

Real Bad: Radical Cybericity and Political Bridges

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Joe Lockard and Mike Mosher, issue editors

1996

Two Oregon lesbian activists bound, gagged and executed with a pistol shot into their heads. A black couple in North Carolina shot dead on the sidewalk by Nazis in the US military. Four Jews murdered in a New York store by an antisemite who kills another five people by arson.

One of the central questions posed by cybericity is how this emergent medium can be used to bridge the gap between the realities of violent hatred and the glowing phosphors of a screen. Each of the above assaults relied on refusals to distinguish between an image and its reality, a disabling distinction that allowed hatred to enact its conclusion. As a technology that projects graphic images and information about diverse human societies, cyberspace engages with this same conundrum of image/reality distinctions. Another graphic technology, television, has contributed to making American war-making shorter, vastly more intense, and technologically brutal. How can cyberspace reshape hatred and violence? Can we analyze how the phenomena of human difference, violence and political process interact on the nets, and then formulate a cyber-politics that emphasizes respect, justice and equality?

Last year we introduced the first *Bad Subjects* Cyberspace issue, arguing over where political cyber-badness might lead. This year we explore domains of badness, both the right and wrong varieties, in emergent net cultures.

Race, that primal ideology of colonial violence, has been on our minds in this regard. Last spring the co-editors of this and the previous *Bad Subjects* cyberspace issue convened a panel on 'Race and Cyberspace' at the historically-black College Language Association's annual conference. We encountered an atmosphere of anti-technological antipathy, but even more one of complete uninterest. While we critiqued cyberspace as 'white space,' the conference attendees found cybericity so foreign to their lives and interests that they stayed away in droves. How and where, we asked, could that connection be made? Colette Gaiter's article on her work as an African-American electronic artist begins to engage this question, and we especially urge readers to explore this essay's hyperlinks at the online BS site.

Lack of cyber-access has continued to circumscribe the online world, a situation that will continue into the foreseeable future. In California, state telecommunications deregulation has shifted public policy away from its previous universal service commitment. Access, the paramount issue of cyberspace politics, is being configured to fit high-profit customer profiles.

Economics, however, are not the only definition of access. Joe Lockard's essay introduces a concept of cyber-english and interrogates its monopolization of online life. Cyberspace remains inaccessible to the vast majority, yet it has been rapidly colonized by white supremacists who have constructed some of the nastiest websites available. Joel Schalit theorizes the expansion of the racist right and Christian Identity movement into webspace, while Patrick Burkart's essay explores some of the free speech ramifications posed by one of these cyber-hate sites.

Mike Mosher polemicizes in this issue on involuntary offline penal communities, another term for prisons. If cybericity represents an inevitable development in social

communication, he wonders, how can America's booming prison system accomodate this future? Also, Mosher graphics abundantly grace this issue.

Science-fiction writer Rudy Rucker appears in these pages for an interview with Annalee Newitz on topics of computer technology and artificial intelligence. Steven Rubio delves into the politics of home pages; Geoff Sauer relates hacker discourse to Diderot; and Cynthia Hoffman (plus friends) describes how two media, television and the net, interact with each other through a *Forever Knight* fan fiction and discussion list.

This issue of *Bad Subjects* introduces a significant genre difference between the online and print versions, one that neatly illustrates the expanding gap between cybericity and textuality. The issue's webbed version illustrates the arguments of its articles through plentiful use of hyperlinks, those footnotes come alive. We strongly urge anyone with net access and reading the print version to put it down, sit in front of a screen, and pull up the *Bad Subjects* homepage. Understanding the cultural difference between these two experiences is what the Cyberspace 2 issue is all about. Simultaneously, this issue acknowledges that net access must never be presumed and works to bridge the differences between cybericity and textuality.

Jessica and David Lockard are the proud sponsors of their father, Joe Lockard.

Mike Mosher is an artist and community muralist who teaches in the San Francisco State University Multimedia Studies Program.

The Ted K Archive

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