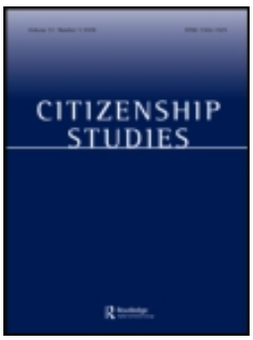

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Cultural citizenship online: the Internet and digital culture

Luke Goode*

University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

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This paper explores connections between cultural citizenship and Internet-based media. It argues that engaging with cultural citizenship assists in moving debates beyond misleadingly narrow conceptions of the digital divide. It suggests that cultural citizenship invokes questions of access, visibility and cultural recognition, as well as tensions between intra- and inter-cultural communication online. The paper calls for a reflexive and critical research agenda which accounts for the 'attention economy' of the Internet and issues of cultural ethics online. The paper concludes that research and debate in this field must acknowledge ongoing tensions and contradictions between a postmodern 'remix' ethic in which the Internet serves as an open cultural archive which citizens can freely access and rework, on the one hand, and claims for cultural authorship, sovereignty and protection, on the other.

Keywords: culture; citizenship; Internet; attention economy; ethics; indigenous culture

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore some of the intersections between notions of 'cultural citizenship' (Turner 2001, Stevenson 2003, Dahlgren 2006, Stevenson 2007) and the evolving role of the Internet as a site of cultural agency. In basic terms, debates around 'cultural citizenship' focus attention on issues of cultural membership, belonging and expression that shape and are shaped by the opportunities citizens enjoy for participating in society at various levels (local, national and global). Toby Miller (2006, p. 35) usefully distinguishes the concerns of cultural citizenship ('the right to know and speak') from those of political citizenship ('the right to reside and vote') and economic citizenship ('the right to work and prosper'), a formulation that accords 'culture' a distinctive dimension, recasting T.H. Marshall's famous tripartite model which delineated political, civic and social rights (Marshall and Bottomore 1992). Such a distinction is best understood analytically rather than empirically, however, given that not only is culture irreducibly political (and often economic), but also because culture impacts upon citizens' life chances and participatory opportunities within economic and political spheres.

In pursuing the question of the Internet's role in cultural citizenship, the analysis presented in this paper sets out some rather general observations that are provisional and far from exhaustive in scope. It is my contention that this is an increasingly important area of research and debate which remains at a somewhat early stage. I suggest that the concept of cultural citizenship, which, itself, has been the subject of considerable debate in recent years, offers a rich framework for analysing the developing socio-cultural and democratic

*Email: l.goode@auckland.ac.nz

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role or potential of the Internet, but that it is necessary to engage with medium-specific issues in order to understand the particular ramifications of this increasingly pervasive mediator of social life.

This paper represents a modest effort to keep such debate and the development of a critical research agenda moving forward. There is, to date, a limited but growing literature explicitly linking studies of the Internet with the idea of cultural citizenship (Livingstone 2003, p. 152, Murdock 2004, Uricchio 2004, Burgess *et al.* 2006). Moreover, many of the key issues implied by the term 'cultural citizenship' have, implicitly at least, underscored more established debates surrounding the Internet. One such debate, inaugurated in particular by Rheingold (1993, see also Jones 1998), concerns the rise of 'virtual communities' and considers the ways in which the online sphere has provided new modes of membership within communities that may or may not have a prior offline existence. New technology may offer new opportunities for social connectivity and the development of cultural identity, but also raises questions about equality of access to and ethical standards within these virtual communities. Debates have also revolved around the nature of identity in virtual spaces and the extent to which they allow for greater fluidity and reflexive engagement compared to more traditional forms of community (Turkle 1995, Slevin 2000, pp. 157–180, Poster 2001). In a more sceptical vein, debates have also drawn attention to the risks of 'cultural tourism' in the online sphere (Nakamura 2001), in which encounters with minority and 'exotic' cultures can be selectively filtered and decontextualized. The Internet has also been examined as a site for the extension of Western cultural hegemony (Sardar 2000) and for deepening inequalities of access to cultural capital (Webster 1995, Schiller 2000) as it becomes an increasingly central and commodified network for cultural circulation that opens up a 'digital divide' leaving disconnected and poorly resourced communities at an ever greater disadvantage. In this paper, I will focus on just two dimensions of analysis that emerge as we try to draw out the connection between Internet-based communication and the notion of cultural citizenship: the 'attention economy' of the Internet (and, in particular, the World Wide Web) and the cultural 'ethics of cyberspace' (Hamelink 2000).

The attention economy

An initial caveat is necessary. There is a danger that, in focusing on the challenges and contradictions of the digital age, we are drawn into a privileged discourse that sits comfortably removed from the most pressing issues of cultural citizenship. It is clear that the reach of digital communication technologies – the Internet, in particular – has expanded rapidly in recent years and, whilst large parts of the global population remain excluded, Internet access is no longer the exclusive preserve of affluent or culturally dominant communities and networks (ITU 2007, pp. 8–9). The Internet has become an important tool for innumerable disadvantaged and marginal 'publics' to communicate both internally and to the outside world. But highlighting the cultural dimensions of online communication, as I seek to argue for here, nevertheless entertains the risk of placing the cart before the horse. The problems faced by 'subaltern', marginal or sub-cultural communities engaged in online communication are often of a distinctly *material* (and urgent) nature. For example: how to maintain reliable networks and keep apace with technological developments within tight financial constraints; how to acquire and disseminate the requisite technical knowledge and skills; how to evade the reach of litigious opposition interests or censorious state agencies.[1]

The ideas that follow are based on an important premise, namely, that the Internet – like any communication technology – never functions *solely* as a tool. This idea reaches back into a debate that has become commonplace within the fields of science and technology studies and the philosophy of technology. Treating technology as more than just a tool may prove counter-intuitive but only at first glance. To offer an everyday example, writing media (paper, ink, word processors and such like) undeniably shape (literate) human cultures as much as they facilitate or empower them. We routinely organize our thoughts through the media-specific conventions of writing before we feel confident to speak them in public, and various historians and philosophers[2] have helped to shape the no longer scandalous idea that modern Western notions of reasoning and of the interior, private mind came about as a *consequence* of writing, rather than vice versa. Many (this author included) would prefer the idea that the relationship is, at least, synergistic rather than deterministic: in such a conception, media, culture and subjectivity are, in fact, mutually interdependent forces. Television, too, has long been recognized as a shaper of culture, rather than simply as a communications tool. Nervous debates about the allegedly shrinking attention spans of post-MTV generations, or the obvious (if latterly waning) influence that TV schedules have on the organization of domestic life, both testify to the ease with which we have come to see this communication technology as a 'shaper' as well as a 'tool' of human culture. So too, I start here from the premise that we should resist the temptation to view the Internet only from a utilitarian perspective, as if an analysis of cultural citizenship was somehow a matter that could be settled by tracing patterns of access to the means of expression and cultural 'visibility' online. Certainly, it is vital that any analysis of cultural citizenship in the digital age considers closely the way in which forms of cultural expression, images, reputations, (mis)representations, stereotypes and so forth circulate in the online world. But we need also to remain open to the intuition that, in 'using' the Internet, individuals, groups and cultures are also being shaped and potentially transformed by and through it.

One fairly obvious reason we are more likely to conceptualize the Internet reductively as a cultural *tool* but more easily accept television as a cultural *shaper*, is the problematic but commonplace assumption that, whilst the architecture of television comprises few senders and many receivers, the Internet is a properly interactive, and therefore a less passive, medium (Negroponte 1996). Such an assumption is disturbed by a rich tradition of ethnographic audience research (Moores 1993) that has demonstrated the complex and *active* processes (interpretation, sense-making and integration into everyday life, to name a few) at stake in media 'reception'. And, just as the binary between 'sender' and 'receiver' is often oversimplified in discussions of 'mass' media such as broadcasting and print publishing, so too is the commonplace assertion that such a binary is now irrelevant in the interactive Internet era. The distinctions between 'old' and 'new' media have been overplayed in the past, and only relatively recently have debates around digital technology retreated from the fascination with technological novelty characteristic of the 1990s in order to analyse, in more nuanced terms, the matrix of changes and continuities (that is, genealogies, as opposed to radical disjunctures) involved in the transition from a predominantly analogue mediascape to an increasingly digitized one (Bolter and Grusin 1999). In fact, there is still a deep-rooted utilitarian bias in debates about the Internet reflected and reinforced linguistically in the conceptual shift from 'audiences' (traditional 'mass media') to 'users' (digital media).

Another layering to this utilitarian bias stems from well-intentioned and valid concerns over the 'digital divide'. Salient as they are, such concerns tend to flatten out other

important dimensions of cultural citizenship. To simplify, we can begin by separating these layers as follows:

- Access to the means of expression
- Cultural visibility
- Recognition

In distinguishing these three levels of analysis, I am rehearsing a somewhat familiar and perhaps uncontroversial theme, but one that often gets occluded by a tendency to highlight problems of access, to the exclusion of other important considerations, in both academic and policy debates around the political economy of the Internet. Put simply, if the emergence and subsequent popularization of the Internet tells us anything, it is that someone who enjoys access to technologies of expression does not necessarily possess the wherewithal to be seen or heard (visibility); and even where visibility is achieved, we cannot assume as a matter of course that this will lead to greater understanding or respect (recognition[3]), or even tolerance on the part of those they reach.

In little more than a decade, the World Wide Web's rapid growth and popular uptake has been accompanied by the emergence of a stark paradox which, according to one kind of interpretation, might reasonably depress universalists, pluralists and cosmopolitans alike. At one level, in terms of content and, especially, in the generic conventions of online culture, there is a high preponderance of cultural concentration, to a large extent consolidating trends already underway in the offline world. Dominant linguistic codes such as Latin script alphabets and particularly the disproportionate presence of American English (notwithstanding the rapid growth of Mandarin and Spanish online – see Internet World Stats 2009) and Western-libertarian norms in online communities (for example, a tendency for values of 'free speech' and 'privacy' to be prioritized above others – see Siegel 2008, p. 8) become *de facto* defaults for international and cross-cultural communications. At the same time, these patterns of cultural consolidation have not demonstrably underscored the growth of enriched cross-cultural encounters and dialogue in the sense once envisaged by the Net's early proselytizers and prophets of the 'global village'. Indeed, the Internet is seen by many to have exacerbated cultural fragmentation, as infinitesimal differentiations based especially on political interests, taste cultures and advertising-driven demographic segments drive a seemingly exponential 'niching' of online fora. This dismal image, which overlays dreams of an 'online library of Alexandria' with nightmares of a 'digital Tower of Babel', was once described in an uncharacteristically prescient (and characteristically pithy) *Wired* editorial as the problem of 'pissing into the digital wind' (Katz 1996): even those who aim to reach out in their online communications regularly find they are talking to themselves. Amongst the many millions of posts littering the blogosphere, most are tellingly underscored by the ghostly footer: 'zero comments on this post'. One serious challenge to the cosmopolitan imagination is ostensibly technical in nature: the problem of information overload and the chaotic, at times almost anarchic, architecture of the Internet turn serendipitous encounters into a 'risk' to be countered by ever more sophisticated search and navigation technology. Encountering material outside one's cultural and political comfort zone becomes collateral damage from which 'smart' technology – which emphasizes the sanctity of the *individual* even as it reduces the subject to an algorithmically derived profile – promises to liberate us. Another challenge to cosmopolitan optimism, though, cannot be regarded as essentially technical at root, is, namely, the enduring seductions of cultural and political parochialism which often, though by no means always, manifest as xenophobia and hate speech.

This bleak diagnosis – though not without merit – is ultimately one-dimensional. Balance demands that we also consider just how pivotal the Internet, from the early days of Usenet newsgroups to the subsequent mushrooming of the World Wide Web, has become for sub-cultural, diasporic and variously marginalized cultural groupings in terms of organizing, mobilizing, developing solidarity and intra-group communication, as well as in communicating to the wider global public sphere. In this view, it is patterns of unequal access that obstruct the realization of this democratic potential, and which need to be addressed. To understand online communication properly, though, we need a more granular approach to the perennial problem of the digital divide. The question is not simply 'which cultural groups have access to the means of expression and which do not?' but also 'what levels of access are enjoyed by different members of a culture?' This second-level question does not emerge anew with the Internet, but has always characterized tensions over representations in the cultural industries. The point is, rather, that by focusing almost exclusively on questions of access, scholarly and policy debates have tended to obscure the fact that the digital divide is a pressing issue not only between cultural formations, but also *within* them. Understanding the cultural ramifications of the digital divide demands that we account for the limitations of multiculturalist frameworks (Kymlicka 1995) and engage with the fact of 'minorities within minorities' and the tensions between individual and group rights that have been at the heart of recent debates on cosmopolitanism (Beck 2005, Appiah 2006). That the Internet serves as a site on which such contradictions are played out is amply clear from the proliferation of blogs and video uploads on topics that speak to contentious cultural values such as arranged marriages, patriotism or sexual identities, reflecting tensions within (and not merely between) groups defined according to ascriptive identities (Hindu, British or gay, for example).

It is possible to push this further, however, and suggest that the Internet is just one facet of globalization processes that increasingly disturb binary models of 'internal' and 'external' cultural communication. The paradox I refer to above – the consolidation of certain dominant cultural dynamics in the context of a kind of cultural entropy unfolding online – should be read in this light. This theme has been developed in debates around globalization and the network society (Castells 1996). Here, it is not necessary to buy wholesale into the thesis that 'places' are being displaced by 'flows' in the spatial organization of social and cultural life – place continues to be a vitally important marker in many online and offline domains, sometimes undoubtedly in nostalgic reaction *against* the spectre of 'deterritorialization'. Nevertheless, in discourses of globalization and multiculturalism, it is commonly accepted that cultural formations are not geographically contained in any simple sense: migration and globalized media consumption are two of the most obvious factors at play here. Still, however, multicultural societies are often imagined as comprising intersecting or overlapping, but essentially discrete, cultural communities which enjoy relative internal coherence and stable boundaries. Alternatively, as in Nussbaum's (1994) version of cosmopolitanism, which draws on the Stoic image of concentric circles of affiliation diffused outwards from the self to humanity, membership and cultural difference appears on a sliding scale calibrated rather simplistically as a kind of cultural 'distance'. The Internet, though, draws attention to the limits of 'sphericular' metaphors in cultural sociology (and, by extension, citizenship studies) and to the need to at least complement them with network metaphors that acknowledge the complex matrices of cultural identity and difference for which the Internet has become an increasingly important medium.

However, this does not mean that the Internet is necessarily well placed to serve the role of that 'intercultural lubricant' envisaged in the cosmopolitan imagination (which, of

course, is rather different from the 'cultural glue' sought locally by communitarians and universally by globalists). The online world expands the scope for highly individualized, self-selecting and anonymous (unobligated) 'memberships'. Varieties of parochialism (whether explicitly xenophobic, implicitly ethnocentric or merely inward-looking) may become more amorphous, contradictory and difficult to define, but parochialism does not dissolve into the digital ether. And certainly, the multiplication of opportunities to express and to self-represent does *not* translate into a guarantee of greater visibility or recognition for subaltern publics: the actual consequences, though defying simple quantification, demand investigation but, on balance, the opposite dynamic may turn out to be the more telling.

The point here is *not* that groups striving to get their voices heard in the global public sphere are somehow mistaken or naive in approaching digital technology as a 'tool' for overcoming the normalizing and marginalizing dynamics of the traditional 'mass' media. However, the mediascape can be characterized as an 'attention economy' in which competition for attention intensifies with the multiplication of outlets in the digital age. Attention is a finite commodity and does not increase in proportion with the growth of media outlets and opportunities for expression. Aside from the growth of paid search engine listings and sponsored links that work to disadvantage those without the requisite capital to float to the top of the digital soup, there is a sense in which search engines constitute an 'attention meritocracy' which disregards status and privilege: there is no reason, in principle, why a small-scale, independent website about hip-hop, say, should not rank higher (and therefore achieve better visibility) than a site on the same topic produced by a record company with large corporate backing. There are, however, technical and economic barriers to this 'meritocracy': acquiring and keeping up with the rapidly changing knowledge required to make sites more visible to automated search engines (search engine optimization), and cross-linking with other sites in order to increase rankings, are examples of demands that favour well-resourced and well-connected organizations. Whilst the Internet may be favourable to the 'long tail' (Anderson 2004) of minority cultural artefacts that might otherwise have remained inaccessible, its services to cultural diversity are tempered by proprietary algorithms in search engines and user-generated content sites that shape the dynamics of cultural visibility towards a 'snowball effect' whereby prominence and popularity are mutually reinforcing (van Dijk 2009, p. 45). Such a dynamic is also characteristic of 'traditional' commercial media but is, if anything, exacerbated in the digital age by the abundance of 'cultural supply' and intensity of competition for attention.

More than this, however, traditional large-scale media institutions still dominate the 'attention economy' of the global mediascape to a striking extent. It therefore makes little sense to conceive of the Internet as a stark alternative to mass-mediated communication. Getting one's voice heard within that global mediascape still translates in large part into impacting on the 'mainstream' cultural industries. Even amid the early hype about the challenge the Internet posed to the agenda-setting power of mainstream mass media, commentary frequently underplayed the extent to which stories broken by alternative online news outlets or creative talents that were discovered online depended for their traction on being taken up and 'mainstreamed' by traditional mass media channels tapping into a now waning popular fascination with the Internet's novelty and its association with 'weird', extreme or obscure cultural phenomena. Given the prominence traditional large-scale media corporations now have in directing attention directly in the online world as content providers (for example, the dominant positions of the BBC and CNN in the sphere of online news), and as reputable guides to the inherently bewildering array of sites

and resources on offer, it becomes important for activists as well as scholars to treat the Internet not as a discrete medium but as part of a wider communicative environment comprising multiple media and platforms.

This link between traditional media channels and Internet communication in struggles for visibility contributes to a theoretical and political tension. On the one hand, the Internet can be conceived by marginalized groups or communities as a potential 'shop window' in which stories, symbols and values can be placed on display. With mainstream journalists and other media professionals increasingly turning to the Internet for research purposes, 'media-friendly' and 'PR-savvy' principles are being adopted by more and more organizations involved in online communication. On the other hand, the Internet continues to be viewed and celebrated as a potential space of 'becoming' and deliberation – an *assembly* – rather than simply a tool of visibility. It affords a degree of 'cultural oxygen' for marginal groups, lacking in much of the offline world, which allows for identities, values, solidarities, practices and traditions to develop (and to face contestation or reappraisal) in new and often unanticipated ways. By definition, then, online communities of debate and cultural participation open up possibilities for discontinuity and dissensus amongst participants, and for ambivalent messages and uncontrollable representations to be conveyed to the outside world. Often, attempts are made to protect the respective autonomy of these 'frontstage' and 'backstage' areas through, for example, the development of members-only areas or private Intranets reserved for the messier realities of cultural deliberation separate from public websites reserved for the task of controlled visibility. Often, though, such neat separation proves unworkable in the context of the Internet's open architecture: where members of a community or sub-culture reject the decisions or status of the gatekeepers attempting to control its public image, alternative sites, sometimes vociferously denouncing the 'official' gatekeepers, can emerge and multiply rapidly. Moreover, the recent growth of a Web 2.0 culture (user-generated content, blogging, citizen journalism, wikis, etc.) tends to favour radically open architectures, shifting the Internet further towards loose and fluid networks based on 'weak' (and anonymous) ties; identifiable 'communities' based on strong notions of membership are not, of course, disappearing altogether, but the growth of a Web 2.0 culture is based on a rather different and more diffuse model that further blurs the boundaries between intra- and inter-cultural communication, or between 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital to use Putnam's vocabulary (2000). In this complex environment, then, the Internet continues to be the site of a tension in cultural politics between struggles to secure spaces of being, spaces of becoming and spaces of visibility and recognition.

Controlling visibility online: indigenous domain names

The ambivalent implications of new technology for cultural citizenship are particularly visible in relation to indigenous communities. As participants at a United Nations workshop on indigenous cultural rights in 2000 attested, the Internet would become (alongside other indigenous media) 'an indispensable tool to promote Indigenous identity, language, culture, self-representation and collective and human rights' (cited in Wilson and Stewart 2008, p. 19). Indigenous communities around the world have traditionally been either ignored or stereotyped by mainstream media and have struggled to gain access to the airwaves in order to claim their own voice, tell their own stories, develop their own political struggles and build their own alliances with other communities (Roth 2005, p. 220, Srinivasan 2006, p. 504). Aside from the political struggle to gain access to the media, indigenous communities have commonly also struggled with the economic challenges of

creating media for small (and often geographically remote) audiences (Browne 1996, p. 6). The Internet radically cuts these economic barriers to entry. And whilst the 'media rights' of indigenous communities have traditionally (and problematically) been conceived in terms of 'protectionism' and 'top-down' policies to close the digital divide (Ginsburg 2008, pp. 290–293), the Internet affords a new level of grassroots participation that potentially allows for a 'bottom-up' energizing of indigenous culture, with members of indigenous communities positioned increasingly as 'media citizens' rather than 'cultural subjects' (Roth 2005, p. 18). This is especially important in challenging the stereotypical and reductive view of indigenous cultures as 'fragile' and 'frozen in time' as opposed to dynamic and diverse (Roth 2005, p. 17, Hopkins 2006, Mills 2009). At the same time, it is clear that the arrival of the Internet heralds some new challenges for indigenous communities. Indigenous communities tend to suffer low levels of access to new technology relative to their nation's population as a whole (Dyson and Underwood 2006, p. 66). And whilst it is not possible for indigenous communities to control the way that any indigenous media products are received and perceived by those outside the community (Roth 2005, p. 220), this is perhaps especially true with the Internet, where 'indigenous content' can easily become decontextualized as web pages are broken down into their constituent parts (text, images and sounds re-purposed or re-circulated) and web users 'surf' for easily digestible chunks of information. In such an environment, indigenous culture is susceptible to commodification and/or misappropriation (Dyson and Underwood 2006, p. 67). As Wilson and Stewart (2008, pp. 5–6) point out, the 'chic' status in the West of various indigenous causes and aesthetic styles can contribute to a kind of cultural tourism or consumerism based on marketable indigenous 'brands'. Conflicts over cultural propriety and management can also occur *within* indigenous communities themselves as the status of traditional gatekeepers is challenged by the Internet's relatively open access structure (Ginsburg 2008, p. 289).

Whilst this summary cannot do justice to the wide range of issues (and diverse circumstances) involved in relating the Internet to the cultural citizenship of indigenous communities, a seemingly small example of online cultural politics provides a clue to some of the complexities at stake. In September 2002, the world's first indigenous second-level domain name (a web address suffix that sits in front of the country code) went live. The '.maori.nz' domain had been lobbied for by Māori in New Zealand who saw the existing Māori domain name, '.iwi.nz' ('iwi' being the word for an official tribe), as restrictive on its own and, as one campaigner put it, an unhelpfully narrow representation of Māori ethnicity as an exclusively tribal culture (Taiuru, cited in Gifford 2001). The '.iwi.nz' domain was initially moderated under extremely restrictive criteria by InternetNZ, the organization responsible for the administration of the.nz country code. As Karaitiana Taiuru puts it, 'although Māori Iwi were assigned [the second level domain]. iwi.nz this was thought up by a non Māori person with no consultation with Māori. The criteria were so restrictive that only a handful of Iwi were eligible to apply for it.' (Taiuru 2004). As a result of pressure, .iwi.nz is now moderated by Māori (Taiuru himself took over as the moderator), under the auspices of InternetNZ, and the qualification criteria have been expanded to allow for a wider range of Māori organizations, including those representing previously excluded urban Māori. Nevertheless, the domain remains reserved for those with official tribal affiliations.

Motivating the campaign for a generic Māori domain name was a sense that Māori were under-represented and needed to become more visible in cyberspace. According to another campaigner, Māori culture, which is of interest to web surfers around the globe for a range of reasons, was being appropriated, exploited, 'museumized' and even

misrepresented online by Pakeha (New Zealanders of European descent) who had taken up prominent domain names such as 'maori.co.nz' and were, as he put it, 'presuming to present a Māori perspective to the world on our behalf' (Himona 2000). The new maori.nz domain offered to mark out a new space for the articulation of Māori identity online. It would also appear to subvert the dominant ideology of the Internet as some kind of ethnically neutral, colour-blind domain. As Hartley and McKee (2000, p. 339) suggest, the values of neutrality (often framed rhetorically as 'anti-racism') have contributed to an 'indifference' towards the particular experiences of indigenous communities across mainstream media. The open architecture and apparent democracy of the Internet, though, has lent still greater weight to such neutralist ideology. This is an ideology that unwittingly reproduces the privileged status of the 'default' or 'unmarked' culture – a particularly tangible phenomenon in relation to the Internet domain name system which positions the US as the default or 'unmarked' location.[4] Campaigners wanted to give more Māori the opportunity to become visible in cyberspace *as* Māori, without reducing or diluting the profile of official tribal (iwi) identities. They rejected the well-intentioned but ethnocentric liberal discourse of the Internet which had envisaged it as a space in which all citizens could potentially participate *regardless* of culture, ethnicity or status. Culture, ethnicity and status are precisely the lifeblood of much online communication, not markers that could realistically or legitimately be erased in the service of a 'level playing field'. And they rejected the tacit essentialism that flowed from the policy of just one officially defined marker of Māori identity (iwi) in cyberspace.

Whilst the new 'maori.nz' name was originally envisaged as a moderated domain to prevent its misuse (by white racists, for example), it was decided that in order to avoid the rigid cultural gatekeeping of the '.iwi.nz' domain, it would, in fact, be left unmoderated. The cost would be that, when it went live, various prominent domain names were bought up by 'cyber-squatters' – Pakeha entrepreneurs intending to sell them on to Māori at a profit in the future. Taiuru reports that within 24 h of going live, 18 iwi domain names (such as ngapuhi.maori.nz) and 38 high-profile generic names (such as education.maori.nz) were 'hijacked' by a non-Māori company who advertised them for high resale prices (Taiuru 2003). And since its inception, several derogatory sites have been registered by non-Māori, with names such as dole.maori.nz, prompting action by campaigners to get such sites cancelled (AMIO 2004).

This struggle has since moved to a new level with Taiuru and the New Zealand Māori Internet Society leading a campaign linking indigenous communities across the world. Following collective representation by indigenous groups at the UN-convened World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva, 2003 and Tunis, 2005, the 'DotIndigi' group is applying for the creation and administration of an indigenous top-level domain name: here, a specific national country code (such as '.nz') would be replaced by the suffix 'indigi' as in '.maori.indigi' or '.lakota.indigi'. Here, then, the online citizenship of indigenous communities invokes an interface between local and global, bypassing the national altogether, reflecting the broader shift towards indigenous peoples engaging directly with (and being acknowledged by) the United Nations and its constituent bodies such as World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

In fact, the domain name issue is just one aspect of some complex cultural politics facing Māori and other indigenous groups seeking not merely admission into a pre-defined model of 'online citizenship' but also a say in the way that citizenship itself is constituted. Debates are currently underway in Māori communities over other issues including: the fate of oral traditions in a predominantly visual medium such as the World Wide Web; the mismatch between mainstream, Western intellectual property norms and questions of

cultural control and guardianship faced by indigenous cultures (something I will touch on later); and concerns over culturally sensitive information, such as that pertaining to tribal genealogy (see Gifford 2000, Taira 2006, pp. 127–162), circulating within the ostensibly uncontrollable public domain of the Internet.

The cultural 'ethics of cyberspace'

It is useful to question whether or not it makes sense to think in terms of a cultural ethics that applies – that could or should be applied – to the Internet. The discourse of cultural citizenship is, by definition, a normative one, though it leaves ample room for debate over principles and strategies. At the very least, it implies a concern for issues of cultural participation, membership of cultural communities, cultural representation and recognition. Bringing the Internet, and digital culture more broadly, into the purview of this normative discourse is a very large undertaking. What follows is intended only to highlight some of the issues at stake when we move in that direction.

Just as debates around cultural citizenship stimulate questions about what is meant by 'cultural rights', so too I believe it is necessary to ask whether and to what extent the language of rights is compelling in the context of the Internet and its increasing significance for cultural practices and cultural politics. One way into this is by looking at an attempt to articulate 'Internet rights' along the model of (and with direct references to) the UN declaration of human rights, the Association of Progressive Communications (APC). When a majority of the world's population still lack access to telephony, let alone Internet connections, initiatives such as those of the APC, which work to enhance access for otherwise disconnected communities, and to get international bodies (like WSIS) to address the digital divide seriously, are extremely valuable. (We should, though, remain wary of those who proselytize the electronic economy as some kind of means to short-circuit the poverty trap – not, it should be said, a mythology promoted by the APC itself.) My comments on the APC's 'Internet Rights Charter' (APC 2006) are intended only to highlight some of the tensions and challenges facing the discourse of 'Internet rights' rather than to cast either the values motivating this document or, moreover, the grassroots projects facilitated by this organization, in a critical light.

The APC's charter groups Internet rights under six broad themes: universal Internet access; freedom of expression and association online; access to knowledge; open source content and software; privacy; and democratic and transparent governance of the Internet. More so than the UN's declaration of human rights, this document emphasizes *substantive* as well as *formal* rights: material infrastructure (networks, hardware, software, technical standards, etc.) is explicitly at stake in the capacity for citizens to exercise their right to communicate and participate in civil society online, free from interference and obstruction by state and non-state actors. What such a document cannot do, without succumbing to rapid historical obsolescence, however, is to stipulate benchmarks or minimal standards (e.g. what measures of 'affordable access', 'inclusive design' or 'linguistic diversity' on the Internet, might be operative). Such principles may only be articulated as aspirational trajectories. On the other hand, it is possible that such a document falls prey to charges of techno-cultural bias when, for example, national Intranets are considered a 'threat' to the global scope of the 'Internet as an integrated whole', or when public access points in libraries, schools and clinics are given explicit mention whilst rural community mobile Internet initiatives in developing countries are not. The point is not to challenge the priorities set out in APC's document so much as to highlight the mere fact that there *are* priorities implicitly embodied: as such, it is necessary to question the extent to which a

singular global declaration of 'rights' can encapsulate the potentially diverse and competing values, needs and priorities for information technology that develop 'bottom-up'. The Charter risks unwittingly reinforcing what Ginsburg claims is a problematic 'digital age' ideology which 'smuggles in a set of assumptions that paper over cultural differences in the way things digital may be taken up – if at all – in radically different contexts' (2008, p. 289). This declaration of Internet rights, then, suffers from the double-bind of being both too general *and* too specific. The most productive response, I suggest, is not to dismiss such initiatives as unavoidably imperialistic but to view them as radically provisional 'anchor points' in the ongoing dialogue between communities, activists and policy-makers (local, national and transnational) in which the critical tensions between values of equality and cultural difference can be articulated.

A further tension arises, though, between the claims (or 'rights') of individuals and groups. Like its UN human rights counterpart, this document (despite references to communities, organizations and collaboration) treats the individual as the indivisible unit of analysis and recipient of these digital rights. The APC declaration privileges the individual citizen without drawing attention explicitly to the conflict between individual and collective rights: for example, it does not highlight a citizen's right to use the Internet to express criticism of his/her own cultural heritage, preferring instead a general statement against the notoriously open-textured concept of censorship. To highlight this blind spot is not to challenge the prioritizing of individual over collective rights[5] but does amount to a claim that declarations of Internet rights cannot serve as a definitive statement of digital ethics or stand in for the ongoing conversation and contestation around collective versus individual rights that the very notion of cultural citizenship evokes when it draws attention to questions of membership and belonging as well as to rights of expression.

These tensions also emerge when we look at cultural citizenship online from a very different angle of everyday cultural practices in the digital sphere. 'Digital culture', viewed through Western lenses, at least, has become strongly linked with postmodern characteristics including collage, non-linear narrative, spatial navigation of cultural 'texts', remixing, cut and paste sampling, fragmentation and a disruption of traditional conceptions of 'authorship' in favour of 'distributed' creative practice (see Manovich 2001, Jenkins 2006). What, as a shorthand, we can term the 'remix aesthetic', now well entrenched in digital culture, is undoubtedly linked to a (not uncontested but increasingly prominent) remix *ethic*, one that could be summed up by the following, albeit reductive, claims: (a) it is legitimate to sample elements from existing cultural artefacts and to modify or remix them in new ways and (b) remixing is, in fact, the engine of creativity and therefore should be positively encouraged. Such claims pre-date the digital age, but are given greater prominence by cheap, easy-to-use tools that allow ordinary users to cut and paste, sample and remix existing material with ease and with pristine fidelity. One particularly compelling statement of the remix ethic can be found in the work of the intellectual property scholar Lawrence Lessig (2004). He shows how a moral panic around piracy, prompted especially by peer-to-peer music file-sharing networks, has provided a pretext for the cultural industries to greatly expand the scope of copyright law, and infringement penalties, creating an environment where all cultural products are, by default, off-limits for reuse, reworking, archiving or critique, even where there is no explicit copyright or commercial value attached to them. Lessig argues that a 'permission culture' has emerged, the public domain has all but disappeared and cultural creativity (which includes modifying, critiquing or adapting aspects of one's own cultural habitat or heritage) is being killed off. He argues for re-balancing the system of intellectual property, making culture public domain by default where no formal copyright has been registered,

and to allow for flexible copyright arrangements in which 'authors' who buy into the remix ethic can reserve some rights (such as the right to be identified as the author) whilst opening up their work to sampling or reworking by others.

Here, I wish to concentrate on ethics, rather than the plausibility or otherwise of plans to institutionalize such matters of intellectual property in law. Lessig is writing from within (and addressing) an American constitutional tradition that is not universally applicable. However, it is necessary to point to the limitations of his view from a more global perspective. What Lessig's writing emphasizes is the potential for digital networks to invigorate cultural creativity and reflexivity. Whilst libraries, museums and galleries have traditionally served the role of public cultural archives, allowing culture to be accessed in order to be critically appropriated, such institutions have tended to be narrow in scope (print culture in the case of libraries, and 'artefacts' judged according to specialized curatorial norms in the case of museums or galleries), and to logistically militate against *direct* critical appropriation (you can't rip pages out of a library book or pull a painting off a gallery wall). The Internet, on the other hand, presents itself as a site where public culture in all its myriad forms (texts, artworks, music, video, etc.) can be archived and where citizens can 'rip out pages' and 'take down artworks' without depriving other citizens of the same rights. Draconian intellectual property rules undercut this potential to reinvigorate the cultural public sphere. Examples of counter-moves which expand the public domain under the principles of the remix ethic are gathering momentum, such as the Creative Commons (www.creativecommons.org) in which Lessig himself is a key player, or the BBC's digital creative archive project underway in the UK. The blind spot in this progressive remix ethic, however, is the vexed question of *cultural* property and belonging. The remix ethic may lend itself well to certain cultural formations, perhaps especially the dynamic and prolific cultural codes that exude the self-confidence and reflexivity we commonly associate with globalization and de-traditionalization. But does this perspective necessarily sit well with all cultural formations, especially those perceived as being at risk and for whom rescuing, protecting and reclaiming stewardship of – rather than remixing – culture, may present itself as the more pressing goal? What does it say about the claims of indigenous cultures, for example, for which the Internet may simultaneously offer new possibilities for cultural renewal *and* the threat of misappropriation and exploitation, as demonstrated in a simple sense in the case of the Māori domain name issue. Tellingly, Māori use the term 'taonga', usually translated as 'treasure', to refer to aspects of culture, including language, traditions, symbols and artefacts, that are seen as integral to Māori identity: such a perspective is to some extent incommensurable with the Western concept of 'property', even when conceived at a collective rather than individual level. This does not need to be understood as a function of a fixed cultural essence that demands preservation. Rather, it flows from often complex community-level protocols (and sometimes disagreements) around cultural access, stewardship, production and distribution that go beyond simple distinctions between private and public property. The Cultural Commons approach opens Western intellectual property regimes up to a more nuanced and multi-layered balance between public and private but, as Christen (2005) has argued, it is the dualism of public and private itself, and not simply the way they are balanced, that fails to capture the complexities of indigenous cultural politics. Lessig's 'solution' to the rigidity of the contemporary copyright regime is to create an environment in which individuals and organizations can enjoy more flexible options for entering into contracts of mutual interest in the exchange and deployment of cultural 'goods': Creative Commons represents, ostensibly, less a genuine 'commons' and

more a re-gearing of private property relations better equipped to mediate – some might say 'colonize' – today's increasingly digitized cultural sphere (Berry and Moss 2005).

Again, my suggestion is not that we dismiss the 'remix ethic' as fatally imperialistic. But we need to see its social-libertarian impulse, which ultimately conceives the public interest in terms of fostering the freedom of all to do with public culture 'as they will', in tension with cultural values that emphasize collective cultural stewardship whether embodied in indigenous or traditional claims for cultural 'protectionism' (against misappropriation or disappearance) or in 'bottom-up' values of cultural autonomy. Although I have given greater weight to the latter of these, the central point I am making here is not normative at the level of hierarchizing competing models of culture or political struggle. Rather, a realistic assessment of cultural citizenship in the digital age demands that we acknowledge and engage with the political 'fault-lines' created, in part, by these competing models. There is, however, a normative premise underlying this analysis: the idea that there is something *intrinsically* retrograde about citizens wanting to protect their cultural creativity, to exert some degree of collective control over the stories they tell and the identities they project, and to prevent them from being misappropriated or ripped out of context, is deeply problematic. It smacks of a postmodern impatience with those whose cultural norms have not quite 'caught up' with the remix zeitgeist of contemporary global culture. The Internet is a rapidly developing space, full of cultural, technological and practical contradictions. For all the distortions and inequities of the online world, that kind of pluralism should be engaged with and brought into the conversation rather than simply pathologized from the outset.

Conclusion

Debates around cultural citizenship stand to benefit from taking seriously the Internet and emerging digital cultures and, in turn, new media scholars stand to enrich their research agendas and conceptual frameworks by tuning in to the discourse of cultural citizenship. To a large extent, studies of the Internet and new media have tended to bifurcate. In one camp, researchers and critics have focused predominantly upon aspects of political economy such as ownership and control of networks, the commercialization of the Internet, net neutrality, and unequal patterns of access for both 'senders' and 'receivers'. In the other 'culturalist' strand, debates have focused around new media forms, semiotic strategies, the changing nature of visual culture, and digital aesthetics. The notion of cultural citizenship is a rich starting point for scholars keen to bring these two dimensions of analysis into dialogue. It reminds us, for example, that questions of access and power in the online environment must be linked to an awareness of the politics of recognition. A suitably reflexive research agenda for this field must always pose and re-pose the basic question of why access to digital networks is significant for particular cultural groups and how digital networks contribute to the constitution of citizenship. The term 'significant' here refers not simply to the everyday sense of being important. It also refers to the question of how cultural groups 'signify', that is, produce *meaning*. This is something which necessarily invokes questions of aesthetics and cultural values. A suitably *critical* research agenda needs to engage with (without ever presuming to understand or speak for) the diversity of cultural voices it implicates in its analyses of power and access within the online environment, because the dichotomy of inclusion/exclusion would not suffice. The cultural citizenship perspective also tempers the tendency for studies of online political economy to investigate the macro 'gatekeepers' and 'agenda-setters' (corporations who control digital networks, for example) without

investigating the micro-politics of online networks, communities and sub-cultures: web-savvy individuals or groups as well as professional media elites can become powerful gatekeepers, self-appointed spokespeople or unwitting representatives in the cultural politics of the online environment. At the same time, the cultural citizenship perspective retains a central concern with power, whilst power is often virtually absent in culturalist debates around new media, or treated as a stable, self-evident and undifferentiated concept in studies of new media political economy. As such, cultural citizenship is a challenging but crucial concept for those concerned with the complex webs of culture and power being woven in the digital age.

Notes

1. To give just one example, 2004 saw the Indymedia.org collective, an international and high-profile alternative news network, battling to find out why some of its servers, located in the UK, were apparently seized by US authorities (Shabi 2004). Such anecdotes remind us of two things: the spectre of state censorship *within* as well as outside the Western democratic tradition; and the limitations of optimistic renditions of the Internet as a globalized, borderless space that eludes national state controls.
2. Diverse examples include Innis (1951), McLuhan (1964) and, in a different vein, Derrida (1997).
3. I use the term 'recognition' following Habermas (1998). Habermas argues that in a pluralistic society, respect for another culture need not and, indeed, *should not* be conditional on the presumed intrinsic 'worth' of that culture. His 'politics of recognition' is premised on the notion of a middle ground in which it is possible to *understand* the claims of another culture without necessarily agreeing to them, and to respect simultaneously its uniqueness *and* its role in the wider society. There are some problems with Habermas' take on multiculturalism that I do not have space to discuss here. Nevertheless, I take that dual aspect of difference *and* membership within a wider dialogic community to be axiomatic for any meaningful discussions of cultural citizenship.
4. In the same year, a.us domain was established and there was an initial flurry of patriotic uptake post-9/11. Since then, however, it has scarcely become a prominent or highly sought after place of virtual residency.
5. Interestingly, a 2003 version of the APC charter placed strong emphasis on the protection of traditional and indigenous culture, whilst the 2006 version that replaced it substitutes an emphasis on individual cultural rights.

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