

Co-responDance: Stream of Conscience

A personal metamedia manifesto by Peter Wintonick

A call for a discussion about a Social Protocol for The Internet

This little essay comes out of thinking done at the Banff Centre for The Arts. Now, I usually go to Banff for the TeeVee Fest. I never used to consider myself as an artist. I'm a documentary filmmaker, for heaven's sakes. But it was only in the last few years, after hanging out at a couple of workshops with Sara Diamond, Susan Kennard and their friends at Banff Centre's New Media Institute, that it started to dawn on me: the two ideas: art and documentary don't necessarily have to be a contradiction in terms. (Sara is the co-creator of the Banff Centre's / Hot Docs / NFB's presentation of Cutting Truths. We'll have more on that in the next issue.)

I was happy and intrigued to be a participant observer at their Synch or Stream think-tank a few sessions ago, and to be exposed to a diverse and disparate, sometimes disparate, community of practitioners, researchers, cyberartists, technoheads, broadcasters and network designers. What Honor Harger, webcaster at the New Tate Gallery, calls a constellation of connectivity.

Over time, when thinking or working digitally, or getting around to festivals and conferences, or by mousing away on the web, I have been witness to a wide interchange of dialog and multilog. Debate and discussion both formal and informal. Stimulating neurons and neuroses, fermenting ideas and thought-bubbles and formatting speculation. I have seen mirrored moments around Immersion, Expression and Interaction, about challenges to video webcasting and netRadio; the impact of Design on ideas, we've seen examined the point of contact between economy and democracy, microeconomics and business models; the political Economy of megamedia, potentials, Rights, ownership and Virtualia as it relates to the concerns of the First Nations Aboriginal Peoples – yes we've done all that. But as the hype in the corporate webworld over dot.com this and cyber-that is beginning to diminish, perhaps now is the time to examine the implications of our collective mediamaking practice on the audience. Despite the technological backbone, how are we thinking about the using the internet to increase human to human communication?

I have really inspired by many individual contributions. But it was the words and wisdom of the native media activist Joseph Leon about the relationship between radiation and tradition – i.e. the ambivalent relationship the Hopi people of the Southern US have had to the new technologies, which clarified an argument for me. How does one reconcile new media with ones own spiritual or individual or social beliefs?

Perhaps it is time to think about a new notion of protocol.

In the Spring of 1967 the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (both ARPA and DARPA) hosted a meeting where the basic design of a proposed national computer network was formulated. As I understand it, since then, a series of technical protocols and standards have been developing, as a way of controlling the bursts and bytes and packets and inflow and outflow and infloflow. A protocol is an agreed-upon format of standardized units used for transmitting of data between two devices. I guess in this case, devices can also mean human beings.

If we care to glance for even a second under the hood of our computers, we are already familiar with many of the acronymic labels. Transport Control Protocol/Internet Protocol Suite (TCP/IP), Point-to-Point Protocol (PPP), Post Office Protocol (POP) File Transfer Protocol (FTP), Hypertext Transport Protocol (HTTP) Network News Transport Protocol (NNTP); Simple Mail Transport Protocol (SMTP).

There are now dozens upon dozens of protocols. Some have generic or trade and brand names. The Internet Architecture Board maintains a list of documents that define standards for the Internet protocol suite. The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) and the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) develop these standards with the goal of coordinating the evolution of the Internet protocols; this co-ordination has become quite important as the Internet protocols are increasingly in general commercial use. Protocols which are to become standards in the Internet go through a series of maturity levels (proposed standard, draft standard, and standard) involving increasing amounts of scrutiny.

I think now is the time is now to develop a different set of protocols, ones which have less to do with the technological and mathematical constructs of the capital 'I' Internet (or the Overnet, or ubernet). But ones which have more to do with the practices of what I would the undernet: The underground, the popcult, the anarchistic, the chaotic, the humanist, the small "p" political, the activist. The global village net and not the globalized pillage net.

I would offer up some principles which might be included if such a Social Protocol for the Internet is ever written or discussed:

Knowing that united nations resolutions and charters are usually a recipe for inaction, and motions generated out of cyber conferences are usually a call to inaction and immobility, I will submit these ideas as a personal metamedia manifesto, to be considered and rejected, subscribed to and re-written, collectivized and privatized.

Although I understand the idea of shared and common values is, in and of itself, a problematic, and sometimes dogmatic, I am arguing here for a social protocol

for the internet where there are common ground values. Values which can build a virtual and civil society based on respect, and democracy in its broadest meaning.

It is an attempt to develop a Stream of consciousness and a stream of conscience for our networked, immersive and artistic work.

A Social Protocol would include:

MULTI-CULTURAL DIVERSITY

We can learn much from the long-term and grounded-in-spirit view of indigenous cultures. Without being patronizing, at the very least any and all notions of a social protocol should respect and include major contributions from first peoples. Independent/internet vision should give voice to diverse indigenous, home-grown images; it can provide a world-wide meeting place for unique, local production; it should join the individual to the international. At the same time it combats the mega-corp forces which would rather create a global netted monoculture out of national and aboriginal expression.

SYNERGISM

A social protocol should allow for a dispersed and horizontal array of content. Not a top down market force flow. This new communication century – has been already been marked by technological advances which are allowing networkers, producers and artists to shift the whole mediascape and ‘language’ of audio and image-making. The result is a completely new way of understanding netmedia, the audience and the world. Technology has enabled this audio-visual revolution, but the creativity of *netmakers*, working in partnerships, are breathing this image revolution to life.

In Gestaltheorie many streams run to the ocean. The Internet is a beehive. A Webplex under r(evolution) - i.e. there are no footprints to follow for what's being done here and now - new thoughts are stirred around as interactive possibilities are expanded. The webplace is a value added, collaborative space. It is Library and Archive. Skill and Art and Craft. And an array of economical, appropriate tools and Resources.

As an emerging and important nexus for technological innovation, especially in the unisphere of net and the new media matrix the web can be a democratic place where the Net and Work come together as a whole, new network. Open Source. Open Code. Open Doors. Copyright and copywrong.

AGORA

A Social Protocol for the internet should reflect the cross-cultural and local view. It should be also be peopled by full spectrum of thinking in an agora, or marketplace, of ideas. Neo-liberal and capitalist. Anarchist and Conservative. While the internet is a global community to serve independent media-making. It can facilitate, subvert and indeed, welcome the post-industrial interface necessary to produce, market media in the modern world.

AUDIENCE AND ENDUSERS

The communitarian heartbeat does not beat in isolation. It is broad-based and broad-cast. In a Digitopia the Human narrative will once again be heard – it will become the common stories of a truly world village. A Social Protocol for the internet should always think of the impact on audience.

THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE, FREE EXPRESSION

A Social Protocol for the internet should respect the rights of content and the rights of creators. The Right to Communicate is an essential human freedom. This Right needs to be recognized and developed as an extension of existing national and international charters and constitutions on Free Speech and related issues, including the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights and Freedoms, the MacBride Commission of the 70's and Peoples' Communications Charters and ideas around a new world information order.

A social protocol will reflect alternative practices and communication policy proposals that are emerging from civil society organizations in different cultural, technological and political environments. It essentially means empowering people with the tools. And the access to airwaves.

DEMOCRACY

The Social Protocol for the Internet should be a call for a democratic Digitopias and the decentralized democratization of the MassMedia – the latest incarnation of the idea of “community”. Despite globalization, massmediamergers and the interNETionalization of McLuhan's GlobalVillage™, many of the newest impulses towards international communication are coming from the bottom up. They are standing on the shoulders of the educational origins of the digital village. Because of the decentralized nature of the digital beast, the Monomedial, monocular, Cyclops may be on the run, looking for an exit sign.