The New Media: The Internet, Democracy, Free Speech and the Management of Temperance

If there is ever to be an amelioration of the condition of mankind, philosophers, theologians, legislators, politicians and moralists will find that the regulation of the press is the most difficult, dangerous and important problem they have to resolve. Mankind cannot be governed without it, nor at present with it.—John Adams to James Lloyd, February 11, 1815

A Crucial Challenge in the Past

About 50 years ago Henry Luce, founder of Time Inc. and publisher of *Fortune*, *Life* and many other successful magazines, approached Robert Hutchins, then Chancellor of the University of Chicago, and asked him to form a commission, the purpose of which was to determine the affects of new technology and social-economic changes on the freedom of the press. Luce was concerned that the revolution underway in mass communications, a force in which he personally had played a key role, was out-stripping society's ability to harness it effectively. As Luce looked to the future, he foresaw a continual stream of innovations in media. After some reflection Hutchins agreed and formed a commission comprised of some of the leading thinkers of the time. Members included John M. Clark, Professor of Economics; John Dickinson, Professor of Law; William E. Hocking, Professor of Philosophy; Harold D. Lasswell, Professor of Law; Archibald MacLeish, Poet, Librarian of Congress and Undersecretary of State; Charles E. Merrian, Professor of Political Science; Reinhold Niebuhr, Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion; Robert Redfield, Professor of Anthropology; Beardsley Ruml, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Professor of History; and, George N. Shuster, President of Hunter College.

In 1947 the Hutchins commission published its findings: *A Free and Responsible Press: A General Report on Mass Communication: Newspapers, Radio, Motion Pictures, Magazines, and Books.* This landmark report, in the words of an Annenberg Senior Fellow,

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Stephen Bates, "contends that the press is free for the purpose of serving democracy; a press that shirks its democratic duties will lose its freedom. The report calls on the press to improve itself in the name of morality, democracy and self-preservation." (Bates, 1995, p. 3) The report marked a new era in the media. It provided a philosophical framework for the daily workings of the press, one that replaced the prevailing rather unbridled, libertarian view. This "social responsibility" approach, as it is sometimes called, is, by and large, the philosophy under which the press has operated during the last 50 years.

Today, however, we face a situation equally as dynamic and as daunting as Robert Hutchins confronted when he accepted Luce's challenge. The new media that is causing concern is the Internet. As a popular saying goes, "this changes everything." And, it raises a new version of an old yet crucial question: "What are the implications of the Internet and its rapidly maturing offspring—the World Wide Web—for a free and responsible press?" In addressing this question there is a great deal to be learned from the history of other media, especially television. Nevertheless there are many factors that we must consider anew. The unique characteristics of the new technology require it. This new media, more than any that has gone before, portends to penetrate deeply into the very fabric of society. Its tentacles are beginning to reach beyond the media itself to affect politics, economics, education and, perhaps, eventually religion. To put this story in historical perspective let us turn back the calendar a few half-century clicks and recount briefly the conditions prevailing in earlier eras.

Had Hutchins looked back 50 years from the time of the Commission's report, he would have observed a much different world from the one he encountered during the early 1940s. In 1897, there were, for the most part, no automobiles, no airplanes, no radio, no rural free mail delivery system, no big mass circulation magazines. The Hearst papers that would eventually become so powerful had barely begun to roll their presses. Virtually none of the mass communication and transportation systems that were in widespread use by mid-century had yet become an integral part of the nation's infrastructure. A commitment to freedom of the press, of course, had been

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a sustaining value of the country well before the passing of the First Amendment. But the kind of "press" that John Adams had in mind in the quote above (which Hutchins selected as the theme for the Commission's report), or that Jefferson and Madison considered, was technologically quite different than that which prevailed in 1897. It was remarkably different from that which the Hutchins Commission reported on in 1947. The intervening half century had brought many changes in the way the society communicated, notably the advent of radio.

During the 1930s Franklin Delano Roosevelt helped bring together a disparate and demoralized nation by means of his "fireside chats," broadcast widely by the new medium of radio. Most Americans first learned about "the day that will live in infamy" that began World War II, listening at home to the radio. The war had just ended by the time the Hutchins' report appeared. It too brought changes. As the war was being fought in Europe Americans sat glued to their console radios as Edward R. Murrow began his evening broadcast: "This . . . is London." Night after night the public learned, for the first time in history, and in a timely and very personal way, how the war was affecting the common people in another land—while they worked, in their homes, even as they were hiding in air raid shelters or subways. The result of all of this experience with media was a new sense of community, one that now stretched across the Atlantic.

These were also times of substantial social change. In 1947 Winston Churchill had just delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech, signaling the beginning of the "cold war." The "Marshall Plan" was in its very early stages of formulation. Jackie Robinson became the first Afro-American to sign a contract with a major baseball club. All of these events were being reported by newspapers controlled by William Randolph Hearst who was regaining some of the economic power he had lost during the depression. The name "Hearst" began to symbolize what was both good and bad in mass communications.

The technological front was changing also. Only a year or so earlier J. Presper Eckert and John Mauchly had demonstrated the ENIAC, the first operational electronic digital computer. And, significantly, in 1947 a group of Bell Laboratories scientists led by John Bardeen, Walter Brattain, and William Shockley invented the transis-

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tor, thereby initiating the age of "solid state," the age of semiconductors. By this time a large array of new information and communications technologies were already in widespread use—offset and color printing, moving and talking pictures, wireless transmission, air transportation and television. These innovations had the effect of increasing the number and kinds of communication channels through which information could reach the public. The newer technologies also tended to require larger initial capital investments and they attracted new investors because of their potential economies of scale. The "mass" in mass communications came to mean a mass audience and mass production and mass delivery of information content. It was the "mass" implications of the technology, its scope and extent of impact, that raised questions about freedom and responsibility of the press.

The Internet: Today's Challenge

In 1997, however, it may well be William Randoph Hearst III, the grandson of the founder of the Hearst empire, whose initiatives at mass communications bear watching. He has created @Home, an Internet company with ambitious plans to reach millions of cable customers and enchant them with dramatic new multi-media products. @Home is a leading edge indicator of another major technological and social revolution, one that undoubtedly will have more far-reaching and profound consequences than Hutchins and his fellow commissioners could have imagined. The driving force behind this revolution is the ability to digitize information of all kinds and to process and deliver it by means of a single integrated technology. The most recent manifestations are the Internet and World Wide Web.

Today's Internet is rather tiny; but, it is rapidly growing into a giant. A few statistics: By some optimistic accounts there may be as many as 60 million people, worldwide, who currently use the Internet. This is likely an overstatement; but, one thing is sure—the growth in viewership is increasing at an explosive rate, doubling in less than a year. The profile of the typical current user is not quite representative of the population as a whole, but it is trending in that direction. Surveys portrayed the typical user as being American (70%, but that is down from an earlier 80%), male (70%, but that too is down from an earlier 80%), young (70% are under 40 against about 60% for the

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population as a whole), and affluent (about 70% make over $40,000 per annum as against 50% for the population as a whole). Circa 1997 viewers have access to over 90 million Web pages of information. This, however, is likely an understatement; pages are being added to the Web at the incredible rate of about 100 pages per minute. There are several sites that record over 100 million "hits" or computer accesses a day. Also, a small amount of commerce is currently being conducted on the Web. Only about a half billion dollars of business was transacted over the Internet in 1996; but, executives at IBM predict that by the year 2000 over $1 trillion of transactions will be initiated on the Web. The U.S. Gross Domestic Product was about $7.2 trillion in 1995, so this means that maybe as much as 12 to 15% of all of the nation's business could be done on the Net. (*The Economist*, "Electronic Commerce," May 10th, 1997; Neilson, 1996)

Youth are gravitating to the Internet and its business promise is in the process of being realized in North America. According to the Neilson Spring 1997 Internet Demographic Study of "the 220 Million people over the age of 16 in the US & Canada:

> 23% are using the Internet.
> 17% are on the WWW.
> 73% of WWW users search for information about product and services.
> 5.6 million people or 15% have purchased on-line."

Stacey Bressler, V.P. Marketing, concludes, "the combination of increased general usage and growth of shopping as an activity, paints an extremely promising future for electronic commerce. This confirms the value proposition for companies planning to use the Internet as a marketing tool." (Nielson, 1997)

The new media is quite different from any that came before. Executives at Sony describe it succinctly as "AV + IT"—Audio Visual plus Information Technology. With this new technology all types of information and media are integrated into a single technology, manipulated in digital form and transmitted over a cluster of networks. These networks are gaining ever-increasing amounts of bandwidth—that is, capacity to handle bits of information.

Importantly, the new technology in also interactive. It has the ability to provide feedback and two-way communications, crucial factors which raise unique and important long term social implications.

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In the form of the Internet these attributes result in a media delivery system that is directly connected to viewers "on-line." It can transport large amounts of information to them almost instantaneously; and that information can be expressed by means of highly dramatic, visual, multimedia presentations. Moreover, the information is structured in a new way called hypertext. Information is linked together in a variety of user selected pathways called "threads" and can be found by means of graphical point-and-click technology. With hypertext a viewer can branch to other text or materials on demand, according to his or her own interests.

The most important relationship with any medium is the one established between the sender and the receiver. The new media changes the nature of this highly influential relationship. With the Internet, much of the control of the flow in information passes from the producer or broadcaster—that is, the sender—to the viewer—that is, the receiver. Traditional mass communications used throughout most of this century—television, radio, newspapers, motion pictures, magazines, books—have been centralized, one-to-many communications, the flow control nature of which is referred to as "push" because the impetus initiating flow comes from the center. A single sender pushes the information out to many viewers.

The telephone was the first mass communications medium to establish a different kind of relationship. It enables, for the most part, an interactive one-to-one form of communications, thereby establishing a push/pull balance between sender and receiver.

The new media has both of these characteristics and more, sometimes even being able to establish many-to-many connections. With the new media, viewers choose the kind of information they want to "pull" toward them; or, as in the case of new "webcasting" software, they choose the criteria for selecting the information they wish to have pushed toward them. Importantly, these viewers tend to enjoy the new sense of power obtained from this ability to control the flow of information they receive. And, they want to keep it that way! Thus arises the source of a new social tension between demands for freedom and responsibility of the press, on the one hand, and the requirements of community, on the other.

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Media and Community

A media system and the community it serves tend to be coterminous: each shapes and gives identity to the other. Thus, historically, there were village newspapers, city newspapers, national broadcasting networks, and the like. These location-specific media function, in part, to build community within a circumscribed geographical area or political jurisdiction. This can work towards social good as with Roosevelt's fireside chats or towards bad. Tyrants and dictators could effectively shape the community by controlling the media—to wit, Hitler and Stalin. Moral issues such as free speech, censorship, political participation, and deliberative discourse, consequently, have until now been defined primarily in terms of a geopolitical definition of community.

The Internet is destroying this distinction. It is changing what, when, where, how and with whom humans share information. Significantly, the Internet's most avid users see themselves as citizens of cyberspace—"netizens"—and not primarily members of any geopolitical community. (Katz, 1997)

Netizen—a New Kind of Citizen

Who, then, are these new citizens of cyberspace? Let me describe one. A few years ago I served on a panel on ethics and computers sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences. During one of the sessions I was seated next to a pleasant young man wearing moccasins, khaki pants, a light blue cotton shirt and sporting a well trimmed beard. I introduced myself to him mentioning that I was a professor at Southern Methodist University. He smiled and said something like, "Man! Do I lead a different life." He described himself as a "family man," a peaceful person who loved to chop wood and dig in the garden on his farm in Southern Oregon. This kept him in touch with "the earth." And, this grounding was important because everything else he cared about he described as "essentially extraterrestrial." He supported his family by taking on programming and consulting work which he did electronically via his modem connections. In addition, he devoted approximately one third of his year traveling to remote places in Latin America where, with his laptop and modem in hand, he instructed rural farmers on the use of the Internet. He com-

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municated with his family and friends by means of electronic mail. His closest colleagues and associates were dispersed all over the world, many of whom he had never met in person. He obtained almost all of his news and entertainment through his computer. As he recounted his way of life, he paused, brought his right hand to his chin, and said, "About a year ago I realized that I was in fact a citizen of cyberspace. Cyberspace is the ultimate source of my personal identity. All of my major concerns in life—except, of course, for my family, the wood and the garden—are related to the technology I use and the cybercommunity of which I am a member."

Cyberspace has become the "new geography of hope," much as the western frontier was a land of opportunity for 19th-century Americans. My acquaintance is the archetype, perhaps even a harbinger, of the type of citizen or netizen that the new media is creating. Another label for such a person is a "cyborg." (Datta and West, 1996) This means that he has evolved into a cross between a cybernetic technological system and a human organism. A cyborg lives at the interface between automation and individual autonomy. One can think of a community of cyborgs as an "information colony"—a virtual community composed of people who spend extensive amounts of time using technology to inform themselves and to communicate, collaborate, compute and share experiences with one another. (Porra, 1997)

Two Illuminating Events

Two recent events, which ironically occurred on the same day—February 8, 1996, reveal a great deal about the current state of these fervent intense users of the Internet: cyborgs, netizens, cybercitizens, and information colonies.

The first was a global extravaganza conducted by author Rick Smolan called "24 Hours in Cyberspace" and subtitled "Painting on the Walls of the Digital Cave." It was a one day, on-line event bringing together some 150 professional photographers and about 1,000 amateurs located in 27 countries to shoot over 6,000 rolls of film and hundreds of digital images. All of these images were transmitted throughout the day to "Mission Central" in San Francisco where they were used to produce a web site and, subsequently, a coffee table

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book. The project showed just how deeply the Internet has penetrated the lives of people throughout the globe. For example, in Dharamsala, India, the Dalai Lama, still in exile, shared his spiritual and political beliefs across the world, by means of the Internet. In Hanoi an aspiring poultry farmer used Internet e-mail to arrange for a $42 loan from an Illinois-based development agency called World Relief, thereby bypassing the unreliable and corruptible Vietnamese postal system. At precisely 00.01 Greenwich mean time young students in Siberia, Argentina, Great Britain and Brownsville, Texas, joined together on a simulated—some call it "virtual"—Journey to Mars, conducted by science teacher Robert Morgan in Ohio. From Newcastle, Australia, an autistic mother who gave birth to four autistic children shared her experiences with others so affected, from countries as divergent as Egypt and France.

Also on February 8, 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Communication Decency Act of 1996. The act made it a crime to transmit "indecent" or "patently offensive" material on-line. About 5 minutes after the President signed the bill, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a suit—ACLU v. Reno—intending to stop application of the new law on the basis that it violated First Amendment rights. ACLU was joined by Electronic Frontier Foundation, American Library Association, Electronic Privacy Information Center, Citizens Internet Empowerment Coalition and other cyber-concerned organizations.

Meanwhile pandemonium broke out in cyberspace. Many cybercitizens were outraged at this threat to their "cyberliberties." Lyricist John Perry Barlow spoke for many when he proclaimed "Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather." (Barlow, 1997) Within a few days more than 5,000 Web sites worldwide had picked up and rebroadcast Barlow's message. E-mails reproducing its text, usually accompanied with addendums and comments, filled the cyberways. (I received quite a few myself.)

In a landmark decision issued June 26, 1997, the United States Supreme Court held that the Communications Decency Act violates

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the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech—resoundingly rejecting censorship of the on-line medium. The Court affirmed the three-judge panel of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, which previously held that the Act was unconstitutional: "Just as the strength of the Internet is chaos," the court opined, "so the strength of our liberty depends upon the chaos and cacophony of the unfettered speech the First Amendment protects." (ACLU, 1996) Lori Fena, executive director of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, expressed her delight that the "court has gone beyond striking down the law, and has stated positively what constitutional principles must govern any attempt to regulate the most democratic mass medium the world has ever seen." (Fena, 1997)

An Ideology is Established

This quest for cyberliberty was not new. The political and philosophical foundations for the cybercitizen's outburst in February, 1996, were laid down nearly two years earlier. In August of 1994 Ester Dyson, George Gilder, George Keyworth, and Alvin Toffler originally published "Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age." The proclamation provoked many responses, some of which are published in The Information Society Forum. (See Dyson et.al. 1996 and also Poster, 1996; Rowe, 1996; and Moore, 1996 for commentary.) The thirteen-page document proclaims that cyberspace "is the land of knowledge, and the exploration of that land can be a civilization's truest, highest calling. The opportunity is now before us to empower every person to pursue that calling in his or her own way." (p. 297) Based on this fundamental premise the authors mount a rather passionate argument for restricted government regulatory practices in communications. They call for new laws to adjudicate and protect rights to informational property. Drawing on ideas put forth in Toffler's "Third Wave," (Toffler, 1980) they call for a general reconceptualization of the notion of community and of social and political life. The underlying ideology is clear: it is resoundingly libertarian, materialistic yet tolerant, rational and technologically proficient, but disconnected from classical politics. The Magna Carta calls for three specific things: complete protection of individual rights, a virtually unregulated capitalist economy, and min-

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imal government intervention in cyberspace. The authors claim that the new media—all modern electronic forms of communications and representations—has become the most crucial resource of the world's advanced economies. The wealth of cybernations—that is, of "information colonies," the authors opine, lies in its central resource, which they call "actionable knowledge." Actionable knowledge can be "received" but it cannot be destroyed by being consumed. It is inherently intangible. This property has far-reaching implications for economics, property rights and democracy. If the new media, as the authors state, is "the most democratic mass medium the world has ever seen" then it must have some important implications for freedom and responsibility in society. What are they?

Requirements for a Democracy

John Dewey posed the moral issue facing a democracy as follows: "Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society." (1920, p. 186) Personal growth, then, is democracy's overarching objective. The necessary conditions for reaching it are informational in nature. They are as follows:

- Each citizen should be exposed to different perspectives on the social, political and economic issues that matter to him or her.
- Each should be able to examine the consequences of these different perspectives.
- Each should be able to act on this knowledge in a way that achieves two simultaneous objectives: it creates a more civil community in general and shapes his or her own personal identity in particular.

Six Ways the Internet Affects the Concept of Democracy

Clearly the citizens of cyberspace, those whose voices were heard in February, 1996, were outraged because the Communications Decency Act abridged their democratic right to personal growth as described by Dewey. It prompted them to political action.

Should we, the general public, side with these dissenters? Why should we believe that this new media is a better tool for democracy? There are at least six distinctive characteristics of the new media that

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must be taken into account in order to shape an answer to these questions.

First, it is important to acknowledge, as was discussed above, that even the notion of "society" or "community" must be fundamentally reconsidered. The typical notion of geographic boundaries does not work anymore. This concept must be replaced by a sense of a commonality of interests as expressed by those who are connected to each other in cyberspace, as the idea of an "information colony" suggests.

Second, we must appreciate that, at the current writing at least, no one effectively controls or manages the Internet. It is headless. It is a true "frontier." So, there is no law or ultimate authority to turn to at this time.

Third, in principle, all members of the public have an equal opportunity for access to the Internet and its information, assuming that each has the technology and education necessary to effectuate the access. That is, some economic barriers exist but few social ones do. "Free nets" and public libraries are among the institutions that are working to overcome these barriers. Achieving a "level playing field" in this arena is one of the objectives of the Clinton and Gore National Information Infrastructure initiatives.

Fourth, we can expect that access to the new media among the world's citizens will continue to expand, at least as fast as it has in the past. The Internet is becoming easier to use, the browsers which access it more powerful, while technological innovations are resulting in a reduction in its overall cost of operation for users.

Fifth, all users have equal standing on the Internet. Power and stigmatic relationships are muted. This is an essential condition of democratic theory, one heretofore not met in practice. Even the Greeks, the founders of democracy, had slaves. The Internet, however, is essentially blind to ethnicity, race, religion, gender and socioeconomic status. It is also blind to the true identity or reality of the person behind the information. For example, any individual may create one or more avatars—that is, artificial personalities or personas that mask one's real inner self. Multiple personas, of course, present a formidable threat to our reining view of democracy. This feature, however, can be used also to preserve the anonymity of communicators when persons, believing that they are being exploited by a more

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powerful party, issue a call for help. This use of anonymity can have salutary effects. When, for example, a postdoctoral fellow at a major university felt that his or her rights were being infringed upon, he or she (we do not know the injured party's sex) took to the Internet to solicit advice on postdoctoral rights, authorship, data portability, and grievance procedures in organized research units. The postdoc was able to obtain advice and expertise from several thousand Internet users, advice unlikely to be solicited or forthcoming if the complainant's identity was known. (Fowler, 1996)

Sixth, since the Internet is interactive, it has the capacity to enhance learning and dialogue by means of critical feedback. This capability is being developed and expanded rapidly. It alone has several far-reaching implications for media and journalism, not all of them necessarily positive. The Internet may, indeed, be used to effectively kill journalism as we know it today. This possibility was envisioned over 130 years ago by the prophetic science fiction writer Jules Verne. In a recently discovered manuscript, written early in his career, Verne describes a future world in which the civil code gives everyone who is named in any journalistic article the right to respond in the same media with an equal number of words and lines. As his story unfolds this right is exercised to an extreme and the channels become clogged with a superfluity of rebuttals. As a result all kinds and avenues of social criticism—the essential lubricant of a democracy—are extinguished from the society. (Verne, 1997) The same result is technologically possible on the Internet. In fact the "Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age" states that cybercitizens demand vehemently that they be given such a right. Exercised to an excess, this right of rejoinder can have the same paralyzing effects Verne envisioned.

Taken together these six factors tend to support the proposition that the Internet promotes democracy, albeit in a new form. But, is this really the case? Are there other pitfalls lurking in the wings?

The Dark Side of the Internet

We must be aware that any media—old or new—serves at least three social functions, all of which it discharges simultaneously. In addition to its generally well-recognized function of informing the public with the facts and ideas that will serve as the basis upon which

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democratic action can be taken, media are also used to pursue two other interrelated but quite different purposes: the media provides entertainment and it engages in persuasion. The media's entertainment function is familiar to us all. And, perhaps, in the aftermath of a Presidential election, we should also be aware that the media is in addition a means by which a few well placed members of the community can attempt to influence the behavior of all other members by controlling their perceptions of reality. This use of the media the political scientist Charles Lindblom refers to as a "preceptoral" function. (Lindblom, 1977) It changes the way people see their world. Preceptoral effects come in at least two forms: commercial advertising and political advocacy.

Most types of media perform all three of these functions—persuasion, entertainment and informing the public—simultaneously. As seasoned viewers of television or readers of the morning newspapers we can usually distinguish between them. The more traditional forms of media have developed norms of presentation so that readers, listeners, or viewers are given clues as to which of the three kinds of information they are being exposed. Newspapers, for example, distinguish op-ed pieces from news articles and advertisements from fiction or cartoons. The boundaries, of course, are sometimes blurred.

The more immediate and dramatic the media, the greater its tendency and its providers' temptation to blur. On contemporary television, to cite a well-examined case, the boundaries have become almost indistinguishable. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, critic Neil Postman describes how television has conditioned the public to expect, or at least to tolerate, visually captivating, entertaining material, measured out in small "spoonfuls" of time (sight and "sound bites" of about three to seven seconds). In this environment the entertainment function all but drives out the media's informing function. (Postman, 1985)

And it gets worse. Ian Mitroff and Warren Bennis argue in *The Unreality Industry: The Deliberate Manufacturing of Falsehood and What It Is Doing to Our Lives*, that television's ability to substitute unreality for reality is nearly pervasive, almost spiraling out of control. (Mitroff and Bennis, 1989) Today's television creates a false world. All dimensions of society are affected. Television encroaches

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into democratic politics by changing the way we view and select political candidates. It promotes the worship of "bigger than life" celebrities, including even news anchors. A few studies even purport to show that certain television shows encourage violent or socially undesirable behavior. Importantly, television has an almost hypnotic, for some even an addictive, effect on its viewers. And, thus, it allows political and business leaders to get away with offering the people pleasing visual images rather than real solutions to their economic and social problems. The poet Octavio Paz observes, "Marx's famous phrase about religion as the opiate of the masses can now be applied, and more accurately, to television, which will end up anesthetizing the human race, sunk in an idiotic beatitude." (Paz, 1997, p. 194) James Fallows makes much the same point in his recent book *Break the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*. (1996)

On the Internet today the boundaries between the three purposes of the media are, if anything, being blurred further still, erasing lines almost to the point of obscurity. Moreover, there are few, if any, social norms to provide control. Basically anyone can post anything they want to at any time. For example, Tim Hughes, a 28 year-old Internet applications developer from West Carrollton, Ohio, put up an entirely fictitious account of how Walter Cronkite spit in Hughes' food. (*New York Times*, 1997) In one phony blow, the most trusted man in the media, a professional with a reputation earned by years of dedicated performance, was viciously maligned with no opportunity to stop the original publication and little recourse afterwards.

Provenance is a problem. On the Internet it is frequently difficult to identify the real sources of information. Web pages may be captivating and contain vivid graphics and interesting messages but their provenance, their original source, may be totally unknown. For example, *The Economist* reported (Jan. 18, 1997, p. 80) that the editors of "Suck," a daily column published on the Internet, had protested by writing in a kind of muckraking article, that Time Warner's Pathfinder web site had copied its look and feel. "This was guerrilla journalism at its best," the reporter wrote, "evidence that the Internet had spawned a new class of journalistic outsiders and armed them to outdo the greatest media operations with no more than a computer and an Internet connection." Was this democracy in action, market forces

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at work, David confronting Goliath? It turned out that all was not as it appeared. In this particular case the editors of "Suck" also work for *Wired* magazine where they produced HotWired, which is Pathfinder's major competitor. They were, accordingly, hardly disinterested reporters. While *The Economist* concludes that this is not the most flagrant of cases of journalistic conflict of interest, "it is an example of the appearance of conflict." It is "exactly the sort of thing editors in the world of traditional journalism are so quick to condemn and (usually) to avoid." No such controls exist on the Internet, however. Identities and legitimacies are often lost.

The Internet is rapidly becoming a battlefield in which information providers contend for one all important prize: viewers' attention. When living in cyberspace one's attention is the most precious resource he or she has. Attention—the focusing of a person's mind—is the sacred resource of the information age. When the boundaries between the entertainment, persuasion and informing functions are blurred, one's attention may be purposefully or unintentionally directed in socially dysfunctional ways, toward the devious or the inane. Several strong economic and psychological forces are at work in this regard.

Advertising is one. Advertising income is the main source of financial support for many Web pages, especially those that purport to provide "free" information. "Banner" ads are sold on websites based on the number of "hits" they get. The "Yahoo!" searching site, for example, has become very popular and made its developers quite rich. Yahoo! uses rather sophisticated computer routines to present fresh, targeted banner ads to each viewer while he or she is searching for the "free" information. The viewer can not effectively escape these ads. Being exposed to them, having to devote some attention to them, is the price the viewer must pay. At Yahoo! the visual clues are rather clear; but, they are not made clear at all sites. Moreover, presently there are no rules or guidelines for web masters and page makers to follow when deciding if or how to incorporate advertising at their site.

The psychological forces are even more insidious. The new media reaches the viewers' unconscious minds as well as their rational minds and it may appeal to baser motivations. Sexually explicit sites,

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for example, are among the most popular in cyberspace. This fact eventually brought a French experiment called Minitel in public online systems to its knees and forced the country's government to totally redesign it.

As previously presented, society's experience with television may provide a good analogy through which to examine the potential effects of the Internet. Postman argues that widespread viewing of contemporary television by ordinary citizens has already resulted in a society dangerously akin to the Huxleian world of contented but unproductive people whose attention is totally dedicated to the seeking of their own self-satisfaction. (Postman, 1985)

Mitroff and Bennis carry this concern even further. They point out that TV now actively deludes viewers into states of unreality in at least two powerful ways: First, electronic images can make the unreal look real. The authors claim, "we are now so close to creating electronic images of any existing or imaginary person, place or thing that an electronic image and a real person can interact at the same time on a computer screen or TV so that a viewer cannot tell whether one or both of the images are real or not." (1989, p. 9) Who can forget the late Fred Astair dancing with a new vacuum cleaner during the 1997 Super Bowl?

Second, electronic images can make the unreal more entertaining, more seductive, more beguiling, than the real. Television, they claim, deliberately distorts, denies, or ignores the complexity of reality, "through the massive infusion of entertainment into every aspect of society which on its surface purports to deal with reality." (1989, p. 10) Why do TV producers do this? Because each show must "score its rating points." It must capture the viewer's attention and hold on to it. If in order to win this fierce competition for viewer's attention a program must resort to a limited selection of events, a slight reinterpretation here or there, a small degree of unreality, so be it. But, this is a slippery slope. Small transgressions, resorted to in the heat of competition, lead to larger ones, especially if they are successful.

The slope is steeper and greasier on the Internet. Due to the nature of the technology it greatly extends television's capacity to create unreality. Moreover, being an unregulated network of networks, the Internet allows many more people to participate actively in the pro-

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cess of manufacturing unreality. Few, if any, viewers are immune to the delusionary effects, even seasoned political journalists using the Web. Thirty-year news veteran, Pierre Salinger, for example, believed he had discovered a supposedly secret document posted by a foreign intelligence agency that described how TWA Flight 800 was shot down. He used the information to promote the theory that a missile shot the plane down. His antics created quite a stir at the time. But, he was later embarrassed to discover that the document had been published on the Web several months before as a joke. Nevertheless, Salinger's gullibility had an effect on many people's lives. In fact, even today the missile theory Salinger put forth based on this bogus information still lingers in the minds of many as a plausible explanation.

This slippery slope culminates in a society in which technology is granted sovereignty over social institutions and national life, a state of affairs Postman calls "technopoly":

> Technopoly eliminates alternatives to itself in precisely the way Aldous Huxley outlined in *Brave New World*. It does not make them illegal. It does not make them immoral. It does not even make them unpopular. It makes them invisible and therefore irrelevant. And it does so by redefining what we mean by religion, by art, by family, by politics, by history, by truth, by privacy, by intelligence, so that our definitions fit its new requirements. Technopoly, in other words, is totalitarian technocracy. (Postman, 1993, p. 48)

If democracy is our goal, what are the antidotes against reaching technopoly instead?

Two Relatively Ineffective Tools for Controlling the Internet

Today, the Internet confronts us with many new opportunities and challenges. Its expanded use seems to be irrepressible. One potential approach for taming the Internet in the interest of democracy is to let it be governed exclusively by the marketplace. A totally free market approach to its growth and expansion, however, raises some severe issues. Ironically, if the Internet is allowed to roam free, as the self-proclaimed citizens of cyberspace call for, it might effectively diminish the very liberty that these netizens seek. As described above, a Huxlian world of bewilderment, passivity and indifference could

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result as the traditional distinctions made between entertainment, persuasion and informing are blurred beyond recognition. In this case, all of the new media's incredibly powerful capability to capture and affect the minds of citizens will have been counterproductive. In this "brave new media world" an indolent people effectively give up the passion and the will to be responsible, upon which a democracy so vitally depends. That is, an electronic press, it turns out, can be too free for the good of humankind.

So, is government control, of the type George Orwell predicted for 1984, the answer? Unlikely. In its physical dimensions the Internet is a large, loosely connected international network of networks, a sprawling hydra with numerous heads of various sizes, big and quite small. Given its chaotic and global nature, it is almost impossible to control by means of laws. Moreover, in its ideological dimensions users of the Internet are fervently libertarian. As described earlier, the community of cybercitizens stands ready to revolt at any attempt to enact such laws. This community would consider any such legislation a modern version of the Stamp Act. The Stamp Act of 1765, recall, spawned the Sons of Liberty and other resistance movements aimed at reducing the British government's control over the colonies. It was a precursor to the American revolution.

Thus, our two familiar tools of social control—the market and the law—appear to be inadequate for coping with the problems of governance stemming from new media. What are the other solutions?

The Management of Temperance

I have only a vague idea of what the solution for governing the Internet might be but I believe the answer lies in what I call the "management of temperance." Temperance, of course, requires a developed sense of balance among the Internet-using public and a capability for discernment—clearing up the blurs—in all of their information acquisition and utilization activities. Management calls for leadership, a new kind of social leadership. We must find among our leaders those who will instill within us the ability to loosen the hypnotic grip of some of our strongest natural desires as we view the Internet. The value of reason and rational thinking must be stressed and developed in its role as an antidote to titillation. These leaders must also encour-

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age the artisans who create and propagate web pages, just as Plato instructed his artisans in an ancient era, to listen to a higher calling, one that seeks to create harmony among all peoples. Ultimately this requires establishing some kind of social or psychological guarantor for the information contained in the pages. It means providing clear signals as to the type of information being conveyed—whether entertainment, persuasion or public information—and revealing the source and authenticity of each message. This may call for something akin to what the young Walter Lippmann had in mind during the early 1920s when he observed that in order for readers to cope with the complexity of an increasingly scientific, technological and global world it was necessary to have experts interpret events for them. (Lippmann, 1965). In particular, Internet viewers also must be adequately warned against what the scriptures refer to as "concupiscence of the eyes." That is, we must be discouraged from seeing for the mere thrill of seeing rather than using our vision for the purpose of knowing.

Which institutions must assume the responsibility for the management of temperance in the age of new media? Here we can turn to history for guidance. Three successive teaching authorities have guided the development of Western civilization—the church, the education system and, more recently, the media. (May, 1997) In these times of great change we may well need to re-energize the two older institutions as a source of governance for the new. A renewal of the religious spirit can help us shape the new technology so that we use it to achieve visions that are superior and grander than we are ourselves. This spiritual energy, whether it emanates from traditional or secular sources, is needed to give meaning to our lives and deeds. It is the fundament upon which people draw to make purposeful connections between the resources at their disposal and the important social, economic or environmental problems they face. (Mitroff, Mason and Pearson, 1994) Spirituality puts the information we receive into perspective.

Education can instill in us a greater quest for knowledge, both knowledge of the real world around us and knowledge of ourselves—that is, to appreciate the value that is the chief goal of temperance: selfless, self preservation. A central and time honored mission of education is to provide the tools a society needs to use the information it

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produces and distributes in ways that ennoble, rather than degrade, its people and their natural character. The great universities and the public school systems can play a central role in pursuing the management of temperance in the world of the new media.

If we hold democracy dear we will recognize these three social constituents—media, religion and education—as imperative to the process, engines for the management of temperance. In the new world of the Internet these institutions must work together to create a free, but ultimately responsible, press. Neither Henry Luce or Robert Hutchins could have foreseen this need. We cannot ignore it.

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"The Hutchins Commission—Fifty Years Later"
Everette Dennis, Ph.D., The Freedom Forum

"In Your Face: Consuming Images"
Carol Adams, M. Div., Author

"Censorship in the New Media Age"
Roger Newman, J.D., New York University

"Instant Decision Making in the Global Village"
Ed Turner, Cable News Network

"Journalism as a High Profession in Spite of Itself"
William Lee Miller, Ph.D., University of Virginia

"From Muckraking to Buckraking: Journalism, Superstars, and the Public Interest"
Jill Abramson, *The Wall Street Journal*

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