Online Community

Information Technology and Social Life

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Virtual Community

- Howard Rheingold - http://www.rheingold.com/index.html
- Wrote *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* – 1993
- Also *Smart Mobs* 2003
- WELL – Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link - is one of the oldest virtual communities still online. It currently has about 4000 members.
- The WELL was started by Stewart Brand and Larry Brilliant in 1985; began as a dial-up BBS, and changed into its current form as the Internet and web technology evolved.
- http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.05/ff_well_pr.html
- "The Well is, after all, a boiled-down, concentrated essence of what people love and hate about the Net: community and intelligent discourse on the one hand, wackos, poseurs, and flamers on the other." - Hafner

Virtual Community

- Authentic community?
- WELL marriages, births, funerals,
- People in virtual communities do just about everything that people do in real life, but leave their bodies behind (?)
- Ecosystem of subcultures
- Potential importance of cyberspace to political liberties and the ways virtual communities are likely to change our experience of the real world.
- Enormous leverage to ordinary citizens at relatively little cost – intellectual, social, commercial, political.
- But, not delivered by technology itself; result of purposeful human actions

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Virtual Community

- Odds that big power and big money will find a way to control
- Cheap personal computers and worldwide telecommunications network- foundation of CMC
- Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on those public discussion long enough.
- Net connected to the future of community, democracy, education, science, intellectual life.
- Too important to leave to special interests.
- Integrate physical travel with online community- virtual communities inhabit real life.

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Cyberdemocracy

- Mark Poster – History professor univ. of Calif.
- http://www.hnet.uci.edu/mposter/
- *Cyberdemocracy: The Internet and the Public Sphere* - 1995
- Discussion of the political impact of the Internet has focused on a number of issues: access, technological determinism, encryption, commodification, intellectual property, the public sphere, decentralization, anarchy, gender, and ethnicity.
- The relation of the Internet to democracy is to challenge or to risk challenging our existing theoretical approaches to these questions of interpretation (not limited to existing frameworks).
- Internet is decentralized communication system
- Germany (making Germans) vs. hammers (pounding nails, tool)

Internet and Public Sphere

- *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*– Jurgen Habermas – 1962 – public space in which reason might prevail, tracing development in 17th and 18th centuries.
- If there is a public sphere on the Internet, who populates it and how?
- Distinction between public and private – gender issues
- Public – essential to democracy, deliberate common affairs.
- Public discourse in pixels on screen (not face-to-face), how is it distinguished from "private" letters, etc.?
- Habermas – public sphere is "a homogeneous space of embodied subjects in symmetrical relations, pursuing consensus through the critique of arguments and the presentation of validity claims."

Internet and Public Sphere

- Internet communities function as places of difference from and resistance to modern society. They are places not of the presence of validity claims or the actuality of critical reason, but of the inscription of the new assemblages of self-constitution.
- Differing role of reader, hypertexts makes him author, disrupting stability of "authority."
- Democracy refers to the sovereignty of embodied individuals and the system of determining office-holders by them, a new term will be required to indicate a relation of leaders and followers that is mediated by cyberspace and constituted in relation to the mobile identities found therein.

Communism? Altruism?