

## Communities on the Verge: Intersections and Disjunctures in the New Information Order

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This article examines the relationship of information technology to communities of color. In recent decades, American microelectronics firms have shifted production facilities to offshore sites while prototypic and short-term projects, research, and development have remained in places such as Silicon Valley. Assembly work that fuels the industry there, done mostly by immigrant women, closely resembles the "low tech" labor of their overseas counterparts. Despite these attachments by people of color at the level of labor and high-tech production, the same people are largely isolated from the technology on the levels of use, consumption, and content development. Some attempts have been made by marginalized communities, however, to "stake a claim in cyberspace." Examining what anthropologist David Hess termed the social and cultural "reconstruction of technology," we argue that attempts to claim information technologies happen on two levels: the "virtual" and the "real." We explore questions of how community is conjured or imagined by people of color using icons and language and how images and language mark insiders and outsiders, we examine the inconsistencies in "global village" metaphors and whether communities of color betray similar inconsistencies, and we conclude that we are both critical of and optimistic about the communicative possibilities of information technology.

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African American	Asian American	class	community	cyberspace
gender	globalization	information technology	race	Web sites

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In his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1991) linked the emergence of nationalism and national consciousness to the rise of print-capitalism, through its impact on perceptions of space, time, and the configuration of communities around vernacular languages-of-state. Anderson's work has been echoed by a number of scholars who have considered the role of emergent communication and information technologies in "nation-" or "community-" formation. In particular, several scholars have noted the centrality of the telephone and telegraph in enabling "national" conversations in the late-nineteenth century United States; that is: conversations that not only elucidated national ideologies but also focused substantially on defining who was included in, and who was excluded from, full participation in the national community. Not surprisingly, the extent to which different individuals were able to participate in defining the parameters of Ameri-

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can “nationhood” during that period was predicated to a substantial degree upon their access to the communication technologies that played such a critical role in enabling the conversations to occur in the first place. The seamless representation of “America” that emerged masked the fissures and unequal power relations undergirding the “official Nationalism” that materialized and reproduced itself in those conversations (Anderson, 1991).

More recently, with the emergence of the Internet and the increasing globalization of news and entertainment media, we have witnessed parallel conversations being postulated in terms of a new “globalism.” The suggestion that these new information technologies are accelerating the formation of a “global community” is implicit in the very terminology—such as “World Wide Web”—that defines the landscape of cyberspace. Yet the limitations on access to this technology are made transparent when one takes into account the fact that less than 20% of the world’s current population have telephones (Crary, 1994). Given that the Internet now operates primarily through phone lines, it is clear that far fewer than one fifth of the world’s population has ever logged on, and, most likely, the remaining four fifths will never do so. Such considerations, moreover, are not merely relevant to the populations of countries less technologically developed than the United States. Even within this nation’s borders, huge segments of the population cannot afford the hardware or connection charges necessary to take advantage of the information and entertainment resources available online. Additionally, a substantial segment of the population is intimidated by, or indifferent to, the very idea of the Internet. Lack of infrastructure, economic disempowerment, language barriers, and cultural or educational inaccessibility thereby delimit the body of users capable of participating in the constitution of the allegedly global online community.<sup>1</sup>

Despite all the hype surrounding the Internet and the rapid rate of growth in usage levels during the past few years—particularly in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe—only a small percentage of even those nations’ populations are regular users of the Internet. Popular perceptions of the “typical” user reflect a general awareness of the disparity between the myth of global participation online and the reality of limited access. This disjuncture is most clearly represented in the characterology of the “geek”: a white male who is awkward and a misfit in the social world but who functions so adeptly as a computer user and in the realm of cyberspace that he is in fact serving not only to define social relations within that realm but in the broader world as well. Individuals such as Microsoft founder Bill Gates embody this phenomenon; Gates deploys a self-representation that highlights his identification as a geek but also as the personification of the American Dream. Men like Gates have come to represent the “universal user” in the popular imagination. But while such conceptualizations of the “universal user” as a white man reflect some realities of online demographics, they ignore the fact that many who do not conform to such stereotypes are striving to carve out niches for themselves and for their communities online.

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<sup>1</sup>These conditions may be *partially* mitigated through the emergence of Web TV. This newly released device, which resembles a VCR and retails for approximately \$300, allows users to access the Internet through their televisions. Although Web TV is less expensive than a PC and more familiar to users who might be uncomfortable around computers, the Internet will remain inaccessible to a majority of the world’s population.

In our project, we aim to analyze sites—not only online but also on the ground—where individuals are attempting to do just that. In this process, we hope to unmask the idea of the Internet as a seamless global community by examining how *marginalized* users are struggling to gain a voice in the production of knowledge online, as well as considering the obstacles posed against such endeavors. Our research has suggested that much of this activity has been accomplished through the formation of communities and collective identification around conceptualizations of race and gender. Of course, the term community is fraught with contradictions, and communities generally embody a wide variety of experiences for the individuals who ostensibly constitute them. In describing the role of newspapers in formulating imagined national communities, for example, Anderson (1991) emphasized that participants in the daily ritual of newspaper reading relied on a perception that the activity of reading itself was shared by “others of whose existence [they] were confident, yet of whose identity [they] had not the slightest notion” (p. 35). Even with the interactive potential of new information technologies, online communicants similarly tend to assume a shared set of cultural values and reference points. Our examination will, therefore, consider not only how the idea of a seamless global community is being broken down by marginalized communities of users but also how the constitution of those subcommunities is promoted by the mobilization of rhetorical or iconographic devices that foster collective identification.

### WHOSE WEB IS IT ANYWAY?

In *Science and Technology in a Multicultural World*, David Hess (1995) attempted to break down what he termed a “technocentric view of science and technology.” Hess contended that such perspectives emphasize the roles of expert communities of users, thereby neglecting consideration of

the idea that science and technology are socially constructed—that is, shaped and imbued with the social circumstances surrounding their production. Science and technology are also socially or culturally reconstructed by those people who use and remake technological science: by managers, local communities, religious groups, consumers, workers and so on. (p. 184)

We, however, do not wish to overstate the revolutionary potential of information technologies. Hess’s optimistic assessment—while recognizing the agency of local communities, consumers, and even workers—belies a very real disjuncture between the production and consumption of information technology. In our view, many of those who provide critical labor in high-tech production actually experience very limited access to use of these products and, therefore, have only limited opportunity to “reconstruct” the technologies they manufacture.

The physical components of computer hardware are primarily produced by immigrant women workers in the United States and by female laborers in less developed countries overseas. However, these women are infrequent users of the end technologies they produce. In other words, women whose labor is so vital in the production of information technology are largely isolated from consumption of the products they manufacture in addition to being alienated from the production of knowledge that these technologies enable.

We, therefore, want to turn our attention first to the question of production of these technologies, both domestically and internationally. As a prototype of economic revitalization for localities around the United States and the world, Silicon Valley in California has been regarded not merely as an exemplar of growth but as a model of technological revolution. The transition to high-tech production, along with the creation of jobs, revenue, and growth, has entailed a utopic promise of a "new information order." The information revolution and the fiscal benefits it has generated, however, have relied heavily on the old capitalist workplace. As Karen Hossfeld (1990) explained,

microelectronics is the "way of the future" not only technologically but, as developed under capitalism, in its work arrangements and social relationships, which are predicated on sharp divisions according to sex, race, class and nation. Not only the technology of microelectronics but the structure of its industries as well are important tools in the capitalist economy's constant search for new permutations in the division of labor. (p. 151)

Hossfeld articulated some of the tensions within the formation of this new information order. It is clear that information technology has facilitated the globalization of capital. The role of information technology in simplifying the performance of routine tasks and providing efficient links within and between business organizations for decision making, both locally and globally, has drastically altered the structure of labor. The new international division of labor, capital's global permutation of the old industrial division of labor, allows for the siphoning off of low-skill production jobs from high-wage economies of older industrialized countries to the low-wage economies of newly and less developed countries.

In particular, much attention has been paid to Asia as a new economic source in the global economy. The economic power of Japan, the opening of China to capitalist endeavors, and the role of Vietnam as an emerging source of cheap labor have directed considerable focus onto Asia. The world of information technology has been courting Asian laborers. It seems that the information revolution has had the effect of actively drawing large sections of Asia into the fold of capitalism, enacting a global approach to production that promises to make the world a "global village."

What this situation highlights is that capital, not people, is global. David Harvey (1989) marked a central paradox: "The less important the spatial barrier, the greater the sensitivity of capital to the variations of places within space, and the greater the incentive for places to be differentiated in ways attractive to capital" (p. 204). That is, people are very much tied to specific places, and in the euphoria about globalism, the importance of the local must not be underexamined.

Jennifer Wicke (1988) has also directed our attention to the spatial specificity of the postmodern subject in production, turning the discussion of information technology and the lifestyles it produces to the figure of the female microchip assembly worker in the Philippines. In the last few decades, microelectronics manufacturers have been shifting their production facilities to offshore sites, particularly in Southeast Asia and Mexico. The low skill and lightweight but labor-intensive nature of this assembly work makes it ideal for migrational production. The new international division of labor created in part by this process is dramatically skewed in terms of race and gender. Aged 16–24, 80% of this new work force is composed primarily of women.

Although most of the low paying jobs are sent from the United States to less developed countries, other high-tech sites such as Silicon Valley and Route 1 in metropolitan Boston

are still crucial for the ongoing needs of prototypic and short-term projects, as well as for sophisticated research and development. Most of the production done in these areas is higher tech, but the assembly work that fuels the industry is performed primarily by immigrant women and closely resembles the low-tech labor carried out by their counterparts overseas. About 50–70% of the industry's workers in Silicon Valley are women and minorities, mostly Filipinas and newly arrived Vietnamese immigrants (the numbers are imprecise, owing to the large number of undocumented workers). By hiring disproportionately large numbers of immigrant workers, the electronic corporations save on money paid out in wages and benefits, while exercising ultimate control regarding working conditions. Employers organize differences between white workers and laborers of color, as well as between men and women, through wage and promotion structures that privilege white male workers. In this manner, managers effectively exploit immigrant laborers in patterns similar to those found in transnational corporations abroad. Furthermore, as the threat of capital flight places larger pressures on the demand for jobs in the United States, collective action is often stilted (Villones, 1989).

Colleen Lye (1995) has argued that

as a symbol of the information technologies that characterize postmodernism, the particular product assembled by the Filipina worker helps expose how a belief in the consumer character of the postmodern condition depends upon rendering invisible the processes of production which have shifted to distant sites. (p. 49)

In this discussion, then, the Asian woman worker becomes central in thinking about the ways technology is produced in a global economy. Lye's argument suggests that Asia can represent either an exemplary subject of labor (hardworking, non-confrontational) or of capital (organized, surplus), adding that the dual representation of Asia may be mobilized to regulate and discipline production forces in the United States. Given these assumptions, the question becomes: what happens to the Asian female body, which is both the subject of labor and the object of capital? Contradictions thus arise as the Asian woman becomes (in Harvey's, 1989, terms) the *place* in capitalist search for space.

While we are not suggesting here that the sorts of social and economic contingencies that concern Asian women are the same domestically and internationally—indeed wages and work conditions and national agendas vary significantly in these sites—we are suggesting that the people who fuel production at these different localities are in a sense the same people. Hossfeld (1990) summed up the situation accurately:

the media have been much enamored with the computer revolution in general and in particular with the imagery and ideology of the industry's preponderance of "self-made" millionaires. But for every young, white boy wonder who made his first million tinkering in the garage (Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak of Apple, Bill Gates of Microsoft) there are scores of low-paid immigrant workers. These women from Mexico, China, Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines, and other Third World countries prop up the computer revolution, in what amounts to a very unrevolutionary industrial division of labor. (p. 152)

As we have already stated, the image of information technology has consistently fostered a rhetoric of inclusion filled with promises of a better life online. Although this rhetoric clearly embodies a false promise, Lye's suggestion that lifestyles at the core are buoyed by the invisible labor at the periphery only partly accounts for the disjuncture between producers and consumers of information technology. It is not entirely true that Asian women are written out of this postmodern product. It would be incomplete to argue

that the recent attention to Asia and the push for information technologies is simply the result of the globalizing logic of capitalism, a contemporary trajectory of capitalist ongoing need to expand in its hunger for accumulation. Obviously, venues for resisting these terms of capitalism exist. In fact, the very information technologies that highlight the disjuncture between production and consumption in the new, global information order can serve as a tool for socially and economically marginalized communities to provide a unified, though informal, tactic of intervention.

### VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES OR CYBERGHETTOS?

Community is a complex and often contentious term that variously connotes collective action, insiders and outsiders, and notions of authenticity. People of color have gathered in communities, virtual and real, both to gain access to electronic media and to put these technologies to new use. Returning to the work of anthropologist David Hess, we suggest that these communities are engaged in a social and cultural "reconstruction" of technology. Attempts to stake a claim in information technology or to "reconstruct" said technologies primarily occur on two levels, the symbolic collective and the political collective, and are intricately bound with notions of community. For the purposes of this study we define the symbolic collective as the visual imagery on Web sites: the icons and images that conjure community and brand Web pages with community signifiers which have collective salience. We are also referring to the retooling of language that usually mystifies and obfuscates information technology, adding to barriers of inaccessibility on a more abstract or psychic level. We want to suggest that central to the "reconstruction" of information technology—via language and images—is a symbolic renaming that occurs in groups or communities.

Our notion of political collectivity refers to more grassroots and "real" time and place efforts to access these information technologies as a way to break down economic and psychological barriers while simultaneously using them as a vehicle to attain the "American Dream." These efforts are contiguous with a long history of technological utopianism that prizes scientific advance as a socioeconomic panacea.

The questions we hope to address are: How is community conjured or imagined by people of color using icons and language? How do these symbols (images and language) mark insiders and outsiders? How do these images create community boundaries in a seemingly boundaryless virtual space? How do the links to other Web sites construct similar borders? And how are grassroots organizations staking a claim in these technologies for their communities? In seeking to answer these questions we look at several Web sites and an organization in Harlem called Playing to Win.

Michel de Certeau (1984), in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, delineated two levels of practice for marginalized and "core" populations, respectively. *Strategies* are the practices of the center (e.g., corporations and the military) that have concentrated power in a society. According to de Certeau, marginalized members, such as workers, deploy *tactics* in response and resistance to the continual control and surveillance to which they are subjected. These tactics are not in themselves revolutionary; rather, they are small practices that make day-to-day living bearable. Furthermore, tactics as understood by de Certeau are constrained by the structures to which they are subject. Tactics, although they can be considered transgressive, are characterized by the fact that they take place within

established social structures. They “insinuate themselves into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety” (1984, p. xix). Tacticians must work within the space strategically created by those in power; they negotiate a space for resistance within the space of oppression, but the space does not belong to them.

In addition to these concrete interventions, de Certeau’s (1984) practices can also occur on a discursive level. The tacticians to which de Certeau referred also negotiate space within the predominating language and vocabulary of the day:

Although they use as their *material* the *vocabularies* of established languages. . . although they remain within the framework of prescribed *syntaxes*. . . these ‘traverses’ remain heterogeneous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of *different* interests and desires. (p. 34)

Particularly salient for this paper are those tactics that are semantic inversions, twists of language, or imagery.

*Cafe Los Negroes* (<http://www.losnegroes.com>), created by McLean Greaves and others, is a self-proclaimed *cyberhood*, a Web site dedicated to the art, music, and interests of Latinos and African Americans. The site changes monthly but generally includes information and interviews with local artists, writers, and musicians in the form of virtual gallery spaces, sound clips, and text. The *Cafe Los Negroes* site is a striking example of the tactics referred to by de Certeau. The interventions that McLean Greaves and his co-creators make in cyberspace are both similar to and different from the predominating cyberculture. On any given visit to the site one will find blatant efforts to “blacken” the Web. Greaves writes a daily column called “Diary of a Cybernegro,” in which he frequently employs terms such as “cybernegroidal” and “cyberlatino” to refer to what he believes to be uniquely African American or Latino experiences with, or uses of, the World Wide Web. His daily column has been known to end with the phrase “by any means downloadable.” This reworking of Malcolm X’s famous quote is a call to arms, declaring cyberspace as the next site at which collective action must be waged. His conflation of cyberjargon with images and language representative of black collective culture is a tactical move. Greaves reclaims and retools the potentially intimidating language of the emerging technoculture.

Spatial cues such as *cafe* and *cyberhood* alert the viewer that blacks and Latinos have taken up residence in cyberspace. These cues also hint at the Web site as a locale of community convergence. *Cafe Los Negroes* has staked a claim in cyberspace by carving out a space for the art, interests, and dialogue of an imagined community of cybersavvy people of color. Although this site was obviously created with a certain viewership in mind, because of the nature of the Web, it cannot be solely delimited for use by members of the black and Latino community.

By carving out a niche for Latinos and Blacks on the Web, this site makes a comfortable gathering “space” for members of this community. The spatial and linguistic inversions found at this Web site are relevant to the less tangible isolating tendencies of cyberculture. Merging culturally resonant language and images with the unfamiliar elements of cyberculture increases the possibility of an African American and Latino presence on the Web. As de Certeau suggested, Greaves and company have “insinuated” themselves into the semantic and spatial logic of this medium.

A second example of these symbolic inversions is the Web site for VNS Matrix (<http://www.sysx.apana.org.au/artists/vns/>). A group of four female performance artists who call

themselves VNS (for "Venus") Matrix have a Web site, a CD-ROM, and an offline magazine called *Geek Girl* based in their native Australia. They have coined the term "cyber-feminist" to articulate their relationship to technology. Their mission is to raise consciousness among women.

More than a re-appropriation, their work is an intervention, a politics that forges strands of feminism with a terrorism of knowledge. In the manifesto that begins their Web page, they write:

The impetus of the group is to investigate and decipher the narratives of domination and control which surround high technological culture. . . . The project which [we] pursue is one of debunking the masculinist myths which might alienate women from technological devices and their cultural products.

To *Cafe Los Negroes*, this site attempts to overcome the isolating tendencies of information technology.

Central to their mission to "investigate and decipher the narratives of domination and control" is the inversion of the geek characterology that predominates in technoculture. They attempt to demonstrate to women that they have both the right and the ability to use electronic media. Their magazine, *Geek Girl*, puts a feminist twist on the white male dominance of geekdom.

VNS Matrix targets young women in its mission to create a passion for technology and technoculture. Its goal is to encourage a new generation of female users to develop an intimacy similar to that which many men have with computers. Their CD-ROM called *All New Gen* is a combination of an interactive game and a comic book that allows the user to choose and participate in the adventures of the lead character, Gen, whose mission is to end male techno-domination. All the super-heroes are women whose secret powers are a combination of female power and the latest technology; for instance, one character has a weapon she shoots from her vagina. A postmodern adjunct to the industrial goddess of *Metropolis*, their pastiche of machine and woman is created on their own terms, combining elements of subject and object as they see fit.

*Net Noir* (<http://www.netnoir.com>) is a self-proclaimed Afrocentric Web site served by America Online that imagines community through imagery that appeals to a collective black memory, using icons. To establish a link from the home page, a visitor to the site is directed to click on the picture of an African drum. The symbol of the drum in the African American community signifies many things, including past channels of communication and the percussive instrument as a musical African retention that was often denied to the slave by the master.

Another icon found on this site is the clenched black fist, a symbol of the black power movement. As is the case with icons, this image is a condensation of years of African American struggle and collective action that recalls the Black Panthers, the 1968 Olympic Games, and even the O. J. Simpson trial.<sup>2</sup> On one recent visit to the site we found an image of interlocked hands in various shades of brown that linked to the part of the Web page called "community." Appeals to the "black community" have a long history among African Americans. This icon suggests this history as well as the heterogeneity of African

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<sup>2</sup>We refer here to several courtroom spectators who claim to have seen a black male juror give the black power sign to Simpson after he was acquitted of murder charges.



Americans. All these symbols harken to a collective past and resound with a shared memory in the present.

*Latino Web* (<http://www.latinoweb.com>) also makes reference to cultural beliefs shared by the group. On the *Latino Web* site there are numerous references to Aztlan, the mythical yet culturally efficacious Chicano homeland. This site also has several links to other sites that may be of interest to Latinos, including ethno-specific sites that highlight, for example, the Cuban American or the Salvadorean experience. Links to Web pages that originate in countries other than the United States provide communication and community with Spanish speakers or those of Latino descent in other parts of the world.

*A. Magazine* (<http://www.amagazine.com>) is an online magazine dedicated to the interests of the Asian American community and Pan-Asian culture. Although there are fewer "community images" than on the African American and Latino Web sites, there are appeals to a presumed Asian community via language and iconography. For example, one can link from the *A. Magazine* Web page to the *Yellow Pages*, a directory of Asian American businesses online. Another link will take the browser to a discussion of the few actors of Asian descent in television and cinema today. This site dedicates a considerable amount of space to discussions of Amerasian actor Dean Cain (of *Lois and Clark* fame) and includes a discussion of "bananas" or "yellow-face" actors and actresses.

*A. Magazine* also contains hyperlinks to a listing of over fifty other Web pages representing various Asian ethnicities and interests from business to culture. A browser can access Usenet addresses such as [soc.culture.hongkong](mailto:soc.culture.hongkong) or [soc.culture.china](mailto:soc.culture.china), or even [soc.culture.taiwan](mailto:soc.culture.taiwan), the purposes of which, according to the Web site, are to provide vigorous debates concerning the three Chinas, stressing cultural differences rather than similarities.

Critics of Asian American Studies or of Pan-Asian coalitions stress that this grouping places Asians from ethnic groups as disparate as the Hmong to the Japanese under one large and artificially imposed umbrella. Community among Asian Americans is imagined to be more complex, so there are fewer appeals to shared cultural iconography as a way of creating community. Although the political practicality of Pan-Asianness is recognized, ethnic-specific groups strive to stress their uniqueness. These complexities are similarly present among Web sites that claim to represent African Americans, Latinos, and women, but in the latter cases difference is more frequently masked in an attempt to stress the greater good of the group.

What these Web sites created by and intended for marginalized groups share are links to other sites that may be of interest to the communities they target. Without a doubt, these sites allow communities to traverse far-reaching geographical borders. In this way, these technologies connect users with shared cultural values and reference points.

There is, however, a ghettoizing tendency that gathers groups of like people together. Although the "global village" rhetoric leads one to believe that these cybervillages will be diverse communities of people linked all over the world, these sites—although they are making important interventions—could be seen to be creating ethnic enclaves not entirely unlike the ones present in cities and suburbs all over the world. The stress on the word global in the now ubiquitous global village metaphor emphasizes the seeming absence of boundaries within cyberspace. However, *Net Noir* contains links only to other Black Web sites. So although the world may be becoming smaller via technological advance, the

global promise of information technology and the World Wide Web is being constrained by the return to communities. Is this a new tribalism?

### AND ACCESS FOR ALL

As we stated earlier, de Certeau outlined how tactics used by marginalized communities are employed in established social structures to negotiate a space for resistance within the space of oppression. Anticipating the lasting impact of new information technology on American culture and life, the founders of *Playing to Win*, a "community-based Internet learning service" in Harlem, New York, hope to get as many people online as possible. For a nominal fee, members have unlimited access to PCs and Macintoshes, word processing, database software, and the Internet. Although the ultimate goal is for members to become cybersavvy, basic technique is often the primary focus because few members have frequent access to, or use of, computers.

The most pertinent issue for people who use the computer facilities at *Playing to Win* is access, because they believe new technologies will provide knowledge, power, and financial security. At a seminar we attended, sponsored by *Playing the Win* to attract new members, it seemed evident that participants wanted to know how they could use the Internet for their own economic, political, and social benefit. Access was equated with knowledge but, more importantly, that knowledge was understood as having some sort of monetary value. It was assumed that the Internet could help one find a job, start a business, or develop the skills necessary to ensure a place in the workforce.

In other words, the community of Harlem residents who joined *Playing to Win* viewed the knowledge they acquired as the key to entree into broader political and social arenas. In her discussion of community formation, feminist scholar Rey Chow employed the etymological latitudes of the term to articulate community formation and structure. Community formation is realized through the concept of admittance. Chow (1995) argued that

community is linked to the articulation of commonality and consensus: a community is always based on kind of collective inclusion. . . there is no community formation without the implicit understanding of who is and who is not to be admitted. (p. 6)

The issue of admittance has particular relevance for specific groups of people who have been excluded on the levels of use and consumption, yet who are fully embraced and often exploited on the level of production. As we said earlier, participation in national conversations is enabled to a substantial degree by access to communication technologies. In the same way, *Playing to Win*'s project of equal access is an attempt to allow marginalized people to enter into a larger national or global conversation via information technology. As Chow (1995) observed, this "basic, physical sense of admittance, of being allowed to enter certain spaces, governs a range of hierarchically experienced geographical and spatial divisions in the colonial and post-colonial world" (p. 6). Groups of people who have been historically discriminated against, disenfranchised, and denied entrance into various physical and cultural spaces now see the Internet as an environment that has a barrier, but one that is penetrable by those equipped with the proper tools of knowledge. The use and knowledge of the Internet then operates as a tool of admittance, allowing for both economic and cultural access.

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to map what we consider to be a tragic irony. The rhetoric of the universal user, the marketing practices that target computers and computer culture to certain communities (e.g., the reader demographics of *Wired* magazine), and the abstract language or jargon code information technologies as being for use by those who meet the requirements of a certain nexus of class, race, and gender. Despite the involvements and attachments to information technologies at the level of labor and production, women and people of color are isolated from these technologies by restrictive pricing and by equally vital but less tangible psycho-historical barriers.

Community is a nebulous term with a varied cultural etymology. Our interest in the notion of community as regards information technology follows directly from the community-building rhetoric that is inherited from the machinic euphoria that has characterized the last decade of the twentieth century. Our relationship to the notion of community is dialectical in that we are both critical of, and optimistic about, the communicative possibilities of information technology. We are critical of the “global villages” and “virtual communities” said to link people throughout the world because we realize that these links often serve the purposes of flexible global capital. Yet we are optimistic about the potential of information technology to be the catalyst for political and collective action—after issues of access are addressed—as well as to increase communication and understanding across international borders. In the end, we hope to have shown that the technological changes are not be as revolutionary as they are purported to be and, furthermore, that the claims of the new information order may in fact recreate and recapitulate the old economic order with very few changes.

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