CYBERSPACE: THE CONTINUATION OF POLITICAL EDUCATION BY OTHER MEANS

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Introduction

Once again a communication technology is being proclaimed the means to achieve fundamental social change. This time it is the World Wide Web on, and the interactive potential of, the Internet. In a very short space of time, it has become a newsworthy and richly mythologised technological system. Twelve to eighteen months ago, beyond academic researchers and developers in the computer industry, only enthusiastic computer hobbyists would have heard of or used it. Now, Ministries and departments of national governments, mainstream political parties, and somewhat more tentatively business and commercial organisations are posting "home pages" on the Web. News media regularly feature its development, often including reference to their own "home pages." There is even a clutch of specialist magazines (***Wired***, ***Internet Today***, ***NetUser***, ***Internet***), none of which is older than about fourteen to fifteen months.

How do political parties view Internet, and how is it being used by them, Ministries and departments of government, and journalists? What might be the consequences of their explorations of this medium? The Internet and other lanes of the "information superhighway" will, it seems, radically change political practices and relations, and facilitate more open, participatory forms of governance. Seemingly, this intrinsically democratic technical system will challenge the institutionalised hierarchies of established political systems. For the British Labour Party, the Internet "could bring fundamental enhancement to the democratic processes itself"[1] and could widen participation in "the processes of reaso-

ning and discussion and reflection inherent in representative democracy." Whatever the Labour Party might mean by this, it is something more than employing interactive information and communication technologies (ICTs) for "instant electronic plebiscites," soundings of public opinion on major policy matters, or of consumers to gauge their satisfaction with services.

While still early days, a discernible pattern of use seems to be emerging in the UK. I have been unable to locate the development of policy oriented, interactive networks[2] in the UK by either central or local government agencies. They have instead concentrated on providing information services. Local authority Web sites, largely represent information about their services and the areas they serve. Most of the files placed on the Internet by UK Government departments and by local authorities do not encourage participation beyond inviting readers to comment on the appearance of the files themselves. The developing pattern of use suggests that, while established political practices and relations might be disturbed, there are already signs that normal service in the predictable future will be much as it has been in the past.

Broadcasting and Citizenship

Use of the Internet by established political actors is conditioned in part by their views on and use of other, more established media of communication. The paper therefore compares and contrasts views on television journalism and politics in the 1960s with those on the Internet and politics at the present time.

In July of 1965 a seminar[3] on Television and Citizenship was held under the auspices of Political and Economic Planning to consider what contributions the "mass" media, and television in particular, might make to nurturing citizenship. The specific focus was whether the mass media had "a substantial influence on civic thinking and action and whether television, so often criticised as an incitement to violence and intellectual degradation, was not in fact already, or at least potentially, a powerful force for civic education" (Blumler 1965, 5).

Blumler's report of the seminar noted concerns about participation in civic affairs, and proposed that, as the responsibilities of national and local government had "steadily expanded to embrace virtually the whole of society, it has become increasingly desirable that the information and the choices on which important civic judgements depend should be communicated effectively to all citizens" (Blumler 1965, 10). On the face of it television provided ample opportunities.

By 1965, parliamentary affairs were being extensively covered by news and current affairs programmes, from the in-depth inquiries mounted by the BBC's ***Panorama*** to the briefer and lighter coverage afforded by its news magazine ***Tonight***. The 1964 General Election was not the first in which television had been involved, but the extent of its involvement had grown considerably to something like the proportions of present day coverage, and the forms were much as they have been for more recent General Elections. Electioneering had become something more of a televisual, rather than a merely political, event. The phrase "television election" had already been coined by press journalists in the course of the 1959 General Election, and by 1964 it seemed even more plausible that elections had become a "virtual," televisual reality. In the course of planning for the 1964 General Election, Grace Wyndham-Goldie (1977, 265), then Head of Talks Group, Television, observed that

The effect of television upon the electorate is, we are told, and there seems little evidence to contradict it, that voters rely more and more upon the election broadcasts in television, and go less and less to public meetings held during the campaign. This may be deplorable but it is a fact. We live an age of television and have to see where television fits into the British concept of democracy and the electioneering system which has grown up in this country.

In the main, the Parliamentary parties were willing participants. Already, there were accusations of bias, as when Harold Wilson criticised the BBC in October 1963 for allowing Robert McKenzie and his fellow interviewers to treat Alex Douglas Home more favourably than they had him (Wyndham-Goldie 1977), but as yet no individual politician nor political party questioned, as did Anthony Wedgewood Benn later in the decade, "whether broadcasting was too important to be left to the broadcaster" (***The Guardian***, 19 October 1968). That relations between the parties and broadcasting organisations were broadly harmonious was a consequence of the volume and composition of the audiences for TV programmes, and of an unwritten contract between them about how broadcasting should conduct itself, by then well entrenched, even for the still relatively new commercial broadcasters. The contract was that broadcasters could do as they pleased just so long as they did so in an acceptable manner (Garnham 1972, 27). Then, as now, broadcasting was expected to operate impartially and objectively in news and current affairs and with good taste in entertainment[4]. These editorial principles did not need to be enforced from the outside. During the formative years of the BBC, Reith had created a highly centralised control structure to make sure they were demonstrably observed in practice. By the early 1960s, Sir Hugh Greene, who set about encouraging enterprise, risk taking and healthy scepticism (Greene 1969), could do so secure in the knowledge that the fundamental editorial principles now defined what it was to be a professional broadcaster. If broadcasting was no longer a profession for gentlemen, and the players had taken over (Greene 1969, 11), the latter played by, and had internalised, the same rules as the former. Sir Hugh spoke of a "two-way flow of trust and confidence" and asserted that "nothing could be achieved by censorship or coercion ... from within the Corporation" (Greene 1969, 82-3). A later Director general, Sir Charles Curran, neatly caught their fundamental importance when he conceded that "yes, we are biased — biased in favour of parliamentary democracy" (Curran 1974, 782).

Blumler's report was much influenced by Almond and Verba's ***The Civic Culture***. The picture of the UK it presented was considered both "encouraging and depressing." Depressingly, nearly one quarter of the UK sample believed that neither national nor local government had any effect on the day-to-day lives, a higher proportion than those with the same belief in the US, Germany and Italy. Nearly one third of Britons claimed never to follow political and governmental affairs. One fifth could name no party leader. Despite relatively high turn outs in General Elections, more than a fifth appeared indifferent to, and only marginally involved with, parliamentary political affairs. In each of these respects the UK sample proved more depressing than those in Germany and the US.

On the basis of such evidence, seminar participants represented political involvement in UK as a diamond. At the top was "a minority with civic ideas and ideals that approximate to our own notions of citizenship," while at the bottom, "a minority whose alienation from the social and political order is acute." They placed "the bulk of the

public to whom politics is rather low in salience but who are prepared occasionally to follow civic affairs with a modest degree of attention" (Almond and Verba 1965, 12) in the middle. What, then, could television do to sustain the ideals of citizenship, not least among those sceptical of, and perhaps also alienated from, political affairs. This minority was "a special concern, for they are convinced that civic participation is useless" (Almond and Verba 1965, 13).

While "citizenship" had a rational side, it also had to do with an individual's involvement in ("attitudes and feelings towards his (*sic*) social and political environment"), and allegiance to the political system[5]. The "constructive citizen" would be committed "to the rules of the game, to concepts of public order and to overriding principles such as equality before the law on which a tolerable society is based." Moreover, such a citizen

> *should be well-informed about social problems and should participate in the community on behalf of carefully considered goals. Effective citizenship depended upon both the possession of appropriate knowledge of the world of social and political affairs and on a willingness to make critical judgements of public situations and events and to act on them in a reasonable manner (Almond and Verba 1965, 14).*

Good citizenship required "a broader, more synthetic and more functional knowledge of how the system operates as a whole and of how it affects the individual."

For several reasons television seemed equipped it to promote citizenship thus defined. It was the most popular of the mass media with diverse audiences for its news and current affairs programmes, which, amongst those with television sets, were more likely to be relied on than newspapers. The "vividness of its pictures" could "convey to the viewer concepts and problems that are difficult for him to grasp or which lie beyond his normal range of experience" (Almond and Verba 1965, 31). Television enjoyed a reputation for credibility and trustworthiness which was seen as a function of its realism, its "apparent ability to provide an "authentic" picture of what is really happening." Though Blumler's report referred only to American data that demonstrated television's credibility relative to the press, radio and magazines, subsequent studies (GUMG 1976; Jowell and Airey 1984) showed much the same in the UK.

What then could television contribute? Trenaman and McQuail's (1961) study of the television coverage of the 1959 General Election, had found that "the accuracy of voters's knowledge of party policies improved progressively with exposure to election television" Trenaman and McQuail (1961, 35). Moreover, television had the potential power to entice the sceptical "back into the arena of democratic politics," partly because it was a trusted medium and its programmes reached many sceptics, and partly also because the sceptics too valued its supposed authenticity. Television could also function as something of a mediator between social groups set apart by differential rewards from the social order. It was considered "inevitable that hostility, suspicion and conflict should often impair the relations of such groups with each other," but at least television could function as a source of knowledge of "the interests and ways of life of various groups and can thus help, without denying conflicts of interest, to promote tolerance of differences"(Trenaman and McQuail 1961, 37). It was that medium through which Britons from different educational and regional backgrounds become acquainted with at least some of the standards that prevail in circles other than their own.

There were, however, two prevalent features of television which could limit its contribution to civic education. One, "an exaggerated preoccupation with the size of audiences" could drive "programmes with a civic orientation to the wall, or rather to the tail end of each night's schedule"[6]. Another was that, like the press from which television recruited for its news and current affairs programmes, it too would become fascinated with topicalities and issues of the moment. In so saying Blumler's report anticipated criticisms that were to emerge more forcefully around the time of the Annan Report on broadcasting, namely that television news in particular was not so much biased against this or that party or social group as against understanding (Birt and Jay, 1975)[7] by, for instance, inadequately contextualising what it reported.

Citizenship, as Blumler and his colleagues had defined it, did not merely require a steady flow of high quality information, but also "a reporting in depth of the moral, structural and historical dimensions that lie behind any issue" (GUMG 1976, 41). Communications media had to learn the trick of "inculcating a critical approach to contemporary problems and institutions," while at the same time "promoting an engaged appreciation of the basic values of the social and political order" (GUMG 1976, 34). In Sir Hugh Greene's estimation this was precisely what the BBC routinely achieved. While the BBC should present varying views, he did not mean,

> *that the BBC merely seeks to foster an equivocal attitude towards all that it broadcasts, to attach an ubiquitous, unanswered question mark to everything it touches in religion, culture, politics or education. But it does mean, in my opinion, that the BBC should encourage the examination of views and opinions in an atmosphere of healthy scepticism (Greene 1969, 95).*

Time and again the advocacy of "healthy scepticism" would lead not only the BBC, but also ITV companies into deep controversy as the certainties of the post war consensus withered or were explicitly questioned during the 1960s. As Sir Hugh's remark indicates many considered the BBC not only to have fostered equivocal attitudes, but also to have undermined moral values and the authority of the very venerable institutions whose approval of the BBC Reith had so assiduously sought. Such views were evermore strongly expressed through the later years of the 1960s and into the 1970s.

Network Visions

Groups otherwise divided in terms of perceived economic interests, moral persuasion, and political affiliation have been largely at one in proposing that "the net" has the capacity to change the ways in which we work, conduct business, act politically and relate to others socially. The Labour Party's policy statement on the "Information Superhighway," (produced by "the Information Superhighway Forum for Labour's National Heritage team") proclaims that

> *we stand on the threshold of a revolution as profound as that brought about by the invention of the printing press. New technologies, which enable rapid communication to take place in a myriad different ways across the globe, and permit information to be provided, sought, and received on a scale hitherto unimaginable, will bring fundamental changes to all our lives*[8].

"The Premiere UK Edition" of Wired, which at Ł3.50 in the UK, ($4.95 in the US, and $5.95 in Canada) is not the cheapest of specialist magazines also promised fundamental change also envisaged radical change. On its cover, superimposed on a like-

ness of Thomas Paine (dubbed a "digital revolutionary"), it proposed to readers that with the Net "we have it in our power to begin the world over again." Stripped over three pages, it quoted McLuhan as saying that "the medium, or process of our time — electric technology — is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and re-evaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing, and they are (sic) changing dramatically." In similar vein are the conclusions drawn by the Chair of a meeting between Ministers from G7 countries and members of the European Commission in Brussels, 25-26 February 1995. Posted on the World Wide Web, the conclusions were that

> *Progress in information technologies and communication is changing the way we live: how we work and do business, how we educate our children, study and do research, train ourselves, and how we are entertained. The information society is not only affecting the way people interact but it is also requiring the traditional organisational structures to be more flexible, more participatory and more decentralised.*

The Bangemann Report similarly observed that information technology "changes the way we work together and the way we live together."

So rich is the mythology, so convinced do so many seem about the transformative powers of the Internet, to draw attention to its rudimentary stage of development seems almost churlish. Using it is still an uncertain and frustrating activity. There is still something of a sense of achievement in discovering "home pages" on the World Wide Web, let alone ones that are in any way interesting or useful. Taylor reminds us that while this information technology is perhaps on its way to becoming domesticated, that is "accepted as part of the furniture not just at work ... but at home, in the street, in the supermarket," there is still some considerable way to go before it is just part of the fabric of our everyday lives. Commenting on the currently fashionable metaphors, Taylor (1995, 41) therefore suggests that "we are just about to begin building some B roads and a few A roads."

Virtual Politics — Government on Line

Through the 1980s the implicit partnership between British Parliamentary parties and broadcast journalists in their conduct of political education has been severely strained. Probing interviews may provide politicians with the opportunity to demonstrate that they can handle well the opposition views put to them. The more "difficult" the examination, the better able they are to demonstrate, or attest convincingly to, their fitness for government. There is a significant down side, however. Gladiatorial contests between politicians and journalists, which have been a feature of televisual politics in UK since the early 1960s, have played a part in undermining the authority of Parliamentary politics. The policies and actions of governments are represented daily as questionable and controversial, and the politicians associated with them as evasive and equivocal. Deepening popular scepticism about parliamentary politics can, in part at least, be attributed to the normal, adversarial forms in which broadcast journalism has cast Parliamentary political differences.

Across the period of the Thatcher Governments, Ministers seriously threatened the institutions of public political education. They were ideologically interventionist,

despite their proclaimed commitment to take the state out of market affairs. As Schlesinger put it with respect to their actions on audio visual industry in the UK, "the shift towards new forms of regulation in the audio visual industries...has been accompanied by quite overt and aggressive political intervention over programming" (Schlesinger 1987, xv). Commenting on the several rows about censorship from the mid 1970s through the 1980s, about Ireland, the revelation of state secrets, and about the coverage of the Falklands war (Connell 1988), Schlesinger suggested that "if a trend is discernible, it is toward a more overt style of intervention by government in broadcasting and a more ready recourse to law" (Schlesinger 1987, xvi). The trend has since developed further with the opportunities presented by ICTs and the Web in particular. Not satisfied with repressively disciplining broadcast journalists who dared question their actions, Conservative Governments have more recently sought to outflank them. They may have, since the early 1980s, refrained from investing public funds in new infrastructural developments, yet have become enthusiastic users of the Web. Driven in part by their commitment to cutting the costs of government, this use also follows from a vision of the Internet as an opportunity to side-step journalism and address the public directly. The partnership with journalists for the purposes of political education has clearly not been dissolved, but alternative arrangements are being seriously explored under the guise of "open government."

The manifest interest is economic. Information and communications technologies are seen to have considerable potential to regenerate European economies in which legions of skilled labour have been de-industrialised. Their apparent economic value has not been lost to governments in other respects. In July 1994, leaders of G7 Governments at their Naples Summit announced their "Government On-Line" (GOL) Project, which was set up to explore ways of reducing costs and improving service delivery through the effective and innovative use of on-line information technology. The project covers three main areas: (1) the replacement of paper with electronic mail, not only within government but between it and the public; (2) the provision of full interactive, on-line services for more complex interactions involving the giving of information to, and the receiving of it from, the public; and (3) the development of on-line transaction processing for the support and delivery of routine services.

Several sub-projects were set up, including the following ones in which the UK takes the leading role:

- Information sharing across government — which investigates the principle of collecting and storing commonly used information once, for use across government departments.
- Delivering government information electronically — a project focusing on publicising innovative ways of providing government information electronically to citizens, businesses and other government customers.
- Locating government information electronically: a project to stimulate the development of effective mechanisms to improve the accessibility of government information for citizens, enterprises and other government customers.

By December 1995, the eleven existing sub-projects had been reviewed to confirm content and participation. A proposal from Italy on municipal democracy was incorporated into the project on Electronic Democracy, which is led by Sweden. Two new sub-projects were approved to provide a knowledge base of local and regional solutions to common administrative problems; and detailed information on job vacancies,

job markets and living and working conditions with the objective of enhancing labour mobility opportunities. The European Commission (EC) will lead these two projects.

As to outcomes, it is hoped that "the organisation and procedures of government should become transparent to the public." Using ICTs to facilitate "the single window approach to service" will "result in government being more accessible and responsive." The absence of conditional, modal auxiliary verbs in such statements ("could," "should," or "would") signifies considerable faith in the technology to bring about these outcomes. There is no doubt that "overall quality of service will be significantly improved," which in turn "will affect the public's perception of, and interaction with, government." This confidence did not waver when it was also asserted that

> *putting government "on-line" will enable citizens to break through the barriers imposed by geography, demographics, skills and knowledge of people, and ability to pay, which have historically had an impact on ease of access to government information.*

The Government's policy under the Citizen's Charter is to extend "access to official information" and to respond to "reasonable requests for information except where disclosure would not be in the public interest." Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information presents 15 categories of information that are exempt, however, including on defence, information whose disclosure (a) would harm national security or defence, (b) would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs, and (c) information received in confidence from foreign governments, foreign courts or international organisations; on internal discussion and advice, information whose disclosure would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion such as the proceedings of Cabinet and cabinet committees; internal opinion, advice, recommendation, consultation and deliberation; and on effective management and operations of the public service, information whose disclosure would (a) harm the ability of the government to manage the economy, prejudice the conduct of official market operations, or could lead to improper gain or advantage, and (b) prejudice the assessment or collection of tax, duties or National Insurance contributions, or assist tax avoidance or evasion.

Part I of the Code of Practice states that Government will:- publish the facts and analysis of facts "which the Government considers relevant and important in framing major policy proposals and decisions;" - publish or otherwise make available explanatory material on departments" dealings with the public, except where publication could prejudice any matter which should properly be kept confidential; - give reasons for administrative decisions to those affected; - publish full information about how public services are run, how much they cost, who is in charge, and what complaints and redress procedures are available; and - release, in response to specific requests, information relating to their policies, actions and decisions and other matters related to their areas of responsibility, unless the requests for information are judged to be "vexatious or manifestly unreasonable or are formulated in too general a manner, or which (because of the amount of information to be processed or the need to retrieve information from files not in current use) would require unreasonable diversion of resources."

Let us suppose, for a moment at least, that electronic access to official information is possible, there is still the matter of the nature and quality of the information citizens are likely to find, should they be motivated to look for it. The official information they

can find is only that which the Government decides to publish and distribute electronically. Nothing new then, apart from the mode of delivery. The Code hardly suggests a more open and responsive government. Arguably, certain categories of information are now potentially available that were not previously, such as press releases and the texts of Ministers" extra Parliamentary speeches. The following extract comes from one such press release, HM Treasury News Release 20/96 issued on 6 February 1996:

> *CLARKE SAYS AFFORDABLE WELFARE STATE SUPPORTS FREE MARKET ECONOMY — Sixteen years of reform have improved the quality of public services, while reducing the share of national income going on public spending, says Chancellor Kenneth Clarke in a speech to the Centre for Economic Performance today. ... The Government's objective is foster an enterprise economy. We will continue to ensure that the British Welfare State remains affordable and provides a positive support to the flexible, free market economy that we are fast becoming. I believe that we can have modern public services and at the same time be a low tax economy. Today I want to explain how these two can complement one another.*

The press release was followed by the full text of the Chancellor's speech to the Centre for Economic Performance (LSE), 6 February 1996. Such material (press releases and Ministerial speeches) accounts for a good proportion of what is now available on Government Web pages.

The extract illustrates quite well some of the problems. There is nothing surprising in the fact that information made available is presented from the Government's point of view. But, it is only such information and that point of view which is available. There is no Official Opposition file. There is no independent interpretation nor critical evaluation of it. Whatever degree of openness there now is, it is tempered by the Government's extension of the power to determine just what information will be made available by its own actions, or on request. Unless one accesses Hansard by conventional means, one would not know that what is presented on-line as information, is contentious. The need for investigative journalism operating in light of priorities and points of view other than the Government's has not lessened with the electronic distribution of such information, quite the opposite.

Journalism in the Electronic Public Arena

So what then of journalism itself? It is not uncommon to read that a new "virtual community" of network users all over the world is growing rapidly around the globe, and that in this "virtual community," anyone with a computer and a modem can be his or her own reporter, editor and publisher, spreading news and views to millions of readers around the world. What is said of "cyber-journalism," echoes what Sadie Plant has said of "cyber-education," namely that "the last generations of twentieth century students are ... learning to learn for themselves, becoming detectives, hunting for contacts and data on the Net, and finding themselves in countless webs of connection across all the old divides" (Plant 1995, 44). Can we, and do we really want to, become DIY cyber-journalists?

A number of UK papers are developing on-line including ***The Observer, The Sunday Times, The Guardian On-Line, The Times, Financial Times, The Daily Record*** and

Sunday Mail, and ***The Herald*** (Scotland). Some, ***The Electronic Telegraph***, for instance, tend to emulate on-line their paper counterparts, while ***The Guardian On-Line*** "provides a jumping off point for a range of Internet-based projects. It is not an on-line newspaper, but a place where we will be publishing material drawn from and complementary to the printed newspapers". All offer useful search facilities of archives.

Where a user has access both to sources and to published articles some interesting possibilities potentially open up. To illustrate something of what these might be I have included the following extract from an article in ***The Electronic Telegraph*** (7 February, 1996), which represented the press release referred to above:

> *Riot warning from Clarke over sudden welfare cuts*
> *By George Jones, Political Editor*
>
> *KENNETH CLARKE, the Chancellor, re-affirmed his commitment to a strong but affordable welfare state last night and warned the Tory Right that sudden cutbacks in spending could lead to "riots on the streets."*

However, he played down any suggestion of differences with Mr Major over public spending, saying it could eventually be brought below 40 per cent of GDP[9].

With access to the on-line facilities, it is possible, and relatively easy, to compare the source material, and the report. We might note a significant difference in emphasis in references to public spending as a declining proportion of GDP. It was the eleventh point in the text of Mr. Clarke's speech and is part of the third quote in the press release.

The speech:

> *11. When I became Chancellor, I set a new objective to reduce spending to below 40 per cent of GDP. I expect to achieve this by 1997-98 and that will be an important milestone. The Prime Minister and I have both said that we will achieve that target and we have both said we will then aspire to reduce it further. To achieve the target we set ourselves, we have changed and modernised the culture of Government in the last few years.*

The Press Release:

> *But that does not mean that the welfare state can be allowed to expand unimpeded. "Big government is out — limited government is in." Public spending as a share of national income is bound to vary from year to year but under this government's policies over the past sixteen years, the trend has been unambiguously downward. ... When I became Chancellor, I set a new objective to reduce spending to below 40 per cent of GDP. I expect to achieve this by 1997-98 and that will be an important milestone. The Prime Minister and I have both said that we will achieve that target and we have both said we will then aspire to reduce it further.*[10]

There is not space here to conduct a detailed linguistic explanation, but the effect of the Political Editor's selections, placings, and choice of words ("he played down any suggestion of differences") transforms the press release and the text of the speech into a purposeful demonstration of unity. (The article speaks of a "determined attempt to lower the temperature by putting on a show of unity with the Prime Minister"). What suggestion of differences? Neither press release nor text of the speech make any such suggestion. The Political Editor is bringing accumulated intelligence of

Tory party affairs to bear on the source material; he stated that Mr Clarke's "speech followed recent speculation that he was at odds with Mr Major's desire to reduce public spending to 35 per cent of national wealth to make room for tax cuts." The article is an example of conventional journalism, performing conventional journalistic tasks (interpretation of the speech in the light accumulated intelligence). The comparison serves to make its implicit interpretive work explicit. Can we really do without these tasks, especially when Governments seek to make available only that official information which they are happy to see in the public domain.

Users — Just Who Are They?

The Bangemann Report was fearful that while the "widespread availability of new information tools and services will present fresh opportunities to build a more equal and balanced society and to foster individual accomplishment," the main risk "lies in the creation of a two tier society of have and have nots, in which only a part of the population has access to the new technology." That division does not await creation. It already exists.

There are to kinds of user survey currently available. One type, such as Graphics, Visualisation, and Usability Center's (GVU's) General Information survey,[11] employs the Internet itself to obtain data, which introduces bias, because only people on the Internet who find the questionnaire and want to complete it, do so. Another problem is that sampling cannot be random. GVU's survey uses non-probabilistic sampling, which reduces the ability of the gathered data to generalise to the entire user population. The GVU are fully aware of, and have specifically drawn attention to, these problems. As with their previous two surveys (conducted in January and October 1994), the Third Survey was run for one month (April 10th through May 10th, 1995). There were just over 13,000 respondents, making this the largest response to any on-line survey, though the volume should not obscure the problems arising from sampling and self-selection.

Given the increasing attention to, and use of the Internet by business and industrial organisations, market researchers have begun to map the demographics. The NOP Research Group (http://www.nopres.co.uk/) conducted two surveys in UK between March and August 1995, employing face-to-face interviews with a nationally representative sample of over 13000 people aged 15+, from which NOP was able to construct "a very broad brush profile" of the situation in the UK. More recently, CommerceNet and Nielsen Media Research (http://www.nielsenmedia.com/) have made available the results of a survey they conducted with three types of respondents in the US and Canada: Internet users, on-line service users and non-users. The survey involved a gross sample of approximately 280,000 telephone calls and yielded more than 4,200 completed telephone-based interviews. Interviews were conducted with a randomly-selected member (who was 16 years of age or older) of a randomly-selected household[12].

Some of the key findings of the CommerceNet, Nielsen Internet Demographics Survey were that:- 17 per cent (37 million) of all persons aged 16 and above in the US and Canada have access to the Internet, while 11 per cent (24 million) of the same had used the Internet, and 8 per cent (18 million) had used the WWW in the past three months.

On average, WWW users were found to be "upscale" (25% have incomes over

$80,000), professional (50% are professional or managerial), . The NOP survey found that 80% of Internet users are in employment, that over three quarters own their own homes, and 45% were classified "AB" (National Readership Survey Classification). Almost thirty five per cent of users earn over £25,000 per annum, while one quarter travel abroad on business. The GVU survey paints a similar picture in respect of the occupation and education of Internet users. It reported that those in computer-related (31.4%) and education-related occupations, including students, (23.7%) accounted for the majority of respondents. Taken together, those in professional and management occupations accounted for just over 39% of their respondents.

On education, Nielsen found 64% have at least college degrees. US users were more likely to have a college degree (US 36.0%, Eur 25.4%), European users are more likely to have postgraduate Masters" (Eur 27.7% - US 18.8%) and Doctoral (13.7% vs. 4.06%) degrees.

As for gender, Nielsen reported that males represent 66% of Internet users and account for 77% of Internet usage. The NOP research indicated that about one third were female. The GVU survey found that 15.5% of users were female, 82.0% male and 2.5% chose "Rather not say!" Compared to its Second Survey, women represent a 6% increase and men an 8% decrease. Compared to the First Survey in January of 1994, this represents a 10% increase for women and 12% decrease for men. This trend was said to be quite linear and suggested an even male/female ratio could be achieved during the first quarter of 1997. On ethnicity, GVU found that 82.3% of the respondents are white, with none of the other groups reporting over 5% of the responses.

The Nielsen study found that, while home Internet connections are important, locations other than home were significant sources of access. 62% of the users said that they had access at home. Interestingly, the research showed that 54% of the users had an Internet connection at work and 30% had access at school (as the sample consisted of persons 16 years and older, at school is synonymous with college in most instances). These percentages translate to 6.7% of total persons 16 and older in US and Canada having access to the Internet at home and 5.8% and 3.2% at work and school, respectively. GVU indicated that European users predominantly gain access via educational access points (45.6%), while least gain access via IAPs (6.2%) and government (2.0%).

Nielsen's comparison of location of access and location of use data indicated a disproportionate degree of use occurring at work. In other words, even though in US and Canada a higher percentage of people have access in the home, people there use the Internet more frequently and for greater duration at work than at home. On the basis of the GVU data, this may be more marked in Europe than the US.

What in their different ways these surveys indicate is that access to, and use of Internet and WWW services is still very much confined to affluent, professional, white, formally very well educated members of US and (western) European societies. There are projects across Europe designed to facilitate the "have nots" to use interactive information and communications technology advantageously, should they find they have the material access to it[13]. It may be for many, if not the majority, the normal access they will have will be solely from the provision of "national kiosks." In the UK, it has been envisaged that the kiosks would be situated across the country in libraries, shopping malls or railway stations. Individuals might use these kiosks to access job vacancy information, or information about local adult education and training programmes — apparently, "all that the individual would need from one easily ac-

cessed point."[14]

However for those with ready access at home and at work to the full range of interactive services on the Internet, and with the cultural capital to make use of it, they will not necessarily become enthusiastic participants in a virtual forum. It is difficult to imagine them becoming cyber-journalists or cyber-activists to any great extent. Increasingly they feel they do not have the time to read newspapers as much as they once did. This sense of a lack of time to do things other than work is related to the changing conditions of professional employment, the sort of employment those most likely to be Internet users will have. Between the 1960s and the present, as a consequence of intensified global competition, even professional and managerial employees have been made to be more productive. There has been an intensification of their work and with it a surreptitious lengthening of the working day[15]. Which of them will be inclined to become their own journalist, let alone a "constructive cyber-citizen" in a virtual political forum?

Conclusions

To draw definite conclusions would be foolish since the Internet is still very much a developing phenomenon. In the last few weeks, the press have begun to report growing evidence of "churn," that is of people unsubscribing from the major access providers to the Internet. This is, as it was with cable services in the UK, a certain sign of early development. Speculation on this matter suggests that this might be associated with the difficulties experienced in using it, and a function of the disappointment experienced on finding that there is not that much which is entertaining or informative. If in addition people find empty e-mail boxes day after day, they might begin to wonder just why they should remain connected.

Cyberphiles want to depict Internet as a sort of "consensual anarchy" which is completely decentralised with no central supervising authority, government or commercial corporation; open (non-proprietary) and is rapidly democratic, crossing national boundaries and answers to no obvious sovereign. Its virtual communitarians like to present themselves a self-regulating equals, indifferent to social identities constructed in other spheres[16].

To say there are no concentrations of ownership and media moguls do not dominate the scene, is to be misleading. The January 1996 edition of ***Wired*** ran a feature on @Home's explorations of ways to link Internet with cable TV. The company @Home is a joint venture of TCI Technology Ventures Inc., a subsidiary of the cable company Tele-Communications Inc., and the venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield and Byers. This company is not alone. Time Warner Cable has also launched a cable modem pilot in Elvira, New York. The major players in the communications and computing industries (Microsoft, for instance) may not yet have made their presence fully felt in respect of the Internet, but they are likely to do so soon in light of such observations as Nielsen's that "total Internet usage in the US and Canada is equivalent to the total playback of rented video tapes," and the growing number of significant companies in other fields that are beginning to use the Web for marketing purposes, while exploring how commercial transactions with customers can be conducted securely. While not yet the virtual agora pictured by some of the hype, it will not be too long till the Web is more extensively subject to the disciplines of the market.

Just as misleading is the notion that the Internet cannot in any way be controlled

by authorities, law enforcement agencies, and Governments. To suggest that "it is literally lawless" as did *Time* (Spring 1995, 7), for instance, is far from accurate. The Internet is subject to legislation on data protection and to libel laws, for example, however difficult they are to enforce at present. In the US, moreover, the present administration has proved willing to promote legislation in the area of copyright. There, the recently published white paper on "Intellectual Property and the National Information Structure" has recommended legislation which, if adopted, would rescind traditional user rights to browse, share or make private non-commercial copies of copyright material, and would encourage attaching "copyright management information" to digital forms of copyright works. Of course, the Internet is already controlled in another way. Governments in the US and Europe are among the major suppliers of Web pages at the present time.

So, what of politics, government and journalism? Is there a new electronic, public arena on the way, changing not only the role of journalism but also the way politicians campaign for (electronic?) votes. The Labour Party would seem to be willing to subscribe to such a view. The information highway (presumably, not just Internet) is deemed to have the capacity to create what it has termed "democratic regeneration":

It can help to make our society more open and accessible. It can empower people in a world where, increasingly, knowledge is the source of power. Yet there is also a danger that the information age will produce not interacting communicating citizens but alienated and atomised individuals living their lives through a screen at home, with a "big brother" state holding vast international data banks on every individual.

The new public arena that is actually developing is something quite other than such rhetoric suggests, for as we have seen in the political sphere, under the guise of "open government," only Government approved information is being distributed. However much the present Conservative government is tempted by the prospect of being able to use the Internet to avoid awkward questions from, for instance, *Today* journalists it cannot do so entirely so long as the coverage of the Internet is restricted The newer, interactive technologies will not replace, but join those already available, and just as television caused the press, radio and the cinema to redefine the services they made available so too might the Internet as it develops.

The cyberphile notion that we can become self-informing and self-learning DIY journalists is really quite beside the point. It ignores the mutual dependency between journalists and their readers. We need their professional services. Rather than speculate on DIY journalism, we should concentrate instead on asking whether or not the services journalists provide, whether by conventional or digital means, are the services we have a right to expect, especially since Government has gone quite some way to colonise the Web. Our monitoring of their activities can become more demanding with ready-ish access to the same source materials they employ. We should be preparing ourselves to argue for the retention and enhancement of the search facilities online journalism has begun to provide, and we should certainly be considering what will be a fair price for these services. Though subscription is currently free it is questionable for how long it will remain so. And we should ask whether journalism is suitably equipped to deal political developments that threaten to by-pass them.

Notes:

1. These and subsequent quotations of Labour Party policy have been extracted from their World Wide Web site (http://www.poptel.org.uk/Labour-Party/policy/).

2. In the US, the House of Representatives' home page, includes a file entitled *Empowering the Citizen*, which is referred to as "*Links to government efforts to improve the government via citizen input.*" There are several networks on various policy topics (http://www.house.gov/Empower.html).

3. Participants included Professors Blumler, Gans, Himmelweit and Janowitz and James Halloran from what was then the Television Research Committee and became the Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester.

4. The Television Act, 1955 obligated commercial broadcasters to act in accordance with these principles. Subsequent legislation in the 1980s with respect to cable operators placed on them no such obligations.

5. Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee's (1954) panel study of an American presidential election had made the points about emotional attachments to political systems more forcefully. Having observed these to be more pervasive than a "rational" disinterested consideration of the political options, they, and Edward Shils in his concluding chapter to the study proposed that the liberal democratic view was idealistic.

6. This was a concern which had been extensively aired in the (1962) Pilkington Report on Broadcasting and in discussions of its recommendations.

7. A series of articles printed in *The Times,* 28 and 30 September, 1975.

8. http://www.poptel.org.uk/Labour-Party/policy/

9. *The Electronic Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/, 07.02.96

10. The full text of the press release and the speech is available at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pub/text/press96/p20_96.txt, and the *Electronic Telegraph* article was obtained, on (free) subscription at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/et/access?ac=1317321115388pg=//96/2/7/nclark07.html.

11. Details about the survey and its design are available at (http://www.cc.gatech.edu/gvu/user_surveys/survey-04-1995/#highsum)

12. Details of the design of the survey are given in the Executive Summary at http://www.nielsenmedia.com/whatsnew/execsum2.htm

13. Manchester, Solihull, Newham, Cambridge, Leeds, Gateshead are among those local authorities developing projects in conjunction with other agencies to support familiarisation with thetechnology and training in its use.

14. http://www.open.gov.uk/govoline/govoline.htm

15. An Institute of Management survey (reported in *The Times* 13.01.94) found that most managers surveyed were working longer hours. Nearly half reported working more than 50 hours per week and most reported increases in workload in the previous year.

16. Stallabrass 1995 offers an informed and insightful critique of the fanatasies underpinning naive Internet enthusiasm.

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