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## Contents

|                                      |                    |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Editorial.....                       | <a href="#">1</a>  |
| Participatory Democracy.....         | <a href="#">3</a>  |
| Culture and Communication.....       | <a href="#">19</a> |
| New Dynamics of Democratization..... | <a href="#">31</a> |
| Rise of Netizen Democracy.....       | <a href="#">39</a> |
| Candlelight 2008.....                | <a href="#">65</a> |
| Graduation Presentation.....         | <a href="#">75</a> |
| Is This a New Era?.....              | <a href="#">78</a> |

## Editorial

In his research and writing in the early 1990s, Michael Hauben identified the emergence of the netizen. This conceptual grasp of an important new phenomenon spread around the Net and so around the world.

While this development of the netizen was recognized in the 1990s, Michael had foreseen that with the new millennium and the spread of the Net the netizens would become more of a phenomenon that one could observe and identify as a significant form that was emerging.

"Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Michael wrote in 1993. "You are a Netizen (a Net Citizen), and you exist as a citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net makes possible. You consider everyone as your compatriot. You physically live in one country but you

are in contact with much of the world via the global computer network. Virtually you live next door to every other single Netizen in the world. Geographical separation is replaced by existence in the same virtual space. The situation I describe is only a prediction of the future, but a large part of the necessary infrastructure currently exists.”

What form this phenomenon was to take in the early days of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has now been demonstrated.

In South Korea, the new century (actually also the new millennium) was marked at first by a struggle against the powerful conservative media which at the time determined the activity of the ruling strata of that nation. Then the Anti-Chosun movement as it was called, named after the Chosun media grouping, morphed into support for a presidential candidate who was willing to fight against the domination of this media.

The netizens rallied behind this presidential candidate and lo and behold, he won the presidency in 2002. A newspaper which grew up online and gave him support, *OhmyNews* was an important part of this victory.

Similarly in China, netizens were active criticizing abuse in their society. Especially after 2003 there were many different critiques contributed to by discussion among those who were able to be part of this political discussion because of the internet. In 2008, a struggle developed against the misrepresentation of an important event in China by much of the mainstream western media. This situation gave birth to the anti-cnn website, which documented the western media false narratives about what was happening in China.

While these particular national forms developed, there was also an international effort to challenge western media misrepresentations on a number of blogs and website in various countries. This has spawned a number of website, discussion groups and articles that carry on this work. We call this phenomenon ‘netizen journalism’ or the emergence of a new netizen media.

This issue of the *Amateur Computerist* gathers some of the articles documenting these developments and which are part of a draft version of a new book.

The new book, *In the Era of the Netizen: Model for Participatory*

*Democracy*, still in a draft form, is an effort to document netizen developments of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. We call this period the Era of the Netizen to point out that while netizens contend with other forms of political activity, the netizen is becoming an increasingly significant factor in the contest over the future. This is why we propose that human society has now entered the Era of the Netizen. We foresee in the long run that netizenship will be the dominant identity and practice among the people of the world.

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[Editor's Note: The following was written in 1995 for the Columbia University course "Radical Tradition in America."]

## **Participatory Democracy: From The 1960s and SDS Into The Future Online\***

by Michael Hauben

The 1960s was a time of people around the world struggling for more of a say in the decisions of their society. The emergence of the personal computer in the late 70s and early 80s and the longer gestation of the new forms of people-controlled communication facilitated by the internet and Usenet in the late 80s and today are the direct descendants of 1960s.

The era of the 1960s was a special time in America. Masses of people realized their own potential to affect how the world around them worked. People rose up to protest the ways of society which were out of their control, whether to fight against racial segregation, or to gain more power for students in the university setting. The *Port Huron Statement* created by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was a document which helped set the mood for the decade.

By the 1970s, some of the people who were directly involved in student protests continued their efforts to bring power to the people by developing and spreading computer power in a form accessible and affordable to individuals. The personal computer movement of the 1970s created the personal computer. By the mid 1980s they forced the corporations to produce computers which everyone could afford. The

new communications media of the internet grew out of the ARPAnet research that started in 1969 and Usenet which was born in 1979. These communication advances coupled with the availability of computers transform the spirit of the 1960s into an achievable goal for our times.

## SDS and The Need for Participatory Democracy

The early members of SDS found a real problem in American society. They felt that the United States was a democracy that never existed, or rather which was transformed into a representative system after the constitutional convention. The United States society is called a democracy, but had ceased being democratic after the early beginnings of American society. SDS felt it is crucial for people to have a part in how their society is governed. SDS leaders had an understanding of democratic forms which did not function democratically in the 1960s nor do they today. This is a real problem which the leaders and members of SDS intuitively understood and worked to change.

An important part of the SDS program included the understanding of the need for a medium to make it possible for a community of active citizens to discuss and debate the issues affecting their lives. While not available in the 1960s, such a medium exists today in the 1990s. The seeds for the revival of the 1960s SDS vision of how to bring about a more democratic society now exists in the personal computer and the Net. These seeds will be an important element in the battle for winning control for people as we approach the new millennium.

## The *Port Huron Statement* and Deep Problems With American Democracy

The *Port Huron Statement* was the foundation on which to build a movement for participatory democracy in the 1960s. In June 1962, an SDS national convention was held in a UAW camp located in the backwoods of Port Huron, Michigan. The original text of the *Port Huron Statement* was drafted by Tom Hayden, who was then SDS Field Secretary. The Statement sets out the theory of SDS's criticism of American society. The Port Huron convention was itself a concrete living example of the practice of participatory democracy.

The *Port Huron Statement* was originally thought of as a manifesto, but SDS members moved instead to call it a “statement.” It was prefixed by an introductory note describing how it was to be a document that should develop and change with experience: “This document represents the results of several months of writing and discussion among the membership, a draft paper, and revision by the Students for a Democratic Society national convention meeting in Port Huron, Michigan, June 11-15, 1962. It is presented as a document with which SDS officially identifies, but also as a living document open to change with our times and experiences. It is a beginning: in our own debate and education, in our dialogue with society.” (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 329)

This note is important in that it signifies that the SDS document was not defining the definite solution to the problems of society, but was making suggestions that would be open to experiences toward a better understanding. This openness is an important precursor to practicing participatory democracy by asking for the opinions of everyone and treating these various opinions equally.

The first serious problem inherent in American society identified by the *Port Huron Statement* is the myth of a functioning democracy: “For Americans concerned with the development of democratic societies, the anticolonial movements and revolutions in the emerging nations pose serious problems. We need to face the problems with humility; after 180 years of constitutional government we are still striving for democracy in our own society.” (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 361)

This lack of democracy in American society contributes to the political disillusionment of the population. Tom Hayden and SDS were deeply influenced by the writings of C. Wright Mills, a philosopher who was a professor at Columbia University until his death early in 1962. Mills’ thesis was that the “the idea of the community of publics” which make up a democracy had disappeared as people increasingly got further away from politics. Mills felt that the disengagement of people from the State had resulted in control being given to a few who in the 1960s were no longer valid representatives of the American people. In his book about SDS, *Democracy is in the Streets*, James Miller wrote: “Politics became a spectator sport. The support of voters was marshaled through

advertising campaigns, not direct participation in reasoned debate. A citizen's chief sources of political information, the mass media, typically assaulted him with a barrage of distracting commercial come-ons, feeble entertainments and hand-me-down glosses on complicated issues." (Miller, p. 85)

Such fundamental problems with democracy continue today in the middle of the 1990s. In the *Port Huron Statement*, SDS was successful in identifying and understanding the problems which still plague us today. This is a necessary first step to working toward a solution. The students involved with SDS understood people were tired of the problems and wanted to make changes in society. The *Port Huron Statement* was written to address these concerns: "... do they not as well produce a yearning to believe there is an alternative to the present that something can be done to change circumstances in the school, the workplaces, the bureaucracies, the government? It is to this latter yearning, at once the spark and engine of change, that we direct our present appeal. The search for a truly democratic alternative to the present, and a commitment to social experimentation with them, is a worthy and fulfilling human enterprise, one which moves us, and we hope, others today." (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 331)

Describing how the separation of people from power is the means used to keep people uninterested and apathetic, the *Port Huron Statement* explains: "The apathy is, first, subjective – the felt powerlessness of ordinary people, the resignation before the enormity of events. But subjective apathy is encouraged by the objective American situation – the actual structural separation of people from power, from relevant knowledge, from pinnacles of decision-making. Just as the university influences the student way of life, so do major social institutions create the circumstances which the isolated citizen will try hopelessly to understand the world and himself." ("The Society Beyond" in the *Port Huron Statement*, in Miller, p. 336)

The Statement analyzes the personal disconnection to society and its effect: "The very isolation of the individual – from power and community and ability to aspire – means the rise of democracy without publics. With the great mass of people structurally remote and psychologically hesitant with respect to democratic institutions, those institu-

tions themselves attenuate and become, in the fashion of the vicious cycle, progressively less accessible to those few who aspire to serious participation in social affairs. The vital democratic connection between community and leadership, between the mass and the several elites, has been so wrenched and perverted that disastrous policies go unchallenged time and again.” (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 336)

The Statement describes how it is typical for people to get frustrated and quit going along with the electoral system as something which works. The problem has continued, as we now have all time lows in voter turn-outs for national and local elections. In a section titled “Politics Without Publics,” the Statement explains: “The American voter is buffeted from all directions by pseudoproblems, by the structurally initiated sense that nothing political is subject to human mastery. Worried by his mundane problems which never get solved, but constrained by the common belief that politics is an agonizingly slow accommodation of views, he quits all pretense of bothering.” (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 337)

Students in SDS did not let these real problems discourage their efforts to work for a better future. They wanted to be part of the forces to defeat the problems. The *Port Huron Statement* contains an understanding that people are inherently good and can deal with the problems that were described. This understanding is conveyed in the “Values” section of the Statement: “Men have unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity. It is this potential that we regard as crucial and to which we appeal, not to the human potential for violence, unreason, and submission to authority. The goal of man and society should be human independence: a concern not with the image of popularity but with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic; a quality of mind not compulsively driven by a sense of powerlessness, nor one which unthinkingly adopts status values, nor one which represses all threats to its habits, but one which easily unites the fragmented parts of personal history, one which openly faces problems which are troubling and unresolved; one with an intuitive awareness of possibilities, an active sense of curiosity, an ability and willingness to learn.” (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 332)

## Participatory Democracy

Those participating in the Port Huron convention came away with a sense of the importance of participatory democracy. This sense was in the air in several ways. The convention itself embodied participatory democracy through the discussion and debate over the text of the Statement as several people later explained. The *Port Huron Statement* called for the implementation of participatory democracy as a way to bring people back into decisions about the country in general, and their individual lives, in particular. One of Tom Hayden's professors at University of Michigan, Arnold Kaufman, came to speak about his thoughts and use of the phrase 'participatory democracy.'

Miller writes that in a 1960 essay, "Participatory Democracy and Human Nature," Kaufman had described a society in which every member had a "direct responsibility for decisions." The "main justifying function" of participatory democracy, quotes Miller, "is and always has been, not the extent to which it protects or stabilizes a community, but the contribution it can make to the development of human powers of thought, feeling and action. In this respect, it differs, and differs quite fundamentally, from a representative system incorporating all sorts of institutional features designed to safeguard human rights and ensure social order." (Miller, p. 94)

"Participation" explained Kaufman, "means both personal initiative – that men feel obliged to help resolve social problems – and social opportunity – that society feels obliged to maximize the possibility for personal initiative to find creative outlets." (Miller, p. 95)

A participant at the Port Huron convention, Richard Flacks remembers Arnold Kaufman speaking at the convention, "At one point, he declared that our job as citizens was not to role-play the President. Our job was to put forth our own perspective. That was the real meaning of democracy – press for your own perspective as you see it, not trying to be a statesman understanding the big picture." (Miller, p. 111)

After identifying participatory democracy as the means of how to wrest control back from corporate and government bureaucracies, the next step was to identify the means to having participatory democracy. In the "Values" section of *The Port Huron Statement*, the means proposed is a new media that would make this possible: "As a social



system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; the society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation.” (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 333)

Others in SDS further detailed their understandings of participatory democracy to mean people becoming active and committed to playing more of a public role. Miller documents Al Haber’s idea of democracy as “‘a model, another way of organizing society.’ The emphasis was on a charge to action. It was how to be out there doing. Rather than an ideology or a theory.” (Miller, pp. 143-144)

Tom Hayden, Miller writes, understood participatory democracy to mean: “number one, action; we believed in action. We had behind us the so-called decade of apathy; we were emerging from apathy. What’s the opposite of apathy? Active participation. Citizenship. Making history. Secondly, we were very directly influenced by the civil rights movement in its student phase, which believed that by personally committing yourself and taking risks, you could enter history and try to change it after a hundred years of segregation. And so it was this element of participation in democracy that was important. Voting was not enough. Having a democracy in which you have an apathetic citizenship, spoon-fed information by a monolithic media, periodically voting, was very weak, a declining form of democracy. And we believed, as an end in itself, to make the human being whole by becoming an actor in history instead of just a passive object. Not only as an end in itself, but as a means to change, the idea of participatory democracy was our central focus.” (Miller, p. 144) Another member of SDS, Sharon Jeffrey understood “Participatory” to mean “involved in decisions.” She continued, “And I definitely wanted to be involved in decisions that were going to affect me! How could I let anyone make a decision about me that I wasn’t involved in?” (Miller, p. 144)

It is important to see the value of participatory democracy as a common understanding among both the leaders and members of SDS. While the *Port Huron Statement* contained other criticisms and thoughts, its major contribution was to highlight the need to more actively involve

the citizens of the United States in the daily political process to correct some of the wrongs which passivity had allowed to build. Richard Flacks summarizes this in his article, "On the Uses of Participatory Democracy": "The most frequently heard phrase for defining participatory democracy is that 'men must share in the decisions which effect their lives.' In other words, participatory democrats take seriously a vision of man as citizen: and by taking seriously such a vision, they seek to extend the conception of citizenship beyond the conventional political sphere to all institutions. Other ways of stating the core values are to assert the following: each man has responsibility for the action of the institutions in which he is embedded ...." (Flacks, pp. 397-398)

## The Need for Community for Participatory Democracy

The leaders of SDS strove to create forms of participatory democracy within its structure and organization as a prototype and as leadership for the student protest movement and society in general. Al Haber, the University of Michigan graduate student who was the first SDS national officer, describes the need for a communication system to provide the foundation for the movement: "The challenge ahead is to appraise and evolve radical alternatives to the inadequate society of today, and to develop an institutionalized communication system that will give perspective to our immediate actions. We will then have the groundwork for a radical student movement in America." (Sale, p. 25)

He understood the general society would be the last place to approach. There was a need to start smaller among the elements of society that was becoming more active in the 1960s or the students. Haber outlined his idea of where to start: "We do not now have such a public [interaction in a functioning community] in America. Perhaps, among the students, we are beginning to approach it on the left. It is now the major task before liberals, radicals, socialists and democrats. It is a task in which the SDS should play a major role." (Miller, p. 69)

The *Port Huron Statement* defines 'community' to mean: "Human relations should involve fraternity and honesty. Human interdependence is a contemporary fact; .... 'Personal links between man and man are needed.'" (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 332)

Prior to his full time involvement with SDS, Hayden wrote an

article for the *Michigan Daily* describing how democratic decision making is a necessary first step toward creating community. Hayden's focus was on the University when he wrote, "If decisions are the sole work of an isolated few rather than of a participating many, alienation from the University complex will emerge, because the University will be just that: a complex, not a community." However, this sentiment persisted in Hayden's and others thoughts about community and democracy for the whole country. (Miller, p. 54)

This feeling about community is represented in the *Port Huron Statement's* conclusion. The Statement calls for the communal sharing of problems to see that they are public and not private problems. Only by communicating and sharing these problems through a community will it be a chance to solve them together. SDS called for the new left to "transform modern complexity into issues that can be understood and felt close-up by every human being." The statement continues, "It must give form to the feelings of helplessness and indifference, so people may see the political, social and economic sources of their private troubles and organize to change society ...." (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 374)

The theory of participatory democracy was engaging. However, the actual practice of giving everyone a say within the SDS structures made the value of participatory democracy clear. The Port Huron Convention was a real life example of how the principles were refreshing and capable of bringing American citizens back into political process. The community created among SDS members brought this new spirit to light. C. Wright Mills writings spoke about "the scattered little circles of face-to-face citizens discussing their public business." Al Haber's hope for this to happen among students was demonstrated at Port Huron. SDS members saw this as proof of Mills' hope for democracy. This was to be the first example of many among SDS gatherings and meetings. Richard Flacks highlighted what made Port Huron special. He found a "mutual discovery of like minds." Flacks continued, "You felt isolated before, because you had these political interests and values and suddenly you were discovering not only like minds, but the possibility of actually creating something together." It was also exciting because, "it was our thing: we were there at the beginning." (Miller, p. 118)

## The Means For Change

SDS succeeded in doing several things. First, they clearly identified the crucial problem in American democracy. Next, they came up with an understanding of what theory would make a difference. All that remained was to find the means to make this change manifest. They discovered how to create changes in their own lives and these changes affected the world around them. However, something more was needed to bring change to all of American society.

Al Haber understood this something more would be an open communication system or media which people could use to communicate. He understood that, “the challenge ahead is to appraise and evolve radical alternatives to the inadequate society of today, and to develop an institutionalized communication system that will give perspective to our immediate actions.” (Sale, p. 25) This system would lay the “the groundwork for a radical student movement in America.” (Sale, p. 25) Haber and Hayden understood SDS to be this, “a national communications network” (Miller, p. 72)

While many people made their voices heard and produced a real effect on the world in the 1960s, lasting structural changes were not established. The real problems outlined earlier continued in the 1970s and afterwards. A national, or even an international, public communications network needed to be built to keep the public’s voice out in the open.

Members of SDS partially understood this, and put forth the following two points in the *Port Huron Statement* section on “Toward American Democracy”:

– “Mechanisms of voluntary association must be created through which political information can be imparted and political participation encouraged.”

– “The allocation of resources must be based on social needs. A truly ‘public sector’ must be established, and its nature debated and planned.” (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 362)

## International Public Communications Network – or The Net

This network and the means to access it began developing toward

the end of the 1960s. Two milestones in the genesis were 1969 when the first ARPAnet node was installed and in 1979 when Usenet started. Both are pioneering experiments in using computers to facilitate human communication in a fundamentally different way than already existing public communications networks like the telephone or television networks. The ARPAnet, which was a prototype for today's internet, and Usenet, which continues to grow and expand around the world, are parts of the Net, or the worldwide global computer communication networks. Another important step toward the development of an international communication network was the personal computer movement, which took place in the middle to late 1970s. This movement created the personal computer which makes it affordable for an individual to purchase the means to connect to this public network.

However, the network cannot simply be created. SDS understood that "democracy and freedom do not magically occur, but have roots in historical experience; they cannot always be demanded for any society at any time, but must be nurtured and facilitated." (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 361)

Participants on the ARPAnet, internet and Usenet inherently understood this, and built a social and knowledge network from the ground up. As Usenet was created to help students who did not have access to the ARPAnet, or a chance to communicate in a similar way, they came to it in full force. In "Culture and Communication: The Interplay in the New Public Commons," Michael Hauben writes that the on-line user is part of a global culture and considers him or she to be a global citizen. This global citizen is a net citizen, or a Netizen. The world which has developed is based on communal effort to make a cooperative community. Those who have become Netizens have gained more control of their lives and the world around them. However, access to this world needs to spread in order to have the largest possible effect for the most number of people. In addition, as some efforts to spread the net become more commercial, some of the values important to the net are being challenged.

A recent speech I was invited to present at a conference on "the Netizen Revolution and the Regional Information Infrastructure" in Beppu, Japan helps to bring the world of the Netizen into perspective

with the ideas of participatory democracy: “Netizens are not just anyone who comes online, and they are especially not people who come on-line for isolated gain or profit. They are not people who come to the net thinking it is a service. Rather they are people who understand it takes effort and action on each and every ones part to make the net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. Netizens are people who decide to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place.” (Hauben, Hypertext '95 speech)

The net is a technological and social development which is in the spirit of the theory clearly defined by the Students for a Democratic Society. This understanding could help in the fight to keep the net a uncommercialized public common (Felsenstein). This many to many medium provides the tools necessary to bring the open commons needed to make participatory democracy a reality. It is important now to spread access to this medium to all who understand they could benefit.

The net brings power to people’s lives because it is a public forum. The airing of real problems and concerns in the open brings help toward the solution and makes those responsible accountable to the general public. The net is the public distribution of people’s muckraking and whistle blowing. It is also just a damn good way for people to come together to communicate about common interests and to come into contact with people with similar and differing ideas.

The lack of control over the events surrounding an individual’s life was a common concern of protesters in the 1960s. The *Port Huron Statement* gave this as a reason for the reforms SDS was calling for. The section titled “The Society Beyond” included that “Americans are in withdrawal from public life, from any collective efforts at directing their own affairs.” (*Port Huron Statement* in Miller, p. 335)

Hayden echoed C. Wright Mills when he wrote, “What experience we have is our own, not vicarious or inherited.” Hayden continued, “We keep believing that people need to control, or try to control, their work and their life. Otherwise, they are without intensity, without the subjective creative consciousness of themselves which is the root of free and secure feeling. It may be too much to believe, we don’t know.” (Miller, p. 262)

The desire to bring more control into people’s daily life was a

common goal of student protest in the 1960s. Mario Savio, active in the Berkeley Free Speech movement, “believed that the students, who paid the university to educate them, should have the power to influence decisions concerning their university lives.” (Haskins and Benson, p. 55) This desire was also a common motivator of the personal computer movement.

## The Personal Computer Movement

The personal computer movement immediately picked up after the protest movements of the 1960s died down. Hobbyist computer enthusiasts wanted to provide access to computing power to the people. People across the United States picked up circuit boards and worked on making a personal minicomputer or mainframe which previously only large corporations and educational institutions could afford. Magazines, such as *Creative Computing*, *Byte* and *Dr. Dobbs’ Journal*, and clubs, such as the Homebrew Club, formed cooperative communities of people working toward solving the technical problems of building a personal and inexpensive computer.

Several pioneers of the personal computer movement contributed to the tenth anniversary issue of *Creative Computing Magazine*. Some of their impressions follow: “The people involved were people with vision, people who stubbornly clung to the idea that the computers could offer individuals advantages previously available only to large corporations ....” (Leyland, p. 111) “Computer power was meant for the people. In the early 70s computer cults were being formed across the country. Sol Libes on the East Coast and Gordon French in the West were organizing computer enthusiasts into clubs ....” (Terrell, p. 100) “We didn’t have many things you take for granted today, but we did have a feeling of excitement and adventure. A feeling that we were the pioneers in a new era in which small computers would free everyone from much of the drudgery of everyday life. A feeling that we were secretly taking control of information and power jealously guarded by the Fortune 500 owners of multimillion dollar IBM mainframes. A feeling that the world would never be the same once ‘hobby computers’ really caught on.” (Marsh, p. 110) “There was a strong feeling [at the Homebrew Club] that we were subversives. We were subverting the way the giant

corporations had run things. We were upsetting the establishment, forcing our mores into the industry. I was amazed that we could continue to meet without people arriving with bayonets to arrest the lot of us.”

## The Net and Conclusion

The development of the internet and of Usenet is an investment in a strong force toward making direct democracy a reality. These new technologies present the chance to overcome the obstacles preventing the implementation of direct democracy. Online communication forums also make possible the discussion necessary to identify today’s fundamental questions. One criticism is that it would be impossible to assemble the body politic in person at a single time. The net allows for a meeting which takes place on each person’s own time, rather than all at one time. Usenet newsgroups are discussion forums where questions are raised, and people can leave comments when convenient, rather than at a particular time and at a particular place. As a computer discussion forum, individuals can connect from their own computers, or from publicly accessible computers across the nation to participate in a particular debate. The discussion takes place in one concrete time and place, while the discussants can be dispersed. Current Usenet newsgroups and mailing lists prove that citizens can both do their daily jobs and participate in discussions that interest them within their daily schedules.

Another criticism was that people would not be able to communicate peacefully after assembling. Online discussions do not have the same characteristics as in-person meetings. As people connect to the discussion forum when they wish, and when they have time, they can be thoughtful in their responses to the discussion. Whereas in a traditional meeting, participants have to think quickly to respond. In addition, online discussions allow everyone to have a say, whereas finite length meetings only allow a certain number of people to have their say. Online meetings allow everyone to contribute their thoughts in a message, which is then accessible to whomever else is reading and participating in the discussion.

These new communication technologies hold the potential for the implementation of direct democracy in a country as long as the



necessary computer and communications infrastructure are installed. Future advancement toward a more responsible government is possible with these new technologies. While the future is discussed and planned for, it will also be possible to use these technologies to assist in the citizen participation in government. Netizens are watching various government institutions on various newsgroups and mailing lists throughout the global computer communications network. People's thoughts about and criticisms of their respective governments are being aired on the currently uncensored networks.

These networks can revitalize the concept of a democratic "Town Meeting" via online communication and discussion. Discussions involve people interacting with others. Voting involves the isolated thoughts of an individual on an issue, and then his or her acts on those thoughts in a private vote. In society where people live together, it is important for people to communicate with each other about their situations to best understand the world from the broadest possible viewpoint.

The individuals involved with SDS, the personal computer movement and the pioneers involved with the development of the net understood they were a part of history. This spirit helped them to push forward in the hard struggle needed to bring the movements to fruition. The invention of the personal computer was one step that made it possible for people to afford the means to connect to the Net. The internet has just begun to emerge as a tool available to the public. It is important that the combination of the personal computer and the net be spread and made widely available at low or no costs to people around the world. It is important to understand the tradition which these developments have come from, in order to truly understand their value to society and to make them widely available. With the hope connected to this new public communications medium, I encourage people to take up the struggle which continues in the great American radical tradition.

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\* This article is online at:

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# **Culture and Communication: The Impact of the Internet on the Emerging Global Culture**

by Michael Hauben

Any document that attempts to cover an emerging culture is doomed to be incomplete. Even more so if the culture has no overt identity (at least none outside virtual space). But the other side of that coin presents us with the opportunity to document the ebb and flow, the moments of growth and defeat, the development of this young culture. (John Frost, *Cyberpoet's Guide to Virtual Culture*, 1993)

## **ABSTRACT**

As we approached the new millennium, social relationships were changing radically. Even in 1969, the anthropologist Margaret Mead wrote of an "approaching worldwide culture." While she wrote of a global culture made possible by the electronic and transportation advances of her day, her words actually foresaw fundamental changes that have been substantially enhanced by the computer communication networks that were just beginning. A new culture is being formed out of a universal desire for communication. This culture is partly formed and formulated by new technology and by social desires. People are dissatisfied with their conditions, whether traditional or modern. Much of the new communication technology facilitates new global connections. This article will explore the emerging culture and the influence of the net on this new participatory global culture.

## I – The Emerging Globalization of Everyday Life

The concept of a global culture arises from the extensive development of transportation and communication technologies in the twentieth century. These developments have linked the world together in ways which make it relatively simple to travel or communicate with peoples and cultures around the world. The daily exposure of the world's peoples to various cultures makes it impossible for almost any individual to envision the world consisting of only his or her culture (Mead, 1978, p. 69). We really are moving into a new global age which affects most aspects of human life. For example, world trade has become extensive, more and more words are shared across languages, people are aware of political situations around the world and how these situations affect their own, and sports and entertainment are viewed simultaneously by global audiences. The exposure to media and forms of communication helps spread many of these cultural elements. While television and radio connect people with the rest of the world in a rather removed and often passive fashion, computer networks are increasingly bringing people of various cultures together in a much more intimate and grassroots manner. A global culture is developing, and the Internet is strongly contributing to its development.

Culture is a difficult concept to define. Tim North has gathered six different definitions in his unpublished master's thesis (1994, chapter 4.2.1):

1. Culture: The shared behavior learned by members of a society, the way of life of a group of people (Barnouw, 1987, p. 423).
2. A culture is the way of life of a group of people, the complex of shared concepts and patterns of learned behavior that are handed down from one generation to the next through the means of language and imitation (Barnouw, 1987, p. 4).
3. Culture: The set of learned behaviours, beliefs, attitudes and ideals that are characteristic of a particular society or population (Ember and Ember, 1990, p. 357).
4. Culture ... taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society (Tyler, 1871; cited in Harris 1988, p. 122).

5. Culture: The customary manner in which human groups learn to organize their behavior in relation to their environment (Howard, 1989, p. 452).

6. Culture (general): The learned and shared kinds of behavior that make up the major instrument of human adaptation. Culture (particular): The way of life characteristic of a particular human society (Nanda, 1991, p. G-3).

One common category in some of these definitions is the passing of previously learned behavior from one generation to the next. Another common category in North's definitions of culture is the importance of experience and patterns of behavior being shared among a group of people.

Historically, during most periods, culture has changed slowly and has been passed on from generation to generation. In the last half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, for most peoples the normal rate of cultural evolution has been accelerating. Mead (1978, p. 64) writes that while in the past, culture was transmitted from the older generation to the younger with slow change from generation to generation, today the younger generation learn from both their elders and their peers. The learning from peers is then shared with their elders. Human culture gets set by how people live their lives (Graham, 1995). Culture is created and re-enforced through how that person lives in context of society and social movements. One is taught the culture of his or her society while growing up, but those perceptions change as he or she matures, develops and lives an adult life. Culture is not statically defined. Rather a person grows up into a culture and then can contribute to its change as time progresses. (Mead, 1956)

People are increasingly living a more global lifestyle, whether mediated through television, radio and newspapers, travel or actual experience. This global experience is facilitated by the ability of the individual to interact with people from other cultures and countries on a personal level. Images and thoughts available via mass media show that other cultures exist. But when people from different cultures actually get a chance to talk and interact, then the differences become less of an oddity and more of an opportunity (Uncapher, 1992). Professor Dennis Sumara argues that the formation of self-identity is

influenced by relations with others. He writes:

The sense of self-identity ... emerges ... from our symbiotic relations with others. In coming to know others we learn about ourselves. It is important to note, however, that it is not a static or unified self that we come to know, for in the coming-to-know – we are changed. We evolve through our relations with others .... (Sumara, 1996, p. 56)

That implies that people and cultures change from the interaction with other people's cultures. This new interaction and subsequent change is part of the formation of a global culture.

There are critics (Appadurai, 1990: etc.) who claim this global culture, or mass culture is snuffing out individual differences for a pre-packaged commercial culture. These critics call for the isolation of communities from each other so that uniqueness can be preserved. This criticism misses that human culture is a dynamic element of society, and freezing it would produce a museum of human society. Uncapher (1992) correctly points out that what these critics do not recognize is that more and more people of various cultures are understanding the power of the new communication technologies. More and more people are reacting against the mass media and corporate dominance and calling for a chance to express their views and contribute their culture into the global culture. As an example, Margaret Mead tells a story (1978, pp. 5-6) of returning to a village in New Guinea which she had visited three decades earlier. She wrote (p. 5):

In the 1930s, when one arrived in a New Guinea village, the first requests were for medicine ... and for trade goods. The European was expected to bring material objects from the outside world .... But in 1967 the first conversation went:

“Have you got a tape recorder?”

“Yes, why?”

“We have heard other people's singing on the radio and we want other people to hear ours.”

The presence of radios made the villagers aware of the music of others, and they wanted a part of their culture broadcast around the world.

Mead understood the importance of diversity to the survival and strength of a species, whether human or animal. However, she also

understood that part of the global commonality was through the spread of scientific understandings and technological developments. The desire for technology is strong among those who have only heard about its advantages. She wrote, “People who have only seen airplanes in the sky and heard the wonderful ways of radio, satellites, telescopes, microscopes, engines, and script are eager to experience these things for themselves.” (Mead, 1978, p. 121) The Internet is one of the new technological advances of today, and can be seen to fit with the above examples. It is important to understand that coupled with the desire for the technological advances is the understanding of the need to control the introduction of such technology and participate to have its use benefit the particular peoples in their particular needs. The peoples of the world understand that with the implementation of technology comes a responsibility for the management and careful handling of that technology. Mead writes about this (1978, pp. 153-154):

... the very burgeoning of science that has resulted in world-wide diffusion of a monotonous modern culture has also stimulated people throughout the world to demand participation. And through this demand for participation in the benefits of a monotonous, homogeneous technology, we have actually generated new ways to preserve diversity.

Even in the primitive communities that Mead studied in the Pacific Islands, she recorded that these people adopted democracy and the use of technology with their own variations and new aspects that served their own needs. The new advances in communication technologies facilitate new democratic processes. People are discovering new ways to participate and add their cultural contributions to a larger world. Efforts to communicate via technology require the acceptance of technological standards and the building of a common technical framework. The growth of communications networks and standards at the same time allows diverse cultures to share and spread their varying cultures with others.

## II – Global Contact over Computer Networks.

The new media of forums, newsgroups, e-mail, chat rooms, blogs and webpages on the internet facilitate the growth of global interactive

communities. These electronic communication forms are made available through community networks, universities, the workplace, portals and internet service providers (Hauben & Hauben, 1997, p. 8). Human culture is ever evolving and developing, and the new public commons that these technologies make possible is of a global nature. A growing number of people are coming together online and living more time of their daily lives with people from around the world. Through the sharing of these moments by people, their cultures are coming to encompass more of the world not before immediately available. Mead (1978, p. 88) understood that a global community and awareness would require the development of a new kind of communication that depended on the participation of those who previously had no access to such power or such a voice.

Newsgroups and forums are a relatively young medium of human discourse and communication. The Usenet technology, one of the first broad newsgroup networks, was developed by graduate students in the late 1970s as a way to promote the sharing of information and to spread communication between university campuses. Their design highlighted the importance of the contribution by individuals to the community. The content of Usenet was produced by members of the community for the whole of the community. Active participation was required for Usenet to have anything available on it. It was the opposite of a for-pay service that provides content and information. On Usenet, the users produced the content, i.e. talk, debate, discussion, flames, reportage, nonsense, and scientific breakthroughs filled the space. Usenet was a public communications technology framework which was open. The users participated in determining what newsgroups were created, and then filled those newsgroups with messages that were the content of Usenet. In forming this public space, or commons, people were encouraged to share their views, thoughts, and questions with others (Hauben & Hauben, 1997, p. 4). The chance to contribute and interact with other people spread Usenet to become a truly global community of people hooking their computers together to communicate. People both desire to talk and to communicate with other people (Graham, 1995; Woodbury, 1994). Usenet was created to make that communication happen. In time it also gave a public voice to those who would not have had the opportunity



otherwise to have their voice heard. By promoting a democratic medium, these graduate students who created Usenet were helping to create the kind of medium Mead believed was an important condition toward the development of a global culture.

In a study about the global online culture, Tim North (1994, chapter 5.2) asked the question “is there an on-line culture and society on Usenet?” His conclusion was that there was a definite Usenet culture. He listed four of the important defining aspects of this unique online culture,

1. The conventions of the culture are freely discussed.
2. The culture is not closed to outsiders and welcomes new members.
3. There is a strong sense of community within the Net culture.
4. It’s what you say, not who you are.

North described the Usenet culture as open and welcoming of newcomers even if there was an occasional unfriendliness to “newbies”. He focused on how the online culture was documented and available so newcomers could figure out how the community functioned and more easily join it. But also not only was the documentation available online to learn from, it was open for discussion.

Another researcher in the 1990s, Bruce Jones described the fullness of net culture:

... the Usenet network of computers and users constitutes a community and a culture, bounded by its own set of norms and conventions, marked by its own linguistic jargon and sense of humor and accumulating its own folklore. (1991, p. 2)

Jones elaborates on what he saw to be an egalitarian tendency or tendency to contribute to the community’s benefit. Jones wrote:

... the people of the net owe something to each other. While not bound by formal, written agreements, people nevertheless are required by convention to observe certain amenities because they serve the greater common interest of the net. These aspects of voluntary association are the elements of culture and community that bind the people of Usenet together. (p. 4)

While North proposed that Usenet was a distinct culture, he argued

that it could not be considered a separate society. Rather Usenet was “a superstructural society that spans many mainstream societies and is dependent upon them for its continued existence” (1994, chap. 4.2.2).

North argued that the Net does not need to provide the physical needs made possible by a society. He wrote:

In this superstructural view, the Net is freed of the responsibilities of providing certain of the features provided by other societies (e.g., reproduction, food and shelter) by virtue of the fact that its members are also members of traditional mainstream societies that do supply them. (1994, chap. 4.2.2)

Rather, those who use the Net live in their daily offline society, and come to the Net for reasons other than physical needs. Others (Avis, 1995; Graham, 1995; Jones, 1991) also studied this new online culture and its connection to the growing global culture. They saw there are a distinct online culture and a distinct offline global culture. While the online culture strongly contributes to the developing global culture offline, it is not the sole contributing factor. The contribution of the online culture to the global culture through such technologies as forums and electronic mailing lists is important as the online media requires participation of the users to exist. Since as media forums, newsgroups and social websites encourage participation, they support the contributions of many diverse people and cultures to the broader global culture.

Both the technological design of opening one’s computer up to accept contributions of others and the desire to communicate led to the creation of an egalitarian culture (Jones, 1991; North, 1994; Woodbury, 1994). People have both a chance to introduce and share their own culture and a chance to broaden themselves through exposures to various other cultures. As such, the online culture is an example of a global culture which is not a reflection of purely one culture. Instead, it both incorporates cultural elements from many nations and builds a new culture (North, 1994). Self-identity evolves through relations with others. (Sumara, 1996, p. 56) The new connections between people of different cultures allows each culture to broaden itself based on the new understandings available from other places; culture changes through the exchange with new ways of understanding and life. And this change and shared changes gets shared around the world.

### III – Community Networks making Online Access Available

Being a relatively young medium, the Net is available to a subset of the world. However, this is rapidly changing. Projects are extending the connections to undeveloped countries and the basic technology needed to gain access is as simple as a computer and modem connected to the local telephone or amateur radio network. More and more people around the world are getting online via mobile devices. Another hurdle to overcome is technical training. However, the democratic ethos of the Net spreads through the help that users offer each other online. A large number of people who are on the Net want more people to be able to use computer technology. Many are helpful and take the time and effort to spread their knowledge to others who desire to learn. Similarly everyone online at one point was new and learning. This experience of ‘newbie’-ness provides a common heritage to unite people. The problems encountered in implementing and using new technology encourages people to connect to others using the technology. This is an incentive to hook into the internet where such people can be contacted. The commonality of people participating in the same technology creates a basis to develop commonality toward other interests.

Community networks in the 1990s provided a way for citizens of a locality to hook into these global communities for little or no cost (Graham, 1995). Community networks also provided a way for communities to truly represent themselves to others connected online (Graham, 1995; Weston, 1994). Without access made available through community networks, through publicly available computer terminals or local dial-in phone numbers, only those who could have afforded the cost of a computer and the monthly charges of commercial internet service providers (ISPs) or online services or who had access through work or school would represent themselves (Avis, 1995). Particular portraits of various cultures would thus be only partially represented. Also, when access is available and open to all, a greater wealth of contributions can be made. For example, there was a strong push in Canada and Canadian communities to get online. A lot of grassroots community network building took place. A Canadian national organization, Telecommunities Canada, stressed the importance of contributing

Canada's various cultures to the online community and in this way made a contribution to the whole community (Graham, 1995; Weston, 1994). In a similar way, Izumi Aizu (1995, p. 6) says that Japan had "an opportunity to bring its own cultural value to the open world." He continues, "It also opens the possibility of changing Japan into a less rigid, more decentralized society, following the network paradigm exercised by the distributed nature of the Internet itself" (Aizu, 1995, p. 6).

There is something to be said about the attraction of representing one's self to the greater community. The many-to-many form of communication where an individual can broadcast to the community and get responses back from other individuals is an empowering experience. No longer do you have to be rich and powerful to communicate broadly to others and to represent yourself and your own views. This power is making it possible for individuals to communicate with others of similar and differing interests around the world. Grass-roots organization is boosted and even the formation of local community groups is all accelerated. Development of the commons to the exclusion of the big media representations makes this an electronic grass-roots medium, or a new enlarged public commons (Felsenstein, 1993).

The online culture is primarily a written one, although much of the text is written generally in an informal, almost off-the-cuff fashion. While people will post papers and well thought out ideas, much of the conversation is generated in an immediate response to others' messages. This text can feel like a conversation, or a written version of oral culture. Stories akin to the great stories of the pre-history come about. Legends and urban myths circulate and are disseminated (Jones, 1991). Pictures and other non-text items can be posted or sent in messages, but these non-text items are primarily transferred and not modified, thought upon or communally worked on as are the textual ideas. Graphics and graphical communication and collaboration occur more on websites, although they are still a less effective communication medium. The common shared online language was in the beginning English (Aizu). That is changing. Other languages exist in country hierarchies and newsgroups and in mailing lists, along with chat rooms, search engines and web pages. Moreover, all these developments, textual or graphic, make

possible a global conversation of diverse views. Mead recognizes that “True communication is a dialogue.” (Mead, 1978, p. 77) She points out that real communication occurs “... in a world in which conflicting points of view, rather than orthodoxies, are prevalent and accessible.” (Mead, 1978, p. 80)

## IV – Conclusion

The new global culture is forming in several ways, none of which is a generic corporate rubber stamp. People are taking charge. They are bringing their own cultures into the global culture and spreading this new culture around the world. This is taking on a general form and an online form. The online form provides a strong means by which people can spread their ideas and culture which in turn affects the broader global culture. This broader global culture also has an effect on newsgroups or online media. The ability to express oneself to the rest of the world is addictive and the rapid increase of new people joining the online global community makes that manifest. “The voiceless and the oppressed in every part of the world have begun to demand more power .... The secure belief that those who knew had authority over those who did not has been shaken” (Mead, 1978, p. 5). Mead states later, “There are new technological conditions within which a new initiative for the human race is possible. But it will not be found without a vision.” To the former call for brotherhood and sisterhood or of loyalty to kin and one’s ancestors, Mead proposes, “we can now add a vision of a planetary community.” She explains that “Within such a vision, the contributions of each culture ... can become complementary.” However, Mead emphasizes, “but within the new vision there must be no outsiders.” (pp. 147-148)

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[Editor's Note: The following are excerpts from a longer chapter with the same title which will be part of the new book.]

# **The New Dynamics of Democratization in South Korea: The Internet and the Emergence of the Netizen**

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## **I – The Global Internet and the Netizen Experience in Korea**

In 2002, the *Sisa Journal*, a South Korean weekly, named 'Netizens' as the Person of the Year (La 2003, p. 1). This represented a rare recognition of a new and significant phenomenon that has emerged with the development and spread of the internet (Hauben 1997). The netizen has become a significant actor in the struggle for democracy. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in South Korea.

Describing the progressive impact that the internet is having around the world, Choi Jang Jip, a professor at Korea University, writes (2000, p. 46):

[A]ccompanied by the development of communication technologies globalization creates new elements that enable people to counter undemocratic or anti-democratic elements .... In the instrumental sense, globalization enables communication for democracy in cyberspace. In terms of content, a greater affinity between worldwide democratic values and norms and the unique experiences of younger Koreans in the democratization movement become possible.

Many South Koreans are dissatisfied with the process of democratic development in South Korea, Choi recognizes that it is not political parties but the internet and the democratic processes that the internet makes possible that provide a continuum with the democratic processes and practices that helped to win the June 1987 victory in South Korea. He explains the reason:

Political society is preoccupied with political parties, political elites, and mass media, which produces and transmits dominant

discourse ... however, cyberspace has no barriers to entry and is an absolutely free space over which no hegemonic discourse can exercise a dominant influence. (Choi 2000, p. 40)

Choi maintains that the Korean experience of democratic practice is important not only for the democratization struggle in Korea, but also as an indication of a worldwide struggle for democracy to come:

The citizen movement using Internet is just a beginning stage. It will become popular in the near future and change the quality and contents of movements because of the rapid internet diffusion and information expansion. (Choi 2000, p. 50)

There is a need to document and understand the experience of netizens in Korea not only to support the democratization struggle in Korea itself, but also toward understanding the contribution of this netizen experience to the worldwide struggle for democracy.

## II – A Model for Democratization

Along with the recognition that the experience of democratic struggle provides the basis for the continuing struggle for democracy in South Korea, Choi believes that there is a need for public understanding of democracy. He writes:

In any given nation or society, democracy develops in parallel with the level of understanding in that society. In order for democracy to take root and to develop in quality, [a] social understanding of democracy has to develop. This is why civic education for democracy is important, and it is necessary to increase public interest and participation through such education. When this happens, people's intellectual curiosity for understanding will increase, and so will their social participation. This is how democracy develops. (Choi 2005, p. 13)

To develop such an understanding, he proposes the need for critical discussion and debate about democracy (Choi 2005, p. 13). Such a process of discussion and experimentation with democracy has been happening on the internet in South Korea. Yet because it is taking place at a grassroots level, online and in the Korean language, it is little understood and even more rarely considered in the world outside of the internet. Choi himself wrote a book translated into English (2005),



*Democracy after Democratization: the Korean Experience*, documenting the history and progress of the struggle for democracy in South Korea. The only clue in his book of the online developments, however, is the cover, which shows a massive demonstration in Seoul that took place in 2004 that was made possible by the online democratic developments. The online newspaper *OhmyNews* is credited for the photo. Thus, the book and its cover demonstrate the confusion about the contribution to the democratic struggle in South Korea by the internet and the netizens. This is understandable as the internet and the netizens are relatively recent phenomena and their contribution to the struggle for democracy is still poorly understood. This article is intended as a contribution to the discussion and debate about democracy that Choi advocates.

### III – A New Model for Democracy and the Need for a Communication Infrastructure

Before discussing the internet and the netizens and their impact on the democratization struggle in South Korea, however, I want to propose a model for democracy that I will utilize in this article. A number of Korean scholars note that a minimalist conception of democracy is inadequate as a goal. Han Sang-Jin, a professor at Seoul National University, disagrees with scholars who depend on institutional politics from within the political system (1995, p. 131). Han writes:

If the outside energy dries up or disappears, it seems very unlikely that any political leader or faction would pursue structural reform. by its own initiative.

As part of his support for grassroots political activity, Han proposes the need to support a culture of diversity, a culture which nourishes the quest for a conscious social identity. He writes:

Crucial for democratic consolidation ... is the capacity of civil society as the basis of democratic institutions in which cultural identities and diversities are nurtured and developed. It is probably in this sense that one may expect that new visions for civilization will also come from East Asia. It is indeed tempting to think about the possibility, and it will be as much so in the future as it is now. (Han 1995, p. 13)

Han's intuition that democratic development requires a cultural

process is similar to the model for democracy created by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the U.S. in the early 1960s. An essay by Arnold Kaufman, a professor at the University of Michigan, inspired the development of the SDS model of democracy which has become known as ‘participatory democracy.’ The essay Kaufman wrote, “Participatory Democracy and Human Initiative” helped to set the foundation for the SDS model of democracy.

Kaufman writes, “Participation means both personal initiative – that men feel obliged to resolve social problems and social opportunity – that society feels obliged to maximize the possibility for personal initiatives to find creative outlets” (Quoted in Hauben 1995). Thus for Kaufman and then for the SDS, the concept of participatory democracy had two aspects, one a role for the person as part of a social process, and two, a role for the society to encourage the creative initiative of the person.

This is different from the minimalist conceptions of democracy and from conceptions relying on an elite to make the decisions for the population, or proposing that democracy means facilitating institutional competition among an elite. Kaufman, and subsequently SDS, proposed a model for democracy which had three elements:

- (1) The involvement of ordinary people actively participating to foster the changes they desire in their society.
- (2) Some structural connection between the community of ordinary people and those in society who make the decisions.
- (3) A commitment by society to foster the creative development and functioning of the population.

SDS saw the need for a communications infrastructure to provide a public space for discussion and debate among the community of ordinary people as crucial for its vision of democracy. For such public discussion “mechanisms of voluntary association must be created through which political information can be imparted and political participation encouraged,” proclaims the *Port Huron Statement* of SDS in the section “Toward American Democracy” (Hauben 1995, p. 7)

In a paper he wrote about the SDS vision of participatory democracy and the internet, Michael Hauben, then a student at Columbia University, described how the creation and development of the internet has provided just such a communications infrastructure identified by

SDS as necessary to realize their model of participatory democracy. (Hauben 1995, p. 7)

...

## VIII – Conclusion

In his book *Democracy After Democratization*, Choi (2005) explains the significant role that the mainstream conservative media has played in Korean society since the June 1987 democratic victory. In a chapter titled “Politics Ruled by the Press,” Choi describes the power of the press over political institutions of South Korea. “If anyone asks me who moves the politics in Korea,” he writes, “I would say it is the press.” (p. 41)

According to Choi’s argument, it is not South Korean government officials who determine the political issues and priorities to be considered. Instead it is the press that sets the agenda and priorities for the political officials, who “adjust their role according to what is reported that day in the press.” (Choi 2005, p. 41) The conservative press wielding this power (Choi wrote the Korean original of his book based on lectures prior to the Dec. 2002 election of Roh Moo Hyun) was in possession of what Choi characterizes as unbridled power, unchecked by any democratic process. Choi proposes that democracy is a process by which justice emerges from the conflict between various opinions and interests. To have a democratic society, a continuous process of reform is needed, one that can continually counter the resistance to democratization of the conservative vested interests. Otherwise the society can regress and there is the danger of reactionary forces gaining dominance. To continue the advance toward a more democratic society, Choi maintains that there is a need for “efforts to continually develop institutional mechanisms to defend it, [to] foster values appropriate to it and further nurture it.” (2005, p. 50)

The online media then developing in South Korea is a new form of institutional mechanism. This institutional mechanism is helping to defend, foster and nurture the continuing development of democracy in Korea. Similarly, the netizens, the online citizens who participate in online forums discussing and debating the issues of the day and the social goals needed to continue the struggle for democracy, are the heirs of the pro-democracy movement of the 1980s.

Netizens in Korea have developed and contribute to many online forms. These include Cyworld, blogs, websites for the discussion of music or human rights or ecology issues, just to mention a few. Also there are websites where serious social or political questions are raised, as for example, where the authenticity of photos of human rights violations by the North Koreans were challenged.

In 2005, three websites for the discussion of scientific developments gained the spotlight in newspapers and scientific journals around the world. These websites were Scieng (Association of Korean Scientists and Engineers) ([www.scieng.net](http://www.scieng.net)), BRIC (The Bio-logical Research Information Center) ([bric.postech.ac.kr](http://bric.postech.ac.kr)), and the Science Gallery of DCInside ([www.dcinside.com](http://www.dcinside.com)). They gained prominence in a controversy that developed in South Korea over possible ethical and fraudulent breaches in stem-cell research by a prominent scientist. Issues raised on these websites led to articles in the print media in Korea (Chosun Ilbo 2005a) and around the world and even in international scientific journals (Chosun Ilbo 2005b). Young scientists in Korea posting in BRIC were proposed as the ‘Netizens of the Year’ for the role they played in helping to uncover fabricated data and false scientific claims in well respected scientific articles by Hwang Woo-sook. He had been a nationally and internationally acclaimed scientific researcher.<sup>1</sup>

The subject matter of these online forms, however, are not the salient aspects. Rather it is the fact that via this new form of communications media, netizens are able to speak out about their views and the problems they deem important and to hear and think about the views and concerns of other netizens. One of the early participants in the U.S. student group SDS remembers a talk by Arnold Kaufman at the SDS conference creating the *Port Huron Statement* on participatory democracy. She writes (quoted in Hauben 1995) :

At one point, he declared that our job as citizens was not to role-play the President. Our job was to put forth our own perspective. That was the real meaning of democracy – press for your own perspective as you see it, not trying to be a statesman understanding the big picture.

Such a process makes possible the active involvement of people in the discussion of issues they find of interest. As each person argues for

his or her viewpoint in discussion with others with similar or different viewpoints, a vibrant debate can ensue. It is just such a process that Choi considers necessary for democracy. This is the kind of process that has been nourished by the online media in South Korea and it has in turn led to the spread and continuing development of the internet.

The online media has had an impact on many areas of Korean society, including election campaigns. The General Election campaigns of 2000 and the Presidential Election campaign in 2002 were especially impacted by online discussion and debate. Describing the role of the internet in the 2000 election, Jeong Hoiok (2000) then of Ewha Woman's University, writes:

The 16<sup>th</sup> general election [April 2000] was the first in Korea in which the real world and virtual world came together thanks to information technology. Indeed, even well established candidates have come to actively use the Internet as an effective campaign tool, while the homepage of the anti-incumbent Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 General Election was visited by more than 900,000 Internet users. Even the Central Election Management Committee made the headlines when it disclosed on the Internet the military records, personal assets, and any criminal records of registered candidates. Moreover, a number of websites are actively engaged in political activities on an ongoing basis.

In a special feature of the French newspaper, *La Monde*, about the 2000 Korean General Election, published on April 25, 2000, the editors observed that "the Internet served as a catalyst for the development of a new form of democracy," during that election. The editors then predicted that, "Once today's information technology is fully applied, this will significantly contribute to furthering Korea's democratization." (Hoiok 2000, p. 5)

The varied forms of online media that have developed in the past several years in Korea are helping to nourish a new form of democracy, participatory democracy. Participatory democracy, in turn, is helping to foster the continuing development and spread of the internet in Korea. The continuing development of the internet and of the netizens protects and nurtures new online forms that have become a new institution for

the continuing struggle to maintain and extend democracy.

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**Note:**

<sup>1</sup>See article in Korean:

[http://www.ohmynews.com/articleview/article\\_view.asp?at\\_code=300437](http://www.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?at_code=300437)

There was a response in English by dongilone:

“I have firmly believed that truth prevails in the long run. I am choked with overflowing emotions of relief and joy, when I am aware that the future of Korean science will not be withered, with your brilliant performance, suffering frequent slanderings and other physical and mental threats to you young scientists, from blind followers of the God Lie. Momentary bitterness of setback is to be welcomed when lasting longer sweet fruit is to be savored.

I am proud of you young scientists.

I treat you all a large barrel of Makoli.”

[http://www.ohmynews.com/articleview/article\\_view.asp?at\\_code=299945](http://www.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?at_code=299945)

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# **The Rise of Netizen Democracy: A Case Study of Netizens’ Impact on Democracy in South Korea**

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The history of democracy also shows that democracy is a moving target, not a static structure.

John Markoff

What does it mean to be politically engaged today? And what does it mean to be a citizen? The transformation of how we engage and act in society challenges how we perceive the concepts of civic engagement and citizenship, their content and expression. The introduction of new information technologies, most notably in the form of internet, has in turn reinvigorated these discussions.

Ylva Johansson

Someone may construe that in South Korea politics the major source of power moved from ‘the muzzle of a gun (army)’ to ‘that of the emotion (TV)’ and then to ‘that of logic (Internet)’ in a short time.

Yun Young-Min

## Abstract

South Korean netizens are exploring the potential of the internet to make an extension of democracy a reality. The cheering during the World Cup games in Korea in June 2002 organized by the Red Devils online fan club, then the protests against the deaths of two Korean school girls caused by U.S. soldiers were the preludes to the candidacy and election of Roh Moo Hyun, the first head of state whose election can be tracked directly to the activity of the netizens. This is a case study of the South Korean netizen democracy. This case study is intended as a contribution to a needed broader project to explore the impact netizens are having on extending democratic processes today.

## I – Preface

In the early 1990s, a little more than two hundred years after the French Revolution, a new form of citizenship emerged. This is a citizenship not tied to a nation state or nation, but a citizenship that embodied the ability to participate in the decisions that govern one's society. This citizenship emerged on the internet and was given the title 'netizenship.' The individuals who practice this form of citizenship refer to themselves as 'netizens.'<sup>1</sup>

In the early 1990s, Michael Hauben, recognized the emergence and spread of this new identity. In the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, he describes how he came to recognize that not only was there a new technical development, the internet, but also, there was a new identity being embraced by many of those online. Hauben writes:<sup>2</sup>

The story of Netizens is an important one. In conducting research five years ago [in 1992-1993] online to determine people's uses of the global computer communications network, I became aware that there was a new social institution, an electronic commons developing.

It was exciting to explore this new social institution. Others online shared this excitement .... There are people online who actively contribute toward the development of the Net. These people understand the value of collective work and the communal aspects of public communications. These are the people



who discuss and debate topics in a constructive manner, who e-mail answers to people and provide help to new-comers, who maintain FAQ files and other public information repositories, who maintain mailing lists, and so on. These are people who discuss the nature and role of this new communications medium. These are the people who as citizens of the Net, I realized were Netizens .... (T)hey are the people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone's part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource .... The word citizen suggests a geographic or national definition of social membership. The word Netizen reflects the new non-geographically based social membership. So I contracted net.citizen to Netizen.

Just as many different meanings have developed for 'citizen,' so 'netizen' has come to have several meanings. The early concept of 'netizen' is 'one who participates in the affairs of governing and making decisions about the internet and about how the internet can impact offline society.' A further development of this concept is 'one who is empowered by the net to have an impact on politics, journalism, culture and other aspects of society.'<sup>3</sup> This case study will explore this new socio-political-cultural identity, the identity of the netizen in the context of recent developments in South Korea.

While there is a large body of literature about the internet and its impact on society, there has been considerably less attention paid to those who are empowered by the internet, to the netizens, who are able to assume a new role in society, and to embody a new identity. This case study will explore how the netizens of South Korea are helping to shape the democratic practices that extend what we understand as democracy and citizenship. Their experience provides an important body of practice to consider when trying to understand what will be the future forms of political participation.

## II – Introduction

In his article "Where and When was Democracy Invented?," the sociologist John Markoff raises the question of the practice of democracy and more particularly of the times and places where innovations in

democracy are pioneered.<sup>4</sup>

Markoff writes that a dictionary in 1690 defined democracy as a “form of government in which the people have all authority.” (p. 661) Not satisfied with such a general definition, Markoff wants to have a more concrete definition or conception of democracy. He wants to investigate the practices that extend democracy. He proposes looking for models or practices that will help to define democracy in the future. Such models or practices, he cautions, may be different from what we currently recognize as democratic processes. “We need to consider,” he writes, “the possibility that somewhere there may be still further innovations in what democracy is, innovations that will redefine it for the historians of the future.” (p. 689)

Markoff suggests that researchers who want to understand the means of extending democracy in the future not limit themselves to the “current centers of world wealth and power.” (p. 663) Similarly, he proposes that the poorest areas of the world will not be the most fruitful for researchers looking for innovations in democracy.

Considering Markoff’s guidelines, South Korea fits very appropriately with regard to the size and environment likely to innovate democratic practices. Events in South Korea confirm that indeed there are pioneering practices that can give researchers a glimpse into how democracy can be extended in a practical fashion.

### III – The South Korean Netizens Movement

Various factors have contributed to democratic developments in South Korea. For example, the activities of Korean non governmental organizations (NGOs) have played an important role. Similarly, the student movements at least since 1980 have served to maintain a set of social goals in the generations that have grown up with these experiences. Government support for the spread and use of computers and the internet by the South Korean population has also played a role.

For the purposes of this article, however, I want to focus on the practice of the Korean netizen. Along with the pioneering of computer networking in South Korea (1980s) and internet technology (1990s), there was the effort to maintain internet development for public purposes. This is different from how in the 1990s, for example, the U.S.

government gave commercial and private interests free reign in their desires to direct internet development.

## A – South Korean Networking as a Social Function

This case study begins in 1995.<sup>5</sup>

In 1995, the U.S. government privatized the U.S. portions of the internet backbone. The goal of the U.S. government was to promote private and commercial use. At the same time the concept of netizen was spreading around the U.S. and the international networking community, partially in opposition to the trend of privatization and commercialization.<sup>6</sup>

In South Korea, however, there was a commitment to “prevent commercial colonialization” of the South Korean internet. The effort was to promote the use of the internet for grassroots political and social purposes, as a means of democratizing Korea. In a paper presented in 1996, “The Grassroots Online Movement and Changes in Korean Civil Society,” Myung Koo Kang,<sup>7</sup> documents the netizen activity in South Korea to “intervene into the telecommunication policy of the government which is pushing toward privatization, and to build an agenda for non-market use of the electronic communications technology.”

Kang describes the formation of the Solidarity of Progressive Network Group (SPNG) in 1995. He wrote, “It is now estimated that the South Korean online community is populated by as many as 1.5 million users.” (p. 117) In the early 1990s, commercial networks like Chollian, Hitel, and Nownuri were main providers of internet access in South Korea. Those interested in developing the democratic potential of the internet were active in these networks in newsgroups devoted to specific topics or on internet mailing lists. Online communities developed and the experience was one that trained a generation in participatory online activity. Describing the experience of being online in one of these communities in the early 1990s, a netizen writing on Usenet explains:<sup>8</sup>

There was Hitel, Chollian, Nownuri, three major texts based online services in Korea. I think they boomed in early 90's and withered drastically as the Internet explosion occurred in mid and late 90's.

They provided the BBS, file up/download, chatting and

community services.

Their community services were very strong. I also joined some such groups and learned a lot. Community members formed a kind of connection through casual meeting, online chatting, study-groups and etc. The now influential Red Devils ... was at first started as one of such communities. It introduced new forms of encounters among the people with the same interest. They also had some discussion space, similar to this news group and people expressed their ideas ....

## B – How the Net Spread

When the Asian economic crisis hit South Korea in 1997, the Korean government met the crisis partially with a commitment to develop the infrastructure for high speed access. It gave support for the creation of businesses to provide internet access and to provide training to use computers and the internet. Describing the program of the South Korean government, Kim, Moon and Yang write:<sup>9</sup>

It invested more than 0.25% of the GDP to build a high-speed backbone and is also providing more than 0.2% of GDP in soft loans to operators from 1999 to 2005.

Along with the financial and business investment, the government supported training programs in internet literacy. One such program was called the “Ten Million People Internet Education” project to provide computer and internet skills to 10 million people by 2002. Unemployed South Korean housewives were particularly targeted and reports indicate that 1 million were provided with courses as part of the 4.1 million people who participated in government initiated programs. Primary and secondary schools were also provided with high speed internet access. internet cafes with high speed access called PC-bangs spread widely, offering another form of cheap internet access.<sup>10</sup>

## C – Netizen Events

Several developments in the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century demonstrate the impact the spread of the internet has had on South Korean society. A key result of widespread access to the internet in South Korea has been the emergence of the netizen and of examples of

netizen democracy.

### 1) The Red Devils and World Cup Cheering

The Red Devils is a fan club for the South Korean national soccer team. It developed as an online community. The club became the main soccer cheering squad. Its original name had been “Great Hankuk Supporters Club” when it was created in 1997. It was renamed “Red Devils” after an online e-mail process “collecting public views through e-mail bulletins.”<sup>11</sup>

The 2002 Soccer World Cup was held in South Korea and Japan. The Red Devils utilized the internet for the World Cup cheering. Describing how the internet was utilized, Yong-Cho Ha and Sangbae Kim write:<sup>12</sup>

(T)he Web was a thrilling channel for many soccer fans across the country to satisfy their craving for information on the Cup. The 2002 World Cup provided Koreans with an opportunity to facilitate the dynamic exchange of information on the Web. In particular, the existence of the high-speed Internet encouraged the dynamic exchange of information about World Cup matches, players and rules. The Internet, which has become an essential part of everyday life for the majority of Koreans, helped raise public awareness about soccer and prompted millions of people to participate in outdoor cheering campaigns.

Major portal sites were flooded with postings on thousands of online bulletin boards. Online users scoured the Web to absorb detailed real-time match reports, player-by-player descriptions, disputes about poor officiating and other soccer information. “Instant Messenger” also played a role in spreading real-time news and lively stories to millions of people. Korea has more than 10 million instant messenger users and many of them exchanged views and feelings about World Cup matches though the new Internet communications tool.

During the World Cup games held in June 2002, crowds of people gathered in the streets in South Korea, not only in Seoul. The Red Devils organized cheering and celebrating by 24 million people.<sup>13</sup> Sociologist

Sang-Jin Han describes how the Red Devils carefully planned for the massive cheering “through on-line discussions about the way of cheering, costumes, roosters’ songs and slogans, and so on.” The Red Devils functions democratically and has online and off-line activities. “Anyone who loves soccer can be a member of the Red Devils,” Sang-Jin Han explains, by going to the website, logging on, and filling out their form. The website is <http://reddevil.or.kr>. When the club started they had 200 members. During the world cup events, they had a membership of 200,000.<sup>14</sup>

The massive street celebrating during the soccer games has been compared in importance with the victory of the June 1987 defeat of the military government in South Korea.

To understand this assessment, it is helpful to look at an article written during the event by Byung-chan Gwak, the culture desk editor of *Hankyoreh*, a South Korean newspaper. I will quote at length from this article as it provides a feeling for the unexpected but significant impact that the World Cup event in 2002 had on Korean society. Byung-chan Gwak writes:<sup>15</sup>

To be honest with you, I was annoyed by the critics who compared the cheering street gatherings in front of the City Hall in June 2002 to the democratic uprising in June 1987. Much to my shame I criticized the foolish nature of sports nationalism ... and even encouraged others to be wary of the sly character of commercialism .... However as time passed, I began to wonder whether I wasn't being elitist and authoritarian .... I was blind to a changed environment and to a changed sensibility. I assumed that people were running around because of blind nationalism and commercialism.

However, this was not a group that was mobilized by anybody nor a group that anyone could mobilize .... On June 25, I wandered around Gwanghwamoon and in front of City Hall trying to get an understanding of the future leaders of this country. Otherwise, my clever brain told me, I would end up an old cynic confined to my own memories. After spending a long day wandering amongst young people, I finally understood. Although trying to understand their passion through this

experience was like a Newtonian scientist trying to understand the theory of relativism, I understood.

What we had experienced at that moment was the experience of becoming a 'Great One.' In a history with its ups and downs, we had more than our share of becoming this 'Great One' The 4.19 Revolution [1960] and 6.10 Struggle [1987] are two examples. So are the 4.3 Cheju Massacre [1948] and the 5.18 Democracy Movement [1980]. The gold collection drive during the IMF financial bailout was part of this effort too – trying to find a ray of hope in a cloud of despair ....

The flood of supporters in June 2002, however, was no longer about finding hope. It was about young people dreaming dreams that soared higher and further than those of the past generations. Unlike the older generation, the younger generation is ready to meet the world with open hearts. They have the imagination to reinvent it and the flexibility to come together and then separate as the occasion calls for it. The whole world was rapt with attention on 'Dae-han Min-gook (Great Korea)' not just because of our soccer ability but because of this young generations's passion and creativity. Does this mean that their dreams have come true? No. Does this mean that all this was nothing more than one summer night's feast? No. These dreams will continue to flourish and the responsibility for making sure that they do belongs to the older generation, which has had the experience of becoming a Great One through such events as the 6.10 or 4.19 ....

Not only did the cheering crowds joyously celebrate the Korean team victories in the World Cup events, they also helped clean the streets when the event was over. Another aspect of the Red Devils achievement was to remove the stigma attached to the color red. Previously, avoiding the color red was a form of anti-communism in South Korea. The Red Devils' organization of the street cheering is a demonstration of how communication among netizens that the internet makes possible had a significant impact on the whole of South Korean society as the celebration unfolded off-line.

Recognizing the importance of analyzing this experience to the

people of Korea, a symposium was held on July 3, 2002 by the Korean Association of Sociological Theory shortly after the World Cup events.<sup>16</sup> The title of the symposium was “World Cup and New Community Culture.” The theme was “Understanding and Interpreting the Dynamics of People (National People) Shown at the 2002 World Cup.” Sang-Jin Han described the dynamics of the culture that emerged from the World Cup events. Cho Han Hae-joang writes (p. 13):

What Han found during the collective gathering was a new community that possessed values of open-mindedness and diversity, of co-existence and respect for others . . . . Impressed by the cheering crowds, Han Sang-jin suggested looking for a point where the values of individualism and collectivism can synergize rather than collide. He wrote ‘If there is a strong desire for individual self-expression and spontaneity blooming in the on-line space on one hand, there must be a strong sense of cohesion and desire for unity in the socio-cultural reality on the other. The new community culture will be equipped with the ability to harness these two forces into a symbiotic relationship.’ In fact, at the symposium, many sociologists confessed to having been astounded at witnessing what they had considered to be impossible ‘the coming together of the generations and the coexistence of the values of collectivism and individualism.’

Influenced by the joy of the World Cup experience, the committee of Munhwa Yondae ( Citizens’ Network for Cultural Reform) organized a campaign. They sought to reclaim the streets for public purposes, and to designate July 1 as a holiday. Also they gave support to the campaign to establish a 5-day work week and one month holidays for Koreans.<sup>17</sup>

## 2) Candle-light Anti U.S. Demonstrations

On June 13, 2002, while the World Cup games were being held in South Korea and Japan, two 14 year old Korean school girls were hit and killed by a U.S. armored vehicle operated by two U.S. soldiers on a training exercise. Once the games were over, many of those who had been part of the soccer celebrating took part in protests over the deaths, demanding that those responsible be punished. In November, 2002, the



two soldiers were tried by a U.S. military court on charges of negligent homicide. The verdict acquitting them was announced on November 19, 2002. Some protests followed. Then on November 27, 2002, at 6 a.m., a netizen reporter with the logon name of Ang.Ma posted a message online on the *OhmyNews* website saying he would come out with a candle to protest the acquittal of the soldiers. On Saturday, November 30, four days later, there were evening rallies in 17 cities in South Korea including thousands of people participating in a candlelight protest in Seoul. They demanded a retrial of the soldiers and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. In subsequent weeks, candlelight demonstrations spread and grew in size. Protesters also demanded that the Status of Forces Agreement Treaty (SOFA) between the U.S. and South Korea be amended to give the Korean government more control over the activities of the U.S. troops in Korea.<sup>18</sup>

The impact of the “candlelight vigils that started from one netizen’s [online -ed] suggestion last month,” is described in a newspaper account:<sup>19</sup>

In Gwanghwamun, Seoul, the candles, lit one by one, form a sea. Tonight, on the 28<sup>th</sup>, without exception, the candles have gathered. About 1200 citizens gathered in the ‘Open Citizen’s Court’ beside the U.S. embassy in Gwanghwamun sway their bodies to the tunes of ‘Arirang’ which also played during the World Cup soccer matches last June. Middle-school student Kim Hee-yun says, ‘Every Saturday, I come here. There is something that attracts me to this place.’

Opposition to SOFA and to the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea continued to grow. The most well known outcome of this movement and the event most often cited as a result of the power of Korean netizens, is the election of Roh Moo-Hyun as President of South Korea on December 19, 2002.<sup>20</sup> The internet and netizens played a critical role in Roh’s election.

An article in a women’s newspaper on Dec 7, 2002, refers to the importance of netizens in South Korea:<sup>21</sup>

The netizens of the Korean Internet powerhouse are magnificent. They are reviving the youth culture of the Red Devils and the myth of the World Cup to create a social movement to

revise SOFA.

### 3) Korean Netizens and the Election of President Roh

Of the candidates potentially running for the Presidency in South Korea in 2002, Roh Moo-Hyun had been considered the underdog and least likely to win. He had made a reputation for himself by his willingness to run for offices where he was unlikely to win, but where his candidacy might help to reduce regional antagonisms.<sup>22</sup> Another basis for Roh's popularity was his campaign plank advocating citizen participation in government. Roh had opened an internet site in August 1999 and his site was one of the successful candidate websites at the time. In the April 2000 election, Roh ran for a seat to represent Pusan in the National Assembly as a means of continuing his struggle against regional hostilities.

Though he lost that election, thousands of people were drawn to Roh's website and the discussions that followed the failed election effort. Through these online discussions, the idea was raised of starting an online fan club for Roh. The Nosamo Roho fan club was started by Jeong Ki Lee (User ID: Old Fox) on April 15, 2000.<sup>23</sup> Nosamo also transliterated as 'Rohsamo,' stands for 'those who love Roh.'

The fan club had members both internationally and locally with online and offline activities organized among the participants. When Nosamo was created, a goal of the organization was a more participatory democracy. Sang-Jin Han, reports that using the internet, the online newspaper *OhmyNews*, broadcast "live the inaugural meeting of the club held in Daejeon on June 6, 2000 through the Internet."<sup>24</sup>

In Spring 2002, the Millennium Democracy Party (MDO) held the first primary election for the selection of a presidential candidate in the history of South Korea. Nosamo waged an active primary campaign. "In cyberspace, they sent out a lot of writings in favor of Roh and Rosamo to other sites and placed favorable article on their home pages." (p. 9) The internet activity of the fan club made it possible for Roh to win the MDP nomination. Nevertheless, he was still considered a long shot to win the Presidency.

Early in the 2002 campaign, the conservative press attacked Roh. In response, more and more of the public turned to the internet to discuss

and consider the responses to these attacks. Analyzing how these attacks were successfully countered via online discussion and debate, Yun Young-Min writes, the “political influences” in discussion boards “comes from logic, and only logic can survive cyber-debate. This is one of the substantial changes that the internet has brought about in the realm of politics in South Korea.”<sup>25</sup> Also Yun documents that as the attacks increased, so did the number of visits recorded by Roh’s websites and other websites supporting the Roh candidacy. (pp. 148-149) In a table comparing visits to websites of the two main candidates, Yun documents a significantly greater number of visits to the Roh website and Roh related websites as opposed to the websites of his opposing candidate. (p. 151)

Along with the Roh websites, the online newspaper *OhmyNews* was helpful to the Roh candidacy. *OhmyNews* developed a form of participatory citizen journalism. The online newspaper helped Roh counter the criticism of the conservative press. Roh gave his first interview to *OhmyNews* after winning the presidency.

The night before the election, a main supporter of Roh, Chung Mong-joon who had formed a coalition with Roh for the election, withdrew his support. That night, netizens posted on various websites and conducted an online campaign to discuss what had happened and what Roh’s supporters had to do to repair the damage this late defection did to the campaign. An article in the *Korea Times*<sup>26</sup> describes how the online discussion helped to save Roh’s candidacy:

The free-for-all Internet campaign also helped Roh when he lost the support of Chung Mong-joon just a day before the poll. Unlike other conventional media such as newspapers and televisions, many Internet websites gave unbiased views on the political squabble between Roh and Chung, helping voters to form their reaction .... The Internet is now the liveliest forum for political debate in Korea, the world leader in broadband Internet patronized by sophisticated Internet users ....

The *Korea Times* reporter describes the activity of netizens to get out the vote on election day in support of Roh:

As of 3 p.m. on voting day, the turnout stood at 54.3 percent, compared with 62.3 percent at the same time during the

presidential election in 1997. Because a low turnout was considered likely fatal for Roh – the young often skip voting – many Internet users posted online messages to Internet chatting rooms, online communities and instant messaging services imploring their colleagues to get to the voting booth. The messages spread by the tens of thousands, playing a key role in Roh’s victory.<sup>27</sup>

During Roh’s election campaign, netizens turned to the internet to discuss and express their views, views which otherwise would have been buried. “The advent of the internet can bring, by accumulating and reaching critical mass in cyberspace, a political result that anyone could hardly predict. No longer is public opinion the opinion of the press .... In fact the press lost authority by their criticisms,” Yun concludes.<sup>28</sup>

Because of the internet, Kim Yong-Ho observes, there is the “shift from party politics to citizen politics.”<sup>29</sup> The attitude of the two main candidates toward the internet proved to be a critical factor determining the outcome of the election. Roh’s main opponent approached the internet as a “new technology.” For Roh and his supporters, however, the internet became “an instrument to change the framework and practice of politics.” (p. 235) “Certainly, politics in Korea is no longer a monopoly of parties and politicians,” conclude Yong-Chool Ha and Sangbae Kim.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4) High School Students Protest Hair Length Restrictions

An example of how the younger generation in South Korea found the internet helpful was the struggle of high school students to oppose hair length restrictions set by the government and enforced by their schools. Teachers in some South Korean schools cut the hair of students who have hair longer than the school regulations permit. Such involuntary hair cutting, students explained, was not only humiliating, but also can leave them with a hair cut that is unseemly. Considering the many pressures that high school students in South Korea are under, an editorial in the *Korea Times*,<sup>31</sup> explains:

Most egregious of all are their hairstyles – buzz cuts for boys and bob cuts or ponytails for girls .... At some schools, teachers still make narrow, bushy expressways on the crowns

of boys' heads with hair clippers, and lay bare girls' ears with scissors. They say these are for the proper guidance of students by preventing them from frequenting adult-only places and focusing on only studies. But this is nothing but violence and abuse.

High school students opposed these restrictions and practices with a website to discuss the problem and how to organize their protests. Over 70,000 people signed an online petition protesting the hair length restrictions and practices. Also there were demonstrations organized online against these practices. The demonstrations were met with a significant show of force by police and from high school teachers.

## 5) Government Online Forums

Netizen activities in South Korea had an effect on official government structures. Government officials are under pressure to utilize the forms that are being developed online. For example, the online website for the President of Korea had a netizen section. Netizens could log on and post their problems and complaints. These could then be viewed by anyone else who logged onto the website. The open forum section of the website was left relatively free of government restrictions or interference for a while.

Uhm and Haugue<sup>32</sup> provide a description of the participatory sections of the President's website. They write:

Behind the outwardly chaotic Open Forum of the BBS on the Presidential Website, a team works quietly, browsing all the messages received through the BBS and other channels for user participation, and sorting them in terms of the need for specific attention and governmental follow-ups. One of the main jobs the team conducts is to transfer each of the messages to the relevant section of the Presidential Office, or to the ministry in charge of the policy area concerned. The other main job is to make a daily report to the President, based on the issues not necessarily ripe for media attention but showing signs of potential that could push the government into difficulties. These interactive channels function as a dynamic store of political issues, spanning the gamut of societal interests,

ranging from key policy issues like the amendment of education acts to essentially private matters like a boundary dispute between neighbors.

Korean government ministries similarly had websites where anyone could post a message, “even anonymously, and share them with others.” (p. 28) These websites were offered as a place where “all public opinion” can be expressed. (p. 28)

Posting to an official site is not necessarily without concern about retaliation, however. Recently, a high school student reported:

We have no channel to convey our opinions to the education authorities. If we post a petition to a Web site of a provincial education office, the message is delivered to our school and teachers give us a hard time because of it.<sup>33</sup>

There are other events which demonstrate the power of the net and the netizen in contemporary Korean politics. For example, there was the Defeat Campaign for the April 2000 election. NGO’s used the internet to wage a protest against the reelection of a number of politicians they proposed were too corrupt or incompetent to continue in office. They called this a blacklist. Several of the politicians they opposed did not get reelected.

Rather than gathering further examples, however, there is the challenge to understand the nature of the practice to extend democracy that has emerged in South Korea.

## D – The Netizen and Netizen Democracy in South Korea

One aspect identified as important for netizen democratic activity is that the netizen participation is directed toward the broader interests of the community. Byoungkwan Lee writes:<sup>34</sup>

People who use the Internet for certain purpose are called ‘Netizens’ and they may be classified in various groups according to the purpose that they pursue on the Internet. While some people simply seek specific information they need, others build their own community and play an active part in the Internet for the interest of that community. (Michael-ed) Hauben (1997) defined the term Netizen as the people who actively contribute online toward the development of the

Internet .... In particular, Usenet news groups or Internet bulletin boards are considered an ‘agora’ where the Netizens actively discuss and debate upon various issues .... In this manner, a variety of agenda are formed on the ‘agora’ and in their activity there, a Netizen can act as ‘a citizen who uses the Internet as a way of participating in political society’ ....

Another component of democratic practice is to participate in discussion and debate. Discussing an issue with others who have a variety of views is a process that can help one to think through an issue and develop a thoughtful and common understanding of a problem. The interactive nature of the online experience allows for a give and take that helps netizens dynamically develop or change their opinions and ideas. Several Korean researchers describe the benefit of online discussion. For example, Jongwoo Han writes:<sup>35</sup>

Another aspect of online is that participating in a discussion with others with a variety of viewpoints makes it possible to develop a broader and more all sided understanding of issues.

Jinbong Choi, offers a similar observation:<sup>36</sup>

By showing various perspectives of an issue the public can have a chance to acquire more information and understand the issue more deeply.

Byoungkwan Lee observes how the net provides “a public space where people have the opportunity to express their own opinions and debate on a certain issue.”<sup>37</sup> Comparing the experience online with the passive experience of the user of other media, Lee notes, “Further the role of the internet as a public space seems to be more dynamic and practical than that of traditional media such as television, newspapers, and magazines because of its own distinct characteristics, namely, interactivity.” (pp. 58-59)

An important function of the internet is to facilitate netizens’ thinking about and considering public issues and questions. Byoungkwan Lee explains some of how this occurs:

Various opinions about public issues, for instance, are posted on the Internet bulletin boards or the Usenet newsgroups by Netizens, and the opinions then form an agenda in which other Netizens can perceive the salient issues. As such it is assumed

that not only does the Internet function as the public space, but it can also function as a medium for forming Internet users' opinions.<sup>38</sup>

Through their discussion and participation, netizens are able to have an impact on public affairs. Hyug Baeg Im argues that the internet even makes it possible for Korean netizens to provide a check on government activity.<sup>39</sup>

[The] Internet can deliver more and diverse information to citizens faster in speed and cheaper in cost, disclose information about politicians in cyber space that works 24 hours, transmit quickly the demands of people to their representatives through two-way cyber communication, and enable politicians to respond to people's demands in their policy making and legislation in a speedy manner. In addition, netizens can make use of Internet as collective action place of monitoring, pressuring and protesting that works 24 hours and can establish the system of constant political accountability.

The impact the internet is having on the younger generations of Korean society has impressed several researchers. For example, Jongwoo Han observes that younger netizens are more quickly able to participate in political affairs than was previously possible. Jongwoo Han writes:<sup>40</sup>

Due to its effectiveness as a communications channel, the Internet shortens the time in which social issues become part of the national agenda, especially among populations previously excluded from the national discourse. The time needed for one generation to learn from the previous one is also shortened. In newly created Internet cyberspace, the young generation, which did not use to factor in major social and political discourses in Korean society, is becoming a major player. The political orientation of the offline 386 generation was smoothly handed on to the 2030 apolitical young generation through the 2002 World Cup and candle light anti-U.S. demonstrations.

(Note: The 386 generation refers to those who were university students in the 1980s. Also they were the first generation of Korean students who had access to computers for their personal use. The 2030 generation



refers to students currently in their 20's and 30's and who have grown up with the internet.)

Jongwoo Han argues that online discussion has brought a needed development in Korean democracy. All can participate and communicate (pp. 16-17):

Due to the revolutionary development of information technology, the transition of power from one generation to the next will accelerate, thus maximizing the dynamics of changes in political systems. The duration of the overall learning and education process between generations will also be shortened. Especially, the Netizen transcends the boundaries of age, job, gender and education as long as participants share individual inclinations on topics.

Explaining how the participatory process works, Kim, Moon, and Yang provide an example from Nosamo's experience:<sup>41</sup>

Their internal discussion making process was a microcosm of participatory democracy in practice. All members voted on a decision following open deliberations in forums for a given period of time. Opinions were offered in this process in order to effect changes to the decision on which people were to vote.

Such online discussion and decision making was demonstrated when members of Roh's fan club disagreed with his decision to send South Korean troops to Iraq in support of the U.S. invasion. Even though they were members of a fan club, they did not feel obligated to support every action of the Roh Presidency.<sup>42</sup> The fan club members held an online discussion and vote on their website about the U.S. war in Iraq. They issued a public statement opposing the decision to send South Korean troops to Iraq.

Several researchers are endeavoring to investigate the netizens phenomenon and the conscious identity that is being developed. They believe that the internet is providing an important way to train future citizens. For example, Sang-Jin Han writes:<sup>43</sup>

I argue that a post-traditional and hence post-Confusian attitude is emerging quite visible particularly among younger generations who use the Internet, not simply as an instrument of self-interest, but as a public sphere where netizens freely meet

and discuss matters critically.

In his research, Sang-Jin Han is interested in the impact the internet is having on the democratic development of South Korean society. He argues that the online experience provides an alternative experience to the authoritarian and hierarchical institutions and practices that are prevalent in society offline. The online experience in itself is a form of a laboratory for democracy. In the process of participating in the democratic processes online, a new identity is forged. One begins to experience the identity of oneself as a participant, not observer. Contributions online are appreciated or the subject of controversy. This is a different world than the one the ordinary person experiences offline and one that is a more dynamic and creative experience. Sang-Jin Han refers to research by Sunny Yoon about the impact of the internet on South Korean youth. Yoon writes:<sup>44</sup>

In short, the Korean new generation experiences an alternative identity in cyberspace that they have never achieved in real life. The hierarchical system of ordinary social reality turns up side down as soon as Korean students enter cyberspace. In interviews, most students claim that the Internet opened a new world and new excitement. This is not only because the Internet has exciting information, but also because it provides them with a new experience and an alternative hierarchical. It is something of an experience of deconstructing power in reality, especially in Korean society, which is strongly hierarchical and repressive for young students.

## IV – Conclusion

In this case study I have explored several aspects of the online experience that generally are given little attention. South Korean netizens utilize the internet forums to let each other know of a problem or event, to discuss problems and to explore how to find solutions. This form of activity is a critical part of a democratic process. It involves the participant not in carrying out someone else's solution to a problem, but in the effort to frame the nature of the problem and to understand its essence.

The internet does not require that one belong to a particular

institution. A netizen can express his or her opinion, gather the facts that are available, and hear and discuss the facts gathered and opinions offered by others. Not only is the internet a laboratory for democracy, but the scale of participation and contributions is unprecedented. Online discussion makes it possible for netizens to become active individual and group actors in social and public affairs. The internet makes it possible for netizens to speak out independently of institutions or officials.

The netizen is able to participate in an experience that reminds one of the role that the citizen of ancient Athens or the citizen just after the French Revolution could play in society. The experience of such participation is a training ground in which people learn the skills and challenges through the process. Considering the potential of the internet, the Swedish researcher Ylva Johansson refers to the potential of technology as contributing to political participation and the concept of citizenship on a higher societal level.<sup>45</sup>

Describing this important benefit of being online, Hauben writes:<sup>46</sup>  
For the people of the world, the Net provides a powerful means for peaceful assembly. Peaceful assembly allows people to take control of their lives, rather than that control being in the hands of others.

This case study of Korean netizens provides a beginning investigation into the impact that widespread broadband access can bring to society.<sup>47</sup> The practices of South Korean netizens to extend democracy is prologue to the changes that netizenship can bring to the world, to the rise of netizen democracy as a qualitative advance over the former concept of the citizen and democracy.

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## **Appendix A**

### **The Early Development of Computer Networking in Korea**

South Korea's first networking system was the connection of two computers on May 15, 1982, one at the Department of Computer Science, at Seoul National University and the other to a computer at the Korean Institute of Electronics Technology (KIET) in Gumi (presently ETRI) via a 1200 bps leased line. In January 1983, a computer at KAIST (Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology) connected to the other two computers. These three computers at different networking sites used TCP/IP to connect. This is the communication protocol which makes it

possible to have an internet. This early Korean computer network was called System Development Network (SDN).\*

In August 1983, the Korean SND was connected to the mcvox computer in the Netherlands using the Unix networking program UUCP (Unix-to-Unix Copy). And in October 1983 the Korean network was connected to a site in the U.S. (HP Labs).

A more formal connection to the U.S. government-sponsored network CSNET was made in December 1984. In 1990, the Korean network joined the U.S. part of the internet.

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\* See "A Brief History of the Korean Internet," 4.1.05

<https://sites.google.com/site/koreainternethistory/publication/brief-history-korea-english>

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>See for example, Michael Hauben, Preface, in Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, IEEE Computer Society Press, 1997, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Chapter 1, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>This is a concept that Michael Hauben developed in an article "What the Net Means to Me," online at:

[http://www.ais.org/~hauben/Michael\\_Hauben/Collected\\_Works/Amateur\\_Computerist/What\\_the\\_Net\\_Means\\_to\\_Me.txt](http://www.ais.org/~hauben/Michael_Hauben/Collected_Works/Amateur_Computerist/What_the_Net_Means_to_Me.txt)

<sup>4</sup>"Where and When was Democracy Invented," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41(4), 1999, pp. 660-690. Online at:

[http://pics3441.upmf-grenoble.fr/articles/demo/where\\_and\\_when\\_was\\_democracy\\_invented.pdf](http://pics3441.upmf-grenoble.fr/articles/demo/where_and_when_was_democracy_invented.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>A significant caveat about this case study is that computer networking and the internet were developed relatively early in South Korea. (See Appendix A) The country is a showplace for the spread of broadband internet access to a large percentage of the population. A study of the spread of the internet in South Korea is a study of an advanced situation which allows one to see into the future. This study raises the question of whether knowledge of the practices of the South Korean netizen movement can help to extend democracy elsewhere around the world.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, note 1, Chapter 12, pp. 214-221.

<sup>7</sup>Myung Koo Kang, "The Grassroots Online Movement and Changes in Korean Civil Society," *Review of Media, Information and Society* 3, 1998, pp. 107-127.

<sup>8</sup>Jongseon Shin, soc.culture.korea, April 10, 2005. Online at:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!original/soc.culture.korean/gbZORadACPQ/IxrUYb7FuE8J>

<sup>9</sup>Heekyung Hellen Kim, Jae Yun Moon and Shinkyu Yang, "Broadband Penetration and Participatory Politics: South Korea Case," *Proceedings of the 37<sup>th</sup> Hawaii*

*International Conference on System Sciences*, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Sang-Jin Han, "Confucian Tradition and the Young Generation in Korea: The Effect of Post-Traditional Global Testing," *International Symposium Dialogue among Youth in East Asia Project*, Yingjie Exchange Center of Peking University, delivered January 14, 2004.

<sup>12</sup>Yong-Chool Ha and Sangbae Kim, "The Internet Revolution and Korea: A Socio-cultural Interpretation," *International Conference on Re-Booting the Miracle? Asia and the Internet Revolution in the Age of International Indeterminacy*, Seoul, South Korea, December 4, 2002. Online at:

<http://www.sangkim.net/it&korea.pdf>

<sup>13</sup>See Hyug Baeg Im, *From Democratic Consolidation and Democratic Governance: 21st Century South Korean Democracy in Comparative Perspective*, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, note 11, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup>Translated and quoted in Hae-joang Cho Han, "Beyond the FIFA World Cup: An Ethnography of the 'Local' in South Korea around the 2002 World Cup," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>18</sup>See for example, Na Jeong-ju, "Anti-U.S. Protests Held Nationwide Over Acquittals of GIs," *Korea Times*, November 27, 2002 and Na Jeong-ju, "Entertainers, Priests Join Anti-U.S. Protests," *Korea Times* December 3, 2002

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, note 15, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup>Kim Hyong-eok, "The Two Koreas: A Chance to Revive," *Korea Times*, December 27, 2002. This article attributes Roh's election to the euphoria generated by the World Cup Soccer Games, the hostility to the U.S. generated by the deaths of the two Korean school girls and the inadequacy of the U.S. response.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, note 15, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup>Yun Young-Min, "An Analysis of Cyber-Electioneering Focusing on the 2002 Presidential Election in Korea," *Korea Journal*, Autumn 2003, pp. 141-164.

<sup>23</sup>Jongwoo Han. "Internet, Social Capital, and Democracy in the Information Age: Korea's Defeat Movement, the Red Devils, Candle Light Anti-U.S. Demonstration, and Presidential Election during 2000-2002," p. 15, no longer online. See also, Han Jongwoo, *Networked Information Technologies, Elections, and Politics: Korea and the United States*, Lanham, Md, Lexington Books, 2012, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, note 11, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, note 22, p. 157.

<sup>26</sup>Kim Deok-hyun, "Roh's Online Supporters Behind Victory," *Korea Times*, December 23, 2002.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, note 22, p. 143.

<sup>29</sup>Kim Yong-Ho, "Political Significance of the 2002 Presidential Election Outcome and Political Prospects for the Roh Administration," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 43, No.2, 2003, p. 233.

<sup>30</sup>Yong-Chool Ha and Sangbae Kim, "The Internet Revolution and Korea: A Socio-cultural Interpretation," Paper delivered Dec 4, 2005 at the conference *Re-Booting the Miracle? Asia and the Internet Revolution in the Age of International Indeterminacy*, Seoul, South Korea, December 4-5, 2005, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup>"No Forced Haircut, Please," *Korea Times*, May 5, 2005.

<sup>32</sup>Seung-Yong Uhm and Rod Hague, "Electronic Governance, Political Participation and Virtual Community: Korea and U.K. Compared in Political Context," paper presented at *European Consortium for Political Research, Joint Workshops*, workshop on "Electronic Democracy: Mobilisation, Organisation and Participation via new ICTs," Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Grenoble, France, 6-11 April 2001, p. 24.

<sup>33</sup>Bae Keun-min, "High School Students Stand Up for Rights," *Korea Times*, May 10, 2005.

<sup>34</sup>Byoungkwan Lee, Karen M. Lancendorfer and Ki Jung Lee, "Agenda-Setting and the Internet: the Intermedia Influence of Internet Bulletin Boards on Newspaper Coverage of the 2000 General Election in South Korea," *Asian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 15, No 1, 2005, p. 58.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, note 23, 17.

<sup>36</sup>Jinbong Choi, "Public Journalism in Cyberspace: A Korean Case Study," *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 2, No 3, 2003, p. 27. Online at:

<http://lass.purduecal.edu/cca/gmj/fa03/graduatefa03/gmj-fa03-choi.htm>.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, note 34, pp. 58-59.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>Hyug Baeg Im, "Democratic Consolidation and Democratic Governance: 21<sup>st</sup> Century South Korean Democracy in Comparative Perspective," *Sixth Forum on Reinventing Government*, Seoul, South Korea, May 24-27, 2005.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, note 23, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, note 9.

<sup>42</sup>An article in the *Korea Times* on March 24, 2003, quotes a member of the fan club: "When we say we love Roh Moo-hyun, we do not mean Roh is always right. We simply mean that we love his ideas for new politics and a democracy in which the people are the real owners of the country." Byun Duk-kun, "'Nosamo' Opposes Assistance to Iraq War."

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, note 11, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup>Sunny Yoon, "Internet Discourse and the Habitus of Korea's New Generation," *Culture, Technology, Communication*, edited by Charles Ess with Fay Sudweeks, State University of New York, 2001, p. 255.

<sup>45</sup>Ylva Johansson, "Civic Engagement in Change – The Role of the Internet," *European Consortium for Political Research*, Edinburgh, U.K., 2003.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, note 1, see for example Chapter 18, "The Computer as a Democratizer," pp. 315- 320.

<sup>47</sup>Hauben quotes Steve Welch who recognized the importance of all having access (*Ibid.*, p. 27): "If we can get to the point where anyone who gets out of high school has used computers to communicate on the Net or a reasonable facsimile or successor to it, then we as a society will benefit in ways not currently understandable. When access

to information is as ubiquitous as access to the phone system, all Hell will break loose. Bet on it.”

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[Editor’s Note: The following is an edited version of a talk given in Copenhagen on Oct 17, 2008 at the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers.]

## **Candlelight 2008 and the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ‘The Net and Netizens’ Netizen Journalism as Watchdog Journalism**

by Ronda Hauben

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In his pioneering research about the impact of the internet, Michael Hauben recognized that the participatory nature of the Net made possible a new form of citizenship, a non geographic form. He called people who were developing this new form of citizenship, netizens.<sup>1</sup>

What would be the impact of this new phenomenon? Hauben investigated several areas where the impact of this phenomenon was particularly striking. One of these areas was journalism. What impact would this new form of non geographic citizenship have on news media? Would netizens make possible a new form of journalism? The net “gives the power of the reporter to the Netizen” Hauben wrote.<sup>2</sup>

This article explores the nature of what this power is. It considers the long desired goal for the press to act as a watchdog to challenge the abuse of power. During the more than 100 days of protest from May through August 2008 netizens in South Korea acted to develop such a press. In this article the events of Candlelight 2008, particularly the

events of June 11, are examined to consider what can be learned from the experience of Candlelight 2008.

The year 2008 also marked the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the article “The Net and Netizens” by Michael Hauben on the internet in the summer of 1993.<sup>3</sup> Hauben posted this article in four parts because it was fairly long. It was based on pioneering research he had done about the impact of the internet by asking online users questions about how they were using the net in that period of the early 1990s. Also, at the time there was some use of the term net.citizen on the net. Hauben contracted the term net.citizen into the term ‘netizen’. Based on the responses he received, Hauben put together an analysis defining a new conceptual phenomenon he called the netizen.

His article summarizing this research was spread around the Net by the Usenet software network and by people forwarding it to each other via e-mail. People embraced the concept of netizen to describe the social and political phenomenon that Michael had identified.<sup>4</sup> Netizen is not a passive identity. Rather a netizen is an active participant in the affairs of the net and ultimately of the world. Identifying as a netizen has become an identity people online have embraced. They consider themselves to be netizens.

In a 2006 book by Mark Poster, netizen was described as a political concept.<sup>5</sup> The impression is given that the concept showed up on the net more or less spontaneously. This is not accurate. Before Hauben’s work, the word netizen was rarely if ever used. After the wide online circulation of his article, the use of the concept netizen became increasingly common. It was a process of initial online research, of summarizing the research, of analyzing it, and then putting the research back online and people embracing it. This was the process by which the foundation for the concept of netizen was established.

The early 1990s was also a time when the privatization of the internet was being actively promoted by commercial interests. Spreading the consciousness of oneself as a netizen became part of the fight defending the public essence of the net from the growing power of commercial interests over the affairs of the internet. An understanding of the origin and development of the concept of netizen has in various ways been obscured by those forces who wanted to promote the

commercial domination of the internet.

In “The Net and Netizens,” Hauben wrote that the net represents a significant new development. “We are seeing a revitalization of society,” he explained. “The frameworks are being redesigned from the bottom up. A new, more democratic world is becoming possible.” This new world had a number of characteristics that he outlined. He described a situation where “the old model of distribution of information from the central Network Broadcasting Company is being questioned and challenged. The top-down model of information being distributed by a few for mass consumption is no longer the only news.”<sup>6</sup>

Hauben observed, “people now have the ability to broadcast their observations or questions around the world and have other people respond.”

The computer networks, he wrote, “form a new grassroots connection that allows excluded sections of society to have a voice. This new medium is unprecedented. Previous grassroots media have existed for much smaller groups of people ....”

The net, Hauben argued, was providing netizens with the ability to create the content and to set the agenda for what is to be discussed. Thus, netizens had the power to not only determine the content for discussion forums but also to design the forms that online discussions take.

Hauben wrote elsewhere that in its simplest form the power of netizens to determine the form and content of online discussion characterizes democracy, making the net and netizens a significant model for a democratic society. He challenged the claim that elections are the essence of democracy, since elections merely allow citizens to vote on candidates once every few years. Democracy, Hauben argued, requires the active participation of the populace and it is a process where their discussion and debate can have some effect on the decisions made by government. That is what Hauben proposed to be a more appropriate model of democracy.

Another one of the earliest articles Hauben circulated online was about James Mill, the father of John Stuart Mill. In 1825, James Mill wrote an Encyclopedia article about the Freedom of the Press. Mill wrote that government officials are likely to be corrupt. These officials

are put in a situation where they have power. Therefore a means is needed to monitor and contain their use of this power. Mill suggested society needs a press that functions as a watchdog to oversee the use of power by government officials. The net, Hauben wrote, makes such a watchdog possible.

“The Net and Netizens” was first posted online in 1993. The conceptual understanding it proposed at that time in the early 1990s was something new. The question to be raised is: How accurate was Hauben’s assessment of the potential of the net and of the netizen to make a more democratic world possible?

In order to answer this question, it is helpful to look at recent political developments in South Korea. Netizens in South Korea have been at the forefront of the struggle to explore the potential of the internet and the netizens to create a more democratic society.

In 2003, an article in the *Financial Times* reported that the new South Korean President had been elected by netizens. It described the election of 2002. The actions of netizens during this election made it possible for the president to be someone from outside the political establishment. Roh Moo-hyun was elected for a five year term as the President of South Korea.<sup>7</sup> Roh had run on a platform supporting participatory democracy.

In 2004, the National Assembly tried to impeach him and the netizens took up the fight against the attempted impeachment. One of the means of fighting for democracy in South Korea is candlelight demonstrations. An activist in South Korea explained that one of the



Candlegirl and Her Army (Nanum Munhwa)

sources of inspiration for candlelight demonstrations in South Korea was the candlelight demonstrations in Leipzig, Germany that helped to reunite Germany in 1989.<sup>8</sup>

Again in 2008, there were candlelight demonstrations in

South Korea. This time for over 100 days. The first of these demonstrations was held on May 2, 2008.

The first candlelight demonstration on May 2 was the result of online discussion and efforts by netizens on discussion groups, which on the Korean internet are called cafes. Realizing the concern expressed in online discussion about what was happening in South Korea, middle and high school students used cell phones and fan websites to announce what became the first major candlelight demonstration of May 2008.

The demonstration was part of an expression of popular frustration with the new South Korean President Lee Myung-bak. Lee Myung-bak, a conservative candidate, had won the presidential election in December 2007. During this election, internet posts about the candidates by netizens were subjected to censorship, with many of the posts being removed on the order of the government, and over 1000 netizens receiving summonses to report to police stations in South Korea to be penalized for their post. This was part of censorship of online activity by netizens trying to participate in the 2007 election campaign carried out by the South Korean government from June 2007-December 2007. In April 2008 shortly after he was inaugurated, Lee Myung-bak came to the U.S. and signed an agreement with George Bush. The agreement ended the former restrictions on the import of U.S. beef into South Korea. It eliminated the regulations that existed to provide precautions with regard to the danger of mad cow disease or other health concerns related to beef. Virtually all the previous restrictions were to be removed.<sup>10</sup>

Middle school and high school students felt the change in regulations on beef would add to their health concerns, along with their concern with other plans the Lee Myung-bak administration had announced to make unpopular changes in the laws in South Korea. Also there was an impeachment petition being circulated online. A number of people in South Korea felt that the new president and his proposed program would take South Korea back to its autocratic past. The candlelight demonstrations were a sign that many in South Korea saw the actions of the new president as a difficult problem for their country.

In August Oh Yeon-ho, the CEO and founder of the internet newspaper *OhmyNews* gave a talk in the U.S. about the candlelight 2008 demonstrations. *OhmyNews* which was started in 2000, as an internet

newspaper pioneered a number of new forms in its commitment to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century newspaper.<sup>11</sup>

The Korean edition of *OhmyNews* combines articles submitted by its regular staff with those submitted by volunteer correspondents from the Korean-speaking population at home and abroad. The staff fact checks the articles and then decides which will be put on the *OhmyNews* front page. The Korean edition has a regular staff. The smaller English language edition of the newspaper known as *OhmyNews International* had only a very minimal staff and its edition was mainly based on contributions of articles by people. The Korean edition of *OhmyNews* is a major newspaper in South Korea.

There's been a very proud tradition in South Korea of protest and sacrifice. In 1987, though large protests the South Korean people ended the authoritarian system which had governed their country. But only in the last 10 years had people felt that they had some minimal level of democracy. In his talk, Oh Yeon-ho explained that people had committed themselves to using the internet to try to guarantee and spread that democracy.

*OhmyNews* had played an important role in the 2008 demonstrations. One of *OhmyNews*' important contributions was to start OhmyTV. Because of OhmyTV, people around the world were able to watch the demonstrations in South Korea. Even if one does not speak Korean, one could have a good idea of what was going on in the demonstrations by watching OhmyTV which was webcast online and therefore available worldwide. At times, *OhmyNews* had 24 hour coverage. Also there were articles and photos about the candlelight demonstration. There were articles covering the Candlelight in the English edition of *OhmyNews*, some of which were translated from the Korean edition of the newspaper.

Though 'netizen' is not a Korean word, it has been adopted into the Korean language. Some online users refer to the word netizen to describe when they are active defending democracy using the internet. Netizens in South Korea took on to broadcast whatever was going on. They would use text messages sent via their cell phones or their laptops. They would discuss online what was happening.

A report on the demonstrations by France24 demonstrated this

consciousness of oneself as a netizen. The reporter interviews someone she calls a netizen with his laptop. Even when the police were using water cannons attacking the demonstrators, one could see some netizens with plastic over their laptops trying to film what was going on. People took their cameras, their cell phones and in any way they could, would broadcast on the internet what was happening. They would get broadcasts back from other people at other areas of the demonstrations. Along with the OhmyTV broadcasts, there were many other sources of broadcasts, as for example via the Korean online video portal Afreeca or via YouTube. People who were not at the demonstration would discuss what they saw and interact with the demonstrators via their computers or cell phones. As one person explained, netizens could go with their laptops to the demonstration. They could be at the demonstration and be online at the same time. So these two experiences really came together in many ways for a number of people during these demonstrations.

Some netizens emphasized that the Candlelight 2008 demonstrations were different from the prior tradition of demonstrations. In South Korea, there is a tradition of militant demonstrations in the struggle for democracy. The demonstrations in 2008, however, were festivals. There were people of all ages participating. There were men, women, and children at the demonstrations. People would bring their musical instruments. For example, in the middle of the police attacking protesters at one of the demonstrations, some people began to play their accordions. At other times, there would be singing. There would be dancing. There was debating. There was a free speech stage set up. People would line up for a chance to speak. Others would listen and react to the speakers. And the demonstrators posted their articles, photos and videos on the internet, so that they became the press. Hence they were no longer dependent on how their demonstrations were reported in the traditional media.

In order to understand what happened during Candlelight 2008, it is crucial to recognize that South Korea is advanced in terms of the internet.

South Korea is among the most advanced nations having the highest percentage of people connected with broadband access. What has

happened in South Korea presents a glimpse into the future, demonstrating what is possible when a large number of people in a country have access to high speed broadband connectivity.

If the internet can spread widely and if there's inexpensive wireless available, people can have access to the internet and to write, to share their videos, and to carry on discussions about what is happening in the world. This form of broad access can function as a watchdog over government officials. This was demonstrated at times during the demonstrations when netizens filmed or took photographs of the actions of the police. These films or photos at times were a protection for people from the arbitrary actions of the police.

A significant set of events demonstrating the power of the internet to make possible a more participatory democracy occurred during the demonstration that took place in Seoul on June 10 and continued into the early hours of June 11. A very big demonstration was planned for June 10, to celebrate the victory twenty-one years earlier of South Koreans over the military government in South Korea in June 1987. Some estimate as many as 600,000 to 700,000 people participated in the demonstration in Seoul on June 10, with over one million people participating around the country. To prepare for the demonstration, the government created a blockade of the president's house, which is called the Blue House. To keep the demonstrators from marching to the Blue House, the police put up barriers. These were shipping containers, filled with sand so they are said to have weighed 40 tons each. They put grease on them to prevent people from climbing over the blockade.



Netizens named this structure, "Myung-bak's castle." They made a wikipedia entry for this as a landmark of Seoul. They decorated the landmark with their posters.

This is a photo of what happened later, after the June 10 demonstration, from 12



midnight on June 11 until 5:30 a.m. On one side of the barrier is the crowd of people discussing what should they do about the barriers.



On the other side of the shipping containers, there are buses filled with police inside and outside guarding the President's house.

Some people brought blocks of styrofoam to the demonstration area, making it possible to create a structure to breach the shipping container barricade. After the main demonstration was over in the early morning hours of June 11, a discussion was carried out by the demonstrators debating what to do about the barrier.

Some argued that the demonstrators should go over the barricade. Others argued that this was too dangerous, especially given the candles and the inflammability of the Styrofoam and the grease on the barricades. The discussion continued for 5-1/2 hours, with people lining up on both sides of the debate. Through the discussion people decided not to go over the barricade. Instead several people with their banners went up on the barricade to show that they could have gone over it if they wanted to but that they had decided not to.

The photo presents the contrast between what is often called democracy and what is much more democratic. On one side of the barricade is the area filled with police protecting the President from communicating with the people. On the other side of the barricade were the people holding a serious discussion and deciding how to resolve a

difficult difference of opinion.

On the later side of the barricade, the people communicated with each other, demonstrating the power and generative nature of democracy. People online wrote about how important it was to them, to see that there could be a discussion where people had real differences which they could resolve. This was significant in two ways:

First, they figured out how to resolve the differences to come to a decision among all of them.

Second, they cooperatively determined how to construct a structure that would enable them to carry out their decision. In this example, the potential to generate a form and content was transferred from the online world to the demonstration area.

The discussion and decisions carried out on June 11 were by a combination of people acting as netizens and as citizens. What they did, I want to propose, represents an important achievement and serves as a fitting celebration of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication online of “The Net and Netizens.”

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#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, IEEE Computer Society, Los Alamitos, CA, 1997. There is an online version of the book at: <http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netbook>

<sup>2</sup>Michael Hauben, “The Effect of the Net on the Professional News Media,” in *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. There is an online version of the article at <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x13>

<sup>3</sup>“The Net and Netizens” is the first chapter in *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. There is an online version of this chapter at: <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x01>

<sup>4</sup>“Socially” is used here because the concept of netizen refers to having a concern for the well being of others, not only for one’s own concerns and interests.

<sup>5</sup>Mark Poster, *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*, Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup>For example, there was difficulty getting the book *Netizens* published and distributed widely.

<sup>7</sup>Ronda Hauben, “Online Grassroots Journalism and Participatory Democracy in South Korea,” in *Korea Yearbook 2007*, edited by Rudiger Frank, James E. Hoare, Patrick Kollner, and Susan Parnes, Brill, Leiden, 2008, pp. 61-82.

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Lee Tae-ho of PSPD, 18 July 2006.

<sup>9</sup>Ronda Hauben, “Netizens Censored in South Korean Presidential Election, *OhmyNews*

*International*, December 25, 2007.

[http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article\\_view.asp?no=381313&rel\\_no=1](http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?no=381313&rel_no=1)

<sup>10</sup>Ronda Hauben, "Candlelight 2008 and Behind the Scenes in the Beef Deal: the Role of the OIE in Changing the Category of U.S. Beef in South Korea," *OhmyNews International*, May 6, 2009.

[http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article\\_view.asp?no=385186&rel\\_no=1](http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?no=385186&rel_no=1)

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, note 7, pp. 64-67.

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[Editor's Note: The following was presented on May 21, 1995 at a party celebrating the graduation of Michael Hauben and some of his classmates from Columbia University.]

## **Graduation Presentation May 21, 1995**

by Michael Hauben

My graduation did not end at the May 1995 Columbia University Commencement ceremonies. I did receive my Diploma on May 17, but my graduation was not completed until May 19. On that Friday, I was interviewed about the internet by a Japanese camera crew for a television documentary to be shown on TV Tokyo. In speaking with these people the result of my four years both here at Columbia and connected to the outside world was revealed.

During the interview I described Netizens and the world-wide community which the internet and Usenet News make possible. Netizens are people who use the various computer communications networks and feel they are citizens of this net. People desire to communicate with others around the world. In order to communicate, to share information and to have a discussion, it is necessary to share a common space and to accept differences. People who connect to the internet willingly help others and work collectively to have a place which allows their personal speech and which allows the speech of others. It is in this spirit of an open forum that we are holding this party today. The internet and other communications networks are about people and are about people communicating with each other. It is this understanding and experience which I shared with the interviewers. The internet is not about computers and isolated experiences, it is a very social human experience.

I entered Columbia asking the question “Why are people, so complacent in this country?” I asked this question on my application essay in 1990 considering that people in Eastern Europe and China were fighting their governments for a better life and a better world, while here at home little seemed to be happening to combat the worsening times.

In thinking about this question, I chose the joint Philosophy/Economics major as my prospective major. My introduction to the Columbia bureaucracy came about when upon visiting campus, I discovered this major had been turned upside down, and was now based in the Economics Department rather than the Philosophy Department and was renamed Economics and Philosophy. The emphasis was: similarly shifted from classical philosophy to contemporary economics.

In arriving at Columbia and setting up my computer account, I connected to the world by using Usenet Newsgroups. My Unix account, hauben@columbia.edu, gave me access to Usenet Newsgroups which are public discussion forums that are circulated around the world. It was in discussions on these newsgroups that I developed my academic study. I was fascinated by the internet and Usenet News and wanted to find out more about this network which connected people from around the world.

It was on the internet and Usenet where I posed questions and conducted research into what other people found valuable about being on-line and how it was important in their lives.

In researching these questions during different history and literature classes, along with several independent studies, I became an active participant of the Usenet Newsgroups and mailing lists. I submitted questions and thought pieces to these forums, and people around the world responded with their opinions and thoughts. I became interested in the Net itself, and I posed questions about it online. Many people online found they shared this interest, and they connected to me and contributed their understandings of the value of the Net to their lives. Many of these private electronic mail messages and public Usenet responses were extremely thoughtful. I also raised questions about how it was possible for such a medium to develop where people were helpful to total strangers. In starting to research the history of the internet and Usenet News, students and professors who were part of that history sent me personal accounts and supporting documentation.

My papers and research about the internet and Usenet have been guided and helped by many real people around the world. When I finished my papers, I contributed back to the Net by making them publicly available and asking for comments and criticism. In addition to various responses of that sort, I also received much encouragement and support. People wrote thanking me for making my writings available. Also, I received various requests from professors and others to reprint and make my writings available to classes and other more public forums. This support was of course in addition to help and encouragement from my parents. All of this support came outside of Columbia. There were two professors in the Computer Science Department, namely Professor Unger and Professor Greenleaf, and Professor Garton from the Music Department who were helpful, but there was very little help from the university or computer science department as a whole. My connection to the outside world and online community is what has both made my research possible, and provided feedback that this research was important and valuable to others. I have mainly enjoyed the time I have spent at Columbia because of the feedback I received from other people saying they appreciated my effort, and that my writings have been useful for more than just a grade.

Identification of this value to society came slowly but surely. People sent various e-mail messages, and this was helpful, but did not feel to be lasting. These past two years have been marked by various events which have helped to solidify my understanding of the value. The word Netizen started to appear both online and in print. Papers I wrote were published in three journals. Ronda and I gave several presentations in New York City and Michigan from the book we put together. A radio station in California interviewed me last semester. And currently Ronda and I are negotiating with a publisher to publish our online book in a printed form. Lastly, professors from the Global Communications Institute in Japan have been communicating with me about my participating at a conference in Japan later this year. The interview on Friday was the culminating event which identified that this work has been recognized as important.

After four years, I feel I have answered the question with which I entered Columbia. The internet and Usenet News provides a place where

people can communicate with other people at a grassroots level to make their lives better and to attempt to make the world a better place. By connecting to others with similar interests, questions and problems, along with people with different understandings, it is now possible to try and do something about the world, and to gain some power in how one lives his or her life.

All in all, while Columbia has been a difficult place to live for the last four years, it has been an honor to be able to contribute to the world some understanding of how to make a better future.

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[Editor's Note: The following was presented on Feb. 21, 2014. The occasion was a meeting announcing the projected online publication of a second Netizen book to be a sequel to the Netizen book put online in January 1994 over 20 years ago. A hope was expressed that there will be a series of such books.]

## Is This a New Era?

by Jay Hauben

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### I – Sequel to the Netizens Book: Remembering Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society*

I want to tell a little story and ask a question.

At a meeting discussing the new book being worked on as a sequel to *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, I made an observation. This new book needs an analytical framework, a guiding idea that helps us pick what articles to put into the book and how to tie them together so the reader sees what we are trying to document and understand.

As an example of such a guiding analysis, I recalled that Lewis Henry Morgan, an American anthropologist in his 1877 book *Ancient Society*, saw human society unfolding through a number of stages. In particular he saw that human society could not enter the higher stage of civilization until the smelting of iron was invented.<sup>1</sup>

I was remembering where Morgan had written, "The production of iron was the event of events in human experience. Out of it came the

metallic hammer and anvil, the axe and the chisel, the plough with an iron point, the iron sword; in fine, the basis of civilization, which may be said to rest upon this metal. The want of iron tools arrested the progress of mankind in barbarism.”

Ronda Hauben, one of the authors working on the new book, thought that such a breakthrough is what the invention of the internet and the emergence of the netizen represents for our time. She argued that many great things have happened but the advance of democracy has been stuck. With the emergence of the net and the netizens, human society can now move ahead with greater democracy and the means to solve problems that have been unsolvable for a long time.

I thought it is the reverse. There was a great worldwide democratic movement in the second half of the twentieth century as witnessed by the 1968 outburst of demands for more democracy in Paris, New York City, Prague, Tokyo, Mexico City and in other places around the world. Then again in 1987 in South Korea, 1988 in Burma, followed in 1989 in China and then Eastern Europe. Perhaps that movement was even seen more recently with the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. The emergence of the net and the netizen is the continuation of that movement and they are its product.

Ronda said that we have an interesting disagreement. But isn't Michael Hauben's article, "Participatory Democracy From the 1960s and SDS into the Future Online"<sup>2</sup> an argument that the 1960s group in the U.S., Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), could not succeed because it lacked a communication network for the realization of full participation of the members of society in the decisions that affect their lives?

I was struck by this comparison with Michael's analysis and Morgan's and decided to read Michael's paper more carefully.

## II – SDS and Democracy's Need for a Communications Network

Michael begins his essay on SDS appearing to agree with me. He writes, "The emergence of the personal computer in the late 70s and early 80s and the longer gestation of the new forms of people-controlled communication facilitated by the internet and Usenet in the late 80s and

today are the direct descendants of 1960s.”

Michael found in the *Port Huron Statement* (1962),<sup>3</sup> that SDS saw that people were tired of the problems and were yearning for change but politics had become a spectator sport. Something new was needed, a more participatory democracy. SDS sought “the establishment of a democracy of ... participation governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; [and] the society be organized to ... provide the media for their common participation .... [C]hannels should be commonly available to relate men to knowledge and to power so that private problems ... are formulated as general issues.” It was necessary “to make the human being whole by becoming an actor in history instead of just a passive object. Not only as an end in itself, but as a means to change, the idea of participatory democracy was our central focus.”<sup>4</sup>

Michael quotes Al Haber, first SDS national officer, “The challenge ahead is to appraise and evolve radical alternatives to the inadequate society of today, and to develop an institutionalized communication system that will give perspective to our immediate actions. We will then have the groundwork for a radical student movement in America.” Haber and Tom Hayden, author of the first draft of the *Port Huron Statement*, understood SDS to be this “national communications network.”

But Michael analyzes that SDS could not be sustained. He writes, “While many people made their voices heard and produced a real effect on the world in the 1960s, lasting structural changes were not established. The real problems outlined earlier continued in the 1970s and afterwards. A national, or even international, public communications network needed to be built to keep the public’s voice out in the open.”

Today, an international, public communications network and the netizens exist. Will human society now make accelerated progress? Is Ronda correct that this is a new era?

### III – Is a Revolution in Human Communications Happening?

Maybe we can see in his writings how Michael thought about this.



I will briefly look at two of Michael's articles, "The Computer as a Democratizer"<sup>5</sup> and "The Expanding Commonwealth of Learning: Printing and the Net"<sup>6</sup> about the printing press.

In "The Computer as a Democratizer" Michael writes, "The computer connects to th[e] democratizing trend through facilitating wider communications among individual citizens to the whole body of citizens." To understand what is needed for democracy to work, he studied an essay by James Mill, "Liberty of the Press" written in 1825. From Mill, Michael saw the necessity of an uncensored press "to keep watch on ... government in order to make sure this government works in the interest of the many." Mill champions freedom of the press, "as a realistic alternative to Rousseau's general assembly, which is not possible most of the time."

But now most people can have an "information access and broadcast station in their very own home." They can participate "in debates with others around the world, search for data in various data banks, post an opinion or criticism for the whole world to see." To Michael, it is a leap not only to have access to information but also to be able to broadcast. He writes, "These systems begin to make possible some of the activity James Mill saw as necessary for democracy to function ... more oversight over government and a more informed population." Also, with the net and the netizen, a new public space is opening up which can serve as an assembly of the whole people. Michael saw that the computer and the net remove some of the obstacles to democracy. And I add make possible a more participatory democracy.

But is the emergence of the net and the netizen a revolutionary development?

To answer this question, Michael studied the history of the impact of the invention and spread of the printing press. The modern printing press was developed in the middle and late 15<sup>th</sup> Century. It quickly replaced the 2000 year old scribal culture surrounding hand copying of texts out of which it grew. Michael writes that "This scribal culture could only go so far in furthering the distribution of information and ideas. Texts existed, but were largely unavailable for use by the common people ...." The printing press and the culture that grew up with it broke through barriers which had previously limited the production of books.

“The broad distribution of presses ... ushered in the age of printing” which accelerated the Enlightenment. “The printing press facilitated the meeting of minds pursuing intellectual pursuits. The interconnection of people led to the quickening of the development of ideas and knowledge. These progenitors of the printing trade were in the forefront of the sweeping intellectual changes which the presses made possible.” Michael agrees with Elizabeth Eisenstein, the author he was reading, that the impact of the printing press was revolutionary not evolutionary.

Jumping to today Michael writes, “Just as the printing press essentially replaced the hand-copying of books in the Renaissance, people using computer networks are essentially creating a new method of production and distribution of creative and intellectual written works today.” Besides making distribution and communication more universal, cheaper and easier, netizens are building the net “from a connection of computers and computing resources into a vast resource of people and knowledge.” Their activity has opened a new kind of public space accessible to all, inviting and encouraging participation by ordinary people in all the questions and potentially all the decisions of society. This public space is separate from either commercial purposes or religious or political limitations or ideas. The net is the “poor people’s” public space and the poor people’s media.

Michael concludes that, in the age of the printing press, “we, too, are in an age of amazing changes in communications technologies, and it is important to realize how these changes are firmly based on the extension of the development of the printing press which took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.” But he also tells us that “understanding how the printing press unleashed a communications revolution provides a basis to assess if the establishment of worldwide computer communication networking is the next communication revolution.” His essay raises the question, are the net and the netizens continuing the important social revolution that the printing press had begun? The first sentence of his essay answers:

“A revolution in human communications is happening.”

Back to my question, is Ronda’s insight that we are entering into the Era of the Netizen correct? I would say it is hard to know. The net and the netizens are only recent developments. Also, we are in the middle of

something very big. It is hard to see its full meaning and impact. I do not know what has been so strongly holding democracy back so cannot really know if the net and the netizens have broken it. I think Michael's thinking was moving in that direction.

As for my thinking, I can say I hope we will see more democracy. If pressed, I would say my guess is that the net and the netizens are ushering in a new era, the Era of the Netizen.

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#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>*Ancient Society*, p. 42: "When the barbarian, advancing step by step, had discovered the native metals and learned to melt them in the crucible and to cast them in moulds; when he had alloyed native copper with tin and produced bronze; and, finally, when by a still greater effort of thought he had invented the furnace, and produced iron from the ore, nine-tenths of the battle for civilization was gained. Furnished with iron tools, capable of holding both an edge and a point, mankind were certain of attaining to civilization. The production of iron was the event of events in human experience, without a parallel, and without an equal, beside which all other inventions and discoveries were inconsiderable, or at least subordinate, Out of it came the metallic hammer and anvil, the axe and the chisel, the plough with an iron point, the iron sword; in fine, the basis of civilization, which may be said to rest upon this metal. The want of iron tools arrested the progress of mankind in barbarism. There they would have remained to the present hour, had they failed to bridge the chasm. It seems probable that the conception and the process of smelting iron ore came but once to man. It would be a singular satisfaction could it be known to what tribe and family we are indebted for this knowledge, and with it for civilization. The Semitic family were then in advance of the Aryan, and in the lead of the human race. They gave the phonetic alphabet to mankind and it seems not unlikely the knowledge of iron as well."

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/morgan-lewis/ancient-society/ch03.htm>

<sup>2</sup>Available online at: <http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/netdemocracy-60s.txt>

<sup>3</sup>SDS, "Port Huron Statement," as found in James Miller, *Democracy in the Streets*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1987, pp. 329-374.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, note 2. Quotes are from Miller pp. 333, 144, and 374.

<sup>5</sup>Available online at: <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x18>

<sup>6</sup>Available online at: <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x16>

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