

I am writing this
essay on a macintosh
computer, a essay



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BUSTER**

machine that replaces the gears and levers of a typewriter with a microprocessor, electronic circuitry, software, and a display screen. On the floor is a modem, which lets my computer talk to other computers over the phone lines. There are more than 30 million people on the Internet whom I could reach via modem if I knew their electronic-mail address. I check my E-mail; I'm carrying on several electronic conversations about this essay, and about other topics. I check a few bulletin boards (there are tens of thousands I might look in on; I keep up to date with a half dozen), looking for interesting information about computers and communications that might enliven my essay, and keep it current. Occasionally I broadcast requests for information. On top of the modem sits the telephone, and that, too, ties me in to an information network. There are more than 500 million phones in the world, and if I knew the number and were willing to pay the bill, I could reach any of them. And as I do my work, I almost always have the radio on, picking a station from dozens of possibilities of broadcast entertainment and news. There is an astonishing electronic information infrastructure surrounding me – surrounding us all.

But the electronic part of the information infrastructure is only a tiny fraction of what's available to me. Every morning the newspaper is thrown into the driveway. The paper is an amazing achievement, more than one hundred pages of news, data, photographs, and advertisements pulled over electronic threads from around the world, processed, organised, and delivered. Every day at about noon the mailman brings mail to the box at the end of the driveway. It has been collected, sorted, moved, and delivered: a traditional information stream, but an important one.

Behind me as I sit in my bedroom is a wall of books. Each of them has its own story – each one written, edited, designed, printed, distributed. The author of each has spent months or years collecting information though all of the channels mentioned here, and more, deciding what's important, and figuring out how best to state the facts, and how to make the case for his or her interpretation of them. Many of the books are checked out of a library – an enormously effective information distribution mechanism, every bit as impressive an achievement as the most modern computer network. Some have been obtained through interlibrary loan, a system that moves thousands of books around the country every day. I swim in an ocean of information. We all do. In this essay, I will be discussing about the communities that were developed through newspapers and television. I will then discuss the communities that have been brought about by hypermedia and how it has affected and constructed communities.

The terms communication and community share the same Latin root as the word common-communis. This common denominator is important to the understanding of the process of communication on two levels. First, the quality of the communication process is understood to be higher among participants who have certain things in common, such as past experiences, values, and beliefs. These are also attributes of a community of individuals. Second, the process of communication, mass or otherwise, requires encoding (by a sender) and decoding (by a receiver), which can be achieved successfully only by participants who share a common set of codes or language (Berger, 1995).

Mass communications comprise the institutions and techniques by which specialised groups employ technological devices (press, radio, films, etc.) to disseminate symbolic content to large, heterogeneous, and widely dispersed audiences. As each new medium developed, existing media declined in use or adapted to more specialised functions, but the overall tendency seems to have been for a steady increase until the present, in the amount of time actually devoted to attending to mass communications. McLuhan (1995) states that the railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure. This happened whether the railway functioned in a tropical or a northern environment, and is quite independent of the freight or content of the railway medium. Television is stated to be the dominant mass medium in almost all advanced countries (McQuail, 1969). Just as the telegraph and the railroad brought people of the world closer together – with all the diverse and unequivocal effects that such propinquity breeds – so TV introduces the inhabitants of one nation to those of another, thereby establishing a certain measure of common experience. TV allows us to share the experiences of those who live at a great distance. However, a genuine village community exists, as Miller (1971) points out, only through the local institutions which embody the shared interests of its inhabitants. Such institutions more or less effectively exclude the participation of outsiders who do not contribute directly to their upkeep. Confronted by dozens of channels to watch, the spectator becomes confused, frustrated and finally, in self-protection, isolationist. One almost deliberately exempts

oneself from the concern which these programmes would otherwise seem to solicit.

In a study of community newspapers, it was shown that these tended to have flourished rather than to have declined under the pressure of the national media and, in view of this, it became arguable that the media, rather than destroying local communities, often played a vital role in their maintenance (Bennett, 1982). Newspaper reading became a community ritual as early as 1848, as Lubar (1993) states. In fact, the reading of newspapers have even been likened to a mass ceremony, a substitute for morning prayers. Anderson (1993) has suggested that the activity of reading newspapers is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar.

The digital encoding of sound, text and image, the introduction of fibre optic lines replacing copper wire, the ability to transmit digitally encoded images and the subsequent ability to compress this information, the vast expansion of the frequency range for wireless transmission, innovations in switching technology, and a number of other advances have so enlarged the quantity and types of information that may soon be able to be transmitted that a qualitative change in culture may be imminent (Poster, 1995). The Internet takes advantage of and harnesses the above technology. Rheingold (1993) states that virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the <https://assignbuster.com/i-am-writing-this-essay-on-a-macintosh-computer-a-essay/>

Internet when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.

The Internet is home to many virtual communities. These communities are based on commercial, professional, and social ties rather than geographical proximity (see Appendix A and B). Since no two people will have identical sets of interests, these virtual communities interlock and interpenetrate in complex ways. The rapid growth of the Internet has been accompanied by a corresponding growth in the number and diversity of Net communities. Dery (1996) states that as many as a million people join the Internet each month and there are no signs of abating the delirious pace. This expansion is due in part to the novelty of the Internet, but it also reflects the real desire of people to interact and share experiences, knowledge and company.

A sense of community is profoundly enhanced when members of a group are able to assemble in a way that gives them a sense of place. Online technologies which allow people to interact in a shared, persistent place foster the strongest social bonds. Usenet newsgroups, which is a large set of discussion groups that are composed of the collected contributions of its readers, develop a sense of community. This sense of community arises because newsgroups have persistence, and because the group of people who participate in a newsgroup changes much more slowly than the content of the discussion (HREF 1).

Robbins (1996) suggests that virtual communities represent flexible, lively, and practical adaptations to the real circumstances that confront persons

seeking community. They are part of a range of innovative solutions for the drive of sociality. The online community both demonstrate a friendliness of a good neighbourhood in the midst of an ever growing world, along with showing the active character. To be part of the online community one must become a part of the discussion, otherwise that which is discussed will be less helpful, and the online lurker will not be in touch with anyone else (HREF 2).

Sharing a virtual place is not quite the same as thing as sharing a physical place like a room or a bed. Bodies need not be in close proximity, and they need not be enclosed by the same architectural or natural boundaries. The crucial thing is simultaneous electronic access to the same information. On the Internet, programs for broadcasting electronic mail messages to all the “subscribers” on specified address lists called “list servers” sprout. They are like electronic Hyde Park Corners – places in which anybody can stand up and speak to the assembled crowd. Electronic “newsgroups” were also quick to develop. Newsgroup software allows participants to “post” text messages (and sometimes other sorts of files), much as you might pin printed notices to a physical bulletin board. Shared “rooms” on the Internet often announce themselves by descriptive or allusive names (like the signs on bars and other hangouts) – The Flirts Nook, Gay and Lesbian, Red Dragon Inn, Cybersex, Romance! Connection, Teen Chat, Thirtysomething, Born-Again Onliners, and so on (Mitchell, 1995).

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is one such system where “rooms” are entered and discussions are carried out. It is a multi-user synchronous communication facility that is available to all users of the Internet. Communication using the IRC program is written, and users are spatially distant, but it is also <https://assignbuster.com/i-am-writing-this-essay-on-a-macintosh-computer-a-essay/>

synchronous. It is a written form of communication that is transmitted, received and responded to within a time frame that has formerly only been thought relevant to spoken communication. Users of IRC have devised systems of symbolism and textual significance to ensure that they achieve understanding despite the lack of more usual channels of communication. Furthermore, a variety of social sanctions have arisen amongst the IRC community in order to punish users who disobey the rules of etiquette - or netiquette and the integrity of those shared systems of the interpretation. Commonly known as smileys, IRC users employ alphanumeric characters and punctuation symbols to create strings of highly emotively charged keyboard art: :) or :-) a smiling face, as viewed side-on; ;) or ;-) a winking, smiling face; (or : - (an unsmiley face; an unhappy face; -(*) someone about to throw up :-) someone whose eyes are opened wide in surprise: - P someone sticking out their tongue >: - O someone screaming in fright, their hair standing on end: - & someone whose lips are sealed @ } - ` - ` , - ` - a rose These smileys and symbols are many and various. There are also many commands that can be used to navigate yourself on IRC (see Appendix C). The users who can succinctly and graphically portray themselves to the rest of the IRC usership will be most able to create a community with that virtual system (HREF 3). Access to the Internet has even empowered disadvantaged communities within society as shown at HREF 4. It was discussed how a group of African-American women from a low-income housing development in North Carolina used online communication to attempt to challenge not only the immediate issue of adequate housing but their position within the unequal power relationship between African-American women and white elite-dominated institutions. Use of online communication afforded the

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women an opportunity to operate outside the local and exclusive pathways of information, discourse and social action controlled by the institution of the housing authority. In a broader sense, their grassroots networking activities online subverted longstanding local articulations of power.

The information flow on the Internet is controlled by those who use it. People actively provide the information that they want personally and other people want. There is a much more active form of participation than what is provided for by other forms of mass media. Television, radio, magazines are all driven by those who own and determine who will write for them. The Internet gives people a media they can control. This control of information is a great power that has not been available to the common everyday person. The Internet helps to make the information available more accurate because of the many-to-many or broadcast and read and write capability. That new capability, which is not normally very prevalent in our society, allows an actual participant or observer to report something. This capability gives the power of journalism to the individual. This new medium allows everyone on-line to make a contribution. The old media instead controls who reports and what they say. The possibility of eyewitness accounts via the Internet can make the information more accurate. Also this opens up the possibility for a grassroots network (HREF 5).

In the very near future, we expect to see many more Internet villages and communities, and these will be enriched by even more powerful and exotic tools that enable people to interact with and relate to one another in new and unique ways. Already we see programs like Net2Phone and CUSeeMe

(pronounced C-U-See-Me) that enable people to view each other (or other
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people) whilst even hearing them. Fujitsu and Compuserve have recently announced a plan to create a graphical chat environment where users will be able to construct their own individual persona or "avatar" from a menu of body parts, and that image will be able to move around rooms and other virtual spaces and interact with the images of other members of chat sessions. We can expect that projects such as that will use 3D effects, live video, and virtual reality - whatever technology and bandwidth will allow to help people interact and collaborate with one another (HREF 6).

The emergence of cyberspace challenges the horizons and the habits of print-based culture. It is now more than five hundred years since the printing press was introduced, and with it came a social revolution in the Western world and the foundations of contemporary society (Spender, 1995). As Marshall McLuhan suggested in the 1960s, the content of any new medium is precisely the old medium that it has replaced; and so, in McLuhan's sense, we might say that cyberspace remains fixated on the traces of the word that it ostensibly renders obsolete. It is thus a by-product of a tradition of metaphysics which bears us back relentlessly to our past (Markley, 1996).

We all need a sense of place, whether it be bounded territorially or in the "placeless" realm of cyberspace. However, the bounded nature of virtual community can indeed be a transnational, transcultural phenomenon. Perhaps the reconceptualisation of community derived from our increasing participation within the realm of the Internet will guide us to a clearer picture of public vs. private life within the globe. Although computer mediated communication offers some advantages over face-to-face communication, e.g., no preconceptions of another person based on appearance, ease of

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coming together, and equal access to the conversation among those participating, we find the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. Indeed, each of the “advantages” could be construed as a disadvantage: appearances do matter; conversation should not be based on solely efficiency; and some ideas are more useful than others. Even such proponents of virtual community as Rheingold (1993) maintain that face-to-face meetings can be valuable in the formation of a true sense of community. Indeed, it seems most likely that the virtual public sphere brought about by hypermedia will serve a cathartic role, allowing the public to feel involved rather than to advance actual participation. Communities seem more likely to be formed or reinforced when action is needed, as when a country goes to war, rather than through discourse alone. Citizenship via cyberspace has not proven to be the panacea for the problems of democratic representation within any society; although communities of interest have been formed and strengthened and have demonstrated a sense of solidarity, they have nevertheless contributed to the fragmented cultural and political landscape of the world that we live in that is replete with identity politics and the unfulfilled promise of a renewed *vita activa*. If nothing else, the expressions of hope and desire for new modes of communication such as the Internet speak volumes about the failures of present and past technologies to help create a just and equitable society. Perhaps these failures should prompt us to re-examine why we continue to place so much hope in technology after so many disappointments. Ultimately, the hope placed in hypermedia is misplaced because change will occur not by altering the technology but by reforming the political and social environment from which that technology flows. Finally, I suggest that the term virtual community is

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more indicative of an assemblage of people being“ virtually” a community than being a real community in the nostalgic sense that advocates of the Internet would seem to be endorsing. The main concern is that the public is more likely to forget what it means to form a true community. If, on the other hand, virtual communities can lead to action, that may be the basis for the formation of real and lasting communities of interest. But until then, any change in the communications structure, such as the widespread use of the Internet, is likely to be unsettling. Therefore, we must agree with Cooley (1983), who wrote in 1909:“ A rapid improvement in the means of communication, as we see in our own time, supplies the basis for a larger and freer society, and yet it may, by disordering settled relations, and by fixing attention too much upon mechanical phases of progress, bring in conditions of confusion and injustice that are the opposite of free.” (p.

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As some of my resources were from the Internet, my Hypertext References

are as follows: Hypertext References

[1http://www. communities. com/company/papers/commerce_n_society/commerce_society. html](http://www.communities.com/company/papers/commerce_n_society/commerce_society.html)

[2http://www. columbia. edu/~rh120/ch106. x15](http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x15)

[3http://www. ee. mu. oz. au/papers/emr/electropolis. txt](http://www.ee.mu.oz.au/papers/emr/electropolis.txt)

[4http://www. sscnet. ucla. edu/soc/csoc/cinc/melebio. htm](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/csoc/cinc/melebio.htm)

[5http://www. columbia. edu/~rh120/ch106. x01](http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x01)

[6http://www. samizdat. com/build. html](http://www.samizdat.com/build.html)

Appendix A Places and Communities on the Internet [http://www. well. com/user/hlr/vircom/index. html](http://www.well.com/user/hlr/vircom/index.html)

The WELL, Rheingoldian home turf, hotbed of gnarly individualism

The River, a virtual community owned and governed by the users. FreeNets Home Page leads to lots of resources for community

networkers

Blacksburg Electronic Village, a state-of-the-art community network. TWICS, a virtual community in Tokyo

COARA, a virtual community in Oita, Japan — far from Tokyo; less bicultural than TWICS; I've visited them

four times IRL. COARA members are starting to put up lots of cool web pages.

OTIS – an online caldron of creativity

Cobra Lounge is one of the weirdest, wackiest, art-troupes in cyberspace, part of The

San Francisco TeleCircus

Scroll down a ways and you'll come across Mamie" Minispoon"

Rheingold Click your way into a whole nuther world, ChibaMOO Vincent's <https://assignbuster.com/i-am-writing-this-essay-on-a-macintosh-computer-a-essay/>

Hollow, a “text-based virtual reality” (MUD-like place). CTD MOO is a virtual community for the Center for Talent Development. Ubiquest is a commercial outfit that creates tools to add human presence to the Web. Mix your real reality and your virtual community: A global guide to Cyber Cafes. TurnPike Metropolis will publish, at no charge, up to one megabyte of your non-commercial Webpages. The Spring is a young virtual community flesh-based in Austin, Texas. Station Rose, my zany Austrian artist friends, are online from Frankfurt, via the WELL in California.

Appendix B Virtual Communities <http://www.unik.no/~markus/bib.html> 1. The Stone-Papers If you like to be taken on a journey not only through the net, but also like to know your culture better, embark on a trip to Allucquere Rosanne Stone's small, yet brilliantly written ftp archive and find out how to go on a Magical Mystery Tour, even Anno 1995.

2. The Well The Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link is the legendary mother of all BBSs. Though many on line communities have made BBS-hopping quite familiar these days, the aura remains. A quality selection of some of the finest materials on Cyberspace and Virtual communities. Namely Howard Rheingold with “Virtual Communities”, Bruce Sterling, and David Ronfeldt with opinions on Cyberocracy and “Cyberwar & Netwar: Warfare between Networks”.

3. PARC at XEROX If you are into MUDs and MOOs, Xerox's PARC probably is the right place for you to stay a while. A whole world of interesting papers at their ftp-archive. Working a little slowly lately. But once you get in, you are likely not to leave before too soon. Try it! 4. WiReD For those who don't wish to

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go through a registration procedure, there is a mirror site with older backissues of WiReD-Magazine in Singapore. You never can tell til you try : WiReD-Magazines service has -in fact - dramatically improved. I found out only after overcoming my reservations of registering real-namewith the editors.

5. HIT LabGetting slightly more technical, you might want to take a look at the HIT Lab, especially in what concernstheir development of a VR-display, using retinal projection. 6. Meckler on the WebYet another magazine on the web, this time more technologically and bussines- (as compared to Zeitgeistand culturally, as in WiReDs case) oriented. No time has gone so far into finding out whether this is morethan an appetizer-site, though its first appearance is quite promising, not as promising as WiReD though.

7. CyberneticsLet alone the fact whether it is a lucky word creation or not, it might be convenient to ask the question ofwhat cybernetics is all about. 8. Encryption and Network MoneyEveryone uses the buzzwords, cyberspace and VR are being reported everywhere around the globe, inalmost any kind of medium. The problem does - however - seem to be: Is there a commercial applicationfor all this? Carl Loeffler, in “ The Virtual Reality Casebook”, seems to suggest “ eventually yes”. Thequestion is, however more complicated for VR than for other usual products being introduced to amarketplace. This is because VR cannot only be a product on the realworld market, but because of itsquality as an almost all (reality) embracing tool has the capacityto become a market itself, reflecting onto the realworld economy or becoming an n-dimensional economyof its own. The question then is: on which currency will this new economy run? Gather some <https://assignbuster.com/i-am-writing-this-essay-on-a-macintosh-computer-a-essay/>

perspectives by one of electronic cash's inventors, David Chaum. For a quite comprehensive overview, see the compilation on electronic payment systems, by Trinity College (Dublin).

9. The Brussels G7 Mini-Summit on Information Society Finally, the Governments are gearing up to create the Global Information Infrastructure (GII). With the GIIfirst having been proposed in 1994 by Vice President Al Gore in Buenos Aires, the Summit in Brussels seems to be an important milestone towards its implementation. Though there is no saying for how long, for the time being you can find a comprehensive documentation about the meeting on the Net.

10. The Tofflers Whilst I don't exactly wish to discredit this selection as being random in its approach, future-gazing Toffler-style has won a new importance in connection with Newt Gingrich's writing the forward to their latest book "Creating a New Civilization". Whilst this text is not available on-line, you might want to take a look at an older interview with Alvin Toffler from the New Scientist.

11. Carl E. Loeffler Hard to find on the Net, but – so I guess – nobody escapes Lycos, the searching system at Carnegie-Mellon. See: Distributed Virtual Reality: applications for education, entertainment and industry from 1993.

12. Web Stars in VR (NASA) It seems to be a good site. Since I have just picked it – and it seems to be quite comprehensive – find out more yourself.

13. The MIT media-lab Find out more about what's going on at the Lab with the support of 20+ of the world's mega-corporations.

14. Bibliography of VR Very good! Compiled at the HitLab and available online.

15. Morten Soby on Virtual Reality Possessed by Virtual Reality by Morten Soby, Research Fellow Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo.

16. Virtual Communities Sources List by Howard Rheingold A good collection on the social aspects of VR and Telecommunication, available at the WELL <https://assignbuster.com/i-am-writing-this-essay-on-a-macintosh-computer-a-essay/>

Website. 17. Niemann Foundation at Harvard University. “Toward a New Journalist’s Agenda” (conference proceedings) Assembled in these proceedings from the conference are some very interesting thoughts on the future of media and communications in the networked world. Find a file with an abstract of the most interesting contributions (as from this bibliography’s author’s viewpoint). 18. CTHEORYCTHEORY is an international, electronic review of books on theory, technology and culture. Sponsored by the Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, reviews are posted periodically of key books in contemporary discourse as well as theorisations of major “event-scenes” in the mediascape. 19. Bruce Sterling’s Short History of the Internet Quite elementary reading about the coming about of the Internet. Before going into the real comprehensive materials, it is probably a good idea to start take a look. 21. Roberto Bisso on “Cyberespace et dmocratie” This article is taken from Le Monde diplomatique in July 1994. It shows some of the applications of modern networked computing in the domain of NGO-cooperation.

22. Hypertext – anticipated Just as most will be amazed by the fact that the notion of cybernetics the way we understand this term today retraces back to Norbert Wiener’s book, some might be surprised to actually find out that the notion of hyper-documents has been crafted as early as 1945 by Vannevar Bush, then Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development. No doubt, Hypermedia play an important role of forming a virtual community’s future media-landscape. An online version of his Article “As We May Think” is available.