Introduction
Where Is Internet Studies?

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Internet studies. New media studies. Digital media studies. Digital arts and culture studies. Cyberculture studies. Critical cyberculture studies. Networked culture studies. Informatics. Information science. Information society studies. Contemporary media studies.

Naming, not to mention mapping, an academic field is a tricky proposition.

In their 1982 book, *Learning the Library,* Anne K. Beaubien, Sharon A. Hogan, and Mary W. George suggest that the growth of academic disciplines often follows four stages. First, disciplines begin with a *pioneering stage,* an intellectual movement formed by a collection of "mavericks" interested in sharing ideas, collecting data, and testing hypotheses. Their work is often developed within the classroom and most often distributed through informal means like personal correspondences, newsletters, and journalistic features. Next comes the *elaboration stage,* a period of growth marked by an increased number of participating scholars and an established but not yet codified set of terminologies and methodologies. This is also the stage during which an organization, usually national, is established and an academic journal, chapters in books, and college courses begin to appear.

Following this is the *proliferation stage,* during which the community of scholars grows dramatically and becomes international in scope. As the output of findings grows, so do the number of conferences and journals, as well as the number of languages through and between which ideas and data are shared. At this stage, undergraduate majors are established, textbooks and monographs are published, and a somewhat agreed upon set of

methodologies takes shape. This is also where "twigging," or the formation of subfields, begins. Finally, we witness the *establishment stage,* which is characterized by traditional markers of academic legitimacy, including the introduction of academic departments, graduate dissertations, federal and private funding, and endowed chairs. Publishers begin to devote series to the discipline, universities establish centers, and the community of scholars negotiates—and renegotiates—a canon. Further, the field witnesses intellectual stratification, often between theoretical and applied research, and a proliferation of subfields.

Using the four stages as a signpost, Internet studies appears to be rapidly approaching disciplinary status. Indeed, many of the traditional markers of an academic discipline are, for better or worse, in place, thriving and growing: a community of scholars; conferences and symposia; journals, journal articles, anthologies, monographs, and textbooks; university courses, common curriculum, and majors; theses and dissertations; theories and methodologies; and academic centers.

There are many communities of scholars interested in the social, political, and cultural elements of new media. Some of these communities are more international than others. To date, the largest and most academically mainstream is the Association of Internet Researchers, or AIR (http://www.aoir.org/). Established in 1998, AIR has hosted six international conferences—at the University of Kansas, in 2000; at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, in 2001; in Maastricht, the Netherlands, in 2002; in Toronto, Canada, in 2003; at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom, in 2004; and in Chicago, Illinois, in 2005—and attendance, an excellent and healthy mixture of mostly graduate students and faculty, runs in the high hundreds. With an increasingly international executive committee and a listserv with more than a thousand subscribers, AIR continues to bring together scholars from across the disciplines and around the world.

AIR is by no means the only umbrella under which to huddle. The Institute of Network Cultures (http://www.networkcultures.org/) has hosted numerous conferences and symposia, and the institute's founder, Geert Lovink, is one of the key players in the Next Five Minutes conferences (http://www.next5minutes.org/), which seek to bring together activists, artists, and academics to trace and transform tactical media. In Germany, the German Society for Online Research (http://www.dgof.de/) continues to network German and German-speaking scholars of new media, while the diverse and deep thinkers of Ciberpunk (http://www.ciberpunk.net/)

continue to generate groundbreaking work in Spanish cyberculture. Moreover, the Digital Games Research Association (http://www.digra.org/) continues to host international conferences that welcome academics, practitioners, and players of digital games.

For a field of study focused on and rooted firmly in new media, we have generated a fair share of print-based findings. As I argue elsewhere (Silver 2000), the twin pillars of cyberculture studies are virtual communities and online identities, and much of the work is derived from Howard Rheingold's *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1993) and Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995). These two topics were (and continue to be) explored, explicated, and problematized by a range of subsequent works, primarily in anthologies, including Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows's *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment* (1995), Sara Kiesler's *Culture of the Internet* (1997), David Potter's *Internet Culture* (1996), Fay Sudweeks, Margaret L. McLaughlin, and Sheizaf Rafaeli's *Network and Netplay: Virtual Groups on the Internet* (1998), and Steve Jones's enormously influential trilogy of anthologies *CyberSociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community* (1995), *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety* (1997), and *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Community and Technology* (1998). As the new millennium dragged itself in, metastudies of the field appeared (and continue to appear), including Thomas Swiss's *Unspun: Key Concepts for Understanding the World Wide Web* (2000); David Bell and Barbara Kennedy's *The Cybercultures Reader* (2000); David Gauntlett's *Web.Studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age* (2000); David Bell's *An Introduction to Cyberculture* (2001); David Trend's *Reading Digital Culture* (2001); Geert Lovink's *Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture* (2003); and Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort's *New Media Reader* (2003).

Along the way, academic journals—print-based and online—flourished, affording multiple outlets for new findings, reworkings of theories and methods, and collectively built canons. For the time being, some of the most influential journals include *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*; *CTheory* (http://www.ctheory.net/); *ebr* (http://www.altx.com/ebr/threads/pages/info.htm); *First Monday* (http://www.first monday.org/); *Game Studies* (http://www.gamestudies.org/); *Information, Communication & Society*; *The Information Society*; *Journal of Computer-*

Mediated Communication (http://jcmc.indiana.edu/); *M/C: Media & Culture* (http://www.media-culture.org.au/); *New Media & Society*; *Surveillance & Society*; and *Teknokultura* (http://teknokultura.rrp.upr.edu/).

These books and articles have found numerous audiences, especially among students who flock to undergraduate and graduate courses in new media and digital culture. What is striking, however, is that while many of the courses are offered through Internet studies and other new/digital media programs, the majority are found within traditional disciplines such as American studies, anthropology, communication, cultural studies, ethnic studies, gender/women's studies, informatics, journalism, linguistics, management studies, psychology, and sociology, to name just a few.[1] This cross-pollination suggests a fertile field, an *interdiscipline,* from which traditional disciplinary approaches can help inform our understanding of new sites of study, and from which such sites can tweak traditional methods and theories. Indeed, the ultimate artifact of a field's pedagogical maturity, the textbook, is abundant, ranging from Erik Bucy's *Living in the Information Age: A New Media Reader* (2002) to Crispin Thurlow, Laura Lengel, and Alice Tomic's *Computer Mediated Communication: Social Interaction and the Internet* (2004).

While new media and digital culture make their way into traditional disciplines, clusters of interdisciplinary collaborations have generated many diverse centers of cyberculture studies. Across Europe, academic centers have been built: Austria's International Center for New Media (http://www.icnm.net/); Denmark's Center for Computer Games Research (http://game.itu.dk/); Great Britain's Oxford Internet Institute (http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/); the Netherlands' Institute of Network Cultures (http://www.networkcultures.org/) and Govcom.org (http://govcom.org); and Spain's Biblioteca de las Indias Electrónicas (http://www.lasindias.org/). In Australia, fibreculture (http://www.fibreculture.org/) serves as an umbrella organization for many Australian universities and scholars interested in digital media. In Singapore, the Singapore Internet Research Centre (http://www.ntu.edu.sg/sci/sirc/) conducts research related to the Internet across Asia. And finally, in the United States, a number of academic centers have appeared, including Pacific University's Berglund Center for Internet Studies (http://bcis.pacificu.edu/); Virginia Tech's Center for Digital Discourse and Culture (http://www.cddc.vt.edu/); University of Maryland, Baltimore County's Center for Women and Information Technology (http://www.umbc.edu/cwit/); University of Minnesota's Internet Studies Cen-

ter (http://www.isc.umn.edu/) and the Institute for New Media Studies (http://www.inms.umn.edu/); and the University of Washington's Resource Center for Cyberculture Studies (http://www.com.washington.edu/rccs/).

So where do we stand? We have a community of scholars, some arranged internationally, others nationally. We have academic organizations that host large and largely international conferences on the field, as well as a diverse array of symposia for multiple subfields. We have books (and book series), anthologies, and journals. We have both undergraduate and graduate courses, which have helped proliferate the field with theses and dissertations on the topic. And we have academic centers and institutes. But do we have a common set of theories and methodologies?

Yes and no.

Drawing heavily from cultural studies and cultural theory, scholars of new media have weaved into their work the theories of Jean Baudrillard, Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway, and Paul Virilio, to name a few. Yet rarely—James Katz and Mark Aakhus's (2002) theory of apparatgeist comes to mind—have we generated new theories of our own. We have applied traditional methods and approaches such as content analysis, cultural history, discourse analysis, and ethnography in novel and admirable ways, and in the case of ethnography, we have significantly altered it to include digital domains (Baym 2000; Danet 2001; Hine 2000; and Miller and Slater 2001). In some cases, including Steven M. Schneider and Kirsten Foot's (2005) "Web sphere analysis" and Joe Walther's (1996) "hyperpersonal communication framework," we have derived altogether new approaches.

It can be argued that a commonly shared set of theories and methodologies is a sign of an academic field's development and sophistication. It can also be argued that such commonly held approaches signal ossification, stagnation, and a lack of imagination. I favor the side of a temporarily canonless field of study (Silver 2004). If and when the canon appears, replete with acceptable theories, methods, and methodologies, I surely hope its foundations are pliable enough for whatever meets us in the future.

We have a young field of study, one that, depending on with whom one speaks, stretches back only five, ten, or fifteen years. In other words, what we have is a field of study *under construction*—with boundaries not yet set, with borders not yet fully erected, and with a canon not yet established. As such, we have a field of study ripe for growth and twigging,

becoming and re-becoming, imagined and reimagined. Now, before the mold is set, is the time for experimentation.

Critical cyberculture studies is, in its most basic form, a critical approach to new media and the contexts that shape and inform them. Its focus is not merely the Internet and the Web but, rather, all forms of networked media and culture that surround us today, not to mention those that will surround us tomorrow. Like cultural studies, critical cyberculture studies strives to locate its object of study within various overlapping contexts, including capitalism, consumerism and commodification, cultural difference, and the militarization of everyday life. Although the origins of critical cyberculture studies rests firmly in academia, it is most fully realized when it moves beyond campus and is built, challenged, and rebuilt with as many publics as possible. Above all, critical cyberculture studies scholars have high goals: we seek to use our collective understanding of new media and their environments to alleviate suffering and oppression and to accelerate freedom and justice. We take our field—and our world—quite seriously.

For the sake of this volume and to encourage further dialogue on the matter, I wish to highlight three crucial elements of critical cyberculture studies: historical contexts, social contexts, and cultural difference.

Historical Contexts

The twentieth century welcomed, among many other things, a dizzying array of new and once-new media. Radio, film, television, computers, and the Internet are merely the major players. Naturally, all of these technologies are historically specific, and their origins, development, adoption, and distribution merit critical attention. By critical attention I mean something beyond (or, perhaps, in addition to) the monthly hagiographies found in *Wired* magazine. For, as Daniel Czitrom notes in *Media and the American Mind,*

> Considered as an institution, each medium that evolved from the work of individual inventors and entrepreneurs was later subsumed into larger corporate or military contexts. The key roles played by small concerns and amateurs in the early history of new communications technologies are too often forgotten. Yet the importance of corporate and military settings for

technological progress and of the accompanying support by large capital investments and highly organized research teams clearly intensifies the closer one gets to the present. (1982, 185)

As we embark on the newest chapter of new media, it is important to engage in what we may call "critical histories of the recent past." This means situating our studies of, say, blogs, Moveon.org, and Grand Theft Auto within larger historical landscapes, including early developments of the Internet and early developments in modern computing, and investigating the ways in which these technologies emerged from within a complex web of corporate and military interests. But it also means looking backward to histories of other once-new media such as radio, television, and, as Jonathan Sterne smartly suggests in this volume, sound recording.

Social Contexts

Back in the day, early adopters of the Net took pleasure in knowing that most people had no knowledge of what would soon be called cyberspace, let alone of more "tangible" elements like e-mail, ftp, and unix commands. Today, of course, cyberculture is everywhere, especially in the West—in sitcoms and sci-fi, in political campaigns and political mobilizations, in *Wired* and *Women's World,* in URLs printed on public billboards and scrawled on bathroom walls. For better or worse, this larger technoscape is our site of study.

Nearly fifteen years ago, Constance Penley and Andrew Ross began their anthology *Technoculture* with wise words:

Technologies are not repressively foisted upon passive populations, any more than the power to realize their repressive potential is in the hands of a conspiring few. They are developed at any one time and place in accord with a complex set of existing rules or rational procedures, institutional histories, technical possibilities, and, last, but not least, popular desires. (1991, xiv)

We must do the same with new media and continue to examine how they are built within and shaped by consumer capitalism, how they are developed, brought to the market, and continually monitored by military interests, and how they are discursively constructed by an array of other media

forms, most of which encourage us to consume stuff we never needed. Simultaneously, we must continue to explore individual and collective agency, a social context in itself, a set of decisions that sometimes leads us in directions that were not preprogrammed.

Cultural Difference

In 1993, Rheingold wrote that "because we cannot see one another in cyberspace, gender, age, national origin, and physical appearance are not apparent unless a person wants to make such characteristics public" (26). He was wrong then, and it is doubtful, after multiple governmental reports, academic studies, and plain common sense, that he still subscribes to such a belief. Critical cyberculture studies approaches cultural difference—human elements of race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and disability—not as an afterthought or a note inserted under "future studies" but, rather, front and center, informing our research questions, frameworks, and findings.

The bad news is that we have a long way to go. The good news is that work in the area is finally beginning to appear. To date, issues of gender online have received the most critical attention with works like Lynn Cherny and Elizabeth Reba Weise's *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace* (1996), Wendy Harcourt's *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace* (1999), Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein's *CyberFeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity* (1999), Eileen Green and Alison Adam's *Virtual Gender: Technology, Consumption and Identity* (2001), Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth's *Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture* (2002), and Lori Kendall's *Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub: Masculinities and Relationships Online* (2002). Works that explore the intersections among new media, race, and ethnicity are far fewer yet include significant contributions like Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman's *Race in Cyberspace* (2000), Alondra Nelson, Thuy Linh N. Tu, and Alicia Headlam Hines's *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life* (2001), Lisa Nakamura's *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (2002), and Emily Noelle Ignacio's *Building Diaspora: Filipino Cultural Community Formation on the Internet* (2005). Studies of sexuality online remain understudied, yet contributions like John Edward Campbell's *Getting It On Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality, and Embodied Identity* (2004) are steps in the right direction. Likewise, critical studies of

age and ageism remain largely under the radar, with exceptions like Karen E. Riggs's *Granny @ Work: Aging and New Technology on the Job in America* (2003). And finally, while scholars in technical communication and informatics are beginning to work on issues of disability, little has been done to integrate the burgeoning field of disability studies with the more culturally inflected field of critical cyberculture studies.

Although the majority of this volume's contributors are from the United States, scholars from Canada, China, Denmark, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Puerto Rico give the anthology a modest and much needed international perspective. Moreover, contributors represent a spectrum of disciplinary affiliations, including art history, city and regional planning, communication, film studies, game studies, journalism, library and information sciences, media studies, psychology, radio-television-film, sociology, speech communication, technical communication, and visual culture. Although a handful of authors are senior scholars, the majority are junior —graduate students, newly minted PhDs, and untenured professors.

   Critical Cyberculture Studies is divided into four section: Fielding the Field; Critical Approaches and Methods; Cultural Difference in/and Cyberculture; and Critical Histories of the Recent Past.

Part I: Fielding the Field

In "The Historiography of Cyberculture," Jonathan Sterne questions the seemingly ahistorical construction of "new" media and offers an alternative historiography of contemporary media culture via sound. The next three chapters interrogate the field of study by situating it within larger and overlapping developments. In "Cultural Difference, Theory, and Cyberculture Studies: A Case of Mutual Repulsion," Lisa Nakamura argues for a more proactive inclusion of theories of cultural difference. In "How We Became Postdigital: From CyberStudies to Game Studies," Espen Aarseth advocates approaching digital culture via game studies and suggests a number of productive avenues that such a direction generates. In "Internet Studies in Times of Terror," David Silver and Alice Marwick encourage readers to take a step back in order to reflect upon the forces of militarization that have always accompanied, informed, and helped shape new technologies—as well as the academic study of such technologies.

   Part I concludes with chapters by Wendy Robinson and McKenzie

Wark. In "Catching the Waves: Considering Cyberculture, Technoculture and Electronic Consumption," Robinson provides an excellent survey of what may be called a "second wave" of cyberculture studies, one that brings together new and "old" media technologies and that reminds us that commercial and consumer imperatives help shape such technologies. In "Cyberculture Studies: An Antidisciplinary Approach (version 3.0)," Wark questions not only the disciplinarity of new media studies but also the utility of disciplinary-based forms of knowledge. As we think through the development of our field of study, we would be wise to consider his words: "The disciplines arise not as a necessary means of managing the abundance of knowledge but, to the contrary, as an artificial means of maintaining the scarcity of access within a regime of knowledge/media predicated on a politics of hierarchy and arbitrary division and an economics of exclusion" (pp. 69–70 in this volume).

Part II: Critical Approaches and Methods

In "Finding the Quality in Qualitative Research," Nancy K. Baym outlines a number of problems found in qualitative research in general and qualitative research in digital media in particular, followed by a set of principles that can mitigate such problems. In "Web Sphere Analysis and Cybercultural Studies," Kirsten Foot puts forth the concept of the "Web sphere" as a productive unit of analysis and discusses methods of Web sphere analysis that can help us explore the complex web of online interactions. In "Connecting the Selves: Computer-Mediated Identification Processes," Heidi J. Figueroa Sarriera brings the field of study into dialogue with contemporary developments in psychology, especially as they relate to notions of subjectivity.

The next two chapters, by Christian Sandvig and Beth E. Kolko, situate the field within Internet infrastructures and cultural policy. In "The Structural Problems of the Internet for Cultural Policy," Sandvig argues for an "infrastructural cultural policy," one that takes technical, social, and legal elements into consideration and encourages creative and proactive involvement on the part of public-interests advocates. This chapter meshes nicely with Kolko's "Cultural Considerations in Internet Policy and Design: A Case Study from Central Asia," which brings together Internet policy and design, focusing especially on efforts currently under way in Central Asia.

   Part II ends with four different approaches to cyberculture studies. In "Bridging Cyberlife and Real Life: A Study of Online Communities in Hong Kong," Anthony Fung leads us through a much needed exploration of the overlaps between off- and online interactions by examining community-building practices of young Hong Kong gamers. Blanca Gordo, in "Overcoming Institutional Marginalization," raises similar issues by investigating the conditions and social processes of community-based organizations working to integrate digital media and low-income communities. Part II concludes with Greg Elmer's "The Vertical (Layered) Net: Interrogating the Conditions of Network Connectivity," a useful analysis of the ways in which new media are vertically integrated, and Stine Gotved's "The Construction of Cybersocial Reality," a provocative approach that combines culture, structure, and the Internet to better understand social interactions online.

Part III: Cultural Difference in/and Cyberculture

Part III explores the intersections of contemporary notions of cultural difference and digital media and culture. In "E-scaping Boundaries: Bridging Cyberspace and Diaspora Studies through Nethnography," Emily Noelle Ignacio bridges diaspora studies with cyberculture studies, paying special attention to notions of identity and nation. In "An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of Cybercultures," Madhavi Mallapragada continues this convergence, adding postcolonial studies and media/cultural studies to the mix. Shifting from theory to practice, Bharat Mehra, in "An Action Research (AR) Manifesto for Cyberculture Power to 'Marginalized' Cultures of Difference," argues how action research can and *should* invigorate the field of study, especially when applied toward social justice and community enfranchisement.

   In "Cyberstudies and the Politics of Visibility," David J. Phillips investigates issues of identity, not only online but also with regard to the researcher, and develops these questions with an analysis of surveillance technologies. Frank Schaap, in "Disaggregation, Technology, and Masculinity: Elements of Internet Research," continues this examination of identity, with a focus on masculinity. Closing Part III is Kate O'Riordan's "Gender, Technology, and Visual Cyberculture: Virtually Women," an exploration of gender and visual culture via an analysis of the simulated newsreader Ananova.

Part IV: Critical Histories of the Recent Past

Part IV offers four critical histories of what could be called "new media's recent past," with special attention paid to the processes of commercialization and commodification. In "How Digital Technology Found Utopian Ideology: Lessons from the First Hackers' Conference," Fred Turner injects the field with a much needed dose of history, tracing the libertarian ethos often attached to cyberculture to the first Hackers' Conference in 1984. In "Government.com: ICTs and Reforming Governance in Asia," Shanthi Kalathil investigates recent e-government initiatives in Asia, in light of developing commercial applications. The book's coeditor, Adrienne Massanari, in "Dot-Coms and Cyberculture Studies: Amazon.com as a Case Study," performs a rhetorical analysis of one of the most successful, and boastful, dot.coms, Amazon.com. Traveling from Seattle to New York, Gina Neff, in "Associating Independents: Business Relationships and the Culture of Independence in the Dot-Com Era," examines the media and cultural negotiations behind Silicon Alley, New York's hypercommercialized version of the so-called new economy.

Critical Cyberculture Studies purports neither to represent a comprehensive view of what the field is nor to suggest a master blueprint of what it should be. Instead, it serves as an invitation to scholars to consider a few new directions, directions that we believe to be too important to ignore and too interesting to leave unexplored. If, as discussed earlier, the field is still "under construction," then *Critical Cyberculture Studies* offers some strategic elements and ingredients that may help to build a more inclusive, more critical, more dynamic, and more interesting field of study.

NOTES

1. For a large yet not nearly comprehensive list of relevant syllabi, see "Courses in Cyberculture" at the Resource Center for Cyberculture Studies, http://www.com.washington.edu/rccs/courselist.asp.

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