalisation moves away from spatial and temporal limits to avoid confining the phenomenon to specific historical epochs and processes that are spatially delimited, such as internationalisation, regionalisation, and localisation. This is not to suggest that these processes are in opposition to globalisation, rather, their relationship to globalisation is complex and changing; they can sometimes

limit and sometimes promote globalisation. According to Held *et al*, the spatial and temporal dimensions of globalisation may vary in terms of:

- the extensity of global networks
- the intensity of global interconnectedness
- the velocity of global flows
- the impact propensity of global interconnectedness (1999: 17).

This avoids the dichotomy of assuming either that globalisation is essentially new, hence ignoring the forms of globalisation that have gone on before,[13] or that the contemporary epoch features no new developments in the scale of globalisation. In this model, there are four other dimensions of globalisation: the infrastructures that support global networks; the institutions which develop to facilitate and maintain them; the forms of social stratification that reflect the way power is organised, distributed and exercised; and the dominant manner of interaction (e.g. coercive, competitive, etc).

Held *et al*'s model provides the possibility to consider globalisation's relationship to the Internet in a manner which takes into account the variety of meanings associated with globalisation without locating these as fundamental features of globalisation. In the dissertation that follows, I introduce different conceptualisations of globalisation, reflecting the views of participants. For instance, in *Chapter Four*, the online activists referred to as being 'anti-globalisation,' are actually not against all forms of globalisation, as they themselves form global networks. They are more

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[13] Tony Spybey (1992) discusses how globalisation, imperialism and the capitalist world economy are interconnected: although China, India, Japan and the Islamic countries developed long distance navigation long before Europe, the Europeans had a belief in the possibility of exploring the entire world combined with an interest in doing so which made it an 'exploring civilisation'. This 'interest', according to Spybey, was reflected in the competitive endeavours of individuals in different European nations and states for military, political and economic success, with the end result that Europeans obtained a powerful knowledge of the world: 'Europeans exploited naval and armaments technology in an age of sailing ships and cannon, and, as a result, gained 'global knowledge' … in organised human activity, knowledge and the ability to record it has proved crucial in the generation of power' (Spybey 1992: 100). This knowledge about the world was institutionalised in the acquisition of colonies and their administration as European empires, leading to global power in the hands of the Europeans. The world economy was structured so that the core economy (Europe) produced ships, weapons and equipment whilst the peripheries produced and supplied foodstuffs, raw materials, and precious metals. The foundations for the current asymmetries in wealth and knowledge were laid, and the symbiotic relationship between globalisation and colonialism is evident in this history.

accurately against a certain mode of globalisation, against the economic, military, and political institutions, for instance, that they see as creating and maintaining an asymmetrical distribution of wealth between peoples. Meanings such as these are, in this framework, not completely constitutive of globalisation, simultaneously, they are not held here as being opposed to the understanding of globalisation that informs this dissertation.

Jan Scholte (2000), identifies five different aspects of globalisation: internationalisation, liberalisation, universalisation, westernisation or modernisation, and deterritorialisation. While Scholte discusses these as different understandings of globalisation, they are borrowed here to illustrate the different ways in which actual theorists conceive of the Internet's relationship with contemporary global processes. Within Held *et al*'s formulation of globalisation, these otherwise confusing and sometimes contradictory positions are contextualised as describing different interpretations of the Internet and globalisation that address specific domains and dimensions but, on their own, do not describe the entirety of the topic. Therefore, while they are, individually, not definitive, they are still useful for outlining the various meanings associated with the Internet and globalisation, that is, the variety of things that are going on within this media.

Internationalisation refers to "growth of international exchange and interdependence" (Scholte 2000: 15) and the large scale movement of ideas, messages, and people between countries. From this perspective, the Internet comprises the media infrastructure that facilitates this increased exchange between countries. Some people see this growth in velocity, extensity, and intensity of interconnectedness, as discussed earlier, as leading to liberalisation. For instance, in economic terms, globalisation and the removal of government restrictions on movements between countries (for example, the relaxation of restrictions on trade, foreign exchange and visas) leads to the creation

of "an 'open', 'borderless' world economy" (Scholte 2000: 16). Examples of how the Internet contributes to this "international economic integration" include 'e-commerce', online trading, and the supposed immunity of the Internet to state regulation.

In contrast to the understanding of globalisation as a positive social and material process, another view is that it perpetuates disproportionate cultural and economic flows, wherein the 'First World' continues to dominate the 'Third World' through the operations of global capital and culture. In this perspective, much of the asymmetrical global power relations today are, to some extent, a legacy of imperialism of the past and is observable in global economic and cultural flows (Ashcroft, Griffiths *et al*. 1998: 110). Some writers see globalisation as:

> creating increased inequalities both within and across societies, spiralling processes of ecological degradation and crisis, and unviable relations between finance and manufacturing capital, as well as between goods and the wealth required to purchase them … economic globalization is today a runaway horse without a rider (Appadurai 2000: 16).

As Appadurai continues, the mobility of global capital works against individual agency and resistance:

> Global capital in its contemporary form is characterised by strategies of predatory mobility (across both time and space) that have vastly compromised the capacity of actors in single locations even to understand, much less anticipate or resist, these strategies.

In this perspective, more recent information technologies like the Internet are interpreted by some as mainly benefiting transnational corporations. Global corporations can conduct their decisions and operate their funds almost instantaneously across great distances and regional and national boundaries. This is even more doable in the case of products that can be stored and transferred electronically. To some, this works against social equity, deepening chasms between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' (Schiller 1995).

Slightly different, universalisation is the process where various objects and experiences are spread to people all over the world, for instance, the globalisation of conveyor belt sushi restaurants, Zen furniture, Disneyland, and club culture. The language and meanings surrounding the Internet have been universalised in this sense (witness the familiarity with terms like 'dot com', 'spam', flaming, and so forth worldwide). Another example is the idea that the Internet may assist in the continuation and spread of traditionally marginalised cultures and their artefacts. On the other hand, it may also assist in the commodification of these same objects and cultures while detaching and emptying them of their 'original' significance.

Some cultural critics also argue that the Internet leads to westernisation or modernisation, where "globalisation is a dynamic whereby the social structures of modernity (capitalism, rationalism, industrialism, bureaucratism, etc) are spread the world over, normally destroying pre-existent cultures and local self-determination in the process" (Scholte 2000: 16). Thus, the Internet globalises objects and experiences unevenly, that is, western/US social formations dominate worldwide. In a sense, the Internet's status as a decentralised media is therefore compromised to a certain degree. Its technology was originally developed in the US, many of its administrative and other agencies are located in the US, and global network paths often ultimately flow through US-based servers.

Deterritorialisation is another aspect of globalisation that finds common expression in relation to the Internet. Deterritorialisation is the dislocation of social and cultural formations from geographical space, that is "social space is no longer wholly mapped in terms of territorial places, territorial distances and territorial borders" (2000: 16). This understanding is manifested, as indicated earlier, in the notions of virtual community and experimentation with identity that many associate with the Internet. It

can also be seen in the development or enhancement of diasporic communities through online and other media technologies.

I will refer to the different meanings or aspects of globalisation outlined above. I also argue that just as globalisation and the Internet extend the power of forces of oppression and control, there are interstices through which socially progressive and/or resistive forces can operate. Nederveen Pieterse's analysis is useful and applicable to my argument. Pieterse writes that: "Critical globalism refers to the critical engagement with globalization processes, neither blocking them out nor celebrating globalisation" (1995: 13, cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths *et al*. 1998: 111). This form of "critical engagement" permits me to problematise the use of the Internet to address local issues on a global scale, yet also allows the identification of ways in which this technology can be deployed for resistance. This point of view also acknowledges that globalisation processes are often not neutral. Globalisation, for instance, can often enact power structures that support Western imperialism; these shape access to global communication and culture – particularly in extending the power of modernity and capitalism:

> [g]lobal culture is a continuation of an imperial dynamic of influence, control, dissemination and hegemony that operates according to an already initiated structure of power that emerges in the sixteenth century in the great confluence of imperialism, capitalism and modernity (Ashcroft, Griffiths *et al*. 1998: 113).

The discourse of the Internet uses terms like 'global village' and the challenge to and transgression of national boundaries, for instance, traditional demarcations of identity and regulatory structures. Hence, I attempt to relate this discourse to the literature on the phenomena of globalisation of culture and transnationalism and how identity politics are affected. Some academics in the humanities and social sciences feel an ennui with nationalism, firstly, with its association with state ideologies justifying

the oppression of ethnic and religious minorities, Islamic fundamentalism, and so forth. As Cheah writes:

> Many argue that the accelerated pace of economic globalisation … in 'advanced post-Fordist' or 'late capitalism,' the transnationalization of military command structures through NATO, and the rise of global hybrid cultures from modern mass migration, consumerism and mass communications in the past two decades have combined to create an interdependent world in which the nation-state faces imminent obsolescence as a viable economic unit, a politically sovereign territory, and a bounded cultural sphere (Cheah 1998: 20).

Globalisation is not a new phenomenon of this century. What has changed is the recognition that distinctions between the self and other, local and global, centre and periphery, national and international are breaking down and need recontextualising. For progressive social action, globalisation needs to be accounted for in discussing asymmetries of power relations. Here, the processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, homogenisation and heterogenisation of culture,[14] the impact upon nationalism and the legitimisation of the state, global capitalism, and the fetishisation and commodification of culture are germane.

Several theorists acknowledge the close relationship between colonialism and globalisation, and, to some extent, one could not exist without the other. Colonialism introduced a range of new communication technologies which transformed communities, including the telegraph and wireless, and required the building of road

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[14] Appadurai uses these terms to describe the phenomena that are said to accompany globalisation. Addressing fears of cultural homogenisation, particularly Americanisation, he points out that the picture may be more complex. For instance, there is the possibility that cultural influences from another society can be 'indigenised,' or that, rather than Americanisation, other fears of cultural absorption (for example, fears of Japanisation in Korea) may be more relevant. Nation-states can also exploit these fears in order to disguise their own hegemonic policies. Appadurai developed a framework to discuss the wide range of globalisation processes; he writes that there are 'five dimensions of global cultural flow': ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes. These describe formations in different fields, for instance, 'ethnoscapes' describes 'the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers …' This model expresses his argument that there discontinuities, 'disjunctures,' between and within these different 'scapes'. Thus, 'deterritorialisation', in this context, describes exiles, migrants, and other people who are 'culturally dislocated,' and 'reterritorialisation,' the process of reattachment to the home culture or to a new culture. These concepts can apply to finances, technology, in fact, any of the other dimensions of cultural flow (Appadurai 1990: 448-445).

and rail networks and shipyards for the movement of goods and people. With the decline of colonialism in its more traditional forms, the contemporary form of colonialism finds its expression in globalisation (Miyoshi 1993). Global culture creates (or is it vice versa) the demand for commodities, images and sounds that supports transnational corporations, which in turn take advantage of and build much of the infrastructure necessary for marketing, production, distribution, and sales, world-wide. To the transnational corporations, the Internet is a marketing, sales, and distribution network.

There is also the view that much of what we understand as a postmodern, informational and global village may be more new modernities; capitalism's next mutation which serves to celebrate yet another universalism (Featherstone, Lash *et al.* 1995). Global culture and the exhibition of diversity often reflects the commodification of culture for easy consumption by world-wide audiences. If the implosion of signifieds (Baudrillard 1993), shallowness of meaning, and accelerated speed of communication, result in a bewildering world, one constant remains: repression and the unequal distribution of materiality still takes place. Accordingly, we need to discuss new methods of resistance in order to address the development of new methods and forms of repression.

4. Transnational Communal Formations

Globalisation influences the degree to which forms of community identification, partly facilitated by globalisation, have changed and what these developments imply for power relations and social hierarchies. These forms of identification include virtual communities, transnational cultural formations (for instance, diasporic ethnic communities, communities formed around certain spheres of interests), and cosmopolitanism. The types of identification these imply affect the relationships of

power and forms of marginal politics that can and do take place: for instance, to some extent, they transgress national boundaries, complicate the nation-state's management of the national culture, as well as other forms of regulation, and, in a similar way, have a shifting relationship with transnational corporations.

Increasingly, cosmopolitanism has been seen as an alternative to nation-based forms of identification, according to Cheah: "cosmopolitanism is the obvious choice as an intellectual ethic or political project that can better express or embody genuine universalism" (1998: 21).[15] However, this is usually accompanied by a re-conceptualisation of the meaning of the term to take into account forms of cosmopolitanism that already exist and also to move the concept away from the more negative or limited associations of the past (Cheah and Robbins 1998). Traditionally, cosmopolitanism meant a freedom from the imperatives of everyday life confined in the nation and claims of universality via an interest in the welfare of humanity as a whole. Accordingly, the customary reaction to such claims was (quite naturally) cynicism and suspicion, whereby cosmopolitanism was tainted by privilege and distance. Cosmopolitans are viewed as fortunate strangers, unaffected by the problems of their host countries, sometimes, dabbling in local affairs with disastrous results, but more often, the "cosmopolitan is held to be incapable of participating in the making of history, doomed to the mere aesthetic spectatorship that he or she is also held secretly to prefer" (4).

As Bruce Robbins points out, a host of writers[16] identified forms of cosmopolitanism that were neither privileged nor 'free-floating'. He suggests that:

> Like nations, cosmopolitanisms are now plural and particular. Like nations, they are both European and non-European, and they are weak

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[15] Cheah himself, in the same text, declares this as an 'open question', citing Benedict Anderson and Aihwa Ong.

[16] He cites the following as examples of those who embrace meanings of cosmopolitanism beyond universalism: Rabinow, Appadurai, Benita Parry, David Hollinger, Mitchell Cohen, Arnold Krupat, Bhabha, Aihwa Ong, Louisa Schein, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Scott Malcomson.

and underdeveloped as well as strong and privileged. And again like the nation, cosmopolitanism is *there* – not merely an abstract ideal, like loving one's neighbor as oneself, but habits of thought and feeling that have already shaped and been shaped by particular collectivities, that are socially and geographically situated, hence both limited and empowered (Robbins 1998).

Robbins takes cosmopolitanism beyond the utopian abstraction of Kant's vision to describe something already in existence and reflected in ways of being and acting rather different from traditional notions of dislocatedness/distance, naïve or cynical meddling, or non-commitment long associated with the term. In addition, it is extended to include groups and individuals situated in the margins within their local/national communities and/or internationally. This is a reversal of past patterns, where critics of cosmopolitanism situated it, whilst its proponents found an advantage in keeping it free floating. In the late 1990s, the renewed support for universalism was accompanied by a mode of understanding cosmopolitanism as "located and embodied" (Robbins 1998: 2). It became imperative to examine what was left of its analytical capacity, whereby, "instead of an ideal of detachment, actually existing cosmopolitanism is a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment or attachment at a distance" (Robbins 1998: 3).

On the possibility of this engagement beyond the nation, of feelings extending beyond one's immediate location or nationality, Robbins points to global religious solidarity, for instance, "pan-Islamic cosmopolitanism that came to the aid of the Bosnians when the Christian or secular West turned its back and went about its business" (Robbins 1998: 5). Concerning the topic of the Internet and its impact on such sensibilities, Robbins writes:

> If people can get as emotional as Anderson says they do about relations with fellow nationals they never see face-to-face, then now that print-capitalism has become electronic-and digital-capitalism, and now that this system is so clearly transnational, it would be strange if people did *not* get emotional in much the same way, if not necessarily to the same degree, about others who are *not* fellow nationals, people bound to them by some sort of transnational sort of fellowship (Robbins 1998: 7, emphases in original).

However, feelings of solidarity beyond the nation, like nationalism, are neither pre-existing nor impossible. They are constructed through combinations of history, technology, and shared emotions and interests. As Robbins suggests:

> They have to be built up laboriously out of the imperfect historical materials—churches and mosques, commercial interests and immigrant diasporas, sentimentality about hungry children and technorapture over digitalized communication—that are already at hand. They do not stand outside history like an ultimate court of appeal (Robbins 1998: 6).

Robbins appears to assume that this sense of engagement with the world at large is attainable, but there needs to be intervention and effort, whether the basis for solidarity is religion, commerce, shared experience, altruism, enthusiasm over new communication technologies and so forth.

However, as Robbins points out, we need to question the accountability and desirability of the cosmopolitan situation:

> Clearly, there is no inherent virtue in transnationality. Is there then, as Anderson suggests, inherent vice: the dangerous license to meddle that comes of feeling passionately engaged in a given state's affairs without accepting the duties of a citizen or being physically present on its territory? Is it distance itself that produces effects like Ayodhya, or does the distance of the supporters merely exaggerate our own sense of powerlessness before ethnic and religious violence that is more often produced entirely *within* the state, violence that citizenship itself is equally incapable of handling (Robbins 1998: 11-12)?

Both Benedict Anderson and Khachig Tölölyan also prompt readers to question "long distance nationalists," that is, diasporic people engaging in local struggles at a distance. As I argue in *Chapter Three*, the Internet provides another avenue for individuals and groups to enact 'long distance nationalism' in ways that reiterate and reaffirm bipolar identity formations as well as, in the process of representation, performing discursive violence on the body and experiences of the 'victims' being represented. In the same chapter, I analyse cosmopolitanism and the rape of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia as a form of appropriation in which the complexity of local issues were subsumed under the

need to consolidate Chinese activism globally and, in the process, form a global collective Chinese identity and response. The 'cosmopolitans' in this case were dispersed ethnic Chinese, predominantly US-based, constructing a form of global diasporic identification that pitted 'us Chinese' against a variety of oppressors world-wide, using the Internet through web sites, email forwards and newsgroup messages to spread the message. Rather than taking part in an imagined national community, these ethnic Chinese constructed a transnational imaginary community using web sites, email forwarding, and news groups.

In *Chapter Three*, I also identify difficulties with the use of the Internet for global activism. These difficulties include the misappropriation and objectification of an oppressed minority to represent a global oppression of a transnational diaspora. Hence, activists used the May 1998 violence against Chinese in Indonesia to represent the historical and current subjugation of ethnic Chinese all over the world. In the process, local differences were ignored in favour of the maintenance and construction of homogeneity in history and character of ethnic Chinese. There was also the burial of a different oppression in a different locality and time. Photographs depicting the alleged torture and rape of East Timorese women by Indonesian army soldiers were appropriated to represent the violence toward ethnic Chinese women during the May 1998 riots, with the plight of the East Timorese left neglected by the diasporic activists.

Yet, without the concern and activism of groups outside Indonesia, regardless of whether they were Chinese or human rights organizations, the issue of the rapes and justice for its victims are unlikely to have been addressed by the Habibie state. This may seem contradictory, on the one hand, I argue that the activists complicated the investigation, on the other, I also claim that investigation may not have even proceeded to the extent it did without the worldwide anger surrounding not just the rapes but the violence and killings during the riots. This is, however, the point that Pheng Cheah and

Bruce Robbins make in their work. They say that, rather than a singular uniform phenomenon that is easily slotted into the category of good or bad, there are *multiple* cosmopolitanisms, a range of different forms. According to Robbins:

> … cosmopolitanism offers something other than a gallery of virtuous eligible identities. It points instead to a domain of contested politics— hence our title ['Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation']. Thinking of cosmopolitics not as universal reason in disguise, but as one on a series of scales, as an area both within and beyond the nation (and yet falling short of 'humanity') that is inhabited by a variety of cosmopolitanisms, we will not perhaps be tempted to offer the final word … (Robbins 1998: 12).

Pheng Cheah discusses the viability of cosmopolitanism as an alternative to nationalism's particularism. In the process, he dismantles and critiques the oppositional delineation of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, providing a valuable survey of the variety of positions on the topic (1998). In this dissertation, I use cosmopolitanism to evoke the traditional definition, that is, as liberation from the everyday life of the nation coupled with an interest in the welfare of humanity. However, I mainly use it in the broader sense of the type of cosmopolitans that not only display interest but also are intimately familiar with local conditions—either as one of the 'locals' or having strong affiliations with them (the former being preferred). For this, I rely on Robbins' understanding of cosmopolitanism as instances of "(re)attachment, multiple attachment or attachment at a distance", where more than one of these processes can be occurring together with another (Robbins 1998: 3).

The international developments since attacks on US targets on 11 September 2001 have made explicit the extent to which the transnational has now become a battleground for different competing forces, as well as a space for cooperation and networking. The trends have been diverse and often not easily universalised. For instance, the nation-state has seen a reinvigoration amongst some countries (like the US) as playing a major role in issues exacerbated by globalisation, for instance, international

terrorist networks, pornography and forms of criminal activity. At the same time, there are increasing calls to move beyond the nation and the state, for instance, to address social problems on a transnational basis, as some of their causes have their roots in globalisation. For instance, Appadurai argues that:

> It may be time to rethink monopatriotism, patriotism directed exclusively to the hyphen between nation and state, and to allow the material problems we face—the deficit, the environment, abortion, race, drugs, and jobs—to define those social groups and ideas for which we would be willing to live, and die … Some of us may still want to live—and die—for the United States. But many of these new sovereignties are inherently postnational (Appadurai 1996: 176).

The Internet is a form of communication that can be both located and local, and yet global at the same time. It blurs the distinctions between producers and consumers of knowledge and cultural content, yet it is always under threat of colonisation by transnational corporations, of regulation and surveillance by state and other agencies. The Internet, it seems, can be both a source and tool of empowerment and oppression for the marginalised and oppressed in society.

5. The Dissertation Ahead

This dissertation explores the interrelationship of power and control with resistance and social activism, attempting to navigate between an overly optimistic assessment of the liberatory potential of the Internet, and a pessimistic, dystopian view. I use a cultural studies approach to address the dialectic between the production of dominant cultural practices and structures and the resistance that accompanies them. It is particularly suitable as I am mainly interested in the interrelationship between the culture(s), the organisational, technological, and political aspects, of the Internet and the 'wider' cultures affecting, and that are affected, by it. Cultural studies, being concerned with cultural practices, the production and circulation of meaning, and cultural events and change, is thereby useful for studying the Internet culturally, to examine how it is

constrained, is implicated by, and contributes towards, power relations, and also how it offers scope for resistance and change. The latter is particularly pertinent, as the Internet has been the object of much speculation in terms how it would affect society, and how it would itself change.

This analysis of discourse, power, and resistance on the Internet deals with selected sites that underscore change; they are sites of both celebration and anxiety over the changes that accompany the development of Internet technology and culture. As Foucault reminds us, "as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy" (Foucault 1988: 123). My approach recognises that we make, and are made by, culture. We have agency, but this agency is constrained by structures that constrain this agency (and can be affected by it). Thus, this dissertation is also a historical account of the Internet's potential for bringing people together and for social activism and change, though it does not claim to be comprehensive. The case studies I have selected illustrate how power relations can shift, how certain Internet sites can become the centre of power contestations, they illustrate, variously, the interplay between transnational cultural formations, nation-states, and individuals; and the structures of the Internet.

5.1 Chapter One: Singapore: Regulation and Dissent

I begin the dissertation by addressing the issue of the nation-state, its capacity to regulate this technology, its role in constructions of national identity and defining the boundaries of behaviour and thought, and possible limits upon this control, using the case of the Singapore Internet. During the accelerated adoption of the Internet by businesses, institutions, individuals and households in the mid-nineteen-nineties, the Singapore state introduced codes of practice for Internet Service Providers, and a proxy

server. I use this case to explore the ripples in Internet discourse caused by the suggestion that the Internet was not, as previously assumed, invulnerable to censorship. Since the initial introduction of regulations, developments in the approach of the state and its institutions to Internet regulation, and the strategies adopted by Singaporean nationals (at home and abroad) illustrate how the relationship between the nation-state, Internet culture, and technology can be sometimes oppositional, sometimes complementary. The chapter also delves into the spaces of resistance to the state's hold and management of national culture and the dominant public discourses in Singapore.

5.2 Chapter Two: Look! A Racist: Fanon and the Racial Politics of Flaming

While *Chapter One* discusses the state, that is, the Singapore state's ability to affect (and be affected by) Internet discourses, *Chapter Two* moves on to the interactions of Internet participants and the notion that the Internet frees people from the constrictions of visual and verbal markers of identity. Through an examination of a lengthy and heated subject 'thread' on race and culture, this chapter illustrates the degree to which dominant discourses circumscribe the interactions of Internet participants in an Australian newsgroup, society-wide discourses as well as those more specific to Usenet. I also address a number of significant identity issues, especially the differentiation of self from other, and culture from body. This chapter, therefore, still deals with power operating through national cultural formations, however, it shifts its focus to consider the transnational spaces that permit interaction between participants from different locations, ethnicities and nationalities.

5.3 Chapter Three: Diasporic Formations, the Internet, and Gender: The Chinese Diaspora and the Riots in Indonesia (May 1998)

In *Chapter Three*, the political and cultural implications of transnational communal formations is explored through an analysis of the handling of the Indonesian riots of

May 1998 by ethnic Chinese on the Internet, specifically, those wishing to create and consolidate a global alliance between ethnic Chinese around the world. The latter involves, at least for the case in question, the deployment of the idea of 'diaspora,' particularly the way the term connotes an oppressed minority displaced from an 'original' culture and place. This expressed itself in emails, forum messages, and web sites distributing images and written text centred on the violence afflicted upon ethnic Chinese in Indonesia during the riots. This chapter is concerned with one aspect: the representation of ethnic Chinese women raped during these riots, particularly the relabelling and dissemination of images from other sites and events to represent these women. In the analysis of these developments, the chapter highlights the potential for transnational cultural formations, even those formed out of a sense of oppression and marginalisation, to enact more forms of oppression, objectification, and mythologising, and how the Internet can assist in these processes.

5.4 Chapter Four: Online Activism: The Anti-Capitalist Network

In contrast to some of the Chinese diasporic activists discussed in *Chapter Three*,[17] in *Chapter Four*, I discuss an anti-capitalist network, which, is informed by intellectual traditions that deal with the problems of representation, objectification, and the creation of new hegemonies in counter-discursive activities. These networks strive to retain close ties with the local and the particular, and the individual agendas and identities of the various organisations and activists that participate. At the same time, they take advantage of Internet technology to form powerful collectives for protest and action spanning countries and regions. Finally, this chapter also critiques the limitations and problems faced by these networks.

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[17] My recent discussions with members of one of these groups, *Huaren*, indicate some of them are aware of the problems of representation.

CHAPTER ONE

Singapore: Regulation and Dissent

CHAPTER ONE

Singapore: Regulation and Dissent

1. Introduction

As I began researching the Internet, the Singapore government announced that it was going to introduce, what was at that time considered impossible, a method of censoring the entire Internet for the whole country. A Singaporean emigrant to Australia, my research and discussion of this issue is inflected by a personal engagement with some of these issues of government control and dissent. I found this case intriguing because the Singapore state's desire for control appeared to challenge aspects of the Internet's dominant discourse outlined in my *Introduction*. The Singaporean government contested the 'truth' that it would be impossible to regulate the Internet, and, correspondingly, the practices of self-regulation. As such, this case highlights how Internet practices and truths are subject to challenge and change.

A view circulating in popular culture is that the Internet liberates the individual and builds community across greater distances. Other, perhaps equally popular, perspectives view the Internet in negative terms. In this latter dystopian view, the Internet's anarchic possibilities lead to abuse, for example, child pornography, aggression, and hostility to other communities and individuals rather than understanding, and so forth. This is of concern to the Singaporean state, because the national discourse closely links the development and continuance of Singapore's capitalist economy to the maintenance of a state-prescribed national identity and culture. The values, perhaps even the entire discourse, of a free Internet, might challenge this

construct of shared national values and identity.[1] The state's Internet strategy does not radically depart from its previous practices and strategies for earlier media technologies, including the press, radio, and television. However, the Internet policy indicates an adjustment in thinking by this nation-state in recognition of the difficulty of applying their traditional regulatory models in the face of the seeming inevitability of transnational cultural flows.

The Internet introduces modes of communication that may challenge previous discursive formations, which underlie centrally-constructed[2] national imaginaries. It is vital to bear in mind that the reverse is also true. The modes of communication on the Internet are affected by state regulation and, in other respects, are not totally determined by the initial biases of the technology. According to the Singaporean government, the perceived threat to existing national discourses make changes in state strategies vital. These strategies need to integrate new modes of communication and define the limits of acceptability within which communication is to take place. This revised ordering of the discourse operates on different levels: in concrete form, for instance, in the state's setting up of a legal and technical environment which regulates access and behaviour. More significantly, it operates on a symbolic level, whereby the regulatory body sets the limits of acceptability in place. While 'unacceptable' behaviour and perspectives may be difficult to totally eradicate, they are firmly established as marginal and 'deviant' from the 'normal'. The technology of the Internet can be harnessed by the state in an

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[1] Whether these discourses were actually so completely incommensurable is a debatable point that I explore later, however, on the surface, the Singaporean state did perceive the Internet discourse of that time as a threat.

[2] There is a danger here of perceiving state-sanctioned discourses as the *only* ones dominant within Singaporean society. A certain ambiguity over this is to some extent encouraged by the PAP government: on the one hand, the view of the PAP government as having a great degree of control over the imagination of the Singaporean populace strengthens the dominant perspective/s. On the other hand, in order to recover some sort of legitimacy, this has been tempered by claims that the practices and values encouraged have a grassroots base and are not totally top-down directed.

effort to bolster the (marginalising) dominant discourse of national identity and shared values.

However, the legal mechanism is just one aspect of control, the other significant means of regulation is exercised through disciplinary power. As Foucault tells us:

> Modern society … from the nineteenth century up to our own day, has been characterised on the one hand, by a legislation, a discourse, an organisation based on public right, whose principle of articulation is the social body and the delegative status of each citizen; and, on the other hand, by a closely linked grid of disciplinary coercions whose purpose is in fact to assure the cohesion of this same social body (Foucault 1980: 106).

The power exercised by the state, through changes in licensing and legislation, expresses the first form of control through "a legislation, a discourse, an organisation based on public right." The second equally important aspect of control is the "grid of disciplinary coercions" that ensures social cohesion.

How do regulatory moves like these modify Internet discourses and practices? I am particularly interested in their impact on the discourses that, until the mid-nineties, dominated the Internet, and, to a lesser extent, still run through its technologies (Usenet, the web, etc) and cultures today. These discourses incorporated liberal and democratic[3] themes, self-regulation, notions of liminality and flux, and virtual community. They greatly influenced the development of regulations, norms and cultures of the Internet, for instance, of MUDs, Usenet communities, and website authoring. I shall describe these themes briefly to show how they impact upon the Singaporean case, in particular, at the level of the Singaporean users of the Internet.

These Internet discourses sometimes oppose, and sometimes, contrary to popular expectation, work *with* the national discourse. For instance, after having introduced Internet regulation in Singapore, in subsequent years, the national discourse

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[3] As the Internet, in its early days, was a technology mainly originating from and developed by US interests, and was dominated by the US as users, these were US notions of democracy.

incorporated some of the terms, and, as the regulatory body argues, the practices, of Internet discourse.[4] Both these discourses provide different meanings, and also constrain and limit communication on the Internet. The latter is a significant point, because it is often assumed that the contrast is between a discourse that liberates (Internet libertarian discourses) and one that limits (national discourses aka Singapore). All discourses constrain, the question is, what do they limit and on what basis and truth-knowledge?

Finally, I am wary of over-emphasising the power of the state, especially in Singapore. To credit the state with the power of complete control is to deny individual Internet users their agency. Rather, I want to understand the scope for resisting and questioning state control while appreciating that it is necessary to be mindful of claims about the Internet's libertarian potential.

My own positioning as an insider-outsider researcher plays a role in discussing Singapore, its political and social climate, and the Internet. Growing up in Singapore provides me with an intimate knowledge of the impact of dominant discourses and the strictures of the state. However, I have to balance this intimacy or experience of Singapore with the awareness that my experience, like those of any one subject, is both subjective and interlaced with social positioning within this society. In addition, the stages of migration and settlement have made me aware of the traps of comparison, that is, weighing the relative merits of the political and cultural systems of Australia and Singapore from a migrant's perspective. There are also the dangers of popular, easy and clichéd responses to the culture and citizens of Singapore, even (or perhaps especially) for emigrants like myself, because of overseas media reports of events and policies.

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[4] For example, I describe later how the regulatory bodies recruit the term, 'self-regulation,' into their documentation.

2. Clash of Discourse: The Imagined Nation Vs the Virtual Community?

In the early 1990s, the Singaporean government began a process of linking up the public and private households, offices and libraries via a computer network by 2000. In 1992, the National Computer Board published *IT 2000: A Vision of an Intelligent Island*, with details on how it would install the infrastructure stage by stage in all households. At that time, the emphasis was on Teletext, and it was in the latter half of the 1990s that the shift was made to promoting the Internet (Rodan 1996). With the increasing popularity of the Internet, the government argued that Singaporeans will need to be familiar with the medium in order to compete globally in the 'information age'. In 2002, roughly one in five Singaporeans are active Internet users, and one in two have access to the Internet (Central Intelligence Agency 2001; Nielsen//NetRatings 2002).[5] While this may seem a far cry from the target to have every Singaporean linked up, this Internet penetration rate compares favourably with Japan and South Korea and is more or less on par with Hong Kong and the United States[6] (Cyberatlas 2002).

In the early stages of the introduction of the Internet into Singaporean homes, bemused writers speculated over this and wondered how the state would negotiate the exposure of Singaporeans to the 'free flow'[7] of information available through this network. They believed the 'Information Superhighway' meant you 'by-passed' the nation-state. A journalist for *HotWired* declared that the "Singaporean way of life will be radically transformed" (Sandfort 1996). This was in an environment where

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[5] According the CIA, as of July 2001, there were around 4.3 million Singaporeans. According to Nielsen//NetRatings, 928,192 Singaporeans were active Internet users, and 2,280,806 had access to the Internet in March 2002.

[6] Although at 36.7 percent, the proportion of active users in the United States surpasses Singapore's.

[7] It is disputable whether or not this flow is 'free' in the first place. Referring to a centre-periphery model of globalisation, cultural globalisation entails asymmetry in the production and consumption of meanings and not so much decentralisation as unstable relations between centre and peripheries. Ulf Hannerz, for instance, argues that certain cultural forms are more defined by flows from the centre than others, and that the periphery is more a consumer than a producer of meanings; (Hannerz 1991) That being said, I would tend towards avoiding the use of the terms 'centre-periphery', as they tend to imply a fixed and permanent relationship, rather than the kinds of ebbs and flows and ambiguities that we are seeing nowadays.

McLuhan's declaration that "the medium is the message" was cited regularly in web sites. People believed in the impossibility of regulating the Internet, and imagined the kinds of electronic communities that would spring up, challenging dictatorships all across the world and facilitating a new form of electronic democracy and grassroots activism.[8]

2.1 Internet Libertarian Discourse

The speculation by journalists on how Singapore would take to the Internet was, of course, anchored in the primary discourse(s) of the Internet during that time, which I have called libertarian discourse. Many journalists saw this discourse as antithetical to the way the Singaporean government operated, indeed, to the hegemony that they saw as prevalent in Singapore.

As I discussed in the *Introduction*, certain constructs form the basis of Internet libertarian discourse, most of which manifest themselves in very recognisable phrases and buzzwords. These include the trinity identified by James Boyle (Boyle 1997), that is, "Information wants to be free," "In Cyberspace, the First Amendment is a local ordinance," and, "The Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it." This trinity signifies the assumptions that it is impossible to regulate the Internet, that the technology prevents censorship and control by nation-states. Along with this trinity, the *Progress and Freedom Foundation* makes similar claims, based on their belief that we have entered a 'Third Wave' knowledge-based economy (Progress and Freedom Foundation 1994). They predict an age of decentralisation and 'demassification,' one that would see the decline of the traditional power and role of the nation-state. These claims appeared to suggest that the Internet would be a threat to the then-current hegemony in Singapore, a country infamous in world media for its totalitarian state.

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[8] An offshoot of this perspective is discussed in Chapter Four.

Another development was the notion of virtual communities and the attendant possibility of amorphous and fluid identity. I have discussed the genesis of the phrase, 'virtual community,' in my *Introduction*, and focus now on the idea of liminal identity. Phil Morle, using the model of cyberspace as encompassing different media, including telephones and MUDs, describes cyberspace as an arena of liminality. He writes:

> When inhabiting the cyberspaces I experience a parallel universe with different potential which I have, until now, struggled to ignore - 'reality' as I knew it is a lie. Time and space are liquid; identity and worlds are multiple; we are always in-between, in transcience, incomplete and in-process. Partiality is relished and the divine reached for (Morle 1996).

These words, "in-between", "in-process", and "liquid", resonate in the postcolonial sphere, where cultural identity has been displaced by shared histories of spatial and cultural dislocation and subjectivity is 'split' amongst a number of identifications (Bhabha 1994; Grossberg 1996).

I suggest we can consider the Usenet newsgroup, soc.culture.singapore, as a liminal space. It allows interaction and mingling of subjectivities and resistance to the narrow constrictions of the web content guidelines put down by the state. A newsgroup like this permits the participation in a public sphere of people in diaspora, perhaps articulation of hybrid identifications by overseas students, visitors, expatriates, immigrants, and emigrants. The accessibility of the newsgroup within and outside Singapore allows the transcultural exchanges to take place in a public space. Wherever a user posts from, their message appears between a few seconds to the next day. They can hide their real name behind anonymous remailers, a move that one remail service provider describes as assuming a 'pseudonymous' identity.[9] The sheer number of messages, more than five hundred per day, makes it extremely difficult to monitor.

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[9] The word, pseudonymous, was coined by Johan Helsingius to describe that peculiar cross between a pseudonym and anonymity provided by remailers (Helsingius 1995). Helsingius was a famous figure in Internet culture and the maintainer of anon.penet.fi, a remailer of notoriety and celebration that was closed down in 1996.

These may account for why there are so many messages discussing sensitive topics usually reserved for private conversations and rarely seen in broadcast or print media.

Some may conceive of the development of deterritorialised identity and virtual community via the Internet as a threat to the imagined community of the nation, yet another possible challenge ushered in by the forces of globalisation.[10] However, globalisation is by no means a new phenomenon, and the earlier forms of globalisation that accompanied colonialisation ushered in the world market and deterritorialisation of cultural identities (Hall 1991). A former English colony like Singapore has to contend with the effects of colonisation and globalisation of the past, that is, the spatial and cultural displacement of the descendants of migrants in diaspora and the Malay population, the establishment of England as the centre, and the marginalisation of the culture and people of Singapore and other peripheries. Postcolonials and diasporic individuals are thus often not in the position to identify with a unified, traditional culture. The choice is often between using that political space of being in between cultures, preferred by Homi Bhabha and many postcolonial critics, or invoking and recovering a pre-colonial, traditional culture. More so than before, the Internet placed such issues of national and cultural identity into the foreground, opening for questioning what constituted the Singaporean national identity and whether and how it should be maintained in the light of the deterritorialised identifications and communities that might be introduced by the Internet.

2.1.1 Reconfiguration of assumptions

The dominant discourses of the Internet, which I collectively refer to as libertarian, are by no means totally aligned and cohesive. However, most of them tend to assume that the Internet as a media technology was not as subject to national regulation as

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[10] The belief that globalisation would witness the decline of the nation-state is disputed, for instance, by Ulf Hannerz (1996). The context for the statement above is more about the *perception* of the effects of globalisation.

traditional mass media, that is, state-based control and jurisdiction was hapless in the face of technologies designed for decentered access and storage of information. Relatedly, these discourses all emphasise the impact of technology upon human communication, identity, and culture. Such a perspective neglects how the application and development of technology is not autonomous and is subject to social, political, and economic forces. This fetishisation of technology is usually accompanied by a fetishisation of the present. We may regard the past ten to fifty years as a new stage of political, economic, human, technological and/or social development, or a precursor to impending cataclysm or decay, all by no means new claims.

James Boyle points out something that is often neglected in the debates over regulation: that is how power, as I have indicated earlier, operates by and through discourse, working through the way subjects are named and formed, subject relations, terminologies, rules, objects, and other elements specific to the area (Foucault 1972). It is not only exercised and controlled through the legal system, or similar formal and concrete structures. I will therefore be discussing, firstly, the state and the Internet regulatory environment of Singapore, and, secondly, the agency of Internet users and producers within this environment, specifically, the counter-discursive practices.

2.2 State and Capital

Libertarian perspectives of the Internet are apt to sometimes simplify the ways in which, in the development of Internet regulations, the interests of state and capital can sometimes converge or clash. While this may not be a focal point of this discussion, it is important to acknowledge the influence, and limits, of transnational and national economic interests. This is particularly so because the role and impact of commerce in the development of the technologies and cultures of the Internet was often a source of anxiety for 'cyber-utopians.' Andrew Calcutt draws attention to the contradiction in the

historical development of the Internet: on the one hand, its military-industrial roots, on the other, its subsequent expansion by left-wing counter-culture members wanting an escape from the triumphs of the right during the nineteen eighties (1999). Added to this is the political elite's (and the Singapore state is no exception) desire to validate itself by attempting to become the architect of the 'information superhighway.' This mix of desires suggests that governments and capitalists have converging interests in taming the seeming bohemia of the Internet, and, to a large extent, this is true. Examples of the interests of the state and capital marrying can be seen in copyright protection, for instance, the recent prosecution of file-sharing programs and networks proprietors like Napster and Kazaa, and moves to develop and enforce laws within and across nations.

Early on, the cooperation between state and capital was accompanied by an oppositional stance from the counter-culture cyberspace/Internet enthusiasts, who saw the interest of governments and commerce in the Internet as potentially destructive of the promise they saw in the medium. Yet, seemingly oppositional terms in cyberculture can not only coexist, they have a way of shifting and sometimes merging. Calcutt points out that, in many cases, these same early left-wing pioneers in the virtual frontier resigned themselves to the inevitability of commercialisation and put their skills and knowledge to use, becoming, as Calcutt puts it, "suits with ponytails" (1999: 44). Not that all such idealists have been absorbed into the corporate culture, for instance, in *Chapter Four*, I discuss present day global action against transnational corporations organised through the Internet. Nevertheless, the point needs to be made that members of the counter-culture, the state, and capital are not always opposed and distinguishable.

Sometimes, the state and capital find themselves defending free speech and the like on behalf of groups to which they are normally opposed, or have their ideals recruited in defence of corporate interests working against legal restrictions. For instance, a proposal to limit hate speech on the Internet as part of the international treaty

on cyber-crime met opposition from United States business and civil liberties groups, who viewed it as an infringement on the rights of (US) citizens and a nuisance to Internet providers (Bowman 2001; Sullivan 2002). Notably, this was not too long after a saga which began when a French court ordered Yahoo to block French citizens from accessing online auctions of Nazi memorabilia in November 2000.

After the attack on the New York twin towers and the Pentagon on eleventh September 2001, however, security has eclipsed privacy amongst governments and Internet service providers (Abreu 2001). The living icon of big business and computing himself, Bill Gates, sent an email on 15 January 2002 declaring security to be the top priority of Microsoft (Coursey 2002). Not surprisingly, governments wishing to endorse moves to establish or reinstate their central policing and regulatory roles have seized on this heightened sensitivity to security concerns. In the face of what seems to be diminished support for the traditional ideals of individual freedom, privacy, choice, and anti-corporatism, a critical appraisal of the impact of regulation is even more vital than before. Such an appraisal should recognise that the interests of state and capital, and even the 'cyber-libertarians,' are not as opposed or aligned as it would seem.

2.3 The Imagined Nation: Singaporean Nation-Building and Community

'Chat,' 'electronic mail', 'bulletin boards' and 'Internet phone,' these words and phrases illustrate the continuities between the past and present, the old and the new in descriptions of the various technologies that comprise the Internet. It seems especially apt that someone in the government of Singapore should use metaphors of neighbourhood and community to describe their proposed architecture for the Singaporean Internet:

> To use the metaphor of the city, our collective objective as Singaporeans is to stake out a place for ourselves [sic] in Internet, a Singapore neighbourhood as it were, with both the public and private sectors

represented, and developing in co-operation and in competition with others (Yeo 1995).

In this passage, a collective goal, to recreate the imagined nation online, is declared on behalf of all Singaporeans. While this is a reassuring image invoking a sense of familiarity and unity, it is also timely to remember that imagined communities such as this require enclosure, homogeneity, and exclusion for their establishment and continuance. The phrase, 'staking out of a place' brings to mind Rheingold's metaphor of the Internet as a new "electronic frontier" (Rheingold 1992) and associations with colonial invasion *and* postcolonial nationalism. At the same time, it marks the recognition of a developing discursive space to negotiate and control, requiring a change in tack on the part of the state, its political leaders and organs of government.

Quite obviously, the state appropriated the discourse of the Internet, with its metaphors of older forms of community, in an attempt to enlist these meanings to support its early engagements with Internet policy, no doubt already acknowledging the need to implement forms of control. Terence Lee and David Birch's article, "Internet Regulation in Singapore," establishes that the Singaporean government's approach to the Internet amounts to censorship of the Internet, within the context of an autocratic government seeking to limit dissent and maintain control of the public sphere (2000). They liken the effects of the so-called 'soft touch' policy of the government to a Foucauldian panopticon, with "auto-regulation" practised by institutions, Internet service providers, Internet content producers, and users.

2.3.1 National discourses

The Singapore government's desire to maintain and extend its control to newer media products and technologies runs parallel to Singapore's then-burgeoning economy and massive material progress since independence from British colonial rule.[11] This

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[11] This was true until the Asian economic crisis in 1997, which major government figures still mentioned in 1999.

progress was accompanied by a discourse that consistently ties the regulation of values and behaviours with material wealth (Clammer 1998). This linking in turn allows the state to legitimise itself as the manager of this control; successful control is bound to the dominance and health of the state. Wong Kokkeong's analysis of the linkages between media, economy and culture in Singapore introduces the concept of "controlled commodification" to describe the state of affairs in Singapore and the relationship between the Singaporean state, global capital and the media. Singapore's political economy is defined as 'peripheral capitalism' whereby the (PAP) state acts as a 'manager' for global capital. This managerial role depends on the state's dominance and hold over the nature of Singaporean society, hence "the state is the most determinative force/influence over media operating as a commercial organization within a market-oriented economy" (Wong 1991 viii).

From a broadly postcolonial viewpoint, such a model replaces the colonial with the nation-state as the central source of domination and coercion. Not surprisingly, functionalist modes of analysis and reasoning prevail in this climate and are hard to avoid when discussing the Singaporean state and its modes of operation. As John Clammer suggests:

> [t]he result has been a state of remarkably Durkheimian characteristics—organised around a core of (state generated) values enshrined in the recent attempt to encapsulate and institutionalise them in a 'national ideology' (see chapter eleven below) and deriving its legitimacy from a self-referential system of supportive mechanisms (Clammer 1998: 222).

In fact, often, the newly independent nation builds upon the economic, political and educational institutions and structures laid down by the colonisers, adopting and adapting the latter's laws and values to suit the postcolonial state. In this, the postcolonial state enacts the ambivalence of the postcolonial subject, on the one hand

attempting to erase the traces of colonial domination, on the other, unable to break away from the residual traces of this domination on its psyche (Bhabha 1994).

Colonial residue is evident in the continued resistance of ex-colonies like Singapore against foreign domination in support of cultural and political autonomy. This, perhaps partially, explains Singapore's response in replicating the binaries introduced by the British colonials, predominantly, between East and West:

> The logic of Orientalism reappears, paradoxically in the Orient itself: East and West are fundamentally divided from each other and the line of division proves again to be an eroticised one, generated this time not out of a clash between western colonialism and the indigenous societies of the East, but between a deeply modernist view and an emerging post-modernism, or between the pressures of globalism upon bounded localisms (Clammer 1998: 229).

Thus, the modernist perspective of the Singaporean government, confronted by postmodernism and globalisation, attempts to affirm an East Asian local identity.

The reason for the PAP governments' obsession with 'pollution' in speeches and policy announcements in Singapore is clear if we consider how the regulation of values and behaviours entail the regulation of boundaries, between internal and external, local and foreign, national and transnational. These boundaries are, of course, defined and naturalised through discourse, and the socially acceptable is bordered by, paradoxically, liminal areas that blur the dimensions of what defines national culture and identity.

This pollution trope is part of a "discourse of crisis" (Birch 1993: 2), "a strategy to keep 'the silent majority' (Baudrillard 1983a) constantly aware of the Singapore citizen habitus" (81). Birch describes a state practice of "staging crises", effected through the media, wherein questions of Singaporean citizenship and identity are manufactured and highlighted, with the answers at the end residing in the policies and definitions of the state itself. The pollution theme is therefore accompanied often by a renewed emphasis on the need to define and/or maintain a political and cultural identity

and common values. This, in turn, often leads to arguments in support of exclusion, whether through marginalisation or self-incision, of the ideas, practices and so forth that do not fit into this model of Singaporean identity, and state-driven policies and initiatives to reaffirm the model.

These affirmations of identity that centre on community, again in functionalist terms, is described by both Clammer and Chua Beng Huat as legitimising the state's actions, drawing attention away from increasing social stratification and the impact of industrialisation and commodification. The latter describes how, in 1991, a communitarian ideology was announced by the PAP government and, from a Gramscian perspective, assesses the extent to which the values and goals implied by these terms were actually addressed and met (Chua 1995). When Chua first published *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* in 1995, in his own words, "the book ended with cautious optimism towards further democratization in the Singapore polity" (Chua 1995), and it located this hope in growing social pluralism in Singapore.

In his paperback edition in 1997, Chua identified further changes in the public discourse due to continued social pluralisation. However, instead of communitarianism and 'shared values', a new term, 'social cohesion', appeared which Chua identified as indicating a shift of emphasis to a more pluralistic electorate. It is in this context of 'social cohesion' and the social and cultural boundaries imposed by the Singapore government that I now address the development and implications of Internet regulation for nationalism and community identity in Singapore and abroad.

3. Singaporean Internet Regulation: State, Nation and the Negotiation of Global Capital

3.1 The Class License Scheme and the Proxy Server

After the assertions of a new milieu launched by the growth of the Internet, Internet users interpreted the Singapore government's actions as a betrayal of the celebrated ability of the Internet to bypass local governments and centralised authority. The first outcry began when, in 1996, the government put into place a number of measures to control the use of the Internet in Singapore, in sum, compulsory licensing and proxy servers. The Class Licence Scheme requires Internet service providers to register for a licence, and this is awarded subject to certain conditions, including adherence to a 'Code of Practice.' Internet service and content providers are now responsible for content management, and the filtering of access to the Internet via a proxy server is mandatory.[12] This content management and filtering, like the license, has to match the guidelines set up by the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA).

Besides Internet service providers and resellers, political parties, groups, organisations and individuals dealing with Singaporean political religious issues, and online newspaper providers charging for access have to register for a class license. Such licensees are held responsible for any content on their site that contravenes the guidelines, with prosecution, fines and the loss of the licence as the penalty. Some Internet users regarded the original form of the Code of Practice and the Guidelines as too vague and broad in wording. For instance, clause 2 in the Internet Code of Practice, states "A licensee shall use his best efforts to ensure that prohibited material is not broadcast via the Internet to users in Singapore" (Singapore Broadcasting Authority 1996b). The use of phrases such as "prohibited material" and "best efforts," coupled

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[12] Details on content guidelines available from the Singapore Broadcasting Authority's website, (Singapore. Singapore Broadcasting Authority 1996c). The announcement of the proxy server was on 17 August 1996 (Goh 1996).

with other instances of vagueness confirmed the suspicions of many that the regulations, rather than the explicit purpose of 'safeguarding the national interest,' were a form of censorship that discouraged criticism against the state and/or the social and political order of the day. Critics argued that the ambiguity of some aspects of the documentation encouraged Internet users, service and content providers to err on the side of caution (Lee and Birch 2000; Rodan 1996).

The SBA has since made amendments to the Code of Practice and the Industry Guidelines[13] to take into account the feedback provided by the National Internet Advisory Committee (NIAC). While the new documents are more detailed about the role of holders of Internet class licenses, and the kinds of material prohibited, similar problems of ambiguity still exist. The definition of prohibited material, for instance, tends to refer to terms which are open to question. For instance, sub-clause 4 (1) states: "Prohibited material is material that is objectionable on the grounds of public interest, public morality, public order, public security, national harmony, or is otherwise prohibited by applicable Singapore laws" (Singapore Broadcasting Authority 1997: n.p.). This is followed by sub-clause (2) which lists the types of material defined as prohibited, including "nudity or genitalia in a manner calculated to titillate," "sexual violence or sexual activity involving coercion or non-consent of any kind." While sub-clause (3) adds that "[a] further consideration is whether the material has intrinsic medical, scientific, artistic or educational value," a licensed service or content provider may still be left wondering if his or her understanding of these terms meet those of the regulator, with the understanding that it is ultimately the latter which will make the final judgement.

As an example of the adverse reactions of some Internet users to the introduction of the regulations, and the underlying beliefs and assumptions beneath these reactions,

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[13] Originally named 'Internet Content Guidelines' when first released in 1996.

the Human Rights Watch (HRW) group write, in a letter of protest to Singapore ministers:

> By prohibiting connections between its citizens and various Web sites outside its borders, Singapore is in essence removing itself from the global Internet. If, as will surely happen, its example is followed in other countries, the Internet, which held such promise as the world's first truly global medium, will be nothing more than a set of country-specific networks where local prejudices and fears are reinforced by technology (Human Rights Watch 1996).

The assumption of groups such as HRW is that the information passed on the Internet is *naturally* free flowing, a free flow that government intervention jams or permits admittance. These phrases, "removing itself from the global Internet", "global medium", "country-specific networks" are symptomatic of the global-local binary so often used in reference to this medium. According to this letter, Singapore will be an island in cyberspace, able to cut itself off from global flows of information, and setting an example to other nations governed by authoritarian states. Others, like opposition politician Chee Soon Juan of the Singapore Democratic Party, point out that the flow is being restrained within the country as well, that "[i]t's just another way that the government is trying to control the free flow of information in this country" (Reuters 1996).

This is a perspective that employs a binary relationship between the imagined community of the Singaporean nation and that of the touted mobile and fluid identity of the Internet, a model that follows a chain of signification along the mythic lines indicated in this table (see overleaf):

	[SINGAPORE]	[INTERNET]
	NATIONAL COMMUNITY	TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY
	Whole	Fragmented (Stone 1995)
	Homogenous	Heterogenous
	Fixed, Clear	Fluid, Indeterminable
	Media-directed	User-directed
	Located physically and culturally	Dislocated, relocated
	Centrifugal	Centripetal
	Multicultural	Hybrid
	Top down	Bottom Up
	Consensus	Individual

This table describes the semiotic process by which various meanings are attached to the myths of imagined community, as pertaining to Singapore, and the opposing trope of mobile and fluid identity on the Internet. Hence, the word, 'Singapore', is tied to a series of meanings, some of which were for a long time unfashionably deterministic and structural. In contrast, as I have already described, 'the Internet' becomes tied to an oppositional set of terms that suggest an antidote to the kinds of communicative and relational patterns permitted by 'traditional', 'top-down', and mass communication technologies of television and print.

This is not to say that the Singapore government was alone and the first to come under such an attack. In July 1994, James Exon, a Nebraskan Senator, called for regulations on the Internet and the Communications Decency Act (CDA) was passed by the US Senate about a year later, and signed by Clinton in February, 1996 (National Computer Board (Singapore) 1996). This act made Internet service providers responsible for illegal posts by their subscribers, and was followed by a Bill making the transmission of 'indecent' materials over the Internet (knowingly) a crime. Although the US Supreme Court ruled the CDA as unconstitutional, a number of states have drafted legislation (CNN Interactive 1996). In Germany, December 1995, in response to

objections by German authorities, Compuserve temporarily blocked access to more than 200 Usenet newsgroups (National Computer Board (Singapore) 1996).[14]

With these developments, including the Singaporean case, some Internet users and 'cyber-activists' realised that the medium was *not* the message, that is, whatever the potential of the technology, how it eventually developed was subject to forces outside the inherent characteristics of the medium. The regulations imposed by governments can constrain the development of the technology and redirect its course. As summed up by one writer:

> It will be fatal if we underestimate the intentions of corporate and governmental interests for control over and access to new media, simply because others are overestimating what is frequently seen as the media's inherently democratic capabilities. The "myths" that are leading the cornerstone legal decisions currently being debated... will become tomorrow's unchallenged precedent as to how electronic sociality will function (Bratton 1997).

3.2 Mutual Dependency and Mixed Strategies

The binary of national and transnational community, and a technologically deterministic understanding of Internet development, obscure how the Singapore state has adapted to the new exigencies posed by the Internet, leading to new legitimisations and strategies. The Singaporean government has found two aspects of the Internet particularly useful: that the Internet does not exclude imagined communal formations, and the technology is not fixed and is in the process of development. Imagined community formations and postmodernistic identity are, after all, not mutually exclusive.

The Singapore government's Internet strategy reflects the complex relationship between the state and transnational forces in its pragmatism and fluidity, in particular, the recognition that the state cannot totally fence off global flows. The policy incorporates resignation to such flows with a desire for continued state dominance over

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[14] Incidentally, this resulted in much gibing in response to posts by people accessing the Internet via Compuserve on Usenet newsgroups around that time.

the range of meanings 'broadcast' in Singapore. The state recognises that the past types of regulations on print and broadcast technology are untenable. George Yeo, for instance, says, "The choice is: we master the technology or it will master us" (Yeo 1995)—this is the rationale behind the 'Singapore neighbourhood' notion. Simultaneously, the government, perhaps in an innovative fashion, was quick to see that, in certain aspects of the Internet, it could still apply prior forms of control.

3.3 Cultural Preservation

The Singapore government have given a number of reasons for introducing these regulations on the provision and use of the Internet. The justification for the 1996 legislation is reminiscent of that given with regard to the broadcast and print media, that is, to protect the existing socio-political environment in Singapore. In a statement released on 3 March 1996, the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA), while noting its utility as a "powerful communication and information tool", stated, "we must also try to keep in check abuses in cyberspace like pornography, hate literature sowing social and religious discords, and criminal activities" (1996a: n.p.). The SBA said, "[t]hese efforts will help to keep the parts of the information highway which pass through Singapore relatively clean", a clear example of the pollution trope carried over from general discourse in Singapore.

According to the SBA, the regulatory framework of 1996 was introduced to "encourage minimum standards in the parts of cyberspace which affect Singapore… [and] enhance the Internet's potential for Singapore while safeguarding the values we hold as a local community" (Singapore Broadcasting Authority 1996a: n.p.). Putting aside for the moment possible motives, this notion of community values alone is not as easily identifiable as such a statement suggests. Considering Singapore's increasing social pluralism and the attempts by the PAP government to impose 'social cohesion,'

whose definition of community values is being used? In the case of Internet regulation, it is the SBA and thus the state that are determining community values.

I also find it necessary to ask: against what or whom are these safeguards defending? The government's statements about the introduction of the regulations suggest that the measures they put in place are to preserve the national culture against external contamination, invoking fears of globalisation-as-Westernisation-or-Americanisation. Yet, the state is not simply a buttress against global flows. It also actively plays a part in exploiting and furthering the interests of transnational corporations. The continued existence of the state, in certain contexts, relied on the maintenance of imagined community of the nation (Anderson 1991) but, as Hannerz has argued, it is now possible for the state to exist despite the "withering of the nation" (1996).

The Singapore Internet, does not, however, spell the decline of the state, rather, it is the close link between nation and state that is falling away. We are not observing the decreased power of the state in the face of transnationalism but the adoption of new forms of governance. This is a governance wherein transnational corporate interests and the state find points of convergence, where the existence of stable, small and apparently homogenous collectivities in conjunction with stable political administration and leadership enable an economically-responsive, and cohesive environment suiting transnational corporatism.

Popular thinking about globalisation often assumes an asymmetrical power relationship exists between small countries, such as Singapore, an island-state, and larger ones like the United States of America, which have the internal markets to support conglomerates and their worldwide industries. However, Anderson points out

that this asymmetrical relationship is a fallacy, especially in the case of "homogenous"[15] countries like Singapore, where:

> the sense of national solidarity is especially strong, making it easier for political leaders to ask for sacrifices without expensive coercion, to develop smoother industrial relations, and effectively to seek specialized niches in the international division of labour (Anderson 1992: 6).

My reading of Anderson suggests that the state can use this interdependency between homogenous cultures, the state, and the economic advantages for transnational capitalism, in favour of preserving a homogenous dominant culture. As Anderson (above) and Ulf Hannerz insist, transnational corporatism does not make the state obsolete. The Singaporean state has had its skirmishes with transnational media corporations. However, as recent history has indicated, the latter can be learning that there is more to profit from cooperating with 'peripheral' states like Singapore.

For the state itself, one possible motive for keeping such a strong control over the dominant culture, and preserving its homogeneity, is self-preservation. This is a defence against global pressures that would otherwise weaken its role as a central authority (for instance, economic, social and political developments) and arbitrator of public discourse and culture. In the case of Singapore, this is particularly significant. Since independence, this small country has had a strong discourse that places the state squarely in the driver's seat in regards to developments in the public as well as private sphere. Hence, discussions of discursive order and the elements of public discourse inevitably return to the state, even in instances where its role is peripheral. Added to this general need to retain its central position in defining and maintaining public discourses, there is also the anxiety of those who have a stake in ensuring that the political configuration remains the same as it has always been, more specifically, keeping the PAP, the party that has ruled Singapore since the nineteen-sixties, in government.

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[15] This description was applied by Anderson, not myself.

An illustration of this impetus can be found in efforts to tighten up on the Internet, including the gazetting of two websites, Sintercom and the Think Centre, and the introduction of amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Act (Rodan 2002), in 25 July 2001, less than three months before the date of the next elections were announced on 18 October.[16] Sintercom and the Think Centre were required to register as political organisations, significantly, the former, although not centred on political issues, was involved in political activism (including campaigning against the Internet regulations when they were first introduced), whilst the latter was more explicitly political and activist in scope. Both are hosted locally, and, during the previous elections, commented on issues and events as well as provided space for the views of opposition party candidates. The election law amendments banned all websites, except those of registered political parties, from promoting political candidates and parties. Any material promoting parties and candidates had to name the publisher, printer and person behind them, and the results of opinion polls and voters' exit polls could not be published until after the elections and voting. Appeals for funds are also not allowed, and whilst chat rooms run by political parties and candidates are permitted, they are required to keep logs of the chat messages. The penalties for violation of these rules are a maximum jail term of twelve months and a fine of up to one thousand Singapore dollars (Associated Press 2002; Wong 2001).

As Garry Rodan concludes, Singapore's Internet regulations, coupled with other regulations and practices, prevents the formation and organisation of independent interest groups which influence the political process:

> Although the Internet has been successfully used to criticize and spread information, there is a big distinction between this and its use to foster organized, collective political action. The Singapore government's strategy to limit the political impact of the Internet is based on this

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[16] Additionally, these were early elections as the deadline for holding the next elections was August 2002.

distinction and aims to prevent the Internet being harnessed to foster a civil society—an essential ingredient for democracy (Rodan 2002: n.p.).

Rodan's definition of 'civil society' and the failure of Singapore to realise this model is useful as a backdrop for the next section of this chapter:

> By civil society, I mean groups pursuing their interests and ideas through political action, either independently of political parties or in concert with them. In Singapore, this is illegal. Under the Societies Act, only groups registered with the Registrar of Societies as political associations can be involved in political activities.

This is, in my view, an accurate summation of the political situation in Singapore, and describes the boundaries of political expression and action in this country, and it is an important thing to keep in mind during the following discussion on resistance via the Internet.

4. Dissent and Alternative Media

While in the previous sections I discussed the power and control exercised on the Singaporean Internet community through libertarian and national discourses, in this section, I aim to demonstrate how this same power also allows or produces avenues and tactics for resistance. When discussing Singapore, it is common and reasonable to assert the dominance of the state over all areas of Singaporean everyday life, and it would be inaccurate of me to claim otherwise. There is an overwhelming amount of material on this aspect of Singaporean life in academic as well as non-academic, journalistic, or fictional (especially satire) writing.

Foucault's conception of power, which informs the account above, as well as Lee and Birch's (2000), was not merely one of power as repression and negation,[17] but was conceived positively as something that *produced* the cultural formations and social

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[17] In an interview with Pierre Boncenne, Foucault said of his studies of madness and the prison:
FOUCAULT … the question at the center of everything was: what is power? …
[P]ower, it was said [during the 1960s], is what prohibits, what prevents people doing something. It seemed to me that power was something more complex than that.
P.B. In order to analyze power, one must not link it *a priori* to repression…
FOUCAULT Exactly… (Foucault 1988: 102).

gradations of the society and epoch under study (McHoul and Grace 1997), including areas of resistance. This is also true of Singaporean society but it has been difficult for researchers to analyse this in a positive way. Firstly, in the public domain, overt and explicitly counter-discursive statements and actions are quashed in ways that reinforce the dominance of the national discourses they are working against. Secondly, the boundary between private and public is relatively indistinct in a country where there is a constant refrain that, because of the economic and political 'vulnerability' of Singapore, the personal choices of its citizens are critical to its survival and continued success. Therefore, Singaporeans have a minute range within which they can express disaffection and opposition. This account of areas of resistance on the Singapore Internet is accompanied, therefore, with emphatic qualifications as to its scope and tangible achievements.

Saying Singaporeans have a limited range of resistance, however, is different from saying that there is no scope at all. The latter, in ruling out resistance, is not only inaccurate, but works against progressive politics on a micro level, that is, one is asked to assume that the only option is to change the political structure and composition in Singapore,[18] a task that is daunting in the least. Such an approach needs to be balanced with an analysis of existing and potential resistance *within* the current political and discursive environment. I recognise that the following forms of resistance can only go so far without a corresponding change in the social, regulatory, and political environment. However, resistance and the potential for resistance do exist. Power is not something merely 'held' by the state, but is distributed and enacted at different levels in society, and, resistance is not something ruled out, even in an authoritarian society, but

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[18] Other avenues to press for deregulation and liberation, that is, participation in politics, as voters and campaigners, interest groups, media, and activism, are severely limited by strict regulation and policies introduced by the government, which, as mentioned earlier, has been dominated by the same political party since independence in 1965.

is created (at least in its forms and expression) by the operations of power. As Foucault has explained, the scope for resistance is built into power relations, using "precise strategies", we have the ability to 'modify the grip' of power in certain conditions, using clear strategies (Foucault 1988).

The Internet may not have altered the fundamental power relations in Singapore drastically, that is, making the form of government in Singapore much less paternalistic or more liberal democratic, which some of its citizens might like to see (and some others not). However, it has introduced new pockets of resistance and engagement that have persisted to this day.

The change in the political environment, as mild as it is, is evident when we compare the past with the present. In the past, dissent was expressed privately or covertly. This was because of a cautious conservative media environment and because public expressions of opinions and values running counter to the dominant discourse tended to be crushed firmly and just as publicly. It was also because it was possible to do all these things with the type of media structure and culture that was in place at that time. Singapore's laws also rule out publicly speaking with more than five people at one time without a license.[19] One of the most obvious changes since the advent of the Internet is the existence of spaces where people can discuss and critique with people outside their immediate familial, social, and other networks. It does this partly because its various applications straddle or slide between mass and private communication, able to form different kinds of communities simultaneously. For instance, email can be used for broadcasting to a large number of subscribers or for private communication between two persons.

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[19] Speakers' Corner, introduced in September 2000, is an exception in that one can simply register in advance. However, even this space is restricted: for instance, the topics of race and religion are not allowed. A local politician from an opposition party, Dr. Chee Soon Juan, ran foul of this rule and was arrested when he spoke on the banning of the tundun (headscarf) for females attending public schools and argued that, following the September 11 attack on American targets in 2001, Muslims in Singapore were being unfairly persecuted.

With the Internet, criticism of public figures and policies, political lampoons and jokes, and attacks on dominant values can leap from coffee shops, dinner tables and lunch time conversations between friends, to a wider audience of (usually anonymous) strangers. In the context of Singapore's political and social history, this is significant. There, on display in newsgroups and websites, are the assumptions, concerns, and views of one's immediate social circle shared (or questioned) by other members of society. Via the Internet, there are public forums and avenues of expression outside the technologically and politically-restricted traditional media of broadcast and print. This freedom of expression was not something Singaporeans had before (at least without quick and efficient reining in). Outside the conservative mass media and the skirmishes with opposition politicians, the most 'dissent' that one encountered in everyday life was through humour shared amongst friends or satire (especially in live comedic performances and theatre). Although an analysis of the psychological and social impact of these changes is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I at least should introduce this as an area needing future research.

The discussions and complaints generated in the websites and soc.culture.singapore paint a different picture of the stereotyped passive and unpoliticised Singaporean citizen to Internet users outside and within Singapore. That there is not much writing on this type of resistance is easy to understand: it is less 'externalised,' less quantifiable and more difficult to observe and analyse than the actions of the various social institutions (such as the state and the media organisations).

Also interesting is the way the rhetoric of the state and the media institutions have had to shift to adjust to this change, including talk of a more participatory 'civil society' model, and the implementation of feedback channels. As most commentators have rightly pointed out, this change may be merely cosmetic and does not signify fundamental changes in the conduct of politics and the way decisions are made in

Singapore. However, that the political (and other) institutions have had to change their language is in itself already a significant shift in the discourse.

4.1 Responses to Internet Regulation

An immediate example of resistant behaviour is the ways the SBA regulations were received in 1996. On Usenet news, for instance, in soc.culture.singapore, the newsgroups were flooded with complaints and speculation about the introduction of Internet regulation. Posters speculated about ways of getting around the requirements[20] and urged each other to complain to their Internet service providers or petition the government. In many of these posts, the libertarian discourse intersected with the discourse of regulation; those against the then-new regulatory framework cited familiar clichés about the Internet medium as a non-interventionist medium and tended to examine the state discourse with a great deal of scepticism.[21]

The margins of what is acceptable to say within this discourse is evident in statements like these:

> According to government pronouncement [sic], they accept that it is futile to try to block all pornographic sites but they must at least make an effort to block access to the more obvious sites. My sources say that it is a symbolic gesture to appease the more conservative segment of the population. That way, the easily disturbed can try to complain to the authorities to `ban' access to some obvious sites like playboy etc ('Thong Wei' 1998: n.p.).

> Well, SBA's got an impossible job to do. They were tasked [sic] in 95 to regulate the Internet and only came up with this hokey solution now. It's an election year with "concerned parents" ignorant of the Internet forming substantial numbers of the electorate. The government must appear to be DOING something. Hence Proxy [sic] servers with much media coverage. It doesn't actually HAVE to work … as long as people THINK it does ('chern ann' 1996: n.p.).

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[20] For instance, they discussed using alternative proxy servers outside Singapore.
[21] These observations are based upon my collection of material from the newsgroup during the 6 months after the introduction of the regulations.

In other words, Internet users like these recognise that the regulations have an ideological function: they do not actually *prevent* people from looking up 'undesirable' sites, as it is not possible to track, charge, and prosecute every single instance. Indeed, while some have rightly said that concerns over children's access to porn was used as a Trojan horse through which the introduction of regulations could be justified, the other side of the picture is that Singapore's standards regarding pornography and sexual codes of conduct are not directed by the state alone. Power and control is not something merely exercised by the state in this regard; rather it runs through the dominant discourse of Singapore and is reflected in the values of mainstream Singaporean society.

The responses that attribute, rightly or wrongly, a surveillance and control intent to regulatory policies can reinforce the power of surveillance, creating an atmosphere where subjects err on the side of caution rather than face possible punitive reprisals. These examples support the policies in that they repeat the logic that the censorship is more symbolic than actual. On the other hand, such responses in a way signify a rejection of the values and ideology of the state discourse, even if this rejection did not result in a drastic change in government Internet policy (much less a change in the make-up of the Singaporean parliament). They, paradoxically, voice something that most Internet users in Singapore already know—that is, that they *can* access most of the material (except the 'obvious' sites) and that, despite the increase in restrictions, there remains a gap in control which the hitherto all-powerful state is unable to close.

The Internet regulations and policy are liberal compared to regulations and policies governing other aspects of Singaporean life, for instance, education, transport, and so forth. In a country where unwanted behaviour and choices are unapologetically severely penalised, the Internet is comparatively open, taking into account the limits already discussed. The use of phrases like 'light touch,' the fact that people *can* still access 'undesirable' sites and newsgroups like soc.culture.singapore still feature, on a

daily basis, many messages that are highly critical of the dominant discourse and of the state, these indicate the extent to which the government recognises that traditional methods of controlling dissent are ineffectual. Government has had to shift and adjust its methods of operation to include this new dynamic. In the process of this reordering of the discourse, the environment has changed slightly. One poster to soc.culture.singapore remarks, in response to George Yeo's public acknowledgement of the difficulty of regulating the Internet:

> Alamak. Georgie? How? Took ya [sic][22] a real long time to realise that ya crappy SBA plan cannot control Internet hor? Last time talk kok so much that even ya YPAP I'net team had piles typing thoz crappy replies here in SCS trying to juztify ya crappy plan …
>
> … Now What? Trying to cover ya own backside again by accepting what all of us I'net oldbies and thoze at SIGNOC'S been recommending in practicing self-regulation hor ('SBAGLK' 1998)?[23]

Beyond the obvious ridiculing of George Yeo and the SBA's Internet policy, this resistant discourse is accentuated in the use of 'Singlish,' the uniquely Singaporean vernacular, which the state is attempting to discourage, especially in public communication (specifically in television and film content).

This may not be satisfactory to people who would like to see a more liberal Singapore, myself included, but I want to stress that, in a place like Singapore, it is rare to see anything more large-scale (in terms of liberalisation) than these kinds of minute transformations. Strategically, it would be an oversight not to work for, and recognise the significance of, such micro revolutions, especially as it seems that these are the most enduring and attainable in the short term. I include the following survey, therefore, to highlight similar 'minor' changes and to give them their due.

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[22] As this post is riddled with non-standard English spelling, vocabulary and grammar, I have not marked subsequent instances.
[23] As with some of the other posters, this is an adopted pseudonym, and the email address supplied in this message is not valid.

4.2 Escaping from the Gaze

In Singapore, the phrase, 'island-nation' is often used in a range of materials including tourist brochures, historical texts, and political speeches. There has always been a high degree of consciousness of the porous nature of its boundaries, and a redoubled effort to strengthen them. This is applicable both to the movement of people in and out of Singapore (residency, citizenship and so forth), as well as the flow of values and ideas. The Internet has become an important staging ground in which anxieties surrounding these flows of people and ideas are played out.

Singaporean laws controlling citizenship and immigration are governed by a discourse of pragmatism, for instance, economic needs. Dual citizenship is not allowed, and people are required to renounce citizenship in other countries to obtain or retain their Singaporean citizenship. For example, children born in England to Singaporean parents may obtain Singaporean citizenship, but to keep this, they must give up their British citizenship by the age of twenty-one and swear allegiance to Singapore. Strict policies surrounding foreign workers regulate who can and cannot remain in Singapore and take up permanent residency or citizenship. While residency abroad is tolerated because it is important for the conduct of business overseas, or the acquisition of significant skills, qualifications and experience, and, hence, the well-being of the Singaporean economy, there is, at the same time, a sense of betrayal and anxiety surrounding more permanent emigration, especially with references to the 'brain drain.' Since Lee Kuan Yew raised this problem (with a great deal of emotion), the predominant strategy has been to persuade Singaporeans to return, especially graduates. The argument goes, 'why be a second-class citizen overseas when you can be a first class citizen here?' In other words, emigrants would never, according to this discourse, be accepted and treated equally overseas, especially in countries where they would be racial minorities, so why emigrate? There is also the concern that, whether potential

emigrants or returned Singaporeans, people exposed to foreign ideas *contaminate* the country, and need to be reintegrated into the local sensibilities and practices. Since they were once outside the local discursive environment, they can (and have) potentially disrupt its meanings and practices, that is, the carefully maintained and buttressed discursive order.

The Internet, therefore, challenges the control of movement into as well as out of the country by facilitating more direct and immediate participation and interaction between Singaporeans in the country, with those living overseas, as well as non-Singaporeans. Of course, this was available through more traditional means. However, it is the combination of the Internet's speed, the way its various technologies can straddle and veer between public and private, mass, group, and individual, and, as pointed out above, how it can reroute around regulation that make it more powerful. Through forums like newsgroups, web bulletin boards, and email distribution lists, Singaporeans residing locally or based abroad, and non-Singaporeans likewise in Singapore or overseas, interact and exchange views on local as well as more international matters.

4.3 Increased Access to Overseas Media in General

One impact of the Internet on Singapore's media environment is the abundance of available overseas information sources. Singaporeans could always access newspapers and magazines, listen to the BBC and so forth, but the myth of 'the fragile island nation' and fear of contamination tempered this access with an awareness that these media could be taken away should they disrupt what was allowable in the public discourse. In the 1980s, for instance, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* was penalised for publishing unfavourable articles on the Singapore government. It was gazetted, that is, it was still allowed to circulate in Singapore, but only if all advertising content was omitted. This

restriction has since been lifted, but with the understanding that the response of members of the Singapore government must be printed in the news magazine. Another example, more to do with cultural policing and gender, was Cosmopolitan magazine. The authorities banned this magazine for women because it featured an article extolling the ways in which women could cheat on their partners.

In contrast, the censorship of the Internet in Singapore has been mainly symbolic and restrained to 'obvious' sites like *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. There are plenty of examples of content the SBA would normally define as a threat to the values, internal stability and culture of Singapore (also as defined by the prevailing discourse). The range of material that would normally be suppressed is immeasurable: alternative, and what mainstream Singapore would consider promiscuous and deviant, sexual practices and lifestyles, drugs, 'snuff,'[24] extremists, and so forth ad nauseum. With the broadband connections that are now widely available throughout the island, Singaporeans can download news items and other information, as well as television and films not usually available locally. Regulatory policies have delineated the boundaries of acceptability, however, the impracticality of monitoring what every user is downloading makes things difficult. A study by the Internet measurement firm, *NetValue*, reveals that Singaporean executives and professionals, along with South Korean students, made the most visits to pornographic websites in March 2001. More generally, Singapore, together with Taiwan, Hong Kong and other Asian countries, were relatively well represented as visitors to pornographic websites and spent the most time at these sites (Reuters 2002).

The Internet allows exploration outside the boundaries of prevailing truths surrounding the culture, politics, and values of everyday Singaporean reality. The

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[24] The slang, 'snuff,' refers to photos, videos, and other material depicting people dying usually violent deaths. Previously often used to refer to video material, and specialty video shops have a 'snuff' section, but has since been broadened to include a wider range of material. When the late Diana Spencer, formerly the Princess of Wales, died, the photos of the accident and her body were available on many of these websites.

examples I provide may not adequately depict the full range of ways in which communication, relationships, and behaviours escape the confines of acceptability in the Singaporean context. They do illustrate the need for research and analysis that goes beyond the 'top down' actions of the state and its stakeholders, and instead, critically appraise the interaction and negotiations that are occurring at the level of the subjects of the discourse.

4.4 The Contestation of National Discourses

One transformation has been in the newsgroups, as I have mentioned, and related technologies, such as web bulletin boards and email lists. These allow some measure of anonymity and freedom from the normal constraints placed on public speech in Singapore.[25] It is not surprising, therefore, that the 'truths' of Singaporean discourse are frequently examined in these areas. The posts do have varying degrees of coherence and sometimes do not come close to the democratic forum for rational debate idealised by liberal discourse. As is quite common in Usenet and other forums, 'flame wars' often break out where arguments descend into personal insults and depart markedly from the subject under discussion. The posters' viewpoints may be so polarised as to admit little conciliation. However, one interpretation of these patterns is that the very vitriol and antagonism of these posts demonstrate the underbelly of the national discourse, that is, the places where the truths are wearing thin.

Usenet seems to be the repository for posts that deconstruct the myths of racial equality and multiculturalism, the dominant version of national history, competent governance (by the PAP) in general and its associated tropes: meritocracy, the fragility of the country, the need to guard against social and cultural pollution, the legacy of Lee Kuan Yew and so forth. It is not hard to find posts exposing the tenet of 'racial equality'

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[25] A recent example is the arrest of Dr Chee Soon Juan, the leader of the Singapore Democratic Party (an opposition party), when he spoke in support of workers' rights outside the Istana on Labour Day after having been refused a permit to do so (1 May 2002).

as a myth that is not realised in everyday Singaporean life, nor of posts that question the near-deity status of the first Prime Minister (and current Senior Minister), Lee Kuan Yew. Sometimes, multiple assaults are conducted, witness this exchange:

> ['ckchow'] He [Lee Kuan Yew] once said Dhanabalan was capable of being Prime Minister, but that Singapore was not ready for an Indian Prime Minister. What happened to racial equality? How do you achieve that when the founding father of the nation can make a comment like that?
>
> ['Vincent'] Singapore happens to have about 75% Chinese to 5% Indians.
>
> ['ckchow'] I am one of the 75% Chinese, and still I fail to see why that should make a difference. Doesn't the Constitution say that there shall be no discrimination against citizens of Singapore in the appointment to any office, regardless of race? ('Lky a fool of his own mindless vindictiveness 2' 2001).

Here, the posters not only examine the myths of racial equality and Lee Kuan Yew's infallibility, but also begin to challenge the notion of meritocracy as an overriding principle in Singaporean politics and everyday life.[26]

While the newsgroup makes an interesting and lively study, other technologies are more popular amongst the general Internet community. In Singapore, surfing the Web, makes up about forty percent of time online in contrast to one percent on news groups. The next most popular activities are instant messaging (twenty-two percent) and email (nineteen percent), and Singapore is unique amongst the Asian countries surveyed in its fondness for chatting (eight percent as opposed to one percent for China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and two percent for Korea). These other means of communication and exchange play a significant role in Internet life in Singapore, as the following examples will illustrate.

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[26] This aspect of the newsgroup was noticed, and members of the youth wing of the party in government, the Young PAP (YPAP), played an active role posting messages that defended the policies of the government. Some posters found it sinister that the YPAP stopped posting shortly before introduction of the SBA regulations and returned to defend them. These Internet users set up a webpage calling for a boycott of the YPAP website and postings ('Bluesky' 1996).

Foremost because they address the subdued political opposition in Singapore, there are the websites of opposition party members and other people disenchanted with the party in government; one of these is Tang Liang Hong. During the 1997 election, members of the ruling party called him an "anti-Christian, anti-English-educated, Chinese-language chauvinist." After the election, he left Singapore, citing death threats as his reason. In the meantime, thirteen defamation actions against him were filed by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and nine PAP members of parliament, based upon his responses to the above characterisation. The court granted damages totalling 9.58 million Singapore dollars (5.65 million United States dollars at that time). He was subsequently charged with several counts of tax evasion.

In the past, the public account of this episode would have been left solely at the mercy of the conservative pro-government press and other media. As with other candidates in non-PAP parties like JB Jeyaratnam and Chiam See Thong (though less so in the latter case), there has been a steady assault on his character and little attempt to present his version of the events. Tang would have faded into obscurity, his name only to be fished out to remind dissenters of what could happen to them if they went too far and threatened the presiding configuration of Singapore society and politics. Aside from rumour, gossip, and a great deal of reading between the lines, it used to be extremely difficult to obtain information outside the official version.

At this point, it is pertinent to compare Tang's situation with Chia Thye Poh, a member of Parliament (Barisan Sosialia party) jailed indefinitely in October 1966 without trial under the Internal Security Act. An explanation for his arrest was given almost twenty years later in 1985 (Hamilton 1998; Porter 1998) when the then-Minister for Home Affairs and Law, Jayakumar, accused him of being a communist. Chia has consistently denied these accusations, no doubt one reason for his lengthy detention. After Nelson Mandela, Chia is the second longest (known) political prisoner having

served more than twenty-two years, mostly in solitary confinement. Twenty-five years old when he was detained, he was forty-nine when he was 'released,' that is, he was lodged in Sentosa (a resort island near Singapore) in a government house. Aside from being allowed to make day trips to the mainland and receive visitors, he was still under severe restraint, for instance, he was not allowed to make public statements, participate in organisations or get involved in political activities. In 1992, he was allowed to move to the city, and in 1997, to accept a fellowship in Germany. The remaining restraints were removed in November 1998, thirty-two years after his arrest.

Although the paths of their descent were different, that is, Chia was detained and not living overseas like Tang, they did share a similarity in that the outcome was a gulf in communication between them and the Singaporean public. Throughout that time, older Singaporeans knew about Chia, but younger Singaporeans had relatively less first-hand engagement with the person or the story. This situation allowed a monopolistic control over this history, that is, complete governance over the truths of the discourse pertaining to this issue and to the wider context of Singaporean history and its political and legal environment.

The change here is that Tang still has a voice and access that Chia did not have after he was detained and until he was released. The Internet has opened a window of opportunity: Tang had a website set up and his supporters have used email and the soc.culture.singapore newsgroup to provide a different account of current affairs and history. This website, last updated in November 1998, presents the legal documents, media reports and interviews surrounding these events (Tang 1998). At the time of writing, there is a more permanent website in English and Chinese that is kept up to date, with his own domain name, that is, www.tangtalk.com. These websites, as long as they remain available, make it less easy for people in power to exploit the erosive forces of time and memory, along with the dearth of information. As much as control over at

least the dominant narrative is maintained, the websites ensure this narrative is not the only one circulating in the public sphere.

In fact, Chia's story too is now available through the same means. When all limitations on his activities were removed, he was finally in a position to issue a public statement:

> … Under the Internal Security Act, the government is given the power to detain a person for as long as it pleases. There is no real safeguard against abuse of power. The Advisory Board under the Act has no power, and no court can question the subjective judgement of the minister. I was told that the only way out was to sign a statement prepared by the Internal Security department, otherwise I would have to remain in prison for long long years, but how could I sign a statement that is not true.
>
> During detention, the detainees can be subjected to all sorts of pressure and even torture. Though I was not physically assaulted, I had been put in dark cell and solitary confinement; and some of my fellow detainees[27] were abused, stripped or rinsed with cold water in chilled air-conditioned rooms. The Internal Security Act is a law that tramples on human dignity and strikes fear into the mind of the people … (Chia 1998: n.p.).[28]

This statement and other material on his history is available on the Internet, after over thirty years of muddiness and general silence from the local media and absence in the narrative of the nation's history. As I have said, I am cautious of declarations about the Internet as a liberalising force, but this example illustrates my point that it is important to acknowledge the potential of this medium for change, even small ones.

The material on Chia is archived at a website called *Singaporeans for Democracy* (SFD), www.sfdonline.org. This website, together with other ones like

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[27] In 1987, the Singapore government arrested sixteen people, saying they were Marxist conspirators. These included catholic priests, members of student unions, theatre producers and the criteria by which they were defined as 'Marxist conspirators' were arbitrary and seemed to be based on activities and views that were critical of the government and its policies. Some of the people released said they were given the treatment that Chia refers to in this statement, and that their release was dependant on their confessing to the charges.

[28] Because of the length of his imposed silence, the reader would please excuse me for including this lengthy quote. On a personal note, Chia was jailed even before my birth, and a hazy figure all through my life in Singapore. Therefore, his release and his finally being allowed to voice his own view of the events is a highly significant moment for me. It is also relevant, too, that this person with this history still has the will to push for reform immediately after more than twenty years of detention; a potent reminder that Foucault's model of power allowed for the possibility of resistance

Singapore Window, www.singapore-window.org, and *Sintercom*, forums.delphiforums.com/sintercom/start (formerly at www.sintercom.com), are attempts by Singaporean nationals stationed overseas and locally to address the paucity of political debate, vociferous activism, and independent local media in Singapore.

The self-declared aims of SFD are:

- To promote democracy in Singapore
- To present an alternative point of view to the propaganda churned out by the PAP
- To provide Singaporeans everywhere an avenue to express their opinion without fear of repercussion through a certain amount of Net anonymity (Singaporeans for Democracy 2002: n.p., as in original).

As is already clear in the above quote, SFD draws from liberal discourses and illustrates the relationship between the national and liberal discourses in generating resistance. In its introduction, it says that the site was set up because Singapore is not a democracy, and introduces a range of issues that go beyond the everyday gripes of locals about censorship, bloated bureaucracy, the rising cost of living, and political tyranny. The issues covered include criticism of the government's support of repressive regimes like that of apartheid South Africa and Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. The site also mentions the lack of transparency in the government's use of the country's cash reserves. It provides a robust collection of links to articles on current and past issues, including material on human rights abuses, corruption, media and law, as well as readers' contributions.

To varying degrees, these sites take advantage of Internet technologies to circumvent Singapore's normal cultural and political parameters. Firstly, there is the use of non-Singaporean hosts and domains. Running a network trace[29] on the address for

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[29] I used 'NeoTrace', a software application that traces the network path of a target node and retrieves information on the owner of all the nodes enroute. This has been acquired by McAfee and renamed 'McAfee Visual Trace.'

SFD, www.sfdonline.com, reveals that this site is hosted in Southwark, England, on a server provided by GreenNet. This organisation is a member of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC):

> The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is an international network of civil society organisations dedicated to empowering and supporting groups and individuals working for peace, human rights, development and protection of the environment, through the strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the Internet (Association for Progressive Communications 2002: n.p.).

The APC actively utilises the libertarian discourse of the Internet. SFD's reliance on this network illustrates the ways in which it employs the potential of this technology for transnational flows for social activism that would normally be difficult within the borders of a country like Singapore.

Sintercom, which I mentioned earlier, has had a rougher time then the SFD since the introduction of the regulations. In 1994, Tan Chong Kee, then a Singaporean PhD student in Taiwanese literature attached to Stanford University, set up Sintercom, an acronym for "Singapore Internet community." The site, like SFD, was originally hosted off-shore on multiple servers, for instance, on a Stanford University web server, as well as other locations (George 2000; 'Speaking your mind online without fear' 2001). The site included selective archives of soc.culture.singapore discussions,[30] analyses of state affairs and issues, interviews, as well as Singaporean jokes, recipes and so forth (George 2000). Other significant sections were added later. For instance, there was the section, 'Not the Local News,' which archived foreign media articles on Singapore, often critical, that the editors deemed noteworthy. There was also 'Not the Forum,' an ironical intertextual reference. The phrase, 'the Forum,' refers to the letters page of the Singapore newspaper, *The Strait Times*. This section displayed submissions to the

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[30] This was when massive newsgroup archives like Google and Dejanews were not available. As newsgroup postings were ephemeral as they were removed off servers worldwide as new posts came in, Tan wanted a more permanent form of storage.

Straits Times Forum that the editor either rejected or, if published, censored the author's text.[31] Besides the website, this material as also available via email subscription.

Sintercom became famous amongst Singaporeans, and groups that hailed this as an example of the potential of the new media to free people from national boundaries and regulations. Sintercom was founded on ideals of civil society and Tan, along with other volunteers, used their real names to show that it was possible to openly comment and debate national issues. In 1995, he was contacted by Philip Yeo, the head of Sembawang Corp, the group that had just started Pacific Internet (George 2000; 'Speaking your mind online without fear' 2001). Yeo offered him free web hosting on a Singaporean server and Tan moved his files to the Singapore server, registered the domain name of sintercom.org, and, for a time, Sintercom enjoyed a unique privilege as a kind of semi-official yet open Singaporean community forum and alternative news resource. It was held up by government ministers as an example of what they claimed was the Singapore government's loosening of restrictions on its citizens and climate of open debate. Further, a prominent link to this site was placed on the InfoMap, a government directory of Singaporean Internet sites (George 2000; 'Speaking your mind online without fear' 2001).[32]

For a while, it seemed that the status quo would remain the same. This was even after Sintercom members led the way in criticising the draft Internet Code of Conduct and Guidelines in 1996, leading to large numbers of Singaporean Internet users writing in and expressing their dissatisfaction. As mentioned earlier, the new code made the producers of websites responsible for content posted to the site. This would adversely

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[31] The open invitation on the website requested information on dates of submission, copies of rejection letters, if any, and, if letters were published but were substantially edited, copies of the original submission with the changes highlighted.

[32] It is quite telling that the link to the old Sintercom site still remains at the time of writing despite developments in 2001. Is this because it has not yet been updated or could it be a failure somewhere in the bureaucracy to come to a decision as to how to handle the demise and rebirth on foreign soil of an entity that served a useful function as an example of the government's liberalisation?

affect Sintercom's operations. Although the regulations were introduced in spite of their objections, Sintercom's status as a lobby group was indicated in its involvement in NIAC's process of industry consultation. This process led to the redrafting of the Code of Practice and Guidelines and the adoption of the so-called 'light touch' policy.

Sintercom was able to avoid having to register as a political site for a time, partly because of the range of material available, but perhaps also to avoid the ensuing negative public relations, as well as the difficulty of enforcement. Tan says that it was mainly because he told the SBA that he could always move the site to Yale or Stanford University, which would be embarrassing for the authorities, not least because of how they would look if they blocked his servers (George 2000; 'Speaking your mind online without fear' 2001). This state of affairs was to change in 2001, though, when the SBA sent a letter demanding that Sintercom register. Sintercom publicised this request online and wrote to the SBA. In the ensuing exchange, available through archives of the old Sintercom kept on the free server, Geocities, Tan sends the urls to the website, asking for the SBA to judge whether the past content complied with the regulation (Sintercom 2001). The response from the SBA is to quote the rules, that is, that website producers exercise their own judgement on whether their content complied with the guidelines. After considering his options and submitting the forms to the SBA, Tan announced that he would close down the site, inviting interested parties to contact him should they wish to take over. Along with the other volunteers, Tan felt that the situation might result in self-censorship as people, with the changed status of Sintercom, might be more careful about what they posted. Additionally, registration meant that the editors of Sintercom were exposed to legal prosecution should the government regard the site to be endangering the national interest. Tan said, when he outlined their options on receiving

the SBA request:

> Sintercom started overseas at Stanford University anyway, and moving it back to Silicon Valley where it started is very easy. The only problem is that going overseas will [sic] contradicts our belief that it is possible for openness to exist in Singapore, and that frank and open discussion of issues is good for the future of our country (Sintercom 2001: n.p.).

In this same text, Tan says closure would allow him more free time. In interviews and statements since the decision to close the site, he speaks of being tired and wanting to concentrate on his career and making money. However, the realisation that the movement of Sintercom out of Singapore would negate the editors' beliefs in the possibility of civil society in Singapore might have played a part in the final decision.

The SBA's move on Sintercom illustrates the workings of power surrounding the Internet in Singapore. It is significant that Tan lists, amongst the achievements he was most proud of, Sintercom's involvement in reporting the 1997 election (Sintercom 2001); conspiracy-minded watchers may find it interesting that the SBA's request was made the year before the next elections. Should Sintercom have gone ahead with the registration as a political site, it would find it difficult to function the way it did during the previous elections. For instance, the contributors and editors might have felt compelled to curb some of the statements they might otherwise make on national issues for fear that they would transgress the rather vague boundaries outlined by the SBA. If this line of thinking is correct, it illustrates the limits on civic society imposed by the national discourse. It was fine for Singaporeans to speak their minds and have an open discussion on national issues, as long as it did not actually affect the political outcome of elections. To put it more bluntly, the authorities would step in if analyses and criticism reached a point where it would result in less votes for the party in government. Of course, aside from the coincidence in timing and from the way the state has conducted itself in the past, this remains speculation.

The saga of Sintercom is also interesting because of developments since then. After a couple of people tried to keep it running on servers based outside Singapore, it was discontinued for a variety of reasons, including fear of getting into trouble with the Singapore government. However, Sintercom was finally reborn in the form of 'New Sintercom.' The new editor's real name is unknown; s/he goes by the name of 'Lee Kuan Few,' a play on Lee Kuan Yew,[33] the first Prime Minister of Singapore and current Senior Minister, and refuses to divulge any information (gender, occupation, location etc) that would help identify him or her. The site is hosted offshore in Sunnyvale, California, by Geocities, which is owned by the US Internet group, Yahoo. These measures enable the site to escape the regulatory requirements of Singapore, although the SBA could block the server, which could entail blocking a massive number of other sites hosted by Geocities. With rumours of further regulatory changes to come, it is unclear at this stage if Sintercom and other similar sites will be left alone for long. However, for the moment, the new Sintercom has reintroduced the features that were available before, except the food and 'Singaporeana' section which they have left out, and, with a forum open to visitors to air their views, the site is decidedly as political as before (if not more so).

Just as interesting are the sites that may or may not set themselves as overtly political but, in different ways, challenge, and work outside the margins of the public discourse. The formation of gay networks, resources and support groups online is an excellent example of this. Please note that the following discussion is not a comprehensive account of gay politics and culture in Singapore, nor is it an attempt to do this. Instead, the topic is explored to the extent that it illustrates how the Internet provides a means of working outside the boundaries of public discourse.

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[33] 'Kuan Few' also invokes how some Singaporeans, particularly people from certain Chinese dialect groups, may pronounce 'confuse', therefore, the meaning of the pseudonym can be read as 'Lee (as in Lee Kuan Yew) confuse[s]'.

While non-heterosexual lifestyles and activities are marginalised in many countries, including Western democracies, in Singapore, it has not reached the point where, in the media, and in mainstream culture, there is anything more than a tacit acceptance of the existence of gay men and lesbian women. Rarely is there a positive 'coming out' story, there are no festivals or marches that explicitly and publicly supports the rights of gays and lesbians and celebrate their existence in the community. There are nightclubs and other places widely-known to cater to gay men and lesbian women, but this is not explicitly spelled out and is, at the most, inferred in their marketing. The legal discourse reflects the general approach taken regarding this issue, mainly in the retention of a nineteenth century British law in Singapore statutes, that is, Penal code 377(A). This states, "Any male person who, in public or private, commits or abets the commission of or procures the commission by any male person of an act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years." Since independence, the policy has been not to prosecute cases of mutual consent involving adults, however, this law can be exploited by someone with malicious intent, and leaving it in establishes the norm and is a barrier for many gay men to speak out and declare their sexuality.

The general marginalisation of homosexuality in the dominant discourse is enacted in the Internet guidelines. Replying to a post to soc.culture.singapore complaining about the lack of concrete action undertaken against 'gay sites' and the toothlessness of the new guidelines, one person says:

> Even though I utterly deplore the homophobic inclination of the original post, the poster could hardly be blamed if even the government sees homosexuality as something to be curbed and minimised wherever possible. [cites the relevant section of the Internet Code of Practice] … Notice how both homosexuality and lesbianism have been defined as sexual perversions. I wonder whether this is the official position of the government or just that of the committee who drew up the SBA (Stanton 1996: n.p.).

As this poster points out, the social demarcation of homosexuality as something outside the boundary of acceptable and normal sexuality is reinforced by regulation, not merely in the retention of the colonial law, but in later texts such as the SBA Internet guidelines. As long as the latter remains, there is a case for saying that, policy and riders aside, gay and lesbian sexuality is still not accepted by the state. This is not to say that these social attitudes *stem* from the law, but that they work in tandem and reinforce each other.

This is illustrated in a couple of cases. One instance was the case of a sixteen-year-old student who faced pressure from his school when he put up a personal homepage declaring he was gay and included his school affiliation on the page. According to Au Waipang, a social critic on gay issues, the local tabloid paper, *The New Paper*, used sensational language and had several inaccuracies; this account relies on the narrative available at his website, *Yawning Bread*, which is based on information supplied via personal communication with the youth (Au 1997). According to this article, the school spoke to his mother days before the school leaving certificates were to be handed out, threatening to sue on the grounds of defamation. The mother, who knew her son was gay, did not know about the homepage and scolded her son, who thereupon removed the homepage. When the time came for the students to collect their certificates, his teacher withheld his, saying that they had to wait until the Principal came back from leave. When his father collected the certificate, he noticed the school had given a very negative report on his behaviour. He made a fuss and the principal changed it to a good report on the spot. His mother complained to the Ministry of Education.

When the SBA was contacted by the *New Paper*, they said that, firstly, they did not monitor personal homepages (not least because they do not have the resources), but acted on complaints from the public. Secondly, they had advised the school to take it up with the student. Aside from this, they did not clarify whether or not the homepage did

contravene their guidelines. I suggest that this is in keeping with the tacit policy of ambiguity in the interest of encouraging self-censorship.

As Au explains in his article, this case illustrates the multiplicity of attitudes in Singapore towards homosexuality:

> It seems to me from the foregoing, that attitudes towards homosexuality in Singapore are, far from being monolithically 'anti' [sic] as is commonly supposed, remarkably varied. Of course[,] there are the bigots like the schoolteacher and the 'Geddit' writer, but many others hold views which are multi-dimensioned. They try to balance their views with a sense of fairness, with a mother's loyalty to her son, with a grudging respect for a gay person's courage, and in the SBA's case, a degree of adherence to stated principles. At the same time, there is the all-too-human tendency to pass the buck (the SBA), sweep under the carpet (the school principal), and to self-censor (the lesbian[34]).

It is therefore important to stress that Singaporean attitudes to homosexuality are often negative, sometimes confused, and sometimes supportive. These attitudes can be found among gay and lesbian people as well (Au 1999b; Ng 1999).

Despite this environment, a positive study on the Internet and the Singaporean gay (male) community was conducted by Ng King Kang for his Masters thesis in Mass Communication at Nanyang Technological University, published as *The Rainbow Connection: The Internet and the Singapore Gay Community* (1999). Ng uses a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the Internet's role in the lives of Singaporean gay males.[35] He concludes that the introduction of the Internet accompanies significant changes in individual attitudes and behaviour, as well as a more active and visible gay male community.

As Ng himself said, there are problems with the sampling methods and the generalisability of his results mainly due to the sensitive nature of the topic and a general fear of surveillance in the wider community. His work identifies ways the

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[34] Tan is referring to another case covered in his article.
[35] Although Tan does not discuss the omission of gay women in his study, it is clear that he uses the term 'gay' to refer to men.

Internet that is useful to Singaporean gay men as a way of circumventing the limits of the public discourse, although there would be a problem with assuming, from this study, that their use of the Internet is always related to their sexuality. The Internet applications most frequently used by the respondents in Ng's survey were IRC,[36] Web browsing, and email. There are two main IRC channels that are used by gay men in Singapore, and these are #GAM (Gay Asian Men) and #GSG (Gay Singapore). These offer the opportunity to meet other gay men anonymously. As one participant in Ng's qualitative interviews says:

> There are not many official gay bars, pubs or clubs in Singapore. Hence[,] there is not much of a chance for gays to interact among themselves. I think IRC has opened up a whole new avenue for us. It has definitely given gay people some space to breathe and be themselves… IRC provides that special place were [sic] you can be who you are and you do not need to put yourself up to any real risk… (Ng 1999: 49).

The Internet assists in the initiation and development of relationships through IRC and email, which would otherwise be more difficult in the generally uncongenial atmosphere ('unofficial' gay pubs and nightclubs aside). This person continues on to say that he feels psychologically and mentally stronger, as he is now more accepting of himself, in part because he realises he is not alone and has a "space." Ng's interviews and surveys indicate that the Internet is important in facilitating a sense of connectedness to a wider gay community that would usually be difficult to do publicly. This is reminiscent of the notion of virtual community popularised by Howard Rheingold (1992).

Similarly, web sites put up by and for other gay men enable readers to gain exposure to experiences and issues in other countries, for instance, "societal and political treatment of gay people, sex, sexually transmitted diseases, popular hangouts, trends". Since the Internet regulations are unclear as to how they define content as

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[36] Inter-Relay Chat

"advocat[ing] homosexuality" (Singapore Broadcasting Authority 1996b and 1997), not surprisingly, non-Singaporean servers host all of the well-known sites run by Singaporeans. Ng identifies the following as the most popular amongst his respondents: *Yawning Bread* (www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/5738/), *Men on the Net* (www.menonthenet.com), *Utopia-Asia* (www.utopia-asia.com), *Aunty Teck's Home for Women in Asia*, and the GAM home page.

While a couple of these sites are pornographic,[37] other sites discuss current issues relevant to gay men (and women). *Yawning Bread*, for instance, features several articles mostly written by its owner, Alex Au Waipang, and guest writers. The articles, which discuss a wide range of issues, are outside the Singaporean margins of acceptable public discourse. Au and the other writers cast their gaze on them from a position that is also not common in the public domain, that is, they try to avoid objectifying gay and lesbian people as 'other' and instead occupy subject positions as gay men or lesbian women. Events in the press and other media are analysed, often providing details absent from mainstream coverage.

Au challenges another aspect of the Singaporean government's official line, that is, that homosexuality is accepted so long as gay men and women do not try to 'convert' others. He argues that this is a weak position because the notion of 'conversion' stems from dubious attitudes towards homosexuality and is difficult to define anyway. Using examples, he illustrates that even the consensus implied in this position is problematic. The case of the sixteen-year-old and his website demonstrates the complex range of community reactions that go beyond claims that Singaporeans cannot accept homosexuality (these claims are used to justify the retention of the Section 377A and the wording of the SBA guidelines). Coupled with the complexity of attitudes in the

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[37] This is not to say that viewing pornographic images and videos itself is not an activity that could be said to reaffirm identity formation and consolidation.

community, there is the reality of homophobia, especially in authority figures, as seen in examples of police persecution of gay men.

The Singapore government enforces the registration of clubs and societies through the *Societies Act*. Clubs and societies that are not registered are defined as 'illegal' and their members face the possibility of fines and imprisonment. For instance, a group of gay, lesbian, and bisexual, *People like Us* (PLU), was running informally in Singapore and becoming quite established, with as many as sixty attending the Sunday sessions. Because the group had noticed undercover agents attending their gatherings from early on, and to avoid sensationalistic media exposure, they decided to submit an application to the Registrar of Societies to formalise their organisation. The group submitted in November 1996 with the following goals:

> to promote awareness and understanding of the issues and problems concerning gay, lesbian and bisexual persons… [and to] (a) hold small group discussions, (b) conduct research, (c) organise social events and (d) circulate a newsletter among Ordinary Members and Associate Members (Au 1999a).

The application was rejected in a terse fashion without any reason. The applicants met with the same response through three appeals, including one to the office of the Prime Minister. It was only with the intervention of a Minister of Parliament, Simon Tay, that the group finally obtained a reason in 2000, more than three years later. The Registrar wrote that the rejection was made on the grounds of Section 4(2) of the *Societies Act*, that is, a society could be rejected if the Registrar thought that it was "likely to be used for unlawful purposes or for purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare or good order in Singapore." The group obtaining support from individual politicians, at least on the point that the Registrar provide them with a reason for rejection, was a small victory (Au 1999a: n.p.). It begged the question as to how the Registrar's office decided that the society could "be used for unlawful purposes" or threaten the "public peace, welfare or

good order of Singapore." This decision was reflected in the group's subsequent encounters with the authorities. According to the website, the ten men and women who were brave enough to submit their names, identity card numbers and other personal information to accompany the registration have "disbanded", as there was a likelihood of facing legal prosecution should these people continue to attend meetings after the rejection.

In 2000, Alex Au applied for a Public Entertainment License, mandatory for indoor conferences and talks, to hold a forum on gays and lesbians within 'Singapore 21'. Singapore 21 was a government-led initiative to develop the 'ideal' Singaporean society. The forum was to address the scheme's key ideas, that is, "Every Singaporean matters", "Strong families," "Opportunities for all," "Feeling passionately about Singapore," "Active citizens: making a difference to society". According to Au:

> The conference hopes to examine where gay and lesbian Singaporeans stand in relation to these aspirations. There are tensions between each of the five ideas and the gay minority, and in resolving these tensions may lie a source of future strength for Singapore society (1999a).

The Police Licensing Division rejected the application thus:

> I regret to inform you that your application is unsuccessful. The Police cannot allow the holding of this forum which will advance and legitimise the cause of homosexuals in Singapore. The mainstream moral values of Singaporeans are conservative, and the Penal Code has provisions against certain homosexual practices. It will therefore be contrary to the public interest to grant a public entertainment licence (Au 1999a).

The original PLU does not exist in a form that would legally expose its participants, and Au applied for the license personally. However, returning to the main theme of this section, these setbacks have not stopped members of the gay community in Singapore from continuing similar activities. Information on subsequent "PLU-inspired projects" is kept at the old PLU website at Geocities; mainly efforts to organise a "gay civil society" in Singapore, that is, network of support and social groups. The

PLU has filtered into the community, entering the Singaporean vernacular (although perhaps not in circulation outside the gay community):

> The term 'People Like Us' continues to be loosely applied to those who share the dream, including many who had not been involved in the early years of PLU. At the same time, its abbreviation 'plu' (pronounced like 'blue') has entered Singapore English as a proud local term for 'gay', as in 'we are plu' (Au 1999a)

The PLU performs a networking function, bringing together the individuals and groups in this area, as well as providing a resource for gays and lesbians looking for information. From this site, people can find information on gay and lesbian email lists and other online forums; advice on legal rights and Singapore law; information on homosexuality addressed to families and friends as well as to gay people themselves; religion and sexuality; "gay-friendly" medical doctors, lawyers and counsellors; and, 'face to face' support groups.

Besides the ones I have mentioned, there are other gay resources that I do not discuss in detail. There are email lists like SiGNel, a general forum for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Singaporeans and Singapore residents. Some of these lists cater to specific interests and groups. There is also an activist email list, plusg@egroups.com, with a more restricted membership. In the midst of these resources, while Au, Ng, and others are positive about the direction of Singapore social change and attitudes towards gay and lesbian people, given the discursive limitations, it remains to be seen whether the traditional resistance points will yield. For instance, positive changes to the penal code, amendments to the practices of the police and government departments, and a more enlightened public education programme, all seem far away at this time.

The legal restrictions and general attitude of the state proscribes the formation of interest groups that can more explicitly, directly, and publicly serve the interests of

bisexual, gay, and lesbian people. It is in this sense that the developments via the Internet hit a snag. In his review of Ng's book, Alex Au, discusses the use of the phrase, 'coming out,' by Ng's interviewees. The interviewees use the term in the context of divulging their sexual orientation to other gay people on the Internet, often using a nickname. Au's interpretation of this phrase is that it describes the process by which a gay person reveals to straight people that he/she is gay. Au asks:

> whether the internet [sic] truly encourages coming out. Or does it merely satisfy gay men in terms of their freedom to communicate within their niche, so that the need to deal with, to confront, society at large is actually reduced? Does the internet encourage escape rather than resolution? Does the compartmentalisation the internet enables augur well for the integration of gay people in society (Au 1999b)?

This is a reminder that the phrase 'virtual community' and the full range of meanings surrounding this term and the experiences it describes needs some examination in addressing the value of such formations and experiences on the Internet. Au's question, "Does the Internet encourage escape rather than resolution?" applies to the other forms of resistance I have discussed here and is not an easy one to answer.

However, it is quite evident that, despite limitations placed on their activities, the Internet has become a space which facilitates the growth and propagation of gay and lesbian groups and networks. These provide a source of support for many individuals, and the strength derived from such a collaborative network, might, hopefully, percolate through to the broader Singaporean society and go some way to positive legal, political and social change.

Finally, the Singaporean satirical humour sites also work the edges of the public discourses, in a different fashion. The state has not had a good track record for tolerance of social commentary, even masked in the form of satire. Amongst the sixteen people arrested in 1987 for taking part in the alleged 'Marxist conspiracy' (see footnote 27) were members of a theatre group, *The Third Stage*, specialising in social and political

satire. The reason given for their arrest was their connection with other members of the 'network.' This does not contribute to a secure environment for criticism expressed through humour and satire. Satirists and comics, are thus aware of the possibility that they may overstep the boundaries, and may calculate whether the consequences, if any, may be too severe for their liking.

The two most renowned sites for Singaporean humour are *Talking Cock* and *Mr Brown*. The phrase, 'talking cock,' is Singlish for 'talking nonsense,' either as a form of criticism (as in "That's ridiculous, you are talking cock"), in good-natured banter, and/or in the context of a casual social occasion, for instance, passing the time with a friend in a café (as in "We just met for lunch and talked cock for a while). It is a phrase more commonly used by males. *Talking Cock*, like the previous sites, is hosted offshore, this time at Huntington Beach, California. The owner, too, is based overseas in New York, and used to run the site anonymously. He has since revealed his identity, that is, he is Colin Goh, formerly a practising lawyer in Singapore and creator of *Concrete Jungle*, a comic strip published in the Singaporean tabloid, the *New Nation*. Goh is evidently aware of the legal and political limits he can work with, that is, so long as the site is regarded as humorous and not 'political,' it escapes the attentions of the authorities, as he points out below:

> Donno [sic][38] why also,[39] but there seems to be a tendency by the press to paint us as a political satire site.
>
> We wish to state categorically that we are NOT a political satire site.
>
> We are simply, a satire site. Politics is just one of the many things we make fun of…
>
> …We suspect that we're basically a victim of the view that the expression of any alternative viewpoint is necessarily a political statement, regardless of how frivolous the treatment or subject.
>
> That may be so, especially in a fibre-deficient and kiasu[40] society like Singapore, but only in the broadest theoretical terms.

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[38] As this excerpt is littered with Singlish (Singaporean English vernacular) slang and grammar, I am not marking every instance of non-standard English spelling and grammar.
[39] 'Donno why also' means 'don't know why it is the case'.

> We definitely do NOT have any particular social or political agenda except maybe that Singaporeans should relac[41] one corner a bit more, try to respect alternative views and opinions more, and eat more fibre.
>
> So, all you nice ISD[42] people, please put away your microphones and night vision goggles and spend your time doing more important things like tend to your air-conditioners[43] (Goh 2001).

This statement is placed at the end of a string of articles written about the site describing it as a political satire site. An almost identical one is included in the site's own self-description. The emphasis here, and the reference to the ISD, indicate that the people behind the site are keen to avoid being asked to register as a political site with the Registrar and face similar issues of self-censorship and liability as the old Sintercom had to confront.

The people behind the site, perhaps intentionally, omit to point out that some forms of humour are subversive. Indeed, a similar criticism raised by Au against Ng's proposition earlier has at least a little validity here, that is, websites and humour act as a safety valve. They release the built-up conflict and tensions created in discursive processes and thus are often part of what is allowable within its confines. Yet, to stop at this would be to overlook the other operations of humour and satire. Freud analysed jokes and their roots in the unconscious. He suggests that some forms of jokes allow an assertion of the ego against repression and can be a form of rebellion against authority (Freud 1963). On a societal level, Henri Berson describes the implied community and power of laughter:

> [this was the] conspiratorial power of laughter, by which society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it … The function of laughter is to intimidate by ridicule … Laughter is always the laughter of a group;

---

[40] 'Kiasu': adjective, literally means in Hokkien, 'scared to lose' but used by Singaporeans to refer to: excessive keenness to take advantage of special advantages; observing regulations and conditions in excess of the requirements; or working to an extreme degree. This behaviour is deemed by Singaporeans to be typically Singaporean. Examples include: someone overloading a plate during a buffet (smorgasbord), a student preparing an assignment way in advance of the deadline, queuing up in the early hours of the morning to obtain a special discount, and so forth.

[41] 'Relac': 'relax.'

[42] ISD: 'Internal Security Department', Singapore's version of ASIO or the FBI.

[43] Another reference to the claims of former political detainees that, while under questioning, they were doused with cold water and questioned in very cold air-conditioned rooms.

however spontaneous it seems, it always implies a kind of freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary (1900 cited in Larsen 1980: 2).

Likewise, Fletcher's definition of satire emphasises the requisite sense of shared norms and understanding of the reality under ridicule:

> Satire, as the term is defined here, is verbal aggression in which some aspect of historical reality is exposed to ridicule. It is a mode of aesthetic expression that relates to historical reality, involves at least implied norms against which a target can be exposed as ridiculous, and demands the pre-existence or creation of shared comprehension and evaluation between satirist and audience (Fletcher 1987: ix).

In this sense, then, especially in Singapore's authoritarian setting, with the tight controls on public communication, jokes release (and reveal on analysis) the thoughts, attitudes and ideas, that would otherwise remain unvoiced and suppressed. Jokes also rely on a sense of imagined community, a shared understanding of the patterns in society and aspects of historical reality that are being held to ridicule.

While *Talking Cock* may not officially confine itself to political commentary, its jokes, varying in intensity and depth, are generally addressed to the prevailing discourses in Singaporean society, discourses which the state and other institutions play a large part in maintaining and propagating. The process of sharing jokes reinforces a sense of unity with the imagined others, and the Internet site heightens this by blurring the boundaries between private and public, mass and personal communication, between producers and consumers of meaning. The avenues for readers to contribute to the site (and access these contributions), either in the form of their own satirical pieces or feedback, strengthen this sense of shared community. Next to the link to each article is the total number of 'reads', that is, the total number of times the article has been accessed. This is not an accurate indicator of the number of people reading a particular article, the counter is triggered even if someone accesses the page more than once and does not keep track of the circulation of each article when it is forwarded by email or

shared in other ways beyond the website. However, some totals are over seven thousand giving a sense of a large unseen community of readers sharing the same material and, perhaps, with similar attitudes to the governing discourses in Singapore.

Talking Cock's content is organised into sections, for instance, there is a 'News' section, which includes subsections like the 'Local News', 'International News', regular columns like 'Dear Ah Beng', 'Lim Peh Ka Li Kong', and a 'Features' section, including the popular 'Coxford Singlish Dictionary'. Each of these lead to current and past pieces: for instance, in the local news section, the reader can find articles with headlines like 'Long Queues May be Due to Terrorists, ISA Warn', 'Master Teachers Demand Servant Teachers', and, the article with the most 'reads', 7,667 at the time of access, 'Top Ten Reasons why your NRIC[44] particulars are needed when you buy an EZ Link Card'. The following passage from an article by 'Dan Kok' and 'Kway Png', 'ISD Museum a Hit', is an example of the kind of humour and commentary that can be found in *Talking Cock*:

> With the Heritage Centre, Mr Wong said, the ISD took a step towards demystifying its work.
>
> "So that the public will support our work, we have to let them see that what we do is crucial to the stability of our nation."
>
> Mr. Wong then gestured to some security threatening artifacts [sic] such as political banners, chewing gum, and copies of Cosmopolitan magazine.

As Larsen remarks, "[j]okes may not be able to topple a dictatorial regime; but there is one important point which adds to the effectiveness of political humour: the oppressors have no defence against it. If they try to fight back they appear only more ridiculous" (1980: 3). *Talking Cock* takes advantage of this, as is evident by the choice of name ('talking nonsense') and the site description, although its situation is more

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[44] The 'NRIC' is Singapore's identity card, mandatory for all Singaporean citizens and permanent residents. It holds details such as one's date of birth, thumbprint, and blood type, photograph, address, and so forth.

complex. Larsen goes on to say, "Furthermore they cannot punish the perpetrator. … Since anti-authoritarian jokes exist mainly in the ephemeral element of the spoken word … the angry rulers would hit only the empty air if they lashed out at them." The Internet itself may often be ephemeral in the sense that the content of websites change and move in a way that material printed on paper cannot. However, in comparison to the spoken, unrecorded word, websites can also be enduring and concrete, archiving material in a form that does not decay over time. As said earlier, *Talking Cock* concretises and publicises ideas and attitudes that used to circulate in a more transient and intangible form. However, there is no cause for concern for those involved with the website as long as the Singaporean Internet regulations remain the same because: the site has a policy that all contributors use pseudonyms; is owned by someone based overseas; and, is hosted on offshore servers. All these allow the site to record and keep its material in circulation whilst remaining out of reach of anyone that might want to bring them to order.

In the process of discussing resistance and the Internet, due to economies of length and time, I have omitted a number of other sites like the *Think Centre* (which faced similar problems as *Sintercom*), *Mr Brown* (a satirical site which has not been updated for a while). This is, thus, not a comprehensive account of all Singaporean counter-discursive sites. My main aim is to show how resistance can work within the limits set by the state by employing some of the avenues offered by Internet technology. In this section, I have foreground the agency of some marginalised and suppressed groups within Singaporean society. The far reach and structure of the Internet network, the availability to locate and maintain websites offshore, the complicity of libertarian groups that make available Internet services for activist groups, the ability to conduct this work anonymously, these features allow some form of public questioning and undermining of the received social and political reality of Singaporean society.

4.5 Limitations

The Internet facilitated the widening of the field of Singaporean public discourse and tested its limits. Nevertheless, the examples of sites of resistance sustained through the Internet are very limited in a number of ways. On their own, they do not point to wide and substantial social change and are modest in their scope. The use of satire, for instance, is powerful in the sense that it allows people to explore subjects and attitudes that would be inexpressible in a more candid form. Paradoxically, satire is limited for the same reason it is powerful: it undercuts its opponents but leaves them standing anyway. The humorists (and the forms and content of satire) who survive are the ones who are judged to be ultimately harmless, if occasionally close to the bone.

Similarly, the hosting of these sites overseas, and the anonymity of some of their contributors and producers, in the same way limit while they liberate. The old Sintercom, for instance, was built on the premise that Singaporean society and its authorities could accommodate debate and critique within a site hosted locally and managed and owned by named citizens. Its demise and rebirth as New Sintercom, sited overseas and with anonymous participants, not only suggests that Singapore may not be ready for the ideals of civil society shared by its former members, it also defines the site as officially 'outside' and marginal. In other words, the forms of discussion and content on the site are marginalised rather than integrated into wider Singaporean society.

More generally, Au's point about the Internet being an avenue to escape the exigencies and strictures of everyday life, rather than confront and attempt to change the social environment, tallies with Garry Rodan's position on the dearth of Singaporean civil society. This is a result of the continued hold of the state on many facets of Singaporean life, including its political scene, administrative and justice system, economy, education, and society, ample reason for general apathy amongst the population. Amongst Internet users, while the networking, communication

and exploration of marginal and resistant discourses is a step towards reform, this has limited effect if it stops short of changing oppressive institutional practices and discourses.

One case in point is the arrest of Robert Ho, a former journalist turned activist. Ho posted articles under a pseudonym to soc.culture.singapore and SFD alleging that PAP government politicians breached election laws by banning people from lingering within two hundred metres of polling stations. He urged people, including opposition politicians, to lodge a protest by doing the same during the current elections. Facing a maximum penalty of three years in jail if convicted of the charge of inciting civil disobedience and violence, Ho's charges were dropped when his wife agreed to send him for outpatient psychiatric treatment. The panoptic effect is evident: firstly, the authorities were able to identify the poster of these articles (the SFD allege that Ho's account was monitored), and, secondly, Ho's call for action failed in that there are no accounts of people entering polling stations illegally (Morris 2001).

Finally, while the proportion of Internet users in Singapore is sizeable (see figures quoted earlier), this is still a group of relatively privileged, well educated, predominantly English-speaking, and mainly male, users. How much do these sites of resistance reflect the interests of the upper-middle and upper classes, not least in that they are often run by members of these classes, neglecting the welfare of those less privileged? One hardly finds, for instance, criticism of the state's paternalistic policies, and, *Talking Cock*, in dealing with the topic of 'foreign maids' tends to focus on the materialism and selfishness of Singaporeans, and pay relatively less attention to the poor working conditions and treatment of 'foreign maids', notably employed by the upper-middle classes and above. A common problem with liberal discourse in general, such blind spots exist in the areas of resistance on the Singapore Internet.

5. Conclusion

The Singapore case illustrates the limits of both the (libertarian) Internet and state discourses, in the 'truths' they propagate about the Internet and in their positioning as opposing, separate discourses. The 'light touch' policy, in its inclusion of industry consultation and in advocating self-regulation, recruits the libertarian discourses of the Internet for the ends of the state and its institutions. To a certain extent, too, discourses surrounding cyberspace that affirm its potential as a place which transcends national and cultural limits, without attendant wider social change, mask fundamental problems in society.

On the other hand, the existence of sites like SFD, *Singaporeans for Democracy* and so forth demonstrate the possibilities for resistance, even within the regulatory environment introduced since 1996. These are, to a large measure, enabled by the technologies of the Internet. However, they are also aided by the very libertarian discourses that are behind overseas organisations providing services such as free or low cost Internet services to activists, discourses that provide the vocabulary and ideas inspiring these people and groups. Practices like the use of pseudonyms and other techniques to hide the identities of producers and contributors and the use of multiple methods of distribution and participation (e.g. newsgroups, email, websites, IRC chat, and web forums) are drawn from established Internet culture. Through these methods, Singaporeans are now able to explore ideas that were previously out of reach or dangerous, to investigate outside the margins of the dominant, state-sanctioned, discourse, and even establish virtual communities and networks in these neighbourhoods, rather than keep within the ones approved by the authorities.

These forms of resistance are, however, limited, as long as the economic, legal, social and political frameworks that maintain the wider pervasive discourses remain in place. However popular they may become, they are still marginal discourses, and still

remain inadmissible, to be hidden from the local non-Internet public spaces. In addition, the Internet's lauded ability to sidestep regulation is cannot be taken for granted and, indeed, in the case of Singapore, in the face of other cultural regulation, can be reduced in its influence. In the face of ongoing discussions of global and regional agreements on cyberspace regulation, copyright battles between corporations over P2P file sharing, the dismantling of anonymous email services like anon.penet.fi, and other developments, statements on the supposedly integral features of the Internet can no longer be made with as much confidence as before. This is more so after the 11 September terrorist attacks and the current climate prioritising security over privacy and the rights of individuals.

This chapter has focussed on the context of state agency and regulation in discussing the alteration, maintenance, and resistance to, the national discourses on the Internet. The next chapter pays closer attention to how dominant discourses interpellate and structure the interaction of Usenet participants, overriding claims that Internet users are freed from the positioning and forms of subjectivity that occurs through visual (and other) markers of identity.

CHAPTER TWO

Look! A Racist: Fanon and the Racial Politics of Flaming

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Subject: Asians don't stink, but their culture sure does.
From: 100351.3267@compuserve.com (Alan Peyton-Smith)
Date: 1996/10/23
Message-Id: <54k7ke$j7t@reader1.reader.news.ozemail.net>
Newsgroups: aus.politics,soc.culture.australian,soc.culture.hongkong,soc.cultu
re.china,soc.culture.taiwan,soc.culture.japan,soc.culture.korean,soc.culture.m
alaysia,soc.culture.singapore,soc.culture.asean,soc.culture.thailand,soc.cultu
re.indonesia

Reality time, folks.

It's not that Asians are ugly and they smell, that's got Pauline Hanson and
most Australians woried, because they aren't, and they don't.

They aren't ugly, and they don't smell.

But I tell you what, there are certain aspects of their culture which are both
ugly and smelly.

Since WWII, it seems that Asian countries, especially Japan, have  done a
magnificent job of "catching up" with the technology-based Western
civilization. Largely, they've done it by becoming great  imitators.

Well, not quite. They've done a great job of imitating the very *worst*
aspects of Western civilization, such as rape-the-earth-and-exploit-the-
workers feral capitalism. Oh yes, they have surpassed their teachers in that.

But what about the more *meritorious* aspects of our culture, such as
presumption of innocence, fair trials, freedom of speech, human rights,
democracy, accountability of public officials, seperation of church and state,
protection of minorities, prevention of police brutality, freedom of the
press, freedom of religion, etc etc?

Some Asian countries pay lip service to one or two of these ideals, but it
seems to me that they do so with a singular lack of enthusiasm.

But not all Asian countries are backward and brutal, so they tell me. Our
closest neighbour, Indonesia, is, they tell me, one of the more enlightened
Asian cultures. You gotta be kidding. This is the country that will not allow
Megawati's pro-democracy movement to exist. In Indonesia right now, the
Moslems are burning Chinese houses of worship. And how can we forget the 2
decades of holocaust in East Timor? While the average Indonesian citizen just
sits there and  allows it all to go on.

If that country and its people are being put forward as examples of the most
enlightened Asian culture, THEN GOD HELP US, WHAT MUST SOME OF THE OTHERS BE
LIKE?? Why would any intelligent Australian want our culture polluted by that
type of culture?

But, we accept immigrants from some of these countries. Come to Australia, we
say. We won't force you to leave you barking-mad religion and culture behind,
we don't care how barking mad it is. Oh no. We have multiculturalism, we want
you to *keep* your barking-mad culture and religion alive, we will *PAY YOU*
to keep your barking-mad culture and religion alive!!

Pauline Hanson has never said that she's worried about the colour of anyone's
skin. No. It's their culture, and their religion.

"They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not
assimilate."

Pauline Hanson is right. I believe we must preserve our culture at all costs.
It is worth preserving

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"He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from
oppression; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will
reach to himself." -- Thomas Paine ('Alan Peyton-Smith' 1996a: n.p.)
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Transcript 1: The First Post

CHAPTER TWO

Look! A Racist: Fanon and
the Racial Politics of Flaming

1. Introduction

> Our cultures are pretty much alike, according to your definition of
> culture anyway. The only things which differs from [sic] you and me is
> my skin colour and the colour of my hair, and that is the reason why you
> don't want Asians here ('Core' 1996).[1]

"Asians don't stink, but [sic] their culture sure does!" This is one of the messages in a

flame thread on Usenet[2] that caught my eye when undertaking the pilot research for this

chapter (a transcript of the first post appears above). I was surveying the range of

messages explicitly about race on Usenet, and especially the phenomenon of flaming

and the part it plays in race relations on Usenet. After a year following flames in the

soc.culture.singapore and soc.culture.australian newsgroups, I selected this thread

because it began with a post presenting itself as supportive of the views of independent

Member of Parliament, Pauline Hanson, the subject of controversy at the time I was

collecting data for this chapter.[3] In addition, the subject title itself is a totalising and

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[1] Punctuation, spelling, and grammatical mistakes are commonplace on the Internet, particularly in
Usenet and Chat messages and I will be refraining from acknowledging individual instances. For ease of
reading, I have occasionally reformatted lines and trimmed off extra line spaces. Where I have retained
the errors of the original source, I usually indicate this by inserting 'sic' or 'as in original' in the
parenthetical reference. Analysis of the form of Usenet messages have been exhaustively done elsewhere,
and are not the main focus of this paper, although it should be noted that 'looking' in Usenet also
includes the way messages are presented. For instance, a poster that uses all capitals in their message is
looked upon as a 'newbie', someone who is too lazy to type upper and lower case and is unaware of the
'netiquette' that using uppercase is rude and constitutes shouting.
[2] Usenet newsgroups are akin to notice boards, anyone can put up a message and that message is
available for anyone that comes across it to read, except that they exist as databases. A useful document
defining Usenet has been compiled by various authors and posted regularly on Usenet itself, copies are
also kept at web sites (Salzenberg, Spafford et al. 1994). 'Flames' are a slang term for replies on Usenet
or email distribution lists using inflammatory and highly insulting language in order to hurt (burn) the
other person.
[3] Pauline Hanson entered Australian national politics as a member of the Liberal Party and was
disendorsed by the party because her views on Asian migration and Aboriginal people were considered
so racist and right-wing as to potentially damage its image. She formed her own party, One Nation, and,
for a time during the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, her and her party were prominent in media
reports and the national consciousness.

homogenising statement, inviting and provoking comment. It makes a distinction between the body and culture using a verb that itself, describing an olfactory characteristic, is very 'bodily-oriented'.

This study of the Usenet newsgroup thread has the following purpose: to analyse in detail the issue of visual difference and the margins of debate in Usenet postings about race. In this chapter, I ask: what are the differences and convergences between the visual image and the written text, and, more specifically, between the encounter on the street and the encounter on the Usenet newsgroups? What power relations are implicated in the Usenet encounter and processes of racialisation?

Perhaps the so-called 'information age' has magnified the global circulation of racial and cultural stereotypes that objectify and limit those positioned in the margins of discourse. The reverse of this is that we could be at the threshold of an age of dissolving centres, where those previously at the margins of discourse can finally participate unfettered in constructing meanings. This chapter addresses these questions through an examination of how the racialised 'other' may be objectified and denied full subjectivity when 'looked' at by the self, and, how the latter achieves their own subjectivity in the process. The possibility that these relations may be altered (perhaps not for the better) with the advent of new modes of discourse using new technologies is discussed. Hence, I consider the question of identity on the Internet; the claims of invisibility on the Internet are examined using ideas from Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1970) and through the case study of 'flaming' on Usenet newsgroups.

1.1 Visuality

The idea of invisibility, that is, the notion of "On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog,"[4] is often seen as one of the reasons for the phenomenon of flaming and

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[4] This originated from a famous cartoon of a dog facing a computer screen and keyboard saying this to another dog.

experimenting with identity on the Internet. The customary delineation of the visual and the written word from each other forms the basis of this assumption of invisibility, and is a binary I contest. For, amongst other things, 'invisibility' forms the basis of the claim that the medium of the Internet allows the participation of those from the periphery for the first time without the danger of prejudice. Invisibility in Usenet encounters is presumed (but is challenged in this chapter) because of the mediation of the written word and the possibility of masquerade and anonymity. For example, one participant, accused of belonging to a culture that produces racists, responds:

> You fail to see such a simple argument and instead have now criticised my culture without even knowing my background. You obviously assume I am Australian. Well, I'm not! Wouldn't it be interesting if I was from the same cultural background as you? You would then have attacked your own culture ('Car Son' 1996).

In Usenet, identity cannot be ascribed by appearance; the bodily identifiers people depend on to position others are supposedly stripped away, allowing tactics like the above, where one can play with one's identification and gain power in so doing. Whether this necessarily empowers marginalised people is another point. In apparent contrast, Fanon identifies the *visual* encounter between self and other as a process of violent inscription: the body of the other is fixed in the gaze of the white discourse, the 'I' of the colonialised subject becomes othered. Fanon says: "I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance" (1970: 82).

Fanon's thought applies to more than just a physical encounter with the racial other and discursive constructs like race do not vanish in the advent of a new technology. Even without recourse to a visible, epidermal difference, there still exists systems of positioning subjects in the discourses used, maintained and negotiated in society at large, and thereby, the Internet. For instance, a person's sanity (or lack

thereof) is defined through a variety of exhibited behaviours and responses. H the person is treated depends on the diagnosis, not just within the medical field, but in the legal system, and by their relatives and friends.

Fanon uses a semi-autobiographical mode of writing to illustrate the process of objectification; he speaks of his entry as a subject in search of meaning and explanation, "I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world…" (1970: 77). However, instead of remaining a subject, he is inscribed as an object, "and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects." Fanon is writing about how the body of the black man is inscribed by the gaze of the white self and thereupon fragments, unable to sustain itself, "I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self". The colonised other is denied full subjectivity and instead is an object; in contrast, the coloniser not only gains wholeness but his or her race is not prioritised as the main means of identification.

Fanon is identifying a problematic that is encountered in the way the periphery is returning to the metropolis, the movement of people from the ex-colonies to the colonising centres. These developments entail the physical encounter of the other not only in the peripheries, but also within the metropoles, hence, the encounter of the imperial gaze and definition of oneself as an other. He says experiencing oneself as other happens in encounters with those of a 'different race.'

Fanon's thought is an amalgamation of ideas. Stuart Hall describes Fanon as being engaged in a three-way dialogue with psychoanalysis, Hegel, and Sartre (1996). From psychoanalysis, Fanon adopts Lacan's mirror phase: the mirror phase's recognition of lack that triggers the fissuring of the subject is applied to the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Hence, the separation of self from the other and subject from object has its roots in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

This self-other problematic is also an echo of Hegel's description of the master-slave dialectic in which the self defines itself in relation to the other and, in the process, marginalises the other. Hegel suggests that:

> Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself*. This has a twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self (Hegel 1977).

Hegel's view of subjectivity as dependent upon the demarcation of a self from an other forms the basis of Fanon's existentialist angst, wherein the colonised other is split by the gaze of the colonial self.

Finally, even this deployment of Hegel is mediated by Sartrean existentialism, which involves a violent possession of oneself by the other. In existing for others, one is emptied out and one's being is mastered. According to Sartre, "the Other is for me simultaneously the one who has stolen my body from me and the one who causes there to be a being which is my being" ('me' being the subject) (Sartre in Hall 1996: 29).

On the Internet, such collisions between subjects are more frequent, because of the compression of time and space that accompanies such globalising media.[5] The question addressed here is how different can these electronically-mediated encounters be from the physical one that Fanon writes about, for Fanon focuses on the look, on the visibility of his difference. The distinction is not so clean – just as discourse regulates physical encounters and interpellates subjects, so does it likewise affect the textual[6] domain of the Internet, particularly in Usenet newsgroups, and racial identification occurs in a different mode from the visual marker of skin colour.

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[5] While there is a time lag when retrieving data from remote servers, still there is a sense that one is 'visiting' a location in space without actually moving – that space in between the locations appears compressed. I would hesitate to claim that this means that spatial distances and geographical locations do not matter. Access and speed of information flow are not equally available to all.

[6] Here, the word, 'textual,' is used to refer to writing, not to cultural texts, that is, units of meaning formed from the interaction of audience and signifiers and inclusive of pictures, sounds, and anything that is capable of conveying meaning.

1.2 Fragmentation of the Subject: Cyberspace

Fanon's preoccupation with how black people are judged on their skin colour highlights the exteriority of the mode of identification he writes about. The subject's entry into the interactive[7] space of the Internet is similar in that the subject negotiates the encounter with the perception of oneself as 'an-other' being. However, this process of identification is complicated by the apparent feature of the Usenet newsgroups where one can not only post freely, but can choose how to identify oneself[8] without the exterior identifier of skin colour. Features like this lead authors like Sherry Turkle to declare that:

> In cyberspace, we can talk, exchange ideas, and assume personae of our own creation. We have the opportunity to build new kinds of communities, virtual communities in which we participate with people from all over the world, people with whom we converse daily, people with whom we may have fairly intimate relationships but whom we may never physically meet (Turkle 1995: 9-10).

Turkle's work is based on her study of multiuser domains (MUDs), which differ from Usenet in that MUDs are a form of simultaneous communication; a kind of virtual reality where one can 'enter' as a character, create 'objects', and interact with other users logged on at the same time, all through written description or sometimes graphics. However, it is possible to identify common tropes in Usenet, including the absence of the physical signifier of the body permitting the construction of identity via written text.

Performing the self in the form of written text facilitates the notion of the decentered, multiple and non-unitary self. This is partly a result of the way personal computer operating systems have developed, particularly 'windows', first seen in the Macintosh operating system and then Microsoft's Windows software. According to

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[7] The space of the Internet as interactive in the sense that a person can place a message which many can read. The 'audience' are also potentially producers of messages in reply, communication is not one way but possibly multi-directional. In such a space, one's identification by other users returns upon oneself and contributes to one's articulation of identity.

[8] It is possible to 'spoof' (i.e., mimic) the email address from which one is posting and hence make it difficult for others to identify where one is from. Even so, the domain from whence one is posting does not correspond to race or nationality, although people sometimes make this assumption.

Turkle, windows "have become a powerful metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple, distributed system" (1995: 14). She writes of different windows as metaphors of different user selves distributed across the windows, one window for work-related files, another for home or personal interests, and so on, all these selves operating simultaneously on the screen.

Windows enables the display of 'spaces' containing different priorities, aspects of the self and their everyday life. On Usenet, using either a browser or software developed specifically for newsgroups, it is possible to read, post, and jump between channels, displaying them at the same time (size of screen and design of software permitting) in multiple windows. The organisation of Usenet into different newsgroups encourages the impression of partial publics devoted to specific topics or interests; this, combined with windows, enables one user to potentially read and participate in different newsgroups. This environment also erases certainty of who is actually reading, whether some of the audience has actually 'encountered' one's musings in other newsgroups as well. Moreover, the availability of anonymous 'remailers' and email forwarding services ensures that the identification of the user through their email address, and the path their post has taken to arrive at the newsgroup, is not always reliable.

The online multiplicity of self may seem to echo Fanon's description of the violent destruction of the unitary subject, and subsequent reconstitution in the epistemology of the white subject. The advent of the Internet takes this "decentered", "fluid," "nonlinear" and "opaque" self into play with other people, complicating further the issues at hand (Turkle 1995: 17). Turkle says:

> In my computer-mediated worlds, the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections; it is made and transformed by language; sexual congress is an exchange of signifiers; and understanding follows from navigation and tinkering rather than analysis (1995: 15).

Here, Turkle is writing about the constitution of identity in the manipulation of signifiers, but hers is an autonomous self that is in control of its subjectivity – the cognitive perception of oneself (multiple or otherwise) mirrored directly in one's online performance of identity. In contrast, Fanon's subject, who has been pulverised and reconstituted by its encounter with the colonial gaze, is stripped of such autonomy and power.

Is 'the look' totally absent in a written medium? In the first place, the distinction between the visual and the verbal is a problematic one. This division between writing and images is destabilised by Mitchell, who decries what he perceives as a gap in knowledge about images, for instance, their effects upon the audience and everyday reality, how to engage with them in practice, and how to make sense of their history (1994). He cites Rorty's description of the history of philosophy as consisting of a progression of 'turns' where old issues are supplanted by new ones as they dissipate. Whilst Rorty's chronology ended with the linguistic turn, Mitchell points out that we have entered the age of the "pictorial turn" (1994: 11), "an age of 'spectacle' (Guy Debord), 'surveillance' (Foucault), and all pervasive image-making" (Mitchell 1994: 13). Ambivalence, fear and fetishisation of images is not new, what is particular to our times, to Mitchell, is the advent of technology that makes the possibility of entirely an image-driven culture realisable globally, thus we have a pictorial turn.

A problem for analysis, in the age of the pictorial turn, is the foundational role played by linguistic concepts to the analysis of cultural text, and the possible inadequacy of such textual analysis (as developed via linguistics) to satisfactorily explain the audience's relationship to images. Mimetic, representational or semiotic approaches cannot explain the image as a "complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality" (Mitchell 1994: 16). As Mitchell puts it,

the pictorial turn:

> is the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or 'visual literacy' might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality (1994: 16).

This returns to Fanon's conceptualisation of the 'look'. Here, Mitchell suggests the spectatorship of 'the look' needs as much depth of analysis as reading. I also argue that Mitchell introduces the idea that it may be possible to observe 'the look' occurring in written texts. In other words, the inscription of the colonising gaze is not confined to physical encounters based on vision but also possible in writing.

Homi Bhabha provides an instance where the look is overturned in a literary text (1994). In Bhabha's concept of the "Invisible Eye/I",[9] there is a space where the objectified other can subvert its objectification. Subjectivity is achieved at a cost, not only to the objectified self, but also in terms of the instability of the identification. The over-inscribed self has the potential to threaten the very being of the metropolitan self. Outside the frame imposed upon the other lies a self that is unseen, what Bhabha calls the "invisible eye" (1994: 46). In his analysis of Jin's poem, 'Strangers on a Hostile Landscape',[10] Bhabha uses the notion of the eye that escapes vision, that returns to 'haunt' the coloniser, the totalising gaze is returned "an anxious absence, a counter-gaze that turns the discriminatory look, which denies … cultural and sexual difference, back on itself" (1994: 47). In his view, this is possible through writing, which allows the

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[9] The invisible eye/I is an idea suggested to Bhabha through his analysis of Jin's poem, "Strangers On a Hostile Landscape" (Bhabha 1994).

[10]   One day I learnt
          a secret art,
          Invisible-Ness, it was called.
          I think it worked
          as even now you look
          but never see me…
          Only my eyes will remain to watch and to haunt
          and to turn your dreams
          to chaos (Bhabha 1994: 46)

questioning of the frame and the performance of this gap between presence and absence, visible and invisible. Thus I reach the problematic of this chapter: what the differences and convergences are between the visual image and the written text, and, more specifically, between the encounter on the street and the encounter on the Usenet newsgroups. What power relations are implicated in the Usenet encounter and processes of racialisation?

2. The First Post

The thread begins with the first message appearing on several soc.culture newsgroups, apparently from Alan Peyton-Smith (hereafter APS), with the subject header, "Asians Don't Stink, But Their Culture Sure Does" (see Transcript 1: The First Post, Page 104). Such Usenet encounters are affected by the undeciderability of identity and, at the same time, the relative ease with which it is possible to track the online presence of the other. Identity on the Internet is partial and undeciderable because what we see online may not be what we get offline. Consequently, this study of Usenet raises questions as to how we have valorised certain aspects of the self, namely, the body, in defining 'authentic' identity. This may seem in keeping with the assumption that Internet technologies provide a disembodied space in which multiple subjectivities become possible (Featherstone and Burrows 1995).

The line between the body and the online self may not be so clearly demarcated, though. In terms of racial politics on Usenet, the posts demonstrate how neo-conservatism, while abandoning genetic accounts of inequality, have not yet discarded an ethnocentric and evolutionary model of different cultures. Body and culture become conflated in the latter, where, instead of criticising the body of the racial other, the other's culture is attacked. In short, the impurities and deficiencies of the body of the racial other are sutured onto their culture. The legitimising binaries upon which the west

depended for colonial expansion still remain, albeit with greater instabilities and vulnerabilities.

2.1 Uncertainty of Identification

Unlike an encounter on the street, we are able to piece together some information about this person from the traces they leave online. So how does one construct APS's identity from this post? First, acknowledging that the user name given may be a pseudonym, one can check the headers in the message. In the 'From:' field, we have this person's email address, which we can use to find out more, that is, through the 'fingering' that is, a command issued through the network such as "finger 100351.3267@compuserve.com." This is used to returned information like the users' account name, and the last time they logged on, optionally also including information stored on the user's directory on the provider's server in a file called '.plan'. These days, though, this function has been disabled by most Internet service providers as a potential security hole and privacy threat, so, in this case, the command now returns, "[compuserve.com] connect: Connection refused". Even if this was not the case, as mentioned earlier, it is possible to set up an account with an Internet service provider with a pseudonym and a matching ".plan" file, or an email forwarding account with a customised domain and username.

A lengthy search through various web search engines, 'people locators' and other similar resources returned nothing on APS or their exact email address, when the search was broadened, the list returned was large and included other Compuserve email addresses as well. Again, a degree of user choice enters the equation, the trace we leave on the Internet depends on the online information we put up and the information we provide to a degree. APS could easily set up web pages under a different name and email address on a different domain. APS could be from anywhere (with email access) and of any race, gender, and class. With a large amount of time and knowledge, a determined

person could locate APS. While people tend to accept the identities provided in messages and headers, unless they are given cause to doubt them, positioning is not as direct and immediate as a glance on a street.

Disputes over posters' identities are a common trope in this thread (and Usenet in general), 'WoodStock', for example, posts a reply to APS's message: "More racist shit from disgruntle American because his job is lost to a superior Asian" ('Woodstock' 1996: n.p.). The newsgroup thread receives this rejoinder the next day, "Hey, Peyton-Smith is NOT ONE of us! He's Australian" ('Dave Johnston' 1996: n.p.). A move to situate APS as yet another retrenched American has been thwarted, and WoodStock is forced to concede: "Ooops, that racist bastard is a disgruntle downunder boy … my mistake [sic]." Of course, APS may not be either Australian or American – both participants are relying on online evidence and there are ways in which one can post apparently from an email account in Australia while actually being elsewhere. So even a look at the path the message has taken through different servers may not be indicative of the location of the computer the message was posted from, not that location of a person is necessarily indicative of their cultural affiliations or nationality anyway.

2.2 The Archive Search

What yielded some results, however, was using web search facilities available for a Usenet archive called *Deja News*, which *Google*, groups.google.com, has taken over since the time of this research. While archives of Usenet newsgroups have long been in existence, they used to be very selective in terms of which newsgroups are archived and files were usually obtained via 'File Transfer Protocol' (FTP). Google archives most of the public newsgroups and is easy to use because searching is via web forms. More significantly, it is now possible to search for all the posts archived from a particular email address in the headers, or particular patterns of letters and words. Google

simplifies things further: using their author profile service, we discover that '100351.3267@compuserve.com' has posted 1,556 articles. The majority of these articles were posted to aus.politics (1,391), with forty-seven messages to soc.culture.australian, forty-five to aus.legal, thirty-six to aus.general, the rest of the figure made up by miscellaneous postings to newsgroups like soc.religion.islam, can.politics, and so on.

Interestingly enough, of all the postings archived by Google from this email address, five, between 5 to 8 November 1996, appear under the name of 'Nelson'. Notably, both pseudonyms, 'Alan Peyton-Smith' and 'Nelson,' signify an English heritage, suggesting a strong identification with the Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-Celtic) culture that many consider as the core of Australian national culture. Whoever this is, 100351.3267@compuserve.com seems to be consistently interested in racial politics:

> There seems to be some question in recent public debates on whether some Australians are 'disadvantaged' as a result of their race. How can there be any doubt? Consider the following:
>
> * A few weeks ago there was an (ATSIC) election in this country where most Australians were ineligible to stand or vote based on their race.
>
> * There are large areas of this country that are 'out of bounds' to the majority of the population, and even if restricted access is approved, the members of the non-referred race are obliged to carry an identity card & authorisation permit.
>
> * Past and present governments in this country oppose assimilation and endorse multiculturalism within the Australian population.
>
> * Current federal 'Affirmative Action' legislation purposely racially discriminates against the majority of the Australian population, and allows for a range of special and exclusive privileges to be assigned to minority races.
>
> The majority of the population is therefore disenfranchised, restricted in movement, segregated and disadvantaged by government legislation. In Australia these policies are known as "Political Correctness". In South Africa similar policies were known as the pillars of Apartheid. Has somebody changed the definition of racism recently ('Nelson' 1996)?

This message is consistent with the views of Pauline Hanson and those later expressed under the APS pseudonym. This email address appears again on 15 November the same year, in a different newsgroup, this time without any name attached, in a thread about Michael Jackson's first child:

> Oops! I have just stuffed up the Internet!!! This is the first time I have been on the Internet and I have just erased somebody elses point of view!! Oh Dear!! The shame of it all ('Re: Ack!!! Michael jackson to become a daddy!' 1996).

In this instance, the participant claims to be posting for the first time, but the earliest post via 100351.3267@compuserve.com was in May 1996, addressing the issue of gun control in Australia. In 1996, Australia introduced a voluntary gun return scheme in which the government guaranteed to pay for the guns. This was after a killing spree in Tasmania by lone gun holder. The poster agrees with a suggestion that the guns should be tendered off to exporters, but, he adds, ideally to countries where guns are not legal. He reasons that it is in these countries that the people need protection from the state:

> …From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, governments are perpetrating the most horrendous tortures on their UNARMED citizenry, their DISARMED citizenry. There is no way they would be allowed to commit these barbaric atrocities if their citizenry was armed. NO way!! Let me detail some of the atrocities that are happening…
>
> Afghanistan, beatings with electric shock batons. Bangladesh, prolonged beatings resulting in fractured limbs, systematic rape of prisoners. Bolivia, electric shocks administered to mouth, breasts, genitals, prisoners forced to suspend themselves horizontally between two chairs supported by only their tips of their toes and their head, if they fall, they are savagely beaten.. [sic] Chile, beatings and electric shocks administered to head, mouth, genitals while chained to a metal bed ("the electric grill", they call it..) Peru, severe beatings, electric shock, hooding for long periods,prisoner's hands handcuffed behind his or her back, and are then hauled up to the ceiling by a rope tied to the handcuffs.. This book goes on and on, pages of this stuff, sickening ('Alan Peyton-Smith' 1996b: n.p., punctuation and spacing as in original).

Of the 217 messages in this thread, sixty-two are posted by 100351.3267@compuserve.com, and within different newsgroups as well, about

twenty-nine percent of the posts originating from the same email address. Someone begins to notice the high frequency and large volume of posting and ask how could one person manage to send so many replies over two months: "Hmm ever notice that it would seem like one guy (you) vs 10+ other posters? I'm surprised that you actually had the time to reply to almost everyone [sic]" ('Voxel' 1996).

2.3 The Encounter

People would not normally read newsgroups using archives like Google, although habits have altered somewhat,[11] and this would not be the way they would have seen and read the 'Asians don't stink' thread. Usenet news software enable users to set customised filters to select which posts they see based on word patterns in the message headers and body. Threads about race are commonplace in soc.culture newsgroups, and people who are tired of seeing them develop filters, like filtering out all references to 'Asians' or 'whites' in the subject headers, to prevent their newsreader from retrieving these messages. In my research, the opposite was done: instead, filters were devised to retrieve all references to 'race', 'culture', 'Asians', and 'whites'. Therefore, unless one is using software without filters, or has not developed the technical expertise to set filters, quite likely the people who see these threads are either not bothered by them, actually interested in them, or simply new to Usenet practices.

Usenet readers have different patterns of use that affect the way they encounter messages. Some may subscribe to several newsgroups, others may be more selective and read only a few newsgroups. While some read a newsgroup regularly over a year, some may subscribe and unsubscribe to different newsgroups rapidly. Therefore, some readers and respondents may be familiar with the posts from this particular individual, some would have seen this one for the first time. The development of this thread

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[11] The ability of browsers to display news article combined the availability of search engines on web pages that allow a great deal of selectivity and complex search operators and sorting criteria present an attractive alternative to traditional Usenet news software.

increases the uncertainty of who is reading: since the message was cross-posted to twelve different newsgroups,[12] several different threads started to run concurrently, as replies often trimmed off the list of newsgroups, following the netiquette of not posting to too many newsgroups.

Advice to new users on Usenet, IRC and Chat always cautions against immediately participating, rather, to 'lurk' for a while and familiarise themselves with the subculture in each newsgroup and chat area. Not only are there questions that are asked so regularly and repeatedly that asking it may result in the poster being flamed, but also there is always the chance that the poster is a 'troll', and the message 'flamebait'. The last two terms mean that the person posting (troll) sends messages designed to provoke a heated response ('flamebait'). It is often inevitable that a medium-sized thread like this eventually includes comments like the following:

> [Quoting APS:] These people are barking mad, and no self-appointed enlightened ivory-tower Leftist pseudo-intellectual is going to tell me otherwise.
>
> That sounds an awful lot like bait. Someone pass the burley. :) ('Greg Breen' 1996, as in original).

Comments such as these reflect another form of 'looking:' explicitly naming a post and poster as belonging to a certain type or category in Usenet communications. These responses are highly political in the sense that they reduce the meanings of the text to the level of surface, disguising it as something quite harmless, in fact mundane. They legitimate the Usenet metanarrative of freedom of speech, are an attempt to rob the poster of the glory of initiating a long thread, and lastly, mock those gullible enough to fall for the trap.

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[12] The first message was cross-posted to the following newsgroups: aus.politics, soc.culture.australian, soc.culture.hongkong, soc.culture.china, soc.culture.taiwan, soc.culture.japan, soc.culture.korean, soc.culture.malaysia, soc.culture.singapore, soc.culture.asean, soc.culture.thailand, soc.culture.Indonesia.

APS himself appropriates this role for his own political manoeuvre, one aspect, that is, the humiliation of the flamers, is exploited by his adoption of the 'troll' label, "To be honest, it was a gross over-simplification of my true opinions, I phrased that way in order to set a trap. Two people have wandered into it, but the one I wanted was smart enough to avoid it. Oh well. Say Lah Vee [sic]" ('Alan Peyton-Smith' 1996a). Flame threads often have the thrust-counter-thrust movement of a duel and this move is received with scorn. Tse Ka Chun replies on the same day:

> I am not going to argue about every little word that you've said, especially since I've disposed of your mail dating from a week ago in never, never land. If you say something to some effect, and then someone is supposed to fall into the trap of pointing that out without quoting your every utterance, then I think that's a pretty silly trap you have (1996).

The attempt by APS to score a victory is overturned by Tse, who derides the worth of his feint.

2.4 Truth and Rationality

In his first sentence, "Reality time, folks", APS seizes the role of the 'truth-speaker' for himself, the one who speaks reality, simultaneously implying that other 'times' have been *un*real. Rationality is important to APS. Like many people, he assumes the existence of an autonomous truth accessible through rationality, and, quite consciously, aligns himself with Enlightenment constructs of universal reason, freedoms, and humanity. Part of his stance is that Asian cultures are fundamentally incompatible with these ideals and Australia's multicultural policy and migration programme would lead to their destruction. He assumes that these ideals of universal truths, freedoms, humanity, and reason are part of Australia's heritage. In this manner, APS proceeds to construct a series of binaries that privilege the Anglo-Celtic-European culture he writes from.

In his book, *Racist Culture*, Goldberg draws on postmodern critiques of rationality and adds that racialisation occurred with modernity. According to Goldberg, racialisation's beginnings are in early European exploration, with racist expression and violent material dispossession justified by the transformation in the seventeenth century in the mode of viewing subjects:

> The new philosophical assumption that bodies are but machines naturally divorceable from minds, that minds are nothing more than physical machines, opened the way to some extreme novel developments in technologies of physical power and bodily discipline. These technologies of discipline and power were superimposed upon human subjects; they encouraged docility by reducing even *social* subjectivities, or at least some forms of social subjectivity, to physical dimensions and correlates (Goldberg 1993).

Enlightenment discourses of rationality masked the exercise and affirmation of asymmetric power relations, for instance, the subjugation of colonialised peoples.

Although, as Goldberg argues above, the Enlightenment mapped the social onto the physical, APS argues that he is not conflating body and culture. He sets up an opposition between being anti-Asian for bodily reasons and being anti-Asian for reasons of culture, but interestingly labels undesirable aspects of the culture as "ugly and smelly." APS displaces the adjectives normally applied to the body and applies them metaphorically to describe culture instead, but for what reason?

The writer, it seems, is supplying visual and olfactory cues for revulsion through the written text, attempting to replicate the immediacy of reflex reactions that ugliness and smelliness trigger on the street while keeping body and culture as a binary. In addition to the ekphrasis of an ugly culture, an odour is invoked. Culture, traditionally the binary opposite to nature and the physical, is bestowed a body through writing.

More than that, 'smelly' is often associated with decay, impurity, and filth. This is not the first time that these attributes have been associated with the racial other. Goldberg, explaining the relationship between body, culture, and racist expressions of

impurity, suggests that racialisation is given racist expression in the treatment of bodies. Through the body, discrimination is practised, but also, through the body, cultures are given a shape and form that legitimate imbalances of power: "the body comes to stand for the body politic, to symbolise society, to incorporate a vision of power" (Goldberg 1993: 54). In turn, to avoid accusations of racism, claims that would normally apply to the body are displaced onto culture. The gap between culture and body are thus straddled via metaphor and ekphrasis.

In using bodily metaphors to describe 'Asian culture,'[13] APS is borrowing distinctions applied to the body to define the culture as sick, unhealthy, and 'other', launching a series of posts in which this discursive strategy is developed and employed. According to Goldberg:

> Hierarchy is established on the basis of a value of purity – whether interpreted biologically (in terms of blood or genes*), hygienically (in terms, for instance, of body odour)*, culturally (for example, language as signifying the evolution of thought patterns and rational capacity), or even environmentally (virtuous character, like nose shape and size, determined by climate) (Goldberg 1993: 54).

In other words, Asian culture, the 'other' of APS's post, is juxtaposed against western culture, the 'self' or 'we', and is represented as impure in terms of hygiene (through the subject header), and therefore something to be excluded, quarantined or, in the most patronisingly charitable instance, cured.

Accordingly, APS's argument revolves around this logic, that is, cultural impurity, hence, he refers to the adoption of 'western' models of capitalism by Asian nation states as "feral capitalism". The 'influx of Asian culture' into Australia is described as 'pollution', again, reiteration of the 'impure' trope. He ascribes no originality or innovation, instead, Asians are "great imitators". The position he adopts is

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[13] This chapter refers to many problematic terms, like 'Asian culture,' 'Anglo-Celtic culture,' 'Asian,' and so forth, terms which describe discursively-constructed categories and collectivities. Rather than littering the entire chapter with quotation marks, I will not be signalling every instance.

thus symptomatic of racist expression of the following nature: "Impurity, dirt, disease, and pollution are expressed as functions of the transgression of classificatory categories, expressed, that is, in terms of laws, as also are danger and the breakdown of order" (Goldberg 1993: 54).

This elucidation of danger and chaos is observable in APS's message when he refers to "barking mad" religions and Asian politics, the implication is that Australia would be a safe, orderly and predictable place without being polluted by impure cultures. This, in turn, leads him to conclude, "Pauline Hanson is right. I believe we must preserve our culture at all costs. It is worth preserving", 'preserve' once more bringing to mind purity (of what he calls "our culture") needing protection from contamination and decay. Hence, impurity, disorder and the danger of contamination are expressed and in turn legitimate boundary maintenance calls for action, like restricting immigration.

3. Framing the Discussion

3.1 The Discourses of Race, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism

In this section, I explore three issues arising from the first post to analyse the topic thread. The first element is the employment of dominant discourses delineating the 'truths' that are possible when discussing race and culture. The second is how the initiator of the thread selects these truths and attempts to set out the boundaries of the discussion. This post, and the thread it sets off, employs racially and/or culturally marginalizing notions shaped during the course of Australian history, and most recently, and ironically, by the very discourse they criticise, that is, multiculturalism.

As Jon Stratton discusses in detail in his book, *Race Daze* (1998), the phenomenon of Pauline Hanson (and APS) emerges from an environment in which a discourse of ethnicity has displaced the discourse of race. This shift during the last

thirty or forty years was prompted by a policy of official state multiculturalism. Echoing trends in Europe and the United States since World War II, Australian national discourse has moved from attributing differences through race and biology to cultural differentiation through the discourse of ethnicity. APS's views are rather like Pauline Hanson's (and other Australians),[14] described by Jon Stratton as a 'culturalist':

> On her own terms, then, Hanson is right. She is not a racist in the sense that she considers race to be determinative. What she is, to coin a neologism, is a *culturalist*. She considers that certain cultures are incompatible and that this incompatibility threatens the claimed unity of the Australian national culture. Race then becomes a marker of that cultural difference (1998: 64, author's emphasis).

Like Hanson, APS emphasises that he is not racist in the sense that he is talking about biological differences. This is evident right from the start in the title of his launching post, through the use of certain phrases (e.g. "Asian culture") throughout the message body, and in his précis of Hanson's views. APS maintains this distinction through the thread. His response to posters accusing him of being racist is a variation upon "I'm talking about culture, not racial characteristics."

Hanson and APS insist on a model of culture as "discrete, homogenous and integrated," a myth that forms the foundation for their assumptions about Asian culture, itself a singular term describing diverse groupings of Indonesian, Chinese, Malay, Thai, Japanese, and Korean races (Stratton 1998: 63).[15] This idea of culture is a construct borne from anthropological studies of much smaller, bounded and homogenous societies, and adapted to the notion of a national culture, palpable and shared by members of a nation. In turn, cultural difference was also legitimated in that the idea that cultures are bounded and limited was a progression of the logic of the discourse of

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[14] John Howard, the Prime Minister at the time of writing, also shares this perspective of race and culture, and Stratton makes a case for arguing that the supporters of Pauline Hanson belong mainly to the lower middle class, as well as those who live in the bush.

[15] While Hanson is referring mainly to these races as Asian, she cites immigration figures that includes Turkish people under this category (Stratton 1998).

national culture and anthropology, leading to the discourse of ethnicity in Australia and other countries. Hence, APS is able to refer to "our culture," referring to 'the Australian national culture,' and "Asian culture" as something so fundamentally different that it is incompatible with the former.

This discourse of ethnicity involves a slippage between race and culture in which race, far from losing its relevance, becomes a signifier of culture. Post-White Australia policy and during the era of multiculturalism, race was and is still used to signify irreconcilable cultural differences (Stratton 1998). The experience described by Fanon of being inscribed as other includes the attachment of a series of assumptions about culture based upon the signifier of the racialised body, a process that occurs in other types of encounters besides the street. In the formulation of Hanson and APS, the Australian national culture is Anglo-Celtic-European, and Asian culture, marked visibly through race, is the other that can never be part of the self:

> Why would any intelligent Australian want our culture polluted by that type of culture? But, we accept immigrants from some of these countries. Come to Australia, we say. We won't force you to leave you barking-mad religion and culture behind, we don't care how barking mad it is. Oh no. We have multiculturalism, we want you to +keep+ your barking-mad culture and religion alive, we will +PAY YOU+ to keep your barking-mad culture and religion alive!! ('Alan Peyton-Smith' 1996a, as in original).

Australian multiculturalism shares many general assumptions about culture and ethnic differences with its critics. Stratton's distinction between "everyday multiculturalism" and "official multiculturalism" may highlight one problem with racist discourse regarding multiculturalism in Australia, which tends to make no such distinctions. According to Stratton, the former describes a lived reality, the intermingling, ebb, and flow of variable cultures, which occur in the course of everyday living. Official multiculturalism, on the other hand, describes the policy and public rhetoric of multiculturalism, although everyday multiculturalism is not entirely

autonomous from official multiculturalism. Quite often, when people speak about multiculturalism, as in the passage quoted from APS's post above, they are referring to official multiculturalism.

Stratton says the discourse of ethnicity replaced the discourse of race during the government's dismantling of the White Australia policy and developing of the policy of multiculturalism. The discourse of multiculturalism in Australia emphasises cultural compatibility and consensus, rather than Hanson and APS's belief that some cultures are fundamentally incompatible. Multiculturalism in Australia, however, in effect encourages the preservation of a core Anglo-Celtic (and, in Hanson's perspective, European) culture, central in the national imaginary. At the same time, the other cultures are, to the main, kept indefinitely on the periphery; for instance, an Australian-born descendant of Italian immigrants is likely to be thought of as a 'migrant', with a culture that, although tolerated (or even celebrated), is not considered part of the core culture. Besides the use of the national discourse of culture, it is this image of Australian society, and the policy of multiculturalism, in conjunction with attitudes left-over from the days of the White Australia policy, that contribute to the thinking of people like Pauline Hanson and APS (1998).

3.2 Subjectivity: Self and Other

Subjectivity, and the nature of virtual community, are also important in considering APS's self-presentation. Derek Foster (1997) argues that participation in Internet forums such as Usenet and web bulletin boards can mean an assertion of the self and the individual rather than community, contrary to popular claims about the Internet and virtual community. Some features celebrated as permitting the formation of virtual communities, such as spatial and temporal displacement, anonymity, and fluidity of

identity, can actually prevent the triumph of *Gemeinschaft*,[16] communal relations, over *Gesellschaft*, impersonal relations. As Foster points out, the ability to play with identity, and the distanciation from one's immediate space encourages a situation whereby "our social cyberspatial selves are far more likely an extension of our conscious selves than a representation of self-conscious being. To be properly self-conscious, one must take into account the other" (1997: 32). Otherwise, the other is only significant to define the self.

In this light, APS's post performs and recirculates a "conscious self" without self-reflexivity, one that utilises and is located within an unproblematised imagined community of like-beings. In an epoch traversed by discourses of transnational, fluid and multiple identities, and a medium that apparently amplifies these phenomena, the initial post uses simple binaries that place 'Asian culture' squarely in the realm of the negative. All the different cultures are gathered up under the singular umbrella term, 'Asian culture,' and a selective use of examples allows him to make universalising claims about supposed common features amongst the different ethnicities. The culture he is writing from has the fluidity and tolerance denied the cultures he criticises. All the negative elements he attributes to Asian culture are, conversely, absent or replaced with finer qualities.

While Usenet newsgroups may appear to encourage an active engagement with the other and with diversity, Foster again raises the possibility that individuals might actually reify or develop self-definitions in defence against the multitude of competing identities, cultures, and viewpoints. On the various Internet spaces, Foster writes:

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[16] Terms famously used by Ferdinand Toennies (1957, cited in Foster 1997), Foster defines *Gemeinschaft* thus: "the term embodies a set of voluntary, social, and reciprochal relations that are bound together by an immutable 'we-feeling,'" in other words, it embodies the notion of community. *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, describe impersonal, utilitarian social relationships, characteristic of modern, industrial and urban society.

> Instead of simply assuming that beneficiant [sic] acculturation occurs, one might rather see the individual gravitating towards spaces that do not seem so strange, and engaging in a process of self-legitimisation. In order to reduce cognitive dissonance, individuals engage in selective exposure as they embark upon their potential learning experience (Foster 1997: 33).

CMC allows the pursuit of specific areas of interest with increasing narrowness. Usenet is divided up into several different newsgroups, arranged hierarchically into subtopics. I have already discussed how individuals can select to read groups within these hierarchies. Within the groups themselves, most of the software people use to read newsgroups[17] can be set to filter certain topics and posters through the use of keywords.[18]

Nonetheless, in seeming contradiction, this post was cross-posted to a number of newsgroups that were dominated by south-, southeast- and east-Asian readers and posters, yet the implied audience is (white) Australian. The combination of the third person plural for Asians with the first person plural reserved for "Pauline Hanson and most Australians," establishes Asians and their 'culture' as the other, and 'most Australians' as the self that is apparently distinct from 'them.' It may seem strange, therefore, that this post was sent to so many newsgroups with participants from the nations he criticises, however, in a way, cross-posting to these newsgroups is an extension of APS's logic that Asian culture is homogenous. He is distributing his post to the national groups that he believes belongs to Asian culture. The result of this tactic was that the thread included responses from Australians and overseas Chinese in Hong Kong and Singapore (although none, at least overtly through certain cues, from Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan or Korea).

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[17] Examples of newsreader software include Agent and Outlook Express.
[18] Usenet participants can choose, for instance, not to download or display any posts by such and such a person, anything posted with '$$$' or 'make money fast,' or anything with certain derogatory terms in the subject headings. On the other hand, they can set their software to highlight messages in the same way, for instance, to download and prominently display all messages with 'Asian' in the title in soc.culture.australia or 'book five' in the Harry Potter newsgroups.

Without going into APS's intentions, his message drew heated responses ('flames') diametrically opposed to the views he expressed. Just as the message reiterates discursive boundaries and distinctions between race and culture, Asian and Australian culture and all their attendant negatives and positives, so such a post would tend to encourage polar responses from the Usenet participants, especially because it was cross-posted to these newsgroups. The resulting 'flame war' would tend to reify this divide and work against the formation of "mutual commitment, mutual involvement, mutual responsibility, and mutual respect between a society and its individual members" (Foster 1997: 25) that could form the foundations for (an inclusive) community.

4. The Challenge

A few questions are evident in the way power operates through this thread. Firstly, I explore how these responses were framed by the initial post and by APS's diligence in responding to most of the posts. Secondly, these responses sometimes reconfigure the terms within which the 'truths' surrounding race and culture were discussed within the thread. Thirdly, this analysis needs to take into account the culture of the Internet, particularly Usenet news, as this also affects the way questions of race and culture are handled in this thread.

The interweaving thread under analysis raised a number of important issues regarding identity: that is, the ambiguity of identity cues, the representation of self and other, and the permeable boundary between body and culture. There is also the interplay of discourses: the discourses of rationality and democracy (and their opposites) trope through the thread. More Usenet-specific discursive rules and practices also play a role in the development of the thread.

Mainly, I am interested in examining how far the thread goes in challenging the culturalist assumptions personified by Pauline Hanson and reiterated by APS. These assumptions are that culture is internally homogenous, and discrete; secondly, that there are some cultures that are incompatible in essence; thirdly, that, to survive and thrive, a national culture must be homogenous (drawing again from Stratton). More specifically, in the exchanges on this thread, I am interested in knowing whether any of the participants question the underpinning assumptions about Asian culture, Australian culture and its heritage, and the effect of migration? In the midst of this, what part does Usenet and its discourses play?

4.1 The Return of the Gaze

The contributors to this thread write within boundaries, that is, the limitations of the idioms and practices available in the discourses that, generally, prevail in their societies, and, more specifically, as deployed by APS in his launching essay. In addition, Usenet debates also tend to have a certain confrontational style that exacerbates any polarities already inherent or developing in wider society. The effects of these are evident in how certain posts on this subject thread utilise and reinforce the discourse that overruns APS's contributions, either in agreement with him or in the process of opposing his position. The ultimate question is the extent to which the participants manage to challenge the culturalist discourse that veils APS's racism by disputing the terms within which he initiated the discussion. To some extent, the responses to APS's posts subvert the objectification of 'Asians' and 'Asian culture,' they turn the gaze back on the gazer, and expose the discursive aspect of the 'truths' he utters. The discussion that follows is organised around the terms that 'frame', and sometimes are subverted by, the responses to APS's post.

4.2 'Cultural Differences'

Some posts did not dismantle the constructs of culture and cultural differences but instead replicated them. Even while attacking APS's views, posters, for instance, would use a similar binary, that is, Western culture in opposition to Asian culture. One such example is the following, which, like APS's post, relies on broad categories that use race to stand for cultural differences, and examples from different countries to legitimate claims about white culture (this phrase is not used but can be inferred):

> Emission of carbon dioxide from USA and European countries together constitute about three quarters of teh CO2 emission. Trees chopped down in North America and Europe, together, also constitute a larger proportion than those in any other part of the world! You people have already raped the earth thoroughly and still continue to do so vigorously! But you ae telling the Asian countries to remain status quo, that means, no increase in CO2 emission… What ever Asian countries need, we should beg from the almighty white men and women ('Loo SL' 1996: n.p., as in original)!

Ironically enough, APS's response to this post is to insert, under extracts of the above message, "I'm talking about AUSTRALIA." The discourse employed by APS allows him to claim that Europeans and Americans have similar heritages and characteristics to Australian national culture, enough to easily assimilate into it, and at the same time to strategically isolate Australia whenever anything negative was suggested about this common culture and its attendant effects. While this post (and APS's reply) may implicitly suggest the holes in the discourse, it (and the others like it) still reinforces the idea that there are distinct cultures, which could be called Asian and Western (or white). This assumption still leaves the door open for Hanson and APS's assertion that these cultures are fundamentally too different to co-exist.

The difficulty of departing from this framework and idiom is evident. Participants often use phrases that interpellate themselves and each other within this binary model of Western/white/Australian and Eastern/Asian culture. Accompanying some of these posts is a tone of outright hostility and a host of expletives; an extract

from the first response from 'TpX',[19] for instance, includes the following, which is the mildest part of the message: "[W]hat fuking rite do u have to say that my culture stinks? and my religion barking mad [sic]?" (1996: n.p.). This poster seems to have at least partially adopted the constructs of the first post in that he/she identifies themselves as 'Asian' and possessing the 'Asian culture' that APS criticises. In a subsequent argument between TpX and another poster who criticises the obscenities in his message, it becomes evident that TpX is aware of this problem: "asian culture… there is no such thing, there are chinese culture and vietnamese culture etc not asian culture [sic]!" ('TpX' 1996). Even with this awareness, the oppositional rhetorical tradition of Usenet debate (especially with flame threads) combined with the binary structure that frames the topic and the limitations of the language available to talk about it encourages a gladiatorial exchange, which obscures these fundamental discursive fissures. In turn, a polarisation of apparently completely incompatible positions develops, for instance, between racist or culturalist claims made on different sides of the debate ('Asian' or 'Australian/White'), or those supporting multiculturalism. One outraged poster, for example, in his criticism of APS, makes similar broad claims using the same binary, including the mapping of 'white' onto 'Australian':

> Who gave you the right to say that our culture is barking mad when I believe that your (Australian) culture is built upon by generations of criminals !!! Pay us ??? Mind you that some of the biggest money inflows into Australia is Asian money. It is Asian investments in Australia that has brought many of my kin to your country. Demographically, most welfare receipients are Aussies themselves!!! [sic] ('Winston Chua' 1996: n.p.).

In the midst of this, there are those who do question the terms within which the debate is set. One author, for instance, may still use the us|them binary (while

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[19] This message was dated 21 October 1996, whilst the first post was dated 23 October 1996, which could be due to the variances in the rates at which different Usenet servers download and forward messages.

identifying himself as 'Asian'), but does probe the extent to which the cultures are discrete:

> The things that you accuse Asian societies of are those that have their foundations in the Western world in general, and they are certainly not unique to Austrailia [sic]. What makes Austrailia so special in this cultural construction? […] As long as you can't prove what is distinct in Australian culture or Austrailian behavior as opposed to the general Western view, then pointing out the shortcomings of the latter in essence refutes the statements you have made about this supposed superiority of 'Austrailian culture' ('Jeffrey Szeto' 1996: n.p.).

Another person interrogates dominant assumptions of what comprises 'Australian culture':

> What culture is that? Aussie culture. Can someone please define this to me. I have spoken to many of my Aussie friends and they all reckon aussie culture is about something to do with the bush and the outback. What nonsense! How many aussies have even been to the outback at least once in their lifetime? Or is it the fish and chips meal you have every Friday night watching the good old footy on tv? Please someone, tell me what is exactly aussie culture ('Core' 1996)?

Yet this same person deplores the situation in Cabramatta and says, "We may form ghettos but we do eventually assimilate. If you came to a new country, you would live close to all your relatives and friends too wouldn't you [sic] ('Core' 1996)?"

Responses like these may illustrate the strength of the hegemony surrounding constructs of cultural difference in Australia, but they also show the possibilities, within these discursive limitations, for deconstruction. An example of this line of enquiry, that is, into the classificatory scheme of the initial post is the following:

> You've been seeking a definition of "racist" in this thread. I'd like to expand that search to define "Asian culture". I know people of Thai, Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Viet Namese backrounds [sic]. All have different cultural "traits". Something common to all that I have perceived is "respect of elders". Now, is that something to be against? I'd like someone, like PH or even APS, to define this "Asian culture" they are so afraid of being overrun by ('Dave Johnston' 1996: n.p.).

Other posts also make the point that the term 'Asian culture' does not reflect the wide diversity of cultures it applies to in the context of APS's post. These are also problematic

homogenising categories, but an improvement on the monolithic 'Asian culture.' Another writer says, "The culture that you are so desperate to preserve from (potential) Asian Australians itself is partly made up of Asian Australian culture" and that "Asian culture is not a single culture."

This poster comes the closest to Stratton's idea of creolisation; he or she departs from either advocating assimilation or the official form of multiculturalism in suggesting that Australian culture itself is a blend of different cultures. In addition, he or she continues:

> You see, the truth is, like it or not, every culture has its merits and demerits. It might also help if you express more intelligence by avoiding generalisations and assumptions when you argue against "Asian culture."
> I am forced to argue for "Asian culture" because you started it, but there is no such thing. It's a bit like grouping a cat and a horse together because they both have four legs ('Tse Ka Chun' 1996).

All the participants have to engage with or work within the framing structures functioning in society and deployed by APS, and those critical of his stance 'are forced to argue' within these precincts. However, as this same post indicates, some of the writers are aware of and can communicate this problem in their responses. This led to confusing juxtapositions. Within the same message, it is possible to find statements critiquing the use of essentialistic categories like 'Asian culture' and 'Australian culture' running alongside other statements that rely on such categories.

4.3 'I'm not talking about Race, I'm talking about Culture'

The distinction between race and culture was another problematic aspect of APS's message. In his title alone, body-race and culture are blended through the metaphor of 'smelliness,' a kind of ekphrastic racism where smell and bodily characteristics are superimposed on culture. To recap my earlier discussion, Hanson's position that she is not racist as she is objecting to 'Asian culture,' not race, is a position that veils fundamentally racist assumptions of the connection between race and culture and ethnic

categories based on racial distinctions. This is especially the case when the next step in this logic is that since Asians have a distinct culture that renders them incompatible with 'true blue' Australian culture, hence the numbers of Asian immigrants should be reduced drastically. In Australian public discourse, race has a "subterranean life" and a new meaning in "its use as a marker of incompatible cultural difference" (paraphrase of Stratton 1998: 33).

In response to critics that emphasise race and racism, APS often repeats his assertion that it is not Asian race(s) that 'stinks' but their 'culture.' This is disingenuous, in the light of the above, for he links race and culture in the logic and signifying chain he utilises. Although many of the contributors to the thread identify APS and Hanson as racists, only a few query the separation of culture from race in his post. The following post is an exception:

> Don't give us this bullshit about how when you are just talking about culture that is not equivalent to being racist. If the culture and the person comes as a complete package, degrading one means degrading the other as well. What is the difference between you saying "I think yellow skin color is inferior based on my own personal preferences" and "I think Asian cultures are inferior based on my own personal preferences"? You ARE blatantly racist, whether you like to admit it or not [sic] ('Jeffrey Szeto' 1996).

Interestingly, in this passage, 'Szeto', it seems, is not arguing against associating certain cultural constructs with certain races, but the reverse, to this person, APS is racist because culture and race goes hand in hand, so criticising a culture is criticising a race. However, as the earlier extract (and other instances in his contribution) written by him indicates, he is aware that notions surrounding Asian and Australian culture are constructs (at least partially). These contradictions, therefore, are the result of discursive constraint, that is, the terms of reference in this thread including the discourses of ethnicity and race, forces that determine what can be said, down to the minutiae of grammar and lexical choice.

Other posters reinforce the semiotic link between race and culture in public discourse while censuring APS, rather than deconstructing it. Some conflate the two, like Hanson, APS, and indeed, many Australian representations of 'non-white' otherness. One example of this is the following response to APS's challenge to identify the racism in his writing:

> I will merely say that I have reason to believe that your prejudicial statements about Asian culture, made subjectively and with insufficient information, has prejudicial connotations to race, if only because different races follow different cultures and can be argued to have various tendencies to develop different cultural systems ('Tse Ka Chun' 1996).

In the process of identifying APS as a racist, this participant, like many others, has affirmed the basis for his racism. As with earlier examples, this illustrates the persistence of such constructs. These participants, from Australia and elsewhere, in support of multiculturalism do not associate it with the views of Pauline Hanson or APS, that is, that the myths of official multiculturalism underlie the assumptions of the racists they denounce.

4.4 Representation of Self and Other:

While the reification of cultural differences and binaries, which form the basis of culturalist and racist ideas in Australia, is a problem, responses to these may also be destabilising. Instead of allowing APS to remain the observing rational subject that objectifies and overdetermines the ethnic other, the participants disturb this relationship by casting their gaze upon the 'white,' 'Anglo-Celtic,' and 'European' cultures that form the core Australian national culture that APS writes from and wants to preserve. The dominant discourses around race and culture (as discussed above) employed by Hanson, Howard,[20] and APS may circumscribe this challenge somewhat, but some of the other participants do still destabilise the subject/object relationship employed by APS.

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[20] John Howard was the Prime Minister of Australia during these posts and at the time of writing.

4.5 Authority: Rationality

In a similar manner, the other participants also expose some of the weaknesses of the discourse of rationality utilised by APS. Having placed the theme of rationality (and its opposite) in the foreground through his responses, APS continues to stress the mapping of the rational with himself and 'our (Australian) culture' and the irrational, "barking mad," with 'Asian culture.' For instance, replying to TpX's vitriolic expletive-strewn post, APS writes, "So much for rational, reasoned debate." To another message insulting him, he replies:

> I tell you what, after seeing the trash posts from some of you people, my respect for Asians generally has really plummeted. I thought most of them were calm, quiet, rational people, but now I see that's just a facade. Give them a keyboard and a 'net connection, and all the poison and nastiness is there on show for all to see ('Alan Peyton-Smith' 1996a).

In extracts like this, the 'subterranean racism' of APS's perspective is revealed. Aspects of culture are conflated onto the signifier 'Asians,' in this case, Asians have a "calm, quiet, rational" "façade" that masks their "poison and nastiness." APS seizes responses that allow him to reinforce this view of Asians while his handling of his opponents encourages inflamed messages.

In countering APS, therefore, some participants try to unsettle this binary of rationality/irrationality and avoid the kind of impulsive abusive replies that allow APS to claim that Asians are irrational, uncivilised and so forth. Some writers examine his claims and attempt to identify flaws in his reasoning:

> Let me refute your argument with two points of my own. First, you have again fallen into the trap of generalising and assuming. In the "Eastern world," which probably accounts for half the number of countries in the world, there are inevitably dictatorships, a disproportionately large number too, I will admit. However there are also democratic countries where freedom of speech prevails, Japan, Taiwan, TpX, etc... being prime examples. Secondly, the fact that "Eastern" governments systematically silence opponents do not mean that Asians in general approve of it, for even in "Western" democracies governments are not fully representative of the people [sic] ('Tse Ka Chun' 1996).

Another example:

> YOU have labelled Asians to be barking mad or otherwise undesirable …
> it is the standard of undesirability which is at debate here. I am saying a.)
> your conception of Asian culture is wrong and b.) the standard which you
> applied to arrive at that judgment is not necessarily relevant to the issue
> of inferiority. The bottom line is: you made a personal judgment, then
> you claimed universal support of that judgment from most of Austrailia,
> and then you used these premises to come to the conclusion that Asians
> need to be excluded in Austrailia's immigration policy. The route by
> which you arrived at your judgment is faulty; your claim to support of
> your judgment is unproven, and the conclusion you draw from such
> faulty premises is obviously unjustified ('Jeffrey Szeto' 1996, as in
> original).

These writers, as explained earlier, may be constrained by the idiom which they have to work within, but they attempt to oppose APS in two ways: firstly, by deconstructing his writing through analysis, secondly, employing a composed writing style.

APS does not attempt to meet his adversaries halfway but insists on recycling the same generalisations and assumptions that incensed them in the first place. This tactic prevents any form of mutual understanding, and any alteration in his fundamental position, instead, the thread spirals onwards. As one poster says to Tse Ka Chun, hoping to obtain a concession from certain people, that is, APS, through rational debate is hopeless:

> … I note that your messages originate in Hong Kong so you may not be
> familiar with some of the more ... shall we say 'unique' aspects of
> Australian internet 'debating' culture. You see, with some correspondents,
> using rational argument just makes things worse. I think by now you may
> have some sense of this.
>
> Now I also believe that a strong sense of personal pride is a feature of
> Asian culture, so you may feel honour bound to keep on going with this
> thread until you finally have won the day through force of argument.
>
> I warn you now - its not worth it! You will experience exasperation,
> consume inordinate quantities of your time, bandwidth and emotional
> energy. Everyone else's kill files will become huge and, in the end, you'll
> have to give up anyway [sic] ('Rob Silva' 1996).

The claim here, that Australian Usenet culture is unique in that it has people on whom rational argument is wasted, is debatable, that is, this may not be unique to Australia (similarly, the statement regarding a "strong sense of personal pride"). However, more relevantly, this does raise the issue of the limits of debate when it might be the case that a regular contributor is not actually interested in shifting their position for reasons of their own. Indeed, the topic thread gathers at least 241[21] messages without APS altering his position, at the most, he makes minor concessions, some of which he subsequently withdraws. By this time, however, it is clear that the majority of the people contributing to this thread do not agree with APS.

5. Conclusion

Despite the absence of traditional visual markers on the Internet, similar processes of inscription described by Fanon still occur, processes that give lie to the popular belief that the Internet liberates subjects from the confines of racial classification. In the Usenet flame thread I chose to analyse, it is clear that the participants were limited in their ability to counter the culturalist-racist discourse underpinning claims that Asian culture was incompatible with Australian culture. This was in part due to limitations in the idiom available to the participants, an idiom that integrated some of the culturalist and racist ideas circulating in Australia. However, there is at least one positive aspect of the study: the persistence of some of the people writing to the group, and their ability to write back. These challenged the received ideas about race and culture, despite the limitations imposed by the discourse and idiom they had to work within. In this respect, the other, constructed by the original poster, subverted the gaze by gazing back. This case was one of relatively spontaneous interaction between individual participants, in the next chapter, I shall address the use of the Internet to form virtual communities and

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[21] It does drift on to other topics and the title is changed on a number of occasions, spawning new topic threads.

solidarities to address social injustices and human rights issues, and some of the problems that these sorts of formations may raise.

CHAPTER THREE

Diasporic Formations, the Internet, and Gender: The Chinese Diaspora and the Riots in Indonesia (May 1998)

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Diasporic Formations, the Internet, and Gender:
The Chinese Diaspora and the Riots in Indonesia
(May 1998)[1]

1. Introduction

In my previous chapter, using the example of a topic thread in Usenet news, I dealt with

the ways in which debates surrounding race and culture originally grounded in national

discourses can spill out into transnational virtual communities. In this chapter, I explore

how the Internet provides social activists with an avenue to reach, stir emotions, and

enlist people far beyond the confines of immediate location. The increasing popularity

of the Internet has been accompanied by a surge in activists' use of the web, email, and

newsgroups. From June 1998, some Internet users passed around email messages

describing rapes and violence against ethnic Chinese women in Indonesia. Sometimes,

these messages included first-hand accounts, image-file attachments and/or links to

photographs and other texts supporting the claims. Existing and new web sites

incorporated images that purported to be of the raped women and often hailed the

Internet user as ethnic Chinese, calling upon their sympathies as fellow Chinese of the

victims.

In exploring activists' use of the Internet and the example of the ethnic Chinese

women, I will analyse the medium of the Internet and the use of this technology in

cultural politics, in particular, for diasporic community formation. My broader concern

is the concept of a 'global Chinese community', and how activists use the Internet to

facilitate this communal formation and consolidation. More specifically, I focus upon

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[1] Versions of this chapter were previously published in: "Global Chinese Fraternity and the Indonesian Riots of May 1998: The Online Gathering of Dispersed Chinese," *Intersections*, Issue 4, September 2000; and "Discursive Violence on the Internet and the May 1998 Riots" in *Violent Conflicts in Indonesia*, edited by Charles A. Coppel, Curzon Press, forthcoming.

the Internet as a medium for the distribution of images through email, web, and newsgroups.

Some of the reactions to these images, and, in general, to the political and social turmoil in Indonesia in May 1998 triggered by the Asian economic crisis, bring to the fore reservations about virtual community and the Internet. I will therefore analyse the use and development of technologies of the Internet for the creation and growth of online transnational communal formations. This critique incorporates a discussion of the changes undergone in the meanings and deployment of the term 'diaspora' in diasporic activist politics. With the "quilting" (Wood and Adams 1998) of dispersed Chinese ethno-communities into a Chinese virtual community come refreshed hegemonic formations. The discourses used in descriptions of related issues and events in web pages by and for ethnic Chinese raise concerns about how to narrate, and counter, oppression whilst dodging the homogenising and universalising discourses which accompany strategic alliances based upon ethnicity.

A variety of readings can be, and have been, made of the case of the May 1998 riots in Jakarta, in part due to the reach of its email and web dissemination and the variances in tone and perspective in print and press radio coverage in Indonesia and overseas. Contributing to the confusion are the actions of local and international activists, the intersecting racial, state, and gender politics, and the context of general confusion and chaos in which these rapes took place. At least three writers have written on the case of the May 1998 rapes: Ariel Heryanto, 'Rape, Race and Reporting' (1999), Ien Ang, 'Indonesia on My Mind: Subjects in History and the Contradictions of Diaspora' (Ang forthcoming), and Laura Lochore, 'Virtual Rape: Vivian's Story' (Lochore 2000). Each of these authors works through the complexities of the events carefully, and, for reasons of brevity, the following summary cannot adequately capture the subtleties of their analyses. Heryanto discusses the Indonesian social and political

environment before, during, and after these events and the difficulties in speaking about the topic of rape and violence in general, and the May 1998 case specifically. Ang's chapter deals with the question of the diasporic intellectual in analysing the website, Huaren, and the way it addresses and tries to construct a diasporic Chinese community. Finally, Lochore's article discusses the violence of the print media's appropriation of the story of one of the victims told on the net.

1.1 Activism and the Internet

This chapter addresses a topic that the previous analyses necessarily refer to briefly - the medium of the Internet itself and the implications in developments in the way cultural politics and activism, in this case, Chinese global diasporic community formation, uses Internet technology. The primary focus is upon the appropriation and use of images in online activism. The East Timor International Support Centre claims that some of the images sent around and displayed on web sites, also subsequently printed in newspapers, originated from their web site, *Timor Today*, and in fact represented atrocities wrought on East Timorese by the Indonesian army and militia. The discursive violence done to the images under discussion on the Internet is part of a mobilising strategy. The case discussed here led to what Anderson has described as "long distance nationalism" that allows the activist to play a "national hero" "on the other side of the planet" (to borrow the phrasing from Anderson 1994: 326). This has become possible through the transnational mediascape provided by electronic and other forms of media.

The advantages of the Internet that led to the deployment of this communications technology on behalf of the East Timorese struggle for independence are the same ones behind the appropriation of these images for other struggles against oppression and violence. Individuals downloaded and redeployed images from the web site (amongst other ones from elsewhere) to address the killing and raping of ethnic

Chinese women during the May 1998 Indonesian riots. NetAction, a project run by The Tides Center [sic], a US non-profit organization, produced a guide called *The Virtual Activist Training Course*, which summarises what the Internet has to offer for activists. It focuses on the opportunities the technology presents for networking and collaboration between activist organisations, reaching out to individuals and communities, collecting signatures for petitions, and raising membership and funds (NetAction/The Tides Center 1998). This chapter addresses the option that NetAction calls "email and web-based outreach" (n.p.).

I am interested in identifying tactics for resistance and activism using the Internet while managing to retain grassroots relevance and minimising the violations that seem inevitable in the representation of the marginalised. Before doing this, I identify some of the pitfalls for social activists using the Internet, no matter how well intentioned their activism might be. Hence, rather than undercut online activism, the critical analysis that follows is meant to facilitate the development of a suitable praxis for action, which is sensitive to the politics of representation.

1.2 Subjectivity and Belonging

Appadurai describes how the electronic media have transformed the work of the imagination as a crucial aspect of modern subjectivity. Television, radio, and other forms of electronic "media transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds" (1996: 3). As with all forms of media, the Internet does not introduce something 'new' in this sense. Like print and other older media, along with other forms of electronic media, Internet applications "are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons."

Digital media refigures 'mass communication' and is a form of media where audiences and producers are not as distinguishable. Thus, we get a situation where an audience member-web surfer can view a web site, download its photographs, perhaps alter them, and then display them on another web site, perhaps with a different context, as a web producer. As Stone suggests, reading practices have altered (Stone 1994). Computer-mediated forms of communication allow for a more interactive social practice in which the reader has an effect on the textual environment. Simultaneously, like other forms of electronic media, there is a distance from events brought to individuals by the Internet. This dislocation raises a further question in relation to the issue at hand: how then do we identify the 'authentic' under these circumstances?

The body of writing about cosmopolitanism is also useful. Especially within communities with a powerful discourse of nationalism, 'locals' traditionally regard cosmopolitans with suspicion as the dislocated stranger/intruder that is exempt from the responsibilities of locals and take for granted the centrality of the West. The last decade has seen the reformulation of cosmopolitanism to include new forms of cosmopolitanism that are strongly located and/or originate from "below" (Nielson 1999). I discuss the viability and necessity of retaining a strong link to the grassroots and argue that this is vital in relation to global activism on the Internet. While I shall demonstrate how the traditional suspicion of the cosmopolitan stranger is applicable in the case today, I am not dismissing the possibility of 'neo-cosmopolitan activists' who work with or are part of local cultures they represent and yet utilise the global arena to achieve their aims.

I want to demonstrate how the meanings attached to the images of women's bodies distributed via the Internet contributed to the development of Chinese diasporic consciousness. This argument requires a brief description of the local context of these images and events in Indonesia and of how ethnocidal violence represents an assault on

a racial body. At the same time, there are special meanings attached to rape in general and to this particular case that also affect reactions to the images. Relatedly, these images of women's bodies are involved in the transnational production of meanings to support calls for global solidarity amongst ethnic Chinese.

2. The Applicability of 'Diaspora'

Firstly, I consider the applicability of the term, 'diaspora' to ethnic Chinese outside China, including the US and Southeast Asia. The phrase, "[w]here once were dispersions, there is now diaspora," cryptically sums up Tölölyan's observation that the term, diaspora, has been broadened to encompass the dispersed communities outside the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian diasporas (Tölölyan 1996: 9). For Tölölyan, diaspora, once a term "saturated with the meanings of exile, loss, dislocation, powerlessness and plain pain became a useful, even desirable way to describe a range of dispersions." The Chinese dispersal occurred over a long period of time and for a variety of reasons, rather than as the result of a single catastrophe or pogrom.

In contrast to the 'traditional' diasporas, the dispersal of Chinese was often the result, not of a crisis or exile, but of poverty and the demand for labour and capital by transnational capitalism. Ethnic Chinese were either abducted to work as indentured labourers or they themselves chose to migrate in search of a better life (Pan 1991). The Chinese diaspora illustrates the reconceptualisation of diaspora described by Tölölyan; its development is not wholly due to exile and loss, nor is there always a strong tie to a motherland.

2.1 The Formation of Diasporic Identification

The motives, conscious or otherwise, behind the appropriation of the images to represent the rape of ethnic Chinese women, have their foundation in the construction of diasporic solidarity. In the contemporary world, the distinction between an ethnic

community and a diasporic one lies in the diasporic community's effort to retain and build ties to the homeland and kindred communities in other nations and states. As Tölölyan argues, a diaspora is not something merely defined by "being" and birth, but also by "doing" and "feeling" (1996: 30), implying that the boundary between ethnic and diasporic communities is not distinct but is defined by *emotion* and *behaviour*. Therefore, I analyse the Chinese websites featuring the Indonesian riots in the context of the raising of diasporic consciousness amongst globally dispersed ethnic Chinese. Through these sites, it is possible to understand the ways in which people understand the dispersed individuals and communities of ethnic Chinese as diasporic through Internet links formed across national boundaries and distances.

The renaming of dispersed ethnic Chinese as the Chinese diaspora is significant when we consider the questions relating to the identity of the (Indonesian) Chinese and the 'diasporic activists.' This is where the homogenising claims of the aforementioned 'consciousness raising diasporans' meet with popular notions of chineseness. They both tend to assume a stable ethnic Chinese collectivity with cultural practices and beliefs that cut across localities, nations, dialects and histories (Coppel 1983).[2] The web sites acknowledge briefly the different histories and cultures of ethnic Chinese around the world but these are more often obscured in favour of promoting solidarity between ethnic Chinese born and/or living in Southeast Asia, East Asia, the US, England, Indonesia and so forth. The productive sharing of oppression, exile, and loss of diasporic awareness and activism in reality obscures other aspects of diaspora. For instance, it becomes difficult to incorporate into this picture the complicity of some mobile diasporans in transnational capitalism and its accompanying "scattered hegemonies" (Grewan & Kaplan 1994). Tölölyan claims, "the new meanings of

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[2] An illustration of this construct of a shared culture is the way Guanxi has been characterised as an essentialised collection of traditional traits of the Chinese. It is actually a set of practices that developed in response to the conditions of colonialism, migration and postcolonialism (Ong 1998).

diaspora have often been coupled with a larger project of re-articulating the nation-state and the concepts of national identity, indeed of identity as such," (1996: 5) mainly serving the interests of transnational elites and the diasporists. These mutual interests lie in the decline of both "the nation's aspiration to normative homogeneity" and "the state's hegemony" (1996: 4). The renaming of dispersions into diasporas allows the assumption of local and transnational stateless power, based upon multiple and transnational belonging and loyalties, that could sustain both the homeland and the ethno-diasporan community.

Accompanying the construction of a homogenous global Chinese diaspora is the reiteration of pain and loss that reinforces the diasporic effect, and, thus, reinforces the feelings of commonality. Wanning Sun describes, for instance, how the Nanjing Massacre websites demonstrate the power of reviving cultural memories, of ritualistic pleasure in sharing outrage and pain, resulting in a feeling of communal belonging (Sun 1998). This process cuts across and works through national boundaries and subjectivities, and it is my contention that the websites discussed in this chapter, featuring the photos of abused women, produce a similar effect.

One of the factors leading to the rise of diasporic consciousness in some communities, identified by Tölölyan, is the ease and speed of communication and travel in comparison to earlier dispersions, when immigration often led to isolation from homeland and kin. We can understand the relationship between the Internet as a media technology, the diasporic groups, and activism via Appadurai's conceptualisation of global cultural flows and how "they occur in and through the growing disjunctures

between ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes."[3] Ethnic politics and diaspora specifically, reflect these disjunctures between the mediascape, technoscape, and ethnoscape.

Research on the transnational Hakka community and the Hakka Global Network (hereafter HGN) email list provides an example of the formation of transnational communities via computer-mediated communication. Eriberto Lozada (1996) conducted systematic discourse analysis on a sample of email messages in the HGN in order to identify the part played by the Internet in defining Hakka identity. His research demonstrated that various characteristics of the email list showed the "production of locality … [and] neighborhoods [sic]" across great distances (Appadurai 1996: 306). Lozada found that members used the first-person in their messages, arranged 'offline' meetings, and messages were direct and intimate. Feelings of community that used to be localised are now global, as Appadurai writes: "ethnicity, once a genie contained in the bottle of some sort of locality (however large) has now become a global force, forever slipping in and through the cracks between states and borders" (1996: 306).

The "global force" of ethnicity is complicated because the Internet is not actually available to all and is a technology which requires a large financial and training investment. Researchers in this medium are familiar with the debate over who has access to these resources, the disproportionate demographic make-up of Internet users, and so on. Bosah Ebo calls these two extreme positions, "cybertopia", the Internet as a "great equalizer", and "cyberghetto", "the Internet as a resource of disproportionate access and its technology, content, and [n]etiquette all reflect certain class, gender, and

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[3] Appadurai dismisses these traditional approaches to the topic of globalisation: centre-periphery, push and pull migration theory, consumers and producers (and other Marxist models); they do not account for complexities introduced by disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics. The different 'scapes' introduced are to indicate the different types of agents involved (nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, sub-national groups, face-to-face groups), the fluidity and irregular structures of these scapes, and the multiplicity of positions and 'worlds' that people and groups inhabit now (Appadurai 1996).

racial inequalities" (Ebo 1998: 2). The problems of long distance nationalism are compounded by the unequal access, of different people, in this case, within the 'Chinese diaspora', to Internet technology. The power to define the experience of members of a collective, in the Internet context, lies in the hands of those positioned advantageously in terms of their income and geographic location. In the final section of this article, I address the implications of this situation for the handling of the ethnic violence during the May 1998 riots by certain diasporic Chinese web sites hosted in servers located in the US.

Today, web pages, news groups, chat and email on the Internet, together with the declining cost and increasing reach of older technologies like the telephone and television, provide people with increased opportunities to 'feel' and enact a sense of belonging to a larger, transnational diasporic community. This is a form of transnational communication, where several of the audience are subjects who are removed from the events described, yet relocated as members of a diasporic community, in this case as a member of an imaginary transnational Chinese community. These web pages enact the particular snarl of gender, racial and diasporic politics that can complicate the study of ethno-diasporic Chinese formations. Most importantly, this case of the images and messages sent via the Internet illustrates the part that Internet communication plays in articulating these complex collisions.

3. The Rapes in Jakarta, 1998

To describe briefly the context of this article: the rapes occurred in the midst of the riots in Jakarta in May 1998, preceded by Indonesia's economic crisis beginning in mid-1997.[4] Indonesian people held extensive demonstrations against Suharto, which escalated after the shooting of four Trisakti University students on 12 May 1998.

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[4] This account is based on Susan Blackburn's article (1999).

Wholesale looting in Jakarta and other cities marked the next three days, and the main targets of these acts were Chinese Indonesians in recognisably Chinese areas.

It was only in the beginning of June that the public became aware of the rapes. Tim Relawan Untuk Kemanusiaan (the Volunteers Team for Humanity) compiled accounts of the rape, along with the location and details of the incidents. I cite the findings of the Team with the disclaimer that the government team confirmed only a third (fifty-two cases) of the 168 rapes (including twenty deaths) reported by the Volunteers Team for Humanity. It is unlikely that any of these figures represent the real numbers, however. The Team compared the rape locations to the location of the riots, and the conclusion of the early report was that the rapes occurred in areas of Chinese concentration while the riots were more widely dispersed all over Jakarta (Tim Relawan Untuk Kemanusiaan 1998). In addition, the rapes happened at the same time as the riots, and in the more violent areas of destruction, burning, and death.

From common aspects in the modus operandi, the Team concluded that the rapes were organised and the Team members raised questions as to the identity of the planners. According to their data, many of the main instigators and perpetuators were unknown to the victims and their families. In addition, the Team amassed material, which indicated that rumours of the imminent rioting and rapes spread days before their actual occurrence. If this is true, the perpetuators could have pre-planned the riots and rapes of 1998. The Team is careful to list a range of possibilities rather than single out members of the military, that is, they say the perpetrators could be "of [a] government body, of the armed forces (ABRI), of any exclusive syndicate, of groups of bandit or hired gangsters or any other group of society" (Tim Relawan Untuk Kemanusiaan 1998: n.p.).

3.1 Meanings surrounding Mass Rape and Violence

Appadurai's proposal that extreme group violence against social familiars is associated with uncertainty over identity is relevant in exploring the semiotic impact of the rapes and the violence. In particular, his analysis relates to "cosmologies in flux, categories under stress, and ideas striving for the logic of self-evidence" (Appadurai 1998: 231). In the context of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, the massive retrenchments, rising food prices and general economic turmoil (Williams 1998) pushed groups in Indonesia over the threshold. Various writers have documented the historical and social background to the complexities of racial politics. In the mood for change and with blame directed at the Suharto regime, not surprisingly, the ethnic Chinese, as a visible minority in Jakarta, became the closest and easiest target.

According to Appadurai, ethnocidal violence "is an effort to stabilize the body of the ethnic other; to eliminate the flux introduced by somatic variation, by mixture and intermarriage: and to evict the possibility of further somatic change or slippage" (Appadurai 1998: 232). He draws on anthropological work by Liisa Malkki on Hutu refugees to explain the extreme brutality displayed toward the body of the ethnic other in such explosive circumstances. In Appadurai's application, policies of assimilation tend to cover over, yet generate some deep conflicts and contradictions. Violence in such situations represents an effort to uncover the 'enemy within'. Rape, in such circumstances, has special meanings: it is a direct attack on the organs of ethnic reproduction and is "the most violent form of penetration, investigation, and exploration of the body of the enemy" (Appadurai 1998, p.239).

Thus, in one sense, the rape of Chinese women could be an instance of the kinds of logic that prevail during a time of uncertainty about identity and expresses itself as violence against social intimates. In the context of the deployment of these images and narratives on the Internet, it is also necessary to consider another aspect of the violence,

that is, gender politics. Rape is more than just another version of violence, and to treat it as such would be to ignore the pattern of domination and submission that defines and directs female sexuality - and who controls it (Websdale and Chesney-Lind 1998).

Sexual violence against women in warfare is not new, and it is debatable whether it is a recent phenomenon in term of ethnic violence. It is, most commonly, a matter surrounded by silence, or naturalised as an unfortunate side effect of war or violent conflict. The silence is paralleled in academia; for instance, there is a dearth of research on the mass rapes in Berlin at the close of World War II (Siefert 1994; Appadurai 1998: 231). While acknowledging the differences between the two cases, some of Siefert's explanations of rape and violence against women in the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict are applicable to the present context. Both cases of rape are an attack on the culture of the other and, as Siefert describes it, an "element of male communication" (1994: 59). During times of war, women are raped to communicate to other men that they are not masculine and competent enough to "protect 'their' women."

Siefert's explanation of rape, while useful for understanding the rapes of Chinese women in Indonesia, needs further clarification. These meanings surrounding the rapes should be qualified by Heryanto's observation that the May 1998 rapes did not occur in the context of war or explicit military manoeuvres (as in Siefert's case studies):

> In most of these troubled areas there was usually an official articulation of goals to be achieved, or rewards to be gained after or beyond the destruction of female bodies (Heryanto 1999: 309).

He comments that the context of the May 1998 rapes, in contrast, was distinguished by the absence of these goals and rewards and so he hesitantly uses the term "political rapes."

The negative message contained in communication via rape still exists, but in a different sense. Heryanto explains that it was a stock practice amongst police and military officers to force other victims to watch or take part in the violence, and thus to victimise on a greater scale. The 'victims' also included NGO activists who suffered emotionally when seeking out and hearing accounts of the rapes, as well as the audience of the media accounts and images. Coupled with the selection of ethnic Chinese women as the targets of rape, racialised accounts of the violence were encouraged. This racialised account obscured the other forces at work during the riots, for instance the strained relations between the military, the state and the Indonesian public, and instead pinned the blame on racism and economic envy, and latterly, religious differences.

4. The Representation of the Rapes

The process described by Heryanto had repercussions overseas in the way people read the images of the abused women. Sun points out how "the images of violated female bodies may also be used as a metonym in representing the traumatised nation in anti-imperialist discourse" (Sun 1998: 17). Rather than a representation of assault on the nation, Chinese bulletin messages and web sites tended to represent the assaults as being against the *trans*national Chinese (imagined) community. The images are mobilised in speed and forms made possible by the convergence of Internet and digital imaging technologies. The compression of space and time has permitted long-distance nationalism, so much so that diasporas can begin to create transnational communal networks.

Laura Lochore raises an ethical problem with representation in her analysis of the Sydney Morning Herald's appropriation and retelling of the story of one of the victims of the May 1998 riots (Vivian) that was passed around the Internet (Lochore 2000). Lochore's conclusion that newspapers and emails appropriated the voice of the

subaltern, Vivian, to suit "neo-(post)colonial ends" applies also to the specific images used in accounts of the rapes. The women in the images I discuss, like Vivian's story, have been virtually raped in the process of recovering their bodies and their violation from invisibility. The stories and experiences of these women, having been silenced, are recovered and reshaped and used for political ends. In this way, images of abused women are stripped of context and then re-contextualised to suit particular regional issues. The women are renamed by firstly losing their names and identity, and then by being re-identified as victims. Images of their bodies are then re-re-labelled yet again as victims in a different context.

4.1 Relabelling

The images under discussion were photographs converted to digital information allowing them to be displayed on web sites and attached to email and newsgroup messages. One photograph showed the bruised and bloody body of a woman, her back towards the viewer, in a building scrawled with Bahasa Indonesian words. This photo, along with a variety of other images, was seen in many of the sites I visited (Indonesian Free Press 1998; World Huaren Federation 1998). Another photo presented a naked woman being penetrated by one man, with another behind him. There were other photographs of battered bodies of women: some with men wearing army uniforms; some without; many displayed extreme acts of violence and were of seemingly dead women, as in the case of one photo where the body of a woman was apparently impaled through her private parts by a broomstick. All these images, either accompanying email or newsgroup messages, or on web sites, were identified as being of Chinese women who were raped by either Indonesian army personnel or by pribumi men.

Some of these photographs were relabelled as showing raped and/or murdered ethnic Chinese women. The ETISC web site claims that the pictures depict the torture of

women in East Timor by the Indonesian military and paramilitary stationed there, and the pictures used to represent raped Chinese women in Jakarta were selected from forty photographs that could be downloaded from the site (East Timor International Support Center 1997). These forty photographs are, according to ETISC, a selection from two hundred photos that were smuggled to the ETISC in late 1997. The words on the woman's body are written in Bahasa Indonesian. The words written on her back right leg and buttock are, "Champion cat shit Dead like a rat." On her back are the words, "Like this, so that you get to feel the consequences." In a couple of the photographs, soldiers hold a sign, inscribed with the words, "Hidup hadiah[5] Nobel" [Bahasa Indonesian for 'Long live the Nobel award'], over her body. The ETISC explains that the text that accompanied the two hundred photos surmises that the sign was probably hers and that this indicates she was one of the crowd welcoming Bishop Belo back after he received the Nobel Peace Prize. This might mean she was tortured and killed in December 1996.

Digital technology makes possible the relabelling of the images of the abused women and enables the creation and storage of photographs that will not decay with time. This "manufactures a present that will forever be new and clear and always convenient" (Chow 1993: 169). The digital form of these images also allows their speedy passage through computer networks. In other words, the mobility and continued importance of images are paradoxically possible through the very technologies that make their 'authenticity' (as referents to reality) even more questionable than before.

Staff reporters for the Asian Wall Street Journal wrote an article identifying the sources of some of the photographs of purported rape victims used in a variety of

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[5] Only part of this was discernible in the photograph, that is "HIDUP HAD [blocked from view] NOBEL," the ETISC deduced the full phrase.

websites, including print media:

> Newspapers in Hong Kong and elsewhere ran the pictures, describing them as photos of rape victims.
>
> That the pictures have been accepted so readily illustrates the growing power of computers and the Internet. At least some of the pictures circulating - there are at least fifteen - were culled from an Asian pornography web site, a gruesome U.S.-based exhibition of gory photos, and an East Timorese exile homepage on the Internet (Wagstaff and Solomon 1998: n.p.).

Through the technologies of digital photography and the online media, pictures on the Internet can be downloaded and pasted up somewhere else, as can photographs sent as file attachments in email and to newsgroups. Attributing this redeployment and acceptance to the "growing power of computers and the Internet" alone would be to make the mistake of assuming that technology is an autonomous entity. In fact, the Internet, like other media technologies, is influenced by the variety of institutions and organisations and the ideological motives of individuals that surround it. Even after the publication of the above report, several sites did not remove these photographs; instead, some captioned them as "fake" and linked them to pages specifically about the Indonesian riots, even though they may not have originated in that context (for instance, Huaren).

5. Responses of Internet Users

The responses from people on web pages such as Huaren and Indonesia Online to these images, do not give the sense that these participants are conscious of the issue of authenticity. The claim that we are witnessing the "death of photography", so dear to those writing on the "visual age",[6] oversimplifies the complex ways in which we interact with images. The force and impact of images remain regardless of the

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[6] The identification of a 'visual age' is a major response to the previously mentioned technological convergence, and has been outlined and critiqued by Kevin Robins (1995).

knowledge that images can be edited, manipulated, created and, hence, can no longer be considered as 'evidence' of events. For instance, a woman describing herself as a Catholic, Chinese woman who spent her school years in Jakarta,[7] now residing in San Francisco, posts her reaction to the photographs:

> This evening, an Indonesian friend visited me at my home here in bay area. He showed me pictures about the raping of Chinese women by pribumi men recently. On the street, in the market, on the sidewalk, in a broad day light. I saw those horrendous pictures for fifteen seconds then closed my eyes and sobed and sobed [sic] (Alacoque 1998: n.p.).

A desire to enable web surfers to distinguish between the falsely identified (that is, relabelled) and the 'real' photographs may motivate the continued inclusion of these photographs in the websites. The possibilities provided by the combined media of digital photography and the Internet enable a substitution of meaning whereby these photographs come to represent the atrocities conducted against ethnic Chinese women in the May 1998 riots symbolically, rather than referentially.

Some of the motives of producers of sites such as Huaren during this time[8] could be discerned in proclamations on their web pages:

> Chinese Diaspora had existed for many centuries and spread far and wide. Early mistreatments had caused many descendents to feel confused, indifferent, or ambivalent towards their heritage. With modern communication technology, this is the right time to bring us together and to promote the sense of kinship [as in original] (World Huaren Federation 1998: n.p.).

There is unevenness in the relationship between the "kin" here, that is, between the author and the scattered people with their unique personal histories for whom he is speaking. Of the "ethnic Chinese", who has access to this technology? Who is writing

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[7] It is quite hard to verify the race and gender of people on the Internet, so when I refer to a poster as belonging to a certain ethnic group etc, I am referring to how they present themselves through certain cues, quite often, the surname, although Indonesian Chinese generally do not have 'Chinese' surnames, through such phrases such as 'we Chinese,' or through more overt declarations as in the unquoted part of this message.

[8] The organisation, and the website, has changed in many ways since the time of writing, although the emphasis on shared problems of discrimination and hardship remains.

here? The organisation behind the Huaren website, World Huaren Federation, was then based in San Francisco and yet claimed to speak for the ethnic Chinese as a whole. This is the other side of the picture, as opposed to the more positive aspects presented in liberal discourses about the Internet and new 'postmodern' communication technologies. The technology is being used to arouse feelings of solidarity amongst ethnic Chinese around the world in a way that accentuates racial distinctions to the detriment of locally-grounded activism that is sensitive to the regional politics of race - a danger of 'long distance nationalism' that Anderson warned against.

The meanings of rape in the context of extreme ethnocidal violence, that is, rape as an assault on the ethnic Chinese and rape as an aspect of men communicating to other men, have gone online. Witness this post to an Indonesian online forum:

> Subject: Chinese-Indonesian Men are A Bunch of Cowards
>
> The first thing that came to my mind when reading the rape reports was: 'Where were the men?' There were no mention whatsoever of any resistance put up by Indonesian-Chinese men to protect the safety and honour of their women. They seem to always rely on their money to 'buy' some soldiers or security guards for their protection....
>
> What a bunch of cowards!! You gave bad name to all Chinese [as in original] (Ng 1998: n.p.).

These sentiments about Indonesian Chinese men were uncommon (at least, they were not expressed often). However, the post is typical of many of the messages on the forum in that it utilises the patriarchal discourses of masculinity, male honour, and women and their bodies as property to be protected. The last sentence, "You gave bad name to all Chinese", can be read as an instance of negative feelings about the diasporic ties between Chinese communities, especially when he refers to their reliance on money to perform their 'masculine' task of protecting "their women". Even so, these ties between different ethnic Chinese communities have been naturalised and felt keenly. Just as Nigel Ng sees a connection between the "name" (or 'face') of all Chinese and what he

perceives as cowardice of the Indonesian Chinese men, the ethnic Chinese online activists and respondents echo this connection. The atrocities conducted on these women have become atrocities against Chinese as a whole.

As explained earlier, the origin of many of the other photographs used in activist sites was also called into question, that is the photographs were not from the May 1998 riots in Jakarta, and this in turn affected how the rape issue was addressed by the media and people in power. Rape, especially on the scale of May 1998, is a difficult enough thing to prove without the added tag of 'false' or 'inauthentic'. In the process of establishing communality amongst Chinese online, the diasporic activists have unwittingly complicated the investigation into this issue. A pro-Habibie Jakarta newspaper, Republika, in an article headlined, 'Is it True that Mass Rape Took Place', 2 August 1998, questions whether the mass rapes actually occurred (Human Rights Watch 1998). In a climate where the Indonesian state and the military were eager to deny the rapes, pro-government press and individuals in Indonesia seized upon the questionable authenticity of the circulated images.

In terms of reactions outside Indonesia, however, while the written narratives included in these email were powerful on their own, including horrific accounts of violence and hostility towards Chinese, burning of buildings, invasion of homes and businesses and so forth, the 'rape' images provoked a visceral reflex in the people to whom I showed them. The reaction was one of revulsion and, in turn, anger, often leading to the expression that 'something should be done'. This response towards the images, together with the representation of the assaults as resulting from racial discord and economic disparity, made for a powerful means of drawing together Chinese around the world. As the email 'forwards' increased and the topic entered current affairs, some ethnic Chinese and some of the media, addressed the rapes as crimes against ethnic Chinese as a whole. On web bulletin boards, people presenting themselves as ethnic

Chinese called for greater Chinese solidarity around the globe.[9] Such forms of diasporic communality are open to a similar criticism to that of a feminism based on a universalising discourse of global sisterhood. This is a universalisation that uses the politics of location as an 'instrument of hegemony' (Kaplan 1994), reiterating boundaries and performing its own marginalising, homogenisation that ultimately subsumes a myriad different identities and injustices under one banner.

In the calls for greater Chinese solidarity, patriarchal discourses of honour and protection (read ownership) of women are employed to feed into the sense of outrage felt by readers. This paternalistic attitude applies to women and also to the 'less fortunate' in the Chinese ethno-diaspora. As one poster protests:

> I've got a message for all of you who sent fake photos. Do you know that what you're doing will only worsen things in Indonesia??? Sure, rich chinese in Indonesia can just pack up and leave right away. But how about the middle-class chinese??? They're trapped in Indonesia. The more you try to divide the pribumis from the Chinese, another riot is more likely to happen. DON'T MISLEAD PEOPLE!! I'm a chinese in Indonesia, and I'm only thinking logically and practically [as in original] ('Uchoks' 1998).

This post highlights the dangers in the way diasporic sites like Huaren have taken up the issue. In their zeal to establish wrongs done to ethnic Chinese elsewhere, issues of class, transnationality and mobility (and lack thereof) become subsumed under all-encompassing collectivities.

Despite frustration expressed on the Huaren site,[10] the online furore has had an impact 'offline' or, in Internet parlance, IRL (in real life), demonstrating the potency of the distributed images and accounts, as well as the refiguring of the Chinese dispersion into diaspora, for transnational politics. Activist groups and other organisations in

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[9] Presentation of identity can occur unconsciously or consciously through markers such as the names used and references in the body of messages.

[10] Documented in Ang (1998). She discusses the various messages on the bulletin board expressing frustration and cynicism about the online discourse being divorced from making an actual impact in Indonesia itself. She also describes briefly the various schemes thought up online, for instance, assisting Indonesian Chinese to emigrate en-masse through sponsorships, and funding.

Singapore, Philippines, China, Thailand, the United States and elsewhere, held exhibitions and protests and the governments of these countries were compelled to at the very least demand an investigation into the rape cases. In Singapore, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) put up an exhibition that included photographs culled from these diasporic Chinese web sites (Zakaria 1998). Forty thousand Singaporeans signed the AWARE statement calling for sanctions should there be a re-occurrence of the rapes (Widyono 1998).

6. Reservations

6.1 East Timor

The use of images of women's bodies is problematic, not least because the victims are not in a position to protest the way their experience is represented and used. As Susan Sontag wrote, "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and therefore, like power" (1977: 4). It is a reminder of how the plundering of bloodied body images has always been a feature of exoticism, patriotism, pornography, journalism, history, and horror – and how these discourses merge and procreate with each other. The use of photographs from East Timor is an example of this plundering, particularly when it is highly possible that the perpetuators of the rape of East Timorese women were the ones that took the photographs. In this case, Sontag's claim, that "the act of taking pictures is a semblance of appropriation, a semblance of rape" (1977: 24), is particularly apt.

The dissemination of the photographs obscured the complexities of the local politics in East Timor itself. While Internet participants made similar assertions, that is, that the Indonesian army was complicit and actively took part in the violence and rapes there, the knowledge that some of these images originated from East Timor combined with the captioning and the context provided in the emails and web sites, did not dispel

anger. In fact, some were aggravated further and saw race and racism as the primary cause (sometimes accompanied by the economic) of the violence. They employed an essentialising opposition of 'good/victimised Chinese' and 'bad pribumis'. This opposition took on a global dimension, that is, some Internet participants substituted 'pribumis' with 'non-chinese oppressor', and added this case to the list of grievances against the way diasporic Chinese were treated in various parts of the world.

One message to the Indonesia Online forum, entitled "This is a small group of Indonesians. Not the entire Indonesia[!]", reads:

> It seems the most debate on the news board is either 'Indonesians are the bad guys' or 'It might not be the Indonesians!' It is almost certainly the Indonesians, but in these revolting rape photos, it seems the most offenders are dressed in Army Uniform. Should you not shout your protest upon the Indonesian Army and not the Indonesians themselves? [as in original] ('An Australian' 1998).

This is followed by a response entitled "Shut Up Aussie[!]", "Australians are racists too, they also party [sic] from queen hanson.racist have no right to speak here [sic]" ('freeman' 1998). The posters of email and newsgroup messages responding to and distributing the images and narratives began to refer to a global alliance, a solidarity amongst all Chinese against oppression of Chinese. In the midst of this, they ignored the plight of the East Timorese, because it did not fit their binary.

Another theme that emerges in both the kinds of reactions online and the violence against the Chinese is the perspective of Chinese as transnational elites. This view of "parachute Chinese" sees them as without loyalty to the nation they reside in and with a mobility suited to the logic of flexible accumulation that presides in this age of transnational capitalism (Ong 1998). The culpability of transnational diasporic practices in contributing to or at least enlarging existing social problems, including the social stratification in Indonesia should be taken into account. Simultaneously, we need

to be aware of the problem that the image of the wealthy and mobile Chinese is also a dangerous and misleading stereotype.

6.2 New Hegemonies

Ang points out that some Chinese Indonesians started to protest against the unthinking appropriation of these issues to generate Chinese solidarity thus deepening the trench between Chinese and pribumi Indonesians. In addition to the East Timor aspect, an interesting development in relation to the discursive violence that can accompany cosmopolitans championing of local causes is in the independent spin-off of Huaren, the Southeast Asian Hanren Network. The site also attempts to gather overseas Chinese under one umbrella, "Southeast Asian Chinese", 'Hanren' literally meaning 'Han' people, descendants of Emperor Shih Huang-Ti. However, there is some recognition that global solidarity has its problems:

> I was inspired to create this site by the need for a venue where the Chinese people in this region can speak out on issues specific to us. The recent troubles in Indonesia attracted a lot of attention. People all over the world were touched by the plight of the Chinese Indonesians and many tried to help. Many were also speaking on our behalf. Although the intentions were noble, I believe nobody understands our problems better than we do. Hence this site. I see myself first and foremost as Southeast Asian, not a Chinese who just happen [sic] to be living in Southeast Asia. I am deeply concerned about the destiny of my country and feel responsible for it. I'm sure many other Southeast Asian Chinese feel the same way (Ooi 1998: n.p.).

The author informs visitors that he is Malaysian Chinese with a Malay grandmother, and a girlfriend in Jakarta. In a way, this site points towards the space provided in the hybrid, detached-reattached facet of overseas Chinese coupled with an obvious, recently challenged, yet crucial aspect of the Internet; its mutability.

6.3 The Role of the Diasporic Intellectual

What practices can diasporic intellectuals adopt in order to avoid replicating the 'scattered hegemonies' of transnational cultural flows today? In her discussion of the

Huaren web site and the rape of Chinese women during the riots, Ien Ang reveals that the Huaren producers contacted her for support and her permission for the site to reproduce some of her articles on Chinese identity (Ang 1998). Huaren asked her to speak on behalf of the Chinese diasporic community. In her own words, "I felt interpellated directly and straight forwardly as a diasporic Chinese intellectual, and asked to speak up as a member of this group, to speak on behalf of it and for it" (Ang 1998: n.p.).

Ang declined this invitation. In this instance, Rey Chow's employment of de Certeau's definition of strategy and tactic is useful in considering the agency of diasporic intellectuals (Chow 1993). Diasporic intellectuals themselves are involved in the development of diasporic consciousness via the intellectualisation of the everyday realities of dispersal (Safran 1991 cited in Chow 1993). Their texts may become weapons (Michel de Certeau, cited in Chow 1993) in this reproduction of scattered hegemonies that accompany the formation of transnational solidarities. Rey Chow describes the diasporic intellectual's dilemma thus:

> Going far beyond the responsibility any individual bears for belonging to a community, 'Chineseness'... lies at the root of a violence which works by the most deeply ingrained feelings of 'bonding' and which—even at the cost of social alienation—diasporic intellectuals must collectively resist (Chow 1993: 25).

Bearing this in mind, Ang's refusal is an instance of preserving that play between location and detachment that has traditionally cast cosmopolitans under suspicion by nationalists, but is instead a positive tactic that avoids the seductive lure of solidarity based on ethnic affiliation. In addition, she enacts and proposes hybridity as a resistive tactic that does not rule out other avenues of going against the grain of these transnational imaginary communities and their attendant hegemonies. Hybridity's smudging of borders, fluidity, and mutability should not be considered redundant but as

ongoing tactics that work on a micro-scale, a process of erosion rather than a systematic centralised strategy that installs new marginalising discourses and habitats.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I do not argue against all forms of online activism, or against the involvement of relatively well-positioned elites in regional issues. The online activism at the very least did draw attention to the rapes, raised awareness, and kept the issue in the public spotlight internationally. This international attention compelled the then-new Habibie government, which took office after Suharto's resignation, to set up a government team to investigate the accounts.

My concern here is, however, with the homogenising effect of the practices and discourses that this case illustrates. The case of the online dissemination of stories and images of raped ethnic Chinese women indicates how a politics that emphasises ethnic solidarity and homogeneity can bury the particularities of a local situation. The indications that people outside the local community could have planned and instigated the riots and rapes were ignored in favour of a position that preferred to emphasise an oppositional relationship between ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese. This is partly a consequence of the emphasis on diasporic identification and solidarity.

The emphasis on race in directing the responses of readers and viewers of these stories and images online repeated the totalising process behind the violence in Indonesia. The web bulletin boards of sites like Huaren included the occasional post that reminded readers not to draw all pribumi Indonesians with a broad brush-stroke, but heated responses that reasserted the bipolar image of Chinese pitted against pribumi and other non-Chinese drowned out these messages. A hegemonic formation was established in the process, whereby ethnic Chinese were aligned globally within the 'Chinese diaspora'.

At the same time, the very technologies that allow these totalising formations and strategies can provide avenues for tactics of resistance. I have sought to identify, in this case study, some of the problems with Internet activism. As I have said in my introduction, the same attributes that allow the Internet to be such a positive tool for social activism allow these problems of representation, authenticity, and appropriation. This misappropriation points to the necessity of retaining a strong grounding in the physical, cultural, political and social environment surrounding these issues. An organisation with close ties and involvement of the locals affected by the issues, could deploy the advantages offered by the Internet to reach a wider international community, collaborate with other organisations, and lobby for change.

The key is to tread between cybertopia and cyberghetto, to recognise the dangers, limitations (structurally inherent or otherwise), as well as find the potential, of this technology, and employ tactics that resist these universalising discourses of solidarity. This medium is employed increasingly to address social inequality and crises, such as violence directed against ethnic communities. These developments of online activism and extremism, of increasing polarisation in interaction certainly need closer examination. Generally, this research has to take into account how the Internet as a technology is structured, how software developments, Internet conventions and practices, and so forth, are not neutral technologies but are likely to be affected by the particular economies that produced them. More specifically, we also have to be aware of the hazards of transnational diasporans who have the luxury of playing national heroes on the other side of the world. Academics studying diaspora, and race and cultural studies, need to research the interface (or lack thereof) between the local, the global, and how these recent developments in communication technology affect and are affected by practices and tactics of online activists.

CHAPTER FOUR

Online Activism: The Anti-Capitalist Network

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Online Activism: The Anti-Capitalist Network

1. Introduction

As illustrated in the previous chapter, the Internet offers scope to activists to contact like-minded individuals. A guide to online activist tools begins, "The Internet makes it possible for activists to expand our networks by identifying and contacting activists in other communities who have similar interests" (NetAction/The Tides Center 1998). This, in itself, is not totally novel: Appadurai argues that the electronic media have transformed the "work of the imagination" (the reworking of social life in art, myth, ritual and dreams), and uses the example of diasporic communities to illustrate discontinuities, for instance, ruptures between the discourses of nation, ethnicity and culture (Appadurai 1996: 7). *Chapter Three* examined one instance of the use of the Internet to construct a network to address problems across national boundaries and geographical space, a network based on ethnic affiliation. In this chapter, I explore another type of transnational network, one based on a discourse and ideology that is meant to embrace the local, but works on a global scale. I look at the ways in which the development of Internet technology and practices, as Appadurai puts it, "can become the fuel for action" and how:

> [i]t is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighbourhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labour projects. The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape (Appadurai 1996: 7).

He continues to describe how this occurs through the mass media creating "sodalities", that is, communities with the potential to move from "shared imagination to collective action" (Appadurai 1996: 8). I am interested in the forms of ethics and tactics that are

palatable in the light of the increased velocity and reach of transnational communication technologies like the Internet. It was with this in mind that I identify and analyse various tactics and modes of practice in activism reliant upon the Internet.

2. The Context of Globalisation and Cosmopolitanism

In considering the significance, impact, and practices of online activism, my assumptions regarding the cultural and economic context of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, outlined in the introductory chapter, significantly shape this analysis of organisations using the Internet for activism. The implications of this environment for local marginal cultures form the backdrop for my analysis of the activist groups online. This chapter discusses forms of appropriation by local and marginal groups, using the technology most touted as 'global' and 'empowering', the Internet. I argue that the same technologies and modes of representation, as much as they control and shape the imagination in ways which support imperialism, are paradoxically avenues for resistance and empowerment. For instance, individuals and groups can appropriate global culture and communication for alternative forms of identity formation (outside the strictures of the local environment) and as a means to combat local oppression. However, activists need to balance this with the dangers of globalisation firmly in mind—for instance, the possibility of cultural homogenisation.

2.1 Grassroots Globalisation

In my introductory chapter, I discussed how, in the late nineteenth century, some writers identified globalisation as a process that developed in conjunction with and in support of colonialism. Likewise, some analysts now view current global processes as linked to modernisation, in particular, Americanisation, contributing to the uneven distribution of capital and knowledge and consolidating the division of labour established in colonial

times. As Arrighi and Silver point out, towards the end of the twentieth century, the concern regarding subordinate groups is whether they face a:

> 'race to the bottom' in wages and working conditions as the world's workers are brought into competition in a single labour market … the threat of capital flight [is] realistic and palatable everywhere. The result is an overall decline in the capacity of workers to protect and advance their interests (1999: 10).

Appadurai sees promise in the phenomenon of globalisation from below, which he says is already happening and addresses the current development of a "double apartheid" (2000: 2). The first divide is between the understanding and debates surrounding globalisation in the academy and that of "vernacular discourses about the global, worldwide, that are typically concerned with how to plausibly protect cultural autonomy and economic survival in some local, national, or regional, sphere" (2000: 2) in the era of globalisation. The second apartheid describes how the poor and their activists are left out of these two realms of debate. These gaps are under challenge:

> But a series of social forms has emerged to contest, interrogate, and reverse these developments and to create forms of knowledge transfer and social mobilization that proceed independently of the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system (and its internal affiliates and guarantors).

These social forms work on behalf of the poor using "strategies, visions and horizons for globalization" that Appadurai terms "grassroots globalisation" (2000: 2).

This 'grassroots globalisation' is seen in the worldwide emergence of institutions, in particular, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), "concerned with mobilizing highly specific *local, national, and regional* groups on matters of equity, access, justice, and redistribution" (Appadurai 2000: 15, my emphasis). According to Appadurai, these play out the local and particular on a global arena and work against the inequitable aspects of globalising forces whilst adapting the structures of communication and organization introduced by the latter. He sees the promise of

'globalisation from below' in NGOs which "are self-consciously *global* in their *concerns and their strategies*[;] … this subgroup has recently been labelled *transnational advocacy networks* (herefter, TANs)" (2000: 15, my emphasis).

These 'TANs' could address two results of globalisation: the "predatory mobility" of global capital, and the "compromised sovereignty" of the state (Appadurai 2000: 16, discussed in [globalisation section]). However, as Appadurai goes on to suggest, the problem is that:

> [m]ost TANs suffer from their inability to counter global capital precisely in its global dimensions. They often lack the assets, the vision, the planning and the brute energy of capital to globalize through the capture of markets, the hijacking of public resources, the erosion of state sovereignties, and the control of media.

In the same article, Appadurai remarks on how new information technologies contribute to the increasing reach and speed of global capital "as measures of integration and interconnectivity." However, the new information technologies also open up possibilities for resistance to global capital, as seen in the anti-Nike and MacDonalds' websites. My intention is not to disregard or deny the former role but to address the extent and ways in which activists working against global capital both locally and transnationally can commandeer these technologies.[1] Some writers see the Internet as a contested territory that offers possibilities for resistance and the creation of a democratic public sphere: "A large number of insurgent intellectuals are already making use of these new technologies and public spheres in their political projects," writes Kellner, citing the example of the Zapatistas (1999: 106).

In this chapter, I also discuss developments in online activism that begins to address the problems of vocabulary and awareness described by Appadurai. He suggests that the language used by universities and policy-makers in describing global issues,

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[1] This is despite the way the interests of global capital may overwrite the form and development of Internet technologies.

missions, and strategies, estranges grassroots advocacy networks. I argue that certain activists using the Internet do have a clear understanding of the advantages of counter-globalisation in general and how it could introduce "locational, informational, and political flexibility currently monopolized by global corporations and their national-civic allies" (2000: 17).[2] The forms of activism under examination here also benefit from modern variants of cosmopolitanism in the sense that, as in traditional cosmopolitanism, there is a gaze beyond the local; there is a sense of connectedness and commitment to a wider humanity. At the same time, in these later forms of cosmopolitanism, there is also a strong awareness of the need to remain tied to the particular and local.[3]

The concern for a wider humanity, or, a sense of connectedness with other issues and other places, allows the formation of transnational alliances that bind together activists working in different locations and on different issues, with concerns that overlap, in this case, concerns surrounding globalisation. Concurrently, there needs to be a strong connection with the local and particular to reduce the same problems of representation, that is, the homogenisation, objectification and appropriation of the politics and issues of cultural others (discussed in *Chapter Three*). At least a strong, critical consciousness and a praxis that maintains these ties with the grassroots helps minimise these problems of representation while allowing activists to work against global capital in its arena. The discourse that structures the forms of activism under examination here is one that tries to balance all these requirements in its development of a global activism against global capitalism.

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[2] Appadurai ends his essay by describing a critical pedagogy based upon innovations in talking about and sharing knowledge about globalisation, a pedagogy that could facilitate new dialogue between academics, activists, policy-makers and intellectuals in various cultures (2000: 18).

[3] For an explanation of these forms of cosmopolitanism, see *Introduction*.

Foucault's ideas about discourse, truth, and power are instructive in this analysis of websites in relation to globalisation and progressive politics. His discussion of the way discourse defines 'what counts as truth' in society; the complex interplay and changes between and within discourses and how power runs through discourse and positions subjects are particularly useful. While I use the singular, 'discourse', this is not to indicate that there is one universal discourse, unchanging across contexts; as Foucault claims:

> There is not (or, at least, as far as the historical description whose possibility we are tracing here is concerned) a sort of ideal discourse that is both ultimate and timeless, and which choices [sic], extrinsic in origin, have perverted, disturbed, suppressed, or thrust towards a possibly distant future… (Foucault 1972: 70).

I use the singular form to refer to the concept in abstract terms while acknowledging that there are multiple discourses in society, competing, complementing, replacing and appropriating one another. New discourses can emerge out of the ashes of old ones, and old discourses can fade in relevance.

This analysis is a synchronic account of a fluid, changing field, which yet retains certain constant elements, in reaction to Foucault's criticism that the act of analysis often presents the field as static. This is to avoid the problem he had with disciplines like archaeology (of his time), that is, "to treat history only to freeze it" (Foucault 1972:166). The analysis, therefore, traces, not some universal form of discourse for action, global action, 'anti-neo-liberalism', anti-globalisation' or 'anti-capitalist' action,[4] in the twenty-first century, rather, it describes discursive developments within a particular timeframe, that is, from the later half of the nineteen-nineties to the beginning of the twenty-first century, and pertaining to particular events and groups.

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[4] The phrases, 'anti-globalisation' and 'anti-capitalism,' are used interchangeably with the other terms as they are the terms used in popular discourse, for instance, by the mass media, to describe these activists and actions. However, some activists have pointed out that it is more accurate to call them 'anti-neo-liberalism' as they are not against 'globalisation,' using as they do global processes and channels. Nor are all of them 'anti-capital' (Graeber 2001).
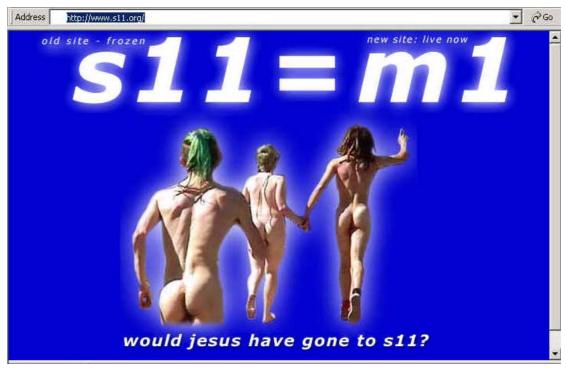
3. Tactics and Modes of Practice in Online Web Activism: A Case Study

3.1 S11, www.s11.org

3.1.1 Description of Site

On 12 June 2001, entering the 'root' level[5] of the S11 site (the home page), www.s11.org, I was presented with an arresting sight: the running backs of three naked people, two males and one female, against a plain blue backdrop. Members of S11 have since updated this page so it is no longer available. However, an analysis of this old page is still worthwhile as it expressed key aspects of the S11 organisation, which, although not encompassing all of the operations and meanings put forth in their website, serves as a valuable introduction to the sorts of subject positioning that informs their work. Past visitors to the sites, whether activists, journalists, law enforcers or other parties, would have the meanings generated by this page in their memory, they are likely to influence readings of the activities and material put forward in this, and other subsequent websites and actions. I, therefore, analyse the page as a cultural memory: a historical residue in the consciousness of a significant portion of the current website visitors that continues to have an impact on the present. Most of these are also elements of the global action discourse that have been carried over from the past. I will discuss the development of these tropes in the later part of this chapter.

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[5] I refer to the way websites are often organised like file directories on our personal computer hard-drives—often, when we type in a basic URL, web address, such as www.s11.org, we are presented with the page on the root directory, usually called the 'home' page. Conventionally, this page is named "index.html" and this page may contain links to other pages on the site, such as "www.s11.org/m1" – the backslash indicates that the page is on a 'branching' directory from the root. However, also as frequently, the Internet user may not even get to the home page, rather, the file on the root directory immediately directs the Internet user to a different page; in the case of S11, this maintains the way pages may be organised thematically (i.e. keep the files in the directory, m1) while directing the Internet user to the updated, more current, content seamlessly.

3.1.2 "Would Jesus have gone to S11?"

Figure 1: S11's 'base level' Web page (www.s11.org, on 9 October 2001)

The figures of the three naked individuals, besides being iconic (being photographs), are also indexical and symbolic (Pierce, 1931, cited in Silverman 1983). The figures seem caught in motion, the one in the foreground seems to be running, and they all are moving towards a destination not revealed ostensibly, but, as the large lettering on top indicates, quite obviously towards the current action, the M1 (May 1ˢᵗ 2001) demonstrations. The figures, therefore, are indexical in the sense that they are pointing the Internet user towards another object—this impression is achieved by the sense of movement and the position of the viewer behind the, gazing in the same direction they are moving. The man on the right is even pointing outwards and upwards, seemingly towards the 'm1' lettering. In a metonymic fashion, the three figures appear to be part of a past protest. Symbolically, the three represent both the participants in global actions and the 'spirit' of the anti-globalisation movement. In public nudity, there is always a mixture of threat and vulnerability—that is, boundaries and taboos surrounding public

behaviour and sexuality are challenged whilst the lack of protection and weapons declare their vulnerability.[6] There is also a sense of pride in public displays of the body—defiance against shame. Finally, public nudity is one of the most effective forms of calling attention to an issue—ostensibly the central drive of protestor activity. While the dreadlocks[7] and dyed hair are contemporary, they are simultaneously evocative of traditional counter-culture, where dress and the way people wear their hair emphasises the difference in their lifestyles, attitudes and beliefs from the mainstream (read dominant discourse).

These suggestions of vulnerability, challenge, pride, youth and contemporariness linked with traditional counter-culture are a call to a path to spiritual rapture or a better future. This latter claim may sound like a stretch of my imagination, but the effects created by digital image editors[8] plus the banner below the image achieves this impression. The diffused white border around the figures and lettering, albeit a conventional technique used often in photographic and graphic manipulation of objects, creates a kind of 'halo' effect. They are moving forward, the pair holding hands in front are smaller than the one in the foreground, leading the eye towards a destination hinted at by the other signs in this text. The blue background is evocative of clear blue skies, and, along with all the outdoor activities a fine day can promise, brings to mind optimism and a bright outlook. This is reinforced by the high contrast of the nude figures, apparently taken in strong daylight. Finally, the banner below this dissolves between "would Jesus have gone to S11?" and "will you go to mayday 2001?" In western epistemology, the figure of "Jesus" means several things, but the meanings evoked in this context refers to those of divinity and strength combined with human

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[6] As I show, this is in keeping with the theme of non-violence.

[7] 'Dreadlocks' describes a hairstyle where the hair strands are randomly knotted and fused together in locks. It is traditionally associated with Rastafarians, but is now an alternative culture style somewhat detached from the Rastafarian religion and way of life.

[8] Photoshop and CorelDraw are examples of software that can digitally manipulate images and photographs.

frailty and self-sacrifice to the masses for the salvation and hope of humanity. Thus, the reader establishes the link between the three naked figures, the figure of 'Jesus' and Christian salvation, and the anti-globalisation actions.

In the context of the anti-globalisation movement, some of these meanings have a lot to do with the rhizomorphic spread of websites left in the wake of the different actions staged across the globe. The Mayday 2001 action, or 'M1', occurred, not in isolation, but was the latest in a series that began on 18 June 1998. The page refers the Internet user to both the past action, S11, and the current one, M1, and links the two in three ways: the huge "S11=M1" near the top, the banner below, and the links to the "old site – frozen" and the "new site: live now". I will discuss some of the reasons for this later. However, the immediate practical end here is to provide a smooth transition, and enough notice, to Internet users that a new action is being planned. This notice is for people who have used this site before and are checking on updates, or people who have not seen this site before but would like information on either the old action, which they may have heard of elsewhere, or would like information on the current developments. Semiotically, the two are linked in meaning—that is, quite obviously, equating the new planned action with the old one, which was, by then, legendary (or infamous, depending on perspective)—in a sense, saying to the user, "Remember S11, well, you can be part of something like that now."

Significantly, too, the names of the action, S11 and M1, are, by now, a common strategic element. They link the local action to a series of actions across the globe (see Table 2, page 230), that is, making temporal and spatial associations, through the convention of combining the first letter of the month and the day of the event around which actions are organised—thus, the letter 'S' for September, and the numeral '11' for the eleventh. In this way, the activists link the action in Melbourne on 11 September 2001, 'M1,' to the September 11th demonstrations in Melbourne the previous year and to

'N30,' Seattle, 30 November 1999. This shorthand displaces the various meanings associated with these other, earlier, events, for instance, civil disruption, peaceful protests that turned violent, strikes against globalisation and global corporations, onto the new ones. Over time, the naming method facilitates the building of legends amongst activists, media, and people not connected with the action, all conveniently collected under short labels. They are also an ingenious device that reminds all and sundry of the timing of this event, including the press, television and radio, other protestors, potential spectators, and so forth.

Another link with past actions, their events and meanings, with the ongoing or upcoming ones is accessible via the images of the three naked figures: in this case, some[9] protestors stripped off in celebration of the final day of the S11 protests (30 September 2001). Police charged at least three protestors with offensive behaviour. In all three cases, the presiding magistrate dismissed this charge but fined one three hundred dollars for providing a false name, and awarded the other two seven hundred and fifty dollars in legal costs against the police (Butcher 2001). The image of the three naked protestors celebrates the outcome of the legal actions against the nude protestors and is an online repetition of the 'offending' act. For the viewers who already are aware of this connection, this image is a playful gibe at the authorities. The web page, in invoking this memory, connects with the audience members equipped with this knowledge, whether they were present, or absent, and sympathetic, or not, to the protestors' activities. This particular link is a *local* one, that is, it specifically connects with the Melbourne action and its developments, and Melbourne-dwellers are more likely to be informed of these proceedings as they play out in the state-based newspapers and other media than people living elsewhere.

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[9] One newspaper source counted six in total (The Australian 2001), and the S11 site mentions four that ran a 'victory lap' around the crown casino and clashed with police (S-11 2001b).

At the same time, the distinctive discursive operations of this website vis a vis global/local networking is one more instance of a universal motif, that is, the prosecution of anti-globalisation protestors around the world. This technique is ironically similar to some of the techniques of prominent global corporations, that is, the use of a central motif adjusted to maximise local cultural formations. This is a technique of merging local and global connections to effectively mobilise individuals and groups in local communities, while simultaneously connecting them up to a wider movement, using the meanings, knowledge (discourses), the techniques and operations, already established across the world.

To sum up, from an analysis of this page, significant techniques and meanings emerge which trope through the other websites spawned in the global anti-globalisation movement. They are interdependent semiotic structures that reinforce and buttress these organizations; they are linked together in signifying chains, and, hence, connect the various affiliates that utilise these meanings. The first of these is the formation of communality through counter-culture associations, inspired by the promise of spiritual rapture or a utopian future (and the fear of its opposite, a present dystopia), and martyrdom via self-sacrifice for the greater good. Secondly, this communality merges with the global in space and time through constant references to past actions spanning different places and times since the inception of this particular movement. While the novelty of organising via the Internet is not lost on the members of the organizations, the websites also enact meanings and actions that bind them to traditional forms of protest. Some of these include the juxtaposition of peaceful protestors against hostile authority figures who legally prosecute and enact violence upon the protestors. Another contrast is the combination of threat with vulnerability: while the activists seek attention through the violating of boundaries, signifiers of defencelessness often accompany the implied threat. The thematic of opposition to authority and civil disruption recurs

online, either in the retelling of the events through bulletins and reports or in the use of material from the events, for instance, photographs and slogans.

3.2 Structure of the Global Action Network

In this section, I am using the word, 'network', to refer to the following connections: that between the actions listed in Table 2 (Page 230) as well as between the groups involved in each action, not just technically, but also semiotically, communicatively, and organisationally. I am not using it in the computing and Internet sense, that is, a series of terminals, computers, and Internet sites linked up on one or more servers.[10]

The strength of these actions is in the establishment and nature of these bonds, especially their flexibility. Many of these ties are not formal and fixed but are unofficial and fluid; the structure of the network obtains these characteristics. I have mentioned that the organisational structure of the network is rhizomorphic.[11] This is, coincidentally, a structure common to the Internet, and it is worth reflecting on this coincidence as it reveals some of the common cultural assumptions and goals in the development of both the global action network and the Internet.

Deleuze and Guattari are critical of the traditional Western forms of writing and philosophy; these betray a 'tree-based' (arborescent) structure that is hierarchical in its branching offs, centralised in having a primary tap root and fixed in always tracing back to the singular, central structure. They argue, "this thought has never understood multiplicity: it requires a strong principal unity as a presupposition in order to arrive at two following an intellectual method" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983). The rhizome, on the other hand, "connects any point with any other point … has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle, through which it pushes and overflows" (47). Moreover, "the

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[10] These include, for instance, the intranets of some organizations, like a university network, or larger scale networks, like Microsoft.com
[11] Rather than strictly rhizomatic, the Internet features structures which veer between tree-based and rhizomic, hence, I use the term, 'rhizomorphic.'

rhizome refers to a map that must be produced or constructed, is always detachable, connectable, reversible, and modifiable, with multiple entrances and exits, with its lines of flight" (48-49). Finally, these represent extremes, it is possible for certain root-based structures to be rhizomorphic at certain nodes, and tree structures to exist in rhizomes.

The preceding description suggests why certain rhizomorphic features of the Internet and the network of the activist groups are useful. The Internet allows for a fluidity affiliate groups can link from or form links to the websites and actions.[12] It provides many different ways in which one could enter and exit this network and its discourse, and the sense of not having a fixed beginning or ending, because of the multiplicity of groups and histories involved. All these features suggest a rhizome-like structure. Yet, some degree of arborescence is also incorporated: the websites have a degree of hierarchical organisation with 'root' index pages that lead to subsidiary sites (even if a user may still enter a site from any point), the groups themselves also have representatives and divisions through which decisions are made and tasks are divided. This is why I suggest that the network of lines connecting the various 'nodes' (groups and actions) have a rhizomorphic rather than rhizomatic structure: the network oscillates between tree and root and rhizome structures. A progressive politics that wishes to avoid hierarchy and centralised organisation is likely to see the rhizome structure as most suitable to its needs. As I will indicate later, many in the network understand this.

I contacted the S11 organization and asked if they could answer some of my questions. The response was cooperative and established the principle that the actions should be and are coordinated through a 'non-hierarchical' structure of power. He or she was willing to answer the questions, but only as a "s11.org webmaster", saying, "with our power structure of affinity groups its impossible for ANYONE to be a s11 spokesperson" (personal communication 2001). This brings me to consider an issue in

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[12] By 'links,' I refer to hypertext linking, but, in this case, the other meanings also apply.

my approach to the field, that is, when studying a network that is presenting an image of being deliberately non-hierarchical, and grassroots-directed, how far is it valid or possible to trace the 'origins'? This question still stands even if I avoid over-prioritising the agency of particular individuals or groups in describing the development of this type of activism (Foucault 1972).[13]

I began this research after the 30 November 1999 action in Seattle. I therefore worked backwards through the websites of past actions and followed links to more information. In some instances, the trail was cold: some links were outdated and did not work, some websites were not longer kept on the server they used to be on, and had been moved or simply were no longer available. Additionally, the websites tended to avoid or neglect identifying an agent that was initiating all the actions. Contacts tended to be for the particular action of the day and the site directed readers to email addresses rather than phone numbers. Some of the email (and postal) addresses were no longer in use, being set up for the duration of the action, and webmasters and organisers often gave 'pseudonymous'[14] addresses.

I decided that the actual process of tracing the sites through 'web-surfing' was a good test of whether the actions and affiliates were as 'decentred' as they made out, at least, in terms of the content and the way the websites were constructed and linked up. The fact that I was able to identify the group that kept track and initiated most of the actions (at least, the more prominent ones) indicates that the actions were not completely random and initiated by local groups. On the other hand, the task was difficult and time-consuming[15] enough to suggest that the network was highly

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[13] Foucault's stance on this is that such subject-centred analyses tend to neglect the crucial discursive elements that play a significant part in the development and maintenance of cultural formations. On the other hand, the Zapatistas and their leader, Subcommandant Marcos, are significant in as much as they are important signifiers in the discourse.

[14] For an explanation of this term, see Chapter 1, page 46.

[15] Some sites would identify another site that began the particular action, on looking at this site, I would discover yet another organization behind it, or reach a dead end. It was through exhausting the links in this way that a very likely candidate was unearthed.

successful in maintaining its decentred and grassroots-based approach to organization. I am interested in, and analyse, how this strategy of working through affinity groups translates into practice through information available in the selected websites.

Foucault's work on discursive formations is useful for doing this. Foucault argues that a discursive formation is identifiable through common patterns in the ordering of objects, kind of statements made possible, ideas and theories. He argues that:

> Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation…* (Foucault 1972: 38).

In the process of identifying the discursive formation of anti-capitalist activism, I also examine certain significant junctures in its development to the present form. Anti-capitalist activism has moved on from its 'roots,' redressed itself according to particular contexts of time and place – but it has an inheritance that has directed its changes, that has informed its practices and responses.

3.3 The Codes of the Network: an Historical Account

The activists' aim for a decentred, non-hierarchical yet closely connected network is reflected, maintained and re-introduced in each website through semiotic coding. David Chandler defines a semiotic code as "a set of practices familiar to users of the medium operating within a broad cultural framework" (Chandler 1994: n.p.). Here, I am describing the diverse and multiply-located participants in these actions as operating within a *transnational* framework that shares certain common practices or semiotic codes. Semiotic codes are the socially-defined rules for constructing meaning out of signifiers. While the web page analysed earlier uses traditional codes, for instance, typography, layout, and photography, some of the deployments of these codes in the

specific combinations identified above are becoming unique to this genre and form of activism.

In this less than exhaustive semiotic analysis, I aim to identify common patterns in the use of semiotic codes, and thereby to identify some of the 'truths' in this particular discourse. I juxtapose these 'truths' against the structural organization and operation of these activist groups to illustrate the degree to which they are a response to globalisation, that is, how far they appropriate some of its methods and meanings. There is also the possibility that these networks may replicate, to the detriment of their explicit objectives, the operations of the thing they criticise. The approach here is diachronic in that I am studying the evolution of this semiotic code over time, and its articulation within an identifiable discursive formation, that is, of anti-capitalist global activism. I am also identifying this evolving system through its deployment, that is, discerning the langue from the parole, the 'grammar' of global action activism through the usage. In this latter aspect, I am aided somewhat by the fact that many of the organizations have already clearly drawn up the principles of this 'grammar', and the most significant of these is the Peoples' Global Action (PGA).

3.3.1 The Peoples' Global Action

In the following discussion of events leading to the formation of the PGA and its first global action, I am aware of the need to maintain a balance, that is, depicting the aims, goals, and practices of the movement without becoming an uncritical promoter. On the other hand, a critical analysis of the movement would be weak if it became overly sceptical and patronising and failed to acknowledge its achievements or potential. Hence, this description is written about the *surface* of the discourse. Readers should not regard it as total approval or support of its feats, that is, not "How successful is the

movement in attaining its *ideals*?" but, rather, "How successful has the *discourse* of the movement been in establishing, reproducing and maintaining itself?"

3.3.2 The Zapatistas

The first global action that captured the attention of the various media and audiences world-wide was in Seattle, November 30 1999, mainly because of the effects of the activists upon the third conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the operations of the city itself, and the reaction of the city government and its law enforcers. There was another reason, and this was to do with the simultaneous protests world-wide:

> Whether you were on the streets of Seattle that day dodging the rubber bullets, or following the hundreds of bullock carts converging on the Narmada dam in India, or marching with trade unionists in Manila, or in London trapped by the £3m police operation, or mocking the stock exchange in Buenos Aires, or even occupying a McDonalds in Milan... one thing was clear to everyone: *at the end of the 20th century resistance had become as transnational as capital* (Peoples' Global Action 2000a: n.p., my emphasis).

However, as well known as the Seattle event is, this was not the beginning of this network neither was it the first global action. The fifth bulletin of the Peoples' Global Action website, dated February 2000, under the section, 'The Accelerating History of PGA', provides an interesting history. The syntactical ordering of the history is telling. It begins with a reference to Berlin, how it was supposed to be the end of history, moves on to Seattle, saying, "It was clear that history had a lot further to go". However, it is also clear, in the move away from Seattle, and the emphasis in the quote below, that the movement is trying to get away from the image that these actions originate from as Western a place as Seattle:

> It wasn't in the acrid mist of Seattle's tear gas that this global movement was born, but in the humid mist of the Chiapas jungle, in Southern Mexico on New Years Day 1994. This was the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect, a day when two thousand indigenous peoples from several groups came out from the

mountains and forests. Masked, armed and calling themselves Zapatistas, their battle cry was "Ya Basta" - "Enough is Enough". An extraordinary popular uprising, which was to help change the landscape of global resistance, had begun. Using a jungle battered laptop computer and intermediaries to get the discs to an internet connected computer, the Zapatistas were able to bypass the media censorship of the Mexican state and communicate directly. People everywhere soon heard of the uprising (Peoples' Global Action 2000a: n.p.).

While celebrating the fame and achievements of Seattle, and claiming it for its own, the movement simultaneously breaks away from this by beginning the paragraph with "It wasn't… Seattle"—placing this negation in the forefront. This rupture is lessened somewhat through displacement and the use of similarity. The use of displacement, as Silverman points out, "neutralizes the differences between two similar or contiguous things by asserting their emotional equivalence" (1983: 89), this is apparent in the repetition of the word, 'mist', first in the "acrid mist" of tear gas in Seattle, second, in the "humid mist" in Chiapas. Both evoke a stifling, in the case of Seattle, a decidedly unhealthy, atmosphere, with human figures surrounded by a haze. While the Zapatistas have a mysterious central figure, Marcos, who provides a rallying point for their activities, this is not evident here. However, the similarity in their construction in the above passage overrides this key difference. The figures and actions of the participants, in this passage, are renowned and celebrated, but not on an individual level—they are half-shrouded in mist and anonymous. This is a pattern manifested in other global actions.

On a broader level, the Zapatistas in Mexico and the activists in Seattle both are working against the dominant ideology and power in society and supporting or representing the disenfranchised. Specifically, both also see the forces of globalisation as key agents of oppression and the need to reach beyond the local and particular, while retaining their specificities, in order to undermine these global processes and agents. This practice is also clear in the earlier passage quoted: the contrasts between the

actions in Seattle, India, London, Manila, Buenos Aires and Milan are highlighted, for

this is part of the currency of the global action movement: the multiplicity of issues and

participants involved. The PGA also emphasises the correspondence between all these

different actions, their locations and concerns, is also emphasised. They all fall under, in

this rubric, resistance on a transnational basis, attempts to engage with a common foe,

global capital, on its own turf.

There are significant differences, of course. "Displacement involves the transfer

of psychic intensity from an unacceptable element to an acceptable one" (Silverman

1983: 89) and the differences indicate why the new element here, Chiapas, is more

acceptable as the origins of the global action movement. The first clues are discernible

in the differences between the 'mists.' Tear gas is synthetic and often used in urban civil

unrest, whilst the phrase 'humid mist' does not immediately evoke an urban

environment, being the result of a combination of a sultry climate and thick vegetation.

Then, of course, there is the contrast between the city, Seattle, and the jungle in

Chiapas, Mexico. The former is in the North hemisphere, the latter in the South; one has

an urban environment, the other rural. It is not a great stretch to imagine why, at this

point in the movement, its members are keen to highlight the movement's roots in

Chiapas, while celebrating the accomplishments of Seattle. The Peoples' Global Action

is closely allied to interests that began the spread of global action activism, more than

subsequent organizations that have sprung up since. The semiotic choices in the above

passage reflect the desire to keep this connection active, to harness the power and

renown of the newer movements to these originating ones. Not doing so might

otherwise open the actions to dismissal as originating from 'liberal western university

students', a criticism handy not only to the right, but also to the critical left. Having

indigenous roots also conforms more to the discourse of the movement, particularly the

notion of organization 'from below', that is, at the grassroots level, rather than from

above—there is more 'street cred', as the parlance goes—particularly as the Zapatista (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, hereafter EZLN or Zapatista) cause is relatively popular on the Internet.

The Zapatista rebels are a famous case of insurgents successfully utilising the Internet and altering the course of events in the process. Since the mid-twentieth century, writers within the political, media-culture and social disciplines write of the Zapatista movement and the surge of online activism as, at the least, indicating a discursive shift or a fresh form of counter-resistance. Most of the material on the Internet is uncritical of the Zapatistas, and to an unusual extent. My search on the keyword, "Zapatista", in November 2001, turned up only a few articles out of seven hundred that criticised the Zapatista movement.[16] Since many others have already written about Zapatistas, I shall focus mainly on that which is relevant to the topic of the global action movement and the development of online activism.

The two main points of interest to me are the contribution of the Zapatistas to the practices of the present-day global action movement, and the critiques of the Zapatistas, especially in the processes of organising action, since these also raise points of concern that might be relevant to the movements which have since emerged. The global action movement's remarkable awareness of the importance of organisational structure, methods of diffusion and the processes of launching operations ensures that a degree of discursive unity is preserved through its various networks and offshoots. These are observable in the Zapatista example.

Chiapas is not a place new to violent conflict and has seen periods of extreme tension over issues such as inequitable land distribution, state repression and sanctioned violence, environmental destruction and the disenfranchisement and oppression of indigenous peoples (Mekenkamp 1998). The Zapatistas named themselves after

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[16] I will say more about this in my critique near the end of this chapter.

Emiliano Zapata, a South Mexican revolutionary army general who fought for agrarian reform during the Mexican Revolution (1910 to 1920) and was assassinated in 1919. The international news media first paid attention to them on New Year's day, 1994, when they took control of San Cristobal and the other towns of Chiapas (Cleaver 1994).

A researcher and participant in the online activities of the Zapatistas, Harry Cleaver, of the University of Texas (Austin), published two influential texts on their history and development. These articulate the discursive methods and practices of the Zapatistas and their adoption by activist groups elsewhere. The Zapatista insurgency in Chiapas coincided with the first day of the operation of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its spokespeople unequivocally condemned NAFTA. This, consequently, meant that the networks and resources of the organizations anti-NAFTA in sentiment were in place and prepared to support and distribute news and information about the events to the world:

> Over the last few years the fight against NAFTA took the form of growing coalitions of grassroot groups in Canada, the United States and Mexico. In each country a broad coalition, such as the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade, was constituted by knitting together several hundred groups opposed to the new trade pact (Cleaver 1994: n.p.).

The first lesson for activists was that they could obtain huge benefits from forming a massive alliance between many diverse interest groups, the sum, as it were, was greater than the parts. The "several hundred groups" represented very different concerns:

> From the beginning, the building of alliances to oppose NAFTA involved not only the obviously concerned (U.S. workers threatened with losing their jobs as plants were relocated to Mexico, Mexicans concerned with the invasion of U.S. capital) but a wide variety of others who could see the indirect threats in this capitalist reorganization of trade relations, e.g., ecological activists [sic], women's groups, human rights organizations and yes, organizations of indigenous groups throughout the continent.

The adversary they held in common, NAFTA, became a rallying point for all the groups. The following passage by Cleaver indicates the inspiration for the global action movement:

> Through the years of struggle against NAFTA position papers circulated, studies were undertaken, discussion raged about the interconnections of the concerns of all these groups. *The anti-NAFTA struggle proved to be both a catalyst and a vehicle for overcoming the separateness and isolation which had previously weakened all of its component groups* (Cleaver 1994, my emphasis).

Activists representing wide strata of classes united to make up a 'fabric of cooperation'. Thus, "[t]hat knitting together was accomplished partly through joint discussions and actions and partly through the sharing of information and analysis about the meaning and implications of the agreement" (Cleaver 1994). In *Chapter Three*, I wrote of the weaving together of ethnic Chinese over the issue of violence against Indonesian Chinese. Similarly, NAFTA and its free trade measures was the rallying point that aided the Zapatistas; the events of New Year's Day 1994 consolidated the associations already in the process of establishing.

After the Chiapas rebellion, the Zapatistas popularised a critique of capitalism and "neo-liberalism" and a plan of action against them that became the theoretical ground for the ensuing global actions, long after the Zapatista connection itself went into disuse or was forgotten. I shall provide more details of these ideas when I discuss the first and second 'international encounters' of the People's Global Action, being the founding principles of the global action discourse. At this point, it is sufficient to note that publishing these ideas as part of the call for participants in the encounters are conceivably the consequence of the successful 'anti-NAFTA' politics.

As Cleaver goes on to point out, the second lesson was the means of this networking. The means to link groups separated by distance was already available

through the same technology developed decades earlier by the United States military:

> Increasingly, computer communications became a basic political tool for extremely rapid sharing among groups and individuals. The same processes of communication linked the coalitions in each country in a manner never before seen in the Western Hemisphere (Cleaver 1994: n.p.).

The news of the Chiapas campaign travelled remarkably quickly, considering the unexpectedness of the events, and their distance from global media centres. The Zapatistas had their statements faxed to several news media from the first day, and because other reports were not yet forthcoming, the reporters relied on these statements for information on what was going on. The activists supplemented these with reports and communication between individuals and groups on email lists, Usenet newsgroups and activist networks. These were collated and organised into news digests, increasing their accessibility over time and space, and expanding their dissemination outside regular participants of Internet forums on Mexican issues:

> As EZLN documents and news reports circulated they generated and were quickly acompanied [sic] by discussion, additional information from those with an intimate knowledge of Chiapas (e.g., academics who had done research in the area, human rights advocates concerned with its long history of abuse) and rapidly multiplying analyses of the developing situation and its background. All of this electronically circulated information and analysis fed into more traditional means of circulating news of working class struggle: militant newspapers, magazines and radio stations (Cleaver 1994).

In this way, the Zaptistas used a combination of communication media technologies to devastating effect, overcoming the difficulties of distance and equipment, giving the Zapatistas prominence in the traditional media and promoting its assertions and objectives through other channels of communication.

Playing on the mythic origins of the movement, the Chiapas and anti-NAFTA movement also inspired the rhizomorphic structure of the anti-globalisation global action groups:

> Beyond the particular issue of the agreement, the process of alliance building has created a new organizational form – a multiplicity of rhizomatically linked autonomous groups – connecting all kinds of struggles throughout North America that have previously been disconnected and separate (Cleaver 1994).

Aside from Cleaver, other commentators also explain their attraction to the Zapatistas' cause as being the result of the latter's goal to make changes in political *practice* rather than supplant the political leadership (Rodriguez 1995; Ten Dam 1999a; Ten Dam 1999b). In other words, they demanded changes in discursive practices rather than in the composition of the dominant subjects in the discourse. In an interview conducted on the day of the Zapatistas' advance in Chiapas, when asked why some of them wore masks, Subcomandante Marcos responded:

> Those of us who are more handsome always have to protect ourselves... What is happening is that, in this case, the officers are those who are masked, for two reasons. One, the primary one, is that we have to watch out for protagonism, in other words, that people do not promote themselves too much.

> The mask is so that there is *no protagonism*, if you understand me, that we sometimes have a lot of, those of us who get into this business of appearing a lot... It is about being anonymous, not because we fear for ourselves, but rather so that they cannot corrupt us; for that reason some wear ski masks, so that they will not appear often and say, "What about me over here?" We know that *our leadership is collective* and that we have to submit to them. Even though you happen to be listening to me here now because I am here, but in other places others, masked in the same way, are talking. This masked person today is called Marcos here and tomorrow will be called Pedro in Margaritas or Josue' in Ocosingo or Alfredo in Altamirano or whatever he is called (La Jornada 1994: n.p.).

This claim that they aim to have no central protagonist is inconsistent with the fact that documentary makers, news media and activists centre the Zapatista ideology and activities around the masked charismatic figure of Marcos. In addition, Zapatista

materials prominently feature his statements. This indicates a flaw in this vision that I will deal with later; a gap between the explicit objectives and beliefs of the movement, and their actualisation in organisational processes and practices. Therefore, for the moment, I draw attention to this practice of anonymity, or, at least, the presentation of solidarity without placing one key figure into prominence, to highlight another pattern taken up in global action discourse.

Another related theme taken up by global action discourse was the Zapatistas' emphasis on community decision-making. This, and other concepts, was demonstrated in communities established in land abandoned by landowners during the uprising.[17] Community representatives divided these ex-ranch lands amongst the families and allocated space, for instance, a house, for international observers. Activists from other countries stayed to observe or participate in projects and used this as a model for decision-making and networking in their own organizations, especially those working in global actions. Weekly assemblies open to everyone in the community enact the Zapatistas' concept of direct democracy and anyone over the age of twelve was entitled to vote on decisions affecting the community. Through these observers, Zapatista notions like "leading by obeying [the community's will]" and communal-based ways of living spread outside Mexico.

The participation of intellectuals, students, and academics assisted in the diffusion of a comprehensive set of vocabulary, theories, objects and subjectivities through different groups, interests, and locations. Cleaver, a good example of this form of intellectual contribution, believes that there are, as he puts it, "lessons for all of us" from this example:

> It provides something different: an inspiring example of how a workable
> solution to the post-socialist problem of revolutionary organization and

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[17] A pamphlet, entitled "Chiapas Revealed," discusses one such area, called Dies de Abril, 10 April, named after the day Zapata was assassinated (Irish Mexico Group 2001).

struggle can be sought. The struggles of the Indians in Chiapas, like the anti-NAFTA movement which laid the groundwork for their circulation, demonstrate how organization can proceed locally, regionally and internationally through a diversity of forms which can be effective precisely to the degree that they weave a fabric of cooperation to achieve the (often quite different) concrete material projects of the participants (Cleaver 1994).

This, and another article by Cleaver about the Zapatistas (1995), are available from the University of Texas server under the aegis of an organization named 'Accion Zapatista'. Websites by global action activists link to articles like these, which thereby become part of the resources available to activists. Others take part in exchanges on Usenet newsgroups and online bulletin boards. David Graeber, for instance, writes in a public Internet forum:

> Academics who for years have published essays that sound like position papers for large social movements that do not in fact exist seem seized with confusion or worse, highminded contempt, now that real ones are everywhere emerging. As an active participant in the movement as well as an anthropologist, I want to provide some broad background for those intellectuals who might be interested in taking up some of their historical responsibilities. This essay is meant to clear away a few misconceptions (Graeber 2001).

These academics and intellectuals 'normalise' the discourse: they contextualise and historicise the practices and ideas of the global action movement. Even as they declare how these constitute a new phase in the practice and thinking of activists, as both Cleaver and Graeber do, they are integrating these into discourse (for instance, academic) that is more acceptable. This is not too hard to do, as the people at the roots of the Zapatista are also very aware of previous models of revolutionary change and practice. The evidence of this sort of thinking through of the basic assumptions and

minute details of practice appears to bode well for the continuation of fundamental ideals of the movement.[18]

Graeber responds to the criticism in the left press "that the globalization movement, while tactically brilliant, has no central theme or coherent ideology" and that of "academic social theorists who should know better, like Hardt and Negri, or Slavoj Zizek" who claim that the movement is simply oppositional to all forms of organization. Instead:

> It is not opposed to organization; it is about creating new forms of organization. It is not lacking in ideology; those new forms of organization are its ideology. It is a movement about creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down (especially, state-like, corporate or party) structures, networks based on principles of decentralized, nonhierarchical consensus democracy (Graeber 2001).

Intellectuals and university students are often the ones leading the revolutionary charge, and this kind of discussion, especially in a space that is not quite 'academic', attracts the attention of academics and non-academics alike. Cleaver contextualises the Zapatista movement as one that offers a path to a left disenchanted by the failures of communism and the social revolutions of the sixties and seventies. These, and the other tropes established above, became part of the initial call for participants in meetings organised by the Zapatistas together with other organizations; meetings that led to the formation of the Peoples' Global Action.

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[18] This is consistent with something Foucault says about revolutionary action:

> If at the base there has not been the work of thought upon itself and if, in fact, modes of thought, that is to say modes of action, have not been altered, whatever the project for reform, we know that it will be swamped, digested by modes of behavior and institutions that will always be the same (Foucault 1988: 156).

However, while the activists frequently state that the practices of the movement are opposed to the practices of what they are criticising, for instance, organisational hierarchies, the above description does not, as yet, confirm that this is what is happening.

3.3.3 The Formation of Peoples' Global Action: the First and Second Encounter and the First PGA Conference

The first steps towards the creation of the Peoples' Global Action were made in January 1996 when the Zapatistas issued a call to actvists to hold five continental conferences all over the world. They planned for an intercontinental 'encuentro' held in Chiapas to follow these conferences. This, the 'First Intercontinental Encounter (or Gathering) for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism', would be held from 27 July to 3 August 1996. The details of these were in an invitation entitled, the 'Declaration of La Realidad',[19] issued by the 'Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation'[20] and 'Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos' (Marcos and Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996). This invitation was through the network already built up before and after the Zapatista fight in Chiapas in 1994, and distributed to diverse newsgroups, email lists, and web pages of various activists and organisations.

The invitations enact the lessons of the Chiapas struggle. One of these lessons is to identify a specific common object, a shared enemy, most obviously, 'neoliberalism'. For instance, the invitations are addressed "[t]o all who force themselves to resist the world crime known as 'Neoliberalism' and aim for humanity and hope to be better, be synonymous of future [sic]" (Marcos and Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996: n.p.). The Zapatistas identify 'Neoliberalism' as the figure spawning NAFTA, the catalyst for the Chiapas rebellion. Neo-liberalism is broader than NAFTA and therefore more suitable for inspiring activists from around the world.

The argument of the Zapatistas, which became the discourse of 'anti-globalisation' or 'global-action' activists, is compelling to many of the groups it addresses, as it combines traditional left-wing notions of ideology and a critical stance

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[19] La Realidad refers to a community run by the Zapatistas and means, literally, 'Reality'.
[20] Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN).

towards capitalism, with an analysis of developments in more recent times and the offer of new hope:

> The new distribution of the world excludes "minorities". The indigenous, youth, women, homosexuals, lesbians, people of color, immigrants, workers, peasants; the majority who make up the world basements are presented, for power, as disposable. The new distribution of the world excludes the *majorities* (Marcos and Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996, my emphasis).

In this passage, the point is established, that what is usually considered marginal, and, even in some left-wing critiques of capitalist societies, lacking in power, could be actually a 'majority', implying that, in solidarity, these excluded and marginalised communities could become very powerful.

In this theoretical paradigm, the material economy of neo-liberalism is just as inequitable as the early capitalism criticised by Marxists in the past: "The new distribution of the world only has one place for money and its servants. Men, women and machines become equal in servitude and in being disposable. The lie governs and it multiplies itself in means and methods" (Marcos and Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996). The "lie" that they refer to is the ideology of neo-liberalism and the discourse that is under attack. According to this 'anti-capitalist' discourse, this lie consists of several elements:

> A new lie is sold to us as history. The lie about the defeat of hope, the lie about the defeat of dignity, the lie about the defeat of humanity. The mirror of power offers us an equilibrium in the balance scale: the lie about the victory of cynicism, the lie about the victory of servitude, the lie about the victory of neoliberalism (Marcos and Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996, my emphasis).

The writers in this declaration identify, therefore, a key restriction in the discourse of neo-liberalism, and this is the 'defeat of hope'. The Zapatistas, and the meetings they propose, offer this hope, and this is the important aspect of the invitation. They insist

that "[a]gainst the international of terror representing neoliberalism, we must raise the international of hope" (Marcos and Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996).

Having established the enemy as 'neo-liberalism', the Zapatistas' invitation added a very long and detailed list of all who belonged to the paradigmatic category of 'enemies of neoliberalism', for instance:

> To all who struggle for human values of democracy, liberty and justice…
>
> …To all individuals, groups, collectives, movements, social, civic and political organizations, neighborhood associations, cooperatives, all the lefts known and to be known; non-governmental organizations, groups in solidarity with struggles of the world people, bands, tribes, intellectuals, indigenous people, students, musicians, workers, artists, teachers, peasants, cultural groups, youth movements, alternative communication media, ecologists, tenants, lesbians, homosexuals, feminists, pacifists.
>
> To all human beings without a home, without land, without work, without food, without health, without education, without freedom, without justice, without independence, without democracy, without peace, without tomorrow.
>
> To all who, with no matter to colors, race or borders, make of hope a weapon and a shield.[21]

At least according to the reports of activists and Zapatistas, more than three thousand[22] people from forty-three different countries took part in the gathering. The involvement of so many people of so many different positions, even as observers, ensured that the movement had an immense reach outside the networks it had established thus far in Mexico, Canada and the United States. These participants, in their turn, spread their accounts of the events and outcomes of the encounter, as well as their observations of the communities run by the Zapatistas and their operations, again, most effectively via Internet websites, email lists, and newsgroups.

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[21] I quote this text at such length to demonstrate the pains to which they went to invite a diversity of interests (Marcos and Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996).

[22] The PGA claims a total of six thousand (Peoples' Global Action 2000a) while Andrew Flood, a delegate from the Irish Mexico Group, places it at three thousand delegates, with "several thousand indigenous people from the local communities" catering or taking part in the ceremonies and entertainment" (Flood 1996). Flood also says they required two main sites, or 'Aguascalientes', Oventic and La Realidad for all delegates, and three other smaller ones, La Garrucha, Morelia and Roberto Barrios.

The participants were welcomed at the opening of the Encounter by a simply worded and extremely eloquent address by the EZLN, reiterating the solidarity between them all, and declaring a new 'beginning'. This address is highly spiritual and metaphorical, referring to beliefs of the indigenous population the Zapatista say they represent:

> Then we went to the mountains to find ourselves and see if we could alleviate our pain in being forgotten stones and weeds.
>
> Here, in the mountains of Southeastern Mexico, our dead live on. Our dead that live in the mountains know many things.
>
> They speak to us of their death, and we hear them.
>
> Coffins speak and tell us another story that comes from yesterday and points toward tomorrow.
>
> The mountains spoke to us, the Macehualob, we common and ordinary people (General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996b: n.p.).

This spiritual quality is combined with a utopian outlook: "Today, thousands of small worlds from the five continents are attempting a beginning here, in the mountains of Southeastern Mexico, the beginning of the construction of a *new and good world, that is, a world which admits all these worlds*" (General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996b: n.p., my emphasis). It is not just common, but almost integral to revolutionary discourse to have such a utopian perspective underlying social critiques and actions. Therefore, like elsewhere, I am not claiming that this address, and other ceremonial performances and contributions that ran throughout the week, *originated* such a mood, but, rather, that they served to explicate and reinforce, were necessary to inspire commitment, and constituted a powerful and significant moment to send off these meanings. As a result, performances of texts like these have a high potential to be a potent memory for the participants. As already stated earlier in this chapter, this spiritual and utopian promise is a common seme in global action discourse.

Accompanying the utopian promise is the theme of martyrdom. At the closing address of the EZLN to the attendees, after a reference to 'slaves' who resign themselves to the forces of global capital, the topic shifts to the participants and the Zapatistas themselves:

> But there are those who do not resign themselves, there are those who decide to be uncomfortable, there are those who do not sell themselves, there are those who do not surrender themselves. There are, around the world, those who resist being annihilated in this war. There are those who decide to fight (General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996a: n.p.).

A familiar pattern by the time of the S11 home page analysed earlier, the portrayal of the activists as martyrs to a higher cause benefiting humanity is, yet again, a solidarity-reinforcing technique. The signified meaning of these passages binds together the Zapatistas, the contributors and observers from the 'five continents,' who may represent different groups, interests, alignments and so forth, but share in common this personal commitment and sacrifice to a better future.

The movement draws upon indigenous and local struggles and frames them globally, appealing to a broader humanism to foster solidarity. The common cause is to save humanity, and the common enemy of humanity is capital:

> The modern army of financial capital and corrupt governments advance[,] conquering in the only way it is capable of: destroying. The new distribution of the world destroys humanity (Marcos and Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996).

The global action philosophy and approach appeals to the people it addresses because it combines grassroots globalisation with a cosmopolitan outlook. Not only does it seem to demand and draw its strengths from the marginalised, it also reaches out and assails in the transnational and global arenas of its adversary. Coupled with this is a 'neo-cosmopolitan' sensibility, an interest in a wider humanity outside the local sphere, an interest that is supposed to be the unifying factor that binds the various interest

groups together. This grand and dramatic scale is necessary to cut across the divides of time and place, and the variety of interests that the movement wants to enlist.

The participants were not passive spectators, but contributed strategies, further critiques and analyses, and proposals for action. Their papers and ideas, tabled at the gathering, were later made available on the websites and entered the 'canon' of materials for activists to utilise. One paper, for instance, discussed the challenges posed to traditional socialist politics by the changes in capitalism in more recent times, for instance, the phenomena of globalisation (Lauesen 1996). Contributions like these sharpened the theoretical foundations of the global action discourse, and their availability on websites allowed existing and potential activists to quickly educate themselves in the discourse, enlist others, as well as provide an armoury against their critics.

At the end of the first encounter, the EZLN made a few key proposals in their closing address (General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996a). The first of these was the formation of an 'intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism and humanity' which would seek out other resistance groups. This supportive network was to be complemented with a communication network so that, in their words, "words may travel all the roads that resist," a striking turn of phrase that was, on hindsight, prophetic in describing how the global actions, which resulted from these beginnings, adopted so many of the terms and meanings already emerging here. Amongst these is the practice of the 'non-hierarchy'. In describing both the network of communication and resistance, they repeat the following: this "is not an organising structure; it doesn't have a central head or decision maker; it has no central command or hierarchies." The deliberate intent behind the rhizomorphic form of the global action websites and the organisations and groups behind the actions is clear from the beginning.

The EZLN also proposed and laid out the first steps towards yet another intercontinental encounter, the year after in Europe. The declarations made in the closing address of the first encounter was to accompany the invitation, and the primary objective was to have a "consultation" on the question, "Do you agree to subscribe to the Second Declaration of Reality for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism?" Not only was the theme already laid out, but the approximate time and place (second half of 1997 and on the European continent) was suggested, the details of which would be worked out by the participants from Europe. The deadline for the 'realisation' of this gathering, by which I presume they meant the finalisation of dates, places, and other organisational details, as well as the issue of calls for participants, was roughly the first two weeks of December 1996. Significantly, the second gathering was to be organised along the same lines as the first:

> We propose that we organise this consultation in the same way that this encounter was organised, that all of us who attended and those who couldn't attend but who accompanied us from afar in this encounter, organise and carry out the consultation. We propose that we make use of all the possible and impossible media in order to consult with the greatest number of human beings on the five continents. The intercontinental consultation is part of the resistance we are organising and one way of making contacts and encounters with other resistance's. Part of a new way of doing political work in the world, that is what the intercontinental consultation wants to be (General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1996a).

Once more, proposals like these establish the modus operandi of the network and their subsequent execution. The global actions drew the attention of the public and the various media not least because of the huge amount and scale of organization, the variety of groups and individuals that were involved, and the speed and variety of communication channels used, in particular, the Internet.

The Zapatistas transferred these ideas to the groups that organised the next encounter, ideas which were often reiterated, word for word, in the invitations and the

materials for the encounter. While the Zapatistas had delegated the responsibility of organising these encounters, their terms and ideas had already become an essential part of the discourse that controlled their language and conduct. These meanings began to detach themselves from the specific Zapatista context, as part of their expressed intent, while the universalisation of these themes and their relaunch in a global activism context also ensured the propagation of the Zapatistas' discourse. An example of this is the Second European Gathering held in Prague, 28 to 30 March 1997. As the next Intercontinental gathering was to be held in Europe, the European encounters were mainly preparatory meetings for the upcoming intercontinental gathering. Participants from different organizations decided upon dates, the topical framework, delegation of responsibilities, the copy of the invitation and other literature, processes of registration and other organisational details.

The principles of working 'from the bottom up' and avoiding of personality (or other distinct agents) cults are observable as ideals that they were aiming towards in their decisions. For instance, in the minutes, they specify:

> There will be no formal invitations, so that the OC [organising committee] will not be those who choose who participates in the Encuentro [sic]. There will be an open invitation (model enclosed) to all people and collectives in struggle against neoliberalism who agree with the Second Declaration of La Realidad and with the Manifesto and objectives of Encuentro 2. The invitation must be publicised as far as possible, but these organisations must express an interest in going and initiate the enrollment [sic] procedure (Cuninghame 1997).

On an overt level, at least, such decisions are an attempt to conform to the discourse already in place, that is, as far as possible, to avoid control of the discussion, issues and direction of the encounter. Control of discourse can occur through the limitation of the subjects admitted into the discourse (Foucault 1981); even if unconscious and without deliberate intent, whatever hierarchies of interest already represented by the participants in the process so far might be exacerbated if the process of recruiting more participants

is not kept as open as possible. On the other hand, if the process of registration (or 'inscription', as they called it) were left completely open, there was a strong likelihood that Europeans would numerically dominate the conference. This was not just because of general disproportionate power, access, and resources between activist groups internationally, but also because the location of the upcoming conference meant that it would be easier and cheaper for Europeans to attend the conference, and the organisers themselves were mainly from Europe. Thus, the organisers attempted to address this, and other concerns, by setting a policy in the event that applications outnumbered the number of places available:

> a) preference will be given to applicants from outside Western Europe

> b) among W. European countries, a balance of representation according to population size and the special case of Spain because of its key role in organisation

> c) Assure the participation of socially excluded groups (Cuninghame 1997, as in original).

A certain amount of control was exercised upon how the organising committees were to represent themselves, for example, in Item D2 of the minutes: "In all matters to do with the organisation and functioning of the Encuentro the OCs are to present themselves as such and not as individuals or as determined collectives" (Cuninghame 1997). This might be partly to do with the avoidance of personality cults and, more likely, to prevent a gradual commandeering of the global movement by a group with narrower interests.[23]

For, by this stage, the discourse of the movement had adopted a global, 'internationalist,' context, while still maintaining the importance of the grassroots. As part of its 'library' of ideas, the basis of appeal is the Earth and 'Humanity'. The logo, for example, incorporates a red five-pointed star set within a rectangle: the five points are symbolic of the five continents of the encounter (Plataf. de Solidaridad con Chiapas

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[23] I address this in my critique.

de Aragón 1997). The outlines of this logo look like they were hand-drawn, in black

Figure 2: Logo for the Second Intercontinental Encounter (Plataf. de Solidaridad con Chiapas de Aragón 1997)

ink, and this apparent roughness of the rendering of the logo stands in contrast to the logos of the corporate media-marketing apparatuses, which the movement is working against. While the encounter, and the global actions that will follow, will be riding on new technologies, the discourse emphasises the connection of the movement with nature, Earth and humanity. In this instance, whatever the actual processes,[24] the look achieved downplays this technological input, emphasising its creation through human effort and creativity.

Even the choice of host name reflects these themes. The Second Encounter's website is stored at www.pangea.org, and it is derived from the word, "pangaea", "the hypothetical landmass that existed when all continents were joined, from about 300 to 200 million years ago" ('Webster's' 2001). As this notion of pangaea and the theory of continental drift[25] gained support from other scientists and entered popular discourse, it has become part of the semiotic store of 'globalists' wishing to emphasise the common heritage and destiny of all humans by evoking this image of the single land mass. This

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[24] The image may have been drafted manually by hand, scanned and developed using digital image software or may have been developed wholly through the computer.

[25] The theory of continental drift and the concept of Pangaea had its beginnings thus:

> Though first proposed by American geologist Frank Bursley Taylor in a lecture in 1908, the first detailed theory of continental drift was put forth by German meteorologist and geophysicist Alfred Wegener in 1912. On the basis of geology, biology, climatology, and the alignment of the continental shelf rather than the coastline, he believed that during the late Paleozoic and early Mesozoic eras, about 275 to 175 million years ago, all the continents were united into a vast supercontinent, which he called Pangaea. Later, Pangaea broke into two supercontinental masses-Laurasia to the north, and Gondwanaland to the south. The present continents began to split apart in the latter Mesozoic era about 100 million years ago, drifting to their present positions ('Columbia' 2000).

idea becomes a metaphor for the interconnectedness of humanity with the earth and its ecology.

This discussion of the preparations and organization of the Second Encounter illustrates how the movement was able to be controlled, that is, retaining the meanings and ideology bestowed upon it in its inception, while minimalising possible contradictions and criticism that it was being 'top' directed. The movement was able to continue to employ the discourse and ideals it began with (for instance, the absence of hierarchies), while maximising its spatial and temporal reach and range of participants. The discourse was transferred and broadened from one that originated from and was specific to the local Zapatista struggle to a global context.

When the Second Encounter took place between 26 July and 3 August 1997, in five locations in Spain, the themes, meanings, and terms had a familiar ring. The gathering was organised according to subject areas ('mesas') defined in the course of the European encounters:

> 1. The Neoliberal economy against Humanity. Our lives beyond the economy.
>
> 2. Our world and their world.
>
> 3. Struggles for culture, education and information.
>
> 4. The struggle against patriarchy.
>
> 5. Struggles for land and the earth, ecology
>
> 6. Against all forms of marginalisation (Organizing Committee for the Second Intercontinental Encounter 1997, as in original).

The organization of the variety of resistance movements under the above rubrics, instead of, for example, under geographical areas, made sense under the logics of the discourse so far, with the advantages of solidarity and networking between different activists worldwide. It had the effect of framing the presentations with a 'global' perspective and directed the discussions towards the goal of creating the 'networks of

resistances and communications' outlined by the EZLN at the end of the first Encounter. In addition, each venue had a working party drawing up a list of proposals they would table during the closing plenary.

A significant development was the eventual creation of the Peoples' Global Action (PGA). The details of how the PGA's formation is related to the encounter are unclear because "[t]he gatherings were intended not to create a global organization or produce a unified strategy, but to discuss how different groups were affected by neoliberalism and how movements might coordinate their resistance" (Kauffman 2000). While the PGA situates its beginnings in the Second Intercontinental Encounter (Peoples' Global Action 2000a), other reports during that time do not mention this as an explicit item of discussion in the agenda or in their observations (Flood 1997; Barchiesi 1997; 'Second intercontinental' 1997). This is speculation, but perhaps the discussion merely occurred amongst the Zapatistas and the other organizations that became the convenors of the PGA. Another possibility is that the others *were* party to the discussions that eventually led to the formation of the PGA in the months after the encounter, but the formation of such an organization was mentioned in passing and in abstract during the course of discussions over the logistics of organising global actions and communication between organizations.

In any event, this is perhaps one contradiction in these developments, that, despite the emphasis on avoiding centralisation and the formation of an umbrella organization that would unite these different groups, the participants in the encounters formed the PGA. The Second Encounter, according to the PGA itself, "outlined a firm rejection of appeals to those in power for reforms to the present world order. [sic] A support for direct action as a means of communities reclaiming control over their lives, and an organisational philosophy based on autonomy and *decentralisation* [sic]"

(Peoples' Global Action 2000a). Nevertheless, for logistical reasons, the PGA was formed shortly after the encounter:

> After the second encuentro, in August 1997, some 50 representatives of these varied movements – including indigenous groups from Nigeria and Mexico, and farmers' organizations from India, Brazil, Bolivia, and Indonesia – sat down to plan worldwide protests against the World Trade Organization, the prime symbol and instrument of corporate globalization. To facilitate organizing, they created an ongoing network, which they called Peoples' Global Action Against "Free" Trade and the WTO, or PGA for short (Kauffman 2000).

As the above quote states, this network planned and issued invitations to protest the WTO meetings and oriented itself towards 'direct action'.

The PGA announced its first conference in late November, less than six months after the Second Intercontinental Encounter. The discussions and networking in the first and second Encounters paid off as activists from various organizations and locations forwarded the PGA's first bulletin and call for participation to several email lists, newsgroups and other activist forums.[26] One of the goals of the second Encounter was to compile a directory "of the various collectives in struggle against neoliberalism;" this was done during the registration and preparation stages of the Encounter (Cuninghame 1997). Thus, when the PGA was ready to issue its invitation, it was able to take advantage of the directory and networks of communication built up with the aid of the previous encounters. From 23 to 25 February 1998, approximately three delegates from seventy-one countries took part in the first Peoples' Global Action conference in Geneva. Again, the movement brought together participants representing diverse interests, including Maori rights, Ukrainian radical ecologists, Earth First, and Canadian postal workers (Peoples' Global Action 2000a).

From this point forth, the global action discourse was further refined, consolidated, and, debatably, institutionalised. The PGA had, from the beginning, a set

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[26] A search of newsgroup messages posted during this period revealed many instances of this same newsletter.

of 'Hallmarks' to discuss at this conference. These hallmarks were included in many of the bulletins sent, being part of the original full-length bulletin issued by the PGA:

> 1. A very clear rejection of the WTO and other trade liberalisation agreements (like APEC, the EU, NAFTA, etc.) as active promoters of a socially and environmentally destructive globalisation
>
> 2. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organisations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker
>
> 3. A call to non-violent civil disobedience and the construction of local alternatives by local people, as answers to the action of governments and corporations
>
> 4. An organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy (Peoples' Global Action 1997, as in original).

Many of the ideas and terms above were developed and established during the course of events I have already described.

Post-conference, other "defining documents," as the PGA puts it, supplemented the hallmarks: the 'Organizational Principles' and the PGA 'Manifesto' (Peoples' Global Action 2001c). Even further refinement of the organization's identity and stance occurred in August 1999, after the second conference, when a fifth hallmark was added in response to concerns that the movement could be confused with right-wing anti-globalisation groups:

> This hallmark was introduced due to the fact that the denunciation of 'free' trade without an analysis on patriarchy, racism and processes of homogenisation is a basic element of the discourse of the (extreme) right, and perfectly compatible with simplistic explanations of complex realities and with the personification of the effects of capitalism (such as conspiracy theories, anti-Semitism, etc) that inevitably lead to fascism, witch-hunting and oppressive chauvinist traditionalism. With this new hallmark, PGA repudiates all reactionary forms of resistance to capitalism (Peoples' Global Action 1999).

Thus, they inserted, as the second hallmark: "We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human

beings." After J-18 that same year, and not long before N-30, the PGA, rather than the 'broadening out' that occurred in the initial stages of the global action genesis, found the need to narrow the scope of the global action movement and refine its solidarity.[27]

The hallmarks solidified the principle aspects of the global action discourse in a summarised form for posting in newsgroups and email lists and dissemination in pamphlets, web sites, and so forth. The 'PGA Manifesto', on the other hand, was a lengthy treatise on transnational capital and its adverse effects. This text brought together various concerns under one umbrella, that is the negative effects of 'economic globalisation' and global capital: gender oppression, environmental destruction, labour, subjugation of indigenous peoples and marginalised ethnic groups, cultural commodification and homogenisation, control of technology and knowledge, militarisation, exploitation of and discrimination against migrants and commercialisation and unequal access to education (Peoples' Global Action 2001c). Here, the theoretical foundations of the discourse are laid out in concrete form, accessible to potential participants, journalists and other interested parties: as Foucault established, theoretical formulations like these are a form of 'ordering' (limitation and control) of the discourse. The unity of the global action and the continuity of some of the main ideas through time and subsequent global actions, can be partly explained in the existence and availability of these founding documents so early in its inception.

In a similar fashion, the organisational principles of the PGA are a continuation of a fundamental stance already made explicit in previous meetings, namely, the global action movement's 'anti-hierarchy' and resistance to institutionalisation:

1. The PGA is an instrument for co-ordination, not an organisation.
   Its main objectives are:

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[27] As will be seen, this did not prevent criticism that alliances were made with groups that might not agree to the totality of the network's beliefs.

<ol type="i" start="1">
Inspiring the greatest possible number of persons and organisations to act against "free" trade through non-violent civil disobedience and people-oriented constructive actions
Offering an instrument for co-ordination and mutual support at global level for those fighting "free" trade
Giving more international projection to the struggles against "free" trade and the WTO.

<ol start="2">
The organisational philosophy of the PGA is based on decentralisation and autonomy. Hence, central structures are minimal (Peoples' Global Action 2001c, as in original).

There are about eleven main principles in total, outlining the means by which the PGA would achieve the first two aims. For instance, there was to be "no membership" and "no juridicial personality." The annual conferences were to be convened by a Convenor's Committee which were replaced "100%" by vote at each conference, and the dates of the conferences were to coincide with the ministerial meeting of the WTO. Volunteers "supportive of the aims of the PGA" were to maintain the information tools of the PGA, including its regular bulletins and its web site, "in a decentralised and rotative manner." These principles, like the Hallmarks, were changed or refined further during the third international conference in Cochabamba, Bolivia, 16 to 23 September 2001. These organisational principles are part of the global action discourse not only in the way they structure decision-making, cultural production and interaction in all activities pertinent to the PGA, they also provide a blueprint for other organizations, and hence shape the organisational formations of subsequent groups, either directly, or indirectly through discursive diffusion.

A key purpose for this conference was the coordination of global actions in May the same year to mark the G8 Meeting in Birmingham and the second ministerial meeting of the WTO from 18 to 20 May. The PGA announced a rough schedule and plans for this in the bulletin (1) following the first international conference, including existing transport arrangements, dates for events like 'People's Trade Day,' marches, a street

party and arrangements in other cities in Europe and elsewhere, with dates and contact information. A seminar was to be held for the Geneva locals and 'guest activists' on 17 May, which would include "practical training on techniques of non-violent resistance to police repression."

This was the beginning of the process by which global actions were coordinated annually, demonstrating how a movement that explicitly disavowed hierarchy and centralisation would be able to initiate, plan, and coordinate several international actions. The actions to follow included a wide range of activities and activists, carefully thought-out routes and strategies, and publicised through sophisticated media mechanisms. Through it all, the themes of autonomy, solidarity, anti-globalisation and neo-liberalism, and anti-hierarchy, trope through the various global actions that followed.

The above history, from the Zapatista-arranged gatherings in Mexico and Spain, to the formation of the Peoples' Global Action, and the lead-up to the first global action, identify the development of discursive tropes within the global action movement from its beginnings, and how they are maintained and circulated across time and space. Some of these discursive developments may not, individually, at least, be exclusive to this global action movement. However, collectively, and with the central theme of anti-neoliberalism (later re-identified as 'anti-capitalism' by the participants, and, popularly, as 'anti-globalisation'), this discourse is novel in its uptake of the relatively new technology of the Internet to propagate, sometimes word-for-word, its central meanings and concepts, and to organise meetings, decision-making and local and global actions. The speed and reach of the Internet is used in conjunction with 'older' forms of communications and technology, often combining them to maximise reach, for instance, the provision of pamphlets as downloadable files in portable document format for activists all over the world to print out and distribute, and the reverse, the publishing of

website and email addresses on print and other media. While preserving (to a debatable degree) the autonomy of the affiliate organisations taking part in the meetings and global actions, the network built up in the course of this history also holds them together through these technologies, the organisational principles and practices, and the discourses of solidarity, globalism, humanism and 'globalisation from below'. The culmination of these efforts come during the global actions, where activists further strengthen their ties by setting up and participating in these demonstrations in key locations in different countries and states.

DATE	DESCRIPTION
27 July – 3 August 1996	First Intercontinental Gathering/Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism: Zapatista meeting with international activists in Zapatista "Aguascalientes", Chiapas, Mexico.
26 July – 3 August 1997	Second Intercontinental Gathering in Spain. Development of idea of global network.
August 1997	Formation of PGA.
2 December 1997	PGA's first bulletin and invitation to conference and global action against WTO.
23 to 25 February 1998	1st PGA conference—includes international delegates; organization of 2 actions.
16 May 1998	1st global direct action agitating against the G8 meeting in Birmingham, in England, and, in Geneva, the 2nd Ministerial Conference of the WTO.

Table 1: Establishment of the PGA

3.3.4 The First Global Actions, 1998 to 1999

The first global actions initiated by the PGA were also important in the development of the discourse. They were the models for organisation, the yardstick by which actions were compared. They provided the experience and counter-tactics, and an idea of what the activists would face in terms of the media, police, and government. Aside from the activists, institutions like the media and police likewise derived much of their subsequent reactions and practices from their reading and the experiences of these first actions. Sometimes, as with the Seattle events and aftermath, these discursive structures were perhaps more rigid than the activists themselves would prefer, locking activists, media and police in adverse patterns of behaviour and response. As such, the activists in

current actions have to take into account the effects of the cultural constructs established early in their history.

3.3.5 May 1998 and Global Street Party/Reclaim the Streets

In these actions commemorating the Second Ministerial Conference of the WTO and the G8 meeting in Birmingham, the basic tropes are already in place: simultaneous action planned internationally. The PGA chose the focal locality and time of the actions to coincide with that of a meeting of a group or institution identified as an agent responsible for allowing or encouraging the interests of globalisation and global corporations. This 'meeting' is the trigger for the coordination of the action and becomes the locus for the international demonstrations in this way.

The first global action initiated by the PGA did not attract the most media attention, or reach the most countries. Possibly, the media attention was not as massive as in subsequent actions, although healthy, partly because the actions in the United States were smaller scale. According to a veteran of New York direct action campaigns, participation in the US was abysmal: "There was barely a blip of participation from the United States: The only coordinated events were a radical street party in Berkeley and a small forest-preservation action in Arcata, the heart of California's Redwood region" (Kauffman 2000).

This first global action initiated by the PGA did, however, feature some impressive figures for that time:

> But in 28 other countries, it was a different story entirely. Five hundred thousand people[28] took to the streets of Hyderabad in India, with the rallying cry, "We, the people of India, hereby declare that we consider the WTO our brutal enemy." In Brazil, an anti-WTO march drew some 50,000 people, including members of the country's Movement of Landless People, who were simultaneously looting supermarkets and government food stores as a protest against hunger (Kauffman 2000).

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[28] The PGA claims 200 000 peasant farmers in Hyderabad, India (2000a).

Over 10 000 people were in the Geneva demonstrations, with over 65 demonstrations in total across the globe. Notably, there were 'Global Street Parties' in twenty cities:

> Some 20 cities held Global Street Parties, raucous and celebratory takeovers of public space, inspired by Reclaim the Streets (RTS), a movement that began in England during the early 1990s from a convergence of Earth First! campaigners against road construction and ravers fighting criminalization of their underground party scene (Kauffman 2000).

As discussed earlier, the global action campaign worked by harnessing the networks, experience and local connections of existing groups, for instance, Reclaim the Streets in the above quote, and allowing a breadth of different forms of protest, as well as the formation of new affiliate groups.

The PGA celebrated the May 1998 action as a triumph, introducing a critical perception of organisations like the WTO. There were, though, acknowledgements that further refinement in organisation and practices were necessary. For example, a significant comment regarding the events in Birmingham prefaced a newspaper article[29] entitled, 'Angry Clashes in G8 City' (Reclaim the Streets 2001a). Located above the extract is the Reclaim the Streets' comment, "WHY WHY WHY – WE NEED BETTER NEWS MANAGEMENT." From subsequent discussions and comments at this website, the primary problem with this article was the statement, "The activist movement arrived in Birmingham to protest during the G8 summit of top world leaders about what they alleged was 'the cult of the car.'" Additionally, the article quoted a protestor as saying, "We came here with the sole intention of having a party and raising the issues relating to our environmental agenda." Both these statements, while certainly reflecting the specific agendas of some of the groups and individuals, in the absence of other information about the main purpose of the activities in the same article, were misleading and suggested that opportunities to effectively publicise the main meaning of the action

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[29] The newspaper was not identified, but the article was originally published on Sunday, 17 May.

had been lost. In terms of its practices, this indicated a need for the groups involved in (at least) the Birmingham Street Party to develop a more comprehensive media campaign.

The same newspaper article, as indicated by the title, placed heavy emphasis on the violence generated during the action, something that occurred in actions elsewhere. The handling of the issue of violence is an example of the inception[30] of a seme discussed in my semiotic analysis of the S11 page. The PGA depicts the agents in the events in oppositional terms, that is, the police, customs officials, and the various non-activist or left-wing media, versus the protestors, demonstrators and performers of the global action. While they draw attention to the large numbers of police, helicopters and so forth throughout the demonstrations, the PGA says that the first incidents of real violence occurred towards the tail end of the first day of action, 16 May.

An excerpt from the PGA site describes the events thus:

> At around 22h30 the demo came back to the city centre and was officially ended. However the sound system was still playing and many people were still assembled. Suddenly a small group started breaking all the windows in sight and the police charged. The remains of the demo retreated towards the park where the caravan was camping. Most of the demonstrators gathered around a fire and tried to calm things, but a small group (many very young kids from the quarter) continued breaking small shops [sic] and affronting the police. Many people got beaten up (especially the people from the caravan, who were not taking part in the fights) – several were seriously injured, at least one ending up in intensive care at the hospital. The police charged with teargas against the camp (where there were families with small children sleeping) and provoked its dissolution in the middle of the night. The fighting went on until 4h30 in the morning as the police helicopter and searchlight attracted hundreds of the Saturday night crowd to join the show (Peoples' Global Action 1998).

This account of the PGA downplays the role of the demonstrators in the outbreak of violence. First, the PGA establishes that the breaking of windows occurred after the 'official ending' of the demonstrations and was, by implication, not part of the plan.

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[30] Many of the signs and mythologies the global action discourse draws on are, as in many discourses, not 'new,' so, by 'inception,' I mean only in terms of the global action discourse discussed in this chapter.

Secondly, the vagueness of 'a small group' seems to suggest that the PGA cannot indisputably disavow them and, at the same time, avoids naming them as participants of the demonstrations either—see next point. Thirdly, regarding the "breaking [into?] small shops," that occurred after the police charge, the PGA is more specific, and identifies the culprits as "very young kids from the quarter," that is, not demonstrators. In contrast, the police are presented as indiscriminating and over-reacting perpetuators of violence, inflicting undue force on demonstrators largely portrayed as defenceless. As I have already shown in my initial reading of the S11 title page, this seme occurs in later global action discourse as well, and complements the trope of global action participants being martyrs to a better, utopian, future.

These portrayals of police and demonstrators recur in other passages and in many of the reports in other places, and in subsequent global actions. They are maintained in the discourse in planned actions, with demonstrators doing their best to convey their vulnerability while highlighting the violence in police actions. On the web and in releases to the media, the PGA and the affiliate organisations replicate concepts that are now a significant part of the discourse. Activists' calls to ensuing actions and gatherings, in archival and historical reports, reiterate this image of the authorities and the protestors. In actions to follow, this, and other themes, feature in the publicity and bulletins of the global action affiliate groups.

3.3.6 J-18

"J-18" is the predecessor of "N-30" in Seattle and occurred on 18 June 1999. Continuity is preserved in the introduction to the J-18 proposal:

> Around the world, the movement grows - from the forests of Chiapas to
> the streets of London, from the grain farmers of India to the landless in
> Brazil to the unemployed in France. Inspired by the Zapatista struggles in
> Mexico and the Intercontinental Encuentros, and by the global actions
> against the G8 (most powerful) nations and the World Trade Organisation
> in 1998, activists from many countries are planning co-ordinated actions

around the world to oppose neoliberal capitalism (Peoples' Global Action 1999).

Before the event, partly as a lead-up, a line of caravans of five hundred people representing the subjugated in the southern hemisphere travelled through Europe, presenting information and challenging financial institutions and governments, to finally end up in Köln in time for the J-18 action. This was a "carnival against capitalism", coinciding with the meeting of the G8 leaders in Köln, Germany, and indicated the breadth of the PGA's function, a broadening-out reflected in the decision taken during the second PGA conference in August in the same year:

> … it was agreed by consensus that the network should in the future work as a tool for communication and coordination for *all the struggles against the effects of the global capitalist regime*, not only against the institutions and agreements that regulate it… The expectation is that the PGA as a process will eventually reach a stage in which it is able to articulate grassroots resistance at global level, working as a global movement, rooted in the basis of peoples' movements all over the planet, and playing a direct political role from below (despite not being constituted as organisation) (Peoples' Global Action 1999).

This may be a formalisation of an approach already in action, but it is significant that this change occurs four months before the Seattle events in November 1999.

As part of the action, a relatively new form of protest activity[31] was observable that is highly apt in this discussion: there were, apparently, repeated attempts to hack into the Futures Exchange ('Judy' 1999). This form of protest, often called 'hacktivism,' did not see its beginnings from anti-globalisation activism,[32] however, it is now very much part of the repertoire, if not overtly acknowledged as anything more central than a tactic of groups affiliated with the network. Interestingly, this is a form evolved from

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[31] Due to legal issues and the 'decentred' structure of the network, the connection of these particular activists with the PGA and wider network is not easy to ascertain.

[32] For instance, on 7 and 9 of August, 1998, people declaring themselves as ethnic Chinese hacked into and changed the home page of a couple of Indonesian sites after the riots in Indonesia, protesting violence against ethnic Chinese (Zhang and Wen 1998). Attempts are made almost everyday on White House, NASA and the United States Department of Defence systems, and in 2000, Yahoo!, Amazon.com, Buy.com, eBay and CNN.com were attacked, causing Wall Street to sell off their shares (Barker 2001).

traditional culture-jamming,[33] where the appropriation of the 'real estate' of capital for the deconstruction of its messages is transferred from billboards to electronic 'real estate,' that is, websites, databases and so forth. This is one fitting example of how the transnational spaces occupied by global capital can be appropriated by activists.

Some English campaigners found themselves in a reflective mood before and after this action, not surprisingly, considering the PGA was now more than a year old, and the organisation prominent in the English campaigns, Reclaim the Streets, had an even longer history in England. While it is not possible to say that these issues and debates are representative of other actions in other locations, they are an example of the kind of reflection and debate that can occur post-action.

In England, the handling of the media was, apparently, much better than the last global action:

1. I think the other big success of the events was the media work. Although I would normally be one who is suspicious of any contact with mainstream media at all, we have shown that by careful use of press releases, we can partly influence what is written about us. All of the mainstream June 18 news reports that I have seen mentioned that the events were happening in many countries, were timed to coincide with the G8 summit in Koln [sic], and were constituted by an amalgam of many different groups. Most importantly, the London events were billed as an "anti-capitalist" demonstration. They can't write us off as "anti-car" protestors any longer ('Keep it up' 1999).

This reflected, perhaps, a growing sophistication in the media machinery of the global action campaigns across the world. While the media reports in England proclaimed that the organising for the event was 'done on the Internet,' this simplified the developments. An activist, in a critical response to the reports, wrote, "We will not 'connect' with the peoples' of 'the south' through internet-working; regardless of the Zapatistas mythical laptop communiqués from the Mexican jungle," pointing out that

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[33] These have their roots in sixties deconstruction of billboard advertising.

these reports ignore the reliance on non-Internet communications (Peoples' Global Action 2000b). In London alone, organisers sent "over a thousand action proposal letters in several languages through libertarian and anarchist address lists, printed up a succession of leaflets in runs of 30,000 or more, held and attended regular meetings, conferences and the like." During the J-18 action, video footage from the demonstrations in England were available on the web as 'live streams'. After the events, people could get copies of compiled video material on mail order.

As an example of adjustment and reinterpretation of the discursive 'rules,' the concept of "non-violence" and appropriate activist behaviour is a frequent trope. The global actions' approach of "non-violence" has been contested externally and internally from differing positions. Externally, governments, police and various mainstream media, focus on potential or actualised violence and portray the participants of the action as inciting violence through property damage, attacks on persons and so forth. Internally, amongst the global action activists, a range of different interpretations abound. Some, as in the PGA report on the Geneva 1998 action, say that, largely, the police or opportunists who were not really part of the global action were responsible for the violence, and that participants in the action took all pains to demonstrate peacefully. Others do not disavow the attacks against property and persons (e.g. a pie thrown at Kim Beasley) but, at the same time, discuss how these are valid as part of the tactics of global action, and yet in keeping within the strictures of 'non-violence'. Still some others question whether 'non-violence' should be part of the discourse, although these people are in the minority. There are other interpretations, but, in the main, the conclusion of most discussions is that "non-violence" is reaffirmed and redefined, and remains part of the PGA's repertoire of discursive statements (Peoples' Global Action 2000b; several reports from 'Reflections on J18' 1999).

Another notable development in the course of this action was the increase in United States participation. In contrast to the 1998 action, this time, there were six hundred demonstrators in Washington, five hundred in New York, a Reclaim the Streets party in Los Angeles, and other protests in Asheville, Boston, Eugene and Olympia (Peoples' Global Action 2000b). The networks, energy and experience thus built up in the States (as well as in Canada and globally), plus the media coverage in the United States, was timely, for the next major global action, a little more than five months later, was in Seattle.

3.3.7 N30: Seattle

Held to protest the third WTO ministerial meeting in Seattle from 29 November to 3 December 1999, the N-30 action is one of the most famous for a number of reasons. Obviously not the first global action or the first incidence of conflict and violence, it is still remembered as the first time most people around the world, at least, those not normally attentive to these matters, became even aware of simultaneous large-scale global action in practice. The fact it was in the United States, home of media conglomerates like CNN, was one major factor in it becoming world news. Then, of course, there were the images and accounts of police in heavy riot gear, the use of tear gas and rubber pellets on protestors and bystanders alike. The mayor declared the city in a state of civil emergency, imposed a seven pm curfew and called in the National Guard, amongst other measures to contain the situation. There was also the seme of violent or anti-social protestors: the mainstream media made the most of property damage (window-breaking and graffiti) and looting.

The events in Seattle have now acquired a legendary status amongst activists and set a notorious precedent for increased planning and security on the part of city officials and police expecting similar protests to occur in their vicinity. They are the subject of

much exhaustive analysis elsewhere, which is why this section will be brief, selective, and shall merely illustrate how they extend and continue some of the discursive developments described previously.

Billed by mainstream media as a mass protest arranged through the Internet before the commencement of the actions, this has become somewhat of an urban legend in the sense that, while not false, it is somewhat exaggerated. As in the previous actions, the Seattle protests used a *combination* of traditional media with the Internet for its preparations and organisation, including encrypted emails, walkie-talkies, and pagers in the streets. The discourse of solidarity and unification of diverse interests under a banner was certainly evident here, and given even greater emphasis as global media coverage was more intense.

An interesting development at this stage is the diminished role of the PGA. This is not to say that the PGA was ignored or did not play a part. More precisely, because the Direct Action Network (DAN) was instrumental in organising and broadcasting the actions in the United States, the PGA did not feature (or, if it did, was less prominent) in much of the publicity and lead-up to the event, not as much as the previous actions, anyway. The PGA was aware of this development, saying, not long after the Seattle action, "Due to its diffuse and fluid nature as well as not having any offices, paid staff, funds or bank accounts, the role of PGA and its link between different events has remained obscure" (Peoples' Global Action 2000b). On the one hand, this may be evidence that its organisational principles (non-hierarchical, decentralised) are working, that the global actions are not in its sole grasp. In other words, this is a development in keeping with the discourse established in the course of the genealogy of this movement, and something that the PGA itself does not wish to recant, rather, wishes to emphasise:

> That is not to say that these events were directly organised by PGA. That would be to misunderstand the originality and the force of a process that develops as a network, with more and more connected centres of

initiative that *maintain their complete autonomy and define their own identity*. The initiative for issuing the calls for action and organising the central blockades came each time from an autonomous group that was connected to the network (Reclaim the Streets in London, Direct Action Network in Seattle, Solidarità-INPEG in Prague, etc), calls that were *then relayed by the convenors and the rest of the network*.

The idea of PGA has not only created a network capable of coordinated action. It has also *contributed to triggering a much larger movement*. This year, no institution of global governance (Climate conference, G8, ASEAN, the World Economic Forum, NATO, TABD, etc.) could meet anywhere without a coalition of local movements coming together to attack them (Peoples' Global Action 2001b: my emphases).

As the above passage indicates, this looseness of association is something the PGA recognises as part of the consequences of their principles, and is even a source of pride.

At the same time, this association is not something the PGA wants to lose totally. Aside from its more obvious and immediate concern that the PGA would thereby lose its reason for existing, the ordering of the global action discourse is a crucial form of linking together the various groups, networks and actions of the global actions. The PGA, although always emphatically described as 'not an organisation,' and with regulations that limit its development as an institution and encourage its functioning as a model of 'direct democracy,' is nevertheless a central regulator of the discourse. Its hallmarks, organisational principles, bulletins and calls for action, cohere the diverse groups that unite and work together to build up the massive direct actions, which can halt cities around the world. Paradoxically, the practices and tropes of the discourse have contributed to both its continuation (in exponentially expanding the network and scale of global action) and its peril (in becoming so large and inclusive that its principles and meanings could potentially dissolve).

The media attention on the violence in the streets, and the violence itself, was the subject, yet again, of much discussion. Media and police accounts say that members of anarchist groups, which they often present as representative of the entire demonstration, initiated the violence through looting, window-breaking, and other acts

against property. All detailed accounts I have seen of these matters say that the first two days, 28 to 29 November, before the WTO meeting on 30 November, were peaceful, except, according to one activist, a broken McDonald's store window (Desyllas 1999). The police, in comparison, describe protestors throwing rocks and directing laser pointers at them. They describe the McDonald's incident as, "Several hundred demonstrators marched to the McDonald's at 3rd and Pine, broke windows, and spray painted graffiti on the building." There is, predictably enough, a marked difference in the language used. Desyllas' account has no agent, uses a passive sentence construction, and implicitly gives the impression there was one McDonald's store window broken by one protestor. The police account is much more active and worded to paint a picture of many ("hundreds") of protestors descending on McDonald's.

On the Tuesday[34] of the WTO meeting, the police began to use rubber pellets, tear gas and pepper spray, and, according to the accounts of protestors and some residents of the city, against not only people who were not conducting destructive acts, but also on people who were not actually participating in the protests and blockades. The Seattle Police Department's (hereafter SPD) account of the events in their after action report provides an interesting contrast to the protestors' accounts. The activists' order of business was to 'shut down the WTO' through 'non-violent' means, and the organisers (DAN) asked that all participants agree to the following:

1) We will use no violence, physical or verbal towards any person

2) We will carry no weapons

3) We will not bring or use any alcohol or illegal drugs

4) We will not destroy property (Direct Action Network 1999, as in original).

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[34] Although a protestor states that the police started gassing people in the *morning*, a short interval after the protestors began their blockades preventing the delegates from attending the WTO opening ceremonies (Gay 1999), most accounts agree that the police gassing began later in the afternoon.

In contrast, police from the SPD noted that property destruction occurred *in the midst* of 'non-violent' protestors. They surmised that this was a conscious and deliberate strategy on the part of the organisers:

> Among other things, WTO commanders were surprised by the high degree of coordinated action orchestrated using walkie talkies and cell phones; the critical mass achieved with the rapid marshalling of forces from all directions nearly simultaneously on the morning of November 30; the conscious use of hit and run tactics and flanking movements through the day and night to follow; and the *effective use of peaceful demonstrators to mask and shield law violators* (Seattle Police Department 2000).

One of the ways the report backs this up is by citing incidents that occurred on the Monday before the WTO meeting (and the riots). The report first emphasises that, through the day, the demonstrators were gathering and conducting their protests at different sites in an impromptu manner, with the aid of mobile phones and walkie talkies, also notifying each other of police whereabouts so the activities could take place outside controlled areas. One such demonstration occurred outside Niketown, according to the police, there was an argument amongst the protestors over whether they should take over the store. The report then quotes a protestor, equipped with microphone, exhorting them to "Keep it peaceful today. Today is not the day to break windows. *Wait until tomorrow*" (Seattle Police Department 2000).

Despite the request from DAN, most of the reports from activists, even some of the ones who did not take part in the attacks on property, did not view the breaking of windows and other acts against property as violent acts because they were not directed at people and did not hurt anyone. A few days after the riots, a subgroup from an anarchist organisation called 'Black Bloc,' claimed responsibility for these activities, listing the corporations attacked and the methods and tools used to deface and damage storefronts and property, and explaining the meanings behind these acts. They were

symbolic acts deconstructing the concept of 'private property' and reclaiming these for the people:

> When we smash a window, we aim to destroy the thin veneer of legitimacy that surrounds private property rights. At the same time, we exorcize that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us. By "destroying" private property, we convert its limited exchange value into an expanded use value. A storefront window becomes a vent to let some fresh air into the oppressive atmosphere of a retail outlet … (ACME Collective 1999).

Perhaps adding to the reluctance of the network to rein them in, the Black Bloc reiterate a seme, that is, the black masks (balaclavas or t-shirts tied around their heads) evoke the Zapatistas and repeat those meanings of anonymity (although avoiding legal prosecution is a main reason).

Although the main thrust of the events was to blockade the WTO non-violently, other activists writing about this issue tend to view property destruction, particularly that of corporate giants such as Starbucks and McDonald's, as being in keeping with the semiotic cache of the global action discourse, even if they personally did not want to participate ('Reflections on j18' 1999).

This is not to say there was total agreement and that the SPD accurately assessed the situation. The anarchists from Black Bloc say that other protestors physically attacked them and that these self-styled 'peacekeepers' were sometimes more a threat than the police.[35] This dispute is significant in relation to global action discourse, because it illustrates one of the paradoxes of bringing together so many different interests. The difficulty of such a solidarity and reaching agreement on what constituted valid 'non-violent' activities and on balancing the individual agendas of the various groups with the entire thrust of the global action discourse are indicated in the following passage written by members of the Black Bloc:

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[35] They also raise suspicions that some undercover police may have been posing as activists 'peace keepers' defending stores.

Response to the black bloc has highlighted some of the contradictions and internal oppressions of the "nonviolent activist" community. Aside from the obvious hypocrisy of those who engaged in violence against black-clad and masked people (many of whom were harassed despite the fact that they never engaged in property destruction), there is the racism of privileged activists who can afford to ignore the violence perpetrated against the bulk of society and the natural world in the name of private property rights. Window-smashing has engaged and inspired many of the most oppressed members of Seattle's community more than any giant puppets or sea turtle costumes[36] ever could (not to disparage the effectiveness of those tools in other communities) (ACME Collective 1999).

At the same time, the global action discourse *is* flexible and tactically-driven. The more positive responses of the other activists to the Black Bloc actions recuperate and reintegrate the latter's actions and ideas into the discourse. The evidence for this process is in the fifth bulletin of the PGA, which includes an extract of the above 'Communique' (Peoples' Global Action 2000b). Significantly, this abridged extract leaves out the criticism of other activists, for instance, the passage above, and other parts that hint at dissension within the ranks.

The activists keep alive the cultural memory of N-30 in Seattle, conducting anniversary protests against global capital every year, often with skirmishes between the police and the protestors. Activists consider N-30 the 'watershed' global action in the US, and, because of how the 'world news' is produced (sourced), by most of the world. Along with J-18, it recurs most often as a point of comparison for subsequent demonstrations and has given global action a particular stamp in dominant discourse. It had lasting impact in how, for instance, the police, media and city officials would prepare for and handle current actions. The repeated reference to this event in media texts, particularly the abundance of reports and analyses from different perspectives on the Internet, ensures its legendary status in history. While I have shown the inception of many of the practices and semiotic chains as occurring before N-30, nevertheless, this

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[36] This a reference to the costumes and puppets used by some groups in the N30 actions.

particular action placed them firmly in the archives of global action discourse, and set

the scene for the actions that would come after (see Table 2: Global Actions from 1998

to October 2001, page 215).

ACTION	LOCATION: EVENT DATE	WEBSITE
Reclaim the Streets	Birmingham & Worldwide: 16 May 1998	http://www.gn.apc.org/rts/global3.htm
J-18	Köln: 18 June 1999	http://bak.spc.org/j18/site
N-30	Seattle: 30 November 1999	http://www.seattle99.org/
A-16	Washington: 16 April 2000	http://www.a16.org/
Mayday 2k	Worldwide: 1 May 2000	http://www.mayday2k.org/
S-11	Melbourne: 11 September 2000	http://www.s11.org/s14
S-26	Prague: 26 September 2000	http://www.x21.org/s26/index.shtml
0-20	Korea: 20 October 2000	http://antiwto.jinbo.net
J-27	Davos: 27 January 2001	http://www.bermuda.ch/reitschule/anti-wto/English
Anti-WEF	Mexico: February 2001	http://www.d4mx.org/
Operation Dessert Storm	April: 2001	http://www.dessertstorm.org
Stop FTAA	Beunos Aires: 6 April 2001	http://www.noalalca.com/
Stop FTAA	Quebec: 18 April 2001	http://www.quebec2001.net/
M-1	World-Wide: 1 May 2001	http://www.mayday2001.org
Asia Development Bank Meeting	Hawaii: May 2001	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopwto99/files/ADB_Hawaii/ADB_Hawaii.html
EU Meeting	Gothenberg: 14 June 2001	http://motkraft.net/gbg2001
J-25	Barcelona: 25 June 2001	http://www.j25.org
J-1-3	Salzburg: 1 July 2001	http://www.antiwef.org
G8	Genoa: 20-22 July 2001	http://www.controg8.org
S-28	Washington: 28 September 2001	http://www.50years.org/
O-3	Melbourne: 3 October 2001	http://www.s11.org/m1/03.html
CHOGM	Brisbane: 6 October	http://www.stopchogm.org

Table 2: Global Actions from 1998 to October 2001[37]

4. Critique

Aside from developing the ideas and strategies for revolution, another function of

intellectual criticism advocated by Foucault is to make the process of revolution *difficult*

and self-aware (1988), in other words, to critique the revolutionary discourse itself. In

this section, I discuss some of the criticism of global action, some of which originated

from the activists themselves. This, in itself, is interesting, because so much of the

material available on the web is self-congratulatory and, if there are problems, the

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[37] This table is compiled mainly from material available from the S11 site (2001a) and supplemented with the archives of Reclaim the Streets (2001b) and Peoples' Global Action (2000a) and also searching and tracing 'backwards,' that is, entering search terms into search engines as well as following links and references in websites and news reports.

contributors blame the authorities and/or the adversary (for example, global corporations or the WTO). Although this is most likely due to a need to maintain and attract support and participation, this tendency sometimes makes it difficult to make an accurate assessment of the success of the tactics and practices of the actions and the discourse in general. It also works against the aforementioned need for revolutionary practice to be reflexive and multifarious, to decrease the chances of solidifying into a new oppressive practice. At the same time, the existence of critical appraisal, although not as popular and widespread, does indicate that a certain degree of critical reflexivity *is* embedded in the discourse.

The Zapatistas, as demonstrated, are significant as both the initiator of the chain of events that led to the formation of the Peoples' Global Action and a source of inspiration for the organisation and tactics of global action. Most of the websites of activists in support of direct action against capitalism do not tend to utter major criticism of the Zapatistas, nor, indeed, the PGA and the other organisations that played significant roles in the development of global action. Thus, the comments and experiences of Jeroen Ten Dam (Ten Dam 1999b), writing on behalf of the Solidarity Committee Mexico, are worthy of note for they come from an inside perspective that is more openly critical of the EZLN and the encounters than usual. Their comments also help to identify a key weakness in the discourse and operations of global action, that is, the effort to build a coalition can lead to certain compromises and pacts that, left unchecked or unexplored, would be detrimental to the network. They also highlight the discursive boundaries of 'what can be said' within the network, at least, publicly.

Ten Dam says, for instance, that the laudatory treatment of the Zapatistas by radical and left-wing groups is a 'blind spot' that reflects a general tendency of the left to be critical of authoritarianism in extreme right groups, but to ignore or be oblivious to the same problem in left-wing groups (Ten Dam 1999a). This, from Ten Dam's account,

seems to be partly due to the cult of personality formed around Marcos, the centrality of the Zapatistas in providing the catalyst for anti-capitalist direct action, and that criticism of the Zapatistas could be counted as support, although unintended, for the Mexican government. If this is true, this may undermine the role of the gatherings and encounters for creating dialogue and modelling 'direct democracy.' Organisational procedures and rules may be intended to protect these things, but an emerging culture of uncritical reception of select groups or individuals can undercut the effects of these practices, while still leaving them, to most eyes, intact and functioning.

Ten Dam discusses a number of other problems with the Zapatistas and groups involved in the Encounters, which I will list briefly only to suggest the types of problems raised in the past. They are important to my work in this chapter because they give instances of how the weaknesses of a movement reliant upon the Internet for its networking can be obscured. In other words, all the meetings and international gatherings not withstanding, there is a greater chance of fissures between ideology and actual practice going unobserved or, at the least, not going through the rigors of critical analysis. The Zapatistas are described as generally opportunistic, open to making alliances with organisations and individuals who have, as Ten Dam argues, doubtful ideologies and practices. One example is Ten Dam's allegation that the EZLN met with the major of the city of Montreuil, but refused to see a group of immigrants without necessary residence documents who riot police, acting on the said major's orders, violently evicted. Also interesting is the divergent account provided by Ten Dam of the treatment and behaviour of the Zapatistas during the intercontinental encounters. He describes them as disinterested and uninvolved in their attendance during the first encounter, and 'sealed off' during the second.

Aside from the Zapatistas, there were also, according to Ten Dam, groups attempting to monopolise solidarity work in their cities, regions or countries, even

threatening other groups. For instance, Ten Dam says that Italian Stalinist groups tried to take over the central planning and impose locations and times of meetings for a European encounter, and refers to other assorted instances where practice fell short of the ideal of 'non-hierarchical' and democratic decision-making. During the first intercontinental encounter, there was also a general reluctance and avoidance of open criticism by participants for the sake of the 'greater good' both during meetings and encounters, and in the reports, despite expressed criticism to the writers. If true, this indicates the limits of what counts as truth and on what is sayable within this discourse. In addition, these problems underscore how the principles and practices set out earlier do not guarantee, that "there are despotic formations of immanence and canalisation indigenous to rhizomes" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 46). Just as importantly, Deleuze and Guattari also point out that this, in itself, does not render such efforts useless:

> What counts is that the root-tree and the canal rhizome are not opposed like two models: the one functions as a transcendent model and tracing; the other functions as an immanent process that *overturns the model and sketches a map*, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic canal" (46, emphases added).

The effort to resist hierarchical tree-based models of organisation and thought, in itself, is an act of resistance that actively challenges the dominant discourse in wider society.

I have discussed the second encounter based upon accounts available on the Web; Ten Dam's account, which is also available on the Web, is more rare, and gives a different impression:

> Even with the preparations it became clear that a small group of *apparatchiks*, mainly from Madrid and Zaragoza had imposed their idea (which was an almost identical copy of the First Encounter in 1996) of how the Encounter should be organised. Groups with a more critical view and different ideas were not given any space to venture their opinions, but strangely enough most of these critical groups did in the end drop their criticisms and participate. This Encounter included the same ridiculous show of accreditation and *ausweis*-like identification papers that were compulsory during the first Encounter... Anyone who dared to

criticise the way things were organised could expect to be treated as if they were spies, there to sabotage the Encounter (Ten Dam 1999b).

The report from the South African delegation has this to add:

> It became in fact apparent that the organization of the mesas and the venues responded to preoccupations linked to internal relations between groups which took part in the organization… These dynamics negatively affected the development of the Encounter. In fact, the fragmentation of some mesas and the emphasis on delegated forms of representation in contrast with direct participatory democracy were often perceived as elements of bureaucratization in substantial discontinuity with the first Encounter that was held in 1996 in Chiapas (Barchiesi 1997).

Without taking a stance on whether they are accurate or not, these are allegations that do not appear in the majority of material available on the Internet and other media, although, at the most, certain web sites, notably, the PGA's, *do* link to the Ten Dam articles. Most other reports mention that the encounters were generally disorganised, but excuse this problem as inevitable, given the number of diverse interests and groups present. Meanwhile, Ten Dam raises another point, in relation to the European network, but also worth considering in general, especially in relation to the issue of violence. He argues that: "Day by day the European network is becoming an ever more bureaucratically organised humanitarian aid organisation, that will do *anything* in the aid of the good cause. It seems to have lost its grip on how things are going in Europe…" (Ten Dam 1999b).

The key here is the phrase "do anything in the aid of the good cause." As I said earlier, the effort to build up a coalition of different groups has sometimes meant making changes to accommodate their agendas and tactics. Sometimes, the efforts have led to a dilution of the initial goals and demands of direct action:

> In our efforts to build a huge anti-capitalist network we have attracted a lot of groups and it sounds impressive but unfortunately too many of them are *liberal* or are open to *authoritarian or conservative* elements. This is partly because of phrases like '*the longer the list, the better the action*!' used in some early leaflets… ('Judy' 1999).

This problem was recognised in 1999, when the PGA made an amendment to their Hallmarks to rule out right-wing nationalist and protectionist groups (see discussion of hallmarks in the section on the PGA). However, this is not to say they have adequately addressed the problem. The tension between the desire to expand the networks and include all parties interested in the actions and the desire to contain the movement within established ideological and tactical limits continues to be an issue, and, as I have argued, is actually an element of the discursive framework set in place since the intercontinental encounters.

One example of the problems the desire to include as many groups as possible could pose is the issue of violence. The PGA initially advocated 'non-violence' as part of its hallmarks; this was removed in 2001 after discussions at the third international conference in Cochabamba (Peoples' Global Action 2001a: n.p.). Significantly, the two main groups objecting to the inclusion of 'non-violence' were the North Americans and the Latin Americans. Instead, phrases like 'maximising respect for life,' and 'civil disobedience' were used to include the range of tactics used in different circumstances in different parts of the world. There may be validity in the point that 'non-violence' meant different things in different contexts, could rule out a range of tactics, and, moreover, did not respect the histories and circumstances of sections of the movement where 'non-violence' would be difficult. Unfortunately, ever since J-18 and N-30, the threat and incidence of violence always accompanies the global actions in media reports and preparations of city officials and police:

> Ever since Seattle, the international media have endlessly decried the supposed violence of direct action. The US media invoke this term most insistently, despite the fact that after two years of increasingly militant protests in the US, it is still impossible to come up with a single example of someone physically injured by a protester (Graeber 2001).

This seme attracts much media attention and publicity, and has entered 'anti-globalisation' and, to a lesser extent, 'anti-capitalism,' into popular consciousness. Simultaneously, the attention paid to violence, however, distracts from these themes. Rather than detailed examinations and critiques of the claims of the protestors, mainstream media reports tend to focus on the numbers of wounded demonstrators and police, store windows broken and disruption caused to the operations of the urban centre, the techniques of the protestors in achieving this disruption and violence, and so forth. Despite the training sessions in non-violent action provided prior to direct action protests, this seme of violence appears too ingrained in the discourse surrounding direct action, particularly in media and security organisations. For some of the activists, violence is a component of their practices. In this instance, the movement is in a bind: it wants to be inclusive, in line with the drive to achieve solidarity with a wide network, attract mainstream attention, and avoid an authoritarian stance on this issue, at the same time, the close association with violence draws attention away from the key messages it wants to promote.

There is one further tragic consequence of this state of affairs: the death of a protestor in Genoa, Carlo Giuliani. Carlo Giuliani was shot by a police officer whilst participating in a confrontation between protestors and a police vehicle. By this time, July 2001, the movement had alleged numerous problems with demonstrators being assaulted and thrown in detention, including a woman who was raped in the custody of police in the S-26 Prague protests the previous year. There were discussions during the PGA conference and, ironically enough, in Genoa, about the problem with the criminalisation of the movement. A detailed discussion of this incident is not within the scope of this chapter, except to say that the activists have blamed the police, agent provocateurs, and the leadership or organisers of the global action movement. One argument is that the smashing of windows, burning of cars and so forth not only

provides a justification for the police to increase hardline security measures, but also is terrifying for the police involved, themselves already schooled in a discourse that criminalises the protestors (Newman 2001; Bello 2001). Walden Bello argues that, amongst the agent provocateurs are activists belonging to a certain group, which he refuses to identify and calls 'Bs.' These 'Bs' have tactics rather similar to the Black Bloc, who *were* present.

What Giuliani's death highlights in relation to this critique is the increasing potential for, and actuality of, violence, especially since Seattle, as a result of escalating police anticipation, media attention, and, perhaps, efforts by activists themselves, sometimes to protect themselves. This discussion does not intend to place all guilt or responsibility on the movement or the individual activists involved: as mentioned, on the part of police, city authorities and governments, their discourse has been increasingly opposed and stern with regards to direct action, and, as a global action day approaches, police are fed a stream of reports, instructions and information that steel them for a violent confrontation (Newman 2001). Some activists protect themselves with gas masks, helmets, body shields, and protective padding; they use tripods and other devices to create effective barriers to, say, WTO meetings, and all manner of sophisticated methods of communication and tactics. As indicated in the Seattle Police Department report, although these measures might be harmless and do not merit a harsh crackdown, the police work in a discursive environment which has already identified these activists as potential criminals and their actions as 'illegal,' and possibly dangerous. On the street, the observation of the tripods being unloaded and used, gas masks and body armour donned, the organisation of the protestors, and not least, the sheer large numbers they face, all these can heighten police apprehension.

In this climate, the actions of groups like the Black Bloc can and have triggered a brutal confrontation. This, as I have emphasised, does not mean the fault lies solely

with the Black Bloc or with the activists, merely that their movement, in drawing together the diverse groups, the wide range of people of all ages, urgently needs to address this issue because of the harm done to the message and to protect the lives of the participants. Bello (2001) argues that there needs to be ways of persuading activists engaged in dangerous and inflammatory (beyond the bounds of 'civil disobedience, not an easy definition) actions to disengage. Proposals like these sit uneasily in the discourse, which emphasises diversity and a non-hierarchical and authoritarian approach to organisation, the same dilemma that emerged post-J-18 and Seattle. Here, again, we can see another boundary of 'truth' within this discourse, of what is acceptable to express.

Another controversy surrounds the debatable involvement of far right groups. This issue was first raised publicly by the Dutch organisation, De Fabel van de Illegaal ('The Myth of Illegality'). De Fabel van de Illegaal say that key organisers of the Seattle N-30 action, Public Citizen and the International Forum on Globalisation (IFG), promoted partnerships with individuals, like Pat Buchanan, and groups in the far right (Krebbers and Schoenmaker 1999). Whatever the truth of this matter, the abundance of material, linked from the PGA website, indicates that there is at least this threat of problematic alliances and a degree of discomfort amongst some of the activists about the people with whom they are marching. One writer on this issue describes "the decision facing the anti-authoritarian left. Do we trade away long-term control over our ability to define the content and goals of our struggles against capitalism, white-supremacy, patriarchy, ecological destruction and the state in return for short-term coalition "victories" over narrowly defined issues" ('Mark S' 2000).

Relatedly, the anti-capitalist movement tends to be concentrated in the north, having less actions and numbers in the southern hemisphere. One chronicler of the

PGA's history explains the south:

> They have very difficult conditions and their own - very full - agendas. These don't necessarily put WTO in first place, since the IMF programs have often already imposed de facto what WTO wants to perpetuate as international law. A big movement in Nigeria, for example, may be willing to participate in coordinated demonstrations if it also coincides with local deadlines, but it generally won't organise a major demonstration just for a far away summit. The very idea of committing themselves to some kind of international action and political responsibility can be new and difficult ('OdM' 1999).

In addition, since Seattle, and not least because of the predominance of United States' media corporations, the actions and practices in the United States often receive more coverage and attention.

Further, to add to the problem, in these areas with the highest concentration of direct action protests, North America and Europe, participants are predominantly white. According to one critic, these issues of race and class are linked: the anti-globalisation campaign is not the global proletariat rising against capital. Distinguishing between the anti-globalisation "campaign" from the "actual anti-WTO struggle", this writer says that the *campaign* has been centred in the north and is largely pro-capitalist while the southern *struggle* is anti-capitalist (Sakai 2000?). While Sakai's dichotomy might oversimplify the class politics in both hemispheres, it does make a useful connection between the following: ethnic composition (the greater participation of white activists); the alliances with more liberal and right-wing activists; the emphasis on northern campaigns; and the content of some of the campaigns. The participation of liberal, right-wing and even left-wing groups can dilute the message of the campaign, which occasionally, in the United States, seems to be more about saving jobs and protecting local industry than about global capital's exploitation of labour and resources occurring in developing countries.

The predominance of white protestors, and the inclusion of groups to the right of the political spectrum, in its turn contributed to the poor participation of people of colour (Martinez 2000). This can add to the oversimplification of the issues: Sakai, for instance, cites the case of one aged woman of colour, working for a minimum wage as a blue-collar worker in the US, scoffing at the assumptions of a European feminist working with third world women. The latter argued that the workers in the more affluent north could now find a common cause with the south as things like subsidised child care, medical benefits, and so forth, were under threat. Sakai argues that the woman of colour[38] did not have these things anyway. This suggests that the ethnic and class composition of the campaign leadership—yes, despite the rhetoric of 'non-hierarchy'—may still reflect the stratification of power and proceeds of wider society and therefore contribute to a blindness or lack of concerted attention to local issues, for instance, racial discrimination and the needs of marginalised indigenous or 'people of colour'[39] in general.

More directly germane, other comments from Martinez indicate that Internet access could also have contributed to the disproportionate representation:

> A July 1999 federal survey showed that among Americans earning $15,000-$35,000 a year, more than 32 percent of white families owned computers but only 19 percent of black and Latino families. In that same income range, only 9 percent of African American and Latino homes had Internet access compared to 27 percent of white families. So information about WTO and all the plans for Seattle did not reach many people of color (Martinez 2000).

Earlier in this chapter, I cited the case of the London J-18 actions, where the organisers used a variety of more traditional media extensively, in conjunction with the Internet. Without further research, it is unclear whether the Seattle action was more or less reliant on the Internet. Certainly, organising meetings and seminars were held 'offline'—

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[38] Sakai does not state her ethnic classification, except by implication.
[39] My discussion of Martinez's critique adopts her terms of reference, although 'people of colour' is a term I use for convenience only, with some discomfort.

however, as Martinez points out, the predominance of white people in the leadership and in attendance at these meetings disconcerted the African-Americans that did attend and discouraged some of them from further participation. This widened the gap in communication even further.

5. Peoples' Global Action at the Time of Writing

I shall focus on two pivotal moments to describe the direction of the PGA and its network in recent times. The first is the PGA's third annual international conference. In the lead up to its third annual international conference, the PGA took note of issues that had come up in the regional meetings around the world:

> These meetings discussed the need to go beyond the global days of action, which are the form of global action practised so far within the PGA space, and explored the idea of sustained global campaigns as a possible step forward. Other issues discussed included the question of violence; the criminalisation of our movements, the expression of solidarity in cases of urgent need; the need to localise more deeply the PGA process, etc (Peoples' Global Action 2001b).

The notion of sustained global campaigns has been mentioned already and included: campaigns against "state militarism and paramilitarism"; "all privatisations"; the "construction of alternative models to the capitalist system," and; "defense and recognition of self-determination and land sovereignty of all people."

Other changes were made to bring "the theory into line with actual practice and experience" ('Olivier' 2001). This was a form of discursive streamlining where the activists rewrote its organisational principles and the hallmarks to suit actual practice and the knowledge gained from experience. For instance, Indymedia web sites were already in use to spread information about global action days. The PGA modelled its own web communication on these sites, that is, decentralised, with open publishing, and no 'official' PGA stamp ('Olivier' 2001). Instead of its annual meetings, caravans would tour each continent and, in this way, representatives from each region would gather and

spread information. There would also be regional meetings, with a point of contact for the PGA, where the convenors, and the frequency and form of meetings would be decided within each region. This was to encourage fluidity, spontaneity, and local grounding.

The third meeting was not well-attended by the US delegates, primarily because of the airline chaos after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon on 11 September 2001, which brings me to the other 'moment.' After this event, the heightened fear and security in the United States and its allies created an even more hostile climate for activists, particularly as the state and some of the public had problems making a distinction between protest actions, for instance, culture-jamming activities, and 'terrorism' (it is arguable there are some activists who also have this problem). As a result, the network, at least, in the United States and England, went through a period of reappraisal and discussion as activists considered how best to act in this environment, and to respond to the attacks as well as the United States' war efforts.

Since then, the network has redirected its attention towards anti-war action during the so-called 'War on Terrorism' that ensued. Although it had its supporters, more so than perhaps the anti-globalisation actions, the activists found themselves committed to a position that the mainstream (at least in England and the United States) did not share. Indeed, some of the reactions were very hostile, and read the activities and ideologies of the protestors as a form of terrorism. As one activist-writer puts it:

> Post-September 11, tactics that rely on attacking – even peacefully – powerful symbols of capitalism find themselves in an *utterly transformed semiotic landscape*. After all, the attacks were acts of very real and horrifying terror, but they were also acts of *symbolic warfare*, and instantly understood as such. As Tom Brokaw and so many others put it, the towers were not just any buildings, they were 'symbols of American capitalism' (Klein 2001: n.p., emphases added).

Aware of this 'semiotic landscape', the delicacy of public sentiment, and of the reduced 'tolerance', increased security and force they would face from police, activists scaled down their activities, changed their practices to take into account the change in society around them. As Klein points out, it was time to shift away from, in her words, a "war of symbols," a need that was already expressed in activist circles prior to 11 September, but accentuated by this event and social aftermath.

As the war in Afghanistan was brought to a close, attention was redirected to the upcoming World Economic Forum meeting in New York. This meeting, usually held in Davos, Switzerland, was shifted to New York due to fears that the usual disruptions that were now a regular annual phenomenon would take place at the customary location. The call to action against this meeting was probably correct in assuming that this decision was motivated by the fact that this was the site of one of the attacks that occurred on 11 September (Anti-Capitalist Convergence 2001). For this reason, this was a pivotal moment, more so than perhaps the 16 October action (O-16). The various media followed the semiotic paths already well-worn by this time, but this time, the rhetoric was more unremittingly hostile, with the New York Police Department declaring a policy of "zero tolerance" for any violations of the law (Baker 2002). With a huge police presence, despite interviews with activists stating that the activities would centre more on a 'street party,' there was a media build-up to a violent confrontation (Baker 2002).[40] This did not happen: the reports in the media described the protests as peaceful and quiet.

An article by activist media tells of the cancellation of an ABC Nightline special on a group of protestors organising for the occasion, saying that the producer of the programme cited insufficient violence as one of the reasons (Skaller 2002). Will the US

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[40] This was also observed in reports from Reuters, AP, and online news media based in New York.

and English anti-capitalist network alter its tactics in the long term? How would this affect protests outside the United States and England? In terms of media coverage, would interest in the protests die down without the pictures and reports of violence? On the other hand, is such media attention to remain a goal of the activists anyway? It is too early to tell if this realignment of the discourses surrounding anti-capitalist protests is long-term and it is possible that the tactics and modes of operation already defined in the past will return.

6. Conclusion

As this chapter demonstrates, the technologies of the Internet are not merely a tool of global capital, but are also a powerful means of drawing together its adversaries for concerted direct action. The Internet is not just a tool: in the course of providing one means of pulling together the myriad groups and interests, it contributes discursively to the way the movement operates and organises itself and to its vocabulary and direct action tactics. The influence of the technology (and its utility) can be seen, for instance, in the rhizomorphic form of the activist network: the spread of websites, the interconnection of activist groups across space and agendas and the passage of information and discussion via this network through time and space. The nature of this network allows, with the reservations already expressed in the previous section, the potent combination of a form of direct democratic decision-making (or, at least, the appearance of such), anti-authoritarian organisational structure, with a comprehensive ideological and discursive framework, which provides the identity of the network and streamlines its operations. In an organic-like manner, the semiotic codes of the network, for instance, codes expressing martyrdom and solidarity, bind the individual groups acting together and maintain this identification within a larger backdrop.

The experience of the network, at the same time, teaches a few lessons about this form of solidarity building and activism. The first surrounds the tension between the control and structuring of the discourse (to use Foucault's terms, the "ordering of the discourse") against the 'loosening' of the same: that is, the widening of participation, agendas, and tactics. The degree to which the movement veers towards one or the other has very real consequences for the way it functions and the reception of its activities, witness the issue of violence and the debates over whether particular organisations should be included as part of the movement and the roles they should play.

The movement's use of the Internet pushes the technology beyond basic HTML pages, which do have their place too. The full range of Internet tools are used: Usenet newsgroups, email and email lists, chat, web discussion boards, online newsletters, downloadable material in portable document format, and online audio and video broadcasts including footage of actions, meetings, interviews. For publicity purposes, activists produce 'flash' clips, that is, animated clips they can download, forward to other people and play on most types of computers.

Another activist tactic enabled by the Internet is 'hacktivism'. This is now de rigueur, often coinciding with other forms of protests, but, perhaps because of the illegal nature of this activity, not officially recognised by the activist groups. During N-30, for instance, the website of the organisation sponsoring the WTO meeting in Seattle came under continual attack. Despite the heavy assault, the hackers were unable to get into the system. In September 2000, during its meeting in Melbourne, the World Economic Forum's website was hacked (Barker 2001). Nike's website was changed so that, from 21 to 22 July 2000, people who tried to view the Nike site were instead redirected to the S11 site. This latter action resulted in a leap from fifty-seven to a high of sixty-six

thousand 'hits'[41] an hour at the s-11 site, leading to a total of eight hundred thousand 'hits' for the nineteen hours the Nike site was directing visitors to s-11 (s-11 2001b). In 2001, the World Bank decided not to hold its annual development economics conference on globalisation, poverty, and wealth in Barcelona as planned to avoid anti-globalisation protests. Instead, it would hold a virtual conference. This was followed by threats by activist groups like Greenpeace that they would likewise focus their activities online and shut down the virtual conference through hacking (Riley 2001).

Beyond the above practices, the Internet also affects how *traditional* media is used. The movement, it seems, best reaches the groups that *should* be taking part (that is, the disenfranchised) when it uses communication methods that are less 'high tech' and elitist, for instance, hardcopy leaflets, face to face seminars and meetings, fax machines and so forth. Where the network excels is when these different technologies are combined to meet different communication needs, a lesson learned early in the Zapatista model and worth keeping in mind. There are potential problems when activism begins to lean too much on one form of communication and neglects others, leading to a gap in participation, as, for instance, the disproportionate ethnic composition in the Seattle events might arguably demonstrate.

The discourse of the anti-capitalist network has entered other cultural channels, and the various activists involved have increased popular awareness of the concept of 'globalisation,' notwithstanding that some of these understandings sometimes refer to vague notions of large corporations like McDonald's, cultural homogenisation, and/or threats to local labour and businesses. This is not only through the direct action campaigns, but also through documentaries, which are also available on order through the Internet. These feature, for instance, the events in Seattle, or exposes of 'sweatshop'

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[41] The word, 'Hits,' describes visits to a website. These figures are usually collected by programs on the server and are available to the site maintainers and includes other information, like the network address (IP) of the visitor and time of visit.

working conditions of transnational corporations like Nike, and Gap and are produced by non-profit 'video activist' groups like Paper Tiger, Whispered Media, Big Noise Productions, and Independent Media Center. A well-known example is "Showdown in Seattle: Five Days that Shook the WTO" (IMC Video Collective 2000). In Australia, for instance, predominantly government-funded stations like the Special Broadcasting Service and the Australian Broadcasting Service at least occasionally broadcast these productions, if not commercial and mainstream television stations.

The 'culture jamming'[42] activities, and other ideas and tactics that accompany direct action campaigns, seem to have 'seeded' and spread to other areas. At the time of writing, the big news item here in Australia surrounds a small group of Melbourne activists calling themselves the 'Dole Army', who say they tricked the producers of two commercial television current affairs programmes into producing stories about how the former lived in sewers and lived off food scraps from refuse, which was patently false. This ploy, which was to highlight the plight of the unemployed and expose tabloid journalism, is culture jamming taken to its logical extreme, and it is not insignificant that the website of the Dole Army includes a link to Melbourne 'Indymedia' and other affiliates of the global direct action network (Dole Army 2002).

Perhaps these activities addressing unemployment and other persistent social issues are part of the 'sustained campaigns' that the PGA and the direct global action network are now stressing, as opposed to 'event-driven' campaigns. Criticism of its modes of operation notwithstanding, the PGA works within a discourse that emphasises that it is historically-aware and self-reflexive and uses a model of direct democracy in decision-making. Since its beginnings, it has gone through a number of changes in

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[42] The phrase, 'culture jamming', describes the tactic of activists to deconstruct and alter media texts in order to expose the discourses that structure them. For instance, in the 1960s and 70s, culture jammers wrote on advertising billboards and transformed the meaning of their images and written text. Culture jamming is, thus, not new, however, it has spread and grown in scale along with the anti-capitalist network.

response to experience and the political climates in which its networks are working. While it has problems with obtaining and maintaining involvement with activists in the south, this ideological, technical and organisational emphasis on grassroots communication and decision-making has allowed the network a great degree of flexibility and spontaneity in response to local conditions while bringing together and organising a large number and breadth of active participants, using the same spaces inhabited by global capital.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I began this dissertation by suggesting that the Internet introduces new modes of power, control, and resistance and can extend or limit discourses existing before its advent. I then argued that an analysis that takes into account multiple discourses, competing or complementary, might help unveil these intersections of power and resistance. In the course of researching and writing this dissertation, I also found that a practice of constant reflexivity is vital to developing dynamic and relevant forms of resistance, a practice that will at least help avoid problems (e.g. of representation) and assumptions from coagulating into fixed 'truths'. My intention was to conduct a flexible examination through a cultural studies approach that mediated between the discourses of the Internet, and of wider society that affected Internet communication, and demonstrate how they were not always opposed, but sometimes complemented or reinforced each other. Through the adoption of this approach, this dissertation has been able to uncover a variety of ways in which power operates on the Internet, in less explicit ways than conceived in early cyberculture studies.

In the first two chapters, I am most concerned with control over public discourses, and with avenues of resistance to this control. In the case of Singapore and Internet regulation, I critiqued the proposition that the nation-state was threatened and that Internet technology and culture freed the individual from national regulation was critiqued. I do not suggest the opposite, that the hold over national culture, behaviour, and so forth was still centralised in the state's hands. Instead, while acknowledging and exploring the state's power to regulate the media, including the Internet, I found that there were, necessarily, changes to the nature of the relationship between the state, Singaporean public culture, and its citizens. These include the state's own adjustment to globalisation and new technologies and the features of the Internet that allow some form

of public questioning of the national discourses. While the former may be disputably cosmetic, and the latter is still limited in scope, they do suggest that at least some small-scale change is underway, which may, or may not, eventuate into more explicit political and social change. Just as optimistic projections of the liberalising promise of Internet technology are in danger of minimising the power of the state and the public discourses already set in place, a pessimistic and cynical stance may also overemphasise the control of the state and the dominant discourses of society. This latter view ignores the less spectacular but still significant smaller changes that are happening. I explored examples of these in *Chapter One*, when I discussed Internet sites that fell outside the Singaporean margins of acceptability. In turn, a model of power that does not recognise the possibility of resistance can feed into a tendency for a fatalistic apathy that neglects to develop these minute changes into something more substantial (for instance, civic participation, voting patterns, and so forth). For instance, besides the problems of political practice, bureaucratic regulation, and so forth, this sort of apathy and fatalism is a major hurdle to progressive social change in Singapore.

The examination of the flame thread in *Chapter Two* established the degree to which a discussion in an online forum is framed and limited by both the immediate and the wider social contexts of the communication. This chapter was concerned with aspects of the Internet which affect interaction in online forums, including attributing of identity to posters and the use of shared narratives (such as those around race). Again, I questioned the degree to which resistance within this framework was still possible, albeit many of the messages were still limited by the framing terms and narratives.

The third and fourth chapters turn their attention to transnational cultural formations, one based on strategic ethnic alliances, the other on a common cause, to analyse the promise and peril offered by the Internet in facilitating and encouraging these networks and communities. These formations use the Internet to pool their

resources and energies for addressing problems of equity and justice. *Chapter Three* focussed on the dangers of essentialising and objectification in the representation of injustice and violence against ethnic minorities, in this case, ethnic Chinese. *Chapter Four*, on the other hand, discussed the development of anti-capitalist networks in order to, firstly, highlight their strengths and learn from them, secondly, to raise interest in the development of oppositional narratives and discourses. These concerns include the construction of a discourse, practice, and membership that can exclude others from participating (including those most disadvantaged by global capital), and the contribution of the activists towards their own marginalisation and criminalisation, which can work against them achieving their goals.

As I did this work, other areas of interest and concern have emerged that I could not address within the scope of this work. These are tied to questions of validity and generalisability. Firstly, much of this work relies on the analysis of texts available online. While I have striven to validate my findings through contacting the organisations or individuals involved, quite clearly, future work in this area would benefit from other forms of qualitative research, especially direct observation and interviewing. This would help in the analysis of the processes of cognition, analysis, decision-making, and interaction not easily observable through textual analysis of online materials.

To demonstrate the need for a more direct and lengthy engagement with the organisations and individuals studied, I cite the case of *Huaren*. In *Intersections*, an online journal, I published an article based on work conducted for *Chapter Three*, which was subsequently forwarded to the *Huaren* forums and was heatedly debated on that site. Subsequent to this, members of *Huaren* engaged in discussion with me and, after a lengthy exchange of emails, I was able to put forward my views on the problems in representation and practice I had observed, while the *Huaren* members, in their turn,

conveyed their position in more detail than observable on the site, forwarding me their email discussions. It turned out, for instance, that there was much more disagreement than earlier thought over the ethics of representation, that is, the views of some of the Indonesian Chinese participants that the organisation should let them speak and act on their own behalf rather than speak for them. Through such participant observation, these important details become more evident and verifiable, and the possibilities of objectifying and over-dismissiveness, on the part of the researcher towards the subject of the research, are reduced.

Another area of interest that I was unable to explore in this dissertation is the degree Internet websites and forums influence decision-making. For instance, of interest to me is the degree to which political (for instance, voting patterns) and financial (for example, share investment) decisions are affected by individual engagement with Internet forums and websites. Again, this is an area that would be best analysed through observation and interviewing, combining 'online' work with 'face to face' forms of research. While writing *Chapter One*, for instance, I was conscious of the importance several theorists place on effecting change at a civic and political level (Rodan 2002; Rodan 1996; Brennan 1997) and the need to include such an analysis in order to analyse the dynamics of the Internet regarding power and resistance.

The work I conducted for this dissertation began during the early stages of the entry of the Internet into wider general usage around the world and initially was more concerned with analysing the libertarian discourses that were popular at the time. These are still very influential, and are the subject of much critical analysis in recent years. The dissertation highlights the usefulness of comparing these narratives with other, perhaps less optimistic, ones, to begin to analyse the contributions of Internet media towards progressive and resistive politics. Questions raised in debates about globalisation and cosmopolitanism have also served to emphasise the Internet's role in

globalisation processes, developing and facilitating cosmopolitan sensibilities, and the benefits and problems thus raised. Finally, the analysis of different contextual dimensions, roughly, the national and the transnational (ethnic and cause-based solidarity) demonstrated the workings of power and resistance at different levels and in different contexts. As in other media (and society at large), when analysing the Internet, it is important to understand that power is not only confined to the discourses and agents that control and oppress, it is something that can offer resistance and change.

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