RICE UNIVERSITY

Landscape of Transformations:
Perspectives, Perils and Possibility from within the New “Informational” Economy

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ABSTRACT

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This research is based on fieldwork at a start-up Internet company. The research captures understandings of an emerging ethos of information and the valorization of information technology in the New Economy. The research also captures the notion of the New Economy itself and concludes that it is to be understood as a late-Industrial development within the capitalist circulation sphere. The research explores the organizational dynamics and the corporate culture within the fieldwork environment. In these regards, modalities of disciplinary power, resistance and negotiation within the workplace are identified. In addition, the culture of the “start-up” company is regarded as a foil that contravenes against conventional business practices. The emergence of a new class of professional knowledge workers is also identified. The research concludes that this new class of knowledge workers
embraces a constellation of meanings of work that reflect particularized values and ideals. The mediation of technology in everyday life and work, the reconfiguration of power relations in “information society” and the varied interpretations of the Internet medium are also described. The central themes of the research include the promise and possibility offered by the development and innovation of information technology along a changing cultural and economic landscape, as well as the perils associated with such change. At the core of the research reside moods and sensibilities of anxiety and uncertainty along this terrain of transformation. Questions of contradiction, simultaneity and ambiguity are also factored into the understandings and interpretations of the changing landscape of the New “Informational” Economy.
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INTRODUCTION

Summary

This project evolved out of the (quasi-) fieldwork notes gathered over the last few years of employment with an Internet “start up” company around the time of the emergence of the so-called New Economy. The time spent in the corporate environment might well be thought of as ethnographically rich and as such, the intention of this project was to use these experiences to capture many of the key issues and questions that touch upon the interconnected landscape of information, technology, the workplace and society.

The central themes of the research include the promise and possibility offered by the development and innovation of information technology along a changing cultural and economic landscape, as well as the perils associated with such change. At issue are questions of anxiety and uncertainty along this terrain of transformation. Questions of contradiction, simultaneity and ambiguity are also factored in regard to the New Economy. In addition, modalities of disciplinary power, resistance and negotiation within the New Economy workplace are also considered.

CountryWatch, a “start up” Internet enterprise, has been used as a microcosm to explore these themes in various contexts including the wider capitalist economy, the rise and fall of the so-called New Economy, the emergence of the Internet and new information technologies in the public sphere, internal corporate operations and organizational structures.
The venue of the “start-up” company also offers a number of descriptions and interpretations about the ethos of information and the valorization of information technology in the New Economy, the notion of the New Economy itself, organizational change and corporate culture, the understandings and identifications of a class of professional knowledge workers and their meanings of work. The mediation of technology in everyday life and work in addition to the reconfiguration of power relations in “information society” are also examined. Finally, given the varied and complex interpretations of the Internet medium, conceptions of community and communication, as well as the need for a broader understanding of the public sphere are considered.

Thus, the research tries to explore these themes via various contexts as follows:

(1) The emergence of the New “Informational” Economy

(2) The question of whether or not the New Economy is really “new.” Is there a (cultural and economic) paradigm shift occurring? How does information factor into the equation?

(3) The development phases of the “start-up” company in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a reflection of the New Economy boom and bust cycle

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1 The use of the term “technology” throughout this research usually refers to information technology specifically rather than other technological sciences such as biotechnology or nanotechnology.
(4) Organizational theories and the integration of organizational models within corporations and in everyday practices

(5) The culture of the “start-up” company as a foil that contravenes against conventional business practices

(6) The meanings and intimations of work among a class of professional knowledge workers with their own cultural value system and methods of workplace negotiation

(7) The evolution of the Internet within the public sphere

**Background**

While the Information Age and the New Economy must be understood as tropes signifying a constellation of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and processes, they are also value-laden symbols around which corporate formation in the last several years has been imagined. Technocrats and infoenthusiasts have glowingly referenced the Information Age and New Economy in dichotomous contrast to Industrial Revolution and Fordist Economy.

Information technology -- largely viewed as one of the engines of the “New Economy” by business experts and infoenthusiasts alike -- has been imagined as a channel of more proficient and fruitful business practices. Specifically, information technology was expected to eliminate unnecessary tasks and expenses, distribute and organize resources both
economically and optimally, facilitate more equitable decision-making and enhance overall efficiency. Indeed, the late 1990s and early 2000 saw the proliferation of a plethora of business technologies, sophisticated enterprise software and online management applications that were aimed at achieving these sorts of efficiency-oriented business results. Moreover, such information technology was treated as proof that capitalism could respond to all challenges including the democratization of the workplace through information sharing.

With regard to socio-political and economic change such as the shift from industrialism to informationalism, the focus is on how global capitalism manages existing structures and systems. In so far as this research is concerned, a key issue at stake is the matter of how information technology simultaneously erodes and recreates structures and systems. So although information technology, the Internet, enterprise software and other such developments might be touted as the mechanisms that revolutionize and even democratize the workplace and corporations, in practice, these techniques can destroy, construct and reinforce organizational configuration. In some cases, information sharing and the balancing of power relations can be advanced. However, in other cases information technology may create new barriers and new ways of enforcing power. At the same time, information technology can also reify the existing regime of power. In fact, rather than old ways being broken down and replaced with new options, a more complex process of creation, destruction and reinforcement in taking place. It may well reflect the circular movement from Old Fordist Economy to the New "Informational" Economy followed by the return to "bottom line thinking" that has occurred recently.
Within the field of research, the path of the Internet start-up company follows this circular path from a regular publishing company, to an Internet company and then back to a publishing company, albeit as an Internet platform. The company highlighted in this project is intended to focus on this terrain of change by following the genealogy of the transitions of the last several years to the present. In so doing, the project also explores the ideas, iterations and inflections associated with the New Economy in late-Industrial society. Indeed, the present corporate identity and business model of the company studied in this research reflects the simultaneity of Old Economy business principles with New Economy ideas and practices. The company studied in this research has largely relied on the constant re-invention of corporate identity, ideas, practices and structures.

Also of interest is an emerging professional knowledge class of workers within this context. This cadre of individuals has its own particular values or interests. As a result, it finds itself at odds with conventional business practices driven by wealth accumulation and established ethics of work. Hence, the individuals that make up this professional knowledge class define the stakes quite differently from the established players on the field. In fact, their vision of work, values, meanings and priorities challenges those of the established regime of long-time corporate players. At the same time, the veteran corporate players find themselves at a “start-up” venture for the purpose of escaping the typical corporate environment but recreating “business as usual” nonetheless. The tensions between these various sets of interests are central to the organizational dynamics of the company.
While carrying out fieldwork within the “start-up” Internet company, a number of multinational corporations such as Enron and WorldCom collapsed in conjunction with the devolution of several information technology ventures and Internet businesses. As a result, the promise of the “New Economy” came into question. To be fair, the conflation of corporate scandals with New Economy enterprises occurred with a fair amount of regularity in popular discourses despite the fact that the collapse of scandal-ridden companies had been due to problems of ethics and corporate governance. Nevertheless, the connection between the two seems to be related to the way in which both Enron-type collapses and the New Economy were imbued by notions of promise and perplexity. That is to say, “assets light” business models and dot.coms shared the spotlight as being “the next best thing” while at the same time, they were cast in a haze of uncertainty about how exactly that vision might be realized. How precisely does one make money without real assets or without a clear revenue stream? Experts on Wall Street seemed to suggest that untold wealth would flourish in the New Economy while technoenthusiasts claimed that the workplace itself would be revolutionized by information technology. Explanations of exactly how this would transpire were another matter. This mood -- of doubt amidst optimism, promise and perplexity, possibility and peril -- characterizes the landscape of transformation.

Intimations

In regard to the late 1980 and early 1990s, the following observation was made regarding the emergence of the human resources paradigm within corporations: “The Taylorist focus on labor as the locus of efficiency, productivity and the consequent survival of the business has
refocused on the form of the organization itself.” In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a related argument could be made in regard to the “New Economy” business model. That is to say, much like human resources, information technology became a focus for businesses. Another striking similarity worth noting is that just as the human resources revolution was poised to explode, supply-side economic theories, “downsizing,” “restructuring” and business practices that could hardly be deemed “people-friendly” ensued instead. In this regard, Christopher Newfield writes of this ironic development by noting that “Wall Street was in charge of the economy. Participation means stock options, not a voice in running either the economy or the firm.”

In my own experience at CountryWatch Inc., it certainly became commonplace for new employees to negotiate the terms of their employment in regard to stock options. CountryWatch -- a disseminator of news, geopolitical information and economic data – had been created as a publishing company but morphed into being an Internet-based enterprise during the late 1990s. The transition to an online enterprise coincidentally occurred just as interest in “dot.com” companies began to materialize in the business arena and register on the stock market.

I recall sitting at lunch with a colleague while he calculated possible valuations of our respective stock options based on varying sets of conditions. I dutifully listened and laughed encouragingly as he discussed the value of regular publishing enterprises’ stocks as compared with Internet companies but truthfully, I was never much of an enthusiastic

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2 Cefkin, 1998: 89.
participant, mostly because I could never fathom the reality of my stock option agreement. I had learned that possessing a hundred thousand stock options and negotiating impressive job titles did not necessarily translate into real power within the company. My perspective aside, the business world in those years was replete with stories of professionals leaving established corporations to take jobs with "start up" companies, just so they could avail themselves of "pre-IPO stock options" – that is to say, stock options given to founding employees prior to a first public offering on the market.

Even Rice University's own Jones Graduate School of Management -- like many other respected institutions -- was touting the possibilities of technology, the unprecedented possibilities of electronic commerce (e-commerce) and the "New Economy" at that time. I recall attending an annual gathering for Masters of Business Administration (MBA) alumni that involved various seminars on Internet marketing and "how to" sessions for starting one's own "dot.com." A former graduate of the Rice University graduate program had invited me to the gathering and was quick to pose many pressing questions of the Internet marketing guru -- a recent graduate of Harvard University -- who sagely outlined the branding benefits of pop-up advertisements. My friend was -- and remains -- utterly perplexed about the profitability of annoying Internet users to death with pop-up advertising. For my part, I ended up in a pseudo-argument with a number of graduates who believed that the Internet presented a glorious opportunity to make money.

Personally, I was still not sure if and how the Internet could truly be the world's new marketplace venue. I knew that the Internet was clearly a significant evolution in economic,
social, cultural and technological terms. The Internet marketplace aside, I was aware that there was a prevailing conception of information technology as a democratizing and revolutionary influence. However, the discourses pervading the seminar about “leveraging the Internet potential” left me feeling rather lightheaded and simultaneously perplexed. Nevertheless, there were too many people to count at the Jones Graduate School of Management gathering who intended to quit their regular jobs and pursue the “dot.com option.” Who was I -- a mere Anthropology graduate student (ironically trying to make a living at an Internet-based publishing company) -- to question their business savvy? Besides, sharing my own insights about the practicality of working in an Internet-centered business had no effect on their enthusiasm.

By mid to late 2000, however, all the idiosyncratic charm and dollar-laden dreams of the “dot.com” mania imploded and fundamental business interests resumed their primacy. Profitability, price to earnings ratios, liquidation value of companies’ assets and other market fundamentals regained their importance. The stock market plummet – called a stock market correction by some -- might well be viewed as the resumption of so-called “bottom line” thinking. The subsequent corporate scandals were said to be a cruel reality check compelling critical analysis about the “irrational exuberance” and the risks involved in the ideological inclinations of the past several years. The fact that corporate scandals were not actually related to the “dot.com” crash was not always questioned since Internet business models and “assets-lights” trading were both understood with bemusement.
This crashing descent into business and corporate reality notwithstanding, the emergence of
the Internet, the profusion of discourses about the so-called New Economy and the associated
Information Era were regarded as representations and perceptions of transformation.
Meanwhile, the workplace appeared to be imbibed by a new sensibility. Perhaps this shift
encompassed a movement from the standard operating practices and procedures of business
and information to a more flexible and diverse modality. At the same time, the perception of
change also characterized an uneasy set of conditions that reflected a complicated and
contradictory mood on the part of social actors within this environment.

At stake was the matter of how something such as information technology simultaneously
erodes and recreates structures and systems. Rather than simply revolutionizing business
efficiency and democratizing the workplace in a uni-dimensional progressive thrust,
information technology, the Internet, new enterprise software and other techniques
collectively shape a more complex process of creation, destruction and reinforcement.
Certainly, this process may mirror the circular movement from the Old Fordist Economy to
the “New Economy” followed by the return to and reconstitution of “bottom line” thinking.
This circuitous and spiraling path is also reflected in the changes made in the company’s very
identity from a regular (and lackluster) publishing company originally named Commercial
Data Incorporated to an Internet company with the snappy title of CountryWatch.com and
then, to an online publishing company with a slight name change of CountryWatch
Incorporated. Other significant changes chart the course of the company and reflect the
movement in the wider business arena. These include the shift from free content and
advertising sales to a constellation of revenue streams that include subscription sales,
advertising revenue and content syndication as well as revenue sharing agreement from joint ventures. The present business model and the current company identity are not simple mixtures of old and new. They are produced out of both the Old Economy and New Economy structures. They have rested upon a system of constant re-invention of corporate selfhood and practices.

**Context**

References to information technology and the Internet in this particular research presume the milieu of the United States, so that the “landscape of transformations” discussed in this project is indisputably an American one. Yet at the same time, in many industrialized nations, an equivalent shift is taking place.

Both Thomas Malthus and H.G. Wells assumed that technology and society were evolving independently. Yet, information technology is intrinsically connected with the social and cultural context within which it resides. Worth considering is the fact that the word “context” is derived from the Latin terms, *cum* (with) and *textere* (to weave), and together they etymologically imply a dynamic of weaving together. No information (or technology)

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4 Some analysts argue that information technology and the Internet itself is an American entity, and may function as another machine of Americanized hegemony. This essay does not intend to reify this jingoistic framework, it simply locates the work and field experience within the U.S.

5 The demise of the Enron Corporation aside, at a presentation to the Rice Alliance of Technology and Entrepreneurship, former CEO Jeff Skilling said that ventures involving online transactions have been more successful in the Scandinavian countries than anywhere else in the world. Meanwhile, Latin America, India, China and other parts of south and east Asia are projected to be significant niches of online users (see Rosenfeld, 2000).

6 Brown and Duguid, 2000b: 203.
exists without relation to its contextual location or positioning, yet writers and designers are often faced with striking a balance between context and information. 7

While new information technologies will continue to proliferate within the political economy, informed by capitalist interests of maximizing productivity for economic gain, the actual outcome of such transformations will be contingent upon the social and cultural contexts they are positioned within and their associated pressures which might favor fixity. 8 Technology and society are constantly constructing and restructuring new and dynamic equilibriums with implications that cannot always be viewed with clarity and prescience. The challenge is to understand the complicated significance of new formations, and to place those meanings and understandings in the larger context of social, cultural, political and economic change.

Born out of my workplace experiences in the field, the primary impetus of this project is to attend to the interwoven relationship between society (or culture) and technology. The words of John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid’s are illustrative of this affiliation: “Social and technological developments ... evolve together in complex feedback loops, wherein each drives, restrains and accelerates change in the other.” 9 Thus, if there is a “landscape of transformations,” it is one characterized by multi-dimensional and multi-directional metamorphosis.

8 Brown and Duguid, 2000b: 203.
My hope is that I can explore these complex trajectories through my experience at CountryWatch and within the wider world of business and culture.
METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic Locus and Theoretical Axis

The fieldwork research has been located at CountryWatch and has been conducted over the last several years. The intention of this project is to use this period of extensive and engaged fieldwork experience to explore and follow the idea of the New Economy in the contemporary cultural and economic context. In addition, the research looks at somewhat emblematic anthropologic themes such as agency and the everyday practice of work within the larger context of global capitalism.\(^{10}\)

In some ways, a very conventional modernist approach to ethnography has been used – the gathering, recording, analyzing, formulating and composing of data from within a field of study over a period of time. Indeed, this project cannot easily be viewed as a progressive multi-sited ethnography. After all, very little physical movement of objects of study has taken place. Yet at the same time, the subjects, topics and themes associated with the field of study -- CountryWatch -- takes one in many different directions, if not materially, then certainly in the metaphoric sense. The project, thus, is better described as a strategically situated ethnography, which attempts to appreciate and interpret the broader system that the subjects of the ethnography find themselves within.\(^{11}\)

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\(^{10}\) See Marcus, 1995.

\(^{11}\) Marcus, 1995: 110-111.
Primarily, the fieldwork research itself has been materially-driven, based upon what naturally emerges from the proceedings within the company, from the events that occur in the wider context of the business environment and from the ideas and questions that are evoked as a result. As such, this project may be regarded as a form of ethnographic practice that reflects the notion of emergent anthropology. Consistent with this sort of materially-driven ethnography, the form of ethnographic practice used in this project entails the inclusion of what is “in the picture of research” both as it evolves in the field on a day-to-day basis, as well as it is eventually written up. Yet in this particular project, being in the field on a day to day basis is not something that can or will be separated from the process of writing up. In many senses, the traditional disentanglement that distinguishes the passage -- from the field of engagement -- to the writing desk where objective reflections are recorded -- will not quite exist. That is to say, it cannot exist in the usual manner whereby the ethnographer completely leaves the field to write up. Rather, the passage from field to desk has occurred and will continue to occur each day as the work for this project ensues. As such, the emergent nature of the project will be one of its constituent qualities.

Although the ethnographic locus of this project is a start-up company that evolved in the halcyon days of Internet ventures and managed to survive the collapse of the technologically-based new enterprises in 2000, thematically, the project explores a number of themes and topics such as the nature of work and the element of learning, the nexus of culture and technology, the emerging Internet-mediated public sphere, not to mention organizational structure and so-called “corporate culture.” In so doing, I have positioned a number of topics together for analysis whose relational contours and textures have evolved and emerged in the

12 Marcus, 1995: 101-102
process of writing about the fieldwork. My intention is to chart some of the paths, processes, associations, concurrences and juxtapositions of these themes and topics, stopping to attend to some of the more distinctive registers within this landscape of study. In this way, I have employed a kind of modernist contextualization that allows for the design and organization of such links and conjunctions, which themselves traverse beyond the traditional and realist ethnography with its focus on totality.

In so doing, one method might be to "follow the thing," as suggested by Marcus. If one considers the commodity chain as a cardinal component of the capitalist framework, then by following the course or circulation of any given commodity's production from its generation through to its marketing and eventual sale back into the process of new research and development, one may well formulate an ethnographic methodology. Granted, in the case of CountryWatch, the "thing" or the "commodity" is not a tangible product but rather, more akin to an intellectual property of sorts, referred to as "content" or "information." Regardless, the generation of intellectual property via the intellectual labor or capital used in its production, marketing and sales is situated within the capitalist macro-model. Thus, by following the circulation of the "thing" -- in this case, content development, production, marketing and sales -- this modality of ethnographic practice allows the capitalist system to emerge on its own, rather than by foregrounding its existence.

By following the “thing,” I am also following the idea of the New “Informational” Economy. Reflecting on the CountryWatch experience and also on the larger terrain within which CountryWatch is situated, I have tried to come to terms with the concept of the New “Informational” Economy, not simply in the scholarly sense (the New Economy as a trope), but also, as “a real thing” (at least within the context of its operations and everyday resonances).

In this regard, the project is not concerned about what Marcus refers to as “an abstract theoretical awareness” of the global capital system that my coworkers and I are ensconced within but what Marcus describes as a “knowingness” or “sensibility.” That is to say, the project is interested in the subterranean understanding of the system of relations of the global economy and of the basic issues facing the people who exist in this landscape. 17 Stated in concrete terms, at the most detectable and discernible level CountryWatch=job=paycheck to many coworkers (in my case, CountryWatch=job=paycheck+healthcare=education=job). We are all aware that we are fortunate to gather some sense of enjoyment or meaning from the work we are employed to do. None of us is incognizant of the fact that many American workers earn a paycheck in venues where the elements of enjoyment and meaning are non-existent. For my two employers at the top of the organizational hierarchy, one might surmise that the company is their “place to die” as they go through some sort of identity crisis that perhaps plagues aging millionaires in the energy industry. For the rest of us, however, what we share is a fascination with an emerging Internet industry, the associated information technology and the internationalized nature of the information content itself. There are few workplaces where lunchtime conversation may include references to Palau without

explanation of its location on a map, after all. Perhaps the ability to find Palau or Kiribati or the Seychelles on a map is neither a significant nor a reproducible cultural phenomenon but the nature of work, its relationship with learning and its location within the capitalist world system, are things that can be ethnographically examined among the subjects of this strategically situated ethnography.

Beyond the suggestion of "following the thing," my intention in this project is to simultaneously "follow the storyline." Specifically, how does the story of this new Internet company play out? What about the story of the New Economy? Is there resolution? At the time of writing, the company still exists while the discourses about the New Economy have not entirely faded from view.

In terms of this ethnography, I am for all intents and purposes not only following the storyline, but also a participant or an actor in this emerging production. The positioning contains its own challenges noted below. Because of my particular roles as both an anthropologist and an employee, the usual concept of ethnographer as participant-observer certainly applies. That said, I hold a formalized position and benefit from complete membership within the company where my fieldwork has been located. This formalized position and complete membership might result in my being placed in the category of "complete participant" according to Gold's system of research observation. Yet my simultaneous role of ethnographer in the field in conjunction with the fact that I simply did not identify myself as a corporatist contravenes against this classification. Since Gold's system includes different levels of participation ranging from "complete participant" to

18 Gold, 1958.
“complete observer” with a range of possibilities in between, it would seem that classification of “participant-as-observer” might be most appropriate. That is to say, while my formalized position and complete membership within the company afforded me maximum access within the field of my study yet my other role of ethnographer both symbolized and facilitated necessary critical distance. In this way, I functioned as participant and observer simultaneously.

“Situatedness,” “Positionality” and “Reflexivity”

My objective in this project is to provide a perspective “from a situated actor’s point of view” in which the circumstances, rationales and expression within the field of CountryWatch can be self-consciously shared outside. Yet as has been noted elsewhere, because I am simultaneously an employee of CountryWatch and an ethnographer in the field, the division between what is inside and outside is not one without confusion. Like many other individuals whose personal values may not lie within the confines of standard capitalist institutions or within enterprises in which free market ideology is not usually regarded with criticism, my livelihood happens to rest upon its existence in this country. Similarly, despite my ambivalences and complicated negative feelings regarding my work, like many of my coworkers I also derive parallel emotions of pleasure and meaning from it despite my personal penchant.

Most ethnographers experience some version of this difficult psychological framework and I do not presume to suggest that mine is distinctive. In his Introduction to Corporate Futures,
Marcus speaks of "the special predicament of subjects who have defined themselves as constitutionally outside and in opposition to corporations and formal institutions of government, now having to incorporate themselves in different ways, thus becoming part or complicit with corporate capitalism in ways that they cannot ignore." In as much as I define myself outside of the field, I was and continue to be positioned within the corporation. Yet within that corporation, I am ever the anthropologist and ethnographer, to the extent that the Chief Executive Officer frequently jokes about "the anthropologist on staff." Bottom line business interests may be an anathema to me but my livelihood rests upon my ability to meet those interests as well as humanly possible.

The problem of being positioned both inside and outside the capitalist macro-system, while having something to do with the abstract issue of power, also takes account of the immediate matter of ethics. As noted by Marcus, "while the ethnographer operates aware of the history of the political and economic circumstances in which identities have been formed, it is not built explicitly around the trope of power, but rather of ethics, that is, the complex moral relationship of the observer to observed, of the relevance of the observed’s situation to the situation of the observer’s own society, and ultimately the exploration of the critical purpose of contemporary ethnographic analysis." My situation is similar, although as an observer playing an investigative role, I am not outside the system altogether.

In essence, I move from an official and formalized role to a subaltern position throughout the course of each day in the field. As such, I encounter overlapping discourses and experiences.

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I have described it as a "quiet multiple identity disorder." It is described as "quiet" and not silent because even though everyone at work knows that I have "another life" as an anthropologist, it is not part of their work world and it is unlikely to be a constant register during interactions with me. Most of my co-workers have a vague recollection that I am "in graduate school" but until very recently, their understanding of my situation beyond that knowledge was hardly ever at the forefront of their minds and it is one that I actively seek to elicit. It is a "multiple identity disorder" of sorts because when not kept neatly separated, one is pushed and pulled in multiple undisciplined directions. For example, at present, I am writing these words in my office after reading through a particularly oppressive business development contract written by my colleague which (in my opinion) does not constitute a fair revenue sharing agreement with our partners. The particular issue spurred my own inner conflict regarding the business arena and resonated with the notion of ethics noted above. With that realization, the contract was duly pushed aside and I opened Windows Explorer on my computer, selected my C-drive, and then clicked on the appropriate folder housing this very document. This is not simply a moment of overlapping discourses and experiences, it is also a moment of conflicting interests and identities.

Thus, being both inside and out of the system, being ensconced within an internal professional dilemma and acting as a participant-as-observer who is also intrinsically connected to the observed via work and livelihood, requires a kind of ethical awareness about the distinctive grounds of knowledge generated through ethnography. As observed by Marcus, "such ambivalent identifications, or perceived identifications, immediately locate the ethnographer within the terrain being mapped and reconfigures any kind of methodological
discussion that presumes a perspective from above...”  

In this regard, my purpose is to stipulate the frequently challenging circumstances of my work with a degree of intended reflexivity, offering it as an additional dimension of contextualization within this methodology. Certainly, if the ethnographer is always implicated in his or her work, then the ethnographer must self-consciously confront the uncertain and ambiguous grounds of positioning, making it an explicit object of reflection. Although the level of self-implication will vary from chapter to chapter and from subject matter to subject matter, the intention is treat my insider/outsider status as the foundation of this research.

In the broader sense, as with all fieldwork, there is always a sentence of being within the landscape. Reflecting the title of this research project, as the landscape is transformed, the ethnographer’s identity is also being renegotiated and transformed as well. Indeed, as stated by Marcus, it is “only in the writing of ethnography, as an effect of a particular mode of publication itself, that the privilege and authority of the anthropologist is unambiguously reassumed.” This is the case even when the publication gives an account of the indistinct and shifting identifications of the ethnographer, in much the same way as I have tried to express here.

**Research Method**

In this research, I draw upon my experience working at an Internet-based company to write “about” the executives and employees (myself included) as they relate to the subjects of the

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23 Marcus, 1995: 112.
research: meanings of work, corporate culture and an emerging professional class within the so-called New Economy. I reference them when relevant and when trying to illustrate a particular moment or dynamic. I have also chosen to let their positions, roles, ideas about the company, the economy, culture and themselves, be portrayed by their own words, in transcripts of conversations, interviews and electronic mail exchanges that I have included throughout this project.
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

What are the contributions of this research?

Because few ethnographies have been created from within a "start up" company during the "dot com" explosion in the New Economy, this project is principally concerned with contributing to the diminutive corpus of material on this subject. 24

This project also extends the Social Sciences literature on corporations. 25 To this end, as noted by George Marcus in Corporate Futures, this is the kind of project that is illustrative of "the cultural interest in the corporate form." 26 Although the disciplines of the Social Sciences tend to treat the corporate form in terms of "corporate culture" and "corporate climate," and a large number of books have been written that deal with corporations in terms of human relations issues and human resource frameworks, this project approaches the corporation from deep within its margins. It is an exploration of corporations and more specifically of this particular corporation -- from the inside -- and in relation to the outside context of macro-culture, global capitalism and the New Economy.

As anthropologists increasingly enter the corporate world, ethnographic methods are increasingly used for the purpose of advancing business. 27 While this project does not seek to advance this trend, it endeavors to shifts the focus of applied anthropology as a practice of

24 Wolff, 1998. Another key contribution to this body of work was the small-scale movie, "StartUp.com," which charted the evolution and devolution of an Internet technology corporation.
business operations, moving instead to the realm of critical analysis of internal corporate dynamics. Of course, it also extends the ethnographies of the workplace. 28 Particular emphasis is placed on the role of information technology on internal corporate dynamics. 29 In this way, the research might well contribute to the literature on industrial relations. 30

At the same time, the project deals with the meanings of work, the nexus of work and learning and the significance of intellectual capital in this assemblage of themes. A plethora of material has been written on the subject of work, its meanings, motivations and its operational features. 31 These writings include seminary pieces on the work ethic and the notion of discipline such as Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. 32 While I am hardly worthy of locating my research within this collection of writings, this project might contribute to the body of publications that deal with the theories and meanings of work of an emerging professional class of worker with distinctive motivations and interests.

The references to the exponential growth and the subsequent implosion of ventures related to information technology in this research proffer evidence that financial and economic risk is often administered using models of risk that vitiate actual engagement with reality. 33 As noted in the research, the changes in business models and revenue streams in conjunction with the paradigms of risk management, suggest that modeling may well replace empirical

29 Zuboff, 1982; see also Baba, 1995; Ellul, 1983; and Robins and Webster, 1987 and 1988.
30 Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939; Lewin, 1943; Coch and French, 1948; Mc Gregor, 1974; Katz and Kahn, 1978, among others.
31 See Kerr et al, 1973; Applebaum, 1984; Gorz, 1983; Hall, 1994; Gamst, 1984 and 1995; Goldschmidt, 1995; and others.
32 Weber, 1905.
33 Luhmann, 1993.
evidence in the everyday functioning of the economy. In this way, the project may offer a concrete case study of these processes, systems and paradigms at work.

Finally, the project, (at least in its proposed formulation) may also explore a modern kind of political agency that is not purely political in nature, but one that rests upon internally complex (social) networks and structures of power and influence. As such, it may also extend models of the public sphere and theories of modernity akin to Habermas, which emphasize internal modalities of differentiation and individuation. As demonstrated by the section on news groups and discussion forums, the tension between Internet-based open source communication and proprietary relations reflect the unresolved relationship between community and capitalism. Moreover, matters regarding profitability on the Internet and the value of information technology itself offer illustrations of how capitalism not only manages existing structures and networks, but also functions to direct the creation and destruction of those very structures and networks.

Because the Internet is an emergent venue employing developing information technologies, it is apparent that the very concepts of learning and work appear to be intrinsically related within this arena of explanation. Most of the writings published on this intersection have come from the business world. This project, however, considers the association of learning and work, along with issues of intellectual capital, and the specific value of the Internet venue on the electronic distribution and dissemination of information, from within

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34 Habermas, 1989; Ackerman, 1980 and 1980; Benhabib, 1994 among others.
35 Schumpeter, 1950.
the discipline of Anthropology. In this way, the implications of the themes and trends covered may have social, political, cultural, as well as economic, trajectories. As such, the project may also contribute to the corpus of material that treats social, cultural and political formations via the machinery of capitalism.

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37 See Latour, 1996.
THE NEW "INFORMATIONAL" ECONOMY

Genealogies of Transformation

Historically, most non-agricultural labor involved learning a craft from master craftsmen during intensive apprenticeships. The guild system itself set the standard for quality control and regulation. With the advent of the steam engine and the creation of machinery, clusters of workers began to labor in factories and mass production ensued, marking increased industrialization from the late 1700s onward. This period of history literally changed not only levels of productivity, spurring huge advances in capital gains, but also the nature of work, and the worker as well, by introducing the blue collar worker to the landscape of work.

From the 1950s onward, with the advent of computerized technologies, the invention of "white collar" work ensued, and by the 1990s, studies indicated that new technologies had galvanized the predominance of white collar workers in the American workplace. 39 Technological advances, innovations in enterprise applications, improvements in high-speed telecommunications, the increase in both personal computers as well as computerized networks, and most significantly, the development of the Internet, changed the very structure of the economy in the United States and, indeed, across the world.

In 2000, Internet usage had so exponentially proliferated that over 50 percent of households in the United States owned personal computers. 40 By 2006, industry forecasters predict that

39 Deal and Kennedy, 1999: 144.
50 percent of all jobs within the United States would be within the sphere of the information technology, thus marking a significant shift in the American landscape of work and in the arena of the economy.  

Variously referred to as the “digital economy,” “network economy,” “knowledge economy” and even “risk society,” this chapter explores the relationship between economic development, the rise of informationalism and the influence of technology, as manifest in the changes on the landscape captured by the phrase New “Informational” Economy. A plethora of business texts have been published in the last decade and a half about how businesses have developed, in accordance with technological progression, and amidst a climate of globalization. The attention -- here --will not be placed on clichéd notions of “speed” and “workplace flexibility” that promise businesses the competitive edge, nor will it be a discussion of the Internet and the New Economy as “The Next Big Thing.” It is also not about the business failures and scandals that occurred at the same time as the New Economy’s emergence, exemplified by what has sometimes been dubbed “Enronomics.” At the same time, this section’s central focus is not an explicit critique of the popularized discourses of the so-called New Economy. The idea of the New Economy as a trope is taken up elsewhere in the research.

For the most part, this chapter looks at what constitutes the so-called New Economy, as it is expressed in contemporary perception. How might this contemporary perception be illustrative of real phenomenon occurring in the marketplace today? How is it different from the Old Economy? Without using economic indicators, such as gross domestic product

41 Rosenfeld, 2000: 217.
(GDP), can one actually discuss the transformation from Old into New Economy? The statistical methodology used for quantifiable calculus regarding the economic performance, for example, was predicated on the idea of a stable system and it looked at the output of agriculture and manufactured goods. Thus, one key element that informs this discussion -- the output of goods and services in a changing economy -- suggests that the discipline of economics may not be the optimal venue for analysis. Consequently, for the purpose of answering the question of what constitutes the so-called New “Informational” Economy, this section of the research attends to the historical transformations, the economic development pathways, as well as the social and cultural conceptions that have occurred in conjunction with the emergence of this idea of the New “Information” Economy.

The Industrial Revolution and the Information Age

The movement from an industrially-based model to the more technological standard is connected with the shift from the prevailing system of industrialization to one that has been termed the “Information Age.” The Industrial Revolution began in Europe -- in the United Kingdom and France specifically -- before taking hold in the United States. During the post-Civil War period, industrialization’s revolutionary effects were exemplified in the industrial advances of the North as compared with the decline of the agricultural South.

Industrialization is associated with the power generated by steam and growing network of railway that was constructed across the West. In the United States alone, the volume of goods transported by railway grew from 55 million tons in 1860 to 72.5 million tons in 1870.
Fifteen years later, in 1885, 437 tons of goods were carried across railways in the United States. Meanwhile, just following the Civil War in 1869, agricultural good and products made up 40 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), yet by the close of World War I, national agricultural output had faded to only 14 percent (by the mid-1990s it was approximated at 1.4 percent). These two sets of trends -- from the period before the Civil War through its aftermath and into the early 20th century -- represent how industrialization was expanding at a time in which agricultural production was contracting.

If the transportation of goods across railways was illustrative of the wave of industrial capitalism, then the factories in which the goods were produced in the first place told the story of industrial labor. Instead of workers walking to the field, the barn or the shed, as had been the case in previous years, they traveled to the factory and to the office.

Clearly, the change in the venue of labor is illustrative of the social, cultural and economic transformations taking place at the time. Yet, both the increase in the volume of goods transported by railway and the shift in labor to factories and offices show how industrialization impacted cultural notions of time. Before the emergence of the factory and, of course, the factory worker, the notion of standardized clocks was not known. Likewise, before goods had to be transported over vast expanses of land, the need for schedules did not exist. Thus, as suggested by Thomas Stewart, the notion of the traditional “nine to five”

\[\text{Stewart, 1997: 7.}\]
\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{Stewart, 1997: 9.}\]
\[\text{Stewart, 1997: 7.}\]
workday may be traced back to the early morning whistle of a train arriving in town in the early days of industrialization. \[^{46}\]

Understood as the period of mass production and capital accumulation, the Industrial Revolution was not just about the production and proliferation of goods, but also about the production and proliferation of ideas. The inventions of innovators such as Eli Whitney and Thomas Edison changed the course of history, hence the very descriptor “revolution” in regard to the process of industrialization. Likewise, the ideas surrounding the Information Age might also be regarded as revolutionary in their own way. As noted by Thomas Stewart, “the story is the Information Revolution’s reinvention of business, economic life and society.” \[^{47}\]

Years before people even spoke of the connection between the Information Revolution or the Information Age and the New Economy, the United States Department of Commerce published a report called “The Information Economy” by a certain Marc Porat, who went on to become the Chief Executive Officer of a communications software company called General Magic. \[^{48}\] Porat’s research is notable because he defined something called “a primary information sector.” Within this newly-designated sector, he placed communications, education, professional services, as well as banking and financial industries, and he estimated portions of other industries that were related to information, such as companies that made electrical machinery, such as computers, typewriters and telephones.

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\[^{46}\] Ibid.

\[^{47}\] Stewart, 1997: 10.

\[^{48}\] Porat, 1977.
He also defined a “secondary information sector” within which he identified information services, such as research and development costs and advertising services.

Using the information about contributions to gross domestic product (GDP) from these two newly-designated segments, he was able to conclude that just over 25 percent of all gross domestic product (GDP) came from the primary information sector, while over 43 percent of corporate profits were also derived from this sector. Likewise, he deduced that an additional 21 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) was obtained from the secondary information sector. Together, at least within the context of the economic sector system devised by Porat, 46 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) was attributable to the information sector. Even if one allows for adjustments and failures within the creation of Porat’s sector system, he was able to show a fairly revolutionary shift in the economy toward the information realm. It is this informational realm of the economic structure that can be characterized as the New “Informational” Economy.

**Conceptions and Understandings: What IS The New Economy?**

There are several conceptions and understandings describing the New Economy. Many of those ideas are covered throughout this research. Indeed, the varied interpretations of the New Economy imbue the research itself in many regards. In brief, this assortment of interpretations congregates around the notion that the New Economy is a fairly new evolution, emerging only in the last several decades, as a result of developments in

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49 Porat, 1977; see also Stewart, 1997:11.
information technology. In this way, one cannot separate the intertwined relationship of information, technology and shifts in the economy. Still, some specific definition and description might be necessitated at this point.

The Encyclopedia of the New Economy describes it as follows: “A world in which people work with their brains instead of their hands. A world in which communications technology creates global competition – not just for running shoes and computers, but also for bank loans and other services that can’t be packed into a crate and shipped. A world in which innovation is more important than mass production. A world in which investment buys new concepts or the means to create them, rather than new machines. A world in which change is constant. A world at least as different from what came before it as the industrial age was from its agricultural predecessor.”

Within this description is a constellation of themes ranging from the triumph of the knowledge industry over manufacturing, the acceleration of a competitive capitalist climate because of advanced technology, and the leveraging of functions and services that are neither tangible nor material. Commoditization is another theme that was highlighted in the definition by the Encyclopedia for the New Economy. Commoditization is understood in the New Economy Encyclopedia as “the process by which the complex and the difficult become simple and easy.” Within the context of global competition, the ability to make things

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50 As noted previously, “white collar” work took hold more systematically in the 1950s, and as Porat’s research in 1977 suggests, the informational aspect of the economy was quantifiable by the 1970s. Various computerized techniques and informational technologies proliferated from the 1970s to the present while the Internet drove further waves of information technology developments over the course of the 1990s to the present.

51 As stated in the online Encyclopedia of the New Economy, 2002.

52 See online Encyclopedia of the New Economy, 2002, on commoditization.
faster and more cheaply is taken as a given. Global competition within the New Economy expands commoditization at a hitherto unknown rate, by accelerating the flow of information, the transference of goods and services, and ultimately, the progress of ideas into products.

The New Economy Encyclopedia also highlights the computing giant, Microsoft, as an example of how the significance of ideas in the New Economy has supplanted production in traditional industries, such as steel.\textsuperscript{53} Bringing attention to the fact that Microsoft's founder, Bill Gates, is the world's wealthiest individual, the New Economy Encyclopedia argues that the stock market valuation in excess of $150 billion of a company like Microsoft is indicative of "a shift in the values of capitalism" that favors the evolution of the New Economy.\textsuperscript{54} The reasons for that shift range from the ease with which information can be produced, replicated and distributed (in comparison with sheets of metal or glass), to the shift in sensibility that the real value of information-based industries lie in the intellectual capital of the people.\textsuperscript{55} Even at CountryWatch, the board of the company has considered taking out life insurance policies on certain key employees due to the importance of the company's intellectual capital. Noteworthy is the fact that the "people" factor in this regard is still expressed in terms of capital. In fact, in its alphabetically-arranged New Economy concepts, the New Economy Encyclopedia posits capitalism as an established fact of life by saying that it is "the way we do business now."\textsuperscript{56} Absent from the discussion is a critique of the capitalist system or a deconstruction of the notion of human beings as capital of sorts.

\textsuperscript{53} See online Encyclopedia of the New Economy, 2002, on the ideas of the New Economy in contrast to traditional industrialization.
\textsuperscript{54} See online Encyclopedia of the New Economy, 2002, on Microsoft's significance.
\textsuperscript{55} See reference in online Encyclopedia of the New Economy, 2002, to its "t-shirt wearing assets" or human capital.
\textsuperscript{56} See online Encyclopedia of the new Economy, 20002, on capitalism.
During conversation at the CountryWatch office, I asked a number of colleagues to tell me about the ideas that were evoked when they thought of the New Economy. One person said “computers and the Internet.” Another said they thought of “geeks at computers” and the binary coding of “zeros and ones” used in computing languages. Yet another mentioned globalization. Three people mentioned E-bay – the online marketplace-- and a fourth mentioned E-trade and online trading. Someone else distinguished the New Economy as the modality by which emerging businesses would operate. Electronic business, which was itself described as online commerce, was also mentioned. The majority alluded to electronic transactions, online shopping, and electronic automation in their responses. While hardly a scientific survey, my spontaneous inquiries during conversations with other employees at an Internet-based business did manage to evoke some consistency in the types of responses. The limited scope notwithstanding, their responses suggest that there is some association between the idea of the New Economy and notions of technology and commerce. Central to this association is the concept of disintermediation – the idea that as networks connect people, shortcuts are created. That is to say, transactions, which are increasingly automated, allow people to invest money or purchase items online using a more direct process. In essence, the responses intimated a correlation between the concept described here as the New Economy and the practice of electronic commerce (e-commerce) over the Internet. Viewed thorough this type of lens, it is understandable that the New Economy Encyclopedia would treat capitalism as something of an accepted reality.
The commercial aspects in the New Economy Encyclopedia's description are also supplemented by more abstract themes, such as innovation and potentiality. These features are illustrated in the New Economy Encyclopedia's stated valorization of innovation over mass production and the intimation that venture capital investment be applied to ideas rather than machinery. Two other conceptual themes that are also highlighted by the New Economy Encyclopedia include the notion of constant change and the reference to an almost revolutionary shift in the social and cultural landscape. Indeed, before transitioning into its alphabetically-arranged concepts, the narrative of the introduction of the New Economy Encyclopedia states the following (emphasis added): "To help inform the architects of this new world, we've assembled an Encyclopedia of the New Economy. Read on, pioneer." 57

The language, imagery and intimations surrounding the notions of a new universe -- traversed by adventurous mavericks and creative innovators -- are inescapable. They do, in some regard, however, contradict one particular colleague's description of the New Economy in which "geeks and computers" were mentioned above. As romantic and elegant as architects and pioneers of the New Economy might seem, it appears as though the "geeks" at their computers, busy writing binary codes of "zeros and ones," also form part of the picture by creating the information technology tools that constitute the New Economy itself.

The New Economy Index offers its own description with the following statement: "The term New Economy refers to a set of qualitative and quantitative changes that, in the last 15 years, have transformed the structure, functioning and rules of the economy. The New Economy is a knowledge-based and idea-based economy, where the keys to job creation and higher standards of living are understood as innovative ideas and technology embedded in services

57 See last paragraph of the introduction to the online Encyclopedia of the New Economy, 2000.
and manufactured products. It is an economy where risk, uncertainty and constant change are the rule, rather than the exception.” 58 In this definition, the idea of structural and functional transformation is, again, highlighted, along with the significance of ideas and knowledge. A number of additional elements are also alluded to, such as the sentiments of risk and uncertainty, as well the belief that higher standards of living and human development are linked with this particular texture and period of economic development.

Another key characteristic of the New Economy moves beyond abstract concepts and concerns the very nature of jobs that working people perform in their quotidian lives -- the increase in the number of “office” workers. Even as media reports highlight the losses of jobs in the manufacturing sector today, as recently as 1998, close to 95 million workers in the United States (about 80 percent of the entire workforce) who were employed in industries -- such as manufacturing and agriculture -- actually spent their days processing or generating information or providing services. 59 In this way, information technology is, invariably, becoming an entrenched part of the work world. Some of the most ubiquitous technological adaptations within the workplace include items like the facsimile machine, the telephone and the copier. In recent years, they have also come to include entire computerized distribution systems, often referred to as “business warehouse” chains created by large enterprise software firms.

Thus, there is a significant movement within the world of work whereby employees are increasingly spending their days working in an office setting, as opposed to being in fields,

58 New Economy Index, 1998.
59 From the New Economy Index’s section on “Industrial and Occupational Change,” 1998.
factories and docks. Yet this is not a new development; the New Economy Index notes that since 1969, virtually all jobs that have been lost in areas such as goods production and distribution sectors have been replaced by office employment. Since the 1990s, this shift has intensified. Described in Schumpeterian terms as the “churning of job creation and destruction” by the New Economy Index, these dynamics involve the accelerated rate and the increased number of companies that are formed and that disband each year, in conjunction with the faster pace of job creation and job loss within such an environment. Indeed, this type of environment goes against the grain of the stability and predictability of the Old Economy system. As such, it has resulted in a field of turbulence in which workers (and even entire communities of workers) face increasing risk and insecurity.

Still, the New Economy Index argues that this tumultuous scenario also drives economic innovation, growth and development. In fact, the New Economy Index draws upon the qualitative differences between the economies of the United States and Japan to show how one economic model can triumph over another. Following a rather orthodox economic ideology in which free market principles are advanced, this postulation suggests that as less creative and competitive companies wither away, more innovative and efficient enterprises replace them. Implicit in this position also resides the belief that the instability is somehow linked with certain qualities, which are described as “dynamism” and “vibrancy.” In fact, these very terms -“dynamism” and “vibrancy” -- are used to highlight the dimensions lacking in the Japanese economy, in comparison with that of the United States. The financial

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60 From the New Economy Index’s section on “Industrial and Occupational Change,” 1998.
61 From the New Economy Index’s section on “Dynamism and Competition;” 1998.
62 From the New Economy Index’s section on “Dynamism and Competition;” 1998.
regimes in the two countries are left entirely out of the discussion, which valorizes the promise and rewards of the so-called New Economy.

Looking at the case of Japan, it appears that the discourses of Japanese economic ascendency in the 1980s functioned as a sort of proxy for foreign direct investment. That influx of foreign direct investment contributed to substantial capital investment and overly-inflated asset prices in purchases (for items such as movie studios and golf courses). These eventually decreased in value. The result was an evaporation of foreign capital, a massive reduction in the Japanese stock market, an increase in bad debts, and also a damaged banking industry. 63 Meanwhile, the aforementioned overcapacity (with insufficient demand) caused prices to fall (as people were induced to buy) and indicated that Japan was headed for a recession. Yet Japan’s Central Bank Authority failed to quickly cut interest rates and increase the money supply (some experts believe that more currency in circulation might have had a stabilizing effect on prices). As such, Japan went from recession to deflation.

Given this background, it is difficult to reconcile the rhetorical language of economic “vibrancy” and the underlying absolutist belief in free market principles with the deleterious effects suffered in Japan’s economy. In fact, the lack of quick governmental intervention appears to have been one of the many significant reasons why the Japanese economy has lost its so-called “dynamism,” while the United States economy was on an upward spiral.

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63 From 1990 to 1993, the Japanese Stock Market lost 60 to 70 percent of value (the Nikkei Average Index 225 went from a peak of around 39,000 in 1990 to below 15,000 in 1992, and now sits at 10,000).
The valorization of certain principles notwithstanding, it would seem that from the 1990s onward, the New Economy has centered on particular industries. As noted in the chapter of the research dealing with the history of the Internet and information technology, the information technology wave started in the 1970s, but expanded over the ensuing two decades as new technological innovations and improvements were developed, and as competition increased. For its part, competition in a capitalist marketplace involves the international arena. The industries that in some way or another involved the New Economy are no exception. Information technology, computers and the proliferation of the Internet can be regarded as global phenomenon. Malaysia is now one of the biggest manufacturers of computer chips in the world while India and China are currently leaders in computer manufacturing. Germany is home to SAP -- one of the world’s most sophisticated enterprise software companies. Still, the New Economy -- as distinct from information technology itself -- has been regarded as a largely American formation, although its reach is global and the international connections are constantly being strengthened.

Because the United States is the place in which many new technologies were developed, a number of companies and institutions have emerged in the United States to support emerging research and development industries. Although California’s Silicon Valley is noted as a particular research and development hub, Silicon Alley in Austin, Texas; Microsoft headquarters in Seattle; the Research Triangle in North Carolina; the Massachusetts Institute of Technology research arena in Boston; and Provo, Utah; are also regarded as “high tech” centers. As business proliferates within busy metropolitan areas, such as the energy corridor
of Houston and the financial markets New York, the spread of sophisticated technology has continued to take hold across the entire United States.

The specificity of the United States as a venue of the New Economy is associated with a number of technological, economic, societal, cultural and institutional features. With new industries and institutions emerging, many of them oriented toward technological research and development (as noted in this research), there have been associated institutional transformations in the form of changes to regulatory frameworks -- both deregulation and the introduction of new legislation. As well, there have been changes to the capitalist infrastructure in order to facilitate the liberalization of economic activities, many of which increasingly have been taking place in virtual space in the form of online transactions.\(^{64}\) In addition, the size of the United States markets, its position within global networks of commodities and capital, its ability to attract capital and foreign investment, and its influence in drawing human intellectual capital from across the globe, have collectively contributed to the fact that the United States may be viewed as a locus of the New Economy. Finally, the societal and cultural embrace of all things associated with technological advancement is illustrated in recent reports and statistics on computer usage by youth, and the popular shared understanding that technology is vital to the education of forthcoming generations.\(^{65}\)

Structural changes, however, have not occurred singularly in the realm of market liberalization, as discussed just above. There have been other social, political and cultural

\(^{64}\) A study by Forrester Research, 1998, projected that by 2003, electronic transactions would be valued at $1.3 trillion, as compared with electronic transactions valued at $43 billion in 1998.

\(^{65}\) I have not included a specific reference for this assertion only because there has been so much material available on the matter in the public sphere of information.
forces at work that have also been influential in forging many of the structural and institutional changes that have occurred during the time of the emergence of the New Economy and unprecedented economic growth.

Notably, the anti-globalization movement has become increasingly vocal and has presented a significant challenge to the free marketeers and laissez faire capitalists advocating the spread of goods and the circulation of capital. Many discussions about globalization have been characterized in terms of the players involved in the globalization movements -- both for and against it. On one side are the free marketeers and laissez faire capitalists who champion the cause of globalization with an unerring belief in Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” of capitalism. On the other hand are a loose collection of anarchists, socialists, communists and environmentalists who decry the actions of multinational corporations and their effects on the people of the developing world. This dichotomous cast has obfuscated an emerging cadre of players. Sometimes called the “middle grounders,” and embodied by representatives from the United Nations and the World Bank as well as individuals such as George Soros, this cadre favors free markets, but with the belief that the benefits of free markets can only be realized with the establishment of strong political, financial and legal institutions and frameworks. 66 They tend to be cognizant of the abuses of free market practices, such as sweatshop labor, ecological degradation and complicity in human rights violations, but rather than opposing the notion of the free market, they call for its amelioration in the form of intensified institutional frameworks and political governance.

Along a similar vein, within the realm of information technology and the informational economy, there have been infoenthusiasts and entrepreneurial capitalists who have viewed the potential of the emerging moment through the prism of unlimited potential, and even avariciousness. Meanwhile, there are those who see information technology in opposition to authenticity and predict dire consequences as a result of its expansion. (See the discussion of the now-defunct merger with Political Risk Services (PRS) elsewhere in the research for an example of those who resist technological change and express distrust of it.)

There is also a third group of players who, as in the case of globalization, understand the imperative of structural support for information technology. They understand that the technological wave is inescapable. At the same time, they have also understood the need to deal legally with monopolies such as Microsoft. It is this third group of players who have discussed the necessity to develop structures and institutions in tandem with technological changes in the Information Age and the New Economy. They are the techno-business equivalents of globalization’s “middle grounders” and they represent a growing socio-cultural segment of the population, represented in business.

In terms of industry development and associated effects on economic growth, a study by Mandel has shown that between the mid-1990s and the end of the 1990s, the information technology sector made up on 8 percent of the GDP in the United States, yet it contributed to 35 percent of GDP growth. 67 The United States Department of Commerce projected that by the year 2006, 50 percent of the entire national workforce will be employed either by

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67 Mandel, 1999; see also Castells, 2000: 148-149
producers of information technology or users of information technology. 68 Even given the
devolution of technological stocks, which occurred from 2000-2001, it would appear that the
influences and impacts of information technology on the national level are substantial, thus
suggesting that the New Economy is a significant aspect of the socio-economic context in the
United States.

Information technology and the Internet are intimately connected, but distinctive.
Information technology is increasingly organized around the Internet. Moreover, information
technology is used to drive the Internet, which can be understood as a venue for
communication, connection, commerce, information gathering, dissemination and reception.
In essence, the Internet can be understood as a medium of circulation. In the business world
-- and certainly at CountryWatch -- the Internet is not discussed as a medium of circulation at
the level of cultural production. Instead, discourses surrounding the Internet are centered on
the Internet industry, and its promise of impressive growth in three areas: revenue,
employment possibilities and the potential values of market capitalization.

At the time of writing, final numbers for the amount of revenue generated by Internet
industries in 2003 were not available. Estimates for the previous year, however, suggest that
over $1.2 trillion in revenue would be generated in 2002 -- a level on par with well-
established industries, such as health care. 69 As noted above, employment in areas related
to information technology, which includes Internet industries, is projected to grow. In fact,
jobs in Internet related industries numbered close to 2.5 million in the United States in the

69 Castells, 2000: 150.
late 1990s. Likewise, despite the bursting of the "tech bubble" in the stock market in 2001 and 2002, by late 2003, high growth technology stocks had again risen in value, with some analysts again predicting that market capitalization might be bloated. In a Business Week article, an analyst for Standard and Poors noted that in 2003, Internet stocks outperformed the Standard and Poors 500 stock index through August 1, 2003. (There was some erosion in the next several weeks due to concerns over earnings reports.) Thus, the promise of another market correction notwithstanding, it would seem that the movement in Internet stock valuation reflected a continuing and strong interest in Internet companies as a source of economic growth.

The business interest aside, the Internet industry is made up of four segments or what the University of Texas' Center for Research in Electronic Commerce (CREC) refers to as "four layers." First, there is the Internet infrastructure, characterized by telecommunications companies, such as SBC Global; Internet service providers (or ISPs), such as AOL; manufacturers of networking equipment such as Lucent, Juniper, and Cisco; and Internet backend carriers, such as Qwest and IBM Business Solutions, which are responsible for hosting websites or servers. Second, there are companies that create applications and software for Internet usage and online transactions, such as Oracle. Consultancies and business entities that maintain website design also fit into this layer, although small companies now provide much of this type of servicing and other related technical consulting services, rather than the large entities, such as Accenture (formerly known as Andersen Consulting.) Third, portals, media, resellers and brokerage firms form a constellation of

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70 CREC, 1999.  
71 Business Week, 2003  
72 CREC, 1999.
companies that benefit commercially from activity over the Internet in rather indirect means, through advertising revenue and commissions. Yahoo, E-Bay and E-Trade are examples of such intermediaries. Fourth, online transactions in the form of electronic commerce (e-commerce) and other electronic business exercises, such as online trading, form the final layer.

As discussed briefly above, there have been institutional, regulatory and structural shifts that have shaped the "newness" of the economy. Still, when one speaks of the economy (of either the old or new incarnations), one is speaking of a capitalist structure. That is to say, the capitalist system is taken as something of a "given." Within that context, information technology is understood as something that will facilitate increased productivity and efficiency, resulting in sustained high economic growth and ultimately, higher human development. Perhaps, however, that pronouncement is the optimistic version of the narratives about the New Economy and information technology. Although it may have the potential to improve human development, access to technology is not ubiquitous and it is certainly expensive. Similarly, although it appeals to notions of transcending borders, there are institutional and political boundaries to be considered, since access to absolutely everything on the Internet is hardly possible. Thus, the New Economy and information technology must be understood as simultaneously inclusive and exclusionary.

If the New Economy is both inclusive and exclusionary, it is also the economy of the intangible. That is to say, it is not an economy of material commodities and of goods and products per se. As the case of CountryWatch illustrates, and as demonstrated by the success
of online brokerage and transactions, the New Economy is, at least in part, an information economy. Dubbed the “information revolution” by some, the Information Age and the associated New Economy are not simply advertising slogans oriented toward the increased sale of wireless devices and cellular telephones that also connect with the Internet.

In many readings, articles and discussions about the Information Age and the associated New Economy, a few themes are repeatedly mentioned: globalization, computerization, economic disintermediation, dematerialization, and the dismantling of the traditional architecture of the industrial organization. Collectively, they represent aspects of an emerging moment of apparent transformation in culture, society and the economy.

The Emerging Moment

The present moment of transformation in this period of late industrialization may be marked by significant transformations in (1) management, (2) labor, (3) government, (4) finance and (5) technology. 73 With regard to management, prior to the growth of the railroads in the late 19th century and the huge industrial firms that followed, managers and owners essentially played the identical role. 74 With the development of railroads, an elaborate hierarchy of individuals was needed to coordinate the fast-growing corporation, focusing energy on matters such as setting goals, allocating resources, monitoring performance and rewarding compensation. This kind of managerial power increased until the 1980s when corporations

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74 Tedlow, 2000: 98.
became extraordinarily complex and ownership became increasingly dispersed. In this way, the 20th century marked the rise of the professional business manager.

The architect of the 20th century corporation, Alfred P. Sloan Jr., the Chief Executive Officer of General Motors, trained as an engineer. Reportedly, this background helped him comprehend the intricacies of manufacturing and contributed to the reputation of being a titan through his executive abilities. How did this occur? It has been suggested that Sloan's reputation in these two domains was based not only upon Sloan's success at making General Motors the world's automobile leader, but also upon his ability to craft marketing and management into something of a science. 75 In short, it is believed that Sloan's executive leadership, which is often cast in contrast to that of his rival, Henry Ford (of the Ford Motor Company), was founded upon his wide-ranging understanding of the automobile industry.

Today, the executives of the New Economy, such as Jeffery Bezos of Amazon.com or Microsoft's Bill Gates, are faced with a different set of challenges and opportunities. Indeed, some business experts claim that the imperative for new executives in the contemporary corporate arena is a combination of financial and managerial discipline along with entrepreneurial fervor. 76 These distinctive qualities are reflective of a different period in human economic history when wealth is -- on a comparative basis -- abundant and continued prosperity may well rest upon technological innovation.

75 Tedlow, 2000: 98
76 Tedlow, 2000: 99
With respect to the changes in labor, it is fair to state that as big business grew, so did labor. Labor movements and unions evolved as counter-measures to the unchecked power of corporations, and they were intended to advocate better working conditions and to elevate the idea of employee rights. Labor, because of the nature of work and the industrial base of businesses, held “blue collar” connotations. Labor strikes, orchestrated by unions, often became acrimonious, and the dichotomy between business and unions increasingly expanded.

As the discourses and perceptions of globalization increased (the cultural concept of globalization aside), these matters took on international relevance, especially when media attention was given to the exploitation of overseas “sweatshops.” Yet at the same time, by making labor an international issue, some experts have suggested that the power of local American unions may have been diminished. Regardless, as the nature of work has moved beyond its industrial base, as employment has increasingly become more of a “white-collared” enterprise, and especially since the late 1990s, as the wages and power of employees has increased, both labor unions and the notion of labor rights may have lost their rallying call. In fact, labor unions and labor rights may well have diminished resonance within the current workforce.

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77 The airline industry, for example, is notorious for poor relations between its management and unions. One of the newest airlines, JetBlue, however, has taken note of this trend and successfully garnered $160 million in outside investment capital—more than triple the usual rate—on the basis of its business model which touts the priority of employee satisfaction (see Donnelly, 2001).

78 This distinctive trend is evidenced in the proliferation of employment agencies, such as Monsterboard.com and CruelWorld.com, which are oriented toward the needs of the potential employee, rather than the possible employer. The success of these agencies in the late 1990s and early 2000s reflects the notion that, the job market became not only employee-friendly, but also employee-favorable during that period, the subsequent job downturn since late 2001 notwithstanding. In this kind of climate, discourses about the fight for workers’ rights seemed a bit incongruous.
Although street protests at recent international summits in Seattle, Davos and Genoa are redolent of the loud call for attention to workers' rights across the world, in the United States, where regular broadcasts reminded the public of a still-booming economy, and employment headhunters frantically searched for the much-needed "talent" to fill employment slots, the nature of labor appeared to have shifted in some manner. Even as the unemployment rate rose to 6.1 percent by mid-2003 -- largely a result of the "dot.com" crash and downsizing within the manufacturing sector -- and while certain politicos claimed that the economy was in a recessionary mode, for the most part, labor trends continue to be favorable for white-collar workers.

Meanwhile, the role of government in the economy, be it of the "Old" or "New" variety, has always been a notable one. Despite the perception of a division between the government and the corporate sector in the United States (the conventional divide between states and markets), it would seem that the two are actually quite interconnected.\textsuperscript{79} The United States Department of Defense's funding for enterprises involving aeronautics, electronics and computer science, for example, is a clear case where governmental and business interests and influences conflate with one another. Indeed, as discussed earlier, the history of the Internet is one of the most ostensible illustrations of involvement on the part of the Department of Defense in such a manner.

Yet at the same time, the government may be positioned to play one of its most powerful roles in business as a regulatory force in antitrust enforcement. While recent attention has been given to the likes of Microsoft's antitrust case, this strange relationship between

\textsuperscript{79} Tedlow, 2000: 99
government and business dates back to pre-New Economy times when United States Steel was prosecuted for antitrust law violations in 1890, and soon thereafter, when Standard Oil and American Tobacco were both disbanded in 1911. A year later, in 1912, the United States Supreme Court put the Terminal Railway Association out of commission for extortion over basic transport.  

In a similar manner, as new arenas of public interests develop rapidly, such as telecommunications and biotechnology, it is likely that the government will continue to play a regulatory role.

Finance is yet another arena marked by significant change. Dating back to the 1970s, the economy was experiencing an explosion worldwide, thus minimizing the market share of United States-owned and operated businesses. With staggering increases in the price of oil in 1973 and 1979, and as Japan and Europe posed a threat to specific industries, such as steel, consumer electronics and automobiles, the financial markets were far less generous to shareholders in the United States. By the 1980s, however, during the Reagan presidency, thanks to the conversion of pension funds into large and monolithic blocks of stock, a new breed of private wealth emerged.

In the late 1990s, the stock market garnered unprecedented popularity. Once thought of as the financial domain exclusively belonging to the very wealthiest echelon of society, and intended to augment and expand their existing affluence, Ameritrade and E-market advertising on television has indicated the emancipation of this financial constituency. As market capitalizations ascended to extraordinary heights in the New Economy on the Nasdaq

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80 Carney, France and Art, 2000: 98
81 Tedlow, 2000: 99
stock exchange, and as “Blue Chip” stocks of the traditional Dow Jones Industrial Index enjoyed the positive (i.e. "bullish") market conditions, the profusion of prosperity in the United States in the late 1990s and early 2000s denoted an important shift in the socio-economic landscape of the country. Yet even as the stock market enjoyed monumental gains, there was also a large measure of volatility, especially with regard to “hi-tech” stocks on the Nasdaq. Although the capriciousness of such stocks may have been due to increasing reservations about the profitability of technological ventures, analysts also characterized market fluctuations as being natural corrections of an over-valued market. By late 2001 and early 2002, the uncertainty provoked by the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C., as well as the unfolding of corporate scandals that were set off by the collapse of Enron, contributed to a downward trend in the market, which has since rebounded to some extent. These factors notwithstanding, it is clear that the domain of financial investment has experienced increasing (and some say increasingly democratized) involvement.

Finally, with regard to technology, the development of a plethora of services and technologies, all aimed at increasing the speed and efficiency of transportation, information exchange and communication, has radically transformed professional operations, as well as personal functions. Perhaps these advances in science and technology have contributed to the increased wealth (mentioned just above) in much the same way as the pioneering ethos led to the Era of Exploration, which was followed by European imperialism, resulting in the amassment of riches for the colonial powers. Later, the emergence of the railroad and the telegraph may have directed industrial transformations in the 19th century, while today, computer-mediated data might well serve a similar set of purposes. Certainly, the 20th
century might be regarded by some observers as “the most technology-intensive era in history.”

At the very least, it appears that the economy has moved from an industrially-based model to a more technologically oriented standard.

From Atoms to Bits

If the Industrial Revolution can be regarded as the precursor to the Information Age, then, according to Nicholas Negroponte, the difference between the two eras lies in the difference between atoms -- the most basic units of matter, and “bits” -- the most essential units of digital information, defined as a binary digit in the technological lexicon. During the Industrial Revolution, the processing, sorting, rearrangement, recombination, and transportation of matter was developed and advanced in an unparalleled fashion. Likewise, contemporary discourses seem to suggest that the world has become immersed in information, in a similarly unprecedented way. In this regard, infoethusiasts forecast the cessation of physical documents (beyond their material or atomic existence), the reduction of knowledge to data, and the transformation of narratives into “hypertext” – the coding language used on the Internet. In fact, certain companies such as Questia are specifically geared toward transforming regular printed text into various forms of hypertext. Meanwhile, a constant source of debate at CountryWatch has been the question of whether or not to continue publishing in traditional book form as well as on the Internet or to cease printing books altogether. While there are still requests for the regular book format at CountryWatch,

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82 Tedlow, 2000: 99
83 Negroponte, 1995; see also Brown and Duguid, 2000: 15.
84 Brown and Duguid, 2000: 19.
the marketing department of the company believes that the trend clearly supports eventual
devolution of traditional printing.

These prognostications notwithstanding, Brown and Duguid remind such visionaries and
infoenthusiasts that the hyper-rationalism that seems to burgeon in the Information Age may,
in fact, be confined within its own originary myths. Historians often state that the
Information Age did not commence with the Internet, but rather, with the telegraph, whose
invention, in effect, disentangled the speed of human travel from the speed of information. 86
Even before the telegraph, fire and smoke were used to transmit messages at the speed of
light, while transcending great distances. 87

This disconnection between physical travel and the transmittance of information is cleverly
illustrated by the Microsoft advertising slogan, “Where do you want to go today?” Clearly,
the rhetorical question intimates that Microsoft has the means to take you there, and the
promotional visuals of people sitting in front of computers also carry the message that the
answer lies in cyberspace, and is to be illuminated in digital terms. 88 Still, it is apparent that
no real or physical movement is ever intended to take place. Atoms do not move or travel;
instead, bits of information can -- and, in fact, do -- traverse across cyberspace, making the
act of “going” somewhere a virtual exercise. As such, Microsoft, and other Internet-oriented
software, browsers and platforms, act as virtual agent or conduits, connecting people with
information, across temporal and spatial constructs.

88 The Microsoft advertising theme is noted in Brown and Duguid, 2000: 20.
Returning to the matter of the Internet's supposed precursor, the telegraph, if one accepts that both the Internet and its predecessor, the telegraph, disconnect the speed of the transmission of information from the speed of human travel across distance, then, a second dimension might also be entertained. Specifically, with the advent of computers (including both hardware, accessories and software applications), information technologies facilitate the transmission, classification and storage of information, as well as "the production of information." 89 Indeed, one of the functions of CountryWatch is precisely the production of information for consumption by users. For the moment, it might be helpful to examine the milieu within which the disconnection between the transmission of information and physical travel has ensued.

**Spaces and Modalities: The Broader Context of Transformations**

In the last several years, much attention has been given to matters such as political and economic restructuring, which also involve changes in the historic systems of accumulation. Central to these transformations is a process of spatial restructuring and reconfiguration. In addressing these matters, David Morley and Kevin Robins have been concerned with media industries in Europe, but their observations on the European scenario are relevant to similar transformations in information technology today in the United States. 90

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89 Brown and Duguid, 2000: 18; see also Castells, 1996.
Specifically, Morley and Robins pose the question, *what is the broader context within which the transformations in media, technology and markets are taking place?*  

91 In answer, they delineate a list of political economists from the Regulation School such as Aglietta, Billaudot and Gauron, Boyer, as well as Lipietz, all of whom analyze the decline of the social system referred to as “Fordism.”  

92 For this cadre of political economists, Fordism is centered in a “regime of accumulation,” focused on mass production and mass consumption, that is controlled by “a mode of regulation.”  

93 Fordism, therefore, is both a method of capitalist development as well as a historically specific union of accumulation and regulation. Its historical specificity finds its roots the provision of higher wages and other benefits in exchange for scientific corporate management.  

94 “Fordism,” a term coined by Gramsci to describe the mechanisms of labor and production, the processes of accumulation and distribution, as well as the power and influence wielded by the Ford corporation’s social welfare system and management which governed workers.  

95 Another element of Fordism has included the transfer of industry from traditional centers to the periphery in places such as Latin America and Asia as a result of declining profits and the need for low cost labor.  

96 In the recession periods of rising wages, declining productivity, market saturation, competition from low wage countries, and increasing costs for public services, structural crises occurred because not only were Fordist resources exhausted, but the future of capitalist development had been brought into question.  

97 In recent years, as the economy strengthened

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and grew ever-more buoyant, alternative frameworks were used to describe these significant shifts. Usually discussed under the rubric of “post-Fordism,” this model is characterized by flexible accumulation, and is manifest today in decentralized production, demassified enterprises (in which production is not located in a large factory on a single site), and niche markets. Technological innovations and developments appear to be the impetus for this shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, as noted above in the section called “From Atoms to Bits.” Put simply, as the Fordist model gives way to its successor, “economies of scale” are metamorphosing into “economies of scope.” 98 This is most clearly and tangibly evidenced in the growth of electronic commerce (e-commerce) enterprises, which, arguably, have been positioned to reconfigure the importance of “brick and mortar” storefronts. 99 Here, the emphasis is not upon the replacement of materiality with virtual alternatives along a linear development course, but instead, upon a distinctive set of emergent modalities that are distinct from the rigid and massified system of Fordism.

As noted by Morley and Robins, Michael Piore and Charles Sabel have critiqued the Fordist model of industrialization in favor of other systems of economic development such as decentralized networks of small companies. 100 Morley and Robins, however, caution against depicting inversions of Fordism (i.e. “anti-Fordism”) as post-Fordist varieties. 101 Indeed, they state that idealistic futures cannot easily remove or dispel “the solidity of inherited

99 With much recent skepticism regarding the pioneer of e-commerce, Amazon.com, some analysts state that e-commerce will never fully outstrip physical stores and services, however, other kinds of online transactions and services continue to be developed, and persist in garnering substantial venture capital funding, thus suggesting the presumed long-term viability of such enterprises.
100 Morley and Robins, 1995: 28; see also Michael Piore and Charles Sabel, 1984
social structures, infrastructures, and relations.” The transformation into the current Information Age, with its digital attributes of technology, powered by what is referred to as the New Economy, is a complex one. It is bereft of an easily discernible genealogy that can track the metamorphosis of Fordism and Industrialization to the current state of being. Meanwhile, whether or not this state of being can be classified as neo-Fordist of post-Fordist is a debate well beyond the domain of this project.

Still, for the limited purposes of this endeavor, Morley and Robins discuss Manuel Castells’ examination of information-oriented development, which is based upon the new forms of communication and information technology, and which produces both the decentralization and the delocalization of processing, production and consumption. As such, Morley and Robins contend that “the transmutation of a centralized space economy into new forms of decentralization and dissemination” quite possibly fuels the global network economy. In this regard, Castells notes that, “the new space of a world capitalist system is a space of variable geometry, formed by locations hierarchically ordered, in a changing network of flows.”

The result of such a network of flows, according to Castells, is a new historical relationship between space and society. Again, these changing modalities might most obviously be exemplified by electronic commerce (e-commerce), virtual shopping and other business and commercial transactions that ensue over the Internet. Within the enclave of information

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103 Morley and Robins, 1995: 29; see also Castells, 1985:5
104 Morley and Robins, 1995: 29
105 Castells, 1985: 7
106 Castells, 1985: 3
technology involving the Internet, however, examples also include business-to-business (B2B) applications that dispense with intermediaries, thus making web-based interactions, as well as access to information, easy and seamless. 107 Hence, as information technology increases, commercial, business and intelligence interactions that once occurred only within certain parameters and from specific loci are now allowed greater distribution. One could, thus, suggest that the result is not simply a ground-breaking historical relationship between space and society mentioned above, but also new sources of capital, as well as new dynamics of power.

Traditionally, capital had to overcome spatial barriers, while capital and labor customarily were brought together at one fixed point for production to occur. 108 By contrast, today with the advent of information technologies, as well as the development of sophisticated communications modalities, capital can be described as “hypermobile and hyperflexible, tending toward deterritorialization and delocalization.” 109 With these distinctive conditions, it is now possible for multiple horizontal movements to move across the field of vertical integration that has traditionally marked capitalist industrial society. That is to say, information technology has had an impact upon the traditional capitalist paradigm so that the regime of Fordist processing, production and accumulation includes a combination of both vertical and horizontal integration. The large production center has given way to include localized units.

107 SAP is one of the most well-known and internationally used technology companies with B2B applications; Manugistics and I2 are examples of B2B supply chain management systems, while Ariba is an example of a B2B marketplace software system.
108 Harvey, 1985: 145
109 Morley and Robins, 1995: 30
Yet organizational and territorial transformation is not simply a positive evolution within the capitalist cycle. As localized units of production, processing and distribution sprout, it would be a mistake to assume that they signify the blossoming of post-Fordist inclinations. These smaller units are quickly created, utilized, and even discarded, depending on the clear benefits to the corporation. Moreover, because of their integrated relationship to wider global market, they suffer the repercussions of market volatility. In this way, it may be argued that distribution and not production marks the center of capitalist power and profit.  

The Fieldwork in Focus: Power and Profit

Seemingly, as information technology lays the foundation for this unique relationship between space and society, not only is a matrix of information formulated, but also a complicated field of power.

In the “field” at CountryWatch, this seemingly complex field of power regarding production and distribution is demonstrable on a consistent basis. As discussed more fully during the chapter on fieldwork within the offices of CountryWatch, the company relied on a skeletal crew of employees during its early days. Interns hired to process paperwork quickly evolved into full-time employees in the Editorial and Information Technology departments. One researcher with a background in music and anthropology morphed into being the head of the technology fairly quickly, while I went from a writer to an editor and news desk manager. Likewise, a languages specialist was responsible for translating research, but she also learned

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110 Garnham, 1986: 31-32
to run economic growth charts and projections. In fact, the company largely developed in those early days because of the versatility of the personnel.

Yet, when a new executive came on board with CountryWatch a few years later, he famously said, “What we need is a lot of VC [venture capital] funding so we can hire the real talent.” His remarks were articulated during a meeting attended by many of the people who had, for all intents and purposes, been performing all the key functions of the company for years. In another similar setting, the head of sales at the time remarked on the fact that the information technology (IT) department was essentially run by a musician with an anthropology degree who had attended a less than spectacular university. The young man’s obvious technical savvy and ability to assimilate computing complexity was irrelevant to the sales manager, who lamented that he was anxious for CountryWatch to hire “a real IT team.”

Sometime soon after came an article in Forbes magazine, which highlighted CountryWatch’s development thusly: “This is no cash-burning Internet machine. CountryWatch has kept expenses down, hiring a few Ph.D.s from neighboring Rice University to write up-to-date reports on each country.” 111 Not surprisingly, many of those very writers and researchers referenced took issue with their depiction. As noted by a European specialist, “It is a little difficult to know if I should be insulted when I see myself described as smart but cheap labor.” In contrast, the very same article glowingly highlighted the careers of the top executives at the company, two of whom had been previously employed at Enron. At the time of writing, Enron had not yet imploded and was considered “the darling of the business world,” as expressed by one of those very executives.

The indelicacy of these cases notwithstanding, they certainly evoked questions of what constituted "the real talent." If not those who produce the content and those who manage the technological venue for dissemination, then, who was the "real talent?" In some ways, the Forbes article offered some clues about who would be considered "the real talent" by the business world, and who would not. Evidently, "talent" did not include those from academia with an ability to learn quickly. Clearly, "talent" did involve some sort of entrenched business savvy. 112 Years later (when the people responsible for those very remarks about "talent" had left CountryWatch), a further deepening of the concept of "talent" was illuminated by the company's budget. While the sales and marketing department was well-funded and employees from that department were afforded commissions and bonuses, the editorial and technical department were understaffed and underpaid in comparison. In the business world, where money is the determining factor or "bottom line," it became increasingly difficult to divorce the understanding of "talent" from those with business interests. Conversely, writers, researchers, and technology personnel were regarded as the "labor" or production staff.

Not surprisingly, the messages that were being emitted from the core of the company were not always positively received. In particular, a growing chasm between the "business talent" and the "production staff" increased. Lunch times and "smoke breaks" only served to emphasize the dissonance between the two factions. For those in management, as I was, the situation was more complicated. During meetings, all department representatives interfaced

112 The notion of "talent" is not to be confused with "intellectual capital" which is discussed later in the research. Whereas "talent" is variously and subjectively understood, "intellectual capital" is developed over time and becomes a vital part of a company's intangible assets.
and the humanizing effect of this type of interaction prevented us from becoming too ossified in our positioning. Still, once these meetings were over and lunch followed, I (as well as the head of the information technology department) very rarely participated with the sales crew. Instead, we often searched out technical and editorial colleagues "on the hill."

"The hill" is a grassy knoll located outside the original CountryWatch office in one of the Riverway buildings, just overlooking the Omni Hotel. "The hill" was a preferred spot of the "production" crew because of its aesthetic charm and also because there was almost no chance of running into a salesperson on the grass. As one web developer said, "If there is no air conditioning and shiny steel around, you can be safe from a salesperson." It is worth noting that when I was promoted to being Vice President at CountryWatch, in the period immediately following, I was rarely invited for either lunch or smoke breaks on "the hill." My promotion came after a "restructuring exercise" in which several employees were let go. In fact, my very first duty was to place fifteen writers on furlough. Although these writers worked under contract from international locations and did not participate in daily life in the CountryWatch office, it is not a stretch of the imagination to assume that the timing and the symbolism of my promotion at a time of layoffs contributed to my loss of standing within "the hill" community.

Still, during the period in which I was considered an intrinsic member of this community, I had the occasion to share many conversation with colleagues about the professional and interpersonal dichotomy that had been formed within the office. One of the observations shared by the writers, researchers, web developers and technical staffers was that it was clear
that the sales, marketing and business staff were favored, while “we” were essentially taken for granted. During one of these conversations, I laughingly mentioned that we could draw a parallel between the power dynamics at CountryWatch and those of the wider world. In this model, the producers are not conceived of as “the talent” but, rather, the labor, much like the labor and raw materials produced in the developing world. Meanwhile, those responsible for business development, sales and marketing, because they ensured that profits were realized, could be aligned with the developed world in which the premium of profits and distribution was higher. Its simplistic construction aside, the paradigm of the developing world posited against the developed world appeared to have had some resonance with my colleagues, some of whom would later sign their emails to me with insignias, such as “Your fellow Third World-er.” Apart from the regime of power that is ensconced in this type of symbolism, there was also an element of self-conscious sub-alternality – itself a characteristic of power dynamics.

Without drawing too dramatic a conclusion from this scenario, it appeared as though some sentiment of exploitation was certainly experienced by several employees as a consequence of the structure and divisions within the company. The irony, of course, lay in the fact that so many of the discourses surrounding the New Economy involve references to the value of human intellectual capital, as discussed in the section on learning, knowledge work and intellectual capital elsewhere in the research. At CountryWatch – itself a so-called New Economy company -- the reality was far removed from the rhetoric.
Production, Development and Growth

Thus far, the discussion of capitalist restructuring (modes of production) and the ascendancy of informationalism (modes of development) have been discussed in tandem with one another. While the two are intrinsically bound together, it might be useful to dissect them for purposes of understanding them better.

According to the theories postulated about industrialization and informationalism, society is structured along the lines of production, human action and power.\(^\text{113}\) By production, the appropriation, transformation, distribution and accumulation of matter is considered. In terms of human action, the concept of experience between human identities within a given cultural and natural environment is examined. Power concerns the relationship between people within the context of both production and experience.\(^\text{114}\)

The capitalist system, the commodification of labor, the private ownership and control of the means of production, all serve to determine appropriation, transformation, distribution and accumulation of matter. Production involves both the orchestration of production and the labor force itself. The relationship between labor and matter involves the act of work as the means of production. The means of production is expressed through the efforts of labor (energy and knowledge of the labor force) within the production process. Thus, in industrial society, the factory worker as well as the mechanisms and machinery within the factory constituted the production process.

\(^{113}\) Castells, 2000: 14. See also Touraine, 1969 on industrialization and post-industrial society.
\(^{114}\) Castells, 2000: 15.
In information society (the "Information Age"), the mode of development, relies on the technological processing of information. The New Economy (which is connected with and, perhaps even a part of the so-called "Information Age") is a fairly new evolution, emerging only in the last several decades, largely as a consequence of developments in information technology. Technology has been regarded as one of the driving forces associated with productivity and economic growth. Indeed, many theorists would say that ongoing technological development has charted the course for production within societies, as well as associated considerations, such as the social formulations of economic organization.

In this regard, Joel Mokyr, a professor of Economics at Northwestern University, has expressly connected technological innovation and creativity with economic progress and development in a book entitled, The Lever of Riches. One of the underlying postulations of his work is the idea that during the course of history, technological progress has yielded exponential and recursive returns. In fact, Mokyr writes, "Technological progress has been one of the most potent forces in history in that it has provided society with what economists call a free lunch, that is, an increase in output that is not commensurate with the increase in effort and cost necessary to bring it about." It is this mixture of potency and utility that appears to have motivated his decision to title the book as such. The word -- lever -- is defined as follows:

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116 Castells, 2000: 78; see also Rosenberg and Birdzell, 1986 and Mokyr, 1990.
118 Mokyr, 1990: 3.
1. A simple machine consisting of a rigid bar pivoted on a fixed point and used to transmit force, as in raising or moving a weight at one end by pushing down on the other.

2. A projecting handle used to adjust or operate a mechanism.

3. A means of accomplishing; a tool: used friendship as a lever to obtain advancement.

The notion of technology as a tool or mechanism or force used to accomplish an objective -- in this case, economic growth -- can be identified. Indeed, Manuel Castells echoes a similar line of thinking by stating that, "In America, more often than not, new technology was viewed as a labor-saving device and as an opportunity to take control of labor."\(^{120}\) Castells, however, does not make the claim that technology is the energy behind economic progress, although he allows that it has an effect on labor, and by extension, productivity.

Productivity, however, is not exactly the same thing as economic growth, although it is a contributing factor to overall economic growth and capitalist expansion. When economies expand in countries across the world, increased productivity is a central factor. Other rationales for expansion include: (1) the vehicle of investment used to drive capital accumulation, as espoused by Robert Solow in his theory for economic growth; (2) commerce, trade, and the exchange of goods, along with an associated decline in transaction costs, as advocated by Adam Smith; and (3) increases in knowledge and technology, as well


\(^{120}\) Castells, 2000: 184.
as institutional changes, as described by Joseph Schumpeter, which either increases efficiency and ameliorates products at lower costs.\(^{121}\)

Whatever the factors that contribute to capitalist expansion and no matter the measurements used in determining national income, gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national product (GNP), most economists concur that past economic growth is materially relevant to the later wealth of countries and the living standards of their inhabitants. Indeed, Mokyr (mentioned just above) has written, “In economics, history is destiny. To say that a country is rich is to say that it experienced economic growth in the past.”\(^{122}\) Thus, if technology is linked with economic growth, then, it is a pattern of technological development over time that determines wealth in the present.

Ultimately, one might even say that technological development determines human development.\(^{123}\) For its part, the New Economy Index states that the New Economy, which is intensely connected with technology and technological change, is not “an end” in and of itself.\(^{124}\) Instead, the New Economy Index suggests that the New Economy and technology are the means by which more significant goals can be realized, such as new economic opportunities, more choice and freedom, greater autonomy for workers, stronger communities, and higher standards of living.\(^{125}\) The litany of meaningful purposes evokes a sense of skepticism about the New Economy and its associated technological innovations as

\(^{121}\) See Solow 1956 and 1957; Smith, 1976 [1776]; and Schumpeter, 1939.

\(^{122}\) Mokyr, 1990: 3.

\(^{123}\) Certainly, one may wish to dispute this point. It is offered only as a conception shared in certain economic development circles.

\(^{124}\) New Economy Index, 1998.

\(^{125}\) New Economy Index, 1998; see section called “The Challenge Ahead.”
an elixir for all things negative in society. Nevertheless, it may be appropriate -- in a limited way -- to suggest that technological development may well have the capacity to facilitate some degree of human development.

To expand on this point, it should be noted that many factors are considered measures of human development in countries across the world – public access to health care; educational opportunities; technological advancement; gender equality and representation; rights and representation for ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities; economic and income opportunities; as well as overall economic wealth. Since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has compiled an index using these very parameters to rank the countries of the world in what is called the “human development index.” 126 Not coincidentally, within a given country, a high degree of economic wealth and technological advancement are linked with high human development. One does not wish to sidestep the myriad of other factors that contribute to high human development, yet these two considerations are almost always factored heavily into designations of high human development countries.

Schools of Thought

Consistent with what might be regarded as “common knowledge” among most economic theorists, if productivity is the source of economic wealth in countries, then technology -- including enterprise, organizational and managerial technology -- may well be regarded as a facilitator of productivity. Indeed, discussions and theories surrounding the basis of

productivity have formed a corpus of work on political economy. The purpose of this research is not intended to answer questions about the sources of productivity, the foundations of productivity, or competing theories about technology and productivity. Instead, this research is oriented toward an exploration of the distinctive texture of the present moment, most especially in terms of the so-called New Economy, and its linkage with technological developments.

Many economic theorists have shared the view that productivity is linked with technological change. Yet some notable contributions to such research from the late 1950s through the 1970s show that while gross output may have increased and expanded, its precise correlation with technological change was debatable. In fact, the research suggests that a constellation of factors -- energy supplies, education, government regulations, in addition to classical growth theory factors, such as labor and capital -- may have contributed to productivity.

Other research, most notably by Richard Nelson in the 1980s and 1990s, posits the centrality of technological change in advancing productivity and explores sources of growth through this analytical prism. Thus, when technological change is treated as a “given” in regard to

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130 Starting with Adam Smith in 1776 (1976 edition), classic growth theory suggests a connection between labor, capital and land on increased output. David Ricardo discussed how labor is displaced by the technological innovations of machinery in 1821 (1951 edition). The research of Solow in 1956 and 1957, and later Kendrick in 1961, on economic productivity tried to show how technical change advanced gross output. The studies by Solow, however, also suggested that more labor and capital were not the only reasons for increased output, but that other factors also contributed to productivity. Later studies by Kendrick in 1973, Denison in 1974 and 1979, Mansfield in 1982 and Baumol et al in 1989, looked at how other factors, such as energy supplies, education and regulation, may have somehow contributed to increased productivity.
economic growth, it opens up a number of other questions about the historical, cultural and environmental context in which technological change occurs and increased productivity is achieved. In particular, it poses the question as to whether or not society -- including its structure and dynamics -- might form the fulcrum of economic growth. That is to say, if technology facilitates economic growth and wealth charts the course for human development, then what is the role played by culture and society in framing technological development and change?

Recalling the seminal work of Joseph Schumpeter and his emphasis on institutions and socio-economic history, the interaction between individuals within society drives economic change. Schumpeter -- a member of the Austrian school of economics -- is regarded as one of the key "structural" economic theorists because of his consideration of environmental, technological and socio-cultural changes and fluctuations in regard to economic growth, capitalist expansion and overall development. Indeed, in Schumpeter's influential book on capitalism, socialism and democracy, capitalism has been understood as more than an open marketplace guided by laws of supply and demand. Likewise, socialism is not regarded as a controlled and centralized economy. Instead, capitalism is envisioned as an order that expands across civilization with a specific set of ethics and characteristics, not unlike the notion of a bourgeois civilization. In fact, Schumpeter's prediction that socialism would eventually replace capitalism was not about a controlled economy replacing a free market, but rather about the cultural and social aspects of capitalist civilization in relation to a later-period civilization with socialist ethics and characteristics. In effect, Schumpeter was

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133 Schumpeter, 1934, 1939 and 1950.
134 See Schumpeter, 1939 on capitalism.
describing how economic systems such as capitalism and socialism simultaneously influence and are influenced by cultural, sociological and political considerations in a wider web of human and social transformations.

Although Schumpeter and his contemporary, John Maynard Keynes are associated with differing economic philosophies, they shared similar antagonists in the form of the aforementioned Austrian School.\(^{135}\) The Austrian School of Economics was Keynes’ greatest opponent and although Schumpeter had been taught within the Austrian School, he moved away from the neoclassical economic thought of the establishment.\(^{136}\) Still, Keynes and Schumpeter held distinctive economic views. Keynes held a profound attachment to free market ideas and became associated with neoconservative economic tenets.\(^{137}\) Schumpeter, although never professing to be a socialist himself and having been a critic of Marx, still held Marxist thought in high regard.\(^{138}\) Moreover, unlike Keynes, he was not an absolute believer in free market principles.\(^{139}\) Yet, as noted by the economic thinker Peter Drucker, the significance in the comparison between Keynes and Schumpeter lies in the fact that the two viewed the enterprise of economics in constitently different ways.\(^{140}\)

While Keynes operated from within the field of classical economics, as stated by Peter Drucker, “Schumpeter’s economy is not a closed system like Newton’s universe – or Keynes’s macroeconomy.”\(^ {141}\) In his Theory of Economic Development, Schumpeter

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\(^{135}\) See Keynes, 1997 [1936]
\(^{136}\) Drucker, n.d.: 1.
\(^{137}\) Drucker, n.d.: 1-3
\(^{138}\) Drucker, n.d.: 1, 3
\(^{139}\) Drucker, n.d.: 1
\(^{140}\) Drucker, n.d.: 1, 3
\(^{141}\) Drucker, n.d.: 3
asserted that structural change characterizes economics rather than the Keynesian notion of self-contained macroeconomics. Schumpeter’s understanding of structural change eventually produced his conception of innovation as the central locus of economic development. For Schumpeter, innovation was not outside the system of economics. Most classical economists have viewed innovation as something akin to an “outside catastrophe,” not unlike war and natural disasters. Innovation, for Schumpeter, however, was regarded as the energy that powers improvements in resources and the productive use of such resources in a modern economy. The conception was rooted in Marx’s work, although Schumpeter’s ideas resulted in a critique of Marxist theory. In particular, Schumpeter would show that profit was not a “surplus value” appropriated from workers, as per Marx, but rather, the very source of employment and income.

Peter Drucker explicates this equation as follows: “Innovation...makes obsolete yesterday’s capital equipment and capital investment. The more an economy progresses, the more capital formation will it therefore need. Thus, what classical economists – or the accountant or stock exchange – considers profit is a genuine cost, the cost of staying in business, the cost of a future in which nothing is predictable except that today’s profitable business will become tomorrow’s white elephant.” Following Drucker’s line of thinking, Schumpeterian innovation constitutes not only a driving force for growth and development, but it also forms an economic and cultural landscape of change.

142 Drucker, n.d.: 3
143 As noted by Drucker, n.d.: 3, in regard to Schumpeter.
144 Drucker, n.d., 3.
Before Schumpeter, theories of economic growth were expounded upon by members of the German and English Historical Schools, which focused on the institutional and cultural roots of productivity. Both schools held the view that economic shifts were dependent upon the historical, social and institutional context within which people exist. Indeed, Wilhelm Roscher, a thinker from the German Historical School, postulated the view that in order to chart economic laws, one must first consider the economic life of the people from the perspective of the historian or social scientist. In this way, Roscher argued for a historical and social scientific methodology in regard to economic growth and economic cycles.

Following Roscher’s call for historical and social scientific inquiry into economic matters, in considering the relationship between informationalism and the New Economy, one must explore the uniqueness of the intersection of these two themes. Is the New Economy just a continuation – a “late stage” – of industrialization? Is technology akin to technical change, which has been consistently cited as a factor in economic growth and development, and most especially in the industrial era? Is technology simply developing continuously, subliminally and imperceptibly in a kind of “technological drift?” Or is there something markedly distinctive about the technological developments at this time that might invalidate a gradualist model, as exemplified by the alleged continuity of inventions such as the printing press or the telegraph? As has been suggested by the work of Marc Porat, as the industrial economy evolves, is labor shifting from a material production function to one of information

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145 Roscher, 1843
146 Jones, 1981: 68.
processing? Is the New Economy a post-industrial or later industrial formulation, or is it significantly tied to the so-called emerging period of informationalism?

The Late-Industrial Economy

Much research produced on the late-industrial (post-industrial) economy has looked at the period from the early 1900s through 1949. It notes that by 1950, employment in the manufacturing sector was at a peak point. This indicator has been put forth as evidence that the industrial economy was in its prime at the time. Yet, in an analysis of the long term trends of productivity growth in advanced market economies, Manuel Castells observes that from the late 19th century and World War II, there was consistent – but moderate – productivity growth, while from 1950 to the mid-1970s, there was an increase in productivity growth, followed by a slowing of the process from the mid-1970s through the early 1990s. The stage in which productivity growth slowed was coincidentally the same period in which technological developments occurred, thus presenting something of an analytical anomaly for those who have linked technological evolution with growth as discussed above.

Castells explains, however, that economic historians have observed an interval between the time of technological innovation and the ensuing period of productivity growth. More significantly, Castells states that before technological advances and ideas can impact the entire structure of the economy at discernible levels, culture, social institutions and business

147 Porat, 1977
149 Solow, 1956 and 1957.
151 Castells, 2000: 85
enterprises must themselves experience their own respective transformations. That is to say, productivity growth is not an immediate consequence of technological innovation and development, while the creation of a techno-economic regime is not an automatic result of such innovation and development.

Castells observes that the necessary transformations and processing that must take place are even more notable as regards technology-based knowledge and information. In a study undertaken in 1997 of 600 corporations in the United States, attention was placed on the relationship between computer technology and productivity within the organizational structures. The findings of the study showed that there was a general correlation between investment in information technology and productivity. More specifically, however, the findings showed that corporations in which customer oriented business strategies that were employed in tandem with decentralized organizational structures, and meaningful training programs, tended to garner the highest increases in productivity growth. Conversely, the purchase and implementation of new information technology within corporations without strategic and organizational shifts garnered far less productive results.

These findings are not cited as a stratagem for effective implementation of technological investment in corporations. Rather, they are noted only for the purpose of illustrating how other contextual factors complicate the formula of “technological advances=increased productivity.” That said, it can be deduced that technology plays a part in productivity, which is the source of wealth in countries across the world, and one of the factors

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152 Castells, 2000: 85
contributing to degrees of human development as discussed above. Yet, as noted below, this beneficial outcome is not likely to be the impetus for technological advancement.

Technology, Informationalism and Capitalism

Both corporations as well as governments invest in technology, not because greater technological advances facilitate wealth, thus benefiting the socio-economic welfare of people and improving their lives. Instead, investments and advances in technology are made within the capitalist economic system. For both corporations as well as governments, the objective is not productivity for the pure pleasure of it. Instead, the objective is profitability and growth value of stocks. In the governmental realm, “stock” may be interpreted more symbolically as political capital. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of running governments like businesses is so pervasive that, the more literal understandings of profitability and investment growth also apply.

In exploring productivity and technology, it can be inferred that both function as the means to achieve profitability and the maximization of stockholder wealth. Following this line of thought, political institutions and instruments function for the purpose of maximizing competition within a capitalist economic regime. As such, profitability and potential stockholder value are the two determinants of technological advances and productivity growth. 154

154 Castells, 2000: 94.
At CountryWatch, the economic objective of the company is clear: to make the company profitable so that it is attractive for either a “buy-out” by a larger conglomerate, or for an IPO (first public offering on the stock market). In either of the two cases, profitability and value are intrinsically linked. Innovative technologies for the Internet and other dissemination media, enterprise software, databases, servers and other hardware are bought and utilized only to maximize productivity by an overly lean (almost anorexic) workforce.

Conceived of in this way, the central thrusts of the corporation within the capitalist economic system -- profits and stock worth -- drive technology. In this particular case, they drive information technology. Whether one looks at the industrial economy or the information economy, it would seem that the underlying motivation remains the same. In business, the motivating factors are profits and stock worth. Following this line of thinking, it is not surprising that the discourses at board meetings and executive meetings at CountryWatch always include references to “making the stockholders rich” or “making money for the stockholders.”

The lionization of innovators of the Industrial Revolution, such as the aforementioned Eli Whitney and Thomas Edison, often obscures the reality that the Industrial Revolution was hardly a gratuitous exercise in intellectual and scientific creativity. During the time of the Industrial Revolution and extending to date, it is highly unlikely that all producers of goods were seeking to create the best possible product for the sheer delight of it. Instead, the focus has been on mass production and the accumulation of capital, as noted just above. Still, capitalist thinker Adam Smith is distinguished for expounding his “invisible hand” theory,
which postulated the view that the pursuit of individual self-interest would ultimately result in collective prosperity. Following this line of thinking, the belief in the “invisible hand” permeates business thinking. Smith had been a student of astronomy and as such, some analysts have suggested that he held the view that there was some sort of natural orchestration involved in the pursuit of personal interest in prosperity, in much the same way as planetary orbits result in cosmic harmony.

Today, the true believers in free market capitalism frequently tout the belief that a given company will succeed because it makes a superior product. Central to this idea is the belief in the rationality of the market, which would presumably sift through all goods and services, and reward the very best. Although market rationality is not the same as Smith’s “invisible hand” theory, they both subscribe to something of a metaphysical understanding of the market.

This capitalist narrative, however, is curiously bereft of any critical discussion of standards. In fact, for the most part, businesses eschew the application of standards and regulations because they complicate production. In fact, as noted by Stewart, early factories flourished because factory owners paid less for labor and not, at all, because they efficiently produced superior goods. That is not to say that efficient production has not been the fulcrum of the factory assembly line. Adam Smith’s visit to a pin factory highlighted for him the utility of dividing production into distinct operations and resultanty maximizing output. Not only was efficiency increased because workers became more dexterous in their particular arena of

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155 Smith, 1976 [1776].
operations, but a more intimate understanding of operations would also help them develop improvements to the process. Indeed, it was thought that it might even lead to the development of factory technology or the improvement of machinery.

Even those cadres of people critical of capitalism imbue their perspectives with something of Smith's "invisible hand" theory and market rationality. By way of example, a former writer at CountryWatch self-described as a "social democrat" and a "critic of capitalism" frequently complained about the short editorial timeline used in writing, editing and publishing regular country-specific reports. In his view, a longer time horizon was needed to refine a given report before sending it to publication and making it available for purchase. During a heated discussion, he complained that the short production time resulted in inferior coverage and as such an inferior product, which would ultimately be bad for business. Implicit in his assumption was the notion that the market would punish an inferior product. This notion, of course, is an extension of the belief in market rationality. In response to his complaint, a frustrated colleague asked, "If we were manufacturing bottles, would it make a difference to anyone but the craftsman whether or not the bottles were excellent as opposed to adequate?" The writer responded by looking at his colleague with a bemused expression.

For the writer, the excellence of the product was paramount, but the central point his colleague was trying to make was that in terms of sheer business interests, an adequate product can potentially reap as many profits as one which can be classified as superior. In such a scenario, the personal pursuit of intellectual excellence would occur hand-in-hand with the CEO's personal pursuit of less production time, resulting in a greater number of
(arguably inferior but still salable) products to sell. The successful sale of such products results in the accumulation of capital, which can be used to further expand (in the form of further production, infrastructure improvements and expanded markets.) In a sense, it is a formula for mass production and maximized profits.

As such, one might state that businesses succeed because they expend the least amount of money and a minimal amount of labor to produce goods and services that will reap the highest profits. The highest return on investment (or “ROI”) is the paramount consideration. During the time of the Industrial Revolution and even today, this is one the primary considerations in business and economics.

The Economics of the Information Economy

Elsewhere in this section of the research, the intangible aspect of information in the so-called New Economy has been observed. By this, what is intended is an understanding of information as distinct from the material qualities of cash money, labor, machinery and equipment, or even labor.

At CountryWatch, where information constitutes the product, being intangible means that there are no space constraints. Certainly, there is a need for extensive virtual space within which the hundreds of thousands of pages worth of information is stored on servers. There is no need for warehouses of books, cd-roms and reports, though. Most customers purchase an online license, using a credit card over the Internet, which facilitates access to proprietary
information. If a purchase is made of a physical book or CD-ROM, rather than an online license, the same credit card transaction over the Internet in which the item is purchased also notifies the publishing company. The relevant content is sent to them to produce the item and then they mail the product to the customer. The concept of warehousing mass quantities of products has been effectively been replaced by “on demand” order fulfillment.

Another aspect related to the economics of information and the New Economy is the fact that information-based goods and services have a very different cost structure in comparison with material goods and services. If one produces sheets of metal, for example, one would want to maximize the number of sheets of metal produced for the cheapest possible price, while selling the sheets of metal at the highest possible profit. Cost-cutting can occur in the realm of the production of material goods. With regard to information products, costs can be “front loaded.” That is to say, the cost of producing the first edition of a book such as a CountryWatch Review is disproportionately high in comparison with the costs of later editions. Design and typesetting need not be done all over again, even if the costs of printing and binding future copies are considered. Moreover, as exemplified by the case of web-based information at CountryWatch, production costs involve design and formatting online information for unlimited distribution, constrained only by bandwidth. In other information-based companies, the framework is similar. Capital investment takes place in the research and development stage.

This “New Economic” principle is actually in stark contrast to conventional economic theory, which includes the theory of diminishing returns. In the 18th century, economic
theorists, Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, postulated the supposition that in business, additional investment becomes less productive than initial investment. In summary, the theory of diminishing returns law states that if one factor of production is increased while others remain constant, the overall returns (in output) will eventually decrease. Following this conception, while two workers doing one job might result in doubled productivity, four workers doing one job will not necessarily quadruple productivity. That is to say, if more laborers are added to harvest the proverbial field, eventually every additional laborer will contribute less productivity than before because there is a decrease in the fixed amount of land to be worked. Used originally in reference to agriculture, the theory of diminishing returns has since been accepted as an economic law underlying productivity within enterprises.

In fact, in business, companies typically reduce investment after initial product development to levels commensurate with typical profits within respective industries. This is because the highly successful businesses risk competition from other businesses willing to undercut the market. Certainly, in resource-based segments of the economy, such as agriculture and the production of bulk goods, the theory of diminishing returns applies. As the economy shifts to more of an information focus or to information-based products such as computers, software, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, and fiber optics, the theory of diminishing returns may be turned on its head. Indeed, there may be expensive capital investments in research and development in these arenas, yet subsequent developments will become less expensive, and as usage of such creations increase, the value correspondingly increases.

158 As noted by Stewart, 1997: 174; see also Malthus 1798, Ricardo, 1951 [1821]
159 Spillman and Lang, 1924.
Stated differently, in the New "Information" Economy, the value of information and knowledge increases in tandem with greater usage.\footnote{Stewart, 1997: 176.} This is exemplified by the almost ubiquitous use of the Windows Operating System by Microsoft on computers. Despite the growing popularity of open source operating systems, such as Linux, it is Microsoft Windows that disproportionately dominates daily computerized usage. With so many software designers also producing innumerable applications for Microsoft Windows that far exceed those for Macintosh's MacOS, the "usage=value" factor for Windows Microsoft is reinforced. In the realm of information technology, networks are connected by an operating system such as Microsoft Windows, within which Windows compatibility is a key consideration and a standard of communication and connection is established. Increased usage of the Microsoft Windows system effectively increases its value, in much the same way as stock prices might hypothetically increase.

Value is not contingent on product superiority, either. As noted by Thomas Stewart in his book on the dynamics and structure of the information-based economy, "Winners can become nearly impossible to dislodge, even by a superior product."\footnote{Stewart, 1997: 177.} There are many information technology experts who believe that Linux' open source operating system is superior to Microsoft Windows. Yet is it Microsoft Windows that is the winner in the marketplace by virtue of its volume of usage. The precursor to Microsoft Windows was Microsoft DOS, which is considered to be one of the most important software programs in history. Yet DOS was not an expert software development. Instead, DOS was based on a
program purchased from a neighboring technology company by Microsoft founder Bill Gates.

The Intel 8088 processor is another example. Computers possess several microprocessors, which are used to carry out various specialized functions and computational tasks. In 1971, the first microprocessor, the Intel 4004, was nothing more than a calculator of sorts but its significance resided in the fact that it was the first device in which all data processing units were integrated in one unit. Later, the Intel 8088 was developed as an inexpensive microchip, and was used by IBM in the original personal computer. Thus, the cheap and fairly unrefined Intel 8088 became one of the most significant inventions in the sphere of computing components.

Likewise, Sony's Betamax videotapes and recorders were not necessarily inferior to Matsushita's VHS videocassettes and recorders. Nevertheless, by expanding VHS videocassette and recorder usage, movie makers issued a larger quantity of movies in VHS rather than Betamax, ultimately driving the latter out of the market completely. Indeed, VHS has become the industry standard in the realm of video recording.

These cases demonstrate how the subjective quality and developmental excellence of given products are not the central determining factors in their success within the marketplace.

At CountryWatch, the complaints and criticisms by writers and researchers who work for the company have centered on the issue of content quality. As has been noted elsewhere in this
research, they have bemoaned the insufficient time horizon to produce the content, while editorial management has, at times, grumbled about the insufficient staff. In both cases, the anxiety has been that CountryWatch is producing an inferior product, which cannot compete with the likes of the Country Briefings by the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) in terms of quality. Certain individuals have darkly predicted the eventual demise of the company as a consequence. As noted elsewhere in this research, this line of thinking is imbued with a belief in the notion that the market will reward the best products and punish the worst. Absent from this set of assumptions is any question of what constitutes the “best” versus the “worst” products. An alternate scenario, however, has been that CountryWatch would produce an adequate product, and capitalizing on the economic downturn and anemic budgets of schools, universities, institutions and corporations, the company would maximize sales and wrest market share away from The Economist Intelligence Unit.

In fact, the reality is that there is an anorexic editorial team of only a few writers at CountryWatch (lean would be too kind a descriptor) who work with an impossibly difficult deadline of producing reviews and forecasts for 192 counties annually and disseminating news stories for 192 countries daily. The product has been reviewed favorably by the likes of the California State University System and the Armed Forces Library system, but it has also had lukewarm and mediocre reviews by other institutions such as the University of Texas. \(^{162}\) Meanwhile, CountryWatch products have been mockingly called “the CIA intelligence source for everyman” by Forbes. \(^{163}\) There have been no overwhelmingly positive reviews proclaiming CountryWatch publications to be incisive ruminations on the

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\(^{162}\) CountryWatch has a catalogue of reviews from its user base in excess of 5,000; the findings noted here of product reviews ranging from favorable to mediocre are sourced in this catalogue.

world of geopolitics, despite the company's self-described identity (imprinted on marketing materials and paraphernalia) as being "a geopolitical intelligence leader." Still, there is a steady stream of letters from readers and subscribers that appear to provide relatively positive feedback about the content. ¹⁶⁴ That steady stream of feedback is not to be considered a scientific validation and could well be subject to prevailing and scholarly critiques of opinion polls. In this particular case, the reference to feedback is offered tentatively, and only as a qualified example of the kind of response that has been registered. ¹⁶⁵ Moreover, it is offered to demonstrate how CountryWatch content falls into the category of reasonably good, but not great, geopolitical news, data and information.

Also surprising is the fact that the sales department has reported a spike in the number of customers who state that they are purchasing CountryWatch instead of The Economist Intelligence Unit not because it is superior, but because it is adequate, and offers, in the words of one customer, "decent value for our money." (Now, it should be noted that the concept of "decent value for the money" is not a revelatory one. A refrigerator manufactured by Frigidaire will provide adequate and moderately reliable refrigeration in comparison with the more upscale Maytag equivalent.) Still, it was notable that most purchasers were not buying both sources of information, but rather only CountryWatch, while canceling their subscriptions to The Economist Intelligence Unit. As such, at a recent board meeting, the CountryWatch management team could report to shareholders that, in fact, CountryWatch was beginning to glean substantial market share from former purchasers of the Economist

¹⁶⁴ On average, as the editor, I receive about a hundred correspondences from readers and subscribers a week. The vast majority of such feedback includes corrections, observations and opinions, as well as some complimentary comment about CountryWatch content, or about their reliance on it.
¹⁶⁵ See Bourdieu: 1990: 168-174 on critiques of opinion polls.
Intelligence Unit. In some measure, the "lower end" CountryWatch information product was believed to be in the process of displacing its "high end" competitor.

Whether or not this trend will hold steady, accelerate or retreat is yet unknown. As the editor of admittedly mediocre products, I hesitate to self-refer to CountryWatch as a bona fide competitor of the Economist Intelligence Unit -- at least in regard to the quality of the content. In fact, comparisons with the productions of the Economist invariably produce angst within the editorial department. As one writer noted, "I'd like to believe that I could write something that was published by the Economist, but I know I don't have the breadth to do so at CountryWatch." Another said, "Every time I hear the names CountryWatch and the Economist uttered in the same sentence, I feel sick."

Still, because of the small size and "hands on" functioning of the company (as exemplified by the fact that I can use a "VPN" from my laptop at home at 2 am to report on a bombing in Baghdad), CountryWatch can dynamically update information at a far accelerated rate in comparison with the likes of the Economist Intelligence Unit, which is not focused on up-to-the-minute updates.

Likewise, as the 2003 war in Iraq broke out and as it became apparent that there was an increasing call for a reconstruction plan in that country, the staff at CountryWatch was able to quickly pull together historical information, political analysis and economic data to create a reconstruction plan, publish it as a book using proprietary publishing technology, and make
it available for purchase over the Internet within the space of a few months. 166 While it can hardly be called either a great work of literature or a seminal piece on Iraq, the book offers the reader a quick primer on Iraq’s historical and political landscape, and it pragmatically addresses many of the issues surrounding reconstruction efforts. 167 Featured on every major television network internationally because of the notoriety of one of the writers -- a disgruntled ex-Secretary of the Army ensconced in a public feud with the Secretary of Defense -- the book is now regarded as a source of ideas for the reconstruction efforts by the United States Army Corps of Engineers working in Iraq, as well as several aid and humanitarian organizations there. 168

Based on these particular examples, in conjunction with the feedback provided by hundreds of customers, the marketing and sales department concluded that the key attributes of CountryWatch products and services revolve around the timely coverage of global events, and the accessible analysis of emerging international issues, in comparison with other more expensive and authoritative geopolitical sources (to be distinguished from conventional news sources).

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167 See the book review by Jeffrey Record in Parameters, the US War College Quarterly (2003-04) and the article by Barbara Shook in Petroleum Intelligence Weekly, 2003.
168 The book has been purchased by the offices of the following: Deputy Secretary of Defense and architect of the war in Iraq, Paul Wolfowitz, the head of the Coalition Authority in Iraq, Paul Bremer, several United States members of Congress, several United Kingdom parliamentarians, Central Command in Baghdad, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, among others. Of the individual purchasers of the book, several have remarked that their interest in the book did not lie in its authoritative treatment of Iraq, but rather, in its practical prescriptions for dealing with Iraq’s challenges, and the accessibility of its section on the events leading up to the war of 2003. One criticism of the book, articulated by an anonymous United States marine, was that it was motivated by the antagonism felt by one of the authors for the Bush administration in which he had served.
In plain and simple terms, the analytical coverage of CountryWatch is likely to be viewed as inferior in comparison with key competitors, but the timeliness of coverage and the “value for money” are highly regarded, even if one deems the products to be mediocre. Thus, CountryWatch exemplifies the notion that one need not be the producer of the best possible product to be the winner in the marketplace. Instead, it delivers an adequate product with certain attractive “value-added features.”

Moreover, as noted just above, as the economy plummets and as companies and institutions have to deal with smaller budgets, it is regarded as a reasonably priced alternative to more premium quality providers of geopolitical information. In this way, CountryWatch has an unassailable opportunity to widely expand market share and become, as it already states in its business plan, “a global leader of country-specific information.” Whether or not the product is actually worthy of such a designation in relation to its quality is another matter entirely. As I have sarcastically noted in conversations with colleagues, CountryWatch can be an exemplar of the triumph of mediocrity.

**Alliances and Shared Distribution in the Information Economy**

There are other features that contribute to the strange economics of information. Competitors, for example, are not necessarily enemies, and sharing information and technology across business fault lines for mutually beneficial business interests often occurs.
In the case of VHS, Matsushita did not protect its proprietary information and technology. Instead, Matsushita offered licensing broadly to its competitors, at very attractive prices, thus expanding its usage and essentially dislodging Sony’s Betamax from the marketplace.  

Conversely, Apple was protective of its Macintosh operating system, and some business analysts have suggested that this proprietary regime contributed to its business challenges and diminished standing in the marketplace in 1987. Apple Computers manufactured own its hardware, including monitors and computers themselves. The internal production was compromised by manufacturing facilities that could only produce limited numbers of computers with proprietary operating systems and software per year. Even if demand exploded, production was constrained by this proprietary system of operations. Meanwhile, Microsoft licensed its operating system to IBM, Compac Computers, and other hardware manufacturers, while maintaining ownership of operating system. In this way, Microsoft could interact with IBM, Compac, and other computers. The arrangement enabled greater interoperability, but with a low cost platform since there were a greater number of vendors using the same operating system. As a result, IBM and Compac became competitors, as they were for all intents and purposes packaging similar products for sale. Microsoft, for its part, became a leader in the world of technology by virtue of the fact that its operating system was being widely used. Meanwhile, Apple was essentially alienated from the process.

Apple, like Sony Betamax, managed to survive the distribution monopoly claimed by Microsoft and VHS respectively, by innovating new products and efficiencies. The use of

170 See Stanford University chronology of Apple Computers.
applications such as PageMaker for Apple’s Macintosh computer spurred a new era in
desktop publishing. In 1990, Apple bought the Pixar Animation Studios from movie mogul
and creator George Lucas, thus advancing its multimedia capabilities. Indeed, in recent
years, Apple’s Macintosh has carved out a niche of computer users needing an impressive
graphics, publishing, and multimedia offering. Notably, many of these users tout Apple
Macintosh’s superiority of quality in comparison with Microsoft. By way of example, one
advertising campaigns center on the testimonies of writers and artists who express
preferences for the more advanced multimedia capacity of Apple Macintosh Powerbook
computers. Within the market place, it is apparent that Apple Macintosh is looking to capture
a niche market. At the same time, it is clear that Microsoft has achieved omnipresence due to
its widespread distribution -- a legacy of arrangements with other technology companies and
developers.

The notion of sharing is not limited to the aforementioned concept of business alliances in
technology. It extends to the very notion of shared information technology. In 1997, Apple
launched its proprietary MacOS X operating system using its own software formulations in
combination with an open source technology. Then, it released a portion (called a “kernel”)
of the MacOS X Server under an open source license. The fact that Apple moved from a
completely proprietary regime to a “hybrid” paradigm marked a significant shift in its
approach to technology. Still, the new “hybrid” approach, which combines a proprietary

171 Apple called the new open source version of the innovative Mac OS operating system “Darwin,” whose
technology was based in “freeDBS” – a free operating system. FreeDBS is used in internet and intranet servers
and powers a constellation of technological applications and processes.
platform with some open source technology, is not regarded to be actual "open source" technology or "free software" by several experts.  

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In fact, several technology companies subscribe to the notion that freely providing software should be the preferable path. For example, Sun Microsystems, which produces the Java programming language used on Windows, Mac, IBM and Unix operating systems, allows the free usage of Java to both developers and end users.  

173 For those who want to embed Java into commercial products, however, a licensing fee must be purchased. For Sun Microsystems, like many other companies, the belief is that widespread usage is the fulcrum of business success, especially in the realm of information technology. As noted by the Chief Technology Officer Eric Schmidt at Sun Microsystems, "We want ubiquity first, then profitability."  

174 Some critics, mostly associated with the "open source" community, would not regard Sun Microsystems's route as a terribly successful one because it did not necessarily inspire creative coding improvements and innovations by legions of open source developers.  

175 Nevertheless, the company did manage to achieve its objective of making Java a fairly ubiquitous programming language used in web development.

Fieldwork in Focus: Alliances and Shared Distribution at CountryWatch

At CountryWatch, alliances and shared distribution quickly became a significant aspect of operations. Some of the earliest alliances were formed with Internet portals such as Alta

173 As noted by Stewart, 1997: 178.
174 This remark is attributed to Eric Schmidt but was recorded by Stewart, 1997: 178.
175 See Brody, 1999 for a general discussion of open source technologies and some specific references to the case of Sun Microsystems.
Vista, the now-defunct Excite, and the powerhouse portal Yahoo. In these cases, a selection of CountryWatch information (some demographic and economic data) was provided to these portals in exchange for advertising revenues (as discussed more expansively in another part of the research dealing with revenue streams) and exposure. It was hoped that the exposure to a morsel of CountryWatch content would inspire users to “click over” to the CountryWatch site, thus earning a “click through” revenue, and then possibly purchase CountryWatch products.

Similar alliances were forged with AOL. At the time this arrangement was put into effect, however, the notion of “free content” was flourishing during the wave of the “dot.com” mania. The fact that no Internet company could actually create a sensible business plan in which revenues could be derived from free content was ignored. Thus, the contract with AOL (composed by the so-called business “talent”) actually provided free CountryWatch content to all AOL users, presumably in exchange for exposure. Unlike the deals forged with other portals, in this case, the entire CountryWatch offering -- not simply a portion of the offering -- was made available for free. When the folly of “free content-plus-advertising-revenue” became clear in the business world about a year later, it was necessary to renegotiate the terms of the contract with AOL, since CountryWatch was moving to a subscription-based revenue model.

Although the arrangement with the cable media giant Cable News Network (CNN) mirrored those of other portals in providing only a portion of the content, it was significantly distinctive because CountryWatch actually paid CNN to provide its country-specific content
on the CNN website. In exchange, CountryWatch was to derive advertising revenue and
“click through” revenues, which would largely offset the costs of paying for exposure on a
high traffic website. The arrangement was actually beneficial to both companies, with CNN
often requesting and purchasing research information from CountryWatch, which would then
be used in news stories broadcast on CNN television. The deal, however, came to a
screeching and unpleasant halt in early 2002. Following the terrorist attacks in the United
States in 2001, traffic to the CNN website exponentially increased. Movement from the
CNN website to the CountryWatch website also increased substantially as users searched to
learn about Afghanistan and its neighboring countries, such as Pakistan, Uzbekistan,
Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. At the same time, however, the advertising banners
(coded with “click through” registers) were removed from the CNN website. In this way,
although traffic to CountryWatch intensified, it was not matched with a register for
advertising revenue. Because this was part of the contract with CNN, CountryWatch sued
CNN for breach of contract. Throughout the legal drama, CNN maintained CountryWatch
content on its website while failing to register – and pay – advertising revenue. The legal
imbroglio was eventually settled between the two companies; however, it demonstrates how
intellectual property has become a more complicated concept as a consequence of online
dissemination.

Other business alliances have centered on shared product development. A North Carolina
company called Topics develops educational activities, served over the Internet, to
classrooms. CountryWatch and Topics have jointly developed educational activities dealing
with the countries of the world, shared the marketing efforts and also shared corresponding revenue.

As CountryWatch has developed some degree of a name in the Internet world of geopolitics, other companies have looked to maximize their own visibility via CountryWatch. In this regard, the financial and investment company Lehman Brothers has a research team that researches and writes something called the “Stability Index” – a measurement of political and economic stability in emerging markets across the globe. Lehman Brothers approached CountryWatch saying that it would provide monthly indices for the purpose of public dissemination. CountryWatch, for its part, would benefit from the use of quality analysis by a reputable source. In this case, CountryWatch has essentially functioned as a kind of geopolitical portal while Lehman Brothers has been the content provider.

Yet another company, the political risk company Political Risk Services (PRS), initially regarded CountryWatch as a competitor. Although PRS’ has been more centrally about political and economic risk rather than the news, reporting, data, and geopolitical analysis provided by CountryWatch, the mutual concentration on the countries of the world made the two companies competitors of sorts. After several exploratory discussions, the decision was made to jointly market CountryWatch and PRS products and to share the revenues. As well, CountryWatch’s technical team was responsible for building and managing the PRS website, which until then had been nonexistent. The PRS joint venture demonstrates how competitors can sometimes collaborate in order to maximize profits. The agreement to enter into this
joint venture with PRS was sometimes referred to as "cohabitation" because it stopped short of being an actual merger.

These cases aside, there are also countless "cobranded" websites, which are developed either jointly a partner company, or by CountryWatch for both companies, for the cost of a substantial fee. Essentially, a cobranded website combines information and resources of both companies. For example, a company specializing in providing information to expatriates internationally combined its offering with that of CountryWatch. The joint offering (a pseudo-blended product) is available on a co-branded website -- one in which both companies can claim branding and the revenues for products and services are shared. Clearly, to form a "cobranded" website, two companies must have complementary, but not competitive, products and services.

Finally, there are several "affinity" agreements with companies offering complementary products in which CountryWatch and the other company agree to reciprocal linking. If a user moves from one website to the other and makes a purchase, a "referral fee" is generated. Given the international flavor of CountryWatch's products and services, some of its affinity partners include VisaPro -- a company specializing in the legal processing of country-by-country visas and permits. Another affinity partner is GeoPolitics -- a travel agency where clients are interested in traveling to exotic locations that they wish to learn more about.

In all of these examples, there are two key objectives: increased distribution and increased profits. Another key element is shared expertise. The conventional wisdom in business is
that “one cannot be all things to all people.” In the case of Apple computers, trying to do everything (hardware, software et al) can often result in inefficiency and ultimately failure. As such, companies develop relationships with other companies in which they can benefit from what is already being done, produced or sold. CountryWatch has largely applied this model to its operations, even if its actual contracts sometime leave a lot to be desired in terms of perceived reciprocal benefits. That said, CountryWatch has assiduously avoided being the sort of operation in which the company does everything, preferring instead to form alliances with distribution channels, and other complementary companies, in which a joint venture could be mutually beneficial.

“Disruptive” Technologies and Ideas

The strange economics of information manifests itself by redefining competition in various industries across the marketplace. Typically, capitalist business practices follow the typical dictates such as responding to customers’ demands, cognizance of competition and more efficiency in existing operations. Harvard professor Clayton Christensen has taken a different view. Christensen says that some of these conventional business practices may, in fact, weaken a company. He has proposed the idea that “disruptive” changes – whether they are of the technological or market structure variety – can actually advance a company’s overall success.

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176 Christensen, 1997.
177 See Christensen, 1997 generally for an extensive discussion of this position.
“Disruptive” changes are innovations that are usually rejected by customers from the onset. For example, despite the fact that new technological innovations may impact the development of a website’s interface or applications, customers may argue against such changes during a beta testing phase. They might even view the new technologies as inferior to the existing capacity, performance and reliability, in some measure. Meanwhile, they might express satisfaction with the familiar nature of the website or application that they are using. Since good business practices usually include the customer-centric approach, no innovative or radical changes may be implemented on the basis of customer demands. Instead, the company continues to practice what Christensen calls “sustaining technologies,” which essentially improve established product and product delivery. 178 Thus, instead of creating fundamentally new products or implementing radically new technologies or market ideas, a company will concentrate its efforts on sustaining the interest of its current customers. Yet by devoting attention to the service of customers, this conformist approach can be detrimental in an era in which information and technology reign supreme. Indeed, companies may be placing themselves at risk of being superseded by innovative upstart entities.

Following the ideas of Peter Drucker, Christensen puts forth the idea that important change and necessary growth in companies begin, instead, with non-customers. 179 While disruptive changes may seem irrelevant and even undesirable to customer within the existing market (as discussed above), in fact, they may be important innovations that possess potential for new markets in the future. By way of example, undersized 3.5 inch disk drives were more

178 Christensen, 1997.
179 Christensen, 1997; see also Drucker, 2001.
expensive and had less capacity than 5.25 inch drives. The smaller drives were not cost-effective and they were certainly not as popular as their larger equivalents. In rational business terms, it would seem as though the sensible course of action would be to stop producing the smaller disk drives. In fact, while the demand and expense presented an immediate challenge, smaller disk drives would prove to be an innovative and compelling development when mobile computer markets proliferated later on. Referred to as “value networks,” many products developed by disruptive means find new niche markets that are separate from a mainstream customer base. Yet these niche markets grow even as the technology, performance, and capacity also progress in an upward moving trajectory. The result may be manifest in the eventual penetration of the mass market. As such, in the strange economics of the New Economy, rational business sensibilities may not be the optimal path.

At CountryWatch, the New Economy calculus of costs and benefits applies not only in the arena of technology itself, but also in terms of the information products. Following the upsurge in interest in terrorism and global security, the United States Department of Defense allocated funding toward the development of an information futures market. Using geopolitical information for countries in the Middle East, these futures were designed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) principally to gather quality information for the United States’ war against terrorism. The project, which soon was referred to as the Policy Analysis Market (PAM), attracted some academics and information technology specialists involved in geopolitical research.
At the launch presentation of PAM, DARPA representatives said that the intent was to use market research as input for further analysis. In simple terms, two types of futures contracts would be formulated – one that would pay if a terrorist attack took place, while the other would pay the same value if there was no attack. The prices and spreads would shed light on the probabilities and confidence. The PAM project, however, was barely off the ground when it was summarily terminated following a tide of bad publicity when DARPA added hypothetical bets on terrorist attacks and assassinations in a mock-up version of the market created for its website.

The unsavory nature of betting on terrorism aside, the concept of a political futures market was so attractive to the Chief Executive Officer of CountryWatch that he decided to pursue this idea, given the fact that the company’s primary specialty is geopolitical analysis. Of course, the proposed CountryWatch Political Markets would not involve betting on terrorist events but, rather, on political events, such as the election results across the globe, based on political, economic, civil and military assumptions.

Very quickly, CountryWatch became increasingly daunted at the idea of creating such a massive trading mechanism and started searching for partners. The financial giant Goldman Sachs expressed intrigue with CountryWatch’s idea for a futures market, but did not offer immediate partnership. The Iowa Electronic Markets (run by the University of Iowa) expressed interest but were bound by a federal “no action” letter that prevented them from a for-profit venture. Meanwhile, another company called Hedge Street was developing a similar political futures concept in which one could hedge against political events. In
researching Hedge Street, CountryWatch discovered that this new company had spent years in litigation as it hoped to be able to achieve legal authority to put such a venture into place, in accordance with the dictates of the Federal Trading Commission.

The legal considerations of such a venture remain monumental due to federal laws. Although the federal Wire Act prohibits gambling on “sports” events, it does not stipulate any other forms of betting within the United States as illegal. Whether or not these federal statutes are changed over time as concepts, businesses and interests in the New Economy change is not known. That said, even if the Wire Act was not applicable, other state and federal laws, such as the Travel Act, RICO laws, and Federal Trading Commission legislation, might also apply.

Against this backdrop, CountryWatch entered discussions with an Irish company called TradeSports, which runs an online betting website. The company was slowly moving into the arena of political betting itself. As such, CountryWatch and TradeSports began speculating about the possibility of developing a cobranded entity called TradePolitics, which would be run out of Ireland and would prohibit transactions from countries in which betting and gambling are illegal.\(^{180}\)

The resolution provided by the TradePolitics concept came after intense internal conflict over this new venture. Some key individuals believed political betting to be only a slight bit less offensive than betting on terrorist events. Others felt that the focus of the company should be

\(^{180}\) The idea of a joint venture with TradeSports was eventually put on hold to await the outcome of legal judgments regarding futures trading.
on the existing product base and not on adventurous jaunts into uncharted territory. The head of sales issued her criticism by stating that current customers were relatively satisfied with products and such a plan would be a diversion of the company’s efforts. Revisiting Christensen’s work above, however, success in technological business should not rely on the feedback of customers, since they -- according to Christensen -- do not drive innovation. Customer feedback might lead to improvements, amelioration and development, but not to new market development, which is postulated as being crucial for business success. In this way, the separate development of a new cobranded website and a subsidiary company with separate funding and functions from CountryWatch, in some senses, appears to fall into the category of new -- and disruptive -- business innovation suggested by Christensen. This concept of disruption will more fully be addressed in the next chapter entitled, "Paradigm Shift." In that chapter, the discussion of transformation from the Old Economy into the landscape of what might be understood as the "New Economy" is continued, along with questions about the qualities that characterize this terrain.
PARADIGM SHIFT

Point of (Re-)Entry

In the last chapter, the discussion of the New "Informational" Economy centered on how this concept is conceived and understood as "a real thing" – at least, within the world of business and the circulation sphere.

This chapter continues the discussion of the perception of the New "Information" Economy as part of a significant transformation in society. In this regard, the chapter explores the notion of paradigmatic shift and whether or not current changes taking place in the business world and marketplace fit into such a descriptor. As well, the New Economy, in addition to the associated Information Age, are together examined as effects of the convergence of multiplicitous social, cultural, geopolitical, and economic movements in the last several decades. Current approaches to the New "Informational" Economy have largely been dominated by economist-type formulas for understanding and analysis (as noted in the previous chapter of the research.) These approaches have been situated within a regime of truth about economic theories of growth, development and productivity. Here, the attention is not on the preoccupations of the discipline of Economics. Instead, it is focused more on the social and cultural processes that have contributed to the internalization and generalization of information and technology in business operations.
Looking at the New "Informational" Economy as an ethnographic form of research poses inherent challenges. Working from within a company that is sometimes thought to be of the New "Informational" Economy typology, means that there has often been little chance of escape from within its structures, in order to view it from outside. The banal over-usage of the term "New Economy" in the mass media to make sense of certain changes taking place in business and society has not helped in this regard. Yet, it is that very exteriority that is required to explore the New "Informational" Economy as a kind of trope.  

The failure of other so-called New Economy enterprises such as Enron, as well as the decreased valuation of “high tech” stocks in recent years, contributed to dire predictions about the collapse of the New Economy model. By collapse, the intent is not to reference the disintegration of New Economy businesses such as the vast and varied Internet company failures. Instead, the reference point is the collapse of belief (for a lack of better expression) in the idea of the New Economy. This collapse of belief in the New Economy has not been realized via a sudden and intellectual appreciation of the New Economy as a metaphoric modality. Instead, the dissolution of conviction has involved the begrudging and sheepish acknowledgement that the words “dot.com” and “technology” were not magical wands capable of switching venture capital (VC) investment into vats of gold, without sensible business plans and revenue streams. The dissolution of conviction has also involved the awkward cognizance that if the Internet was, indeed, the Next Big Thing, knowing how to leverage it remained somewhat uncertain within the so-called New Economy. Consequently,  

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181 If one considers language to be tropological in form, that is, a matter of modalities of expression, then the term New "Informational" Economy contains varied interpretations that are interpolated into its (apparent) meaning as an economic transformation (or process, development or phenomenon) in the United States and around the world.
it was not uncommon to have experienced the disparagement of the New Economy. At CountryWatch, the Chief Executive Officer happily decided to reincarnate the company as a “dot.com” entity (a matter discussed elsewhere), but later said, “Oh, the New Economy? Well that wasn’t really anything. It was just a moment.”

Despite these types of utterances, there have been significant organizational, procedural, operational, and even ideological changes within CountryWatch that suggest that some of the themes associated with the “moment” have been internalized and generalized. That is to say, technology and information are not simply viewed as a complex of “operational tool-plus-product” at CountryWatch, but they have come to be understood as part of the corporate identity, and even part of the larger business environment. The negative resonances surrounding the New “Informational” Economy notwithstanding, many of its principles abound and its practices have been standardized. Moreover, in a similar manner as the notion of corporate culture moved from the lionization of human relations in the 1980s to an intensified variety in the 1990s, so too has the understanding of the New “Informational” Economy transmuted. \(^{182}\) In this case, however, the direction and velocity are of decreased intensification. The infoenthusiasts’ devotion to an informational and technological juggernaut might well be replaced by a less dramatic (albeit significant) effect.

Thus, one of the objectives of this chapter is to consider the New “Informational” Economy not so much as a “real thing” in the unfolding of economic life and practice, and certainly not as a defined concept with a determinate and closed referent, but rather as a theme, a

\(^{182}\) See Marcus, 1998, p. 5, 6 regarding the human relations revolution and the trope of corporate culture.
modality, a metaphor, an idiom, a process, a concept, a trajectory, et al with its own particular qualities.

From Steel to Software

Thomas Kuhn used the phrase “paradigm shift” when he wrote about structural changes in the disciplines of science and in the study of science over the course of time.\textsuperscript{183} Stressing the socio-cultural and psychological factors that contribute to the acceptance of scientific theory, Kuhn’s work has been touted as influential far beyond his intended scientific audience.\textsuperscript{184} Kuhn circumscribes two phases of scientific discovery – (1) “normal science,” which is founded upon established scientific theories and principals and (2) the point at which scientific anomalies accumulate and the gaps in these theories and principles unravel, thus leading to new findings and revolutionary scientific theories, which Kuhn calls “paradigm shifts.” When the principles of “normal science” regarding a given paradigm can no longer be used to solve scientific problems, often a new paradigm emerges, as exemplified by the discoveries and revolutionary theories of the likes of Copernicus, Lavoisier, Newton and Einstein.

It should be noted that the reference to Kuhn used here is for the purpose of examining -- in brief -- the very language and meaning of the notion of paradigmatic shift. The term, “paradigm shift,” is frequently mentioned by infoenthusiasts in relation to the evolution of the New Economy. Kuhn’s exploration of the structure of scientific revolution (a concept

\textsuperscript{183} Kuhn, 1962.
\textsuperscript{184} As noted by Ron Johnson in a review for the \textit{Times Higher Education Supplement}
reflected in the title of his book of the same name) is not one that neatly or easily can be transposed into the subject of this research. Still, in considering the notion of economic and socio-cultural transformation, one is compelled to consider its qualities, distinctive elements, and, indeed, its very structure.

In fact, the scientific focus of Kuhn’s work does not preclude its inclusion in this work of anthropological inquiry, since Kuhn himself drew on cultural and political examples when writing about paradigmatic shifts. Indeed, he made note of a similarity between scientific and political revolutions when he explained that both were inaugurated by the mounting impression that existing theories, beliefs and institutions were not able to resolve the problems posed by the environment (which was itself, to some extent, created by those very theories, beliefs and institutions.) In the case of the evolution of the New Economy, which is assuredly not the same thing as the political balkanization cited by Kuhn, it would appear that a distinctive transformation is occurring. One of the interests of this research is the question of whether the New “Informational” Economy is merely another step along the course of capitalism or, as noted just above, another building block in the capitalist structure. Is it possible that the New Economy and the associated Information Age constitute a paradigmatic shift in Kuhnian terms?

As aforementioned, the notion of paradigmatic shift is often used to describe the changes in the economy from industrialization to the present. Despite the common theme of change or transformation, the language of paradigmatic shift in science cannot precisely be applied to

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185 Kuhn, 1962, see chapters V and IX.
186 Kuhn, 1962; see chapter IX.
the notion of a cultural and economic movement from the traditional and industrialized Old Economy to the emerging technology-based and information-oriented New Economy. The principles of capitalism that texture the Old Economy formulations are not eroding and, in fact, still apply to the New Economy in many senses. Detractors of the New Economy often decry its very existence on the basis of flawed business models, as exemplified by Enron, which cannot withstand the “bottom line” business considerations of “Old Economy” enterprises. Still others contend that the New Economy is simply an outgrowth of the old. For them, the technology-based and information-oriented economy is simply another development within the existing economic structure of industrialization, and it is revolutionary only within the existing paradigm of economics. Nevertheless, for some infoenthusiasts, the informational aspect of the New Economy represents the emerging moment of something akin to a paradigm shift in society, culture and economy. As such, it might be useful to consider this conception of paradigmatic shift a little further.

When one uses the vocabulary of the paradigm, one is defining a set of assumptions and rules of procedure (including procedures of theorization) upon which the structure of operations are based. The Kuhnian paradigm shift occurs when a collection of scientists reject the existing set of assumptions and rules in favor of a new one. 187 For Kuhn, the displacement of one paradigm by another does not occur because repeated testing renders one framework “true” while relegating the other to the realm of “falsity.” For the most part, scientific observations can be located within a given framework of rules and assumptions – that is, within the context of the given ontology and in a manner that is hardly theory-independent.

187 Kuhn, 1962.
As the limits of the existing paradigm are illuminated, Kuhn contended that scientists move slowly and gradually in the direction of the new paradigm. As observed by Kuhn himself, it is only when the articulation of findings fails in being properly assimilated into existing paradigms -- (anomalous findings) -- that theoretic shifts occur. In this way, the underlying drive behind paradigmatic shift is not the scientific pursuit of truth and its subsequent revelation. Instead, it is a matter of problem-solving and the viability of theories therein. In these regards, Kuhn’s peers in the scientific community saw his postulations as rather outrageous; they contradicted the modernist view that humankind was moving toward truth through the gradual and cumulative advancement of science.

In his work, Kuhn critiqued the presentation of truth as something to be revealed through science. He reproved the depiction of scientific discovery as a steady set of developments building easily upon one another in a linear configuration. Indeed, scientific writing in textbooks has obfuscated the more circuitous permutations taken in scientific inquiry, as well as the revolutionary shifts. It is this critical assessment of linear thinking that can be applied in the exploration of the transformation from Old Economy to New Economy. Specifically, the New Economy may not be simply understood as another development within the existing economic paradigm. That is to say, understood as a phenomenon (or “a real thing”), the New Economy may not simply be another slab to be laid upon the capitalist structure.

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188 Kuhn, 1962.
189 Kuhn, 1962; see chapter IX specifically.
190 Kuhn, 1962.
191 Kuhn, 1962.
Manuel Castells writes, "The information economy is a distinctive socio-economic system in relationship to the industrial economy." Castells goes on to say that the distinction does not lie in the sources of productivity growth since knowledge and information are both key aspects of economic development, as exemplified by the genealogy of science in the chemical industry, by new sources of energy in manufacturing and also by the managerial changes that resulted in Fordism. For Castells, the point of distinction is the shift to a technological mode -- based on information technologies -- which occurred during a period of industrialized development or what Castells calls “the mature industrial economy.” In this way, Castells points to the historical specificity of informationalism and technology.

In terms of the dynamics that gave rise to transformations in industrial society, technological developments may have initially extended the capacity and transformed the structure of the industrial economy, thus creating a global economy. It is this global economy, characterized by what Castells frames as competition between traditional and new economic agents (corporations and other commercial operations), but with the influence of government, that produced new technologies as a consequence of competition. These technologies themselves resulted in further productivity for various sectors and corporations. This arrangement put forward by Castells suggests a fairly circuitous path -- a positive feedback loop -- in which technology both stimulates development and results from it.

193 Castells, 2000: 99; see also Hohenberg, 1967.
194 This is a point discussed by Castells (2000) throughout his book on the Network Society but which is treated more thoroughly in the chapter entitled, “New Economy” p. 77 – 162.
Castells argues also that during the information and technology transformation, a related process of development has occurred. He writes, “The generalization of knowledge-based production and management to the whole realm of economic processes on a global scale requires fundamental social, cultural, and institutional transformations which, if the historical record of other technological revolutions is considered, will take some time.” 197 For Castells, the concomitant societal shifts and changes texture the picture in such a way that one cannot simply depict the economy as information-based (a description noted within this research and elsewhere in the body of works on the New Economy). Instead, reflecting the earlier statement that there is a historical specificity to informationalism and technology, the economy has become informational. That is to say, the cultural and institutional aspects of the socioeconomic structure also figure prominently in the information and technology framework. Put simply, the industrial economy is not only about new sources of energy, increased yields in production, and overall economic progress. It includes the emergence of a socioeconomic structure, with related societal characteristics, cultural attributes and technical divisions of labor. 198

In this way, the New “Informational” Economy may be understood as having a distinctive quality. Yet at the same time, the New “Informational” Economy is not an actual or complete departure from the industrial model. Indeed, it is hardly revolutionary in quite the same way as the transformation from agriculturalism to industrialism. Castells notes, the New “Informational” Economy does not “oppose the logic” of industrialization, but rather “subsumes it through technological deepening, embodying knowledge and information in all

197 Castells, 2000: 100.
198 Castells, 2000: 100.
processes of material production and distribution on the basis of a gigantic leap forward in the reach and scope of the circulation sphere." As such, this apparent transposition (or "gigantic leap forward") to an informational and technological model does not singularly imply the displacement of the industrial economy resulting in a Kuhnian-style paradigmatic transformation. Industrialization remains the primary engine of the capitalist enterprise, while technological intensification and the associated internalization of knowledge and information are integrated into the existing operational paradigm.

This technological intensification and the associated internalization of knowledge and information, however, is not to be confused with the "building block" conception in which more sophisticated processing and production mechanisms result from new knowledge and information. Nonetheless, there certainly is some degree of technological escalation. Contemporary factories are no longer the assembly lines of old but have morphed into factories with innumerable computerized functions and equipment. Machinery -- called "computer numerically controlled tools" or CNC machines -- such as metal-cutting lathes and drills, have built-in microprocessors to guide the drill bits. In farms and ranches, agricultural equipment is now produced with computer chips of some kind. Likewise, cargo is now loaded onto ships, jets and trains by computerized cranes and crafts. Models of several cars, such as Corvettes, now contain "smart technologies" for functions as mundane as those of the odometer, as well as more specialized services such as street directions. In fact, automobiles now contain a greater number of microchips than sparkplugs.

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199 Castells, 2000: 100.
200 Tapscott, 1996: 7
202 Tapscott, 1996: 7
203 Tapscott, 1996: 7
and the overall cost of a vehicle’s electronic system is one of its most expensive aspects of automobile production. Working with such vehicles increasingly requires familiarity with computerized technologies. That said, what has changed is not so much the sphere of human activities but how those activities are processed and carried out using information and technology as well as the symbolic value therein.

If there is a product that symbolizes the notion of Information technology, it might well be the microchip. Consisting of a small crystal of silicon semiconductor, the microchip carries out electronic functions in an integrated circuit, usually for the purpose of processing operations. There are a number of variations of microchips ranging from biochips, which uses strands of DNA to identify genes in biological environments, to RAM memory chips, which can be inserted into computers to increase memory. The basic microchip only performs simple electronic functions operations, such as acting as the gateway for the transfer of information stored on a computer’s hardrive into memory (for use in applications). It is the operating system such as a Windows or Linux operating system that actually manages the software applications, in a kind of computerized system of logic. Yet it is the microchip that is commonly associated with , as evidenced by the name of one of the venues of development -- Silicon Valley.

Although the manufacturing of microchips has now shifted to global manufacturing centers such as Malaysia and India, the fact of the matter is that the value derived from the

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205 As noted by the owner of Frank’s Vettes, a Houston-based Corvette dealership.
manufacturing of microchips exceeds the value of steel produced. \(^{207}\) The symbolism of the microchip is not in its manufacture particularly. In fact, the manufacturing of the microchip has been effectively “outsourced” within the global economic system, reflecting a trend of outsourcing manufacturing that has been ongoing since the mid-1990s. \(^{208}\) Rather, it is the information, technology and content represented by the microchip (vis a vis the operating system) that is at stake.

In a sense, the movement toward information and technology reconceptualizes the very notion of what is regarded as a product, or even production, for that matter. \(^{209}\) Rather than physical products, ideas and technology characterize value in the New “Informational” Economy, in a new formulation of symbolic – and real – capital. As such, some observers have referred to this (arguably paradigmatic) shift as the “dematerialization” of culture and the economy. In fact, the material value of information within the global economic system remains relevant, bringing into question the notion of dematerialization. Still, there is a lessening of the materiality in terms of muscle and physical labor expended to boost productivity and growth. The energy expended is not in the field or in the factory. Instead, as some infoethusiasts have suggested, energy is expended in the brain. Indeed, even within the structure of the military, a growing awareness has emerged that conflict strategy is essential. Of course, military equipment, weapons and crafts are both material and heavily technological, but within the last decade, the military has increasing prepared for the prospect of attacks in information systems as well as “cyber-terrorism.” The purpose here is not to delve into the intricacies of such a threat, but rather to show by example how informational

\(^{208}\) Stewart, 1997: 14.  
considerations are perceived as the new engines of growth, driving along a path toward a (presumed) new era. The objective here is not to determine the truth of this perception, but rather to unravel it in some small way by viewing the New "Information" Economy as something of a value-laden symbol.

Technology, for instance, as observed elsewhere in this research, is not a new phenomenon in American society. It has, however, been largely viewed as labor-saving mechanisms. Neither technology nor information has generally been viewed as the essential instrument of organizational change. In fact, as noted by Castells, organizational change -- that is, structural changes within organizations of various kinds -- has occurred in response to the need to deal with changes within operational environments.\textsuperscript{210}

In this regard, Castells calls attention to the fact that as the number of multinational corporations grew, as the nature of doing business has expanded so that decentralized decision-making has become necessary within large companies, and as subcontracting and joint venture alliances increased, new technologies were on the rise. These changes in corporations and in the course of doing business would have been unmanageable without computer networks, powerful microprocessors, and digital telecommunications networks. By way of example, consider the many large companies using Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) to communicate both with suppliers and customers. Electronic Data Interchange was being used as early as the 1970s in the automobile industry. Although Electronic Data Interchange eliminated several processing procedures, as well as paperwork, it was expensive and

\textsuperscript{210} Castells, 2000: 184-185; see also Cohendet and Llerena, 1989.
difficult to use. That is not to say that there was an overwhelming requirement to develop a replacement. Indeed, many companies that heavily invested in the implementation of Electronic Data Interchange have continued its use. By the late 1990s, however, as new businesses were formed, network technologies and new developments in software emerged and were utilized far more expansively than Electronic Data Interchange. One example of such a technological development is Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP), which facilitates the exchange of information in a decentralized, distributed environment, using .xml technologies. Simple Object Access Protocol is used by trading partners and newer companies for whom investing in Electronic Data Interchange would be cost-prohibitive. Moreover, Simple Object Access Protocol provides an extensible (theoretically limitless) messaging framework in which a number of protocols (computing standards) can be used. Thus, these newer technologies appear to satisfy the requirements of emerging companies with more modest budgets. In this regard, Castells writes, “It was because of the networking needs of organizations, large and small, that personal computers and computer networking underwent an explosive diffusion.” As such, Castells expressly states that changes within organizations and specifically within businesses of the global capitalist economy have induced new technological trajectories.

At CountryWatch, which is simply a small emerging company on the cusp of the so-called New Economy, this type of dynamic can be observed. As CountryWatch moved from being a traditional disseminator of information to an online company, new technological trajectories have emerged. Delivering the online geopolitical information offering to a

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211 Castells, 2000: 186.
plethora of customers on a small budget (enterprise software solutions are too expensive) has necessitated the development of new technology, such as the creation of proprietary software. In this way, the desire to expand operations and the need to remain competitive directed the course of technological innovation and development.

That said, one might also find that developments in information technology -- exemplified by various enterprise software systems for accounting and human resources -- have facilitated and advanced the process of organizational change. Specifically, they have displaced workers, particularly middle management and associated staff, via corporate restructuring (a topic taken up later in the research).²¹⁴ Less ominously, developments in information technology, most particularly in the form of computerized communications systems, have created operational network within corporations themselves and with other outside corporations with whom there might be a strategic alliance. A networked system in such a case does not simply facilitate easier electronic communication, but may also track and administer transactions in joint ventures. In discourses about corporate restructuring, the language of “workplace efficiency,” “organizational flexibility” is often articulated. Indeed, at CountryWatch, that very concept was used to describe a layoff of several key employees in 2000. Likewise, the plethora of advertising about computerized networks and telecommunications devices in the media advance the idea of “working smart” in order to maximize “business performance.” Microsoft’s advertising campaign for workplace software in which an entire company is linked internally and externally from purchasing to sales to billing to shipping in the matter of three weeks exemplifies this idea. Soon after this advertising campaign aired, the Chief Executive Officer of CountryWatch mentioned that the

²¹⁴ Castells, 2000: 185; see also Boyett and Conn, 1991.
company should consider implementing this very system (in the end this idea was deemed cost-prohibitive.) Hence, has both contributed to and resulted from organizational changes in corporations.

Notable also is the fact that both the examples of corporate restructuring and the corporate network demonstrate how people (bodies) are either eliminated or connected via information technology. In both cases, the focus is not on the human element, but on what is best for the company itself. The word “layoff” or “employment furlough” is rarely uttered to describe the loss of employment for people. Instead, more abstract descriptors such as “corporate restructuring” are used. Perhaps the careful use of abstract phraseology is an effect of the influence of human resources management over the last decade. Regardless, it is the company and its structure that are privileged in this formulation. Within a capitalist framework, the understanding is that the health and wealth of the company will indirectly benefit a segment of people: the shareholders. The symbolic value, thus, resides in the corporation, which is itself an operating unit within the global capitalist system. Information technology, understood as a kind of energy that augments “business performance,” holds a similar value by virtue of association with and within the corporation. Indeed, its value is both literal -- because it is believed to advance competition and maximize profits, and symbolic -- because of its esoteric qualities.

The symbolic value of information technology does not rest only in its association with the corporation. The term “network” has been used here to reference a system within corporations and across corporations. A network can be as specifically circumscribed as a
specific set of organizations involved in a strategic alliance of one kind or another, or it can be as broad-based as all companies within a given geopolitical range. Information technology is a means by which elements -- employees, separate companies, suppliers, vendors, customers, products, information, and data -- within the network are connected. One ostensible means of connection is via sophisticated telecommunications modalities. Another is via complex relationships with nation states as well as international and regional politico-economic blocs. In a global capitalist framework, with rapidly changing needs that demand technological adaptation, Castells suggests that it is the network, with its various trajectories in business and politics, rather than the corporation, which is the essential unit of operations.

Castells, of course, offers this view only after extensive discussions about networks of trust in Chinese businesses, *keiretsu* vertical networks of specialized industries in Japan, and hierarchical *chaebol* networks in South Korea, all of which are beyond the scope of this research. Still, Castells’ decision to identify the network as the newly emerging unit of operations is key since several business and commercial operations appear to be latching on to the network model, if only at the level of the “language” and resonances of this conception. In formulating a definition of the “network,” Castells considers how companies no longer function as autonomous entities providing products and services for a fee in a type of transactional marketplace. Instead, companies and various other organizational units function together within and across economic webs. For Castells, the “network enterprise” (one that embodies the principles of network idea) and the broader matrix of network enterprises that constitute the network conception operate to position the agents

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within this system in relation to an environment whose currents of operation include interconnection, speed and other intangible variables.

Castells distinguishes Cisco Systems -- a provider of switchers and routers that guide data within communications networks -- as an example of a “network enterprise” by quoting the company’s business model. In summary, the business model advocates a relationship with its key constituencies as a competitive differentiator, the overall sharing of information and systems and the leveraging of the network for competitive advantage. 217 The business model articulates the view that simply being connected is not enough; instead, business relationships and the communications technologies that support them must themselves exist and function within a “networked fabric.” 218 Clearly, Cisco has placed a primacy on the notion of the network. Cisco’s achievement in distributing its routers across the world and its financial success as a company, however, invite an altogether uncomplicated justification for the belief that the network equals the future in business and technology. Perhaps the notion of the network, in the sense discussed here, can be viewed as simply instrumental. Perhaps it is not the new “unit of operations” in replacement of the corporation, as argued by Castells.

Yet many of the principles expressed in Cisco’s model, although not expressed in the form of a business plan, texture operations in other businesses, CountryWatch included. Within that company, and during communication with customers, shared communication and networked customer service are regarded as vital components. Geopolitical information and news are not limited commodities (there is no shortage of news and information on the Internet) and as

such, other means of differentiation by customers is required. Likewise, the actual business model depends on networked relationships with supplier and vendors, but more importantly, with other companies in the form of strategic alliances. Producing co-branded websites in conjunction with other companies (a concept discussed elsewhere in this research) is crucial to the revenue stream at CountryWatch and depends heavily on the very structure of the network to formulate content, present the co-developed product in a seamless fashion and eventually to market sales and process transactions.

So, Castells argues operations and organization induce technological change and innovation that can fuel further organizational change in a circuitous model. Thus, the network, whether or not it actually displaces the corporation, may be understood as another element of existing operations and organizational change, with its own geometry of profit-oriented motivations.

The Spirit of Capitalism and the Ethos of Informationalism

Ensconced within the earlier discussion of the symbolic value associated with information technology, as well as networks, organizational change, and the corporation itself, is the informational aspect of this constellation of elements. Apart from the symbolic value placed on informationalism, is there an underlying ethos that connects informationalism with the capitalist system?

In so far as the capitalist system is concerned, Max Weber has said that the spirit of capitalism does not exactly coincide with the actual capitalist order, which now governs
economic, political and social life. 219 Weber observed how money, markets and power of
the political establishment of fourteenth century Florence were unfavorably regarded as
somewhat unethical and unjustified. In contrast, he noted that in eighteenth century
Pennsylvania where the lack of money, and the impending possibility of a return to the barter
system resulted in a very different sensibility. In Pennsylvania, the pursuit of money, markets
and other aspects of capitalism were viewed favorably. Indeed, they were regarded as part of
civic responsibility and reflected a positive ethic, largely because of the religious (Calvinist)
ideas connecting money, work and salvation. 220

According to Weber, Calvinism included a set of beliefs around the notion of predestination.
For Calvinists, predestination centers on the idea that one cannot undertake good works or
execute acts of faith in order to be guaranteed to a place in heaven. Instead, Calvinists
believe that one is either among the “elect” or outside that specialized realm. Having said
that, wealth was to be understood as an indication of “elect” status and as such, it might
promote the acquisition of wealth. The Weberian “protestant ethic” was grounded in
religious tenets. These religious tenets gave rise to a spirit of rigorous discipline and
encouraged the application of effort for the purpose of acquiring wealth. 221

Today, it is difficult to suggest that acquisition of material goods is a by-product of a spirit of
rigorous discipline based in religion-based ethics. Indeed, the consumer impulse in
contemporary society does not seem to fall within the Weberian construction as the frenzy of

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220 Weber, 1958: 75. Note that Immanuel Kant’s treatment of ethics also formulated a similar construct in
which work and labor were viewed as a duty that the self must satisfy. Likewise, Hegelian philosophy has also
characterized work as a way of realizing the spirit within the self.
mass consumption within the modern marketplace is not easily synthesized with the Weberian focus on the spirit. Weber himself notes, "Today the spirit of religious asceticism...has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer." 222

Meanwhile, acquisition or accumulation in Weber’s universe of thought is not the principal impetus while mass consumption is antithetical to his disciplined mode. The propensity for accumulation (the pursuit of money and commodities purchased in the marketplace) and mass consumption might well be identified as a particular feature in American society. Certainly, the everyday consumerism of American culture is easily identifiable and may influence cultural formation. The popular political discourses in the United States about freedom, including economic freedom, reinforce the capitalist system of operations. These deeply held beliefs about capitalism are connected very closely with political ideas of democracy, upon which notions of American identity are positioned and affirmed to some extent. Is this the spirit of capitalism today? The answer to that question is one that will have to go unanswered in this research.

Nevertheless, the way in which profit – a measure of value – is attached to material goods and commodities suggests a structure of how value is attributed and how this process can become generalized in society, as a kind of ethos. As Theodor Adorno has said, cultural commodities, are not valued in accordance with their “specific content and harmonious formation.” Instead, profit -- the capitalist impetus -- is projected onto cultural forms. Certainly, Adorno was referring to cultural commodities, such as literature, film and art

within the culture industry. Still, this referential field might, in some particularized manner, be extended to include information and technology. After all, Adorno made note of the fact that the concept of the "culture industry" was not to be taken literally, as it referred to the standardization of the thing itself. For Adorno, progress, or what he termed the "incessantly new" was no more than a mask for the continuance of "eternal sameness," which, in this case, is the profit motive.\textsuperscript{223}

If the competitive thrust to maximize productivity and profitability drives -- and is driven by -- informational and technological innovations, then the value placed on information technology is an effect of the dominant capitalist system and late-industrial society. Capitalist thinking would indicate that the actual monetary value of any product or service such as information technology would be revealed within the marketplace. The symbolic value is less tangible and is associated with the cultural conditions. Both aspects, however, can be linked with the aforementioned ethos of informationalism.

In order to describe this ethos of informationalism and for the purpose of considering the "evaluative elements" that inform the way in which information and technology are viewed, a closer examination of the landscape of transformation as well as the contours of informationalism is needed. The next sections consider the informational juggernaut, informationalism in capitalist society, and more specifically the influence of information and technology within corporations and within the sphere of fieldwork. \textsuperscript{224}

\textsuperscript{223} Adorno: 1991.
\textsuperscript{224} See Geertz, 173: 126-127 regarding "ethos."
The Technological Juggernaut

In the 1950s under United States President Eisenhower, popular thought pertaining to technology had bifurcated into two factions. On one side of the divide stood the cornucopians who envisioned everything from nuclear power plants in every home -- also know as “electronic cottages" -- to the end of electronic monopolies and the demise of corporations. On the other side of the border were the malenthusiasts who predicted the critical necessity for bomb shelters and the inevitability of nuclear annihilation. 

More recently, Bill Joy, the co-founder and lead scientist for Sun Microsystems and co-author of the Java programming language, warned of an uncontrollable “technological juggernaut thundering toward society” in severe need of both direction and restraint. The article within which Joy’s position is articulated is itself an interesting return to the malenthusiasts’ stance of the 1950s. Rather ironically, this stance is expressed by Joy who is a well-known technocrat in The Industry Standard, which is a leading journal within the circle of information technology. As such, Brown and Duguid observe that it marks an interesting moment “in the digital zeitgeist.” That is to say, the expression of Joy’s position encapsulates the simultaneous sentiments of technology’s promise and peril.

In the 1950s model, innovation would make nuclear energy cheaper and more easily reproducible, thus making mass production and accessibility an easy process. While the economic rationale may appear reasonable in the business sense, it is clear that the social and

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cultural implications of such a model were not considered by the futurists of that time. As noted by Brown and Duguid, social environmental movements, increasing governmental regulations and legislation and the ensuing disasters at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island all served to stymie the effects of the juggernaut. Concomitantly, similar social and cultural forces have ensued, with similar mitigating results.

Despite this reality, technology is sometimes viewed as an irrepresible force with unforeseen ramifications for society and culture. Indeed, Morley and Robins have acknowledged that “technological mediation is associated with estrangement from the real.” Baudrillard describes this kind of cultural neurosis as “a state of fascination and vertigo, linked to this obscene delirium of communication.” With the advent and proliferation of technological media and an emergent society characterized by space-transcending information, there has been “a culturally generalized psychosis, appropriate to a rationalized, bureaucratic and technocratic society of indirect relationships and large-scale integration, now on global scale.” Richard Rorty has suggested that this trend might be a consequence of the Enlightenment project’s ideal of objectivity where the individual distances himself or herself from surrounding persons, via attachment to something that can be described without reference to any particular human beings. Meanwhile, Morley and Robins propose that Baudrillard’s ecstasy of communication networks and cybernetic systems might be attributable to the evolving and globalized network marketplace,

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228 Brown and Duguid, 2000b: 196.
principally characterized by commodity flows and advertising spectacles.\textsuperscript{233} Certainly, it is fair to say that new technologies aimed at communicating information cannot be properly understood without reference to wider networks and systems, as well as society and culture.

Purely at the level of technological innovation, good designs for systems, applications and even telecommunications cannot successfully evolve in glorious technological isolation. They will have no viability unless they are user-friendly, and they actually serve a purpose in the quotidian lives of users. Along these lines, Brown and Duguid put forth a more complicated perspective by suggesting that all technology should be considered within a social and cultural context.\textsuperscript{234} As exemplified by sophisticated Internet-oriented robotics, one of the most powerful applications used today are autonomous agents. These robotics-engineered search applications are called “bots” (short for robots). “Bots” function to endlessly search and catalogue countless services, concepts, persons, institutions, words \textit{et al} across the Web for specified entities\textsuperscript{235} Usually personalized with human sounding names such as “Ask Jeeves” or “Alexa,” these “bots” are engineered to provide seemingly intuitive responses to queries by users over the Internet. “Ask Jeeves” appears to be popular because the interface provides the user with the impression that “Jeeves” is an actual person responding to inquiries. Likewise, “Alexa” -- although far less well-known than “Jeeves” -- has gained popularity among professional researchers because of its ability to follow and

\textsuperscript{233} Morley and Robins, 1995: 39.
\textsuperscript{234} Brown and Duguid, 2000b: 196-200.
\textsuperscript{235} While agents search and catalogue, search engines simply search, so that responses are often less refined than that of agents.
cross-reference primary searches and queries. These abilities offer the user the illusion of having a research partner with supplementary psychic capacities.  

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The capabilities of agent software have transformed Internet brands like Yahoo! into lucrative portals or entryways into cyberspace while also functioning in commercial scope.  

237 Agent software runs on well-known electronic commerce sites such as Amazon.com or CD-Universe.com by greeting the potential buyer, usually by identifying him/her using "cookies" or small data files installed on a computer that communicates such information. The agent software facilitates online sales suggestions to users, allows customized advertising to appear on the screen, searches the warehouse of such Internet stores for requested items and finally provides the capacity to shop and pay for such items over the Internet in an online transaction.  

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Meanwhile, enterprise software for business and commercial processes such as inventory control, supply chain management including business warehouse distribution, payroll, accounting, human resources, as well as scheduling and logistics has become commonplace.  

239 Even restaurants use software for managing supplies and administering customers' orders. In this way, the most mundane aspects of doing business have now been

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236 Alexa utilizes the tracking technologies mentioned elsewhere in this essay, by simultaneously tracking, processing and redirecting auxiliary searches on the side panel of the computer screen, while the user carries out a primary search function. In so doing, the user often has the illusion of having a search partner who appears to "know" where in cyberspace he/she has been or where he/she might consider as a future destination in Internet travel.


238 Anthony Giddens has written extensively on the moral implications of increasingly humanized technologies (1990). While the scope of this paper limits any detailed treatment of this issue, Giddens' work suggests that technology must be explored and understood within a cultural and social context.

239 SAP software is used in many Fortune 500 for supply chain management, Maypicks, Manugistics, and 12 are examples of distribution and supply chain software. Quick Books is used in accounting, while PeopleSoft, Peachtree, and Paychex each are used for payroll functions. ADP is used in human resource management while UPS has launched scheduling and logistics services online.
procedurally transformed through technological applications. While it is far more interesting to talk about the most unusual and fantastic technical developments such as agent software and “bot,” the less interesting applications used each day in businesses and other organizations function together as part of a system of automated routinization. Such automated routinization is part of the capitalist process and marked the rise of the assembly line factories. This thrust has continued as new technologies have been adopted in late-Industrial society.

The viability of such technological developments seems to rest upon their purposes and significances at the human end-user level. That is to say, the reception level of technological advances cannot be ignored as it steers the direction and trajectories of the supposed juggernaut, perhaps preventing the kind of explosive results that Joy seems to portend. Agent software and “bots” both exemplify and underlie the idea that information is neither simply a substance nor a given reality. Rather, information technologies have increasingly become an integral part of social life, necessitating the creation of such capabilities and advancing access to information in cyberspace. Put simply, the cultural context informs and influences innovation.

At the same time, all technologies have the potential result of shaping society and culture. One need only think of Gutenberg’s printing press, the proliferation of publishing, the dissemination of information, the formation of notions of community, and the eventual formation of the nation state. Likewise, the railroad, the telegraph, the telephone and

\footnote{See Anderson, 1991.}
most recently, ever-advancing telecommunications mechanisms as well as the Internet have increasingly helped humankind transcend distance.

Thus, culture and society simultaneously create -- and are produced -- by the technologies mentioned above. “Reception,” along with “transmission” and “circulation,” are often used in discussions of both communication and cultural production.

Returning for a moment to the notion of the technological juggernaut, power is assumed almost without demand for demonstration as an active and determining force. In contrast, culture is seemingly the passive and reactive repository of such influence. Ensnconced within such a model, technology is treated as a causal force while culture is viewed as an effect to be measured in accordance with the impact of the technological cause. Yet culture does not simply respond to conditions of technology. As exemplified by the prospects for nuclear energy as well as agent software, society is not simply at the mercy of technology. For this reason, Brown and Duguid state that looking too closely at the progression from atoms to bits may miss the role the bits play in the world of atoms.\(^\text{241}\) That is to say, critical movements in the New “Information” Economy may traverse not just from atoms to bits, but also from atoms to bits and back again.

If culture and technology operate in this circulatory manner, then how does this process ensue within the circulation system of capitalism?

\(^{241}\) Brown and Duguid, 2000a: 146.
Informationalism and Capitalist Society

The transformations of information and technology are not so much revolutionary as they represent an intensification and reconfiguration of capitalist processes. Within this formulation, information technologies extend and intensify capitalism’s influence. Yet such extension and intensification do not simply imply a process of escalation or amplification. Instead, information technologies refine conventional power relations and operations. For example, the patterns of centralization, synchronization and standardization, which exemplify the conventional mass media, are undermined by demassified media, such as the multiple and varied “channels” of cable television and the Internet. At the core, however, lies a capitalism-driven framework in which multiple channels translate into multiple niches of consumers and multiple branches of consumption.

Nicholas Garnham has examined the transformation of new media and information markets through the lens of political economy. Garnham considered the significance of market principles in the formation of a communications revolution and noted that new technologies “develop the market for so-called information goods and services as a new growth sector” ultimately aimed at the “expansion of price and profit.” Although Garnham’s observations preceded the Internet explosion, they may nonetheless hold some relevance in regard to the emergence of recent technologies. His views may well complement those expressed by Manuel Castells whereby new technologies are developed and manufactured as a result of competition, result in further productivity and profitability for various sectors and

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242 Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Mobilization, Technology and Everyday Life”).
corporations, both stimulating development and resulting from it. This very process symbolizes an intensification of the capitalist circulation in which there is a progressively more pronounced dependence on capitalistically produced and marketed commodities.\(^{244}\)

This is not to be understood as an overly-deterministic view of capital over all else, but rather an inclination. The effect of more pronounced dependence of capitalistically produced and marketed commodities is a post-Fordist context in which social relations are increasingly being mediated by consumerism and consumption.\(^{245}\) Within the New Economy, this involves the aforementioned monetary and symbolic value placed on information technology.

The business model of CountryWatch demonstrates how information may be viewed as the thrust of emerging economic growth. Specifically, because of information technology, the production and circulation of news services, consultancies, financial and business information, printing and publishing, and even film are increasingly converging in what might be called a “tradable information sector.”\(^{246}\) While print capitalism has been in existence for centuries, the development of a “tradable information sector” represents a recomposition or restructuring of the prevailing network of knowledge and information for broad commercial purposes. That is to say, within an ever-increasing information sector, the creations of the culture industries can be found alongside both geopolitical information and pornography, each available for purchase by licensing fee, session fee or subscription.

Meanwhile, as transactions for information occur increasingly, the process by which information is gathered, sorted and stored is also ongoing. In this regard, and as exemplified

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\(^{244}\) See Trachtenberg, 1982.

\(^{245}\) See Alt, 1976.

\(^{246}\) See Information technology Advisory Panel, 1983: 11.
by various CountryWatch data and information products, the commodification of information is taking place. As noted by Schiller and Schiller "a much wider range of information has become profitable because it can be flexibly processed, selectively rearranged, and quickly transmitted and disseminated by a virtuoso new technology." \(^{247}\) Indeed, this is precisely the undertaking of CountryWatch as demographic information, public policy reports, news and analysis, as well as statistics and data are collectively transformed into informational commodities for which commercial rates are charged. \(^{248}\) Thus, the leveraging of information products made possible by the systematic data processing, cataloguing and storage of information technology becomes an extension of the existing practices of capital accumulation and commodification. Stated differently, information is, therefore, both processed and possessed. \(^{249}\)

In the late 1980s when they were writing about this particular matter, Robins and Webster did not believe that the commodification of information could be viewed as an informational revolution. As already noted, informationalism and information technology may well represent an intensification and reconfiguration of practices within a late Industrial and post-Fordist landscape. That said, it is worth noting that the perspective of Robins and Webster was espoused at a time earlier than the proliferation of the Internet or the rise of the so-called New "Informational" Economy. Interestingly, Robins and Webster made mention of H.G. Wells' notion of the "world brain," which was envisioned to include the entire human memory of knowledge, ideas and achievement, and which would be made universally

\(^{247}\) Schiller and Schiller, 1982: 461.
\(^{248}\) National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1982; see also Lumek, 1984.
\(^{249}\) Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called "Knowledge, Information, Intelligence").
available. Of course it would be too facile to suggest that the Internet might be seen as the coming to fruition of some kind of Wellsian vision. In the pre-Internet and pre-New Economy temporal and spatial landscape, however, Robins and Webster write, “The World Brain anticipates what we can see now as an emerging new regime of information production, circulation, consumption, and control; as a new economy and politics of knowledge.”

If there is “a new economy and politics of knowledge,” as suggested by Robins and Webster, then how do knowledge and information mediate relations of power? Perhaps, in part, the answer resides in the manner in which both knowledge and resources are co-opted and made into power and capital. Once collected and gathered in a systematic fashion, knowledge and information are transformed into intelligence. In this regard, intelligence does not imply the mythical activities of James Bond-type spies or Central Intelligence Agency officers, but a discipline that cuts across both private and public institutions. That is to say, when such intelligence is captured, it then inhabits information reservoirs in the form of data banks, analytical instruments for financial investing, political risk assessment, economic forecasting, as well as geopolitical and strategic analysis. These information reservoirs are the effects of a capitalist system that is informed by an ethos of informationalism. Yet this very ethos of informationalism is part of the technological and informational thrust involved in the intensification of capitalism.

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250 See Wells, 1938.
251 Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Knowledge, Information, Intelligence”).
Information Technology in the Corporation

Earlier in this chapter, reference was made to the historical specificity of the New “Informational” Economy. Certainly, the evolution and advances of information technology have been regarded as significant by some observers. As discussed earlier, while information technology affects business and commercial operations, the activity and interests within organizations also influence technological development and innovation. Left out of the brief discussion above, however, is a consideration of how advanced and flexible information technologies have made it possible for either an information processing apparatus or information itself to be a product. 252 That is to say, as businesses carry out their normal functions, they may develop new technologies and a technological apparatus that can become profit-yielding products of sorts.

United Parcel Services (UPS), for example, is best known as a delivery and shipment service. Yet in its daily operations, United Parcel Services has had to deal with related considerations such as logistics, transportation, insurance for shipped items, international trade and freight costs. It has also had to create operational mechanisms such as those for tracking parcels, delivery dates, and accounts. In so doing, it developed its own supply chain concept. Seeking to leverage these ancillary facilities that were conceived and created purely for the purpose of operating efficiently, United Parcel Services recently launched a business solutions division. The business solutions division includes consulting services, supply chain applications, virtual enterprise design and planning, as well as international tariff consulting

252 Castells, 2000: 78
and accounting software. In this way, the company's technological apparatus was transformed into a sophisticated product offering because this shipping and delivery company re-imagined itself as business solutions provider.

The story of United Parcel Service is not unique. For the purposes of ethnographic illustration, consider the venue and subject of the fieldwork research. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Country Data International predated CountryWatch in 1997. Its focus was the publication of reports on every country in the world followed by the dissemination of country-specific news to accompany the reports. In response to the increased requests for country-specific information and news to be made available over the Internet, and also because of the rising popularity of Internet-based companies on the stock markets, the company changed its name to CountryWatch.com. In this way, a company without an expert technological infrastructure presented itself to the market as a New Economy venture. The information technology capacity within the company evolved as matter of demand and for the purpose of accommodating the delivery of information.

Like United Parcel Service, new knowledge in the realm of information technology and business solutions was developed as a consequence of normal operations. Both companies leveraged this newly learned expertise. For United Parcel Service, this development occurred in the form of an entirely new field of business from the delivery and shipment of packages. In the case of CountryWatch, the ability to build co-branded websites and to syndicate content on the Internet was marketed and sold to partner and affiliate companies. Although it is not a radical departure from its original focus on content, the repackaging and
recalibration of the forms in which content is disseminated has indicated a shift from traditional publishing (which was never done particularly well in the first place) to new dissemination modalities and revenue streams.

In both cases, the companies have essentially recreated themselves to take advantage of a changing marketplace. This recreation has involved a process of re-imagining. At United Parcel Service, advertising slogans capture some of this process with the words, “What can Brown [the color of United Parcel Service trucks and uniforms] do for you?” The unspoken answer is that United Parcel Service can provide limitless consulting and logistical assistance upon request. At CountryWatch, the re-imagining process was stimulated during a brainstorming session for new marketing materials when the slogan “Website to the World” was developed. This very slogan was eventually dropped when the company became incorporated. Still, at the time when Internet ventures were being popularized, it captured the idea of being a one-stop venue where information, data and news about the world could be found. Even the “Ws” on the CountryWatch name and the slogan were formatted to slant in a forward (right leaning) direction and with linear angles, supposedly intended to portray a technological image. The name of the company – CountryWatch.com – carried within it the image of an Internet entity of the digital era and the so-called New Economy.

The parallels between United Parcel Service and CountryWatch might well end at the level of image and re-imagining. In those early days, CountryWatch was not really the equivalent of an Internet-based storefront. In five-second descriptions of the company, employees and executives often described CountryWatch as an online publishing company, yet the company
has never been precisely a publication house with online channels, either. In fact, its publication capabilities have been of the novice category, categorized by "on-the-job" learning about how to automatically convert files for publication in books and for web-based publication. That said, CountryWatch's presence within the New "Informational" Economy is not simply a matter of producing, printing and circulating reports, forecasts and new stories online using technologically sophisticated software. The vast majority of clients and customers are businesses, educational institutions and government entities, which actively search out online research sources. Because of the primacy placed on Internet-based research by educational, governmental and corporate institutions, CountryWatch has been benefiting from a systemic shift -- both institutional and cultural -- that is occurring at this time in society.  

Likewise, the demand for the kind of political, economic, environmental and socio-demographic information of the sort produced by CountryWatch has been increasing, due to the activity in the international spectrum. As more attention is focused on global instability and acts of terrorism, the attractiveness of an online intelligence service with timely news and information about the countries of the world has amplified. Typically, CountryWatch uses reports by an application that tracks users on Internet websites called Web Trends. Using Web Trends, one can chart an upsurge in page views by what are called "unique users" since September 11, 2001, a date when global instability and terrorism became the primary geopolitical issue in the United States. Indeed, the institutional demand for such material has

\footnote{Federal guidelines, corporate charters, and the several educational consortiums now specify a minimal number of online research sources within their respective budgets. Most cite the "digital" orientation in the global marketplace and culture as the reason for this measure.}

\footnote{Page views by unique users as well as sales increased following September 11, 2001 when global instability and terrorism became the primary geopolitical issue in the United States.}
exponentially increased, as exemplified by the escalation in sales from the time CountryWatch was formed to the present.\textsuperscript{255}

Marketing cannot be considered a factor in the upsurge in both interest and sales since CountryWatch has always had a limited budget for marketing and those funds have actually decreased in the last two years. Moreover, the number of Internet-based sales (subscriptions purchased over the Internet), in conjunction with the user currents tracked by Web Trends, suggest a marked proliferation in total purchases and user interest since the specific time of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.\textsuperscript{256}

As certain geopolitical issues come into the political purview, as exemplified by the frantic concerns over North Korea's burgeoning nuclear program and its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, associated spikes in interest in CountryWatch's new wire coverage of North Korea, as well as the sales of Country Reviews for North Korea, can be tracked. The increase in interest and sales do not escalate and fall in a volatile, materially-driven pattern. Instead, there has been a quantifiable and sustained increase that can also be observed. Likewise, when there is a development or an obstacle in the Middle East peace process, as illustrated by the advancement or contraction of "Roadmap for Peace," interest in the news wire stories and Country Reviews for Israel intensifies. Again, although a notable "spike" occurs, the level of sales and interest does not return to pre-event levels afterward. Although there is a leveling off or "plateau effect" of sorts, a persistent increase in interest

\textsuperscript{255} As noted in the CountryWatch monthly sales reports and annual company reports, a sample period from 2000 through 2003 shows three year compound growth rates of 79.7 percent.

\textsuperscript{256} Sales and interest increased quadrupled in 2001. From 2002 to 2003, sales accruals increased by 40 percent, cash sales increased between 20-40 percent, while cumulative traffic on the website (measured by unique users) increased by approximately 40 percent in the same period.
and sales has been recorded. Requests for further information-based products have also been registered following key geopolitical events such as the request for a special report on Palestine following developments in the Middle East. Page views for the Palestine report have remained quantifiably high whether or not key events occur in Israel and the broader Middle East.\footnote{As shown by Web Trends tracking data, 2003.}

The Pew Research Center’s 2003 Project on the Internet and American Life findings show that online information-seeking activities have expanded and increased by more than 50 percent since 2000. While 80 percent of those online searched the Internet looking for answers to specific questions, the Pew Research Center asserts that the increase in content available online, as well as the momentum of important news events, have spurred a growth in the online news population from 2000 to late 2002.\footnote{See Pew Research Center’s 2003 Project on the Internet and American Life.} In fact, in 1995, only 6 percent of online users were reported to access news over the Internet. By March 2000, 60 percent of online users were reported to have acquired news from the Internet, and in December 2002, 71 percent of those online acquired their news from the Internet.\footnote{See Pew Research Center’s 2003 Project on the Internet and American Life, particularly the section on online news gathering.} For comparison’s sake, it should be noted that while gathering news is more popular than searching for health information or purchasing a product online, it registers less frequent activity than searching for information on pre-sales products. Whether or not the actual availability of content and the thrust of the news cycle contributed to this rate of growth is unknown. Still, frequent and increasing news gathering online appears to be a measurable reality.
While news is defined broadly in the findings cited above, there was a quantifiable 57 percent increase in the number of people searching specifically for geopolitical news and information between 2000 and 2002 – a finding that corresponds loosely with the CountryWatch experience of increased interest in geopolitical events and scenarios. Major public events or international episodes also seem to result in surges in online interest in both general news and information, as well as that of the geopolitical variety. The Pew Research Center’s investigation showed particularly how a full third of the online population used the Internet as the principal source of information during the presidential election of 2000, while the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the period around the war in Iraq in 2003 registered an increased number of people using the Internet as a primary source of news and information. Again, reflecting a similar experience observed internally at CountryWatch, the upsurges in the use of online news and information-gathering of the geopolitical variety were fairly well sustained without a significant drop-off in interest, as demonstrated by online activity.

Just above, it was noted that the Pew Research Center linked the rate and growth of interest in the Internet as a source of information with the actual availability of content and the thrust of the news cycle. The Pew Research Center asserts that this advance has been a result of the

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260 This percentage is derived from the Pew Research Center’s 2003 Project on the Internet and American Life, while similar findings on particular countries have been registered at CountryWatch’s internal tracking system.
261 See the Pew Research Center’s 2003 Project on the Internet and American Life, particularly the section on online news gathering.
262 The Pew Research Center’s 2003 Project on the Internet and American Life showed that in the month prior to September 11, 2001, general news gathering was 22 percent and increased to 27 percent by the time of the attacks; that percentage was sustained through early 2003, when it jumped another 10 percent to 37 percent as the war in Iraq approached. Meanwhile, specific geopolitical news and information gathering increased by 57 percent between 2000 and 2002, with a full 40 percent of online users taking advantage of the Internet for geopolitical news and information. Likewise, internal tracking of country-specific wire and information at CountryWatch indicates a similarly sustained trend.
“overall maturation of the Internet audience, increasing broadband penetration, and news events.” 263 The increase in broadband can be correlated with the convenience of immediately available information resources, another factor registered in the Pew Center’s research via surveys and interviews. In essence, respondents said that they chose the Internet as a source of geopolitical news because the traditional media was not able to provide the kind of information in which they held an interest. 264 In particular, they specified an interest in “issues” and went on to express dissatisfaction with even the particular yields of their online search results. It is assumed that this constellation of findings contributed to the Pew Center’s contention that there has been a “maturation” of the Internet field of participants.

Also contributing to the notion of a recent surge in the interest in international affairs in the last two years has also been an increase in the number of companies expressing an interest in pursuing joint ventures and developing co-branded websites. In a discussion with an executive from the New York-based financial enterprise Goldman Sachs (GS), it was observed that although GS was developing complementary information about markets in other countries, it had no interest in writing a book with CountryWatch. Instead, the discussion centered on the synergy between the international financial expertise produced at Goldman Sachs and the international information (political, economic and sociodemographic) produced by CountryWatch, within the context of online dissemination and transactions.

263 See the Pew Research Center’s 2003 Project on the Internet and American Life, particularly the section on online news gathering.
264 See the Pew Research Center’s 2003 Project on the Internet and American Life, particularly the section on online news gathering.
Although the unfortunate and tragic events of September 11, 2001 certainly resulted in an increased number of unique page views on the CountryWatch website as aforementioned, that date is not a fixed timeline denoting a massive upsurge of corporate interest in global intelligence. In 2000, the media giant Cable News Network (CNN) forged a joint agreement with CountryWatch in which country-specific information would be provided for dissemination across the globe on the CNN website and also for use in broadcasts. Indeed, the “map room” depicting Afghanistan and surrounding Central European countries such as Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan had been developed by CNN just prior to the military offensive by the United States in Afghanistan in late 2001, using CountryWatch information and data. That very information and data had been made available to CNN as early as 2000. While the anticipated mass interest in Afghanistan increased following the 2001 terrorist attacks, CNN’s desire to use and disseminate geopolitical information to its audience had emerged as a result of public interest prior to 2001.  

CNN aside, similar agreements were formed with well-known Internet portals such as AOL and Yahoo. An interest in international content and coverage motivated the joint venture agreements. As such, these cases demonstrate how the Internet medium of the New “Informational” Economy might be viewed as a channel of transmission rather than an absolute fulcrum of cultural and economic change. In this way, CountryWatch is not singularly creating information products to be sold for profit, although that is certainly the basic modality of its operations. CountryWatch is developing products as dictated by the

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265 CNN gained popularity as a source of geopolitical information and news during the first Gulf War a decade earlier in 1991.
particular geopolitical climate and as prescribed by a niche of customers who are interested in knowing about that very climate.

Of course, one cannot easily say that this niche of customers is actually interested in learning about the countries of the world or the political and economic dynamics therein. After all, the news, information and data provided by CountryWatch are intended to provide a user with an "overview" of the demography, political, economic, investment, socio-cultural, and environmental conditions of each country. The material is neither encyclopedic nor scholarly in its respective scope and orientation. One user on the telephone with the customer service department said: "When I keep hearing about the Kurds in Iraq and the Pashtuns in Afghanistan, I just want to know who they were." In fact, it is more likely that the caller wanted to know about the ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in the two countries in which United States military forces were engaged in battle. It is also likely that the caller wanted to grasp that information in two paragraphs or less and in one easy-to-digest style and format, such as that offered by the CountryWatch website. It is hardly likely that the caller wanted to know the Kurds and Pashtuns in the most penetrating sense of the word. That compelling level of knowledge is to be distinguished from information -- a subject that is taken up elsewhere in the research.

Communicating any such information in an electronic dissemination medium has been the domain of information technology. Capturing that information -- sometimes in two paragraphs of less -- has been undertaken by an editorial staff which has to pare down voluminous research to create an "overview" or synopsis of sorts. The work is not
journalistic in scope because if there are "good stories" to be followed, they cannot be properly tracked. Instead, they are given short shrift in favor of a chronologically arranged review. Analysis and interpretation of any substantial manner are impossible, since they would require more time, substance and virtual "real estate" to produce. These limitations indicate that even as the discourses and depictions of the New "Informational" Economy expound upon the transition from material goods and tangible services of the industrial and manufacturing-heavy economy to the invisibility of information and technology, many of the existing business considerations and practices remain in tact. In this way, the ethos of informationalism and the capitalist system of business are constitutently linked in the New "Informational" Economy.

The Ethos of Informationalism meets Risk Analysis

Following Clifford Geertz's call for "an approach to a theory of value which looks toward the behavior of actual people in actual societies living in terms of actual cultures for both its stimulus and its validation," the next section looks at the ethos of informationalism within the specific context of a joint venture gone awry. 266

In 2001, CountryWatch was approached by an international risk analysis company called Political Risk Services (PRS or the PRS group). Originally, contact with the risk analysis company occurred when PRS designated CountryWatch to be a competitor. Soon thereafter, the PRS group approached CountryWatch with an interest in possibly working together,

266 Geertz, 1973: 141.
presumably to transform the competitive dynamic into something more generative. Although PRS sold more expensive risk products, their sales numbers were on a downward slide at the same time that CountryWatch, with its cheaper content, enjoyed increasing sales. The PRS group first agreed to a joint sales venture with shared affinity arrangements whereby both companies could sell each other’s products for a percentage of the profits. Over time, that arrangement expanded in the form of content sharing. Then, with more clients demanding that PRS make available its content in an online format, CountryWatch, which was in the process of developing its own customized content management software, formed an agreement to create an online product for PRS. CountryWatch then launched and managed a new website for the PRS Group.

The relationship between both companies was increasingly intimate and precipitously close to going forward with a merger. In fact, the Chief Executive Officer of CountryWatch intended to purchase PRS, resulting in a merged company with CountryWatch as the controlling entity. Only days before it was to be finalized, CountryWatch decided against the merger and in late 2003 an agreement was drawn up to finally sever all ties between the two companies.

It is difficult to know the perceptions and thought processes of the individuals at PRS, and so one cannot presume to understand what the PRS management and staff believe or how they felt about the failure of the merger. Still, the reason for the decision to halt the merger by CountryWatch was very clear. Within CountryWatch, the decision not to go forward with the merger was made on the basis of the growing and “disturbing” perception that PRS could not
fully adapt to being a New Economy company focused on immediacy, timeliness and dynamic aspects of news and information using innovative content management software. Despite its expressed desire to “modernize” its operations with the new website, PRS’ culture and operations were that of a traditional publication entity with a specialized offering of risk products.

By way of example, during the period in which the buyout and merger seemed imminent, as the head of editorial operations, I had to familiarize my equivalent at PRS with the content management process. Personally, I found the experience to be one of the most tedious endeavors of my professional life. Every technological procedure was transformed into an obstacle as my equivalent expressed the view that writing in word documents and later transforming the word document into .PDF format was preferable to the customized content management system with its integrated database. I tried to explain the necessity of using the system so that all content was placed into a unitary and integrated pool of information in the form of the database since content was not simply produced for textual publication, but also for dissemination in web-based formats, such as “.html” and “.xml.” The procedure proposed by my PRS equivalent would have resulted in the “.html” and “.xml” coding of millions of pages of content – an almost impossible process that would have been highly ineffectual given CountryWatch’s volume of content disseminated on a daily basis. Meanwhile, my PRS equivalent darkly espoused the pitfalls of new technologies and the benefits of working with the same (in the collective CountryWatch opinion: antiquated) publishing process that had been ongoing for years. Various departments at CountryWatch reported equally tedious and impossibly difficult “technology transfer and sharing sessions”
with their PRS equivalents. In a meeting with the Chief Executive Officer, the CountryWatch managers diplomatically explained that the transition for PRS would likely be a difficult one due to the differing “cultures” of the two companies, primarily in relation to technology. Faced with the prospect that he would have to compel a massive shift in the sensibilities of the main players at PRS, the executives at CountryWatch decided to end the merger process entirely.

The merger that never actually ensued with PRS is notable because it exemplifies the case of a content company that resisted the technology wave. Whereas PRS personnel often expressed an antagonism toward technologies, CountryWatch personnel could not envision working without it. In meetings with PRS personnel, there were many references to existing “procedure.” This was exemplified by the repeated utterance of the CEO of PRS along the lines of, “We have the best procedure for that (insert task of choice).” The CountryWatch staff actually kept an online log of the number of times the CEO of PRS disparaged technology verbally or over emails with statements such as, “Well, you can’t count on technology for everything” or her personal favorite, “The person is the master of technology, and not the other way around!” Indeed, the latter statement enjoyed weekly tracking by among various CountryWatch employees summarizing the number of utterances in what came to be known as the “technopeasant log.” In contrast, during weekly meetings where the latest demands and interests expressed by customers were transmitted (for example, the desire for usage statistics), the response by CountryWatch’s staff and management was typically, “Can we automate that?”
There is also another symbolic aspect about the PRS distinction from CountryWatch. PRS exists within the context of print capitalism. PRS' interest in creating a website and transaction capabilities were simply for the purposes of "updating" traditional dissemination and sales channels at a time when trends have favored technological formats for the circulation of information. In contrast, CountryWatch has constitutedly viewed the circulation of information differently. The processing of information into a database, which allows for effective online searching and with .xml tags, is part of how CountryWatch understands content. Indeed, content is understood within the context of how it can be easily transformed into various different formats (textual print in book form, CD-roms, .PDFs, .html web format, and even streaming and broadcasting information). The relationship with technology is, therefore, intertwined with an understanding of how content is used for purposes beyond textual production. This "value" distinction between the two companies has been viewed as so significant (at least to CountryWatch-ers) that it effectively ended the prospects of the merger. To date, within CountryWatch, many people from frontline staff to executives still jokingly refer to "breaking up" with PRS; they often express relief that the relationship ended before the "wedding" and subsequent "marriage" took place. The irony, of course, was that PRS, a purveyor of risk analysis, was actually risk-averse in regard to information technology. By contrast, information technology had permeated the CountryWatch system both operationally and in terms of the corporate philosophy. In this way, CountryWatch had come to view itself as an embodiment of the New "Informational" Economy. Such a perception, however, is not without contradiction as discussed in the following section.
Anxiety and Potentiality

As far back as the 1970s, Alvin Toffler recorded many of the popularly articulated themes of the New Economy, such as the democratization and balancing of hierarchical corporate structures as a result of technology. 267 By the 1980s, Toffler was also offering insights about the social and psychological dimension. 268 As regards these issues, Christopher Newfield combined the work of William Ouchi, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman to describe the later profusion of human relations writings in which workplace productivity was aligned with the institution of a supportive intra-corporate operating psychology. 269 Yet, as noted by Newfield, despite the development of human relations constructs (of the type discussed by Toffler), they were never fully distinguished as systems (vis-a-vis empowerment techniques), and correspondingly, there was no monumental human relations revolution within the corporation structure. 270 Instead, the period of Reaganomics, later followed by the Bush I years, largely reified the existing model of operations.

Since the 1990s, a profusion of popular literature about the so-called New Economy has been published, much of which essentially build upon Toffler's observations of a changing field, as a consequence of technology generally and information technology more specifically. Among them is Blur: The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy. Using the idea of business as an organism within an economic ecosystem, authors Christopher Myers and Stan

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268 Toffler, 1980.
Davis put forth the idea that a "molecular economy," characterized by biotechnology, nanotechnology, and material science, will be the next revolutionary wave.

Their enthusiastic advocacy of such a future includes a delineation of emerging technologies, as well the need for a new zeitgeist in response to these changes. In this regard they discard managerial notions of planning and engineering of the environment, in favor of "adaptive management," "sense and response," as well as "self-organization." Not surprisingly, these themes follow the aforementioned sensibilities of business as an organism within an economic ecosystem. Using case studies such as that of the Capital One credit card company, they show how business functions are moving in the direction of the model they describe. The title of the book also was perhaps conceived to indicate the speed of connection, as well as the element of intangibility, as the distinctions between buyers and sellers, office and home, products and services become more blurred. As a result of the blurring of boundaries, a new synthesis is formulated. This new synthesis is expressed in a mixture of what one might call "scientific-speak," futuristic thinking, and shock value.

Yet despite the feeling of speed, instability, volatility, and crisis conveyed in their work and ideas, much of what is proposed is an extension of business practices. The case study of Capital One, for example, is not within the sphere of future scientific technology; it is a case of a traditional financial services company adopting newer methodologies and practices to operate and dynamically respond to customer needs. The methods and practices are to be understood, however, within the context of a new economic ecosystem, because of the
sensibilities and images that they evoke: a hypersonic, scientifically-styled, evolutionary mode from Old Economy into New Economy.

The emotion and mood captured in the title of the book *Blur*, and more particularly, the connotations of the word “blur,” include the following: obscure, haze, shadow, mist, fog, indistinct, smear. The visual imagery suggested by the word “blur” is also one of rapidity and confusion. The use of scientific language, which may well be located in the metaphoric domain of the unknown, contributes to the atmosphere of mystification. It is this atmosphere of perplexity, captured in the book by Myers and Davis, which provides a pathway into a discussion of the mood associated with a period in which change seems to be a constituent element. Change, of course, is a constant fact of life, but various vectors of transformation which have surrounded the idea of New “Informational” Economy, have made the awareness of change and transformation more explicit.

Ambivalence

Works such as *Blur*, although intending to address the emerging avenues of technology and business, may also signify a particularly unresolved ambivalence. That ambivalence consists of a tentative mixture of promise and peril – the promise of a technologically vibrant and advancing future and the perils associated with confusion and change. The simultaneity of promise and peril has, in some way, resulted in a concurrent embrace and retreat from the realm of information and technology.

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272 Webster’s Revise Unabridged Dictionary, 1998 [1996]
Over the course of the last decade, discourses and policies of corporate culture attempted to reassess normative habits and business operations, while also managing social change within the boundaries of corporations. Yet, at the same time, the idiom and ideas associated with corporate culture also embodied a withdrawal from the same course of action in society at large.  

In his treatment of corporate culture and particularly, the corporate culture philosophy adopted by followers of Tom Peters (mentioned above), Christopher Newfield notes that there appears to be a lack of confidence in the larger context and macro-level of society, as represented by the state and the traditional corporation.  

Using the example of how traditional corporations limit their costs, Newfield observes that employees are generally contracted to work with few measurable benefits. Newfield cites James Kouzes, who describes employee contractual relations as a unilateral proposition in which the employee is offered no guarantees of long-term employment, payment on the basis of performance, increases only at the level of inflation and bonuses that will be diminutive in comparison to those of managers. Newfield himself goes on to note that businesses slash benefits or place the financial burden onto the employee as a measure of “employee empowerment,” but one that only serves to make people’s lives more difficult. In essence, it is a scathing review of a corporate system in which people find themselves in opposition to the power structures

273 Marcus, 1998: 7 on the interest in corporate culture representing capitalism’s desire to manage uncertainty within its own organizational constructs, as well as its abandonment of this task in the broader context of society. See also Newfield, 1998: 48.
within which they must function. Perhaps it is this lack of confidence in the governing structures (whether it be the government or the corporate system) that has driven the self-reflective reassessment of habits and operations within the boundaries of corporate organizational units.  

The recent emphasis on information, technology and the notion of the New “Informational” Economy has carried with it similarly contradictory imperatives. First, there is an undertaking to rethink “business as usual” practices, and to embrace the possibilities and opportunities offered by new technologies as beneficial developments for business. Second, there is a proclivity to balk at the thought of mystifying technofutures. As stated by a sales executive at IBM during a business meeting with CountryWatch, “I may work for IBM, but a lot of my investment is in Proctor and Gamble. My view is all this techno stuff has its benefits, but, well, you just never know what is going to happen with the markets today and with these bad apple CEOs. I figure everyone has to buy soap and detergent, so that’s where I put my money.” His doubts may well be microcosmic of shared sentiment, exacerbated in some regard by a corporate system that has lost public confidence, due to recent scandals, as evidenced by dubious business dealings of companies such as Enron, WorldCom and Tyco. That is to say, although the New “Informational” Economy is often regarded as the mystifying Next Big Thing, it is also one that cannot be trusted in some regards.

Nevertheless, the interest in the technological and informational thrusts of the New “Informational” Economy, the adaptation of technology in business, and the primacy placed

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277 Newfield (1998: 48-49) describes how the primacy of the group (as opposed to the individual, and certainly without regard to the state or the policy level) in a sense “manages” the climate and dynamics of operation.
on information, as exemplified by expressions of "the Information Age," have collectively formulated a response to the uncertainties of change in society. The fact that has itself contributed to the spirit of change only serves to complicate the scenario. Flexibility, rapid responsiveness, extensibility, disintermediation, decentralization, connection and other frequently touted aspects of a progressive information technology structure are mechanisms for managing the internal workings of the corporate organization during a period of change. These very mechanisms represent the potentiality of the workplace, in which the rules and the operational atmosphere itself might undergo some sort of (possibly positive) transformation. Yet doubts about the promise of such transformation also linger, as evidenced by the statement of the IBM sales executive above, and the doubts of CountryWatch employees discussed below.

Thus, uncertainty and fears associated with a changing environment have resulted in a reliance on the options offered by a New "Informational" Economy. The dynamic moves in a circular direction as the very institutional and infrastructural changes administered by information technology serve to manage internal tensions and assuage doubts. At the same time, they also impart a level of additional uncertainty to the prevailing ethos of change.

At CountryWatch, a venue within which many of these dynamics have been at play, many traditional business issues coincide with newer concerns. To an extent, the CountryWatch case suggests that even in the face of transformations from so-called Old Economy to the present time, corporations may face very similar challenges that companies a century ago were confronted with: viability and profitability, employer and employee relations. Thinking
about human relations, corporate culture, and even developing a technologically progressive infrastructure are key considerations discussed in meetings and between employees on a regular basis. Yet, these interchanges and discourses coexist with doubts about the company’s survival, given the fact that CountryWatch’s inception preceded the Internet boom years, remained barely sustainable through the years of the Internet crash, and more recently, survived (rather than thrived) during the crisis of corporate governance and a recessionary economy.

Given these fairly dire circumstances, budgetary cutbacks have occurred both in the editorial and information technology departments. These budget reductions, the periodic questions about “making payroll,” occasional layoffs, and everyday news about the macro-economic climate, decisions to call unscheduled board meetings, even the personal moods of upper management (and their effect on other employees) collectively expose a sense of overall insecurity, which ultimately affects daily functioning and modalities of thinking.²⁷⁸ By way of illustration, several employees at CountryWatch have quietly searched for other jobs while lamenting the fact that the employment possibilities in an unstable economy are paltry. As noted by a former head of sales during a pessimistic phase, “I love my job but I can’t commit career suicide. I have to try to find something stable.” Or, in the case of the accounts manager, “When we struggle to meet payroll, I get depressed. I read the news at home and I get depressed. I come to work and I look at our spreadsheets and I get depressed. I need to get the hell out of here but where do I go? I don’t want to go but I feel like a chicken in coop waiting to be plucked. But if I leave this place and try to get another job at an equivalent level, I am facing a challenge. The job market sucks.”

At the level of upper management and the board of directors, there is a less ominous mood, perhaps because most of this cadre is independently wealthy and not dependent on a paycheck for living expenses. Perhaps it is because many of them have invested in the company and cannot conceive of failure as an option. At board meetings, for example, there have been multiples incidences in which a particular member of the board considers the projections for the next quarter and emphatically declares that these objectives must be met. After all, he (it is usually a “he”) has X amount of dollars invested or Y number of stock options and refuses to sacrifice them. Such declarations are made usually in a fairly jocular manner, as dictated by the protocol of boardroom camaraderie. Regardless, even at this stratum, there is an aura of tension mixed with fervor about “making the numbers” (realizing budget and revenue predictions) and “expanding market share” (business growth and increased profits) so that the company will eventually be well positioned for either sale or an IPO (first public offering).

Against this backdrop, information technology is discussed as the crucial determinant for success and “staying competitive.” Because CountryWatch’s business model is centrally focused on geopolitical information dissemination, there is also a prevailing interest in conceiving of new conduits and platforms that users might employ to access information.279 So, for these reasons, there has been a widespread belief that an emphasis on information technology systems would be a vital aspect of the company’s viability. Although the company may well benefit from a larger editorial staff, which could produce an expanded and improved content offering, and even if more sales staff and an increased budget might

279 Red Herring, 1996: 15.
benefit the bottom line, it is information technology that has been emphasized because of its perceived ability to keep the company on the path of success.

The specific case of CountryWatch notwithstanding, the attention to information technology may well be encountered in various other small businesses as well. Even though the aforementioned Political Risk Services Group (PRS) eventually demonstrated an unwillingness to embrace technological solutions, its initial interest in CountryWatch was for the purpose of expanding content coverage and, notably, developing an online delivery platform. At the time of the two companies’ alliance, the PRS group’s sales trends were decreasing and the CountryWatch upper management wondered if the company’s internal woes had precipitated the partnership overtures. In this way, as companies experience phases of precariousness, and as actors in the field of business fear displacement, they may well latch on to discourses and modalities that present the perception (if not the reality) of resolution and hope.

In examining the discourses of “corporate culture” prevalent in the last decade or two, George Marcus notes that this outlook has found resonance among “those most vulnerable in current displacements and reorganizations – middle management as well as the owners and managers of small corporations and firms.” Marcus also suggests that “thinking about business organizations in cultural terms by those who feel most imperiled or have had their worlds shaken by dismissal is a way of dealing with the change in despair and hope.”

While one cannot simply substitute the discourse of corporate culture for the informational and technological modalities in a seamless fashion, it would seem that similar moods and

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sensibilities have been evoked in the face of transformation, and comparable (if not parallel) measures have been called upon to direct and cope with the trajectories of change.

This context of vulnerability, which, as noted just above, begs for resolution of sorts, compels a short examination of its psychological and sociological conditions. The issue of trust, or by extension, confidence, which has been cited above, carries with it a link to the notion of anxiety.

Borrowing from the work of Anthony Giddens in The Constitution of Society, as well as Giddens' own referential reliance on some of the ideas of identity development by Erik Erikson, the earliest stage of individual maturity involves a basic polarity of trust and mistrust in which a given infant comes to comprehend that absence does not absolutely imply desertion. 281 In this first episode of social accomplishment, the notion of trust affixes itself to the concept of confidence in a liaison of mutuality. Yet this initial establishment of confidence does not occur without stress and apprehension. Instead, as noted by Giddens, it is located within an environment of "diffuse anxiety." 282 Indeed, Giddens goes on to suggest that it is this experience of anxiety, and the desire to mitigate it, which may form the earliest motivation for impulses of control. 283 That is to say, the experience of anxiety, and the desire to alleviate its associated conflicts, may function as the impetus for what Giddens terms "a tension management system." 284 Clearly, Giddens' (and by extension, Erikson's) analysis, as it relates to human psychological development and social life, cannot be effortlessly

282 Giddens, 1984: 54.
284 Giddens, 1984: 54.
superimposed and easily applied to anxiety as a condition of contemporary society, and specifically, the New "Informational" Economy. That said, Giddens' construction of psychological maturity is a synthesis of theory that offers a structural understanding of the societal context of current circumstances without being an exercise in etiology.

Returning to the matter of CountryWatch's interest in consolidating its information technology infrastructure and adopting new enterprise software, CountryWatch invited the aforementioned IBM sales executive to preview IBM's "business solutions" offering. Ultimately, IBM's "business solutions" proved too costly for a small company such as CountryWatch to implement. Even so, the preoccupation within CountryWatch with the idea of "business solutions" as a kind of elixir, and the decision to formulate such "business solutions" internally, are relevant issues in some symbolic sense. Together, they demonstrate not only the practical considerations of basic operations, but also a regime of management that has been enacted in response to the doubts and anxieties of corporate existence within the company itself, as well as within the larger context of instability. Indeed, it is a regime of management seeking to both moderate and control this context of instability in which unpleasant vibrations of upheaval are being experienced.  

To be clear, by "larger context of instability," the volatile marketplace, which rises and falls with vulnerability to external events, is being referenced. Also part of the "larger context of instability" is a capitalist system that may be undergoing some degree of change in this late-industrial period. Organizational change, which together with associated developments in

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285 Marcus (1998: 10) observes that social actors (within institutions once believed to be stable) hold a perception of "seismic jolts as well as tremors of change."
information technology shape part of the systemic transformation, exists along with a sense of predicament. Crisis may be a more dramatic descriptor of the same effect although Tom Frank describes it as a kind of desperation for "workplace democracy" in which fairness, honesty and confidence in domain of business can occur, and where "some sort of power confronts business." 286

The call for business -- a function of the capitalist system of operations in the United States -- to be challenged by an opposing power is likely to be viewed as a rather shocking proposition by standpoint capitalists, and as such, it demarcates a sense of crisis. Left unspecified is who or what should take up the mantle of confrontation. Also unspecified is the matter of whether it is the corporate structure that is at stake or the larger realm of capitalism. There is also no suggestion that governance should be the confronting entity, effectively continuing the prevailing dissonance between states and markets. Drawing upon some of the ideas already expressed here, the idea of the New "Informational" Economy, to some extent, carries with it the hope of resolving this predicament (i.e. crisis). Yet it also carries a number of other interpretations and valences of a fairly contradictory typology.

Reflecting once again on the book by Myers and Davis, technology and information offer solutions and promise through a veil of blurred vision and experience. It is this lack of clarity, spurred perhaps by the speed of change, which intensifies the confusion associated with the precariousness of periodic flux. Yet simultaneously, within the very same frame, futuristic delight and intrigue and perhaps even optimistic anticipation, are also depicted. Reflecting this dimension is the daily viewing of cable news, which invariably includes

286 Frank, 1996: 12.
advertisements featuring repeated thematic representations of boardrooms within which quirky but knowledgeable techno-experts solve all the management problems of unnamed companies. In a sense, the techno-expert is presented as the miracle maker whose seemingly unorthodox but sage insight is received with rapt wonder. In this way, there is a concomitance of hope and threat. The promise, as well as the pleasure of possibility, is located alongside the prospect of peril.

Promise:

A few years ago, in trying to describe this ambivalent ambience, I wrote the following:

In many senses, if one can call this “a transformative period,” it might be marked concomitantly by the anxiety of the present and the promise of the future. Indeed, at the time of writing, as the global marketplace struggles with financial volatility of technology stocks traded on the Nasdaq stock exchange, one might say that the anxieties of the present may be more abundant than the possibilities of the future. Nevertheless, as noted by Tim Burners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, the principal potential of the Internet has always been the idea of a shared information space.

Thus far, the Internet has evolved as a one-way dissemination medium, in a way similar to that in which journalistic media have developed and circulated information. There is a level of receptivity by the consumer/reader/viewer/user that indirectly influences and affects what

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287 At the time of writing in late 2000, technology stocks, in particular, were very hard hit on all the major stock exchanges, and most especially on the Nasdaq. Although an initial sell-off began in the spring of 2000, by the fall of that year a new period of selling began and prevailed until April 2001.
kind of information is transmitted, but the notion of a shared space for information exchange has never really existed at the mass or global level before. As a space of data, the Internet is still a specialized arena where the technology is esoteric and sometimes difficult for the user to interpret (even though user-friendliness is on the upswing). In technological jargon, the need for a “simpler interface” is necessitated, if Burners-Lee’s vision is to be actualized. As well, accessibility is limited rather than ubiquitous if one considers the lower economic echelons of society, or other less developed countries, where access to computers is limited.

The media often represents online users (Web surfers, as well as users in chat rooms or newsgroups) as disconnected, anti-social geeks. In fact, some individuals suggest that the Internet is a medium of isolation rather than connection, by reducing participation in communities more than did the proliferation of automobile and television usage (see http://www.stanford.edu/group/sigss/). Most developers of online groups envision a far more optimistic outcome for online communities. Indeed, they envision a place where communities can be built over time and where a mixture of private information is displayed, along with forums and venues for public discussion and discourses, across time and space. Most significantly, unlike traditional media, which disseminates information, the consumers/readers/viewers/users are the ones who drive the material or content that circulates.

The technofuturists are not unrealistic. They realize that in erasing time and geography -- in effect -- by removing spatial and temporal boundaries, they may connect people with similar interests in computer interfacing, sports, paella cooking, or even anthropologists in the field
across the globe. They also realize that a strong architecture for these discussion forums is vital, perhaps with doses of editorial redirection, for any online forum to actually have value, generate interest and possess the potential for developing an actual community. Put another way, they know that a forum which connects people is not automatically or easily a community per se. A "web of trust" must be developed, as in any relationship, be it individual or collective, personal or professional. Further, most Internet developers agree that a successful online community is founded upon the coexistence and balancing of opposing forces. The ways and means by which this communal paradigm is established seem rather paradoxical. In some sense, it may be similar to the paradoxical issues faced by city planners who must meticulously plan, design and build spaces that foster spontaneous and various social activities. In these stages since the Internet's inception, it is apparent that well-planned venues are far less successful than unplanned ones. Indeed, spontaneity seems to be the hallmark of engaging discussions as well as successful forums. That said, how does one "plan" for spontaneity?

Another critique is that email is no substitute for in-person connection. In a Stanford University study, Professor Norman Nie observed that "E-mail is a way to stay in touch, but you can't share a coffee or a beer with someone on e-mail or give them a hug" (see Feed Dialogue http://www.feedmag.com/dialog/di295). Similarly, the media has recently reported a number of online romances that grew over email and in chat rooms, but dissolved quickly when in-person meetings followed. Still, other observers view e-mail as being reminiscent of the art of letter-writing, and they remind the critics of past moments in social history when people bemoaned the advent of the telephone for eroding personal contact, or when people
worried that the popularity of movies would replace book reading. Apparent in all these observations is some degree of romantic nostalgia for mediums of communication.

Since writing this piece a few years ago, there have been a number of changes in regard to the Internet as a communications medium. In fact, what was once a one-way dissemination medium has been transformed into a shared space in which information is exchanged. Political discussion groups (Democrats Underground and Free Republic), virtual marketplaces (E-Bay) and genealogical networks for finding relatives (Rootsweb) are all examples of thriving communities in which information and ideas are exchanged within a virtual public space. Meanwhile, although online romances have been marred by predatory types and relationship failure, the success of a number of online dating services (J-date, Harmony and Match.com), many of which boast successful partnering and marriage, suggest that this concept has been refined in the last several years. Also, while there are people who eschew electronic mail as a means of communication, the usage of electronic mail has significantly increased and remains the most popular online activity.288 Of course much of the increase in electronic mail usage has centered on marketing efforts, resulting in the overabundance of unwelcome entries in virtual mailboxes screaming the word “Viagra” or promising to “double your income.” Still, other telecommunications devices have also increased and in fact the use of instant messaging has also been registered as an increasingly popular online activity among certain groups.289 Indeed, in 2003, the Pew Research Center published its Internet and American Life Project, which showed that the total online

288 The 2003 Pew Research Center Project on the Internet and American Life showed although the daily average online population in the United States is 66 million, 102 million Americans use electronic mail, a 31 percent increase from March 2000.
289 The 2003 Pew Research Center Project on the Internet and American Life showed a marked increase in instant messaging as a means of communication among the Hispanic population particularly.
population in the United States totaled 63 percent of the total population, including a broad cross-section of demographic groups. Overall online activity, including -- but not limited to -- communication was said to have increased 27 percent in the last three years. Once envisioned as an alienating medium, the Internet appears to have advanced virtual communication significantly.

Also notable is the fact that although web development was considered a fairly specialized qualification several years ago, the increase in the number of people learning how to code in HTML for Internet publishing is exemplified in the quantity of web pages and web sites developed by so-called “non-experts.” Certainly, the more difficult and comprehensive XML code, as well Visual Basic and other languages needed to develop sophisticated systems, remain in the realm of the technological experts. Nevertheless, a once esoteric field has become more accessible and understandable.

So, in only a few years, many of the doubts associated with the advent of the Internet and its related information technologies have been assuaged, leaving instead a more promising constellation of possibilities. Recalling for a moment the profusion of popular human relations and business management literature that began to emerge in the mid-1980s and flourished in the 1990s, there was a particular emphasis on the impressions of promise and

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290 The 2003 Pew Research Center Project on the Internet and American Life showed that the online community in the United States is about 63 percent of the total population, age 18 years and older. The online population was reported to have been demographically diverse, with certain differences in how groups undertake online activity. There were also chasms in online usage with elderly persons, people from rural areas, people with disabilities, the unemployed, as well as people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, tending to be less likely to use the Internet or electronic mail.

291 The 2003 Pew Research Center Project on the Internet and American Life showed that the size of the online population on a typical day grew from 52 million Americans in March 2000 to 66 million in August 2003 – an increase calculated at 27 percent.
possibility. 292 The legacy of this movement (for lack of a better term) is evidenced even today at CountryWatch where employees jokingly and sarcastically talk about “turning challenges into opportunities” and mockingly remark that “problems are really possibility in disguise.” Over time, one might conclude that some of the charm of this positivist enterprise is eroding, as evidenced by the acerbic references in the CountryWatch workplace. One might well hypothesize that these positive discourses are not finding the same kind of receptive response as before. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the sense of peril mentioned earlier has not disappeared. Indeed, it continues to contribute to an overall sense of ambivalence.

Peril

As noted in the section just prior, there is an enduring sense of anxiety, which prevails within information technology and indeed within the context of the so-called New “Informational” Economy. The predicament, even crisis, of the established institutions has already been discussed, but there is another realm of anxiety that requires acknowledgement.

In The Social Life of Information, John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid note that in spite of the popular discourses expounding the Internet’s disintermediation (and the associated effects on relations of power and knowledge in the Foucauldian sense), debates over proprietary relations of the Internet have been on-going. 293 Questions have arisen about whether or not intellectual property, now in the hands of individual authors after being under the control of

293 Brown and Duguid, 2000a: 250.
the Stationer’s Register, is again reverting to the domain of publishers and corporations. Similarly, regardless of the pronouncements about new laws regulating cyberspace and the digital environs, the fact remains that, at the present moment, the existing realm of jurisprudence in the United States bears upon contracts, copyrights, guarantees and suchlike.

Meanwhile, even the most progressive and technically oriented companies have been compelled to think in terms of “the bottom line,” which is itself a 600-year old relic of double-entry bookkeeping. Brown and Duguid’s work was published before the corporate scandals of the business world, which to some extent may have influenced a return to traditional business practices, the concentration on “bottom lines,” and the capacity to deliver dividends. Yet even before the discovery of the deeply flawed accounting practices of certain companies, the billions of Venture Capital funding that flowed into Internet start-up companies were offered up precisely because of a belief that there would eventually be a tremendous yield of profits. Put simply, Venture Capitalists were banking on the impact of companies’ “bottom lines.”

These items have been liberally selected here to try to show that technological futurology and proclamations of the new landscape of business notwithstanding, there are several traditional (read “old”) customs and institutions that have not only been taken for granted, but also prevail. Hence, in practice and in terms of sensibility, moving forward and reaching into the past may be occurring at the same time. Perhaps, progress seems to call upon legacies of the past.

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The desire on the part of infoenthusiasts and techno-futurists to view this moment as distinct (as exemplified by the notion of "paradigmatic shift") exists simultaneously with the knowledge that progressive futures filled with the possibility promised by information technology can only be realized on the fulcrum of the past. The pioneering lexicon is, therefore, compromised by this awareness and anxiety is produced as a result. Accordingly, the apparent landscape of transformations may be regarded through a veil of unease... always self-referential about the past and future, as evidenced by the very terms "post-Industrial," "late-capitalist," "Old Economy," and "New Economy." Such anxiety may be reflective of the cultural moment. As the focus in the business world moves from tangible goods and service to information and technology, the conditions within which such transformations take place holds their own significance.

**Creative Destruction**

Why is the New "Informational" Economy -- a term identified as a trope by scholars and exiled from the vocabulary of many embarrassed business types -- relevant? Perhaps, as suggested in the material discussed directly prior, the response centers on the simultaneity of possibility and doubt, promise and peril, pleasure and threat. If so, what does this simultaneity itself indicate? Conceivably, it may be the aforementioned "larger context of instability," the dilemmas facing corporate organizations and a state of predicament (or even crisis). As such, the discourses and processes associated with the New "Informational" Economy may in their own distinctive manner be working through the experience and conditions of crisis.

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297 Mattis and Daly, 1999: 162.
In regard to structural change and transformation, Joseph Schumpeter (discussed in terms of economic theory in the previous chapter) originated the term “creative destruction.” As denoted by the term, creative destruction is at once inflected by the positive attributes of creation, innovation and design as well as the more menacing intonations of destruction, obliteration and eradication. Together, “creative destruction” can be a practical description of ongoing transformations as evidenced by new technologies. Indeed, the term “creative destruction” gained currency in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a rather hackneyed term during that very period. In fact, it was used in conjunction with another cliché term (the very subject of this research) – the New Economy. Indeed, at information technology conferences and conventions, executives and keynote speakers invariably declared that the process of “creative destruction” would replace the Old Economy with the New Economy.

In 1942, Schumpeter described “creative destruction” as a “process of industrial mutation” that “incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one.” In this way, Schumpeter was positioning “creative destruction” as the defining characteristic of the capitalist system. Schumpeter wrote, “This process of creative destruction is the essential fact of capitalism.”

The declaration by technocrats that the so-called New “Informational” Economy would be an outcome of “creative destruction,” misses the fact that Schumpeter was describing the constitutive aspect of capitalism itself. That is to say, because Schumpeter is referencing an

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298 Schumpeter, 1975 [1942].
299 Schumpeter, 1975 [1942]: 82-85.
300 Schumpeter, 1975 [1942]: 82-83.
"incessant" revolution, interpreting the New "Informational" Economy as the fruition of "creative destruction" largely ignores the concurrence of both creation and destruction. Stated differently, while executives, infoenthusiasts, and techno-enthusiasts revel in the idea of constructing, directing, maintaining, administering and even affirming the New "Information" Economy as the result of paradigmatic shift, in fact, "creative destruction," as "the essential fact of capitalism," promises an unrelenting state of transformation and by extension, crisis. 301

This very perpetuity of transformation is also internally generated. Specifically, it revolutionizes the economic structure from within, as cited previously. Thus, new developments in information technology, and as regards the New "Informational" Economy are to be considered effects of the prevailing capitalist system. The popularity of discourses about the democratizing and equalizing influence of information technology as well as paradigmatic change are not set up in opposition to the capitalist field of power. Instead, they function as discourses, mechanisms and metaphors for resolving the sense of crisis and the complexities of transformation within that field of power.

Discourses of (Life and) Death

From the 1990s to about 2001, there were references in media, popular culture and most especially in business circles about the transition from the so-called Old Economy to the New Economy. In 2001, in the wake of the collapse of Enron and the spate of business scandals that followed the devolution of technology stocks and the so-termed "burst of the Internet

301 Schumpeter, 1975 [1942]: 82-85; see also Marcus, 1998: 9.
bubble,” there was growing number of references to the “death” of the New Economy. What had been heralded as the new birth within the market place had been effectively killed off and hastily buried by certain players within the arena of business and finance.

Even at CountryWatch, which at that time had been named CountryWatch.com, there was a reactionary move to drop the “.com” from the company’s name, thus changing the identity of the company. Perhaps it was a quasi-re-imagining of sorts. The new name, CountryWatch Incorporated, was envisioned and intended to portray the idea of a content provider that fit into the category of “normal business operations,” complete with pinstriped shirts.

Yet by late 2001, the discourses of the New Economy were making a comeback. Articles asking the question of whether or not the New Economy was really dead began to materialize and were soon followed by declarations of the resuscitation of the New Economy. “Creative Destruction,” had gone into a compressed state of overdrive followed by retrograde movements. Consider the following excerpts from articles in various industry journals as well as the mainstream press:

_The dying begins..._

In 2000, as the Nasdaq Stock Market lost about 20 percent of its value and as Internet start-up companies were in the process of layoffs, Rachel Konrad, a staff writer for CNET News, asked the question, “Is the digital economy doomed?” She answered her own question by responding in straightforward terms: “Hardly. Although disruptive to employees and stock
markets, the business of the Internet is simply experiencing the kind of natural consolidation that recast many other industrial landscapes from automobiles to banking. But along the way, the so-called new economy is beginning to endure some difficult growing pains, felt more acutely than in previous cycles because of the Net's hyper-accelerated pace.  

So, pain, growth and exertion have led to the weakening of the system and, accordingly, the dying begins. Truthfully, the dying does not begin with the pain, growth and / or exertion; dying, in fact, begins at birth. Yet the acuteness of the experience sensitizes one to impending death, or as noted here, “doom.”

Later in the piece, Konrad quoted Steve Jones, the head of the Department of Communication at the University of Illinois, who predicted that the very idea of the Internet and an Internet-based economy would become outmoded as it is integrated into the mainstream (global) economy. Jones also predicted that by 2005, “there will be no such thing as the digital economy.”  In this way, ending and termination is experienced, while death is precluded, via the process of integration into the mainstream.

__Body parts__...

By early 2001, Esther Dyson, from the New York Times Syndicate, observed that many start-up ventures were not complete companies but body parts “created to be sold rather than to grow into full fledged companies.” Lamenting that many of these companies had

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303 Jones, as quoted in Konrad, 2000.
insufficient management, inadequate Venture Capital (VC) funding, or had failed to meet their own targets, Dyson warned of the demise of many of these businesses. In this regard, she asked, “Is the New Economy dead? Are VCs all sharks and entrepreneurs all fools?” In response she noted that everyone wanted to be a CEO, no one knew how to manage operations, and while some companies had technology and no sales staff, others had sales staff and consultants but nothing to sell.  

Dyson was actually calling for the buy-outs and mergers of what she termed “body part start-ups” by established companies. Hence, disjointed body parts, while hardly denoting actual death, certainly envisaged long-life only via the route of integration, as noted above. In the aforementioned case, integration into the mainstream is advanced; in this scenario, integration into the realm of established companies is advocated for the purpose of making body parts into a whole… and ultimately, surviving.

*Did it die?*

Also in early 2001, Robert Atkinson wrote an editorial for the Progressive Policy Institute in which he asserted, “The reports of the New Economy’s demise had been greatly exaggerated.” He went on to state, “Every time another dogfood.com site bites the dust, or the Nasdaq falls another five percent, pundits talk of the impending decline of the New Economy. Was the New Economy a flash in the pan? Are we doomed to return to the dismal days of the late 1980s, or even worse, the 1930s?”  

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Yes, here is another registering of potential doom. This time, however, doom is not contemplated in the abstract. Instead, there is an element of panic as Atkinson recalls the recession of the late 1980s and the depression of the 1930s. Against this backdrop of dread, one can almost imagine a market correction reducing billions into millions as being akin to the act of consigning one to poverty.

That said, the question of whether or not the New Economy is dead is considered along with self-conscious questions about its character. Meanwhile, the claim that the New Economy’s demise has been greatly exaggerated carries with it a kind of controlling bravado. Like a patrolling policeman at the site of a possible crime, Atkinson may have well said, “Carry on, people. Nothing to see here.”

It is not dead... and it is bigger than life!

By mid-2001, Kevin Maney, a technology columnist for USA Today wrote, “We love to curse the New Economy. Oh, do we feel betrayed. All that Internet stuff – look where it got us. Laid off. Bankrupt. Thinking Krispy Kreme is a hot investment opportunity. Sir Walter Raleigh probably felt such betrayal about the New World when he lost his colony at Roanoke. All that promise. All that supposed upside. And what did the New World get him? His entire investment went south. Later, in England, he got executed, which is sort of the 16th century equivalent of us getting laid off. But if Raleigh felt that way, he would have

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306 In April 2000, just as the Nasdaq and the Dow Jones fell, Krispy Kreme Doughnuts went public and unlike the dire circumstances of the day, its offering price of $21 almost doubled to close at $37. Its shares went on to increase by 600 percent. Although its valuation has slowed, in 2003, it was forecast to outperform the market.
been taking a narrow view of the New World. He would have been blind to what it really was – a wide open, new kind of place that would one day give birth to Disney World. .... New World. New Economy. Maybe we’re in a similar bind. The New Economy could still be there, but it might be much bigger than the Internet, full of promise we can barely imagine.” 307

Maney later recalled the insights of Nathan Myhrvold, the Chief Technology Officer at Microsoft, who has said that that there is, indeed, a New Economy, but it is one based on exponential change, using exponential technologies. Notably, in Maney’s rumination, although the New Economy has not died, it is not presented as alive. Indeed, as interpreted by Maney, not only is the New Economy not dead, but it is framed by a calculus of variables that transcend established conceptions.

*Enron is dead; the New Economy is not...*

At the close of 2001, writer and founder of Digital 4Sight, Don Tapscott, wrote, “First the dot.com collapse. Now the largest ever corporate failure in American history. Almost every day it seems another nail is pounded into the coffin of the New Economy. But recession or not, the Internet has transformed the way the word does business. And the key tenets of corporate survival strategies from previous downturns – hunkering down, shelving new projects and sticking to basics, no longer make sense. While cost-cutting is appropriate, today it must be achieved along with unprecedented business model innovation and agility.”

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For Tapscott, (and several others noted here), the informational infrastructure of the Internet characterizes the nature of the New Economy. In this regard, Tapscott suggested that the transactional value afforded by the Internet remains significant. Tapscott claimed that Enron’s energy trading platform – EnronOnline – was considered one of the more valuable components of its operations, and constituted the motivation behind Dynergy’s attempted purchase of the collapsing company. It was a deal that never materialized, however, Tapscott’s contention centered on the fact that although Enron was dead, the New Economy, within which Enron was supposedly located, was very much alive and driving the future.

No, it is very definitely DEAD.

Of course, other individuals, such as Morgan Stanley economist, Stephen Roach, wrote in the Global Economic Forum, “It now seems as if history will judge the latter half of the 1990s to have been an aberration. It wasn’t supposed to have been that way of course. America’s boom was widely presumed to have ushered in a period of unbridled prosperity that the rest of the world became increasingly desperate to emulate. Built on a foundation of IT-led productivity enhancement, the New Economy was widely thought to have broken all of the old macro rules. Sustained vigorous growth – without inflation and business cycles – became the norm. A powerful e-based connectivity was presumed to have created new synergies between businesses, workers and consumers. Corporate earnings power was judged to be virtually unlimited, especially for those enterprises that embraced the scale and scope that e-based platforms could deliver. The New Economy was all that and more. It brought

Washington, Wall Street and Main Street together. It was the dawn of what was promised to be a glorious future. That future is now in tatters. Its demise began with the excesses of the Nasdaq – a classic asset bubble that ended up infecting the real economy.”

Roach’s words sound much like a post-mortem of a promising and fabulous romance that ended in some pathological and curious fashion. Indeed, for Roach, the late 1990s were “an aberration” and the REAL economy (presumably understood as distinct from the false and illusory New Economy) had been “infected.” In this way, the New Economy was on track for destruction and was intent upon taking the “real economy” with it.

*The Guru killed it.*

Paul Krugman, Professor of International Affairs and Economics at Princeton University, and columnist for the New York Times, agreed that the likes of Enron were quite dead, but declared the death to be the fault of “trendy management theories.” In this regard, Krugman wrote, “Enron sold lots of things, but above all it sold itself: it crafted a self-portrait that business gurus loved. Like a schematic diagram from The McKinsey Quarterly or The Harvard Business Review, Enron’s business plan made a perfect Power Point presentation. Other companies hired business gurus as consultants; Enron, in effect, put the gurus in charge. What they created was a company so trendy that investors were dazzled. And that let executives get away with financial murder.”

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In this case, Krugman was writing about Enron, as a company within the New Economy with few hard assets and no clear means of support, during a time in which “flexibility” and “vision” were valued. His descriptions of trendy management theories and schematics conceived of by “gurus” are illustrative of a certain ethos that appeared to be pervasive during the late 1990s. As stated by Krugman, “Investors weren’t interested in hard facts; they flocked to the companies that told the best stories. And this created tremendous pressure on managers to conform to the latest trend. Corporations became fashion victims.” 311

Recalling Tapscott’s perspective above, information technology has been viewed as a kind of magical potion. Meanwhile as noted by Roach, the New Economy promised a kind of business and financial El Dorado. Here, as suggested by Krugman, consultancies were akin to gurus and wizards. While Roach presented the New Economy in terms of illness and eventual death, Krugman portrayed the Enron demise as a consequence of stylishness management theories, or as he put it, “death by guru.”

_We’re dead too._

John Greenwald of Time suggested that not only was the New Economy dead, but it had exacted quite a large toll. The collateral damage included the entire investing community. Greenwald wrote, “It was fun at first, admit it – watching those bratty dot.com billionaires, oops, millionaires – ha! – thousandaires squirm as their cyberpriced stocks came screaming back to earth and their dotcoms disappeared overnight. But then, something else dawned on me. It wasn’t just the kids from Stanford taking it on the chin. It was us. Suddenly, warning  

lights are flashing. In recent weeks, everyone from mighty Intel — whose microchips power 80 percent of the world’s computers — to lumber and housewares seller Home Depot has signaled a drop in profits, leading nervous investors to pummel their stocks.\(^{312}\)

Okay, so Greenwald assumes that everyone — the collective “us” he referenced — to be investors. This massive assumption aside, Greenwald was heralding the fact that the so-called New Economy was intrinsically tied to the overall economy, which, for him, is the equivalent of the investment economy and its associated investor class.

*It was never dead; in fact, it wasn’t even sick*

According to Dennis Grimms of Price Waterhouse Coopers, the New Economy has neither died nor was it ailing. In answer to the popular question “Is the New Economy Dead?” Grimms answers, “I think not. The fact remains, business to consumer (B2C) is not dead. In fact, it continues to grow with B2C sales growing from $6 billion to $10 billion in the past year.”\(^{313}\) Grimms went on to state that although New Economy businesses have struggled to find a profitable business model, this should not be viewed as a sign of death. For Grimms, wireless telecommunications and the mobile Internet form the promise of further New Economy vitality. In this regard, Grimms’ views are similar to that of Tapscott, cited above.

*It’s dead but it’s no big deal.*

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\(^{312}\) Greenwald, 2000.

\(^{313}\) Grimms, 2001.
A humorous view of the New Economy's supposed death was offered by Kipp Cheung of Brandweek, who noted, "With headlines that scream hyperbolic hogwash like The New Economy is Dead! it is no wonder that folks have the jitters about the future of business on the Net. You know its bad when the media starts spreading the word of the new austerity measures being enacted by many companies. What's really going on is that perks like free, in-office massages and gourmet lunch buffets are being replaced with more scrutinized expense reports and sack lunches. Turns out that the new austerity is actually the old regular way of working. I only hope we get to keep the comfy Aeron chairs." 314

Here, Cheung has observed how the death of the so-called New Economy is measured in accordance with the transition into a perk-free existence. A New Economy company called Journee Software in Austin, Texas, is an example of a company that boasted innumerable perks for its employees. 315 From trips to Mexico for every staff member, to bowling parties every Friday afternoon, and even full-body massages and free lunches, Journee employees enjoyed a rather pampered existence. The fact that the company changed its business model repeatedly (from real time transaction customization to customer relations management to enterprise information integration) and had only one customer (another company owned by the cousin of Journee’s founder) seemed immaterial. Indeed, the flow of Venture Capital (several rounds of Venture Capital investment ranging from $24 to $10 million most recently) was endless. Three and a half years later, it seems that Journee’s benefits plan are more in line with that of a typical Old Economy company, although “free lunch at Austin’s

315 See Journee Software website.
best restaurants” are still available. If the New Economy is dead, it doesn’t seem to matter to Journée.

*It’s dead and this is where you’ll find it.*

Since all things that die need a resting place, Ebituaries and FuckedCompany.Com are two such graveyards of New Economy companies that “died.”

The creator of the Ebituaries site published the following explanatory note on the homepage of the website, “After a few of the websites I like to visit started putting up notices stating that due to difficult financial conditions and their inability to secure new venture funding, they are taking their websites offline. Some of these swan songs are actually horrible to read; some are funny; some actually provide some insight into the failure of the company. But all of these final gasps for air are shortly taken offline as the company enters the final stages of Chapter 11 or Chapter 7 or some other gloomy section of the U.S. tax code. I have decided to capture these swan songs as a matter of historical interest as well as the obvious entertainment value. I post them on this website not to intentionally ridicule the efforts of the people who ran these companies, but as a reminder of the fragility that supports an economy.”  

Meanwhile, FuckedCompany.com has attracted disgruntled employees, not only from within the so-called New Economy, but across the business world. Although there is a “dead

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317 FuckedCompany.com
pool” of notable company deaths and a log of defunct companies. It is also a venue for anti-corporation rants. A recent visit to FuckedCompany.com showed that a discussion forum entitled “Happy Fun Slander Corner” had been added. Entries in this acerbic section included postings entitled, “Ford Can Eat My Shit” and “Laying off 1200.” Posters in these sections seemed to include both ex-employees as well as disillusioned current employees. Other features included postings of corporations’ internal memos by angry staffers hoping to bring attention to their companies’ questionable business practices, and links to naughty websites, such as “Customers Suck.”

While Ebituaries is a kind of online obituary for defunct companies of New Economy, FuckedCompany, com is an irreverent venue for “bad news” about the economy and it also functions as a clandestine forum for those wishing to express critical views of the corporations for which they work.

_It’s alive and kicking, damn it (but the Republicans want you to think it is dead)._

Robert Atkinson (cited above) insists that the New Economy is not dead at all, but, indeed, “alive and kicking.” Atkinson criticized the Bush administration for its neo-Keynesian approach to economic affairs by decrying the massive tax cut plan enacted in 2001 and noting that the Bush administration possessed little vision in regard to the promise of the New Economy. These politicized observations aside, Atkinson asserted that the “life” in the New Economy resides in the realization that it was never “the next new things” but that it was a fact of systemic transformation. In this regard, Atkinson wrote, “The New Economy
embraces more fundamentally a profound transformation of all industries, the kind of transformation that happens perhaps twice in a century. The emergence of the New Economy is equivalent in scope and depth to the rise of the manufacturing economy in the 1890s and the emergence of the mass production, corporate economy in the 1940s and 1950s... The New Economy represents a complex array of forces. These include the reorganization of firms, more efficient and dynamic capital markets, more economic churning and entrepreneurial dynamism, globalization, economic competition, and volatile labor markets.”

There are three elements that run through these excerpts of Atkinson’s piece. First, he has insisted that not only is the New Economy very much alive, but that certain political interests want it dead (or want the public to believe it is dead, thus leading to that very end). Second, in order to re-inscribe “life,” if you will, into the conceptual construct of the New Economy, Atkinson has used active and energetic references to describe an ongoing process of transformation. This desire to re-inscribe life into something believed to be dead may also have been the motivation behind is the lengthy list of “complex forces.” A third consideration is the reference to the New Economy as being the equivalent of the rise of the manufacturing economy. Rather than position the New Economy’s advent at the end of the linear configuration that runs from agriculturalism to industrialism to the present, Atkinson has captured the New Economy, not as another epochal transition, but as a later transformation within the context of industrialism. In so doing, the New Economy has been conceived in more accessible and current terms.

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318 Atkinson, 2001b.
*It's alive and kicking as is the fact of capitalism.*

“Alive and Kicking” was apparently a popular phrase used to assert the being and existence of the New Economy. As recently as 2003, Bruce Bartlett in “Capitalism Magazine” drew upon productivity earnings (yielded under the same Bush administration that Atkinson criticized) as proof that the New Economy was flourishing. Bartlett pointed to the information technology devices and infrastructure as the driving force behind the increased productivity. 319

*It’s alive and kicking because we said so.*

Atkinson and Bartlett aside, Microsoft, also proclaimed the New Economy to be “alive and kicking” on its official website. In January 2003, the following was published on Microsoft’s website, “To borrow a phrase from Mark Twain, reports of the death of the digital economy are greatly exaggerated.” While the article went on to issue the caveat that it was true that the technology industry was growing more slowly than in the late 1990s, it also asserted the following, “As the industry builds on its enormous cumulative growth of the past two decades, technology is becoming even more integral to our lives and indispensable to the economy.” 320 As such, Microsoft strategically linked future economic health and sustenance to innovations and developments of the New Economy. Who would dare argue with this assessment of the New Economy by the paramount information technology giant?

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Maybe it died. But it is back...

Finally, Jeff Opdyke, a staff writer from the most well-known business journals in the country, the Wall Street Journal, claimed that the once-decimated New Economy had been revived. Indeed, not only was it back from the dead, it was "sizzling." Opdyke’s position has been that despite the challenges of the last several years (and the deaths of several New Economy ventures), the Internet is here to stay and the companies that have managed to survive will prevail. Opdyke wrote, "Some investors are wading into brand name companies such as Amazon and E-Bay that are profitable and rapidly attracting new customers. But others are snapping up the kinds of small Internet companies that had become practically a joke in the past few years. The difference now is that some of these companies have a lot of cash on their books, are modestly profitable or near break-even and have real products. As a result they seem less at risk of disappearing." 321

In so far as this risk is concerned, of the remaining 209 publicly traded Internet companies, upwards of 41 percent of them were profitable in the fourth quarter of 2002, as compared with 17 percent of the same companies in 2001. 322 This figure is hardly evidence of an unabated trend, however, the perception may well be that Internet companies are again looking attractive to both Venture Capitalists and investors. In the case of CountryWatch, the CEO trotted into a management meeting one Monday morning with copies of this very article for everyone in attendance. He handed out the copies while triumphantly declaring, "You see, we’re not really dead!" Indeed, a resurrection was afoot.

Having encountered such a plethora of writings and articulations of birth, death, and rebirth in regard to the New “Informational” Economy (the aforementioned selection is only a sampling), I had no choice but to include it in the research. Essentially, in all these varied writings about the New “Informational” Economy, despite their focus on business and other commercial interests, I had stumbled along a topos of death.

This topos of death, however, has its own qualities. In each piece cited, for example, there is no evidence of grief or mourning per se. “Suffering,” as it relates to loss, is generally expressed in trenchant and acerbic terms, with mocking references to investors who lost fortunes, or with sardonic recollections of employees who no longer enjoyed extravagant benefits paid for by investment funding. In addition, there are hints of doubt hidden in the emphatic declarations that the New “Informational” Economy is “dead and buried.” In much the same way, there are hints of desperation in the strong assertions that it is “alive and kicking.” Perhaps it is the bravado of the language that evokes these tensions.

Another consideration in this topos of death is the lack of closure or absolutism involved in death. Death is repositioned so that it is not a final state. Ending also denotes continuance. Either the New “Informational” Economy rises from its deathbed or it comes back from the throes of death. An even more disturbing dimension is to be found in the discourses that suggest that it never died in the first place. So, amidst the pronouncements of the New
"Informational" Economy's death are found avowals about its live state of being. The contradiction evokes a rather eerie (even ghostly) dimension.

Likewise, death and loss are understood in conjunction with restoration, as the New "Informational" Economy is both lost and found in the references to death and revival. In a sense, these dualities function together to reconfigure the understandings of what is, and what is promised to be. This dimension is exemplified by discourses about the failures of the New "Informational" Economy alongside expositions of its the promise.

In similar form, the death of the New "Informational" Economy is expressed in terms of absence, as something gone or something that is no longer here. Yet in that moment of acknowledgement and articulation, absence ironically calls presence to mind.

As noted by Marilyn Ivy in her work on the meanings and symbolisms of death in Japan, "Only from the position of loss can one assert that nothing has been lost... The realization of loss is forestalled, denied, by an insistence that nothing is lost." 323 This paradoxical construction underscores the incongruous impulses to both deny and affirm death. Life evokes death while death evokes life. Cast against this topos of death, the New "Informational" Economy, may be understood here as a discursive mechanism that simultaneously circumscribes a repository of loss even as it releases life. Like the anxieties that characterize the mood of change and transformation, the narrative of the unfolding of the New Economy is textured by confusion and unknowing.

323 Ivy, 1995: 188, 190.
THE FIELDWORK AND THE FIELD

The Company and the Products

At its inception in 1998, the company, called Commercial Data International (CDI), published demographic, historical, political, economic, enterprise and environmental data on every country in the world. The data was more in-depth than the facts and figures provided in the CIA Factbook or State Department's Background Notes, but it was hardly encyclopedic in nature, and it contained minimal analysis. Over time, however, the depth and breadth of material increased, and was (on certain occasions) even compared to the Country Briefings by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). Still, with a very small staff (to date, there are just under 20 employees), the material published is perhaps more akin to that of The Statesman rather than the Economist Intelligence Unit, functioning as something of an overview of information, events, issues on the countries of the world. Nevertheless, comparisons between the Commercial Data International and The Economist Intelligence Unit were a frequent source of debate within the company and outside at the commercial level, in sales negotiations with prospective customers.

324 The company covered 191 countries in the world, using the United States' Department of State recognition criteria for coverage in the case of 191 countries. The country also covered Serbia and Montenegro because although it was not officially recognized by the Department of State, it had been recognized as a country by the United Nations. Later, East Timor became an independent and sovereign nation state, thus increasing the number of countries covered to 192. Places such as Taiwan and Puerto Rico are covered in appendices but are not treated as countries because of their contested status accorded by the Department of State and the United Nations.
326 See Economist Intelligence Unit, 2003.
Soon after operations commenced, it became apparent that even if Commercial Data International published bi-annually, the material composed became out of date very quickly. Consequently, Commercial Data International acquired licenses from several different international news sources (including United Press International, Pan African News, Xinhua: China News Agency, the United Nations’ Inter-Regional Information Network, Interfax, Central Asian News, Radio Free Europe, National Technical and Information Service, Caribbean News Agency and EFE – the Spanish language electronic news agency.) Every day, between 600 and 1000 stories on any given topic are culled from the news wires into the company’s computerized database, and then filtered “by country” (the proprietary software technology identifies and filters relevant words and country names). Once each story is filtered, it goes through a process of analysis, parsing, editing, branding, and transmission, before it is uploaded onto the website for publication. In this way, subscribers can access newsworthy items from a plethora of sources across the globe. The news wire service of Commercial Data International was the foundation of the company as an Internet enterprise.

The actual publication of the 191 (eventually 192) books on each country have been on-going to date. Writers and researchers (myself included) were hired to compose and compile the content of each book, according to a consistent format. The arrangement of each book was as follows:

Chapter 1 – Demographic information and maps
Chapter 2 – Political Overview, including the political history, political conditions, government functions, government structure, principal government officials, leader biographies, foreign policy and foreign relations, and defense forces.

Chapter 3 – Economic Overview, including the economic conditions, macroeconomic data, key sectors, and global rankings for trade, gross domestic product, population, development and technological achievement.

Chapter 4 – Investment Overview, including investment climate, taxation parameters, key enterprises and stock market information.

Chapter 5 – Social Overview, including history, ethno-cultural and linguistic descriptions, human development issues, cultural etiquette, travel guide and health advisory.

Chapter 6 – Environmental Overview, including environmental challenges, pollution trends, global environmental snapshot by region, descriptions of environmental concepts, and delineations of international accords relating to the environment.

Apart from the research, writing, compilation, and data generation required to complete close to 200 books covering the aforementioned material, there was also an unending production process. Since the staff had no experience in publishing, each section and data table of each book was created separately and then merged together after editing into unitary documents.
Those documents were then manually transformed into PDF files and then sent to a publisher for transformation into a cheaply-bound book.

In later years, as the familiarity with technology increased and as proprietary software was developed, this process was refined so that each section of each country review is now accessed and worked on from within a content management database. Most people in the company have restricted access to the database and researchers and writers now simply submit their work within the system, ending their part of the production process by clicking on a button that reads “copy edit.” The copy editor is then automatically notified of the work that has been submitted and he or she can copy edit the content and likewise click on a button that reads “final edit.” This step effectively notifies the editor who may then issue further changes before authorizing the work to be uploaded and published to the website. The same database also generates .PDF versions of works that can be downloaded from the company’s website. The database also manages the content used for the generation of CD-roms as well as the content for book publishing in a fairly painless manner. In this way, the content management system includes a work flow process and is a far cry from the early Commercial Data International days in which everything was done in a fairly laborious fashion and notifications of work flow were issued personally. Personal notifications usually involved a writer running from the editorial department to the administration department with a zip disc containing separate sections of each review while screaming, “Zimbabwe is done! Time to PDF!!!” Indeed, the poor and inefficient work flow process and the labor-intensive production prompted one manager to comment, “This is like a Soviet bureaucracy!”
During that first year in existence, the company was in its "production" stage and by late 1998, it experienced its first "identity crisis" as it had to deal with the transition from research and development to marketing and sales. In generality, three issues were illuminated at that time and led to the evolution of the company from an inexperienced publishing entity to an equally inexperienced Internet-based company.

First, because of its inability to penetrate the traditional book selling market dominated by established publishers, it was difficult to sell the books that had been produced. The Internet solution promised to resolve the problem of distribution by allowing books to be sold online rather than through bookstores at the online bookstore giant, Amazon.com, and later at the online storefronts for Barnes and Noble. Because Amazon.com, as an Internet pioneer, had automated its process by which book sellers could enter the retail market, albeit at a heavily discounted price, it was the first major distribution avenue for CountryWatch reports.

Second, Commercial Data International realized that publishing was a very expensive business. As such, the company concluded that it might be more cost-effective to publish on a "demand" basis for print and focus the publishing attention for all 191 (now 192) country-specific reviews on the Internet medium instead. In its early stages, CountryWatch used information technology to store data and information, while that material was published in-house via a messy process of converting text into printable forms. The idea of Internet publishing developed over time only after the idea of downloadable .PDF reports had been in effect. The actual Internet publication route happened later as CountryWatch perfected the idea of publishing news stories online via a specialized XML database, and as new
technological applications were developed within the company to make hundreds of thousands of pages of information available both over the Internet and in a printable format.

Third, because the news wire services (which were included in purchases of the books) had been made available online via the Commercial Data International website, and because the reviews would now be disseminated online (as an alternative to traditional publishing), the company was inadvertently transformed into an Internet company.

In addition to the country reviews and the news, the website itself – as an Internet portal – became a product onto itself. The name of the company was then changed from Commercial Data International to CountryWatch.com, and the structure of the company transformed from an “LLC” or “limited liability corporation” to a Delaware Corporation (also referred to as a “Delaware S-corp”). Suddenly, it became identified as one of many “start up dot.coms” in 1999 (even though its roots lay elsewhere). As such, the potential wealth of the company exponentially increased, and musings of IPOs (first public offerings on Wall Street) were uttered. 327 In this way, CountryWatch was suddenly a very distinguishable entity from its nemesis, the Economist Intelligence Unit. As an Internet-based “start up” company with a predominantly youthful and informal staff (unlike the “old men in suits” who wrote for and ran the Economist Intelligence Unit), CountryWatch.com was self-described as a “younger, hipper, sexier global intelligence provider.” At the very least, this was the perception, if not the reality, of CountryWatch.com. Younger, hipper and sexier in image, however, did not

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327 Note that since 1999, the Nasdaq stock exchange, specializing in technology and science stocks, experienced a significant devaluation in April of 2000, followed by continued volatility to date. Consequently, many privately-held technological enterprises, including CW.com, which were previously positioned for IPOs have since retreated from their leanings toward public offerings.
translate into being a genuine competitor alongside the established, substantive and intellectual productions of the Economist Intelligence Unit. Still, the staff at CountryWatch took solace in the ideas and the imagery associated with Internet companies that were very much in vogue at the time.

In the first few years of operations, the company operated on capital funded by the Chairman and Founder, as well as capital infusions by “angel” investors. No Venture Capital (VC) funding had been added to the CountryWatch.com coffers. This was not because CountryWatch.com had not courted Venture Capital funding, but, rather, because the West Coast investors were simply not interested in a small, low-technology operation in Houston, Texas. Most start-up companies were located on the west coast of the United States at the time and were funded by financial money on the east coast. 328 On Wall Street, financial wizards saw the potential of technology-oriented investments, particularly as regards fledgling Internet ventures, and began investing in west coast ventures ranging from technological applications for transaction-based websites to content-based Internet portals. Houston-based CountryWatch was simply out of that scheme. In need of capital to keep the company functioning, the Chairman and Founder then approached wealthy associates from the Houston-based energy industry, many of whom possessed the financial wherewithal to invest in his company. It is, thus, from this group of “angel” investors that CountryWatch.com operations were funded in the early years of existence.

In the last two years, having tried to leverage a number of business models and after launching a number of partnerships and new products, the company managed to achieve

328 See Wolff, 1988 on the upstart online drive in the early years of the Internet as a profit-making venture.
sustained success in its sales, paving the way for self-sustainability in the present, and projected profits by the end of 2004. Meanwhile, the company also dropped the “.com” suffix at the end of its name, and renamed itself CountryWatch Incorporated, or simply CountryWatch. Of course, the domain and website address continued to be www.countrywatch.com.

Partnerships and Strategic Alliances

In terms of new partnerships and strategic alliances, CountryWatch collaborated and affiliated with a legal and consulting firm specializing in travel documents, an online travel agency, as well as a language translation service to form business associations. In forming these partnerships and strategic alliances, there was a concerted effort to seek out partners for whom there would be some kind of synergistic interaction between CountryWatch’s content and their particular products and services. Because of the international orientation of CountryWatch’s content, it is conceivable that users would also be interested in the type of exotic international travel offered by the travel agency. Linking country-specific background information to the particular destinations offered in a co-branded website brought content and travel services together in one venue, where possible transactions or queries could be registered. Likewise, travelers interested in country-specific information might also require information about documentation and visas, or even translation services. Thus, another two partnerships were formed; they appeared to make sense on the basis of the type of content and products offered by companies involved in these strategic alliances. The nature of the partnerships has been in the form of reciprocal linking, revenue sharing derived from
referrals and purchases from one website to another, and revenue sharing on co-branded websites featuring shared content and products.

Not all partnership ideas have, however, been successful. As noted elsewhere, a close partnership which came precipitously close to becoming a merger was formed with a risk analysis group. Using the CountryWatch’s background information on countries as well as its growing experience in Internet technology and content management, in conjunction with the other company’s risk analysis models, the two companies formed an alliance. This relationship, based on shared revenues, endured for a few years finally ending when it was clear that they did not share compatible “cultures” as regards information technology. The story of this failed merger is addressed elsewhere in the research; however, it is illustrative of how such alliances can prove beneficial for a designated period of time, but like a bad marriage, they are not necessarily intended to be everlasting commitments of togetherness.

Meanwhile, as the information technology and Internet wave crested, the company ventured into the realm of Internet telephony. For purposes of clarification, Internet telephony includes various communications modalities -- voice, facsimile, and/or voice-messaging application -- that are conveyed over the Internet rather than via publicly switched telephone networks. The procedures involved in Internet telephone calls involve the conversion of the analog voice signal to a digital format and the compression and translation of the signal into Internet protocol packets for transmission over the Internet. CountryWatch’s telephony service was touted to be “the big money maker” for the company. As such, substantial investment money was used to find a person who would manage this venture and work on the
issuance of telephony cards (akin to long distance calling cards) to customers. Needless to say, this venture was not a success. Telephony -- although a low cost alternative to regular long-distance telephone calling for those with access to a computer and the Internet -- never realized its promise. The reason for the failure of telephony was largely due to the fact that the quality of audio reception was never particularly good.

Other failed ventures included "CountryWatch Briefings" (day long, in-person briefing programs on selected countries in the world) and "CountryWatch Bazaar" (an online marketplace of items and music from across the world). In the case of the briefings, the expense of marketing and publicizing these events turned out to be exorbitant and was complicated by the labor-intensive preparation needed to carry off such events successfully. After delivering only a few briefings on Central Asian republics such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, this venture was laid to rest. In the case of the CountryWatch Bazaar, compact discs featuring world music, as well as interesting items from various countries in the world, such as chocolate from Belgium, were made available for purchase on the website. Although several other electronic commerce enterprises on the Internet were failing at the time, advocates of this idea claimed that the context-specific nature of this particular offering seemed more promising. Still, this venture ended abruptly when two partner companies providing the items for purchase went bankrupt. Since then, there has been no effort to rehabilitate the project with new partners.

Instead, attention has been placed on expanding CountryWatch’s product offering. In this regard, other sub-domain websites were added. The first of these new websites was an
education-oriented site called CountryWatch@School featuring a research portal, fully formulated lesson plans for use in classrooms, online multiple choice quizzes for various countries, articles on subjects ranging from globalization to the notion of sovereignty, links to other education websites, as well as options for educators to purchase customized lesson plans. In regard to the customized lesson plans, CountryWatch formed a partnership with an educational consulting group to collaborate in this regard.\textsuperscript{329} The second new website was a commercially-oriented site, CountryWatch Business Services, featuring expert consulting services for those involved in international business. The third sub-domain website, CountryWatch Maps and Data, offers comparative data on subjects from human development to economic macro data, which can be mapped using specialized charting technologies. A fourth product, the CountryWatch Forecast, features five year economic forecasts covering the major economic variables in every country. The forecast includes access to static web published results, as well as interactive excel models that allow users to vary the parameters and exogenous inputs.

In addition to these new features, CountryWatch has also created “Special Reports” for purchase regarding current events affecting the world of geopolitics. In this regard, works entitled, “About Islam,” “Afghanistan and its neighbors,” as well as “The War in Iraq and its aftermath” were developed and sold online during periods in which these subjects held public interest. Two books (distinct from the usual reviews published on an annual basis) have also been published in the last two years. One is a plan for the post-war construction of Iraq entitled \textit{Reconstructing Eden: A Post-war Plan for the Political and Economic Development}
of Iraq, while the other was an alternative to the Kyoto Protocol and a response to global warming called The Carbon Conundrum. These books and special reports have been published in small scale (only a few thousand each). However, genuine interest may be indicated by the robust number of sales of these items. As such, another book of this typology (i.e. formulas for dealing with global issues using pragmatic means) is planned for 2004, possibly on either North Korea or Iran. As well, a “Special Report” on the 2004 election in the United States, along with electoral maps, will also be launched during the mid-year period.

The Business Models

The transformations of CountryWatch’s business models can be tracked simply by looking at the name changes of the company – from Commercial Data International to CountryWatch.com and then to CountryWatch Incorporated.

As Commercial Data International, the sale of country reviews in textual, cheaply-bound, book format was not terribly successful, due to the company’s unfamiliarity with the publishing industry and its inability to penetrate the book market. In these early days of the company’s existence, there was no known profit source other than via subscriptions to the online reviews and wire services or the purchase of the reviews in book form. During this period, subscription sales barely trickled in thus leading to questions of the overall viability of the enterprise. Outsiders would inquire as to the extent of CountryWatch’s “revenue stream” and frankly, few people in the company’s insider cadre had a convincing answer to
that question. The answers were not resolved when the company underwent a transformation from traditional publishing to the Internet business, and the anticipated profit source unexpectedly changed.

As Internet content providers continued to sprout up across the digital landscape, the prevailing questions about viable revenue streams continued to mount. Still, there were few people attempting to offer serious answers to these questions because so many Internet companies -- most of them with no revenue stream whatsoever -- had gone public and enjoyed exponential stock valuations from the start. The Internet health website, Dr.Koop.com, for example, triggered a stock price of $50 shortly after its debut as public company.

By 1999, CountryWatch.com, like many other Internet companies, began to look at advertising as the preferred revenue stream. The concept of Internet advertising had been in existence since 1994 when an advertising contract between HotWired and AT&T was launched. According to conventional wisdom, repeated and frequent usage of the website (like that of a television channel or radio station) would lend itself to advertising revenue. In the Internet medium, mass usage is referred to as “many sticky eyeballs.” Transforming users (or eyeballs) into revenue is referred to as “monetizing eyeballs.” Because usership (and eyeballs) is (are) potentially in the millions, marketing and advertising revenue is referred to as “viral marketing” that spreads in epidemic proportions.
Also that year (in 1999), CountryWatch became the international content provider for major Internet portals such as Excite, AOL, Alta Vista and Earthlink. With millions of “sticky eyeballs” on the CountryWatch website, via these major portals, the potential for successful “viral marketing” appeared favorable to many market analysts. In fact, advertising revenue was paltry and the business development staff wondered about the viability of this revenue stream.

Monetizing eyeballs through viral marketing occurs hand in hand with the notions of freely available information on the Internet. This model relied on voluminous online usership which would result in associated advertising profits. Specifically, any given Internet-based company would want to accrue as many visits (or “hits”) to the website as possible as well as a high “click through” ratio by which a user would click on an advertising banner. Heavily trafficked websites with associated high “click through” ratios command higher advertising revenue than less trafficked websites with lower “click through” ratios. In much the same way as a television network or radio station is aimed at acquire high ratings, many Internet-based businesses (to be distinguished from exclusive electronic commerce websites) are aimed at maximizing and maintaining the number of active users on their websites.

Encyclopedia Britannica, for example, was purchased by an individual who believed that the encyclopedia should be accessed online and that its content should be freely available. It is unknown whether he believed that the stock prices of the encyclopedia as an Internet company would be worth his while, or whether he hoped to benefit from advertising revenue. Needless to say, free access to the encyclopedia lasted for only a short while and was
replaced by a subscription-based model by which users pay $59 for access on an annual basis.

By the early 2000s, there was no conclusive evidence that Internet advertising and sponsorship revenue was actually profitable. This was the case not just within CountryWatch, but across the landscape of Internet business. In fact, there were many suggestions that the Internet advertising concept was in fact a failure due to a combination of irritation experienced by consumers who encountered pop up advertisements, as well as the economic slowdown.\(^{330}\) Still, this business model continued to be used by many Internet companies despite its inherent flaws. (How much revenue can really be derived from “click throughs” from originating websites to commercial websites marketed via banner advertisements when the payment per “click through” amounts to only a few cents?). In fact, this type of model has seemed to work best in high traffic websites, such as the Internet portal and directory, Yahoo!, where several millions of users/viewers might click on an advertisement, thus generating revenues as a result of the volume of “click throughs.”

After the initial launch of Internet advertising, despite its rosy promise, it became increasingly apparent that such a revenue stream would not yield the kind of profits needed for Internet companies to survive. Indeed, Encyclopedia Britannica’s free online service turned out to be a failure and consequentially, a user fee had to be applied. A similar evolution took place at other information-based Internet companies such as online magazines Salon and the Nation in addition to CountryWatch. Although these companies offered free content at a time when freely available information was the rage on the Internet, advertising

revenues were meager and could not sustain these businesses. Salon offered users the option of reading its articles only after they had "clicked through" an advertisement or for a subscription fee. CountryWatch moved from free content to very modestly priced subscription content. In recent years after managing to capture substantial market share, it gradually increased pricing.

In fact, subscription-based revenues for Internet companies with salable products, such as information-based entities including CountryWatch, the Nation, Salon, and the strategic intelligence entity named Stratfor, are now the norm. Although newspapers still provide free information online, users are not privy to news archives while more comprehensive information carriers provide not only news, but archiving ability, as well as a host of other features. Another strategy employed by businesses is to leverage a "hybrid" model whereby certain core products and capabilities are available for subscription, while some free information is also provided to ensure a high volume of users or "traffic."

Meanwhile, some companies have expanded their business models to include lucrative sponsorship revenue from established companies. Perhaps this shift to corporate sponsorship has contributed to projections that banner advertisements on the Internet will generate as much as $23.5 billion in 2005.\(^{331}\) Of course, it is unknown as to whether or not this forecast is another case of overly-optimistic predictions about the Internet’s commercial potential.

Recent indications from the business world suggest that advertising revenue may be making a significant return as the number of online users has expanded exponentially in the last few

years. Thus subscription-based revenue models are increasingly being supplemented by a new wave of advertising revenue, which in its second wave, promises to be more lucrative than its initial entry. In this regard, the volume of viewers (or users) continues to be of paramount importance. Ultimately, tsunamis of “hits” and large numbers of users or “sticky eyeballs” are the factors that drive revenues and differentiate the popular websites from the rest. In the realm of business and technology, those with more hits and users are the ones that will (theoretically) derive the most revenues, via advertising, sponsorships or lucrative multi-user subscriptions. At CountryWatch, for example, I have a collection of information memorandums received over the last three years that tracks the company’s change in revenue model from advertising revenues, to corporate sponsorships, to multi-user licenses, to the current incarnation, which includes all three variants.

At CountryWatch, during the “free content” phase of the Internet, sales staff traveled across the country trying to sell subscriptions at a time when no one wanted to pay for content, and much less at a price so high (over $1000 for a subscription to the world set.) During one such meeting, a prospective customer said that she was interested in the product but simply would not pay excessively for content. Following the idea that a high volume of customers was good for business and feeling desperate about making a sale, the CountryWatch employee asked, “Well, would you pay $99 for a subscription to the world set?” The individual, although shocked at the ridiculously dramatic drop in pricing to a tenth of the original price, agreed to $99 price tag. Since then, individual basic subscriptions (reviews and wire access for all 192 countries) have been priced at $139, while individual premium subscriptions (reviews, wire access, data and maps) have been priced at $239. Subscriptions
for academic institutions, governmental institutions and corporations start at $239, $339 and $439 respectively, but increase on the basis of the number of users. Special reports and special edition books vary from $29.95 to $39.00, while subscriptions to individual countries are $39.00. The political risk and forecast products start at $2000 for world sets (for educational institutions) but are priced at $5000 for corporations. Although the pricing of the basic products in the aforementioned manner occurred as a result of the desperation by a staffer to make a sale, the pricing has proved to be appropriate.

As discussed in the chapter on the New Economy, the condition of the economy, the prevalence of budget decreases and extremely high-priced competition from the Economist Intelligence Unit have paved the way for CountryWatch to capture a niche in which affordable geopolitical information can be purchased in an online format. As discussed in that very chapter on the New Economy, the actual quality of CountryWatch’s material can be considered mediocre and hardly of the superior variety. This is generally understood as a fact among many persons who work at CountryWatch, especially the editorial staff who actually produce the material. The appeal of CountryWatch to customers, however, lies not in its editorial excellence but rather in the notion of “value for money.” Not surprisingly, editorial staffers often jokingly refer to the CountryWatch offering as “Bob’s Discount Intelligence Service.”

Meanwhile, even as CountryWatch was negotiating pricing structures for content on the Internet, other revenue streams were being explored (as noted above). One particular area was the development of an international marketplace or “Country Bazaar.” With an
international focus, it seemed natural for CountryWatch.com to develop an international electronic commerce (or e-commerce) component to the website. There, users could purchase a variety of desirable items in an online global marketplace. The executive office of the company envisioned upscale items like chocolates from Belgium, watches from Switzerland and Beluga caviar from Russia. When a few employees mentioned that it might be difficult to find “upscale” products from less wealthy nation states, the problem of how this electronic commerce component would function became further highlighted. Of course, the company had no real idea of who the majority of users (and potential buyers) would be. That omission was eventually addressed when educational organizations (schools, colleges and universities) became some of the biggest purchasers. At that time, it was clear that the average student probably could not afford to buy caviar from Russia. In fact, most students using online resources in schools and libraries would be prevented from conducting any kind of commercial activity online as regulations in this regard began to emerge. Evidently, there was a kind of disconnect between how the executives of the company envisioned the “global marketplace” and how such an entity might function in reality. Not surprisingly, market analysts eventually expressed doubts that any Internet-oriented venture could actually find success without meeting the “bottom line” objectives akin to the Old Economy.

No clear conclusion to this electronic commerce conundrum was ever offered, however, over the course of the last few years; as usage on the Internet has increased (see previous chapter), so too have online transactions and purchases. In fact, several electronic commerce enterprises on the Internet have yielded profits as a result of what appears to be a growing comfort and engagement with the Internet as a marketplace and a venue for information prior

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332 UCLA Internet Project, 2002.
to making purchases. The popularity of E-bay and Priceline, as well as the burgeoning profitability of several online stores selling varied products -- from those as exclusive as diamonds (BlueNile.com) and others as pedestrian as ball point pens (Staples.com) -- suggest that time and familiarity have contributed to the volume of online transactions. Indeed, even at what was now called CountryWatch, Inc., it was clear that the sale of information and content for a reasonable price could (finally) result in a steady revenue stream, which had not been possible when the company had tried to sell regular printed books exclusively. Also, business ventures, such as the online marketplace, which had failed before, could potentially find some success in a milieu in which online shopping was becoming a normalized activity. Stated differently, within a period of a few years, familiarity and engagement with the Internet has become a venue within which people are more willing to conduct the business of their lives. Also, increased usage of the Internet tends to lead to further usage and consolidated Internet activity. With this shift it mind, both the profitability and the population base of CountryWatch users appears to be experiencing some degree of momentum.

The Company Today

Today, the vast majority of CountryWatch's customers are located within academia and include the universities in the California State University system, the University of California, the University of Chicago, Fordham University, the University of Iowa, the University of North Carolina, Georgetown University, University of Minnesota, Colombia University, the Naval War College, the Army War College, Ohio State University, University of St. Thomas, the University of Houston, the University of Wisconsin, Yale University and
Rice University. In addition, thousands of high schools have also purchased CountryWatch subscriptions, and include the entire Houston Independent School District. As well, hundreds of public libraries, such as the Air Forces libraries, the Orange Country library system and the New York public library system, are clients. Cultural institutes, such as the Arts Institute and the World Affairs Council, are CountryWatch customers. Governmental clients also factor highly and include the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Marine Corps Intelligence, the State Department, the Department of Commerce and the Center for Strategic Intelligence. International entities, such as the World Health Organization, the Norwegian Parliament, the South African Embassy and the Military of Canada have also purchased CountryWatch subscriptions. In fact, the military officers of Canada who are sent on peace keeping missions across the world are given pre-deployment briefings using CountryWatch’s geopolitical intelligence information. Corporations with subscriptions to CountryWatch include Morgan Stanley, Chevron Texaco, and Fox News. There are also several thousand individual purchasers who are not affiliated with any particular institution or company.

Like many start-up companies, CountryWatch has struggled with inordinate expenses and small profits in its early years, leading to negative cash flow or “burn rate.” This “burn rate” was less spectacular that other start-up companies that spent millions of investor capital on frivolous ventures. In 2000, approximately 12 start-up Internet companies each paid close to three million dollars for 30 seconds of advertising time during Superbowl. Industry experts said that it was the highest price ever paid for television advertising. In one case, a company called Ourbeginning.com reportedly paid 400 percent of its 1999 revenues for Superbowl
advertising. 333 Meanwhile, Journee software spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to take employees on extravagant vacations and to pay for clothing with the company’s logo. At CountryWatch, the expenses were not spent on advertising and branding but rather on hiring employees (regional specialists and writers, networking and computing experts, as well as a vast sales force. Expenses also included outside technology consultants, whose work ended up being too expensive to implement. Ultimately, these costs were still sufficiently painful as to result in cutting expenditures and employee lay offs. In recent years, expenses (along with the size of the staff) have been reduced and together with the escalation of sales, suggest some degree of promise for the company. Still, the "exit strategy" for CountryWatch is undecided. There are three main possibilities: (1) a buy out or purchase from another company; (2) an IPO or initial public offering creating a new publicly traded company; or (3) a reverse merger, which would position CountryWatch within an existing publicly traded company. All three exit strategies are oriented towards the creation of value and liquidity (transformation of assets into cash) in the company’s stock. The precise date of any such “exit strategy” is unknown.

Information Technology and Business Development

CountryWatch did not ride the information technology wave with the intent of joining the surge of new business development. The company evolved out of the practical requirement to publish comprehensive reports on every country and to disseminate news. The Internet simply offered a venue and an opportunity for such an easier and less expensive publication process. The publication world is an insular space where learning about distribution channels

is closed to outsiders and upstart companies. Countless effort in the early years of the company’s inception was spent attempting to penetrate customary publishing and distribution networks to no avail. The ability to publish online was a way of resolving the immediate challenge of finding a publisher who would be willing to publish 192 books in a ridiculously short period of time. In a business where timeliness is of paramount importance, lengthy pre-publication processes -- aimed, quite rightly, at precision and accuracy -- could result in another form of detriment.

The idea of selling proprietary products on the CountryWatch website occurred as an afterthought. Customarily, an author or a publisher approaches the retailer (e-retailer) to sell. Selling from the source was, in the early days, akin to street corner artist selling his or her own creations on the side of a street. Nevertheless, as the notion of electronic commerce took root, the sale of CountryWatch information products became available from the company’s website and to date, accounts for a substantial margin of sales. In this way, CountryWatch moved into the arena of online business and electronic commerce almost accidentally and as suggested by Manuel Castells, utilized and developed technologies for the purpose of staying competitive within the emerging cyber-capitalist market.

Peter Drucker has suggested that the revolutionary aspect of the New “Informational” Economy and the Information Age is not so much the artificial intelligence of “bots” or even the effect of computerized data processing on operations and strategic decision-making in businesses. After all, most people who use computerized systems are not enthusiastically

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334 It was only after “Reconstructing Eden” had been featured on all the major media networks, and as potential customers expressed the desire to purchase copies, that regular publishing houses showed any interest in carrying the book.
availing themselves of “bots” in droves while businesses have not been transformed into fully-democratized and horizontal workplaces. There are, however, two notable developments: (1) Internet-based commerce and business; and (2) process routinization. 335

As regards electronic commerce and online business, it would appear that the Internet has in some ways become a kind of virtual marketplace with business interests. Following Drucker, it would seem that many observers view the Internet as a kind of super distribution channel for goods and services, even though references to the Internet as the “information super highway” has prevailed. Indeed, at CountryWatch, information products are sold in a virtual zone that is a channel for information services and products, as well as being a venue for commercial exchange. In much the same way as the railroad transformed the mental geography of people, so too has electronic commerce eliminated distance by forming one market venue accessible to anyone with Internet access in the world. 336 (Of course, it goes without saying that “anyone with Internet access” is a highly particularized group.)

The Field of Circulation

CountryWatch metamorphosed from a fairly traditional publishing entity into an online business. Indeed, it became a company that endured the Internet mania and the subsequent “dot.com crash” thanks to its ordinary subscription revenues. Interestingly, despite the ideological reversal espoused by market analysts suggesting that Old Economy corporate formations and their associated revenue generation models somehow “trump” those of the

335 See “Beyond the Information Revolution” and “Routineization” in Drucker, 1999.
New Economy, the CountryWatch case suggests that the emerging developments associated with the New Economy and embodied by the Internet landscape may have contributed to its apparent commercial success. This emerging landscape, marked by the prevalence of Internet sites, technological circulation and new digital applications in business, may not constitute the commercial purpose or an end result per se. Yet, increased new modalities of the New Economy and the Internet landscape have contributed to CountryWatch's survival as a company as well as its increased revenue.

In an Old Economy bookstore, for example, customers freely browse and their actual purchases of content (in the form of books) contribute to "bottom line" revenues. The capacity to browse cannot be undervalued, as the customer's temporary and limited engagement with the product (the book in the case of the bookstore) is often the motivating factor leading to eventual book sales. If CountryWatch can be considered an online publisher, then it is fair to say that technology allows users to explore some freely-available content in cyberspace. In effect, users may browse virtually amidst limited material, but they also have the option to purchase subscriptions for the entire CountryWatch repertoire if so desired. Perhaps the paradigm is not so different from the Old Economy version and information technology has simply replicated the browsing-to-buying cycle in virtual form. Yet information technology has also offered a wider range of circulation because the CountryWatch "store" is not located in a specific geographic range but rather, it is available anywhere an Internet connection is available. Thus, the potential market is global.
There is another aspect worth considering. The CountryWatch “store” offers products proven to be marketable to users for purchase: content. There is an existing publication market and if the Internet is viewed as another modality of dissemination and circulation, it is not impossible to conceive of CountryWatch as a viable venture in the business of content. On the other hand, it is difficult to know if users feel compelled to pay for pet products over the Internet (re: Pets.com). Consider the following quotation by Neil Gros and Peter Coy:

“The new rules require more than ingenuity, agility and speed. They call for redefining value in an economy where the cost of raw technology is plummeting toward zero. Sooner or later this plunge will obliterate the worth of almost any specific piece of hardware or software. Then, value will be in establishing a long-term relationship with a customer – even if it means giving the first generation of product away.” \(^{337}\) Although Gros and Coy appear prolific in predicting the devolution in value of specific hardware and software, as well as envisioning the importance of customer relationship management, their observation suggests that raw technology itself is not what constitutes success in the New Economy but rather, a deeper value. \(^{338}\)

Value might reside in other places such as the interest in information and as exemplified by CountryWatch, the willingness of users to pay for it on a sustained basis. The interest and value in information is taken up further in forthcoming chapters, however, for the moment, it should be noted that there seems to be some sort of relationship between the idea of the Internet and information. The Internet has also become a highly commodified venue, but

\(^{337}\) Gros and Coy, 1995.

\(^{338}\) In the height of the “dot.com” mania, Internet sites, technology companies offering “business to business solutions” – referred to as B2B industries such as Ariba, hardware enterprises such as Cisco, and software giants such as Oracle, toppled the Nasdaq. In the aftermath of the “dot.com” crash, providers of customer relationship management applications, such as Siebel, were forecast to be the new darlings of the Nasdaq.
even in cases of commercial transactions, studies have shown that a large amount of time spent on the Internet in regard to purchasing items is spent researching those very items. In this way, the Internet operates as the marketplace, the industry reporter, as well as the virtual “better business bureau” with customer feedback posted on all major commercial websites, such as E-bay and Amazon. Regarded in this context, the Internet and, indeed, information technology, as understood as a modality of circulation that drives value elsewhere rather than a commercial destination in and of itself.

The Major Players

The company was founded by a graduate of Westpoint who later acquired his Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University. He was the former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Enron’s European division, and the chief negotiator for several major renewable energy ventures. He sat on the board of Enron but severed his connections with the company when Kenneth Lay, the notorious ex-CEO of the now defunct energy trading company, decided to chose the equally notorious Jeffery Skilling as his successor.339 Currently, he acts as the Chairman and CEO of CountryWatch. He has also founded another company called DKR, which builds renewable wind power facilities. The President of CountryWatch is also a Westpoint graduate, with a Ph.D. in Economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.); his professional background includes acting as the CEO of an Enron subsidiary.

339 In conversation, CountryWatch’s CEO has said that he left Enron because he had no interest in working with Skilling.
Sitting underneath the executive office in the workplace hierarchy are the various departments – Information Technology, headed by a Chief Information Officer (CIO); Finance and Administration, once headed by a Chief Financial Officer; Sales and Marketing, headed by a Vice President (VP); and Editorial Operations, headed by another Vice President (VP) and the Editor in Chief. The actual people working in these roles have changed; there have been three CIOs, two CFOs, four head of Sales; and three editors.

Underneath the management and direction tier, there is a production team, consisting of a copy editor, news wire editors, as well as regional and contributing researchers and writers from across the globe, many of whom are currently on an employment furlough. There is also a small team of technology specialists and network technicians within information technology (IT). In addition there is an administrative and accounting staffer, a small customer service department, and a modest sales force. As noted above, the total number of people working at CountryWatch numbers less than 20. This current accounting, however, has not been static. In the earliest days of operation, full time staff amounted to no more than five people, with a number of temporary staffers, who were hired simply to prevail through the initial production process. Later, in the height of the Internet boom period, like many other start-up companies, employment numbers bloated close to 50. Given the limited revenues at the time, such a large staff was unsustainable and many people were eventually laid off or furloughed.

If the company’s structure has been expressed in hierarchical terms, it is because the company seems oddly “status-conscious.” This distinction is notable only because the
company does not seem to follow the usual trends of Internet “start up” companies, liberally flavored with bohemianism, supposedly because of the creative nature of the business. Whereas most Internet-based companies tend to be notorious for their lack of orthodoxy, and celebrated for their flexible work environments and lateral (rather than vertical) internal structures, Country Watch is more akin to a typical industrial enterprise, with a military-like reverence for hierarchical stratification. Moreover, while most Internet-based companies often endorse a policy of “open” decision-making, CountryWatch was, in its earliest years, a closed system. Perhaps this structure is reflective of the executives’ legacy at the Westpoint military academy. Whatever the rationale, the first few years at CountryWatch were characterized by a dynamic of directives and edicts from above and execution at the lower levels. Despite the aforementioned imagery that CountryWatch was “younger, hipper and sexier” than its competitors, in practice during the first several years of existence, it operated very much like an orthodox corporation with a model of vertical integration.

This hierarchical “Westpoint” culture was to change slightly as the employee base expanded. Since the executive office did not conduct any due diligence in regard to new hires, a series of swindlers and corporate thieves arrived within the company, took fairly powerful positions with access to resources, and proceeded to bleed the company of its limited funding. Meanwhile, a sophisticated sales call center had been established to generate sale and several new salespeople had been hired for this purpose.

The shift in emphasis from production to sales produced rifts in the power structure that could roughly be divided among the “business class” of employees and the editorial and
technological “producer class” of employees. The “business class” drove to work in souped-up sports utility vehicles and dressed in designer clothing. They generally did not love their jobs and could just as easily have sold trash pickup devices. In fact, one sales person offered precisely this view of his job. In contrast, the writers, researchers, web designers and technologists tended to enjoy their jobs because of their interest in the work. They were generally paid less and so their cars and clothing were nondescript. Still, they seemed to enjoy the camaraderie of working with other creative types, and often shared fairly eclectic and bohemian views of life. Most importantly, though, their lack of identification with the “business class” was clearly apparent. In fact, one might even say that their identities were defined in opposition to the sales force, which, during conversation, was thought to represent the empty materialism of society and culture. In a sense, this division made it clear that the former military hierarchy had now metamorphosed into a dichotomous class system.

Eventually, as a result of budget cuts, market conditions, and internal strife due to the discovery of corporate thievery, a restructuring program was instituted. The remaining staff, numbering just under 20, and the remaining employees, now trenchantly self-described as the “CountryWatch survivors,” seemed wary and uneasy about the massive change that had occurred. Of course, most “survivors” wondered if they would be the next visitors to the proverbial chopping block. Over time, however, perhaps because of the small size of the remaining workforce and the close working relationships that were formed, a third cultural shift occurred within the organizational structure. This time, however, a fairly synergistic workplace culture appeared to be emerging. While hardly a utopia of internal corporate relations, the remaining “players” at CountryWatch have their own reasons for coming to
work each day. Still, there is a general atmosphere of collegial respect, and collaboration on projects between the sales, editorial and technology departments. In fact, the heads of these departments (of which I am one) meet on a weekly basis to discuss problems and issues and to work together to find resolution. The weekly inter-departmental meetings were developed precisely to prevent communication glitches and to facilitate positive working relations. Also notable is the fact that the Westpoint style military environs has almost disappeared. No longer are Westpoint mantras substituted for company policy. Also significant is the daily walk that the CEO takes down the hallway, stopping at each office to chat personally with each employee. While simply a gesture of courtesy, several employees have mentioned that the more “personalized” touch within the office has contributed to a workplace atmosphere that is far less conflicted than before. It is unknown if this mood will prevail or if it is simply a present stage. However, its contrast with other “stages” of CountryWatch’s short lifespan has, in some small way, registered. Note also that the chapter on organizational structure will more fully deal with these matters of organizational change.

My Position in the Company

If you go to Amazon online and do a search on my last name and omit any selections that come up as the other anthropologist (a Russian specialist) called Denise Youngblood, you will find literally hundreds of books with my name listed as the editor. A search of my married name will elicit a similar response. The truth is that I did not simply edit 192 books. Following the furloughs of most of the writers and researchers, my “reward” for being a CountryWatch “survivor” was to write several chapters of each book.
In my various editorial capacities (writer, researcher, content and research developer, managing editor et al), I learned not just how to speed-read, but I also gained some knowledge of complex geopolitical conundrums. The ease of access to global news wires allowed me to understood border conflicts in the most remote parts of the world, in a way that I might never have otherwise grasped. I knew the intricacies of the United Nations’ peace-keeping mandate in every corner of the world. I checked major political watch groups regularly so that I would know when a government fell, or when elections took place in countries that subscribed to an electoral process. I learned complicated taxation codes and regulatory frameworks for all of these countries. I began to comprehend the bizarre provisions in the Kyoto Protocol and issues related to mandated global greenhouse gas emissions standards.

In my work, I also managed to add my own personal ideological predilections to the material. (These were in such subtle ways, few people would actually notice.) For example, I diligently replaced descriptions of country types, like Castro-led Cuba’s as “a communist dictatorship,” (a favorite of the United States’ Department of State) with a more particularized terms, such as “personalist regime.” The word “dictatorship,” by way of illustration, has become a matter of political rhetoric rather than a descriptive term.

At a more explicit level, I made suggestions for “content improvements” at meetings, observing that all the macroeconomic charts and graphs had no “real” relevance “on the ground” (an anthropological term). What did they mean for the people who lived in
countries with appallingly low gross domestic products (GDPS) and gross national products (GNPs)? None of these “improvements” ever amounted to anything substantive, until another Rice scholar from the Baker Center’s Political Science department (a European specialist) wrote a scathing letter to that effect.

After hiring a Canadian journalist who had worked in print and television media, my incarnation as the managing editor came to a close. I was then “reincarnated” as the part-time Managing Director of Content Development. To be honest, I was never quite sure what precisely that meant, but for the most part, it involved new content additions and changes, as well as derivative services. The title notwithstanding, I have to say that in a ridiculously short space of time, I went from being the proverbial “techno-peasant” (one who knows and does very little in the realm of information technology) to someone who developed audio and video features for the website, coded in HTML, and developed the educational website. This aspect of learning will be addressed more fully later in the essay as it touches upon the nature of today’s learning-oriented workplace. Later, I began to work on the creation of new cultural, human development and environmental content, as well as content affiliations and other forms of business alliances.

Following the mass layoffs in 2001, the various editorial functions were consolidated under one umbrella and I was given the position as head of all editorial operations. Over time, my professional life at CountryWatch became filled with worries about publication deadlines, as well as meetings and discussions, all of which were punctuated with endless acronyms like B2B (business to business technological applications), B2C (business to consumer
operational paradigms), IPOs (first public offering on the stock market), JVs (joint venture
deals), VCs (venture capitalists/investors), CPMs (cost per minute rates) and CRM (customer
relations management). When I closed my eyes at night, I could almost see a parade of
alphabetical letters in my mind. Terms like “connectivity” (the capacity to connect
effectively and seamlessly with servers, vendors, consumers, and the world at large and
electronically), as well as discussions about revenue streams and non-capital intensive
measures, became the norm.

Countless sleepless nights ensued, and on many drives home I felt emotionally and mentally
overwhelmed, but my personal circumstances prevented me from executing an exit strategy.
By that time, I had a plethora of health problems and medical bills to attend to, and so I knew
that I had no choice but to stay the course. If I am most honest, there was a part of me that
enjoyed what I was learning as well. I disliked the commercial, profit-driven aspect of being
in the business world, but I loved being a part of an emergent organization and an expanding
industry. I also knew that the chances of finding a job after I completed my ethnographic
research, while retaining my health care coverage, were highly limited. Consequently, I
endured the ambivalent experiences and feelings. After the initial shock wore off, I began to
assimilate this new knowledge. I could never quite understand the motivation behind any of
it (the profit motive included). Yet I became (and still remain) the simultaneously fascinated
and appalled observer... the employee AND the anthropologist. My place of employment
was -- and is -- my fieldwork. I understood the work I do and the content produced better
than most people in the workforce at large, because I had literally created the product and I
had worked in some of the core arenas of business development.
Having stated all of the above, I must make it clear that my responsibilities involve the production of mediocre-quality content. Information on the demography, politics, government, society, economy, investment climate, taxations standards and environmental concerns, while arcane and pedantic at times, is not the equivalent of rigorous critical analysis. One cannot regard this type of work as compelling. However, the comprehensive treatment of the political, economic, social and environmental factors facing the countries of the world in a concise arrangement, perhaps, holds its value in the realm of information.

Whereas journalism tends to be materially driven by emerging news events, the work at CountryWatch involves the depiction of a unitary, chronologically-arranged story about each country, with reference to certain significant events. Quite like journalism, however, one is constantly making judgments about that which can be omitted and that which is essential to the representation of the country-specific story. The politics of representation are, thusly, also part of every country review that is crafted. As well, there is a kind of intellectual lamentation that also characterizes the process of writing and editing these reviews because there are so many trajectories and dimensions that I wish I could address more substantively and with intensified critical inquiry. A sampling of subjects I wish I could write more expansively about include Russian media consolidation, the cult of personality in authoritarian governments, mobilized peasant movements in South America, the politics of oil internationally, and the relationship between warfare and ecological damage, to name but a few. The volume of work and its compressed schedule, however, prevent such treatment and results in a pervasive feeling of regret that can never be fully lost.
At the same time, there is something satisfying about knowing the capitals of every country in the world (maybe a part of me enjoys being a cornucopia of useless trivia.) There is also something curiously enjoyable about knowing that the major export from Nauru -- phosphate -- is composed of bird droppings. Likewise, there is a strange sense of amusement that is evoked as one writes about the leader of Turkmenistan -- President Niyazov -- and his increasingly eccentric behavior, such renaming the months of the year after himself and re-charting the human life cycle so that old age is postponed until 85. Chagrin more than amusement is experienced in regard to the appointment by the King of Tonga of an American businessman as his personal "court jester." The very same court jester absconded with $26 million of state funds. Perhaps these items are insignificant bits of information that hold little meaning outside the context of complex matrix of relations within which they exist. Juxtaposed in random fashion, there is an element of the bizarre that I cannot quite ignore.

The nature of the work aside, my schizophrenic existence as both employee and anthropologist at CountryWatch carries with it a constellation of identity issues. The tortured feeling of being a fraud has textured much of my time at CountryWatch. Although I have spent several years working at the company and even benefiting from promotions (which effectively serve to embed me further within the CountryWatch corporate structure), my simultaneous identity as the ethnographer in the field has always functioned as a countering force to any fixity that I may have otherwise experienced.
It is not so much the fact that I am working at my job and working on my research simultaneously, although the negotiations of relationships within this context can often become complicated due to the insider-outsider bifurcation. The more deeply felt experience of fraudulence lies in the intellectual and philosophical complicity within a corporate system that I cannot identify fully with, while still retaining an attachment to my work. Having a private office was helpful in providing a space in which I did not have to negotiate selfhood. Although it was a location and a means of “escape” during stressful times, it was also a place where I could lay aside my feelings of conflict and where I could remove the layers of self. In trying to define or describe what I was experiencing at the time, the only word that comes to mind is “emptying.”

Yet the fact that I actually had my own space was itself a sign of status within this particular workplace. It was my very position as an editor/anthropologist-in-the-field that motivated the Chief Executive Officer to offer me my own space in the first place. In fact, the anthropologist identity may have been instrumental in my own successes within the company and may have contributed to my ability to penetrate the male-dominated, militaristic, Westpoint ethos of the early days of CountryWatch’s incarnation. This privileged situation yielded certain benefits not simply in the form of my own private space, but also in terms of access and authority, as will be discussed later.

Rather than being viewed as a female employee within the field of employment, the identity of anthropologist positioned me as something of an “exotic other.” 340 Meanwhile, even though I was a member of the “producer class” by virtue of the type of work that I did, my

self-presentation was quite different from other Birkenstock-wearing members of the “producer class.” In this way, my efforts to “go native” certainly have not been entirely successful. Moreover, I had been given management positions within the company, even though everyone knew I was also an anthropologist. In some ways, my taking on more responsibility within CountryWatch could clearly be interpreted as a case in which the “exotic other” is brought inside to become part of the organization.\(^{341}\) In these various ways, my positioning as something of “an exotic other” was doubled, and even tripled. Yet within this context of multiplied “othered” selfhood, possibly via some bizarre process of symbolic jujitsu, I was afforded certain dimensions of access and authority which other people, and certainly other women, did not possess.

The Chief Executive Officer, for example, chose to discuss and reflect with me on all human relations issues facing the company (a disgruntled editor with an anger management problem, by way of illustration) because, in his words, “you’re an anthropologist.” The first few times this occurred, I tried to diplomatically explain that an anthropologist is not a psychologist. Over time, however, I realized that he was essentially treating the discipline of anthropology as a domain of sensitivity regarding human affairs. Yet the identification of me in this manner was not simply linked with human relations issues. During introductions to visitors, board members and others, he made a point of identifying me with the statement, “This is the anthropologist.” Likewise, as other colleagues passed by in the hallways, they cheerfully greeted me with declarations such as “Oh, it’s the anthropologist! How are you today?” Significantly, another colleague, who went on to work as a manager in the information technology department, had done his undergraduate work in anthropology. Nevertheless, he

\(^{341}\) Suchman, 2000.
was never identified as “the anthropologist.” The differences between undergraduate and graduate credentials aside, the central reason why the term “the anthropologist” has been repeatedly invoked in regard to my identity has to do with the fact that I was expressly at CountryWatch for the purpose of engaging in fieldwork, in addition to my regular job.

It is possible that those persons who branded me as ‘the anthropologist,” were affording me a degree of symbolic capital. As noted by Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic capital, “when it is acknowledged in accordance with the categories of perception that it imposes, the symbolic power relations tend to reproduce and to reinforce the power relations which constitute the structure of the social space.” 342 In this way, the organizing system is not legitimized via imposition. Rather, the “structures of perception and appreciation” are applied to objective structures of the social world, effectively presenting a self-evident view of the world. In this way, the pronouncement that “you are an anthropologist” is made into a self-evident fact, even as that title is laden with varying meanings.

During a specific conversation (about an internal dispute regarding a new product launch), I mentioned to the Chief Executive Officer that I felt like the character of the Counselor on the television series, Star Trek: Next Generation. The character of the Counselor on this television show was frequently portrayed discussing the latest drama facing the Starship Enterprise with the Commander. She was generally depicted as the Commander’s empathetic sounding board and his interpreter of meaning. At the time, the Chief Executive Officer jokingly noted that he had the balding head of Commander Picard. Following this exchange, I recalled that the Counselor in the television series was positioned somewhat

outside the organizational command structure. That is, unlike the character Number One (the second-in-command officer), the Counselor was alongside the crew of the Starship Enterprise, rather than precisely located within in. The Counselor also had significant access to the power brokers such as the commanding officer.

Returning to the conflicts of positionality within the corporate system, the boundaries of identity have been blurred between employee and anthropologist and between employee and manager. Meanwhile, as the anthropologist engaged in fieldwork, I have been located outside the system but with a unique passageway from the outerbanks to the apex of the hierarchy. In this way, although I have remained conflicted about the insider/outsider configuration, and even as I regularly struggle with the tensions associated with the realization that I am actually working within a commercial enterprise, my complicated and often contradictory identity locations within the office have also resulted in specific measures of escape within the system in which I currently work. This has been exemplified by the benefit received from having my own office that offered the opportunity and space by which I could experience the (cleansing) feeling of emptiness. As noted by Christopher Newfield in his piece on “Governance, Accounting and Planning,” while producers of “proper” culture, such as poets and writers, imagine people seeking freedom outside the organizational formations, most people seek freedom within organizations. 343

Notes from the Field(Work)

Part of my job at CountryWatch involved responding to inquiries and comments from users and clients. Despite my assertion above that I frequently felt angst-ridden about my simultaneous roles as employee and anthropologist, there were times when I was very much the employee at work. The following electronic mail transmission was received from an irate user and I include it here along with my response to try to illustrate one such moment.

“Dear Editor,

What’s wrong with you idiots? Why do you keep describing the people of FYROM as Macedonians? To inform you ignorant pieces of shit, let me tell you that Macedonia is GREEK and the Macedonians are Greek? Got that? I can’t believe you motherfuckers call yourselves “geopolitical intelligence leaders” when you can’t even get the facts straight. The U.N. – that’s short for UNITED NATIONS just thought I’d inform you since you’re so damned ignorant - has said that the official name of the country is FYROM. Got it?”

This vitriolic message is only one of hundreds received each year from those with Greek nationalistic sensibilities about the controversial country name and insignia of Alexander the Great on the flag of this country in question. Aegean Greeks believe that the name Macedonia and the image of Alexander the Great are forms of cultural and historic appropriation, while Slavic Macedonians believe that it is their right to use the name and flag to designate their country which lies in the area of historic Macedonia. The acronym,
FYROM, refers to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It was designated by the United Nations in an attempt to quell the controversy surrounding the name and flag issue, during a time when Greece was attempting to block the country’s entry into the international body.

In response to these hundreds of messages each year, I have composed a standard response, which reads as follows:

“Dear Mr. X,

Thank you for your thoughts regarding the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. CountryWatch is always pleased to receive feedback from our users.

We understand that the name, Macedonia, has been a contestatory issue between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M.). We also understand that the historical region of Macedonia is now divided into the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M.), Greece and a tiny portion of Bulgaria, and there are competing claims as to what might be regarded as authentically Macedonia.

Because this is such a sensitive issue, in all the content that is internally generated (this obviously excludes certain news coverage), we expressly use the full and official name designated by the United Nations. I gather, therefore, that your objection is to the use of the name of the people of the country as Macedonians, as well as the subject line titles in news
feeds bearing the name Macedonia. I am sure that you can appreciate the fact that there is no alternative with which to reference the people of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and that we, at CountryWatch, have no control over the terminology designated by external news agencies. Of course, you are perfectly free to contact them yourself to air your thoughts.

Should you have further thoughts you wish to share or if you require clarification of CountryWatch's policy in regard to the issue at hand, please feel free to contact us. Should you have further thoughts to register regarding the political scenario of country recognition and designation, we encourage you to contact the United Nations, or the particular governments of Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M.).

Most Cordially,

The Editor”

Naturally, this exchange is centered on the issue of identity politics, and clearly, the disconnection in tonality between the originating message and my response demonstrate how communication both symbolizes and obfuscates underlying elements.

Scattered throughout this research have been references from CountryWatch employees who, like myself, find some degree of satisfaction, if not enjoyment, from the jobs they hold. They – and I – say things like, “I like being able to work in an internationally oriented
environment." Or, as stated by employee GP, "I enjoy work in a company in which there is some value ... we teach people about the world." Admittedly, I concur with these motivations. They are significant parts of the construction of meaning that I have erected for myself in regard to work. Yet, I cannot always access these feelings when I receive electronic messages of the type transcribed here.

For a moment, I want to return to the suggestion above that the words of the originating message and my response both symbolize and obfuscate underlying dynamics. Despite the actual text of the message transcribed above, which I transmitted -- in an official role -- in response to the irate customer, my personal reaction was instead one of irritation and frustration. My actual thought process was probably better illustrated by an equally irate electronic message sent to the assistant managing editor, MAA, in which I expelled my aggravation as follows:

"M ~

Can you believe this? (See email below.) I am trying to do my JOB, for Christ's sake and I have to deal with Mr. Identity Politics in Athens. Give me a freaking break!!! He's having a cow because we published a news story originating from United Press International with the word "Macedonia" in the subject title instead of FYROM. As if I have any personal control about how UPI reports their stories. Am I supposed to call up the president of UPI and tell him how he should be instructing his journalistic staff? Oh and he doesn't like the fact that we call the people of this country Macedonians. What the hell? Does he want me to call
them the FYROMIANS, as if they are an alien species? And why don't they leave me the hell alone because I have three political reviews before I can leave for the day and I already have a migraine.

--D"

The editorial department receives similarly irate and frustrated messages from individuals who wonder why coverage for Taiwan is subsumed within the review for China. 

Likewise, there are inquiries by Palestinians and Puerto Ricans about coverage of these areas within CountryWatch reviews of their administering powers (Israel and the United States) is offensive. Both Indians and Pakistanis express their furor over the placement of the Line of Control separating Kashmir.

At some level, where my political and personal sensibilities lie, I feel some empathy mixed with frustration and ambivalence regarding identity politics. Clearly, it is difficult to actually access the more benign and sympathetic dimensions of feeling or the so-called "meaning" in one's work when one is frantic about meeting the already-insanely high objectives of the job. Of course, once the emotionally explosive reaction is experienced, I can distance myself from the scenario to some degree and send of a cordial response, not accidentally signed at the end with the words, "most cordially". When I type those words, what I am usually

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344 Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao are all covered as appendices within the China review because the United States Department of State does not recognize their autonomy as sovereign states.

345 Because neither Palestine nor Puerto Rico are autonomous, recognized sovereign states, coverage of these areas are treated as appendices within the reviews for the countries with geopolitical or military authority over them.

346 The LoC is located in accordance with the placement used by Magellan Maps.
thinking is more along the lines of "most pissed off and violently frantic because you've ruined my God-damned schedule for the day" but, ostensibly, such an exposition of truth would be ill-advised. Then, as the day goes on and as I become consumed with the objective of meeting my deadlines for that time period, there is a certain kind of emotional numbness that transpires.

In attempting to write about this emotional deadening, I wrote the following in my journal” “Like an artist painting a naked thigh, my concentration -- as I write about the Lord's Resistance Army's latest incursions in Uganda -- is on the contours of that particular issue.” Am I feeling pleasure as I write? If so, is this pleasure drawn from the interest in subject matter or is it pleasure derived from the fact that I am not stocking shelves at Sears? Yet pleasure is not precisely the same thing as value or meaning or the more nuanced varieties of such characteristics.

Regardless, what is experienced is some degree of distance and disconnection, which are constructed in order to deal with the various pressures of work. Its effects are identity-laden -- How did I transpose myself from liberal internationalist to corporate worker with “bottom line” objectives? In some strange jujitsu mental maneuvering, this question evokes questions of critical distance and disconnection, which must be constructed by anthropologists in the field.
The Anthropologist in the Corporate Field

Moving away from the anxieties and dissonances of this particular anthropologist in the field, some attention must be paid to the growing number of anthropologists in the field of corporations and commercial enterprises.

For the most part, anthropologists in the corporate field are not people with anthropological backgrounds working as editors or research developers, as I have. That is to say, the term does not reference people who may in a generalized sense use their anthropological backgrounds to formulate careers outside the discipline and outside of academia. When the term “anthropologists in the corporate field” is levied, it is referencing the increasing number of anthropologists who now work in corporations to study how people behave in workplace environments, and to observe customer behavior or other forms of consumer services, using ethnographic methods. These arenas of industrial anthropology and corporate anthropology might, for example, include not only a study of workplace relations, but also an exploration of how people engage and use products and services, thus contributing to improved design. In these regards, the instruments of ethnographic research, such as observation, subtle interviewing, and systematic documentation, can illuminate dynamics within organization and about markets that are often left uncovered by traditional research. 347

The car manufacturer, General Motors, the consulting agency, Arthur Andersen. the telecommunications players, Nynex and AT&T, the computer chip maker, Intel, photography and film giant Kodak, the card and novelty company, Hallmark, the software and electronics

347 Kane, 1996.
developer Sapient, and the manufacturer, Whirlpool, have all hired anthropologists to use ethnographic methods in research for these companies.  

At General Motors, for example, anthropologist Elizabeth Briody’s research of workers showed that a newly-devised program at one of the company’s plants was failing not because of any of the inherent problems with the program itself, but because of the organizational culture which left workers feeling powerless.  

At Hallmark, an anthropologist was hired to study family relationships within the homes of people. Meanwhile, Sapient hired close to 25 anthropologists to examine how people use technology. Likewise, consulting firms such as LTG Associates actively search out anthropologists to study behavior such as the interaction of multicultural crews of astronauts at McDonnell Douglas, as well as the patterns of use by various ethno-cultural communities at health clinics.

In the case of Arthur Andersen, anthropologist Susan Squires evaluated professional training programs using in-depth observation. There, however, she found that the title “anthropologist” conjured up images more in line with stereotypical notions of archaeology. As such, she began to simply refer to herself as an evaluator. Another term used by anthropologists to explain their roles in the corporate field includes “knowledge liaisons.” These alternative terms should not, however, be confused with trendspotters, who have gained currency in recent years; trends, after all, tend to be short-lived incidences without fundamental grounding in behavior and meaning. Terminology aside, in her work with

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349 Kane, 1996.
351 Kane, 1996.
engineers, Squires advised against the invention of “a talking washing machine.” Just because the technology was available to create such a device did not mean that people would actually need or want it. Likewise, another anthropologist at Motorola advised an engineer against developing a television that could be worn on a belt. Although the technology behind such a creation might be interesting, there was no suggestion that people wanted such a device. With up to 75 percent of new technological products failing in the marketplace, the insights of anthropologists about human patterns of behavior can be invaluable, particularly in the early stages of development.

At Nynex, Patricia Sachs was hired when employees did not positively respond to a new technological system. The engineers working on the system wondered if the problem resided in the social systems of operations. Based on her findings, Sachs assisted Nynex to develop a “work systems design” within the company that more effectively organized work and delivered services. Meanwhile, at the computer chip company, Intel, Tony Salvador became its first engineering anthropologist. Salvador’s objective was to use observation and other ethnographic techniques to see how new technologies would fit into entire environments of operations. In this regard, one of Salvador’s projects was to understand the environment, experience and engagements of youth – one of the growing segments of technological consumers.

In many of these cases, the exploration of the uses of technology and gadgets, the success or failure of new policies and programs, and the relations and practices of people as consumers

354 Kane, 1996.
355 Kane, 1996.
appear to position the employees in the workplace as the objects of inquiry and examination. In this way, employees and individual consumers can be viewed as the equivalents of “exotic others,” while the anthropologist crosses boundaries to study and record the habits, practices, and lives of these very “others.” 356 That is to say, the attention placed on “others” in offices, factories, and homes effectively transforms the familiar and ordinary activities of everyday life into the realm of the exotic.

What is the particular value the anthropologist might bring to these matters? Cathleen Crain of LTG Associates noted that, “Anthropologists understand complexity and can help devise answers that reflect that complexity.” 357 As such, anthropology is treated in business and commercial enterprises as the source of methodologies of observation, which ultimately assist in developing new products, consumer behavior and employee relations. Moreover, the ethnographic practices of observation are preferable to orthodox marketing techniques, such as focus groups and questionnaires. 358

In this regard, several marketing and advertising firms have begun to actively seek not only insight from anthropologists, but also ethnographic training. For example, at the advertising agency, Callahan Creek, Cindy Maude and some of her employees attended “an anthropology boot camp” aimed at helping companies improve employee relations and

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356 See Suchman, 2000 on this “otherizing” process.
357 Kane, 1996. See also LTG Associates.
358 Focus groups undertaken by General Mills showed that mothers were clamoring for whole grain breakfast food; a study by a team of anthropologists who observed activities in homes, however, showed that families eat snacks en route to school work and other routine activities. The results of the anthropological study resulted in a decision by General Mills to launch a packaged yogurt product that did not require a spoon to be consumed, and could be integrated into active lifestyles with ease.
ameliorate their understanding of the customer base. The actual description and arrangement of such a "boot camp" was relatively unspecified, although Maude was reported to have said that the course deepened the participants’ awareness of people (in this case, women) as consumers. One can only assume that it entails a crash course in in-depth observation and what Genevieve Bell, a corporate anthropologist at Intel's People and Practices Research Group, called "deep hanging out." Andrea Simon, a former anthropologist at Citibank, formed her own consulting company aimed at "demystifying anthropology by integrating perspectives and observational skills to help other corporations change their cultures and grow their businesses." Simon describes this notion of "deep hanging out" as "a rigorous study of people’s every day lives with in-depth, in-context interviews, observations and participation, occurring in their natural setting. Once analyzed, the data can generate surprising ideas and aha’s."

Returning for a moment to the problems of marketing surveys and multiple choice questionnaires, ethnographic inquiry entails a less expansive scope but deeper (more meticulous) examination. Insights are derived not only from participant observation techniques, but also via engagement and interactions with people, and they invite multiple perspectives. These approaches and applications in the area of business and commerce have formed an emerging form of marketing research called "ethnographic market research," which is informed by anthropological practice, and which, as noted here, is gaining currency.

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359 Henricks, 2002. See also Callahan Creek.
360 Henricks, 2002.
For businesses, another attraction to the anthropological alternative lies in the fact that anthropological examination is no more expensive than surveys, polls and focus groups. Given the rise of consumer capitalism, there has also been greater investment in advertising, marketing, and more sophisticated forms of commodity promotion, which has resulted in an attraction to particular versions of anthropological practice. Other reasons for the increase in the interest in anthropology (and the notion of corporate culture) resides in the claim by some individuals, such as Phil Gardner, the director of Michigan State University’s Collegiate Employment Research Institute, that cultural sensitivity has become an important consideration within workplaces, and this level of awareness has stimulated an interest in culture, cross-cultural interaction as well as human differences.

Whether or not this interest in the cultural dimension will have a significant effect on the anthropological enterprise remains unknown. Still, it is fair to state that there has been an interest (perhaps even a rediscovery) within popular culture in tracking the increasing registers of anthropologists within corporations. At the same time, however, the interest in the presence of anthropologists working within corporations does not simply involve the desire to define ethnography as methodological practice, or to laud the business benefits of anthropologists’ findings. Diane Francis, an editor and columnist for the Financial Post, as well as David Johnson, the Canadian province of Ontario’s minister for education, both disparaged the utility and contributions of social scientists within the domains of scientific

365 Henricks, 2002.
and technological development. 369 Although the contributions of social scientists to computer science development has been measured by some as negligible, social scientists, and most especially, anthropologists, have been welcomed into corporate environments. 370

Evidently, the majority of the work being done in the realm of corporate anthropology appears to be in realm of consumer products and activities. As anthropologists are faced with intense competition for a few positions available in academia, as well as limited numbers of post-doctoral grants, some are turning to companies for employment of the sort discussed here. Indeed, the managing editor of Anthropology News, Bill Young, made the observation that “responsible departments are now admitting that there are no jobs in teaching.” 371 Of course, the healthy salaries of anthropologists in the world of business tend to exceed those in academia. 372 Nevertheless, the commercial concentration of this sort of work may be precipitously close to violating anthropological ethics. Is it acceptable for scholars to use the knowledge of their discipline to promote consumerism? Are the products developed as a result of ethnographic modes of research necessary contributions to human development? Is this an issue of consternation?

Resolving this matter does not seem to be a concern for certain academic institutions with several universities and colleges now actively recruiting what is being referred to as

370 See Koerner, 1998; Church, 1999; Hafner, 1999; and Weise, 1999.
372 Marietta Baba, the chair of the anthropology department at Wayne State University noted that entry-level salaries for anthropologists working in the corporate sector are high, noting one entry-level position was salaried at $76,000. See also Boss, 2001 in which salaries for anthropologists in corporations have been recorded as high as $100,000.
"practicing anthropologists." 373 Meanwhile, the University of South Florida developed a new course aimed at anthropologists interested in working in the world of business and commerce. 374 Likewise, Cris Johnsrud, an anthropologist at the Southern Technology Application Center of the University of Florida, has called for a more explicit relationship between the discipline and the contemporary world. 375 Within the corporate world, employment listings for anthropologists were beginning to be registered at an increased pace in 2000. 376

The genealogy of corporate anthropology recalls the applied anthropological work of Lucy Suchman and Julian Orr, who looked at how people interacted and engaged with technology at Xerox’s Palo Alto Research Center two decades ago. 377 During Suchman’s time at Xerox, she recommended that the copying process be simplified by adding the green “copy” button on its copiers. 378 That standard green button has been in place on several office equipment ever since.

The genealogy of anthropologists in the corporate world, however, pre-dates the Xerox scenario. During the 1930s, at a time in which agitation between labor unions and management was high, anthropologists in the United States attempted to help decrease the discord within companies and factories. 379 During World War II, anthropologists were used to assist in making companies more productive. Between that time and the 1960s, the

373 Boss, 2001; see also CNN, 2001.
374 USA Today, 1999.
376 Job postings on Internet employment websites included calls for anthropologists to work within Information Technology companies.
377 See Workpractice Online.
378 Workpractice Online; see also Henricks, 2002.
number of anthropologists functioning as organizational consultants increased. In the 1970s, the area of applied anthropology was subject to suspicion as a consequence of the political climate surrounding the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{380} Fears arose that anthropologists would be used as spies whose activities would be obfuscated by the cover of "research."

The suspicion and mistrust of applied anthropology and work intensified well into the 1980s with the inclusion of a provision by the American Anthropological Association that research performed by an anthropologist should be public. Although the provision was not permanent, several anthropology departments advocated the separation of academia and corporations.\textsuperscript{381} In recent years, however, the American Anthropological Association has described corporate opportunities for anthropologists as such, "Many corporations look explicitly for anthropologists, recognizing the utility of their perspectives on a corporate team. ... A corporate anthropologist working in market research might conduct targeted focus groups to examine consumer preference patterns not readily apparent through statistical or survey methods." \textsuperscript{382}

By the 1990s, as businesses and corporations dealt with the reality of culturally diverse workplaces, the notions of "culture" and "corporate culture" were popularized.\textsuperscript{383} Moreover, the idea of anthropologists as "cultural brokers" – to be distinguished from the idea circulating in the 1930s regarding anthropologists as "power brokers" between unions and management – began to gain influence. In this case, the value resides in the rich

\textsuperscript{380} Boss, 2001.
\textsuperscript{381} Boss, 2001.
\textsuperscript{382} See American Anthropological Association Careers Brochure.
\textsuperscript{383} See Marcus et all, 1998.
information that anthropologists can provide to companies trying to design new products. Yet is it this "value," designated by the corporate sector, which presents the central conflict for the anthropologists who question the ethical underpinnings of using ethnographic practice and anthropological insight to advance consumerism.

Principally, these themes and developments discussed thus far indicate the emergence of anthropology as a commercially consumable entity, or what Lucy Suchman has referred to as "anthropology as brand." 384 The phrase "anthropology as brand" invokes the mass production and advertising that characterized consumer-oriented capitalist culture. Its central reference point is the idea of the manufacturing of difference and the creation of distinctive cultural imaginaries. 385 As has been suggested here, touchstones of difference and distinction have been used within the marketplace to attract consumers.

Meanwhile, even as anthropology is positioned as a discipline that is distinctively constituted to gather intimate understandings of "the other" (in this case, employees within the corporate structure as well as consumers of products and services created by corporations), it would appear that the idea of anthropology in the corporate field, as it has been discussed here, is to be understood as a kind of capital. That is to say, the "magic" of anthropological methods and practices must be deployed and leveraged. This "magical" wand waving uncovers "the unexplained variable" -- a term described by Chuck Darrah that refers to the cultural dimension of things. 386

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386 Darrah, as cited by Suchman, 2000.
Perhaps the anthropologist's role as interpreter, interlocutor and sensitive researcher could also be employed to (enact agency and) interrupt the process of attracting and advancing consumerism. (Note: This is not a suggestion, but simply an observation). Yet this sort of construction casts the corporation in the role of the manipulative center of evil, the anthropologist as the pawn-turned-heroine, and the consumer as the victim, in an uncritical field of power relations. Commodities – as real (material) things -- indicate dimensions of desire and seduction. Desire and seduction are drives experienced within a network of power relations. "The consumer," in this sense, forecloses understandings of individuals as participants, and as "desiring subjects" within this regime of power. That is not to suggest that advertising imagery, marketing campaigns based on the findings of consumer behavior, and other capitalist imperatives should be ignored. Part of the power of seduction may lie in the sublimated and deceptive ways in which these themes texture everyday life.

387 Suchman, 2000; see also Miller, 1998 on commodities.
388 Suchman, 2000 as regards "desiring subjects" who consume for the self and others
ORGANIZATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Organization Defined

1.  
   a. The act or process of organizing.
   b. The state or manner of being organized: a high degree of organization.

2. Something that has been organized or made into an ordered whole.

3. Something made up of elements with varied functions that contribute to the whole and to collective functions; an organism.

4. A group of persons organized for a particular purpose; an association: a benevolent organization.

5.  
   a. A structure through which individuals cooperate systematically to conduct business.
   b. The administrative personnel of such a structure.\textsuperscript{389}

Models of Structure, Behavior and Integration

Under the rationality and technical primacy of corporate enterprises and other commercial entities lies the human dimension. Occasionally subsumed under the rubric of human relations within a given organizational structure, and sometimes treated as the popular notion of “corporate culture,” the standards, meanings, relationships, networks, authority

configurations, behaviors and actions within organizations complicate the rational and
technical veneer of business. Human resources and human relations departments are the
primary internal organs that take the standards, meanings, relationships, behaviors, and
actions within corporations into account. Middle management and executive leadership have
also considered these dimensions, albeit in a more hesitant manner. The idea of
“corporate culture” has become a popularized notion in business that has given rise to an
entire genre of literature and training courses. It has also contributed to the fields of
management theory and organizational behavior. Meanwhile, the use of “culture” in these
regards has resulted in criticism about the appropriation and vulgarization of anthropology.

In the late 1990s as discourses about the New Economy gained currency, the belief that
technological efficiency would act as the elixir for all structural and procedural challenges
occurring in businesses offset the cultural and human considerations. Technology was
supposed to revolutionize the workplace. Relaxed and unorthodox work environments
exemplified by ping pong tables in board rooms and bowling parties on Fridays at Internet-
based (dot.com) companies were supposed to facilitate creativity and innovation.
Meanwhile, the information network facilitated by new technologies promised to
democratize the workplace through information sharing. For some people, the bursting of the
Internet bubble made clear the transparency of these ideas and the return to traditional
organization and management resumed. At the broadest level, this reversion meant that
shareholder value triumphed over all other considerations and ultimately, it resulted in the
diminishing of the human and cultural elements exemplified by downsizing in the late 1980s

390 Deal and Kennedy, 1999: 1.
391 Marcus, 1998: 5.
392 Deal and Kennedy, 1999. See chapter on fieldwork in this research as regards anthropology and business.
and early 1990s and the outsourcing trend in the early 2000s.\footnote{Deal and Kennedy, 1999: 2.} So, for some individuals, the progressive organizational tenets that became associated with the New Economy were effectively purged. In the last few years, there has been some degree of a resurgent interest in the notion of the human dimension as companies revisit the notion of “corporate culture.”\footnote{This issue is discussed more fully in the chapter called Fieldwork and the Field.}

Prior to 1900, the church, the military and other traditional institutions functioned as the models of organizational paradigms as there were few organizational theories available. Generally, the organizational perspective was one that emphasized the division of labor and the utility of machinery to generate labor.\footnote{See discussion of Adam Smith's pin making division of labor in Smith, 1976 [1776] as discussed on the chapter on the New “Informational” Economy.} After 1900, Frederick Taylor’s structural theory of scientific management gained currency.\footnote{See Taylor, 1911. Taylor’s structural theory centered on industrial efficiency, the design of management activities, the replacement of method with differentiated responsibilities of workers and the cooperation of managers and workers to accomplish work in accordance with an equal division of labor.} The 1920s saw the rise of the classical school and another structural approach exemplified by the theories of the French manager Henri Fayol.\footnote{See Fayol, 1949. In Fayol’s model, work was specialized according to logical groupings, command was unified and scaled (a formal and circumscribed structure), and activities were coordinated through communication.} Another structural perspective originated in the 1920s and was associated with the German sociologist, Max Weber.\footnote{See Weber, 1946 and 1947. Weiss (1983) notes that Weber’s writings were not translated into English until the 1940s when his examination of European organizations led to the idea of bureaucracy. For the most part, Weber’s framework emphasized order, system, rationality, uniformity and consistency of rules in management, as well as the equitable treatment of employees by management.} The bureaucratic, classical, and scientific schools all prioritized the structure and design of organizations. The 1920s saw a shift to the behavioral framework and the human relations school, which was focused on the implications of the attitudes, feelings and other interpersonal considerations of workers, their
roles, and the factors that influence performance. The studies by the Western Electric Company and the National Academy of Sciences on Western Electric’s Hawthorne plant represent the foundation of this school by uncovering how worker morale improved, along with performance, as a consequence of what is called “the Hawthorne effect.”

There was a resurgence of classical school in 1930s, followed by the group dynamics school and a return to behavioral perspective, which encouraged individual participation in decision making. The leadership school of the 1950s stressed the importance of groups having both social and task leaders. This behavioral perspective led to the development of theory X and theory Y management. The behavioral decision making school also of 1950s suggested that individuals “satisfice” or accept satisfactory rather than optimal choices in decision making. A shift to more integrative perspectives ensued in the 1960s with the integration of both structural elements and the human dimension, along with the influences outside the organizational environment. The integrative approach included the sociotechnical school that treated technology as a primary influence upon structure and interpersonal interaction.

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399 See Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939. The “Hawthorne effect” showed how interest in workers by managers, in conjunction with positive feedback, resulted in increased self-confidence motivation and productivity.

400 See Lewin, 1943; Coch and French, 1948. Various theorists found that participation in groups such as discussions about best practices and applications of methods led to decision making and change.

401 See Bales, 1958.

402 See McGregor, 1974. In this formulation, theory X managers believe that workers do not enjoy their work and avoid responsibility. As such, workers must be controlled and pressured into compliance and effort. In contrast, theory Y managers assume that work is to be embraced and that self-direction and self-control will result in the achievement of objectives.

403 See March and Simon, 1958. This approach postulated the view that individuals would consider limited alternatives rather than the full range of possibilities.

404 See Trist and Bamford, 1951. Studies by theorists of this school on technological advances within coal mines observed that technological change often resulted in job specialization and correspondingly, changes in interaction among workers. These changes (specifically, job specificity and loss of interaction) led to poor job
dynamic systems theory. In the 1980s, another integrative perspective called contingency theory emphasized the correspondence between organizational processes and various environmental contingencies.

Today, the integration of structural and behavioral theory in the understanding of organizations is fairly commonplace. Other elements such as increasing internationalization of companies, the effects of technology and the fact of diverse workplaces function together to complicate the picture.

At CountryWatch, it is difficult to suggest that there has been any particular approach at work. In fact, it is difficult to argue that CountryWatch even adhered to any particular organizational paradigm. The company was founded and directed by individuals from backgrounds in multinational corporations with boundless budgetary discretion and the benefits of human resource departments. In contrast, CountryWatch has had no such human relations operations in addition to a tight budget that precludes much investment in such matters. As such, there has been no conscious attention placed on the makeup of the workplace or the interactions therein, unless crises and problems occur. At such times, there is usually a reaction and response of sorts (as discussed below).

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satisfaction and absenteeism. As such, theorists of this school suggested that technological change be considered in conjunction with the social or interpersonal dimension of work.

405 See Katz and Kahn, 1978. In this formulation, each organizational system contained interrelated and interacting subsystems. There were "inputs" such as new people, resources, information and revenue from outside and "outputs" such as the products or performance that were generated internally. The objective of the organization was to establish equilibrium and adapt to changing circumstances.

406 See Burns and Stalker, 1961.
The structure has been, for the most part, that of a small start-up company with an executive branch at the top, middle management underneath, with front line sales and administrative staff as well as researchers and writers below. For all intents and purposes, it follows a typical vertical integration model fashioned after military-style hierarchies. I suppose one could suggest that it possesses the characteristics of a classical structural organization in which work is specialized according to relevant groupings, command is both formalized and circumscribed structure, and activities are organized via communication. This type of operational framework seems at odds with popular notions of flexible and open management in the New Economy. Meanwhile, this traditional operational framework is frequently cross-cut via the dynamics between employees and managers. Such interactions are contoured by both passive and active resistance to these conventional norms. In these various ways, despite its self-description as a New Economy company, the organizational configuration and management style of CountryWatch may be regarded in terms of contradiction.

Perceptions

BK, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at CountryWatch, describes himself as “a pretty easy going guy” who lets his employees “do their jobs” without too much interference from him. He sees his employees as “generally hard working and competent.” Asked whether or not he feels as if he relates to his employees, he responds, “Relate to them? We get along fine, I think. I say hello as I walk down the hallway. My door is open if people have issues.” When he is asked how much time he interacts with employees and how he communicates with them, he answers “We have a meeting every Monday with the VPs (Vice Presidents).

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407 This model follows Fayol’s theories mentioned before.
And they tell the employees what's necessary. Sometimes I might come to a sales meeting.” The CEO also notes “Every year, I have a big Christmas party at my house. It is a real good time. I think everyone really likes that. It is one more way we can all get together as a company.”

Employee GP, however, says that there is insufficient information sharing. GP would like to know where the company is headed and does not like the fact that BK only has substantive interaction with the key decision makers in the company. He believes that such poor communication is not acceptable for a small company where a higher level of contact or “face time” would normally be expected. Employee GP is also irritated because there is so much secrecy among the upper levels of management, especially since everyone finds out what is going along anyway by virtue of the fact that the office is small and office gossip quickly circulates. GP always attends the Christmas party even though he does not personally celebrate Christmas. In this regard, he says “We aren’t paid enough, so I might as well go to the party for the free food and booze. I mean, why should I not attend? It is the only enjoyable thing we ever do as a company.”

The disconnection between BK and GP is notable because their differing perceptions of the scenario at CountryWatch were not incidental. At issue are the behavioral and structural aspects of the CountryWatch workplace. Interaction from the top level to lower levels was not understood or experienced in the same manner. Meanwhile, the actual structure of the workplace was not a matter of consideration. Instead, it is regarded as the given state of the company and its institutional framework.
When I asked the CEO to describe the CountryWatch structure, he replied as follows: "Well, there’s me at the top, but there is also the Co-Chairman, and then I have my Vice Presidents, and then everyone else is underneath." I inquired about the fact that his description of the personnel structure was expressed as though he were reciting the organizational chart of the company. He agreed and promptly emailed me a copy of the page from the company business model in which this very organizational chart was displayed. Trying to press the issue further, I asked if he could envision any other way of thinking about the structure, perhaps in a more organic manner since the various roles and functions intersected with one another. He listened semi-intently and responded by saying "Well, it is true that that everyone has a role to play and we’re all pretty dependent on each other to get the job done. But you have to have a structure. You need a chain of command. We can’t all sit in a circle and sing Kumbaya. How else are things going to get done?"

Clearly, BK believes that a traditional structure of vertical integration with top-down management is necessary. BK’s perspective is reflective of the operational configuration of CountryWatch which happens to be incongruous with the popularized discourses about progressive human relations approaches and unconventional New Economy companies.

**Function**

**Weekends:**
The new wire editor sends a list of emerging stories to the editorial department. The editor considers the list of emerging news stories and cross-checks it with current storylines in search of breaking news and significant events. A proposed list of countries and associated storylines is finalized and the research for those storylines is conducted. Meanwhile, the information technology team is at the office checking on the functionality of the servers and network connections and usually backs up the system on an alternative system in the case of emergencies. At certain times, sales staff may be away at conferences, seminars and trade shows, most of which tend to take place in periods which include weekends.

Mondays:

The "country of the week" and the "global news update" are launched by the editorial department. The sales figures and sales reports and compiled. An executive management meeting is held whereby the sales figures and reports are detailed to the CEO and the rest of the team. The sales are delivered on an accrual basis by the Vice President of Sales and Marketing while the CEO asks about the cash situation, which is always less promising than accruals. The importance of making those sales and earning cash is discussed and presented as vital. The CEO regularly says things like "We've got to hump those sales." The rest of the Vice Presidents tend to look at the ground in response because they are embarrassed by the CEO's terminology. Some discussion includes forthcoming conferences and trade shows where the possibility of new deals may be launched. I give my report of the country that has been chosen to be highlighted as the "country of the week" as well as the other geopolitical hot spots featured in the "global news update." The intent is to explain the selections and
update the team about the major international developments. The publishing schedule for the
country reviews and the forecast are then discussed as well as the currency of the new wire.
Later in the day, an information technology meeting is held with all managers and executives
present so that a report on current operations can be offered. All meetings produce
subsequent meetings during the day or week to sort out problems or issues that arise.
Departmental meetings are also held for the same purposes during the course of the week.

Daily:

Employees are supposed to arrive at 9 o’clock in the morning for work. Some crawl in later.
Generally, there is little outward mention of tardiness (such matters are dealt with between
supervisors and employees in person). It is, however, common for someone to walk down the
main hallway asking “Where is so and so?” This inquiry might be understood as a passive
mechanism for making it publicly known that so and so is late or absent. If an employee is ill
or absent for some reason and calls in to notify the office, a group email is sent off informing
the entire company of his or her whereabouts.

The environment in the office is usually quiet; the only noticeable voice is that of the CEO
who has conversations on his speaker telephone. If the sound is a distraction, no one dares to
mention it and works through his conversation, which resonates through the hallway. The
receptionist’s voice is the only other one heard throughout the hallway. No response is
generally given when she takes a call from a customer or general business inquiry.
Occasionally, she takes personal calls. If she laughs too loudly, one of the managers
invariably slams his or her office door shut. This may be followed by the occasional slam of other doors. Several minutes later, someone will make their way up the hallway with a “job” for the receptionist, effectively forcing her to end her telephone call.

Lunch is officially offered for an hour a day. Most people run to the cafeteria in the building to pick up and sandwich and eat at their desks while working. Others collectively order “take out” options. Social congregation takes place as people retrieve their orders and sort out payment. Sometimes people go out for lunch but it is generally a rarity. Although legally mandated for two 15-minute periods in a 8-hour work day, coffee breaks do not exist. People stand by the coffee maker while they help themselves to coffee and chat for a few moment but they carry their cups back to their desks. Smoke breaks present the only consistent escape from one’s desk because one has to take the elevator downstairs and go outside the building.

The work day officially ends at 5 o’clock. Nevertheless, employees who leave at that time are generally asked if they are leaving early for the day. The unofficial end of the day is after the CEO departs the building. A mass exodus usually follows soon thereafter.

Procedures:

According to the employee handbook, five sick days are given each year to each employee. There are official holidays as well as 10 days of vacation which are not given automatically but have to be earned over the course of the year. Requests for vacations must be submitted
via a special form that must be signed by one’s supervisor and then handed into the administrative department for processing. Notification of being away on the basis of illness must also be handed in using a special form. Health care is provided but employees must pay half the cost, an amount that is deducted from their paychecks. Annually, employees must attend a meeting whereby their health benefits are discussed and the costs of certain undisclosed employees (everyone knows who they are anyway) are reported to be the cause for the increase in health care costs to the entire company. Commissions and bonuses are given to the sales department on the basis of individual performance. Retirement plans or “401Ks” do not exist. Stock options have been issued to many (but not all) employees usually on the basis of tenure or contributions to the company.

I want to return for a moment to the aforementioned position by the CEO that a chain of command is needed in order to “get things done.” Clearly, the company’s leadership regards structure and order as vital to workplace operations. Structure and order, however, are also treated as established realities by several other people in key positions at CountryWatch. VS is the Vice President of Sales and Marketing. She is actually trained as an attorney but has made her career in sales working for a number of Fortune 500 companies. We were discussing her tenure at some of these companies when I asked her about some of the difference working at a smaller star-up company versus larger, established corporate environments. The following exchange ensued:

VS: Working in sales in many of the other companies, like CountryWatch, required a technical background. I worked for a software company called UUNet and also the online
information system Lexis Nexis. The technical and database experience helped me at CountryWatch, but the main difference (which is also its appeal) lies in the fact that you can make a difference in a smaller, start-up company.”

DY: “Tell me what you mean by making a difference.”

VS: “Well, I am not talking about feeding the poor. I am referring to the fact that one can be part of building a company from the bottom up so that one plays an integral role in that company’s potential success. There is a lot of purpose and also fulfillment in that sort of endeavor. Managing sales at those bigger companies is about making profits, commissions and contributing to the bottom line. The bottom line is equally important here but there’s something else going on. It isn’t just about the corporation, I guess, but about the idea. There is an emotional commitment, I suppose. Personally, I think I am attracted to the dysfunction too. I think there is a problem of unclear objectives and a shotgun approach and I’d like to work on the problem solving.”

DY: “What would you describe as dysfunctional?”

VS: “Well, there is a need for a stronger corporate identity with clear cut objectives, like I mentioned, and clear cut rules too.”
DY: “It is funny, but some people might say that the dysfunction lies in the fact that there are too many rules, and parameters and divisions for such a small company. What’s your thought?”

VS: “You might be asking the wrong person because I do come from a corporate background. I think you have to have clear cut rules and regulations in every organization or else the whole operation will flounder. There has to be firm lines of authority and I think recognizing how these lines are not always enforced presents the opportunity for positive change.”

DY: “Tell me what you mean by the rules and the lines of authority. Also what do you think about levels of autonomy here?”

VS: “I’ll give you an example. If you’re supposed to work from 9 am to 5 pm then you should be here at 9 o’clock in the morning. Not 9:05 or 9:15 or 9:35. If one person is allowed to be late then everyone else thinks it is okay and soon you have chaos on your hands. And I am glad you asked about autonomy because I think it is possible to function as a professional organization on one hand, while recognizing how important it is for employees to have the autonomy to creatively do their jobs once they are here at the office. In a small company like this, there is a lot of room to implement creative ideas and a wide scope of freedom to operate. And that’s why I think it isn’t a lot to expect people to follow the rules. I mean, you do need some discipline, some order to the whole thing. You can’t have everyone just doing their own thing when and how they feel like it. So I think you need
some order and some control in the workplace, along with the freedom and autonomy in operations.”

**Theory X and Theory Y Management Models**

In this chapter, I have suggested that the CountryWatch might well function like a classically structured organizational entity rather than the progressive New Economy company it purports to be. The discussion directly above was intended to describe not just the structure itself, but also the regime of operations that rests upon clear roles and expectations. This is only part of the story.

Within the company, despite these rules and expectations, two different styles of management can be identified. The head of sales, for example, adheres to a strict regulatory framework within her department. She reminds her employees that there are “expectations” whenever she finds that they may be unusually tardy or appear to be conversing for too long as they refresh their coffee cups. She holds frequent meetings and expects sales reports to be submitted weekly. She deliberately sends out messages or memorandums to the entire workforce when one or two individuals fail to turn in advance vacation notices or properly filled out expense forms. She says that she notifies everyone in the company of these lapses “just for informational purposes.” In contrast, other department heads may shake their heads when employees are tardy or forget to attend to the requisite bureaucratic details, but they rarely comment on or react to these incidences. The contrast in management styles is illustrated in the following exchange during an executive meeting:
Vice President of Sales (VS): “I am having some real issues with (employee) EW. She keeps coming in late from lunch. I’ve talked to her about it but I am not seeing an improvement. It is really driving me nuts. I am going to have no choice but to write her up.”

Chief Information Officer (CR): “Write her up? Do we do that?”

Me (DY): “Do we even have a book in which we can detail the bad ways of employees?”

(laughter)

VS: “Oh go ahead, laugh at me. But this is a real problem. I mean, we can’t have her coming in late like this after lunch. It isn’t right.”

CR: “Well, did you talk to her about it? Explain it to her… about what your expectations of her might be?”

VS: “Yes, I did…” (sighs)

DY: “And what did she have to say in response?”
VS: “Well, she said that she doesn’t take a lunch every day so she should be able to have some leeway on the few days in which she does leave the office for lunch. Can you believe that?”

CR: “Oh no. Shocking!”

(more laughter)

VS: “I don’t see why you both think this is so amusing. I am frustrated here. She is determined to try to get around the rules and I just don’t know what to do about it.”

CR: “Look, I don’t mean to minimize your frustration but it doesn’t seem like a big deal to me. She has an hour for lunch every day that she doesn’t take. So, on the few days she goes for lunch, you could give her a little rope since she has accrued some of that time.”

VS: “But she doesn’t have that time accrued. Where in the employee handbook does it say that she can have time for lunch accrued? This is the kind of thing whereby you let it get out of hand and everyone is slacking on the job. I can’t have that!”

DY: “I am not sure it is necessarily in the employee handbook, but I really don’t pay too much attention to the timelines of people. Sometimes I notice that JR (employee JR) is late in the morning but then I keep in mind that he stayed late working on the forecast. So it all evens out.”
VS: “I think you’re both missing my point. It isn’t that the actual hours even out, it is the general atmosphere of slacking… as if we have no rules and if we do, it is perfectly okay for them to be bent. That’s just not right.”

CR: “You know, I just don’t think it would be in my best interest to make a big deal about that kind of stuff with my employees. They just wouldn’t respond well. They’re pretty self-motivated.”

DY “I agree. I am not sure that it would be – in my case – a good idea to be rigid about these kinds of rules. I just don’t think writers respond well to that kind of ostensible control.”

VS: “Well you two can go on and on about the how your creative employees are all so freaking self-directed but this is a company, damn it. I am fine about being easygoing but we have to have some basic rules and standards. I mean, where is the corporate environment here? Where it is?”

Recall the earlier discussion of theory X and theory Y management. While theory X managers believe that employees resist responsibility and must be pressured into compliance, theory Y managers assume that self-direction by employees will result in the achievement of objectives. Clearly, if one superimposes this behavioral school into the conversation transcribed above, VS can be considered to be a theory X manager. Her desire for a corporate environment with clear rules and regulations exemplify her belief that employees
must be controlled. In contrast, CR and I can both be regarded as theory Y managers who favor a more flexible management style. Both CR and I worry that insisting on the observance of rules will not be well received by employees, preferring instead to use a relativist calculus about time and work in the office.

Earlier, I have observed the contradiction in terms of corporate structure and management styles between the actual modus of operations and the idea of CountryWatch as a progressive New Economy company. Yet, as shown by the theory Y management practices discussed here, it is clear that in addition to contradiction, the organizational landscape is also marked by more relaxed and perhaps even progressive standards. In this way, there are competing practices and attitudes at play suggesting that the organizational landscape is characterized by some degree of simultaneity as well as contradiction.

Dysfunction

During the course of CountryWatch’s existence, the company has had as few as five employees and as many as fifty. Throughout the course of the company’s life to date, there have been discussions about “corporate culture” and “managing diversity” in the workplace. Most of the time, these conversations have occurred as a reaction to events within the organization.

\[^{408}\] I ascribe this designation to myself with some degree of trepidation; it is not without caution that I offer an interpretation of my behavior in a scene in which I am inscribing myself. I understand that my formulation is simply an idea and an interpretation.
By way of example, in the very early days of operations there was a high dependence on temporary workers. One such person was hired on a short-term basis to help with the construction of the country reviews (during the period in which these books were being painstakingly produced without much technological aid). In casual conversation, she mentioned that her property values were decreasing because of “all the black people who were moving into the neighborhood.” The repetition of such comments was not well-received within the office, given the fact that it was inhabited by a fairly culturally diverse group of people. After these incidences transpired, a group of employees went collectively to the CEO’s office to register their complaints. The CEO expressed his clear dismay, and noted that other corporations such as Texaco had to face litigation as a result of discriminatory comments and behavior. Not willing to risk such an outcome, he promptly dismissed the offending temporary employee and sent out a memorandum noting that discriminatory comments or behavior would not be tolerated. While clearly taking action, the CEO’s response was not precisely a policy position on discrimination in the workplace.

Another incident occurred in which a company-wide electronic mail message was sent out noting that Martin Luther King Day was to be regarded as a “floating” holiday. This meant that one could elect to take it as a vacation day or alternatively work on that particular day and use the vacation day at another time. One individual responded by “replying to all” and sharing with the entire staff his views on the celebration of Martin Luther King’s birthday while ignoring all the important contributions of the presidents of the United States. He also observed that it was a shame that modern times had succumbed to dictates of minority pressure groups and political correctness. No one really knew if he intended to share his
particular views with everyone or if he had erroneously replied to the entire office instead of one of his peers. Nevertheless, a flurry or electronic mail activity ensued as well as colorful conversation by the coffee maker, which included the threat to “whip his sorry ignorant ass” by one technical wizard. Eventually, the firestorm that had erupted reached the executive office. Because of the location of the CEO’s office at the time, a colleague and I were able to overhear the CEO with the offending employee, so we could attest to the fact that it was stern and promised firm action should such a scenario present itself again. This fact, however, was not shared with the rest of the office and so to date, no one was ever officially informed that the executive office had any opinion on the matter. The entire staff was not informed that some form of action had been taken if only at the level of a warning. Instead, there was no information sharing or debriefing of the incident.

Later that year, another employee sitting in the office space with administrative colleagues levied her own complaint that she was consistently being subjected to Christian-centric conversation, which made her uncomfortable. Specifically, she found it difficult to concentrate on her work in a room in which discussions were taking place about who would be proceeding to hell after death. In this case, the offending employees were full-time workers and immediate dismissal was not the desired outcome. Instead, the idea was to cultivate an environment in which respectful interaction was facilitated. At least, that is what many thought the objective should be.

Since no one at CountryWatch had particular expertise in human relations, the CEO thought that the best course of action would be to get everyone in a room to “hash it out.” Some
individuals thought that the idea was a bad one because it was without any particular resolution in mind. They were not, however, about to openly express what they actually thought. So, everyone marched into the boardroom for the “hashing out” session. In the end, the Christian-centric group marshaled their efforts and effectively branded the employee who had complained as “a drama queen” who had never complained about anything until this point. For them, the accusation had come out of nowhere. The complaining employee was reduced to tears while I tried to explain how difficult it might be for someone who is in the ideological minority to actually say what he/she believes when he/she is simultaneously trying to bond with coworkers. This line of thinking was entirely lost on the group. Instead, efforts were made to put a policy in place regarding acceptable topics of conversation. Again, I tried to suggest a general environment of respect and a cognizance of diversity was needed. While a few employees including the CEO seemed to appreciate my suggestion, the outcome of the “hashing out” summit was to list all the topics that people should not talk about: ethnicity, religion, political views, and other contentious issues.

This policy was (predictably) violated on several occasions. One of the more memorable scenarios played out at a conference for the American Libraries Association at which a sales person was demonstrating the offering to a prospective customer. That prospect asked to see the country-specific page for Canada, and the (alpha male, Texas A and M, football playing and military worshipping) sales person infamously replied, “Why do you want to see Canada? Canada is all steers and queers.” Since one of the editorial staff was Canadian, a fracas ensued. The situation was not helped when the same sales person decided to evaluate all the female coworkers’ physical assets in a fairly complex ratings chart. Rather than revisit
the idea of creating a culturally conscious organizational space, the sales person was reprimanded and another delineation of acceptable subject matter was circulated.

**Color Coded for “Work Style” Identity**

A year later, as the company grew and as restraints on spending relaxed, a decision was made to have a human relations expert conduct a workplace analysis. By this point, the emphasis was no longer on the personal identities of the people in the office and the particular insensitive offenses that occurred. In conversation among various concerned employees, it was determined that the only way anyone could even begin to address the particular interpersonal dysfunctions of the workplace was not to suggest that one examine attitudes to ethnicity and gender. Instead, the focus would have to be on the fact that people functioned differently. If one could not address identity differences, it was believed that addressing functional differences would at least make the workplace livable.

The actual analysis was conducted by a particularly enthusiastic fellow with a motivational style that was reminiscent of a talk show host. He made everyone in the office take a psychological test which would presumably sort each person into specific profiles. Learning about these profiles would help us all understand how to accommodate coworkers’ diverse “work styles” by speaking the appropriate “work style language.” The result was a color coded system of profiles that magically sorted most people into groups that tended to match their work skills. For example, the executives were classified in the red-coded “powerful pragmatists” group; the sales and marketing types tended to be slotted into the green-coded
"communicators"; the technologists and editorial staff were almost all associated with the blue-coded "thinkers"; while the remaining administrative types were the yellow-coded "organizers." Of course, there were exceptions. Nevertheless, the clean circumscription of personalities and types according to job made many of us wonder if the test had been rigged in some form or fashion. Everyone was asked to fill index cards with notes about how to deal with other color-code types in order to facilitate efficient communication within the workplace. These notes included statements such as "always bottom line requests and issues when dealing with red-coded power pragmatists" and "always try to connect with green-coded communicators rather than simply discussing the pure issues." Everyone also received a laminated color-coded sign with their "work style" type printed on in, which they could keep along with their helpful index cards of notes.

However facile the aforementioned exercise might have seemed (and it certainly seemed facile to many of us), it was an interesting look at the constellation of different personalities at CountryWatch. Work style differences, however, did not account for cases of corruption or incidents of systemic gender discrimination.

**Corruption**

As if cultural insensitivity was not enough, the organizational crisis extended to the realm of corruption. If there was only one fiasco at CountryWatch, it might have been thought to be an anomaly. CountryWatch, however, seemed to have endured a significant number of human resource crises.
A few years after its inception, CountryWatch was searching for a "real" Chief Information Officer (CIO) to replace the musicology-major-turned-technology-specialist. Once a new CIO was hired, her twin sister – a so-called sales guru from BMC software -- became a regular fixture at the office. After convincing the CEO of her expertise in running a sales call center at BMC, she was also hired at CountryWatch. Almost immediately, they became known as “the evil sisters” because of their intimidation tactics and because of their ferocious attempts to gain influence within the organization. They were classic examples of those who step on others to get ahead. Without going into the details of their disturbing tenure at CountryWatch, they were finally fired when it was discovered that they had used company credit cards to swindle hundreds of thousands of dollars of merchandise from the company coffers. Likewise, the mild-mannered accountant who always seemed like a disgruntled and ornery fellow was also found to have been pocketing thousands of dollars, while concealing the losses from the balance sheets. Even the Chief Financial Officer was let go after he tried to extort money from a business partner. Collectively, these episodes which coincided with the Enron debacle in the wider world of business, made many people wonder why the "thieves" had so easily been afforded the power, the access and the best compensation, as compared with other employees. Was it because they were older and so they had the aura of wisdom and experience?

I cannot say that the CEO ever outwardly contemplated this question. After the fiasco with the CFO, the CEO had occasional conversations with me about this cadre of employees. I am not sure how these conversations began. Perhaps they were due to my enduring role as
“the anthropologist on staff” (as noted elsewhere, the distinction between anthropologist and social psychologist was lost on most people). Whatever the reason, the CEO would wonder about corporate criminality, not just at CountryWatch, but also at Enron, which he had left precisely because of the questionable cast of characters. I suggested that more due diligence be enacted before hiring other employees; he countered that there was sometimes insufficient time and money for due diligence. The fact that he had lost so much money because of failing to investigate new hires seemed to be beyond his comprehension. I never attempted to bring up the prospect of the “halo effect” – a perceptual distortion that occurs when an individual allows one characteristic dominate the evaluation of another. In this case, the “halo effect” may have been the similar Westpoint background of the CFO, or the apparent maturity (in comparison with the existing CountryWatch staff) of the two sisters. 409 Regardless, the “halo effect” can advantageously privilege certain individuals above others even when the body of evidence does not legitimate such benefits.

These considerations aside, the CEO seemed to become attached to one theory that we jointly evoked to explain the thievery we had seen take place at CountryWatch. Because the CFO, the evil twins and the accountant were all middle-aged or older, he wondered if faced with the pressure to get rich by a certain age, they had essentially failed to meet their personal goals. The sense of failure within a company in which the top executives were some of the most successful people in the country, and where many workers were exceptionally intelligent and young, may have had some effect in reinforcing the sense of disappointment, ultimately driving them to commit nefarious acts. He really did not know if his explanation

409 Judith Gordon (1996) explains the “halo effect” in regard to perceptual distortions in the workplace noting that features, such as attractiveness, can result in increased performance evaluations, pay raises and promotions.
was baseless or not. It was an explanation that the CEO began to use in discussions about such matters. After repeated use, it simply became the corporate narrative that circulated to explain these corrupt moments in the company’s existence.

Needless to say, the internal dynamics within the company, for all intents and purposes, was characterized by stress. I personally took refuge in my closet-sized office. I have been told that other people met for drinks at “happy hour” to decompress from the situation. Within the office environment, however, a deliberate process of division took place, effectively diving employees into certain groups. This would eventually end, with some basic re-integration of remaining employees, after a process of restructuring and downsizing.

**Gender and the Rude Boys’ Paradise: A Reference Point**

“So I went to that meeting with MSNBC... I felt like I was at a tea party with my daughter’s friends.”

(Quoted by the CEO of CountryWatch in regard to the youthful and female makeup of the media team at MSNBC.)

Although CountryWatch’s CEO insists that his comments (cited directly above) are not a reflection of his views of women, it is difficult not to interpret his words as being latent sexism. They appear to underlie the CEO’s perception of the world of business where middle
aged white men are the norm and where younger females in positions of power appear to be an oddity.\textsuperscript{410}

Still, it is ironic (or perhaps rather appropriate) that the CEO had such an alienating and uncomfortable experience when meeting with the MSNBC media group. This is because Microsoft - one of MSNBC's parent companies -- has evolved into one of the most female-empowered corporations in the world where meritocracy is alleged to have superseded the "old boys' club." Most interesting and directly relevant to the experience of the CEO is the story of Microsoft's remarkable transformation from a towel-snapping boys' locker room, to a workplace where the future growth of the company rests in the hands of the women who run the Interactive Media Division.\textsuperscript{411}

Yet Microsoft was not always home to such a gender-conscious environment. When software development was in its inception, most of the players were men. Within the enclosures of Microsoft, this scenario was no different. In fact, it was commonplace in the early 1990s for bit maps with nude women to be displayed on computer screens while pornographic posters adorned office walls. One of the most famous of these was the Excel applications poster featuring a nearly nude Teutonic dominatrix in smoke, leather and chains.

\textsuperscript{410} The CEO also hired another female colleague and me, later elevating us to the status of management. Whether or not these measures function as some sort of counter-balance to the sexism I have suggested is not a matter I can fully address. I have, however, asked him on a number of occasions why he hired me and why he has continued to keep me in the management portfolio. His response is usually some variation on the theme of my competence and intellect. I can only extrapolate in stating that while he may appreciate such qualities in individual women, it is difficult for him to think of the power brokers in the world of big business as youthful females. Based upon this line of reasoning, I have, therefore, interpreted him as being "latently sexist." My interpretation, however, is not intended as an absolute proclamation of his character; it is simply my expressed opinion.

\textsuperscript{411} Moody, 1999: 3.
Today, however, Microsoft has metamorphosed into (arguably) one of the most progressive workplace environments for women and minorities. In fact, Microsoft has in many senses monopolized the market on female engineering talent. With 14 percent of women graduating from computer science programs, Microsoft has realized that winning market share will involve attracting the best "talent," and creating a workplace environment that is attractive to the top tier of technology experts. In this regard, Microsoft transformed itself into a progressive workplace environment that has been popularly envisioned by the promise of information technology in the New Economy.

Technology, however, is not simply a matter of numbers and science. It involves design, architecture and excellent communication. At no time was this more apparent than in the early days of CD-Rom design or more recently, in web site design and in interactive applications where the aesthetic component is paramount. These priorities were present for Microsoft as well. As such, Microsoft had to recruit large numbers of artists, writers and editors to collaborate with its engineers. Most of those new recruits were women and as they acquired technological experience, they evolved into one of the most influential divisions (Multimedia) within the company. Today, the Multimedia sector is the Interactive Media Division and apart from being run predominantly by women with acumen in both the technological and aesthetic dimensions, it is the combination of these talents that constituted the future of software development.

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413 Moody, 1999: 3.
414 The mixture of technological and aesthetic acumen in this field seems to rupture the dichotomous notion of left brain (Science and Math) and right brain (Humanities and Arts) abilities, which often are attributable to men and women respectively.
Returning to CountryWatch, given the background of Microsoft, it is ironic that the CEO of CountryWatch would have had such a sexist impression of the company's media division. It is also curious that he seemed oblivious of the parallels within his very own company that also rests upon a mixture of technical and creative acumen, erodes the binarism of science and aesthetics, and ruptures bottom-line business practices with concerns over creativity and "soft" content.

In more recent times, as two of the main departments at CountryWatch have been turned over to the direction of women, the traces of systemic sexism continue to be felt. When two or more females laugh audibly, the CEO frequently walks down the hallway and jovially asks "What is all the cackling about?" His joking manner is presumably intended to mitigate against the sentiment underlying his words, which might be construed as both a veiled criticism as well as a comment of gender difference. "Cackling" is clearly not a pleasant description and it conjures up images of the annoying noises of hens. As such, one could make the argument that the word is deployed to indicate "otherness." In contrast, when male laughter is heard in the office the CEO does not jog down the hallway to ask what the testosterone-laden hollering is about. In this way, working with women -- even women he selected and placed into positions of authority -- remains a source of some discomfort.

In terms of corporate gender relations, the CEO's decision to surrounding himself with key female executives seems to fly in the face of what can only be described as his personal gender discomfort. As such, gender relations at CountryWatch, not unlike conflicting
management styles, are imbued by competing attitudes of simultaneous acceptance and opposition.

Symbolism

The issue of systemic sexism stemming from the highest executive at CountryWatch has not been mentioned gratuitously. The descriptions of various workplace incidents mentioned here are not offered as indictments against the management of the company or its employees (although this might well be justified). Certainly, it is true that the haplessness in developing meaningful responses to these cases, and the inability to craft a sensitive and ethically informed workplace environment, could well be regarded failures of sorts. One particular CountryWatch employee referred to the situation as “a result of disassociative leadership.” Along with the aforementioned incidences involving ethnic and religious prejudices, they texture the broader issues of organizational structure and particularly the power dynamics.

In addition, the depictions of these scenarios were offered (in part) to indicate the degree to which the human relations element and cultural awareness were ignored. This is not a case in which human relations and cultural awareness were given short shrift. Rather, there is a general incognizance of the systemic aspects of the human dimension within the company. Also absent has been the notion of thoughtful equity sensitivity and a formalized sense of organizational justice. Human relations and cultural consideration have been treated instead when they crop up as the occasional headaches or intermittent issues to be dealt with. In general, the focus has been on the business operations, possibly as a result of the prevailing
idea that businesses cannot help people unless they are left unencumbered to function and ultimately maximize profits. 415

Power and inequity, however, are part of the corporate dynamic and structure, just as equity issues touch all relationships and just as the matrix of power textures the interactions within a given organization and the organizational landscape itself. This is hardly a revelation.

In the case of CountryWatch, the specificity of the conditions includes the fact that it is a small company in “start-up” mode that quickly increased and decreased in size. In a company without a formal human relations department, there was no discernible process to deal practically, psychologically or culturally with the rapid increases in personnel followed by the turbulence and rupture of downsizing. The additional elements of cultural insensitivity and occasional incidences of corruption only served to exacerbate the general conditions of chaos into a highly dysfunctional and sometimes traumatizing environment.

The way in which female executives are marked as “others” through the deployment of seemingly harmless (but still gender-laden) language has functioned to demarcate subterranean insider-outsider boundaries at the level of gender. The affable demeanor of the CEO not only while he deploys this language, but also in the generally pleasant way in which he interacts with all female employees, presents a scenario in which underlying affronts are obfuscated by a veneer of charm. As such, female employees are left without an ostensible response. A clear and egregious violation of professional behavioral norms would invite a defined reaction. For example, if the CEO had said “All you women talk too much and laugh

like a bunch of cackling hens" one could appropriately claim that he had been overtly offensive. The teasing tone of his delivery, however, leaves sufficient doubt about intentionality in the minds of those on the receiving end. His pleasant and humorous attitude, however, mitigates the "otherizing" thrust of his comments, effectively pulling back the very people he pushed onto the other side of the metaphoric dividing line. Consequently, females in such situations are rendered unable to react. Instead, they might choose to join in the laughter even if what is actually felt is closer to discomfort and confusion. At some level, frustration and confusion is experienced simultaneously with rationalization. With no room for redress, the insider-outsider boundary is drawn while the psychological terrain of those left outside the operational atmosphere is one of uncertainty and unknowing. Like the contradiction and simultaneity of the management styles and corporate structure discussed earlier, the "otherizing" thrust highlights the contrast between males and females, while affability and humor serve to bridge the very boundary that was constructed.

Deployed in such a manner, pleasantries and jocularity hold a certain value and wield specific effects. In the post-downsizing period, most employees describe CountryWatch as a far less stressful environment in contrast to the distress and turbulences that occurred in earlier years. Descriptions and depictions of managers and coworkers are benign and framed by notions of congeniality. As illustrated by this case of the CEO, amiability conveniently vitiates expectation of a fair, culturally sensitive, well-managed workplace. Indeed, during a conversation with employee MA, she was asked how one might cultivate a more inclusive environment. In response, she said "There should be a lot of positive reinforcement, and employees should be valued. And the basic stuff, like saying hello, developing a good
rapport with others, and also being warm and supportive.” Even in her formulation, the abstract qualities described included agreeable interpersonal dynamics rather than a clear framework for the development of workplace fairness, justice and effective management.

Meanwhile, the closed system of information sharing (expressed in an employee’s criticism above) as well as the inclusions and exclusions of certain levels of employees at meetings, operate in a similar manner to mark the insider-outsider boundary within the workplace. While it is fair to say that every executive meeting cannot be attended by every CountryWatch staffer, and while every piece of corporate correspondence is not likely to be shared with receptionist and upper management alike, closed door meetings in a small company serve to deliver the message that all employees are not of the same status. The regularized weekly schedule of meetings functions to remind and reinforce this fact in a systematic fashion. In response, several employees comment on the fact that “there are too many meetings” as a way of expressing opposition to this framework. Note the following exchange:

AMS: “I think it is interesting how some people are included in all the meetings; I also notice that they close the door of the board room. It just seems like we’re too small a company for that.”

DY: “Do you mean that the company is too small for all those meetings? Because it is a waste of time when there is so much to do?”
AMS: “Well, sort of. I mean that we’re so small and you’d think that we’re more connected as a result. So it is just really weird for everyone else when certain people huddle in the room and close the door.”

DY: “That’s what happens every week on certain days…”

AMS: “Yeah. I know. Every week certain people scramble about the office, photocopying sales reports and news wire contracts, and then those people stop by the coffee room to fill their cups, and then they run quickly into the board room, and the door shuts and no one comes out for hours.”

DY: “So is it the fact that there are closed door discussions that are taking place that seems weird?”

AMS: “I guess. I mean, I suppose they’re talking about the business, but it isn’t like the rest of us don’t want to know what’s going on or that we don’t have an idea or two to offer.”

DY: “Is it the exclusion, then, that’s troublesome?”

AMS: “That’s only part of it. I don’t know what I am saying. Forget what I am saying. It is just weird for everyone else. You know, we do offer ideas and suggestions. I talk to you about that stuff all the time. But it isn’t like it is a meeting. It is a conversation.”
Although employee AMS did not precisely articulate her perspective in this exchange, tentatively moderating her observations with statements like, “I don’t know what I am saying,” it is clear that in her view, the meeting itself is at stake because of what it represents. The exclusion of certain participants, the selectivity regarding whom should be included, the regularized schedule of the meeting, the secrecy of what takes place during the meeting, and the fact that the meeting exists in the first place (as opposed to conversation or dialogue), effectively creates divisions that may well be interpreted as hierarchical and divisive by some individuals.

Likewise, the phrase, “I am not sure if you were included on that email exchange” transmits the message that the original recipients hold the most significance. The very same electronic mail message might well then be forwarded to the person who was “missed” in the original delivery. Forwarded information or intra-company intelligence serves as an expression of acceptance and a mechanism of access for certain employees of rank and privilege. Certainly, some correspondence may be department-specific, such as the coordination of new wire editing schedules or trade show itineraries. Nevertheless, much of the key correspondence about the direction of the company is shared only at the top levels between executives and directors, across departmental lines. A decision to enter into a risky merger, for example, will require the input of technical and information consolidation as well as valuation and new price points, hence the inclusion of the heads of information technology, editorial and sales departments. They would not include every staff member in each of those departments, yet those very staff members would eventually hear about decisions and developments down the line. Active participation in discussions via inclusion in the exchange
of electronic mail or conference calls demonstrates one’s access and reifies rank and privilege. Simultaneously, it reinforces the outsider status of others. Hearing about the contents of the same message in a secondary meeting or overhearing information by the water machine are illustrative of the varying distances from the power center or core of decision-making. Again, being included on such correspondence segregates those of the core decision-making group from those who hear about such correspondence from the outside.

The regulation of power, authority and control within the company occurs in other ways as well. Recall the incident noted above in which VS, CR and I were discussing the tardiness of employee EW. VS’s intent may well be to reinforce the regime of power within the organization, and her frustration resides in the fact that the lackadaisical management style of certain individuals, such as CR, counteract her attempt to reinforce rules. Thus, her adamant demand regarding the adherence to the rules is ruptured in some measure by our refusal to attend to these rules. The very existence of a competing work style (expressed by CR and by me) in which the imperatives are rendered impotent, demonstrates the presence of a tension. In reaction, VS both underscores and accentuates the importance of the rules by “writing up” the offending employee in an attempt to reinscribe a circumscribed regime of power.

Certainly, VS may be oblivious of the fact that she -- as an agent of sorts -- is reproducing the power and hierarchical structure in her actions. Still, the imperative to emphasize the regulative framework of the corporate environment suggests some (perhaps discursive) awareness that authority and control are at stake. That is to say, there is a difference between intentional actions and an intended project. In this regard, Anthony Giddens writes “In
reproducing structural properties agents also reproduce the conditions that make such actions possible. Structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what to do in their day-to-day activity. Human agents always know what they are doing on the level of discursive consciousness under some description. However, what they may do may be quite unfamiliar under other descriptions, and they may know little of the ramified consequences of the activities in which they engage.”  

In all these cases, everyday operations, functions and situations as trivial as they may appear become coded in such a way as to indicate a kind of network of power relations. Most clearly exemplified by the use of particular mocking yet humorous language, but also identified in mundane activities such as meetings, memorandums and electronic mail correspondence, these events and actions are transformed into value-laden symbols attributing status and circumscribing positions. In effect, these events, encounters, measures and modalities of communication together form a system of signification in which power, authority, legitimation, and domination are inherent. Indeed, Giddens notes “Many seemingly trivial procedures followed in daily life have a more profound influence on the generality of social conduct.” The moments of constitution, exemplified by the decision to hold weekly meetings or to conduct closed systems of communication, are also moments of reconstitution in which such routines and encounters become generalized institutional practices in day-to-day corporate life. In this way, the routines and encounters of everyday

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417 Giddens, 1984: 22.
life within CountryWatch both produce and reproduce the existing dynamic and asymmetries of power relations. 418

These institutionalized practices found in the routines and encounters of the corporate experience exhibit some "structural properties" as Giddens has suggested. 419 That is to say, structure can be identified in the moments in which these institutional practices occur, during the experience of encounter or the occurrence of the routine but also in the enduring qualities of these features over time. The repetition and frequency of such moments (regularly scheduled meetings, for example) build upon one another in a recursive interplay, embedding meanings in such as way that notions of hierarchy and status distinctions become naturalized.420

Rules, as techniques and methodological procedures, are also incorporated into the production and reproduction of practices by virtue of the fact that they (1) constitute meaning and convey value (as discussed here in terms of power, authority and status) and also because they (2) sanction social conduct and interaction. 421 Thus, rules are both constitutive and regulative, thus indicating a duality of structure. That said, the use of the word "sanction" here implies at once authoritative approval as well as the penalty for noncompliance (such as "being written up"). 422 In this way, another element of duality here reflects the tension

418 See Giddens, 1984: 18 in which he notes that institutional practices "express forms of domination and power."
419 Giddens, 1984: 17.
420 Giddens, 1984: 16-17.
embodied in simultaneous constraint and enabling (as exemplified by VS’s strict adherence to the rules along with the refusal to attend to the rules by CR).

This tension notwithstanding, the traditional hierarchy however slow, cumbersome and politicized it might be, continues to operate as the main model of commercial enterprises and other major institutions. The promise of technology’s democratizing effects in New Economy companies has not been clearly realized at organizations like CountryWatch. Even as new political models emerge such as the rotating and representative configuration of the European Union’s parliament, and even if progressive and inclusive commercial enterprises take root, as exemplified by companies such as the Body Shop and Whole Foods with their idiosyncratic and community-oriented ideals, many organizations wittingly or unwittingly embody characteristics of classic hierarchy. That is, the division of labor, the element of discipline and regulation and the predictability of routines and schedules all function together. Discipline and regulation organizes power so that it is allocated along a vertical course, orchestrating and charting both access and inclusion along strict fault lines.

If the structures of signification mentioned in this section serve to illustrate power and authority as well as the boundaries of the insider-outsider corporate landscape, and if measures to substantively address organizational justice and fairness appear to be something of an anathema to companies such as CountryWatch, then are there competing forces that operate in opposition to the dominant scheme? What other movements might be examined? What other measures and mechanisms horizontally cross-cut the prevailing structures and operations of vertical integration in companies such as CountryWatch?

Horizontal Shift

In an essay entitled "Toward a Higher-Order Merger: A Middle Manager's Story," Melissa Cefkin writes of organizational empowerment movements aimed at maximizing productivity and efficiency as well as increasing quality management, all of which she describes as "top-down initiatives" of businesses. In many senses, the narratives and discourses of the New Economy (or the Information Age and the Digital Era) may reflect some similarity with the moment Cefkin's work touches upon. In both cases, business principles of efficiency and productivity commingle with enthusiasm over how such tenets affect human relations positively.

While in Cefkin's piece the emphasis is upon organizational empowerment from a human relations perspective, today's discourses on organizational empowerment are couched in terms that valorize technology. That is to say, in much the same as the notion of human relations is intended to open and flatten the normally hierarchical structure of the corporation, new information technologies supposedly facilitate information sharing and promise to democratize the workplace. Specifically, computer access and Internet connections are thought to make information more easily distributable and available not simply to the public but also within organizational structures.

424 Cefkin, 1998: 91, see also Notes, #4 on p. 111.
425 See Cefkin, 1998; see also Senge, 1990 and Covey, 1992.
The observations expressed by certain CountryWatch employees (cited above) implied that information -- and particularly the sharing and exchange of information -- configure the organizational framework. That is to say, the economics of information plays a vital role in how power, authority and other status-oriented qualities are exercised and experienced. Meanwhile, the constraints and control of information constitute and reconstitute relationships and status.

In fact, many organizational units are defined in as circumscribed a manner as possible (in terms of geography or markets or function) for the purpose of limiting collaboration and maximizing control by management. In this way, a fixed constellation of information channels are produced to support discrete and independent working units. Managers and employees functioning within these units may grasp the most intimate and detailed knowledge of their particular arenas, whereas upper management and the executive branches possess the most thorough understanding (the “big picture”) of a company’s situation. Meanwhile, fragmentation by department or unit encompasses other challenges such as inter-departmental stress and power struggles.

The reporting systems within companies are designed to facilitate the upward flow of information from subordinates to the upper echelons of the corporate ladder. However, an equivalent downward flow usually does not exist. Instead, managers and executives edit and parse the information that they convey to their employees. For example, a manager at CountryWatch may be closely aware of the potential benefits and costs of a particular

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427 See Ostroff, 1999.
business alliance in the works because the details of the contract are constantly being discussed and developed. He or she, however, will not delineate these details to an employee within his or her department, preferring instead to mention briefly that “such and such a deal is in the works and may be beneficial to the company.” In a small company the manager might not feel that it is to her or his benefit to have another employee increasing the breadth of knowledge about the prospective deal in such a way as to facilitate meaningful conversation between employees and the CEO at the water cooler or in the hallway. Sensitive legal issues aside, the monopolization of information serves its own political purposes within corporations where competition may be at stake. In this way, information and specifically the asymmetries of information also indicate asymmetries of power.\(^{428}\)

Information sharing aside, the information technology infrastructure of an organization is constituentlly supposed to make possible both the transfer and the circulation of information needed by all process players within the organization. Consider for a moment the cycle of product development, marketing and sales. For the innovators and production generators, access to information from consumers (that is, from the sales force) is an intrinsic aspect of product development. Understanding the reception level (that is, how a product is received or used) is vital information for future innovations. Likewise, understanding the product via the production generation process is relevant to the marketing and advertising departments since they must understand all the features and benefits of a given product. A simple information technology structure that includes access to intranet email (electronic messaging within the organization) may be sufficient for the sharing of such information between pertinent departments and personnel. More complex infrastructures such as a virtual

workplace and or a company network with the capacity to develop data points, presentations and concepts, or even develop software jointly over cyberspace also serve a similar purpose.\footnote{Applications such as NetMeeting are illustrative of such capacities.}

The sophistication of such technologies notwithstanding, it remains unknown as to whether or not information technology infrastructure has in fact a democratizing effect on organizational structures. In the context of a New Economy company like CountryWatch, one could hypothesize that the vertical integration model of the hierarchy as well as the selective landscape of interaction might be transformed with more information sharing facilitated by information technology. Yet, even in an information technology-rich environment like CountryWatch, the traditional vertical integration model may prevail. Certainly, other elements also exist such as more fluid and flexible management styles used by certain players on the scene. But just what is the contribution of information technology to the corporate terrain? This proposition is explored in what follows, starting with the transcript of a conversation on information technology and the matter of information sharing that has been discussed thus far.

**Information Technology and Information Sharing**

A conversation between an information technology (IT) consultant and myself:

DY: "How do you define IT?"
RC: "That's tough... I mean information technology? The use of computers, networks, applications, and systems to improve business processes. IT is not limited to core business processes, or to organizational management or to strategy, or even to daily operations. It encompasses all of these processes as well as processes which extend outside of the organization."

DY: "What about information sharing? How is that part of IT? Or is it not?"

RC: "I think of information sharing as more part of the culture or modus operandi."

DY: "So you don't think that by its very nature, IT facilitates information sharing?"

RC: "No."

DY: "Why not?"

RC: "Information sharing can extend to any business process, management... production... strategy. i.e. A process that may not be intimately linked to IT. Speaking in the context of IT, virtually any organization has its IT staff positioned in areas of expertise. For some of these employees, sharing their application-specific knowledge would compromise job security."

DY: "What do you mean by that?"
RC: "For example, a given organization has ten different reporting tools at its disposal, and ten IT employees responsible for supporting each tool. By sharing their administrative knowledge of these tools, they allow themselves to be replaced by their remaining associates. This is a very inefficient culture. If the organization had a culture of retaining and retraining its employees, this would engender a climate of information sharing behavior among its employees and they could be transitioned into new roles... this is a much better use of human resources."

DY: "But getting back to information sharing and IT, maybe I asked the wrong question. You don't think, by the very networked structure of information technologies that it facilitates the sharing of information?"

(DY thinks: Doesn't the exchange of emails about a proposed venture involve both the structure of technology -- the system, servers, network, email traffic etc.-- and the actual communication of information across email technology?)

RC: "Email makes communication easier, but it doesn't initiate communication. IT makes information sharing easier, but it does not facilitate it. It is the culture that facilitates this. Take SAP for example, it is a massive corporation with all conceivable IT resources available... all hardware, software is at its disposal. But if you ask product managers in the
Americas what product developers in Europe are working on, or planning for future releases, you will likely get diverse answers, each of which is suspect.\textsuperscript{430}

\textbf{Information Technology as a Technique of Power}

While information technology does not automatically result in information sharing, the argument might also be made that it also serves to reinforce and reproduce the disciplinary regime of work and production psychically, materially and symbolically in the workplace. Moreover, the disciplinary regime can be reproduced politically through state intervention into the management of society. The political intervention of the state can be manifest in two regulatory ways: (1) as a caretaker of the citizenry through economic planning, as well as welfare and social policies; or (2) as a controller through surveillance and intelligence activities typical in what can be described as "the security state."\textsuperscript{431} In the United States, notably in recent years, it is the second item which is of particular interest in a society marked by recent episodes of terrorism.\textsuperscript{432} That said, the notion of surveillance also influences the regulatory regime of work and production in other ways.

In the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon conceived of a mechanism for surveillance in institutions, such as asylums, schools, factories and prisons.\textsuperscript{433} At the core of Bentham’s conception was the idea of an inspector who could see what was happening without himself

\textsuperscript{430} This excerpt cited here was part of a conversation which took place between a solutions architect for SAP enterprise software and myself.
\textsuperscript{431} Hirsch, 1981: 82, 83 and 87.
\textsuperscript{432} Before the recent terrorist events in the United States, however, Anthony Giddens (1985) wrote about how nationalism, citizenship, and war contributes to heightened surveillance as well as the control of the transmission of information.
\textsuperscript{433} Bentham, 1843.
or herself being seen. Bentham, therefore, suggested that those functioning within the Panopticon should not only be under inspection or surveillance in real terms but also believe -- or feel -- themselves to be under inspection or surveillance. It follows that the individual believing or feeling himself or herself to be under scrutiny by an omnipresent inspector would respond by self-monitoring within an insidious disciplinary and regulatory regime of power.

Following this paradigm, Michel Foucault has viewed the Panopticon as the architecture of control and as a mechanism by which power is channeled. Everyday behavior, identity and activity, are all placed under surveillance in an effort to influence the mechanisms of power that frame everyday life. As noted by Foucault, within the Panopticon a person "is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never the subject of communication." Thus, according to Foucault, the major effect of the Panopticon is: "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."

In this way, the Panopticon effect transforms "the monitored individual into a visible and knowable object." Visibility is key to this paradigm whereas the mechanisms of power are reliant upon invisibility.

Robins and Webster put forth the view that new information technologies offer another means by which power is channeled through the information network and wired society in an integrated system of intelligence, discipline and control, but without the physical architecture

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434 Foucault, 1979: 77-78.
435 Foucault, 1979: 200.
436 Foucault, 1979: 201.
437 Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Society Under Surveillance”).
of Bentham’s brick and mortar Panopticon.\footnote{Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Society Under Surveillance”).} Knowledge organizations and other kinds of cybernetic workplaces may be viewed as the equivalents of prisons within this formulation. Meanwhile, the activity of surveillance has become commonplace within the “wired society” purportedly for commercial purposes. Cable and other television networks can track consumer preferences as regards programming, while online applications such as WebTrends register user pathways and choices on various Internet websites. Websites like Amazon and Merlite Jewelry use specialized applications which track customer interest in certain products, making suggestions to customers as they browse in cyberspace. A customer who seeks interest in a book X on the Amazon website, for example, will be presented with a screen saying “Customers who bought book X also bought books Y and Z.” In this way, even desire and preference are registered. The aggregation of this type of user information, data, transactions, associations, tastes, preferences, desires and activities form a network of ordinary and mundane intelligence, by which individuals become visible and knowable much like those transformed by the web of Panopticon techniques.\footnote{See Foucault, 1979: 224; see also Robins and Webster, 1988 generally.}

As noted by Robins and Webster, technologies of surveillance and control are not a new phenomenon; new information technologies simply extend and expand this capacity.\footnote{Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Society Under Surveillance”).} For example, at CountryWatch the remote worker selecting and editing news wire stories is an object of surveillance and control. He or she is connected to the company’s operational network through virtual access and a manager need only enter the wire administration domain of the administrative system to watch, second by second, as a news story is processed and published. While not an overt mechanism for surveillance and control, the news wire
editor is aware at some level that he or she could be observed and as such, he or she may well “self monitor.” Earlier in the chapter, some attention has been given to the fact that CountryWatch employees across departments tend “self monitor” in other ways. Cognizant of the fact that certain managers might view them as having a poor work ethic if they actually took their full lunch hour outside the office, they apply the principle of “self monitoring” and eat at their desks while working. Other employees have said that they take a full lunch hour outside the office only on Fridays, while working at their desks on other days. These individuals have said that they are aware that they will be monitored on the one day they dare to leave for an hour. One particular employee lamented the fact that she always came in after the Chief Executive Officer and on the days she worked late, he did not seem to notice. Asked why this was important, she answered “Well, there is a certain message you’re delivering if you come in after the head honcho and leave before him especially when on the days you work your butt off, he doesn’t notice. I mean, in the end, what does it matter if he can’t see that?” Clearly, the capacity to “see” is paramount.

Likewise, customer service is networked through the company so that a manager can enter the customer service domain of the sales and marketing system to examine a log of all communications (by telephone, electronic mail or regular mail). The log is codified by time and date and is signed by every employee who might have had an interaction with a given customer. While this system is intended to provide excellent service and responsiveness to customers, it is easy to see how it also functions as a surveillance and control mechanism. Consider for a moment the following text of an electronic message sent by a manager to a customer service representative at CountryWatch:
“Dear E,

I forwarded to you some correspondence from this customer regarding a problem with his account. I noticed that it took you 34 minutes to respond to the customer even though I expressly stated that it was a priority action item. While 34 minutes would be acceptable on a day when there is a lot of customer service activity, on a lighter day when I can hear you laughing on the telephone from down the hallway, it is not. I hate to be an ogre about this but timeliness is essential to good customer service. I expect a better turnaround time in the future.” 441

Thus, the worker within the wired workplace can expect to be constantly scanned and monitored by what Robins and Webster calls “the electronic eye of the central computer systems that manage networks.” 442 Yet demonstrable and visible work ethics also suggest that sometimes the “eye” of the system need not be part of an electronic network, but simply a unspoken set of rules and conditions that flow through a system, regulating, disciplining and even facilitating the self-monitoring of workers, to produce a desired effect. In this way, while it is hardly a physical Panopticon, the CountryWatch workplace is nonetheless an arena of surveillance and concomitant control. This everyday reality is at odds with the popularized notion of the democratized workplace of the New Economy that has been liberated by the capabilities of information technology. Instead, the capabilities of

441 This correspondence was forwarded to me by its recipient -- employee, E -- with permission for use in this research.
442 Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Society Under Surveillance”).
information technology appear to reproduce and reinforce existing relations of power and means of control.

Is the Internet a Model of Organizational Structure?

Along with discourses of information technology (IT) democratizing and transforming the hierarchical workplace are discussions of the Internet accomplishing the same objectives. Whereas information technology supposedly creates information sharing which then (presumably and automatically) translates into power sharing, the Internet by virtue of its configuration and utility (presumably and automatically) opens, democratizes and changes the office organizational structure.

The very paradigm of the Internet is that of a matrixed, networked, and hyperlinked structure within which everyone is connected with each another. This model is antithetical to the vertically integrated organization where information is concealed and meted out from the top, or where power is wielded from the uppermost tier. The organizational chart in the typical business usually mirrors this hierarchy in which the top is always narrower than the bottom. With the Internet, hyperlinks remove the individual, decentralize authority and thus, subvert the hierarchy.

As was suggested in the conversation regarding information technology and information sharing cited above, there is some suggestion that “flatter” corporations will somehow evolve out of IT and the Internet, thus creating a more egalitarian workplace. This perception is
viewed by some as a rather “infocentric” one. That is to say, as communication becomes more seamless, IT may facilitate disintermediation of sorts but disintermediation does not easily or necessarily translate into decentralization and a horizontal organizational chart.

By way of illustration, all business development ventures at CountryWatch such as alliances with CNN or challenges to the State Department regarding the criteria for recognition as countries may be shared and discussed collectively over electronic mail, while contracts and position papers may be jointly written via the computerized network called “the source.” Electronic mail is sent and carbon-copied to “team leaders” (meaning management and executives) and certain levels of information on “the source” are only open to management and above. Although the overall staff may be informed of some of these developments, it is the executive branch of the company that actually functions as the locus of decision-making. In certain cases such as prospective mergers, new ventures and legal proceedings, other members of staff are never included at all. Hence, despite the appearance of information sharing, the hierarchy of the corporation remains intact with no actual democratization or decentralization in existence. Indeed, Shoshona Zuboff of Harvard Business School observes “The paradise of shared knowledge and a more egalitarian working environment just isn't happening. Knowledge isn't really shared because management doesn't want to share authority and power.”.

Zuboff’s observation coincides with the aforementioned discussion of information sharing at CountryWatch and the advantages of monopolizing information in order to preserve the

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444 Zuboff, quoted in Lohr, 1996.
prevailing asymmetries of power. The conversation cited above (in conjunction with Zuboff's position) seems to suggest that revolutionary and sophisticated technological changes do not inevitably or invariably lead to either information sharing or a horizontal shift of power within an organization. 445 That is not to discount the benefits of the horizontally oriented company in which information sharing is advanced. Free enterprise advocate and businessman Jack Stack, for example, has said that "The more people know about a company, the better that company will perform. This is an iron clad rule. You will always be more successful in business by sharing information with the people you work with than by keeping them in the dark." 446 Still, as noted above, a commonwealth of information also implies the extension of decision making power in which information sharing contests hierarchical structures and systems based on secrecy and confidential information. 447

Horizontally-organized entities, however rare they might be in the corporate arena, are more process-oriented. The actual processes involved are cross-functional in purpose and extend across the organizational framework. Having stated that, the horizontal organization is not simply the inverse of the traditional vertical structure upon which most industry in the 20th century was built. That is to say, it is not simply an organization free of hierarchy. The (ideally) horizontal organization is a flat paradigm where all processes are intertwined, thus making the exercise of decision-making an involved process executed by work flow teams. Rather than having decisions made by the supervisory layers above, decision-making becomes an effort in collaboration and rests upon a management team that endorses and

445 Note that Brown and Duguid use the well-known example of FedEx to show that decentralized decision-making can and does occur, thanks to IT, but it is dependent upon a corporate commitment to an alternative power structure (Brown and Duguid, 2000: 29-30).
446 Stack, 1992: 71.
facilitates a climate of openness, cooperation, and empowerment. In this way, decisions are made “on the ground” in a consultative manner, across a matrix of power.\footnote{Examples of companies that might be regarded as horizontally organized companies include Whole Foods, which has an expressed “communitarian” philosophy in which all stakeholders in the company share in its fate, as exemplified by salary and bonus caps, and “open book” policy for all employees (who are called “team members,”) as well as an expressed mandate of information sharing.}

\textbf{The Horizontal Organization at Work: An Ironic Example}

In April of 2000, the Rice Alliance of Technology, Science and Entrepreneurship hosted one of its monthly seminars highlighting business concepts and focusing upon innovations in technology, science and business. At that particular seminar, then-Chief Operating Officer and President of Enron Jeff Skilling gave the keynote address. For the thematic focus of his speech, Skilling chose to discuss Enron’s new online transaction services which had been pioneered by his European division. Skilling declared that when his Scandinavian colleagues (technically, his subordinates) first suggested the concept of an online transaction capacity, he adamantly opposed the idea for a myriad of logistical and business reasons. Several months after Skilling rejected the proposition, the Scandinavian division informed him that they had established the service despite his opposition, with full resolution of the logistical and business concerns he had expressed. With these modifications now in place, Skilling was easily able to see the value of the online transaction services and within a few weeks of operations, more than 120 million dollars worth of transactions had occurred using the new capacity. Until the time of its demise, Enron’s new online capacities have become one of the most lucrative ventures in the business world.
The focus of Skilling’s account then shifted to the matter of Enron’s open and horizontal structure within which employees were not only empowered to think and act innovatively, but also the actual corporate infrastructure itself supported and encouraged genuine information sharing as well as a fairly democratized distribution of power.⁴⁴⁹ He explicitly stated that the success of the new online transaction services could only have been developed within an organization that allowed a climate and infrastructure to act with a large measure of freedom and autonomy. Noting that traditional corporate hierarchies based on the military model of vertical integration prevent not only the sharing of information, but also the power to act innovatively and creatively, Skilling expressed an appreciation for the horizontal equivalent which as exemplified by the case at Enron, proved to be profitable as well. According to Skilling, the corporations that will both survive and thrive in the future will possess a commitment to the empowerment of its workforce, as well as an employment climate that allows for the sharing of power.

After the Rice Alliance seminar, I mentioned the keynote address by Skilling to the Chief Executive Officer and another executive of CountryWatch, both of whom were former colleagues of Skilling. They both innocuously expressed “different philosophies regarding business” when speaking of Skilling. In comparing Skilling’s “philosophy” with that of the two CountryWatch executives, it might be said that the first formulation (outlined by Skilling) is illustrative of an emerging model germane to the current moment in which New Economy ideas have gained currency, only to be denounced when Enron’s scandals were revealed and taken up again in recent times with renewed and resurgent interest in

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⁴⁴⁹ In this case, “democratized” refers to the fairly autonomous framework of operations in which various divisions could accomplish tasks without a classically formulated reporting structure.
information, technology and the New Economy. The second formulation (the traditional institutional approach familiar to CountryWatch executives and in place within the company) reflects the traditional approach to labor, productivity and vertical integration, characteristic of Industrial society.

Put aside the corruption and disgrace associated with Enron (and Skilling himself as he faces the prospect of prosecution) and the type of organization Skilling has described is that of a fairly progressive one which resists normative and hierarchical organization. Meanwhile, despite its position as a so-called New Economy company with an informational orientation, and even though it is a small business in which employees are afforded more direct contact with key decision makers, CountryWatch is organized very much as a traditional, vertically integrated, hierarchical firm. The irony of this situation notwithstanding, as has been argued in this chapter, this type of organization is kept in place through the submission of people within them which is itself shaped by the actions, strategies, and operations that regulate the system. Moving beyond this type of organization -- primarily by encouraging cooperation rather than competition -- has been the topic of many writings and ruminations by human relations experts such as Tom Peters, Peter Senge and James Kouzes.\(^{450}\) For the most part, they call for the “liberation” from the standard structure of operations not via corporate-sanctioned reform or even grassroots change, but rather by transcending the hierarchy. Whether or not their particular prescriptions for such an outcome are feasible is not the point here. Instead, they provide an entry point to the next chapter’s discussion of counter-forces, which might function to subvert or resist the dominant forces within organizations like CountryWatch.

Landscape of Transformations:
Perspectives, Perils and Possibility from within the New "Informational" Economy

Volume II

by

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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Doctor of Philosophy
"Culture at CountryWatch? ….Well, there are several different cultures -- one is a "work very very hard" culture. Lots of running around and burning energy in a nervous, somewhat overwhelmed way. One is a "who do you know and what are your connections?" culture. One is a "what gender are you?" culture. VERY buddy-buddy thing going on that's clearly a Men Only club. That relates to the insider club culture.

It looks like we’re this small, laid back, start-up company on the outside and these days everyone pretty much gets along. But there is also this kind of entrenched traditional corporate thing going on… maybe because of the big multinational background that BK comes from, and he hasn’t really changed his outlook much in this place. Oh sure, he doesn’t wear Armani suits here, but it is the attitude that hasn’t changed. I guess it is the way in which only certain people can play with the big boys because they can speak about stock valuation and profit margins. It is as if some people speak the same language and some don’t and that makes a difference. There's a negative pattern of only including some people in company decisions and others don't even know major changes have happened. Communication I guess. Some people resent the fact that they are left out. They think to themselves, well I’m smart too, so
why doesn't my voice count? Some are actually better at it than others, I just experienced it a lot before. There would be a corporate reshuffle and my boss would be changed and no-one would even tell me --- stuff like that. Also lots of closed door meetings with a clear sense of who's in and who's out -- whose opinion is valued and whose is not. I think the company is too small for that. Less meetings would be healthier anyway.

Other side of the culture is one is pretty free to express themselves. There is not a lot of shaming and blaming kind of crap -- the anger is usually more low key and also directed at people who probably have done something to deserve it. (previous place I worked fired people weekly for very little reason and it created an abusive culture of fear). For the most part, CountryWatch values intelligence, innovation and independence (generally). It has a very "brainy" culture, which I love and enjoy. CountryWatch is open to laughs as long as it's not within a 3-hour radius of a board meeting or something else that makes people run around like chickens with their heads cut off.

There is this other facet, and it kind of cuts across the whole set-up because there are certain things, I guess you could call them values, which everyone shares. We might have intellectual differences on particular issues, but we're all kind of interested in similar things. It is a utopian view of the world, maybe it is something vaguely like a shared "we are the world" idea where "we have to make the world a better place" and the fact that the company's
focus is about the countries of the world, in its own way, brings this whole line of thinking together in some way.

There isn't enough social interaction though. We should have more little parties or dinners or stuff. Just every now and then so people will feel more like a part of the team. I must also have to say that teamwork is very very very evident in our department. This is a big stress reliever for all of us I'm sure. Lots of warmth and friendships fostered due to conscientious and kind editors.

Overall negatives are prejudices and "closed" clubs, the fact that we're understaffed, and anxiety. Positives: brainy, fun, warm and non-punitive -- you're not going to get your bra popped if you have to take off with a sick child.

A real positive set and a real negative set. Kind of interesting." 1

Westpoint Legacy

According to Edgar Schein, the most salient characteristic of a young organization is that it is the creation of a founder or founding families. 2 That is to say, the beliefs, assumptions, and values of the founder (or founders) are apt to be imposed upon the personnel hired, and upon

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1 This is an excerpt of a conversation with employee AMS.
the general functioning of the corporation. Over time, these convictions, ideas and tenets come to be shared and viewed as normative and this ethos becomes naturalized within the corporate culture. Schein observes that this ethos is the cardinal source of the organization's identity and competencies within the organization is defined and measured accordingly.

Many of the expressed perspectives by employees at CountryWatch (for example, the perception of the company as hierarchical and status-oriented) seem to come from the top. That said, there are other values and qualities that characterize the company such as the priority placed on business savvy as well as intelligence. This view has been articulated by several employees and can be traced in many of the interviews transcribed later in this chapter. In this way, other facets complicate the classic vertical and militaristic model.

If one considers the particular background of the founder as a graduate of the Westpoint military academy, it should be noted that this particular institution cannot be absolutely cast as a stereotypic military establishment. Westpoint’s militaristic framework exists along with its priority on the intellectual education of its cadets. The mission of Westpoint does not only entail the training and transformation of cadets into patriotic fighting machines but also their “education” and “inspiration.” In this regard, Westpoint keeps a tally of its recipients of prestigious awards and scholarships such as Rhodes, Herz, Marshall and Truman Scholars. Thus, if CountryWatch has been embedded by the founder’s Westpoint legacy, then the hierarchical structure is only one aspect and should also be considered along with the appreciation for “smart” and “competent” employees, as described by the company’s

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5 United States Military Academy at Westpoint.
founder. In this regard, the founder has said, “We want bright and talented people at CountryWatch, not just business experience but that spark of something more.” This founding philosophy of militaristic structure populated by educated and intelligent bodies is not, however, the same as the company vision.

More than the company’s short-term efforts to benefit from opportunities in the marketplace, the founder’s long-term vision ideally contributes to the success of enterprises, according to the analysis of the profiles of large corporations. In the interview detailed just below, the company’s founder has expressed two clear objectives in regard to the company. These objectives are: (1) to start an independent company and (2) to make it financially successful. Viewed jointly, these objectives hardly constitute a vision. In fact, CountryWatch has no clear or expressed image surrounding the corporate ethos, its image and its purpose. If there is a vision, it is an internationalizing one that has evolved from the inclinations and penchants of employees that are illustrated by the citations transcribed throughout this chapter.

The primary “embedding” mechanisms for the establishment of company philosophy (if not vision) can be established by looking at where the attention of the company’s leadership resides. For his part, the founder’s attention has been on the business (revenues, expenses, profitability) aspect of the operations and as noted in the previous chapter, not at all on the formation of a particular workplace ethos.

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6 See Deal and Kennedy, 1999: 26-28, which references the profiles of several large corporations, such as General Electric, Westinghouse, Citicorp, Chase, Motorola, Zenith, Ames, Walmart, Disney and Columbia Pictures, to suggest that the notions of vision, leadership and substantial goal setting for the long term were key characteristics of strong and robust companies.
7 Schein, 1994: 98.
Meanwhile, if the success of the corporate culture can be measured according to the strength by which the founding philosophy is rooted, some writers on corporate culture have said that failure is viewed via the challenges posed to the established regime. While there are clear frustrations with the rigidity of the company’s structure, as described in the previous chapter, the citation above and in the employees’ views transcribed later in this chapter, it might be difficult to concur with the notion that challenges to the established regime are demonstrations of failure. Indeed, as the case of CountryWatch illustrates, challenges to the established regime have resulted in the development of the employees’ own vision of the company and the ways in which their own interpretations and meaning may be realized in the micro-processes of their activities and their presence at the company. In this way, if there is a founder’s culture within the company, then it is also true that there are competing identities, values, motivations and meanings as well. The tension between these sets of interests texture the stakes ensconced within this research.

Empire

The Founder, Chairman and current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CountryWatch is a graduate of Westpoint military academy and holds a doctorate in economics from Harvard University. He has worked for a number of multinational energy companies including General Electric and Enron. At Enron, he was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Enron’s European operations but also negotiated and ran projects in other parts of the world, including Mongolia, Russia, the Central Asian states and India. He left Enron following the transition of power in that company in which Jeffrey Skilling became the new CEO. He

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8 Schein, 1994: 92
started CountryWatch shortly thereafter and later also co-founded a renewable energy company focused on wind and solar technologies called DKR. Following are excerpts from various conversations shared with him:

DY: “I am going to start as broadly as possible... why CountryWatch?”

BK: “I had the desire to run my own business; I had a lot of experience in economics. Everything I knew told me geopolitics could be a good market but I really did not understand the problems of marketing. For the most part, it was the subject material that motivated me. I am naturally inclined to global politics and economics, but I also wanted out of the typical corporate environment. I had had enough of the bureaucracy and the politics involved in the management of large companies. At the last company I was at – Enron -- there was a change in culture and personality and it was no longer interesting to me. So I wanted out.”

DY: “How was it less interesting?”

BK: “I am being deliberately vague. The people who came in were less interested in an asset heavy trading model, so I didn’t see that as a being viable path at Enron anymore.”

DY: “So you went from asset-heavy trading to CountryWatch or should I say, Commercial Data International?”
BK: “Yes, like I said, I was sick of the corporate garbage. A company in start-up mode is more concerned about survival than politics and everyone has to add value or you simply can’t afford to keep them on staff. Work is a value enterprise and the people are assets. A start up company is a very exacting environment. You can directly see the effects of any person’s efforts.”

DY: “I can see how a start-up company’s operations would be quite different from an established corporation. But why start a company of your own? Why undertake such a massive risk?”

BK: “Huge rewards. There is a positive net income. The market will pay high net multiples if we succeed. So I put my money into this idea because I believed there would be a reasonable return.”

DY: “I remember when there was a weekly rumor that the company was going to shut its doors because the burn rate was high and the revenues were low. Why did that not happen?”

BK: “To make a company work, you need to be determined. When it was just my money invested, it was easier to think about walking away but I always felt that we were just a step away from success. I still feel that way. When there are other people’s money invested and some of those people are friends with whom I have a connection, I have an obligation to see it through and make sure it succeeds. Same thing with the employees. After all these years, I can’t leave them hanging. I suppose in the final analysis it is a mixture of hope and obligation
that has kept me in the game, although I do believe that we have an admirable rate of growth and it is sustainable over the long term. So that is quite an achievement for all of us. We have 7 million sunk into the company. That's less than other start-ups so maybe that has helped. In the end, we can see market returns being generated, especially as we increasingly capture the market.”

DY: “It is clear that there may well be a monetary benefit if all goes as planned. But it isn’t as if you need this company to be successful. You're a very wealthy man. You have accomplished a lot. Why not retire? Why continue to work and why work at something as taxing as building a company from nothing?”

BK: “Call it work if you want but I do things I enjoy. I enjoy working with numbers, hence my interest in the forecast. I enjoy politics and the international component because I enjoy traveling and seeing other places. So that was part of the motivation behind the products like the Country Reviews. I'd buy similar reports from the Economist and they were so pricey, I figured I could create an alternative that a prospective traveler or a researcher could use. Getting back to the work – it provides a purpose in life. I like building things. I used to build pipelines and now I build wind power plants but CountryWatch is the information equivalent of building something out of nothing. You start off with nothing there and then you do all this work and you end up with something tangible. You can make power stations out of green fields or an international information database out of uninhabited cyberspace. Maybe it is work but it is also about fulfillment.”
DY: “So the money doesn’t factor into this?”

BK: “Sure the money factors into it. I have an interest in accumulating wealth, but not just so I can live the high life...Not that living well is a terrible thing. But the money isn’t just a pile of chips with which one can enjoy life. I think of it more as a scoreboard. Did I succeed? Did I acquire wealth? Did I enjoy it?”

DY: “So what you’re saying is that money isn’t pursued as the means of a fabulous life but as a measure of success and fulfillment. It is a barometer rather than a resource.”

BK: “I think so. Money is still a resource bit it is also an instrument with which I can gauge success. I think it involves what I was talking about before – my sense of obligation to investors and employees. It isn’t just about me; they have to succeed too as part of the team. I am the team captain and we all win together, but the rest of the team is looking to me to make it happen.”

DY: “So it is a team in so far as we’re all in it together, but you’re still the head of the team and the one with whom the majority of the responsibility lies.”

BK: “You know at Westpoint the motto is “duty, honor and country.” Duty lies in the fact that we all have to take work seriously; honor involves carrying out the work with integrity (none of those Enron shenanigans), and country in this case is not patriotism but loyalty...
loyalty to the company. I think those three things are the keys to success. Work hard and with integrity and the company will do well and we will all succeed.”

DY: “That’s interesting. The “work hard and succeed” formula is discussed all the time in American culture. It is one perception of how the capitalist system works to the individual’s benefit. But your formulation -- let’s call it the Westpoint formulation – is a little different. It isn’t one that can be framed in an equation of ‘if a then b’ or work hard and succeed. There is an imperative of work but it is work done within the sphere of a particular value system. And it is also about the collective interest, whether that is understood as country or company.”

BK: “I am a Ph.D. in economics. You’re turning philosophical on me. I am not saying you’re wrong in your observation, though. I just don’t think that much about it. It was time for me to leave Enron and create a company elsewhere. I think I just got tired of the work hard and succeed at any costs motto. It wasn’t something I could buy into.”

DY: “So you created your own company where you could be the team captain and the rules would be more acceptable.”

BK: “I think that’s probably right.”
DY: "There is this view, which I've heard mentioned by one or two people who shall remain nameless. They think that CountryWatch and DKR are your way of building your own little empire. What's your response to that?" 9

BK: "My empire? Hmm. My immediate response is to say that's a lot of bullshit. But maybe there is some truth there. I do want to create something new out of nothing and I do want to lead the successes of both CountryWatch and DKR. The whole idea of an empire is pretty loaded. I guess in terms of creating your own domain, having a central authority or unitary control, there are some aspects of empire there."

**Business Card as Insignia**

The Co-Chairman of CountryWatch and former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is also a graduate of Westpoint military academy and holds a doctorate in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has worked for a number of multinational energy companies including Enron. At Enron, he managed a number of projects in other parts of the world, including China and Indonesia. He worked in the Dominican Republic and after returning to the United States decided to join CountryWatch. Following is part of an interview with him:

BB: "I think I was a passive aggressive kid growing up. I was supposed to be the perfect son. Getting away and going to Westpoint was a way to gain a little independence. Except

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9 DKR is the renewable energy company founded by BK and two other people; the DKR office is located on the same floor as CountryWatch, and both companies share the same technical and telecommunications infrastructure.
you end up in this institutional machine so I am not sure I was actually getting the kind of independence I really craved. But I was good at sensing what people wanted and acting on that basis. So at Westpoint I was really doing that ‘smiling at the emperor’ and thinking bad thoughts inside.”

DY: “Smiling at the emperor?’”

BB: “I think there’s a Chinese phrase for it – ‘thick face and black heart.’ That was me. I excelled and then I became a senior cadet and the next obvious step was to go into infantry, but I chose armor instead (just to be slightly rebellious). I ended up in Vietnam. Then I was at Fort Bragg in the airborne division and after that, I was sent to Alaska to be a General’s Aid. That is when I thought that maybe I missed some things in life that a young officer should do, so I applied for graduate school and went to MIT. When I finished, I was on board with the Westpoint faculty for three years. I actually knew BK, who was also on the faculty at Westpoint during that time. The whole experience made it clear that I didn’t want to be a professor, but I also didn’t want to be in the army anymore. So I left. I hooked up again with BK and another fellow, JW, who were doing development work for Enron internationally.

DY: “So that was you entry point into Enron?”
BB: “Right. The first project was in the UK right after they privatized the energy sector there. We were building a large power plant – LNG.\textsuperscript{10} It was exciting to be part of something new and where there was the risk of failure, but the execution part – ugh – drudgery. Sheer drudgery. But JW had a knack -- I call it a lack of shame -- for asking for outrageous amounts of compensation and he’d arrange for us to be well compensated too. It was a wild time. We succeeded beyond people’s wildest expectations and when you pull off the impossible, then people start asking you to do other seemingly impossible projects. So by the 90s, I had worked on projects in the Philippines, China, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The last project was in Indonesia but then the Asian Financial Crisis cratered the whole deal. It was a project to ship LNG from Surabaya to Japan. The whole thing collapsed.”

DY: “This was the deal in which the son of the Indonesian president owned 50 percent of the interests and Enron owned the other 50 percent and the Indonesians decided they would rather go bankrupt than let Enron scoop up the remaining assets, right?”

BB: “Exactly. Anyway, I left Indonesia and then went to Panama to work on a project there to privatize the energy industry and then I went to the Dominican Republic to do a similar deal. Then, I went to India. I was taking these projects because people asked. That’s how I had carved out my career since leaving the faculty at Westpoint. But after India, I decided it was time to quit traveling and working on energy development. I was 52 and I had never been unemployed and I didn’t want to look for a job. I didn’t want to think about looking for another job. It was the late 1990s and the Internet was hot.”

\textsuperscript{10} LNG denotes liquefied natural gas.
DY: “So enter CountryWatch. The energy development consultant becomes an Internet executive?”

BB: “Here’s the thing... I was consumed with worry over how I would answer the question about what I do for a living. What do I say to people who ask what I do?”

DY: “Couldn’t you say you were retired? Wouldn’t the fact that you’re wealthy and successful and retired by the time you’re 52 be telling in its own way?”

BB: “People talk about retirement by 40 or 50 all the time but it is a crock. People say it’s great but it really isn’t. The fact that you retire is not enough. You have to do something or you feel like a dud. Maybe if you happen to be self-directed it wouldn’t be so bad. It isn’t easy to go from feeling like you’re making stuff happen to making nothing happen. Truthfully, I don’t think my heart was ever really in the whole Internet business, but I liked the idea of working on a really new idea, seeing it succeed. And I liked the title and association of working in a very hot and very interesting industry.”

DY: “The cachet factor.”

BB: “Yes, the cachet factor. But it is also the fact that this is unbroken ground, so it stimulates new ways of thinking about how to make it work, how to leverage the value. And
frankly, I was in a state of unbroken ground not knowing what to do with my life. It is the most fearsome thing that I was faced with, especially for a man.”

DY: “You don’t think it wouldn’t feel that way for some women who have spent their adult lives working?”

-laughter-

BB: “Oh don’t start with me!”

-laughter-

BB: “It was the most fearsome thing for THIS man (is that better?)”

DY: “The political correctness aside, I do think you are indicating a connection between work, identity and masculinity.”

BB: “I think that connection is exactly right. I don’t have all the right cultural answers for you; I just know how I feel and how it has been experienced for me. Not having a spot where you belong was a big part of the problem, because it touches upon your sense of self-worth. Finding a spot with the element of cachet was part of the motivation to come to CountryWatch. It gave me back that edge and that sense of value.”
DY: "Was part of the appeal also the risk factor? Investing in a start-up Internet company?"

BB: "I can do whatever I want. That's the benefit of wealth. The Enron payout for me came in the early 1990s -- long before all that asset-light business plan of Skilling and his lackeys. But I didn't have time to spend it... so I put it in the stock market where it increased, and I took the rest of it and created a charitable foundation."

DY: "That's the foundation you're currently working on?"

BB: "Yes. The thing about a foundation is that you have to give most of it away. It is a fact of law. So you never have room to be too greedy and too out of touch. But getting back to CountryWatch, I really didn't have the same kind of connection to the company as BK, so even if I lost all the money I invested, it still wasn't the kind of money that BK invested. And although I know people on the board, they weren't my selections. So I just don't have the same psychological framework at stake. I was a lot freer. It really comes down to the fact that CountryWatch gave me the kind of business card I wanted and it let me channel my interest in working on something really new. I am not a building guy. That's BK. That's what makes his blood pump. Not me. Building things slowly and executing them as I said before is drudgery. I like the excitement of new possibilities, and so the promise of the Internet is really what interested me in CountryWatch, although I can't say I loved it.

DY: "Interesting..."
BB: "I definitely didn’t love all the workplace dysfunction and having to manage that. I think we made a lot of mistakes. I think in a small company where you don’t have a human resources department to deal with the human dimension, you have to be good at thinking about this kind of thing yourself. And I don’t think I was good at that. I don’t think BK is either. I actually think a lot of the dysfunction also rests with the fact that we came from big multinational corporations in the energy industry and we really didn’t know what we were doing in so far as running a small, start-up Internet company was concerned. People are always looking for industry leaders and after the Enron disaster, there was all this talk about Old Economy rules having won the day. But I actually think that you need a very specialized New Economy skill set to be successful at companies like CountryWatch. Maybe we are learning on the job...”

DY: "So you think the human relations aspect is important, even more important in a small company? And you think that applying established business principles aren’t always the best thing, despite the so-called death of the New Economy?"

BB: "Funny, you call it human relations rather than human resources.... But yes, it is vital. There is always going to be dysfunction but I think in big business, it may be managed a little better by virtue of the existence of a human resources department. In a small company, dysfunction is not only tolerated but becomes part of the operations if it is left unchecked. I think that’s why we ended up with all those awful incidences of extortion from the company and so on. And yes, I do think you need to develop creative business practices. I wasn’t aware of that at the time, though. I was too busy experiencing the mild horror that we had no
idea how to publish but we wanted to be an online publishing company, that there were so few writers and researchers and that the IT expert was actually a musicologist. It is something to discover that the people who really end up building the company are not those we hired because of their impressive resumes but the young, bright people, with the eclectic backgrounds. The people we found through employment services ended up being freaks of the sort you might find via an online dating service. But then we also attracted other people who were driven to create and who simply fit into New Economy or informational mold much better. They don’t appear to be the typical corporate types and that’s what throws you -- as the executive -- for a loop. So you find out that the neatly processed, suit-wearing, excellent resume types are the real freaks and the ones who look like hippies are the ones you can count on.”

DY: “Ever heard the term ‘bobos’ – bourgeois bohemians?”

BB: Wasn’t there a book about that? Some kind of modern day hippie?”

DY: “Sort of. I was thinking of the whole idea of ‘bobos’ as you were describing the two different types who ended up being hired at CountryWatch. It is an interesting contradiction.”

BB: “It is even more contradictory when you factor in the Westpoint backgrounds of some of us... But you know, Westpoint was really good at reaching into the army and selecting people who were very talented and making them into stars. I think we’ve all had a lesson about how to do that at CountryWatch.”
Contradiction (*The Westpoint Boys Meet The Pseudo-Bobos*)

The executive branch of CountryWatch, along with most of the company's board members share similar Westpoint backgrounds and professional careers in the energy sector. As noted earlier, the operational structure of the company can clearly be described as traditional and hierarchical, based on the customary notion of vertical integration rooted in military institutions, with an emphasis on the intellectual capital of employees.

Despite the power wielded by the likes of the Westpoint-oriented executive branch, the "counter-culture" of the company has evolved into an influential force. CountryWatch has accrued a crew of employees -- from upper management to administrative staff -- who might be classified as Generations X-ers, hippies and other "subaltern" types. As a group, they are notorious for wearing Hawaiian shirts, Birkenstocks or toe rings to work. They tend to describe themselves as philosophically "non-traditional," "ultra-liberal" or "progressive" and they possess diverse artistic, ethnic, political, or academic backgrounds.

At the management level, the voices of this counter-culture have not prevented the domination of the company's aforementioned executive branch and advisory board by the Westpoint professional cadre. Still, CountryWatch's counter-culture, if one can use such a term, has reminded the executive office that global interests traverse beyond the realm of international business to human development, cultural and environmental matters as well. Whether or not these contentions carry weight and are treated with due diligence remains
unresolved. Nevertheless, this group of employees has resisted the norms of organizational structure and identity, ultimately reshaping the original identity formulation of the company via small measures of resistance and processes of inter-relational negotiation.

In a conversation with Dr. Steven Currall, an Associate Professor at Rice University’s Jones Graduate School of Management, the trend of counter-cultural voices mentioned directly above was described as “the gradual socialization of the executives and the company at large.”\(^{11}\) Noting that matters of human relations, organizational structure and what he refers to as “corporate climate” are the intangible elements that ultimately “make or break” most companies, Currall also holds the view that these ingredients are even more pronounced in cases of “start up” ventures where adaptability and creativity are requisite constituents of the workplace.\(^{12}\)

Returning to Schein’s assessment that a corporate culture’s success or failure rests upon the potency of the founder’s legacy, one could conceivably argue that the very notion of a unitary corporate culture appears to be a homogenizing one that assumes a monolithic and uniform ethos, and that overlooks the divisions and variations within the corporate topography. A contrasting view might be that the strength of a corporation’s culture is not measured singularly by the durability and dominance of the founder’s legacy. Perhaps a successful corporate culture can be one within which there is sufficient flexibility to accommodate change as well as competing ideas and concepts. Indeed, as noted by several

\(^{11}\) In May of 2000, I had one of many conversations with Dr. Steve Currall concerning many of the business and socio-cultural scenarios I had experienced at CountryWatch. The quote cited here was a response indicating Currall’s assessment of what I had described to him over the course of these conversations.

\(^{12}\) Dr. Currall stated this position in March of 2000, at an executive training program for alumni of the Jones Graduate School of Management.
CountryWatch employees, flexibility (as expressed in varying ways) tends to mitigate the more constraining aspects of the corporate structure. There are other competing themes, values, meanings and significances which inform the sensibilities of the CountryWatch employee counter-culture. The following section attempts to unpack some of their qualities and characteristics.

"Bourgeois Bohemians"

Some of the employees profiled in this chapter via conversational excerpts (excluding the two members of the executive office) have been heavily involved with the creative content and innovative technologies produced at CountryWatch. Others work in other capacities such as sales, marketing and administration. Most of them, however, fall into a category of well-educated, relatively young people, who may have tracked very different career paths for themselves but found themselves at CountryWatch simply because they were looking for appealing work of some sort. For example, included in the profiles described prior are a trained attorney running the sales department, a specialist in health administration working in sales, a writer / activist functioning as the head of accounting and administration, a social worker turned news editor, a financial analyst from Wall Street now editing the economic forecast, and a former United States Marine who directs the information technology department. There are also the usual suspects – political scientists who worked as regional specialists for CountryWatch’s editorial department who now work at academic institutions such as Yale University.
In trying to find a term to describe this cadre of players at CountryWatch, I happened upon a book about the “new upper class” by David Brooks that referenced the term, “bourgeois bohemians” or “bobos.” ¹³ Of course, it goes without saying that one cannot seamlessly and precisely superimpose Brooks’ depictions of an emerging class onto a group of individuals such as CountryWatch employees. Having issued this caveat, Brooks describes this emerging class in the following manner: “It used to be easy to tell a bourgeois from a bohemian. And the bourgeois were the straight laced suburban types, went to church, worked in corporations. And the bohemians were the arty free spirits, the rebels. But if you look at upscale culture, at the upper middle classes, the people in Silicon Valley, you find they’ve smashed the categories together. Some people seem half yuppie-bourgeois and half-hippie-bohemian. And if you take bourgeois and bohemian and you smash them together, you get the ugly phrase bobo.” ¹⁴

Brooks locates the source of bourgeois activity in the early 1700s when affluent colonists in the United States discovered refined tastes and gentility. ¹⁵ Richard Bushman has detailed the shift from the coarseness of life to refined elegance and sophistication in his survey of parlor society. ¹⁶ Adding to the rise of the bourgeois mode was the social ethic of the merchant class in which ambition was tempered by self-improvement, frugality, order and moderation. ¹⁷ By the late 1700s, there was a bohemian revolt underway whereby the materialism of the bourgeois classes was not simply eschewed, but repudiated. ¹⁸ Largely

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¹⁴ From an interview between Gwen Ifill and David Brooks on Public Broadcasting’s News Hour (2000b).
¹⁶ Bushman, 1992.
¹⁷ Franklin, 2003 (re-issue).
because artists had to succumb to a society increasingly dominated by merchants and the marketplace, revulsion for all things bourgeois increased among the creative classes, as exemplified by Flaubert's famous signature, "Bourgeoisophobus." Cesar Grana has examined this rising tide of bourgeois antagonism and concluded that it must be a manifestation of the doubts associated with the Enlightenment project, and the particular conflict between notions of freedom and the demands of practicality or rationalism in modern life. 19 Certainly, that element of dissonance between the practical matters of life and the impulse to freely follow one's inclinations is a characteristic frequently found in the musings of CountryWatch employees and others in creative and technological industries.

Brooks highlights some of the more recent sources of "bobo" culture and thought, spotlighting the 1960s and the 1980s particularly as key periods that have informed "bobo" sensibility. Notably, Reaganesque commercialism of the 1980s, illustrative of bourgeois activity, has been fused with the free-spirited bohemian elements and philosophical idealism of the 1960s. In this formulation, liberal or progressive values are positioned in opposition to the realm of (supposed) rational free market ideology. The bourgeois aspect of "bobo" culture can be confused with that of "yuppies" (young urban professionals) -- a neologism made popular during the 1980 that may accord with the metropolitan existence of CountryWatch employees two decades later. Meanwhile, as alluded to elsewhere, CountryWatch employees also tend to hold certain idealistic ideas about "a better world" and aspirations to improve "the quality of life." These sensibilities might well be associated with "hippies" or the bohemian dimension of "bobo" culture. Because the CountryWatch employees function in the professional world of "yuppies" but hold more spiritualized views

typically aligned with “hippies,” I have wondered if the term “yuppies” (yuppie-like hippies) might not present an alternative descriptor to “bobos.”

That said, while there may be distinctions in varieties of “bobos,” several characteristics and affinities of this broadly defined culture can be applied to the employee cadre at CountryWatch during a period marked by the New “Informational” Economy. 20 As noted by Brooks: “The people who went to universities with rebel attitudes suddenly found themselves with stock options. They hated consumerism, but they found themselves consuming. I mean, really, it’s a product of the information age, because the essence of this age is that ideas and creativity are as important as finance capital and natural resources. So those who thrive, can take on emotions and ideas, and turn them into products. And so they have one foot in the world of emotions and creativity and the other foot in the world of the marketplace. One foot is in bohemia and one is in the bourgeois world of selling.” 21

Following this vein of through, despite the prevailing influence of conventional business practices and traditional management styles discussed in this research, the business enterprise has been transformed to some extent from the domain of well-connected male members of powerful elites to a more amorphous constellation of meritocrats. In fact, one could argue that Westpoint graduates like the CEO of CountryWatch represent an earlier meritocratic typology of individuals born into modest circumstances but for whom the Westpoint experience acted as a springboard to future success. The CountryWatch cadre represents a New Economy variety of meritocrats. Education, ongoing learning, innovation, creativity,

technological acumen and business involvement have propelled them on a course for success. Unlike the "bobos" described by Brooks, CountryWatch employees are not necessarily wealthy although they certainly have the potential for wealth thanks to their stock options.

Status Code and Distinction

A particular assemblage of CountryWatch employees originate new technologies for content management and website development, create information and content in time compressed blocks and devise interesting strategies for building the business. For many, advancement within the company has been gradual and a result of years of contributions at less than market wage. Their efforts have been driven by the fact that they find their work -- in a word -- "interesting." Although considered to be bright and accomplished, they are not the sophisticated elites who function as vaunted consultants for well-known companies like McKinsey and Company or Accenture. Not excluding sales people whose compensation tend to be driven by salaries, commissions and bonuses, CountryWatch employees tend not to be motivated so much by money, but by creative impulse and the desire to be engaged by their work. Within the sales force, there are some for whom "the lessons of Death of a Salesman were taken to heart" and they question traditional notions of sales. \(^{22}\) Nevertheless, they now find themselves making a living in this very area. Within the editorial department, it is fair to say that most employees share a collective sense of frustration about the fact that they are constrained by cost and time from creating the kind of content they believe to be possible. For those who left CountryWatch entirely, there display some sense of nostalgia for both the company and the work. Among those who remain, there is no eagerness to leave and some

\(^{22}\) Brooks, 2000: 40-41.
degree of attachment is typically expressed, if not to the company then certainly to the work. A similar sort of attachment seems to reside within the information technology department.

For many of the highly specialized employees at CountryWatch, there is always the chance of wealth due to stock options held in this private company that may eventually be offered publicly or be positioned for a buyout. With such possibilities in the offing, most of these people know that there is a chance for substantial wealth creation. Yet few of them actually remark on its possibility when discussing their continued relationship with the company. As illustrated in the interviews and excerpts detailed in the research, a number of other themes are registered instead: flexibility, autonomy, knowledge, learning, intellectual engagement, interesting work, control, the intimacy of a smaller company, the opportunity to be part of building a company and watching it flourish.

Another frequently cited characteristic was the fact that most CountryWatch employees think of themselves as above average in intelligence and accomplishment. Returning to the exposition of "bobos" for a moment, Brooks recalls an essay called "This Age of Conformity" by Irvin Howe which, in 1954, discussed the lost vocation of intellectuals in favor of the bourgeois inclinations of intellectuals as they became seduced by money and the promise of a higher standard of living. 23 Going on lecture circuits and having attached themselves to institutes or commercial outfits, intellectuals were increasingly debased and commercialized. Perhaps inspired by Russian understandings of the intelligentsia, the vocational intellectuals rigorously pursued the truth, contested orthodoxy, resisted authority and took philosophical positions on matters expressed in elegant but authoritative language.

23 Howe, as cited in Brooks, 2000: 140-142.
24 In recent times, the plight of the intellectual’s soul has (supposedly) been lost while commercialization and the commodification of culture -- taken up by Theodore Adorno -- have become normal fare. 25 Today, the popular lexicon is filled with terms such as the “marketplace of ideas,” the “attention economy,” and “intellectual property.” 26 In this way, the sphere of ideas and intellect is co-opted for commercial advantage and bourgeois interests.

While CountryWatch employees cannot all be considered intellectuals, there are a number of scholars, innovators and technocrats who have been employed by the company. While hardly a think tank, CountryWatch’s fare has included a prescription for post-war development in Iraq, the prediction of economic crisis as a consequence of the precipitous slide in the United States dollar and massive structural deficits, as well as an alternative plan to deal with global warming. 27 An associate of the founder of CountryWatch named Daniel Yergin penned books on subjects such the history of oil and its promise of affluence. 28 These are no gravely intellectual or erudite tomes probing the issues of the day. That said, they have their own utility in serving a more pedestrian interest and consequently, these publications have gained currency. Moreover, information and analysis form the basis of intelligence products to be marketed and sold in niche markets. 29 In many senses, the economy of informationalism has spawned opportunities and career trajectories for people -- inside or outside the academy -- who have a capacity for research, writing, analysis and

25 Apart from Howe, see also Adorno, 1991.
27 See White, Kelly, Cape and Youngblood Coleman, 2003; Kelly, Baldwin, Rolfes and Youngblood Coleman, 2004; and Kelly, 2002.
29 Brooks, 2000: 149.
creativity. These opportunities tend to be lucrative and offer career advancement. As a result of this development, the very term "intellectual" and its associated meanings have come to mean "educated analyst" and "specialized expert." "Educated analysts" are regularly interviewed for comment and insight in the media and "specialized experts" are called upon to offer testimony in certain legal matters. For the average person on the street, there is no distinction between classical intellectual scholars and this professional knowledge class.

Using CountryWatch as an example, niche markets include corporations, government agencies and educational institutions in need of an online encyclopedic source of geopolitical information. The professional knowledge class functioning in this arena possesses academic capital in the form of the correct degrees from esteemed universities and political capital via the high level connections formed in multinational business transactions. These qualifications -- or what Pierre Bourdieu terms "symbolic capital" -- are leveraged for financial gain and for other benefits such as notoriety and distinction. Brooks wryly notes that although intellectual life is always a mixture of careerism and altruism, "the bobo intellectual reconciles his quest for knowledge with the quest for the summer house." I am not sure that this formulation extends precisely to the employees of CountryWatch because the regular employees (executives and board members excluded) are simply not wealthy enough to be classified in this way. Still, as exemplified by statements like "I have to make a

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31 Because I write and edit reviews on every country in the world, I receive innumerable requests to serve as an "expert witness" in international cases involving subjects such as human rights, immigration or political asylum.
living” and “I have to pay my bills,” it would seem that the nexus of knowledge-oriented work and material considerations form the rationale for this kind of work.

Employees of CountryWatch express other predilections as well. They consistently describe themselves as being creative or having creative inclinations. Illustrated by several profiles of employees, attachment to the work at CountryWatch is partially due to the belief that they are ill-suited for “regular jobs.” One CountryWatch employee said, “I could get a job working on inventory projections at a department store or doing data analysis for some boring company but that would be beneath me. I have to do something interesting… something that fascinates me. I think you might as well give me cyanide-laced cake as my last meal if I had to work in retail or something ordinary like that.” In this way, the distinction -- usually captured by the frequently used descriptor “interesting work” -- constitutes the key consideration.

This is not to say that the technical and editorial employees at CountryWatch are unaware of the fact that they are paid more in stock options than by paychecks. Likewise, they are fully cognizant of the sheer volume of work that is expected of them. On a very small staff, hundreds of thousands of web pages filled with information and data must be maintained and updated on a virtual 24-hour cycle. As noted elsewhere in the research, the information producers of the company are aware that they are the equivalent of “third world-ers” pumping our products to be marketed and sold in the “first world” marketplace. The appeal in many senses dwells not in the promise of wealth so much as the work itself, and the associated sense of control and ownership that they feel for their work.
The technical specialists feel as though they "own" the website. It is their domain of control. As noted by one information technologist, "It isn't the best feeling to know that when the network crashes, I have to fix it. That is a lot of pressure. But I do like the fact that I CAN fix it and when everything is working as it should be, it is because of me. And I love the fact that I can work on the new website development and when it is done, I can say, wow, that is mine." In the online publishing business, network crashes or node failures resulting in lost Internet connectivity are the equivalents of massive heart attacks and kisses of impending death. For Internet-based companies, there is nothing so terrifying as the error message "http 404 file not found." Usually, other people in the office also encounter the same message within the same time frame, so the drama unfolds, punctuated by woeful cries of "Where did my Internet connection go? and "The site! The Site! We're down!" These wails are typically followed by suddenly crowded hallways that become filled with anxious employees commiserating about the prognosis. The technological specialist in such a situation is the doctor or healer who restores life through connectivity.

Likewise, editorial staffers note that there is something mystical about writing about the inauguration of the new leader of the Central Asian republic of Georgia and pressing a button and making a storyline "go live." When the country of East Timor finally gained its independence after a bloody imbroglio with Indonesia, the country-specific web page for East Timor "went live" on the moment of independence. Coverage of East Timor began in that moment and CountryWatch went on to boast that it was the first country-specific provider to do so, beating out the Economist and other competitors. "Going live" is akin to
breathing life into something that was already there. Watching an item be transformed into published hypertext across cyberspace within a micro-second makes an event seem hyper-real. As well, there is a sense of control over the substance of that which is conveyed to the world of reception. Choosing which news highlights to crawl across the new ticker on the front page of the CountryWatch website becomes an act of authorship, carrying with it a kind of authority that that young professionals are rarely afforded. So despite the endless work and the perception from the outside that the technical and editorial staffers are minions in the business world, there is some sense of importance (even self-importance) infused into the scenario.

Authority and importance, however, are expressed with subtlety. Extravagant displays of wealth have given way to more nuanced expressions of taste. The images of executives and business people seated at polished desks, dressed in finely tailored Italian suits, ruthlessly conducting business no longer apply to New Economy companies. They have given way to key players and corporate “team leaders” seated on ergonomically correct chairs, dressed in torn jeans, contemplating the implications of disintermediation and information decentralization in a post-Gutenberg information galaxy.

This imagery is only one aspect of this changing workplace. Of particular significance is the way in which the authorship of work in business is understood. Despite the ascendency of commercialism and the capitalist frame, the business motif has been pushed to the recesses of the consciousness, obfuscated by notions of creativity and personalized expression. Of course, the fact remains that companies like CountryWatch are still functioning as businesses
with marketplace orientations and in accordance with accepted business objectives: to minimize cost and maximize profits and shareholder value. These operational facts, however, are obfuscated by conceptual veils. For example, CountryWatch is in the information business but CountryWatch writers and editors express pleasure about their jobs by stating that they get to write about the countries of the world. They also note that they get to “educate” people about the less known parts of the world. One writer said, “It is all about Iraq, Iraq, Iraq and maybe a little about the Israelis and Palestinians in the regular media. But we get to bring attention to Bolivian grass roots movement or human rights abuses in Zimbabwe.”

In this way, employees appeal to the importance, value and authorship of their jobs, while eschewing the business considerations that frame and fund those very jobs. This is a mechanism of negotiation by which they extract meaning and significance from their work within a corporate system for which they may not feel complete acceptance. Hence, part of the desire to eschew the business (as a business) lies in the doubt and ambivalence about conventional corporatism and the business establishment. In fact, it is unlikely that this cadre of employees would wax lyrically about any establishment order in the first place. This is probably why a small business like CountryWatch holds some appeal, despite the reality of its conventional management order and sometimes stultifying hierarchy. This anti-establishment element expressed in antagonisms of some employees is not just an opposition to the structure of the company, but a generalized dissatisfaction with the business ethos. Of course, it is highly doubtful that employees would express their frustration in theoretical terms. Stated differently, they are unlikely to deconstruct corporate capitalism in everyday
conversation. In workplaces and in businesses like CountryWatch, business operations take precedence and the human dimension is considered after the fact, when time or money permits. As a tenet, this conceptual framework is not one of prosperity with a purpose, but rather purpose after prosperity. Other imaginative alternatives are rarely considered and as a result, there is discontent with the established order.

So why do workers who experience this type of discontent continue to work in business (apart from the obvious pragmatic demands of livelihood)? Let us return for a moment to the engagement experienced with their work and particularly, aspects of authorship and control. It may be that the particular expertise or ability that they have cultivated in their work allows them to negotiate some sense of peaceful existence within the business domain. Call it savoir faire or refer to it simply as a specific skill set, for those in information technology, there is an intimate understanding of the arena. At CountryWatch, there are so many proprietary applications and specialized functions that a technologist forms an understanding of the quirks found in sequel servers, the flow of information to and from voluminous databases and the peculiarities of web-friendly font sizes and vector graphs. Likewise, editorial staffers have acquired sources and strategies for following the permutations of governmental processes and election accounting around the world. In a sense, they have a "feel" for the processes involved in making information come alive and for understanding the interrelationships and networks involved in so doing. Integrating new workers into this scenario is never easy and as a result, employees "in the know" possess a sense of responsibility that drives engagement with work.
Let me try to place this formulation in concrete terms. Given the demands of my job, I know that the United Nations peacekeeping forces use CountryWatch reports to prepare peacekeepers for missions abroad. I know this because I receive messages from the missions coordinator notifying me about upcoming tours of duty in which she typically issues special requests. These requests are not just about the content but also about the way in which it is served over the Internet platform. Whatever frustration I may feel in regard to the business or the company is assuaged and pushed aside by the immediate demands of my job and the responsibility felt to those who read CountryWatch material. And yes, this sense of responsibility likely feeds the aforementioned impression of importance (and self-importance). For editorial staff, the significance of creating material to be used by peacekeepers lies in its ability to heal the metaphoric soul that they fear has “sold out” to business interests.

The matter of “selling out” to business touches upon a particular set of politics and a specific brand of social awareness shared by many who work in editorial and technological departments in New “Information” Economy companies. This cadre of employees tends to be socially aware, and as in the case of CountryWatch, they are particularly sensitized to the politics and economics of the international scene. Not surprisingly, their shared discussions often include discourses about social justice and fairly sophisticated policies. 34 During lunch, in hallways, over coffee or drinks, conversation focuses on political developments, articles read in progressive journals, such as *The American Prospect* or *The Atlantic Monthly*, issues such as the widening chasm between rich and poor, and social movements including gay rights. They regularly email each other articles about matters ranging from

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34 Brooks, 2000: 40.
failed structural adjustment programs in Latin America to burgeoning ecological awareness in Central Africa. Most are involved in community service, volunteerism, or community engagement in some measure.

Although the company does not participate in corporate sponsorships, CountryWatch employees voluntarily contribute to Heifer International -- a not-for-profit organization that works to end hunger in communities around the world. The resonance of this particular agency with CountryWatch staff probably lies in the fact that the agency binds collective interest in international affairs with a shared politics devoted to social justice issues. Several employees have said that working in a corporate environment has made it difficult to work through their philanthropic inclinations. In this regard, some employees have said that they feel "trapped" by the agendas of a business world that does not share the same priorities. Because of its international focus, involvement in the Heifer project affords a sense of relevance, perhaps in ways not so dissimilar to the sense of "responsibility" mentioned above. As such, involvement of this sort offers a means by which employees can shape the organizational culture so that it concurs (in some limited measure) with their apparent values.

The presence of those values is registered in the high degree of political correctness that employees exercise. Recounting some of the incidents of insensitivity discussed in the previous chapter, one CountryWatch employee said "to display the boorishness of racism and sexism is to show a lack of civility, education and compassion."

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35 Heifer International Agency.
Because of their relative youth, some of these employees also distinguish themselves from their more mature colleagues because they simply lack a sense of desperation or compulsion to succeed. That is to say, experiencing panic about wealth and success is an anathema. They have a more metaphysical approach to such matters. In fact, to be concerned about wealth (as per their more mature colleagues) is to denote a lack of status because there is an overt celebration of anti-materialism among this grouping. This hardly makes them Generation X type “slackers” of the type profiled in popular culture. Instead, as shown by their own impressions and attitudes expressed in the research, they have their own motivations, purposes, meanings and impulses that frame their lives.

They share lunch on “the hill” overlooking the Omni Hotel close to the office, or occasionally at quaint restaurants with unique cuisine and reasonable pricing. They have drinks on Fridays at the run down bar with a vast offering of South American wine and cheap Belgian beer. They wear Seattle-style grunge wear, although ethnic-chic, resale chic, on sale chic, and retro chic are also common attire. They balk at coworkers who pay full price for designer items, noting that they are vulgar displays of vanity mixed with stupidity. A common phrase used to decry those possessing the penchant for shopping and consumerism is “more money than brains.” The ceaseless bashing of such consumerism may take place at Starbucks which they will admit is “a bastion of commercialized coffee hell.” However, since they usually condemn Starbucks while simultaneously sitting, drinking and enjoying coffee within its premises, the denunciations cancel out their very presence within Starbucks’ walls to begin with.
This mental framework might be called “financial correctness.” It might also be regarded as a kind of countercultural capitalism. According with the anti-establishment sentiment mentioned earlier, this creative cadre of employees subscribe to particular conventions on materiality. Whereas in the past wealth was something to be displayed ostentatiously in the form of Cadillacs and Newport mansions, the expression of wealth has been transformed so that it is now a matter of taste. That is to say, it is based on the knowledge of what is “the best” and how to choose it. In a sense, the expression of wealth has become more discreet and nuanced by the concept of taste so that even the less wealthy can express upper class discrimination by choosing the best coffee (smooth semi-dark Brazilian blend sweetened by raw brown sugar) or the best bed linens (natural fibers with the highest thread count) or the best handmade soaps (made from ylang ylang and pure sandalwood). Extravagance -- in the form of East Coast mansions or expensive cars -- is viewed as vulgarism and as such, it has been replaced by everyday taste-driven consumerism. Coffee, linen and soap are also more accessible and inexpensive expressions of status and distinction. In this way, the code of “financial correctness” requires subtlety and the celebration of taste. As illustrated in the Starbucks scenario, it also involves the condemnation of all things commercial. Meanwhile, raw brown sugar, handmade soap and natural linen all suggest motifs of authenticity that contravene against the tastelessness and impropriety of commercial wares.

Another aspect of the code of “financial correctness” is what Brooks calls “one downmanship.” This feature involves simplicity in the face of formality and splendor. The relaxed (but not necessarily thrifty) self-presentation of editorial and technical staff at
CountryWatch style is a reflection of this code that also involves international garnishes. For example, an employee might wear a Guatemalan belt bought from a peasant in a village during his or her jaunt in Central America. Likewise, when an employee is complemented on an Indonesian scarf, a colorful story might follow about how said employee happened upon it in the first place. It might begin with a statement about how that employee was working for a development agency in that part of the world. These international garnishes in self-presentation are valorized as exemplars of authenticity and positive social ethics. They are portrayed in contrast to someone else sporting an expensive diamond ring -- an item sure to spur conversation about the financial and political incorrectness of African “conflict diamonds.”

The expressions of taste, preference and choice discussed here are also signifiers of status within the social structure. In this regard, it may be useful to consider Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the “habitus” which is “at once, a system of models for the production of practices and a system of models of perception and appreciation of practices.”  38 These constructions form both social position (in this case an emerging privileged New Economy class) and the context in which this social positioning is constructed (a state of cultural and economic transformation). Bourdieu goes on to say that “the habitus produces practices and representations which are available for classification.”  39 In so doing, certain items can be classified and categorized along a gradation of quality, marking and grading some items as superior and alternative types as inferior.

Bourdieu observes that the social world presents itself as a symbolic system or differentiated variation in which various activities, choices and lifestyles are “coded” to signify different things in a subterranean manner. That is to say, Bourdieu’s respective champagne, wine and whiskey drinkers correlate to the drinkers of better and worse coffee among “bobos,” “yuppies” and CountryWatch types. Choices, preferences and tastes are coded to signify and connote status and distinction. It is in this sense that Bourdieu notes that for those who “possess the code” (that is, the conventions of classification) not only is one’s own place understood, but also that of “the other.” Moreover, those who determine the best tastes (the best coffee, the best soap and the best linen) in opposition to lesser alternatives are themselves products of the social conditions in which they exist.

In this particular case, those social conditions may not precisely imply a life of privilege. Still, given the life worlds of the people at CountryWatch, those social conditions may denote some relative proximity to privilege. The simultaneous understanding of injustice complicates the scenario so that things determined to be “the best” are not only items of economic privilege but also items deemed to be politically or socially appropriate, as exemplified by the motifs of authenticity. Indeed, an element of antagonism can be identified if one considers the following categories of items imbued by levels of economic privilege and sociopolitical correctness:

(1) Items that are symbolically endowed but materially lacking (a handmade soap from a fair trade cooperative in a developing country)

40 Bourdieu, 1990: 133.
(2) Items that are both symbolically and materially endowed (an expensive but environmentally efficient hybrid vehicle)

(3) Items that are materially endowed but symbolically lacking (mansions, Cadillacs and diamonds).

The ability to classify, categorize and choose -- according to preferences and tastes within the field of goods and services -- is emblematic of one’s location on (or close to) a particularly textured landscape. 41 In this case, it is a landscape marked by both economic advantage as well as a regime of political and social “consciousness” (for lack of a better word), ultimately resulting in financial correctness.

Professional Engagement and Personal Idealism

Given the backgrounds of CountryWatch’s founder and investors, workers are painfully aware that the company is funded by the profits of big business such as Enron and via players at the highest level of the capitalist system in the United States. These are people who fly on corporate jets, have second homes in Aspen and golf on private courses in the Virgin Islands. While the technical and editorial employees at CountryWatch may excoriate big business, monopolistic ventures, corporate welfare and corruption in theory, they may well distance the company’s executives and investors from these matters. For example, during conversations about the corruption that ensued at Enron, it became quite common to hear someone say, “Well, BK (the CEO) left Enron when Skilling came on. So there’s no way he could be like the rest of them.” Another frequent assertion is that “BB (the co-chairman) doesn’t talk to

Ken Lay anymore.” Utterances of these types are presumably intended to reconcile prevailing belief systems with the fact that there is some complicity with the dominant market system that is regarded with ambivalence and doubt. The coexistence of countercultural impulses within free market orthodoxy discussed here seems to rest on the domestication of anti-establishment sentiment and its absorption into the capitalist mainframe.

As noted by David Brooks, this cultural movement is “by instinct anti-establishment, yet, somehow sense they have become a new establishment.” 42 Thus, the people who form this cultural movement are characterized by a sensibility of anxiety about their uncomfortable positioning. In a sense, they live the tension between external success and internal virtue along an axis of countercultural capitalism. 43 The uneasiness of anti-establishment capitalism involves the desire to resolve the theoretical and cultural contradictions that texture the lives of those who live within its borders. This uneasiness may be connected with a sense of prevailing anxiety. After all, the volatility in the economy in recent years has meant that job security is not to be taken for granted. Another crash could be around the corner or another quarter away. Although this cadre of people do not actively strive to become wealthy, it is not implausible that a more generalized sense of insecurity about economic conditions might reinforce the drive to work, learn, and perform. Whereas other generations may look toward wealth generation as a process ending in comfortable retirement, this generation of workers cannot place their faith in the durability of a turbulent economy. Yet it is this very sense of anxiety that may well have contributed to the

sensibilities of these people. That is to say, they have re-adjusted and re-calibrated their value systems so that attachment toward the external manifestations of success like money and consumer products has been replaced by internalized values of consciousness instead.

Economic concerns offer only one rationale for the anxieties associated with the tension between “external success and internal virtue” and for the unease associated with the inherent contradictions of anti-establishment capitalism. According to Daniel Bell, capitalism is itself informed by contradictory compulsions -- Weberian notions of self-discipline and hard work on the one hand, and self-gratification and accumulation on the other. 44 Notions of freedom, liberation and exploration may have led to the erosion of discipline and hard work, while consumerism and materialism have resulted in an endless orgy of acquisition in which material satisfaction can never quite be satisfied. For Bell, this development was described as a deep crisis of the human spirit and augured disaster as a result. Disaster, however, did not quite arrive. The actual outcome was the increasing importance of work.

The increasing primacy of work has been attributed to the baby-boomer generation. 45 Most of the editorial and technological employees at CountryWatch, however, fall more neatly into the Generation X demographic classification and also express the significance and primacy of work in their lives. Perhaps one can make the argument that young people employed in creative and technological arenas -- from technology companies in Silicon Valley and other technology-rich locales to start-up companies in unlikely locations like Houston-based CountryWatch -- have become increasingly attached to their work. If this theory holds true,

44 Bell, 1996 [1976].
then it runs counter to the view that work is becoming less important in the formation of American selfhood. Perhaps the primacy of work is specific to a particular cross-section of society including well-educated, well-traveled and fairly well-paid persons for whom international engagement, social justice and idealism are central core considerations. Stated another way, their engagement, activism and idealism are made possible materially by earning wages and psychically through the creative, interesting and informative nature of work itself. That is to say the work and engagement feed one another and become mutually consuming. As stated by one employee at CountryWatch, “I actually moved out of my old place so I wouldn’t be distracted by other people and I could work more diligently late at night from home.” Meanwhile, a developer from an information technology company observed that even when he is in bed at night, he “is thinking about code.” 46 His perspective was reflected in the view of a CountryWatch developer who talked about “being in the code” in much the same way as one might “be in the zone.” Within the editorial department, a wire editor observed that even though she is not officially expected to work both weekend days, she invariably does so because she “can’t stand the idea of us not generating as much news as any other day.” She also said that “shit still happens in the Congo and the FARC is still kidnapping politicians in Colombia, even if it is Sunday and everyone here wants to watch football.” 47

Indeed, the cycle of events in the world of information is endlessly churning and continues without stoppages. Likewise, technology used to power Internet websites and ventures is a 24-hour endeavor. It is without spatial and temporal boundaries that make the responsibility

46 “Code” is a referent for the various coding languages used in programming.
47 FARC is the revolutionary leftist rebel group responsible, along with several right-wing paramilitaries, for much of the ongoing violence in Colombia.
involved for maintaining these ventures endless. In cases of small start-up companies for which there are limited financial and human resources, this makes the burden of work more acute. Certainly, at CountryWatch and at a number of other small start-up ventures such as DigitalSoldiers or Enform Technologies young specialists working in the realm of the New "Informational" Economy are often the last ones to leave the office parking lot late at night and the ones most likely to work on weekends. Yet, as exemplified by CountryWatch, these very people who tend to expound vociferously about the problems of the capitalist world are also likely to be driven toward success within its very enclaves.

Unlike typical workaholics, this cadre of people is driven to succeed but not necessarily to amass wealth. Success is measured in other terms. Recalling the earlier notion of intellectual vocation, work among this cadre has become a vocation of sorts, rather than a job nor an occupation. It is not defined purely by exertion although energy and action are certainly involved. It is not simply about function either, although laborious process and progress are imperative. As expressed by several employees in their desire to make their work “go live,” the idea of eliciting an effect or arriving at a specified condition is part of the attraction. Work also implies wielding influence and as stated by other employees, expressing idealism and activism about the world has been an impetus for many employees’ continued tenure at CountryWatch. The expression of idealism and activism this sense entails an almost redemptive quality because it offers some degree of mental salvation for individuals who may view the capitalist system within which they operate with ambivalence.
In this way, work takes on a spiritual quality and is assumed with a kind of messianic zeal. The company’s success — not so much as a business but in terms of the idea it represents personally to the people in the company — depends upon the work. The United Nations peacekeepers depend upon it. Indeed, shared senses of identity depend upon it because work has become an expression of being. Work in this context may form the nexus by which contradictions can be reconciled. That is to say, work as a practice of capitalism is changed by the conditions in which it exists. It is transformed into a practice of idealism and an expression of sensibility. In this way, it becomes associated with meaning in life.

Whereas financial well-being is understood as the most obvious objective of work, notions of purpose, significance and meaning have taken on increasing importance. That meaning may be derived from the mark of distinction — of being different from “typical” or “average” workers in other “ordinary” fields of employment which, as stated by one CountryWatch, would “deaden the soul.” That distinction is also derived from the importance (and self-importance) associated with doing “interesting” work whereby employees are required to have their pulse on the events of the world. The element of distinction is also manifest in BB’s need for an important and distinctive title to go along with his business card. In fact, the element of distinction also flows through the references to “intelligent” and “brainy” people who work at CountryWatch. Meanwhile, job titles, which denote status, are much like educational qualification by the manner in which they convey symbolic capital. As noted by Pierre Bourdieu, they offer the “profits of recognition.” 48

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Frustrations of the sort expressed by AMS at the very beginning of this chapter about workers who wield more or less influence across the network of power relations are found in the realization that not everyone across the working landscape has the same cache of symbolic capital. Moreover, those in possession of greater quantities of symbolic capital are themselves recognized and acknowledged in this regard. ⁴⁹ As such, they can monopolize rank and status and they can also influence the terms of value. This is why Bourdieu suggests that symbolic power entails the capacity for “world making” or the power of constituting divisions and authority. ⁵⁰ Put another way, symbolic capital functions as a kind of credit or trust. It is given to those who have garnered recognition and status and who -- as result of that positioning -- can now impose recognition and status. Power is thus constituted and reconstituted from within, essentially deeming designation of “insider” and “outsider” status. ⁵¹

Regime Formation: Acculturation and Regulation

Employment dissatisfaction of the sort produced by divisions and structural control discussed above is rarely understood as the failure of organizational justice. In his examination of working class youth bound for work in factories, Paul Willis says “Neither the institutional, customary, and habitual forms in which domination is mediated from basic structural inequality, opposed and transformed, are recognized for what they are.” ⁵² With regard to working class youth, Willis explains this matter by drawing attention to the fact that social

⁵¹ Even so, symbolic power is both limited and facilitated by material capital in the modern capitalist context.
⁵² Willis, 1977: 59.
regions, the institutional supports and the relationships shared contain some measure of autonomy from the wider realm of social conditions.\textsuperscript{53} Likewise, the procedures, processes, and workplace conditions of CountryWatch while illustrative of macro-cultural features also contain their own particularities. That is to say, CountryWatch has its own specific legitimizing belief system about "interesting work" and its own specialized system of informality in self-presentation and operation that function to insidiously conceal the organizational machinery of domination. So despite the fact that the configuration of the company is that of a formalized and hierarchical corporation, these particular characteristics ("interesting work" and the casual workplace environment) have a mystifying effect.

Meanwhile, there are explicit measures of control and regulation at work. In particular, discipline functions to augment and maintain the institutional axis of the company. At CountryWatch, VS holds regular meetings with her sales staff. Once a month, she asks them to submit their answers to a questionnaire logging the amount of time they believe they spent on "work related activities." VS has presented this procedure to her staff as a measure of "professional accountability." Asked why she would implement this gauge, she responded "I thought it would help my staff be more aware of time management. I thought it would be really useful for them in their professional self-development. It is going to help them increase their time management skills. And since they're logging their own time and taking stock of their own use of that time, it really respects their autonomy." The fact that this questionnaire is actually a glorified clocking mechanism notwithstanding, VS is of the mind that she is assisting her employees in their professional development. Because the employees must fill out these questionnaires themselves rather than be evaluated by their supervisor, there is

\textsuperscript{53} Willis, 1977: 59.
some veneer of acceptability because the procedure appears to respect the autonomy of employees. Yet this is precisely the reason that these very employees cannot easily resist the procedure as unfair. After all, the exercise has been presented as one that is to their benefit. In this way, VS has implemented an instrument of discipline, aimed at maximizing productivity and ultimately intended to compel desirable behavior. Beneath the expressed rationales for exercise lies a prescription for right and proper corporate conduct. As noted by Willis "it is the moral intensity of maintaining this axis" which is at stake.  

Such "moral intensity" is expressed as correct and appropriate posturing. For example, some employees may be condemned as having "a bad attitude" while others may be praised for the opposite. Of course, the words "right attitude" or "wrong attitude" are rarely used. Eating at one's desk while working through lunch fits into the domain of having the "right attitude." Taking a lunch break and leaving the office, although technically acceptable, is scrutinized while returning late from lunch falls into the realm of violation. In crude analogous terms, taking a lunch is technically acceptable in much the same way as one might drive through an intersection while the green light turns amber. If amber switches to red while one is still in the proverbial intersection, one is at fault. Vigilance about lunch schedules and habits is part of the life world at CountryWatch. At best, it is discussed with mixed irritation and amusement among employees. At worst, it results in the feeling of being part of a totalitarian regime. In one particular case, manager JC inquired, "Oh we're going out for lunch, are we?" Employee MH who was the subject of this inquiry smiled and demurely murmured in the affirmative. After the fact, during conversation with colleagues, she said pointedly "WE are not going for lunch. I am going for lunch because it is my goddamned right to eat a freaking

54 Willis, 1997: 66.
lunch and I shouldn’t have to sit at my desk to do it!” While her assertion was indeed true, according to the unspoken disciplinary regime of CountryWatch, she -- like all employees -- is subject to rather constraining expectations. By acting in accordance with those expectations, a given employee displays to management that she or he is conscientious and possesses a “good attitude” and a preferred work ethic. This ethic harkens back to BK’s Westpoint motto involving hard work and positive values.

The notion of a preferred work ethic has also been manifest at CountryWatch by VS’s exasperation with employee AA’s query about the number of vacation days and paid holidays available. AA was upset that some annual holidays in 2004 such as Independence Day fall on weekends. Because employees “lose” these day offs, AA emailed the upper management asking if employees would be compensated for these holidays. VS, responded by prefacing her correspondence with the words: “according to the employee handbook…” VS then went on to explain that the vacation and holidays available were delineated in the handbook according to the name of the holiday and not on the particular week day when such a holiday might fall. As such, AA was not “losing” a day off as she never had the day in the first place. VS then forwarded the text of the email conversation to other colleagues in upper management along with an irritated exposition about AA’s preoccupation with days off. Asked why a legitimate inquiry would cause her such aggravation, VS replied that AA was more concerned about days off than the days she was expected to work. She then asked, “What does it say about her work ethic, hmmmm?” For AA’s part, she explained that her repeated inquiries about paid leave might be an indication of the general stress and exhaustion she was experiencing. She noted “If I know I have Independence Day off in July
when I know I am going to be going crazy closing all the academic deals for the fall semester, then I just feel better... like I am going to have a break from it all.” Meanwhile, VS counters AA’s register of discontent (expressed in the articulation of repeated inquiries) by referencing the handbook as a manual of objectivity. That is to say, the schedule outlined in the handbook is not only to be understood as a timetable but also an independent mechanism of regulation. Put simply, AA should not be concerned about losing days off because “according to the handbook” she was never entitled to compensatory days anyway.

In his discussion of the state schools attended by the working class youth of his study, Willis pays attention to other mechanisms of control such as the way in which architectural design and the use of space function to impress the structure of domination. Willis writes “In a simple physical sense students and their possible views of the pedagogical situation are subordinated by the constricted and inferior space they occupy, Sitting in tight ranked desks in front of the larger teacher’s desk; deprived of private space themselves but outside nervously knocking the forbidden staff room door.” 55 In the former office space of CountryWatch, staffers were cramped into small cubicles in shared spaces while executives had large offices with expansive windows at the end of long corridors and hallways. My private closet-sized office -- although bereft of windows -- positioned me distinctly from the majority of other employees. Rank and status were encoded in the spatial design and allocation. In the new office space at Two Riverway, rank and status is expressed with more subtlety. There is a greater expanse of space and natural light is abundant. For the most part, whether one’s space is solely inhabited or shared most people agree that unlike the previous venue, it is pleasant. Yet there are other class-bearing symbols. Most employees still sit at

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cubicles -- albeit larger ones -- and only upper management and executives have their own offices. Meanwhile, office furniture and accessories take on significance. Wood paneled desks in customized designs were offered to management and executives as well as wood bookshelves, framed art and fabric upholstered chairs. Regular employees have metal bookshelves, art is pinned to the walls and chairs are of the Office Depot variety. A walk from a vice president's office across the hall to a salesperson's cubicle or a developer's desk paints a picture of status difference.

Another mechanism of control is manifest in the way in which information is shared. In the previous chapter there was a discussion of the prevailing notion of technology advancing information sharing and a more democratized workplace. It was also argued that the established structures and mechanism of authority and subordination maintain that very order. At a small company such as CountryWatch it is difficult to stop the seepage of information from inside closed doors to the collective purview. Walls are not soundproof and conversations in hallways provide clues and reference points for others to connect the evidence and draw conclusions. Yet upper management and executives operate in other ways to deliver the message that even if the information is inadvertently revealed, it is not shared for democratizing purposes. By way of example, at one point CountryWatch considered outsourcing its information technology functions. Although meetings with prospective outsourcing companies and consultants were held out of the office, there was an internal "buzz" about such a prospect. Yet, despite the fact that this buzz existed, management sought to draw a veil. Consider the following exchange:
JR: “So we’re moving toward outsourcing IT?”

BK: “Where in the world did you hear that?”

JR: “Well, I kind of thought it was general knowledge.”

BK: “I was not aware of any such general knowledge. Of course, we are always looking at possible ways of improving our technological delivery but that should not be confused with any popular gossip.”

In fact, it was true that CountryWatch was considering outsourcing and it was a fact that actual meetings toward such an end had occurred even though the plan was eventually squashed. Notably, however, BK did not seek to clarify JR’s inquiry in any way. Instead, he offered a perfunctory response (not an explanation) that might account for any awareness of possible outsourcing, while at the same time disparaging the unofficial channels of information dispersion by labeling it as “gossip.” The perfunctory and ambiguous response - - heavy with the language of a corporate press release (“of course, we are always looking…”) -- was delivered to make clear to JR that he would not be afforded sensitive information reserved only for the innermost core of company operations. Moreover, it functioned as a veil to obfuscate realities in much the same way as a comment composed by a public relations functionary might deflect attention from undesirable evidence. Employee GP states “It is like there is a weird dance of we know; no, you don’t know; okay we don’t know (because you say so); but really, we know.”
In these various ways, there are both localized and systemic levels of logic at work functioning together to constitute, maintain and reconstitute a regime of power and domination. Employee handbooks, office space and schedules are instruments deployed and used to regulate this regime. Each works in subtle ways as part of a system of symbolic signification to produce and reproduce both the corporate cell and the capitalist system within which it exists.

**Within the Workplace: Resistance and Negotiation**

The perspective of AMS at the start of this chapter describes the constellation of resonances experienced by employees in workplace environments. They reinforce not only mechanisms of domination and subordination, but also the alienating effects of structures of power. Although meaning -- in the form of “interesting work” or important work that seems to “make a difference” -- provides some degree of reconciliation, for many members of this cadre of workers it is only a part of the story. Frustrations and antagonism are genuine experiences within the workplace.

While ideological terminology and value-laden words such as “exploitation” are unlikely to be uttered, there is a sense of resentment over the reasonable deduction that they (the workers) are not being treated fairly. Meanwhile, they are not blind participants within an organizing system that classifies, ranks, positions and subordinates them while expecting them to display “good attitudes.” Recall for a moment the response of MH who insisted on
taking her full lunch hour out of the office. Although hardly enacting a rebellious act of agency or rebellion, she is not unaware of how the system works. MH approaches her relationship with the company in terms of a fair transaction. (1) She works, (2) the company pays her for her work and (3) she asserts her right to her proper lunch hour. Even if she polite responds to JC’s inquiry, she will not be reproved by subterranean messaging about right attitudes. In effect, she is fully cognizant of the ideal rules of engagement but she chooses to ignore them. Ignoring those rules of engagement, however, is not the same as actually attacking them. 56 Her attitude to JC was presented as outwardly demure regardless of what she may have felt on the inside.

Likewise, even though AA knows that VS is not happy about the fact that she is concerned about her holiday and vacation schedule, and despite her awareness that VS has interpreted her concerns as signs of a poor work ethic, she asserts the following: “I really don’t care if she doesn’t like my questions. I want to know if we’re getting some kind of time off, even if official holidays happen to fall on weekends. I just want an answer. If I don’t get the same amount of days as usual then I’ll just have to be sick. Like not really sick... but sick so I don’t come into the office.” In this way, AA has no intention of fully complying with certain aspects of the regulatory work regime. Neither MH nor AA is acting rebelliously, however, each is resisting the existing regime of power.

Resistance, however, is not the only dynamic at play. Negotiating acceptable terms of participation within a workplace might also occur. Consider the following exchange with

56 Christopher Newfield (1998: 58) has written about this effect, noting that when corporate ideas do not coincide with what employees really believe, they are not likely to “trash” them, preferring instead to ignore them.
AA. In particular attention, note the way in which she develops her own rationale for dealing with her situation at CountryWatch:

DY: “Why did you decide to work at CountryWatch?”

AA: “Because of the money, really. I heard that I’d make so much more money than where I was working before.”

DY: “Where was that?”

AA: “I was doing sales for a trash disposal service. For the most part, the money never panned out at CountryWatch, but I like the fact that the product I sell is interesting – a HECK of a lot more interesting than trash disposal.”

- laughter –

DY: “I can imagine.”

AA: “I also like the fact that I get to travel and I like the fact that so many clients are from the educational sector. It makes my job seem less… well, like a job. I always wanted to do something more fulfilling than sales. Selling this kind of product…” [voice trails off]

DY: “An information and technology based product?”
AA: "Yes, selling this kind of product seems to add value to students' lives. Okay sure, it isn't like I am ministering to the homeless or helping the underprivileged but at least I feel as if there is a little of my identity in what I do."

DY: "So having your identity correlate with what you do is important to you, then?"

AA: "Sure, as far as it is possible. We all have to work. There is not much of a choice about that. We have to pay the bills. But if a person can have a small part of herself and her values imprinted onto she does for a living, it makes a difference."

DY: "What do you mean? What kind of difference does it make for you?"

AA: "Look, no one likes having to wake up each morning and return to the daily grind. No one likes to feel like a hamster spinning continuously on the corporate wheel. There's nothing wonderful about that feeling and when I am on 59 in traffic on the way to the office, I am not exactly thinking -- gee, I can't wait to get there so I can start my spinning. But like I said, I have my bills to pay so I have to show up each morning. Once you get to the office and you're in that environment, you have to come to terms with your life in some way."

DY: "Tell me about coming to terms with life."

AA: "I was getting to that.."
DY: "Okay, don't mind me interrupting you..."

AA: "So like I was saying, you have to come to terms with your life. And there are lots of ways you can do that. Selling a product that students can use as opposed to trash services is a way that I can justify what I do for a living. People need trash pick up -- maybe even more than they need our product -- but there is something more important about information than garbage. That's pretty clear! So that's one way -- the most important way, in fact -- in which I have come to terms with my work life. And there are other aspects. No one likes to feel as if they are the low person on the totem pole. I mean no one wants to be the mail guy or the receptionist, right? And being a salesperson isn't the same thing as being a decision maker, especially if you think you could do a better job at making decisions. I am not saying I fall into that category but I know a couple of people who might... Anyway, the benefit to being near the bottom is that there is less responsibility. I just have to make my [sales] numbers. And so at the end of the day, if I don't feel like the most important person in the company, I know that I have other perks -- like the travel, lesser responsibility and more vacations. That realization can help in coming to terms with the state of my life."

DY: "I understand what you're saying, but you also seem very motivated and upbeat in the office. You don't seem like someone who is creating a mental calculus of the checks and balances of working here."
AA: “I don’t think it is conscious but I think it is something one has to do. I know that it isn’t a popular thing to say but life isn’t that easy and because I do know about people who don’t even have jobs in this economy, it isn’t lost on me that I have a job and that I can get some pleasure and some sense of purpose from what I do. The fact that I get to work with smart people who are also very nice and with whom I have a personal connection helps. But despite it being a dot.com, the company runs a lot like a tight ship and so I have to keep reminding myself about the fact that there are some important benefits to being here.”

DY: “A tight ship? You think there is a rigid structure at CountryWatch?”

AA: “I don’t know what I’d call it but there is a definite sense of rules and regulations. My sister-in-law works at Moore’s Business Forms and it is like a factory line there. You have to clock in and clock out and you can’t talk to another soul. Can you believe that? We don’t have that at CountryWatch, but there is all this other stuff going on under the surface so that you know what you can and cannot do. It is obviously a better situation than Moore’s, so I think about that and I breathe a sigh of relief that I don’t have to work in a place like that. But because we have our own weird system, it helps to think about the benefits... like the connections with people. So maybe I do run a calculation in my mind about the challenges and the benefits. But that’s what you have to do.”

JW decided to resign from CountryWatch altogether rather than accept what to her were unfair working conditions. A former writer and researcher, JW recalled her situation at the company as follows: “They laid off about twenty people and I was one of the few left. They
expected me to be HAPPY because I survived the layoffs. HAPPY! I am supposed to be happy that I am one of five people left so now I'll have four times the amount of work to do! Because that's how it goes at CountryWatch. Oh you're done with your endless list of countries to write about. Well here's another three or four lists to keep you busy. As if that isn't what life at CountryWatch entails. You're always busy. It never ends. So that's why I left. Because I couldn't stand that shit anymore.” Notably, however, when asked if she would ever consider returning to CountryWatch, she replied, “Yeah. I'd come back. I liked the work. I didn't like how much work there was to do or the way management seemed oblivious and expected everyone to be happy to be doing it. But it is difficult to find a place where you can write about important things happening in the world and feel like you're making a difference. Where I am right now is easier in terms of the volume and expectations, but I don't have the same feeling like I am part of something important. I guess that's why I'd come back. You guys have any openings [laughing]?”

The case of JW is one in which the employee drew her own personal demarcation line making clear her limits. Yet at the same time, she also articulated a precise reason as to why employees at CountryWatch rework their stances within the field of power. Specifically, the CountryWatch system delivers a message of status or distinction to the players upon the CountryWatch landscape. That message causes consternation if status or distinction is not sufficiently valued. The fact that employees are expected to perform extensive and difficult tasks (happily) delivers a conflicting message about value and importance. Nevertheless, impossibly lofty expectations also carry with them a message of significance and worth.
Note, for example, an observation made by employee MH during a conversation:

MH: "The thing about working in a place with so many really bright people with lots of degrees is that it still isn't an academic environment. It isn't like, say, college."

DY: "Yes, I know what you mean. It isn't like going to university where you pay the money to learn and your professors exist to facilitate your intellectual growth."

MH: "Exactly. It is ultimately a business. And a business means that you have to consider costs – an issue I am very familiar with since I look after the accounts. I see the bank balances and the financial spreadsheets, so I understand in bottom line terms why we have so few people on staff to take on mammoth tasks. So although everyone probably likes the work they do because it is interesting and very stimulating, it is also extremely difficult and demanding because of the sheer volume that is expected of us. Take BK, for example. I don't have a problem working for him. He expects a lot of us and I think he is clueless about the kind of effort that goes into executing some of his half-assed requests. That makes the work high stress. The expectations are so high and when you meet the expectations, then the next set of expectations is even higher. There's something gratifying about having so much rest on so few people; it makes you feel worthwhile and as if your contributions matter. But it is also really stressful and maddening because the bar is constantly being set higher. That can feed into the impression that you're really contributing some value to the business, so it is an endless cycle. "

Of course, it is true that building the self-esteem of workers through the successful completion of difficult tasks and objectives is hardly an expressed goal of CountryWatch. The company is concerned singularly with bottom line business results. Nevertheless, the messaging involved in the “endless cycle” MH referenced can potentially reconcile employee disenchantment by inscribing individual value into the scheme.

Meanwhile, meaning is also reinforced by the idea that the focus on international events and issues at a company like CountryWatch is vital. As noted by JW, being part of “something important” holds its own attraction by assigning meaning to one’s work activities. The observation by AMS that intelligent and “brainy” people populate the CountryWatch workplace also serves to emphasize and fortify meaning. Inclusion within a domain of perceived intellectual capital bears the mark of distinction. Perhaps this bestowal of distinction can allay the typical framework of domination and control.

If it is evident that there are frustrating and often unfair conditions of employment, then it is also apparent that people tend to seek meaning in their work. One CountryWatch employee MA suggested that it was her way of “making the irritating realities more bearable.” MA may be describing the way in which people negotiate their work lives by coming to terms with the less desirable aspects through the pursuit of meaning. So even when they feel controlled and perhaps even oppressed by the rigid organizational and management structures, they continue to extend their capacities and seek some measure of fulfillment. At the broader level, the pursuit of meaning may function to alleviate the insecurities and anxieties of a society and an economic system that cannot promise stability. Work in the
current context of economic and cultural uncertainty no longer carries with it the promise of retirement and a good life down the road. Instead, as exemplified by employee SR's statement that "you never know what could happen in the future" due to political or economic crisis, work becomes associated with meaning and a positive identity within a turbulent macro-cultural system.

In his examination of working-class youth, Paul Willis describes the alienating conditions of the schools to which these youth are educated. He notes that the counter-school culture created by the young men "weaves a tapestry of interest and diversion through the dry institutional text." 57 At CountryWatch, a similar process is identified in which "interesting work," notions of importance (and self-importance) and inclusion within a realm of intellectual (and symbolically rich) capital essentially weave their own tapestry of significance through the rigid and often stultifying strictures of the organizational structure. Thus, processes by which value, meaning and significance are negotiated also serve to reformulate the field of power while at the same time producing and reproducing that very sphere. In this way, dominant culture and counter-culture work in tandem with one another.

**Cast of Characters: Finding Meaning in Work**

The following section includes excerpts from conversations with various CountryWatch employees. There is an inherent difficulty in trying to capture the perspectives and predilections of my own colleagues who are simultaneously subjects of inquiry. They have engaged with me quite easily as a result of professional relationships built over the course of

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57 Willis, 1977: 52.
years, confiding the thoughts that they would never freely articulate to direct supervisors partially because of the power dynamics that texture those relations. It is, therefore difficult for them (and for me) to conceive of the subjects and topics of our various conversations as "data points." My particular position as both colleague and researcher appeared to have offered an entry point by which they openly discussed matters of interest to them as they related to work. The following is simply a constellation of conversation excerpts transcribed here because of their relevance to the subject of my research. Although I have arranged the following excerpts according to the person with whom I was having a conversation, the particular excerpts for each person did not occur coherently as a continuing thread but rather as part of various discussions over the course of weeks, months and even years. If there is any particular thematic focus that motivated me to select these excerpts to highlight, it was the notion of meaning in the work. This particular theme was not explicitly selected, however, but rather emerged in the process of talking about our respective roles and continued involvement at CountryWatch. This is not such a surprising topic to have emerged in a start-up company in the New Economy where job security and career stability do not factor highly as guarantees within the professional landscape.

Revelation

MH works in the administration department at CountryWatch and is primarily responsible for the accounting system of the company. She also works on the news wires as a way of breaking up the monotony of her accountancy job. MH and I have shared several
conversations about the fact that she doesn’t particularly love her job but she enjoys working at CountryWatch.

MH: “I’d love to get out of this field (accounting) but I originally got into it because it was a way to have a stable career. I didn’t – and still don’t – have the luxury of not taking that into consideration. I’d love to have a job where I could feel passionate about what I do. Who can feel passionately about numbers and spreadsheets? But when I work on the wire, I feel something… a connection with the world. And when I compile the sales stats and I see the wide range of customers from the peace corps to schools, well, that’s the closest thing to passion that I feel.”

DY: “So why don’t you try to move into an area where you can feel that passion more directly?”

MH: “You know, I made some mistakes when I was younger. I was just looking at the practical consideration and I didn’t even see the practical benefits of getting an advanced education. So I decided to go the business and industry route and now that I am deeply in it, I am not at all fulfilled. Being at CountryWatch and seeing how so many people find their work interesting and enjoyable, I see how so many people out there can benefit from what we do… Now I have started thinking about following my passions and using my talents with a lot more psychological abandon and without an eye on the job or the money.”

DY: “So your thinking about work and maybe even your life has changed?
MH: “I think it is a general frustration about where I ended up in my life when I look around and see all these opportunities for learning while working and how all these other people working here are fulfilled. I find myself feeling trapped. I grew up thinking I’d find a place myself in the right company and that would be it. And now I see that it isn’t the company that you need to find but the right career or the right kind of work.”

DY: “I think there is a lot to that but there are a lot of people in the world for whom a job is enough and finding fulfilling work is beyond the scope of consideration. In fact, I think that is the kind of approach you have mentioned yourself.”

MH: “Most of us aren’t independently wealthy so we have to make a living. That’s the way it goes and that’s how I was raised to think about my life. But the interaction with people at CountryWatch who are doing interesting things has been an influence. Now I’d like to do something more meaningful with my life, but not everything meaningful comes with health insurance and a way for me to pay my mortgage. Until I get to the place where my life and the work I do reflects my view of the world, this is not a bad place to be. At least the exposure to what’s going on around the world can be educational and it can help me be more effective in the kind of activist work I’d like to do one day.”

DY: “So that’s a key motivation behind your continued presence at CountryWatch?”
MH: “That’s one reason I am CountryWatch. Then there are the people. The people here speak intelligently about all kinds of diverse issues facing the world. I need to be around people like that. I used to work for a welding company. Very nice people there too but there was just no intelligent conversation coming out of that place. Here, you can have a debate about global warming, or a Supreme Court case, or the construction of the wall in Israel. In other companies, people talk about their kids and the football game. There is nothing wrong with talking about kids and football, mind you, but I want the intellectual connection. I want to be around people who are concerned about the state of the world and who are conscious of the important issues. Now it is hard to say if the CountryWatch people are representative of people in society at large. I guess it depends on your environment. I mean, there are lots of people out there who just don’t have the time to be concerned about the world or who are just too tired to be informed.”

DY: “Why is it important to be informed?”

MH: “It is important to participate... to be a citizen of the world.”

DY: “From what you’ve said, you’re of the mind that working at CountryWatch in some measure helps you stay in touch with the events of the world?”

MH: “That’s part of it. You can learn from all kinds of experiences but in my case, working on the news wires helped me to learn about the world. And I’ve learned about opportunities from my interaction with coworkers who are more on the frontlines of the events going on.”
They're writing the stories and the reports and they're working directly with the clients like the U.N. or the State Department and helping them get the information they need. My dream was to work for the U.N. or the Peace Corps but I never thought it was a possibility. That's why it was a dream and not a hope or an aspiration. Now I actually work for a company that has contact with those agencies. That's something. And getting back to the interaction with the people who work here... well, it has been a revelation for me to see people doing what they like for a living. This place is crawling with people with all kinds of degrees and I can now see that you don't actually have to have a practical justification to do something you love for a living."

Passion

EW runs the customer service division but also worked in the marketing arena for CountryWatch in the very early days of the company's incarnation. We were sharing a discussion about that early period at CountryWatch when I asked EW about the challenges and benefits of her particular role in the company's evolution.

EW: "The benefits involved the learning potential and the autonomy to try new things and make mistakes. If I had an idea, I could follow through. And of course, this was during the dot.com heyday when doing risky things in business was really in vogue. The opportunity to develop a corporate marketing strategy and the creative potential involved was really amazing. I had been raised to think that work was not enjoyable; it was something by which you paid you bills. And suddenly, I was being paid to do something that was not only
enjoyable but educational and creative... and in an environment with lots of really brilliant people. How often do you find that in work? It was something special. But at the same time, we were a new company and we really didn’t know what we were doing so I also felt alone and without guidance. Sure there was a lot of autonomy... there still is. Pick a project and it is yours to bring to fruition. But the goals and the targets (apart from sales numbers) were never clearly articulated and that was scary. You could be brilliantly creative or a brilliantly illuminated disaster. And there is a lot of room in between.”

DY: So there was some anxiety there?

EW: Big time. But you know, there was this passionate desire to succeed. And, in fact, that feeling is still here. If you have that much passion fueling an activity or a project, it is bound to evoke anxieties. On the other hand, passion is what makes you get out of the bed in the morning, right?”

DY: “Would it surprise you if I said that I know for a fact that passion doesn’t make everyone get up in the morning, but the knowledge that they have to pay their bills is what drives them to get up instead of rolling over and going back to sleep?”

EW: “No, no... I’m not surprised and I didn’t mean to sound like an idealist. We all have to work and we spend more than 40 hours a week at work. That means that we’re probably spending the majority of our lives in business or some sort of organization. Obviously we’re not digging ditches for a living so the outlook is a little different. This is a place filled with
really bright people and there is so much to do in order to successfully build a company using new technologies. I think that newness does make a difference and probably lends itself to a little more passion than other jobs. Actually, this isn’t just a job.”

DY: “For you or for everyone here?”

EW: “For everyone, I think. This just isn’t a place filled with ditto heads doing the job by rote. I believe that work is an expression of life’s mission but I am not so ridiculous as to suggest that everyone is playing out their respective life’s mission here. At the same time, I don’t think people are spinning their wheels and collecting their supply of nuts so they can retire and enjoy the good life in their 60’s either. You just can’t push yourself -- as most people do here -- and not derive some pleasure or joy, or even be driven by some passion. We had a few of the spinners here during the years but they didn’t last. You can’t last here if you’re a spinner. It just won’t work.”

DY: “Are you saying that one needs to possess a mission of sorts to function at CountryWatch?”

EW: “Hmm... a mission? The company is a business. It functions like a business with bottom line commercial interests and the hierarchy here is laughably like that of a Fortune 500 company. I’ll grant you that. But I’d describe CountryWatch as a project and the people who work here and who have successfully endured all the years of changes and volatility here are people who are committed to bringing the project to fruition. Maybe they’ll get rich
as a result, maybe not. Call it a mission or a project... it doesn’t matter but it surely isn’t just a place where you can have an ordinary job.”

DY: “I am interested in your idea of CountryWatch being a project for the people who work here. Can you expand on that idea?”

EW: “You want me to say more?”

DY: “Uh, yes. I want you to say more. The idea of CountryWatch as a project is an interesting one.”

EW: “Well, as you know, I’ve been around this place for quite awhile. Now it is turning into this venture on the verge of success. That’s quite an accomplishment and I think if the sales and circulation turn out as projected this year, then we may have something other than a project on our hands. But for a long time, it has been exactly that. We’ve seen the conflicting visions... the corporate identity questions. We knew we wanted to publish information about the world but is that content supposed to be data or information or analysis? Do we write books or are we distillers of information? Do we publish like other publishers or do we serve it over the Internet? As a website, are we purveyors of information or do we sell stuff? Are we a shopping site or is the only thing that a shopper can buy a subscription? How do we sell? As we’ve experientially answered those questions, we’ve made a heck of a lot of mistakes, none of them fatal, but definitely not the kind of stuff that would be acceptable in a normal business. I mean, how do we call ourselves publishers --
even online publishers -- when we learned on the job what we were doing. Heck I learned how to market on the job! So this hasn’t been run like a business but more like a project. The more I think about it, the more I wonder if there isn’t a mission aspect at play. Do you want me to continue?”

DY: “Please do.”

EW: “The people tell the story. People like BK, BB, SD, CR, AMS and you who are totally fascinating and stimulating to talk to because you’ve all traveled or taken unorthodox paths. All these people, with one exception, are still here and they have really created a situation in which intelligence is valued and so you really have a learning environment. Okay, so the military and Enron backgrounds have also created these hierarchies that make me shake my head but you also have this place in which ideas flourish. I think that makes up for the corporate control crap. Or at least it makes it bearable. You shouldn’t have let me go on. I am not sure what my point is other than the fact that there are really bright people here who have kind of found a home, even if that home is less than perfect. They are not necessarily meant for academia but the regular job wouldn’t do either. So they have this place where they could potentially build something interesting and successful or use their brains and their creative talents.”

Talent
AMS is a news wire editor at CountryWatch. She worked as a social worker for years before changing careers and finally arriving at CountryWatch. During a conversation, which originally centered on the fact that she had come from a social services background, AMS explained why she made the career shift.

AMS: I was a social worker because I wanted and continue to want a job where I can make a difference. But being a single mom and having that kind of job wasn't exactly the perfect situation. Really, I was desperate to get out of a field that was both personally fulfilling and demanding. I wanted a little more of the former and a little less of the latter. So I actually started at CountryWatch by accident. I was just temping to get by, pay my bills, until I found a job that fit my needs. But in my interview, I mentioned to BK that I was a single mom and he said "we're family friendly" and I thought that was pretty cool."

DY: "Family friendly, yes, but you've also told me countless times that there are other parts of CountryWatch that frustrate you."

AMS: "Well, the company is family friendly on one hand and kind of dysfunctional about people considerations on the other hand. It doesn't have to make sense, does it?"

DY: "I don't know... that's what I am trying to figure out."

- laughter -
AMS: “Anyway, so I took the temp job here as BK’s assistant and the work was pure drudgery. I was computer illiterate… I mean, come on, I was a freaking social worker for God’s sake! How much time do you think I spent on a computer? But here I was working for an Internet company as the personal assistant to Mr. Family Friendly Guy. I couldn’t understand his handwriting; I couldn’t comprehend his lavish lifestyle; I hated the mundane things I was expected to do like answering the phone and making appointments. I couldn’t even transfer a call properly because I was so technologically ignorant. I took the job as a temporary assignment but I was miserable. I was so clueless about all these seemingly unimportant tasks to do and I also felt like the whole thing was beneath me.”

DY: “Oh my. You thought it was beneath you?”

AMS: “Yes, and I am not ashamed to say so. I didn’t like being a minion and I wasn’t intellectually challenged. Even though I had intended to do this temporarily, my mind and my heart were still focused on finding something that would be fulfilling to me and where I would have a high satisfaction level. Expending some degree of intellectual curiosity would have helped. The irony is that I was so absolutely terrible at the brain-dead functions of being a personal assistant.”

DY: “I am not sure that it is all that ironic. It is possible to really suck at a job if you’re essentially under-functioning.”
AMS: “Well then I must have been under-functioning because I truly sucked at that job. Out of the blue, the wire editor who was scheduled to work didn’t show up on one particular day. So out of desperation – because the news must be transmitted – they asked me to fill in for her. So there I was, someone who had no computer training and couldn’t manage the stupid phone, working on the wire administration in front of a computer. It was hilarious. But you know, I learned really fast because it was interesting and challenging. I was spellbound by the variety of news stories from across the world, from places that I rarely heard about in the mainstream media. It was fascinating. As luck would have it, the usual wire editor was sick for the rest of the week and by the time she got back, I was culling and uploading more stories than she ever did. So they moved her into another function and they offered me that job permanently and I took it. I felt like I was finally being given an opportunity to shine, so I learned the technical side of the operation in record time and I think I just had an affinity or a talent for understanding the kind of newsworthy items to select. So it ended up being perfect. And I am still here.”

DY: “Yes, you’re still here. But let’s go back to your affinity for understanding what is newsworthy.”

AMS: “Well, that’s the easy part. That just requires instinct about what’s big, what’s relevant and what’s simply interesting. More important is the fact that I know how to create a mosaic of news and information so that each day, a person who reads the news from CountryWatch has a picture of the world today. And it is a picture quite different from the international news synopsis on ABC or CBS. There is a mechanical process of parsing news
and information that has to be undertaken each day but there are also linear, chronological
and issue-oriented patterns that when formulated together, create a mosaic of information.
That's where relevancy and intrigue gives way to concerns about the overall understanding
of a country or global development. I am good at that and so even though I end up working
seven days a week and the bizarre power machinations in the office drive me a bit nuts, I
love what I do. It gives me a sense of purpose.”

DY: “I've heard a few people talk about the sense of purpose they feel as a result of the work
they do at CountryWatch. I am trying to figure out if the purpose is what drives people to do
their jobs (I have heard some people say that), or if purpose is what results from the work.
Or is it both?”

AMS: “It is probably both... the psycho-emotional benefits motivate us and provide the
reward so that this endless cycle of performance follows. And it really is a cycle of
performance because you can't survive in this place if you can't perform well. And actually,
I think that knowledge that you can perform well is like a jolt of self-esteem which overrides
all the hierarchical power shit.”

DY: “Does it really vitiate all the problematic power and control dynamics?”

AMS: “Maybe. Maybe not. But it sure as hell makes it more bearable to know that you're
smart and competent and the work you do has an impact across the world. That would make
up for a lot of stuff.”
Creativity

SR works in the Information Technology department. He is responsible for a variety of duties ranging from networking, technical support and maintenance, website management and new project development. In a conversation, SR outlined some of the reasons he was attracted to working at CountryWatch.

SR: "While I was in school, I needed the flexibility. So that was the most pragmatic consideration. Another source of attraction is the fact that CountryWatch is a small company so if I have a problem that needs to be solved there is direct access. I don’t have to jump through hoops to arrive at the decision-makers and there is no fear associated with talking to people in upper management. That is related to the fact that there is direct input. I look at my brother – he works in IT for Continental Airlines. He worked his way up to his current position. But even though he has an important title, all his decisions have to be approved and he has to go through a series of upper management before he can get things done or to get answers. For me, I just need to make one call or walk down the hallway to BK’s office and get a yes or no on an issue. So that’s attractive to me. I guess the most important thing though is that I really like the work. I do the research and I get to learn and then I get to apply that knowledge through technical problem-solving."

DY: "Tell me more about what you mean when you say problem-solving."
SR: Take hardware for instance. First of all, I learn about hardware by working on it. I can see how computing has changed just by upgrading someone’s computing capacity. We use really complex forecasting models for the global forecast product so we actually have to use computers with more process-intensive capacity there. Or for the marketing team, they need better video cards to generate marketing materials. And you need lots of memory to carry all those reviews you work on and publish. So I have to figure out how you use each computer and customize hardware solutions to meet everyone’s respective needs. And in the case of software – in accounting we have to simplify the existing accounting software so that it has more efficient performance, whereas in editorial, we have to develop and elaborate on existing software so that it is responsive to the differences between publishing in text and on the web. And because we grew into being an Internet company (which is not the same thing as regular publishing), we had to develop a database-driven system to populate the website but it also involved using really powerful servers. The whole system is something we had to develop. And technology is changing along with the changes in business function.”

DY: “That’s interesting. You know there has been some material written about how the demands of enterprises have in some ways driven technological innovation. I guess that is what you’re getting at?”

SR: “Well I don’t know about the stuff that has been written but it makes sense to me. I basically use existing software coding knowledge to create and develop solutions for everyone here in the office. The requirements here are very specific and you’ll never be able to go to a computer store and just buy a program that will meet all your needs. So it has to be
created and developed. It is actually the opposite of seeing the next big application out there and deciding you can’t live without it. It is really about trying to resolve issues that already exist and the way you resolve technical issues is through innovation and creativity. Writing software is creative but it is also about solving the problems of processing and expression. And that’s really the best part for me. I am being paid to play with ideas and technology and to be creative. Take, for example, the new website design. It is a mixture of functionality and exciting design. That’s the kind of job or goal that is very motivating so you’re playing with ideas and it is really enjoyable. Once I start working on ideas and coding the website, I get into the code...” [voice trails off]

DY: “You get into the code? What does that mean?”

SR: “Well, you don’t answer the phone, you don’t check your email, you’re systematically coding. You basically just assimilate yourself into the code. When you come up against a problem, you have to originate an answer from within the coding system so it is more of a resolution than a solution. You can’t come up with resolution from the outside; it has to come from within the coding logic.”

DY: “I think I understand... you have to be entrenched and ensconced within the system itself.”

SR: “Right. So what was I saying? Oh yeah, so when I am working on the new website, I am getting into the code, like I said. And when that whole process is complete and I can make
the website live – even if it is just a beta site that everyone else evaluates – it is still the best feeling in the world. You spend all this energy creating an entire world of information and then in a second it comes alive. There is a real satisfaction in making things go live.”

DY: “Yes, I think I know exactly what you mean. I can write something for regular publication and when it is done, I am still thinking about all the potential things I screwed up or didn’t pay enough attention to. But when I write the Global News Update and I press the button that makes my story go live, there’s something really cool about it. I think it is the surge of satisfaction that you feel in a moment.”

SR: “The satisfaction part is huge. I don’t want to do something for a living if I can’t feel that. I think it is because there is a mix of learning and applying that takes place and then there are some real results that get shared with a wide world out there. The upshot has been that I have so much more respect for myself since I have been working here. I am not just some techie goofball who plays with technology for the sheer pleasure of it, although I do enjoy it. I can see something real and tangible as a result.”

DY: “So you think that working here has made you feel more self-respect?”

SR: “Yes, for the reason I mentioned – because I am accomplishing something. I am using my brain and my skills but I am also making a living. At the same time, there are tons of people looking at my work. Look at how many customers we have at CountryWatch. I also think that my background plays into this. I am originally from a country where you’re born
into your lot in life. Here in the US, you can create something of yourself IF you have the opportunity and you don’t have too many insurmountable obstacles. And no, I don’t think living the American dream is a cakewalk. That’s just a phrase. Like I said, IF circumstances line up in your favor, you can make something of yourself. But the fall form grace, if it happens can be massive. The whole economy could crater or there could be a huge terrorist event, and that could irrevocably change things. There’s that old Chinese curse about living in interesting times… and interesting times isn’t meant to be a good thing! So the more I make something of myself here, the more self-respect I can build, and the more credit I can also accumulate for the long run, because you just never know what could happen."

**Power**

CR is the Chief Information Officer. Although his career path now resides in information technology (IT), he is a former United States Marine. He arrived at CountryWatch a few years ago to work in the information technology department and eventually took over direction of the department when the former Chief Information Officer resigned.

During a conversation with me about how we both ended up at CountryWatch, CR said: “It just happened. It was the dot.com era. I wanted to be in a smaller company because there is more freedom to make your mark and less bullshit… you know, political bullshit. I think I stayed because of the people. I didn’t like everyone at first. In fact, I thought a lot of people were turds in the first few months I was here. But I liked BK. And then, I got to know other people, like SR, VS and you… and I liked you all, so I stayed.”
DY: “So you stayed at CountryWatch, at least partially, because of the people?”

CR: “Well, there was a time when I thought there were certain, shall we say, difficult people, especially from a technology perspective. My job is to capture what people want and need and make it real for them. JC, for example, would explain how he wanted the forecast to be and it was difficult. He’d give his opinion and if you tried to extract more information, he’d think you were arguing with him. It was as if he didn’t realize that you can’t just tell an IT person what you want and they wave a magic wand. You need to learn more... need to understand the information that goes out there and they way it is going to be used and manipulated. Ultimately, it is about how to capture and convey that information and then, how people can use it.”

DY: “So, the transmission and reception?”

CR: “Is that an anthropology thing? Did you just turn into D-the-anthropologist on me? Damn, and I though we were just having a nice lunch here.”

In another similar conversation, CR said, “Being here lets me create my own destiny.”

DY: “Your destiny? Wow. That’s a huge thing to say. What does it mean?”
CR: “There are objectives for the business, but the way to reach those objectives is up to me. It is up to me to learn and utilize what to learn and how to be creative. Remember when I told you awhile back that it was about the freedom? Well, that’s what I mean. And another thing, and this relates to the freedom, is the flexibility. I like doing what I do on my schedule. There is so much to do with a content company on the web, especially one with international news. That makes it even more important. I always try to do a good job but here ‘good’ isn’t enough. I mean, there are kids using our stuff for their education. You can’t just get by with what you do; the bare minimum is not enough. But then when you do a good job and you launch a co-branded website for a company or for a school, or like the stuff I am doing right now to make the website ADA compliant, well, seeing all that come alive is great. 58 Seeing your efforts turn into results... it’s something. It’s something measurable.”

DY: “So, this isn’t just a job for you...”

CR: “Oh not at all. I would be depressed if this was just a job. I need to be producing something. By producing, I mean solving problems with creative solutions. You can’t do that on a factory assembly line or managing a restaurant. Oh sure, maybe I’d like being a park ranger because I could be outdoors. Or maybe I’d like being a scuba diver, but I like what I do because I feel like I am making a difference, while being creative and learning a lot. And it is definitely not about the money.”

-laughter-

58 Making a website AD compliant entails making it usable for individuals with disabilities, as dictated by the Americans with Disabilities Act.
DY: “No, it is definitely not about the money!”

CR: “You know, technology is sexy.”

DY: “Tech is sexy?”

CR: “It is the same reason you want a bigger, better TV or a gadget with bells and whistles. Okay, so your new PDA is more efficient and easier to use, or the new TV has better definition. But it isn’t just that. It is the smooth steel and buttons that make things happen. It’s ego… and control.”

DY: “Okay, I think, I know what you mean. I think I do…”

- laughter -

DY: “Ego, control, power… sexy. Okay, I get that. I am having a little trouble reconciling it with a PDA and I am not even going to deal with the smooth steel stuff. But let’s talk about the power part of it. Tell me about technology and power.”

CR: “This is for your research, isn’t it?”
DY: “You know, you’re the only one who ever calls me on that. But yes. So now that we’ve established that, tell me about technology, power…” [voice trails off]

CR: “Well, let’s back up. You mentioned power and technology together. For me, part of the appeal is that not too many people know how to do what I do. And now that we’ve internally developed all these applications, the content management system, database administration and things like that, well, it isn’t as if someone can come in from the outside and easily do what I am doing. So there is some security in knowing that this is my domain. The power part of it comes into play at the interpersonal level. We’re in the information business but we’re also in the Internet business because the Internet is our platform for delivery, so that makes me everyone’s magician in a sense. My team and I make it all come alive and in some ways, that insulates me from all the other interoffice dramas that go on.”

Identity

GP works on government and corporate accounts at CountryWatch. His background is in institutional management, hence his responsibility for the larger establishment clientele. We were sharing a discussion about the Chief Executive Officer (BK) when the following exchange ensued:

GP: “BK was already very successful before he started CountryWatch. I don’t know what the company is for him. Maybe it is his way of owning something. Maybe it is the crowning
achievement of a self-made man. But he still doesn’t have the same hunger to succeed that many of us have.”

DY: “You don’t think he wants to succeed? He’s the one with the sunk costs in the company.”

GP: “I am sure he wants his money back with lots of profits but CountryWatch is not the same to him as it is to us. I wouldn’t call it a vanity project but he’s like one of the presidential candidates with only a small chance of winning who is in the race for the experience and the exhilaration. And then you have some candidates who want to win. They REALLY want to win against all odds. I classify BK in the former category. CountryWatch is an interesting thing for him to do and an interesting way for him to be viewed as a business maverick by his Westpoint friends. And yes, you’re right. He has a lot of money sunk into this place but we’re the ones who really own it.”

DY: “I take it that you’re not referring to our stock options.”

- laughter -

GP: “No… not our stock options…”

- more laughter -
GP: "I mean we’re the ones who have the emotional commitment to it. We’re the ones who work on the products, producing, publicizing and selling them. We’re the ones who are attached to the work we do here. Heck, I bet BK doesn’t even realize how much work the editorial team does each week on the reviews or managing the news desk. We’re the ones whose lives have become invested in this company and making it succeed. Come on, he’s no Bill Gates who is mentally absorbed with the technological creations of his company!"

DY: "So he’s no Bill Gates. What does that make us? Fools for investing ourselves? Or people who just need jobs?"

GP: "For me, the paycheck is not the issue. It is about the work and how it fits into my life and my identity. I didn’t want to work at J.C. Penny’s as a student in need of a job to pay my bills and I don’t want to be a hospital administrator or something as bland as that. In concrete terms, there is a sense of accomplishment that comes from the fact that I make a sale to the Library of Congress or the Government of Canada. But there are less quantifiable reasons. What you do defines your selfhood. Or at least, it defines my selfhood. I can’t think of myself and my work as separate things. This is not just a place for interesting work at CountryWatch although there is a definite energy that is involved in building a company from nothing into something. There is also something valuable about watching the culture of this place take root. Because we’re so small and we’ve only been around for a few years, it is like watching a child flourish and develop a personality."
**Work and Life**

JR is a researcher and writer in the editorial department, specializing in economic analysis. He worked for Dell Computers and before that, he was employed as a research analyst on Wall Street for Salomon Smith Barney. He also worked in Japan for several years. I wondered why and how someone of his background was at CountryWatch. This is an excerpt from a conversation on that topic:

**JR:** “My life isn’t what I had planned. In fact, it was going in a very different direction. Like all kids who graduate from an Ivy League university, I was expected to go on and do big things... land a job in the land of the professional elite. Everyone I graduated from college with aspired to be an investment banker or maybe an advertising guru. A really interesting option would be to work for a hedge fund. In Texas, you go to Texas A and M and then you get a job in the energy sector. On the east coast, you look for the right job in Manhattan. So there I was on Wall Street following that path. And I admit, my life was pretty superficial. I wanted to have the right answer to the question about what I did for a living. There are definite psychic benefits to having the right job.”

**DY:** “The obvious question that follows is one about those psychic benefits...”

**JR:** “I think it is really about showcasing your position on top of the world. If you’re a man, that means a lot of alpha male acting out. These days, that is done with a metrosexual twist.”
DY: “Ah yes. I knew you’d get to the metrosexual stuff. Are we talking conspicuous consumption here or celebrity worship?”

JR: “Oh probably a little of both. You dress in Armani suits during the week, you have $100 grand in debt and you have all of the books by George Soros because celebrity worship is a refined game. You live in Manhattan because everywhere else sucks, and you say things like ‘Seinfeld didn’t matter to me until I lived in New York.’ Basically you function like you’re the center of the universe.”

DY: “So what happened? How did you find yourself off the perch?”

JR: “Irrational exuberance happened. I was working for Jack Grubman…”

DY: “Jack Grubman? You’re kidding!”

JR: “Nope, I was working for the bastard. And soon, I wasn’t doing research analysis on telecoms anymore. Instead, I was taking notes for his defense. And we all knew where that was headed, so I decided it was time for me to leave. New York is a great place to be when you’re on top of the world but when you’re not…. well, it isn’t pretty. So I left New York and I headed to Texas. I was on an Enron project for a really short period of time and then I started working for Dell. It was really a succession of messes.”

59 Jack Grubman was one of Salomon Smith Barney’s foremost analysts who championed Global Crossing and WorldCom even as they tumbled toward bankruptcy.
DY: “How was Dell a mess?”

JR: “It was a different kind of mess. It was not the kind of corruption you saw with Grubman or with Enron which was essentially motivated by greed and the desire to be on top. Instead, Dell was process hell. Dell is really well known for having a great business plan, inventory control, no floor space… you know all the details so I won’t bore you. But the same kind of painfully logical planning process also applied within the company. Clock in; clock out. It isn’t Microsoft. You’re not working because you’re inspired. You’re working for the annual bonus and you operate according to the metrics – x amount of calls and y amount of sales. It was all about the metrics and the weekly goals. They even gave the customer service folks a script they have to follow when they get calls!”

DY: “I think a lot of customer service departments have scripts.”

JR: “True, but this is all part of the soulless enterprise that is typical of Dell. What I am trying to say is that Grubman and Enron are soulless but so is Dell, in a different way. I despised Dell. But getting back to the customer service department’s script, you’re supposed to answer the phone by saying ‘Welcome to Dell, how can I help you?’ I used to fantasize about training the department to say instead ‘Welcome to Hell, how can I hurt you?”

--laughter --
DY: “So you left Dell, or should I say, Hell, and you ended up here. Why? What’s the appeal of a tiny start-up company that can’t pay you the kind of money you’re used to making?”

JR: “I think part of it was the collective sense of betrayal I felt from my years of corporate life. It left me disillusioned and forced me to rethink a lot of things. It isn’t like I had one huge moment when everything came into focus…”

DY: “So there was no revelatory moment?”

JR: “Uh no, but I like that word… revelatory. But no, no such moment. Frankly, the CountryWatch.com moniker implies irrational exuberance.”

DY: “That’s why we dropped the dot.com.”

JR: “Right. But being me and having not actually experienced a revelatory moment, I was still thinking about the importance of having a fashionable job. The dot.com part of it was dicey but CountryWatch, on the whole, is cool. So there was some appeal just on the basis of the coolness quotient. But in case you write me off as completely and shamelessly superficial, I was not in a good place because of all the corporate crap and I was in my own way reprioritizing my life. I wanted to find a job where I could learn and maybe have an impact. I also wanted to find a job where I could use my degree and not be so concerned about keeping up with other people. At CountryWatch, I am getting paid to learn and it is in
a small company -- which is really the venue driving growth -- and I have some responsibility of ownership about the material I produce.”

DY: “Well, there is definitely a great deal of autonomy here, mostly because we are so understaffed. There is no room for a lot of micro-management.”

JR: “I think that is part of the attraction. I feel responsible for the work I do and I want the company to succeed. But there is something else too. I used to feel like I was always rushing to work in New York at Salomon and I couldn’t wait to leave work at Dell. I have a different feeling here. It is my life but it isn’t a burden. For instances, I daydream about the economic model we’ve developed.”

DY: “You daydream about the economic forecasting model?”

JR: “Yes. I have this recurring daydream in which I give a presentation in Topeka, Kansas about the five-year projections on growth generated from the model. I guess the point is that I AM a resource at CountryWatch rather than a number impacting the bottom line. But I am not just a resource to the outside but a resource internally, in so far as how we move the company along.”

DY: “I am getting the sense that it isn’t about your work as your identity. It is more about work and life, from what you’re saying.”
JR: “Correct. It isn’t about having the right job or the cool job anymore. It is about the job which complements your life.”

DY: “So, if I were a dream analyst, which really doesn’t apply here because we’re talking about a daydream and not a journey into the subconscious, I’d say that the presentation of the economic model represents your engagement and connection with your work, while Topeka, Kansas is in the daydream to represent the antithesis of Wall Street. Kansas is way more homey than Manhattan.”

JR: “That’s pretty good! It is about the intersection of work and life.”
THE WORLD OF WORK

Work in Western Thought

The concept of work dates back to early Western civilization. Herbert Applebaum looks at the concept of work in ancient Greece and Rome, noting that in Homeric society, work was an enshrined part of life’s activities. 60 He also observes that in Homeric society, the term *demiourgoi* is used to denote a social category of artisans, while the term *techne* is used to denote the expertise or knowledge leveraged by this category of people. 61 In Classic Greek culture, work became associated with an inferior kind of life because the truly “free” human being was one of leisure who was able to spend time on contemplative pursuits. 62 In Hellenistic Greece, ideas about the rationalist underpinnings of the cosmos led to the idea that work was one aspect of the cosmic order. 63 Meanwhile, Stoicism contributed to the view of work as a mission or as a vocation. 64 During the Roman Republic, Cicero viewed wage-paid as little more than slaves. 65 Although farming was viewed highly by Roman culture, handicrafts and artisanship did not gain stature until the time of the Roman Empire, in tandem with the decline of slavery and the profitability of handiwork. 66 Still, manual labor was not revered. 67

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60 Applebaum (1995: 48) notes that mythological figures such as Odysseus and Penelope engaged in activities that may be regarded as work. See also Illiad 61.23-24; Odyssey 2.97; 6.30).
62 Applebaum, 1995: 48-49. See also classical Greek literature, such as Xenophon, 1970: IV.2 or Aristotle, 1946: VII, 1328b.37-1329.2 for examples of how work, and particularly manual labor, was viewed as inferior.
63 Applebaum, 1995: 49.
64 Edelstein, 1966: 77-78.
65 Cicero, L.XLII.150-1. See also Heitland, 1970: 458.
67 Guinagh and Dorjahn, 1942: 498.
Ancient Hebrew culture seemed to treat work with some significance while figures such as Jesus were presented in biblical accounts as the Christian exemplar of the working man. \(^{68}\) Christian thinkers, such as St. Paul and St. Augustine took up the notion of work as a vital and respected aspect of human existence while the Franciscan, and Benedictine traditions lionized the benefits of disciplined life, of which work was an integral part. \(^{69}\) As agriculturalism expanded in the Middle Ages, work was coordinated in the development of royal estates while at the same time, the apprenticeship and guild systems expanded. \(^{70}\) Later, Martin Luther and John Calvin moved away from the monastic view of work. Luther is associated with conceptions of work as an ethical action and practice, while Calvin exalted of work as a sign from God. \(^{71}\) Protestantism and ethics of work would eventually be connected with capitalism. \(^{72}\)

In the 17\(^{th}\) century, Thomas Hobbes expressed the view that people were obligated to contribute to society by working while John Locke, a product of the English Enlightenment, viewed work as the underpinnings of private property and selfhood. \(^{73}\) In the 18\(^{th}\) century, French Enlightenment thinkers like Denis Diderot connected work with higher esteem. \(^{74}\) Meanwhile, Voltaire looked at work, effort and the value of life while Jean-Jacques

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\(^{68}\) Applebaum (1995: 51) cites Mosaic law as well as examples of Saul working in the fields and David tending sheep herds in Old Testament passages as examples of how work was regarded in Hebrew culture. Later Israelite culture might draw upon representations of Jesus as a carpenter, fisherman, teacher and shepherd as examples of Jesus as a working man.

\(^{69}\) Applebaum (1995: 52) notes that St. Paul was frequently quoted as saying “If anyone will not work, let him not eat,” while St. Augustine commended the virtue of work as sustenance for both the body and the mind.

\(^{70}\) Applebaum, 1995: 53. See also Lucie-Smith, 1984: 113-114.

\(^{71}\) Applebaum, 1995: 55.

\(^{72}\) Telos, Issues 75, 81.


\(^{74}\) Diderot, 1953.
Rousseau linked the notion of the worker with that of the thinker. Outside of the French Enlightenment, Benjamin Franklin, influenced by Calvinism, put forth the view that work was the foundation of society. Adam Smith, a product of the Scottish Enlightenment, formulated a theory connecting labor with value and envisioned the inherent monotony of these forms of modern work. On the other end of the spectrum of economic theories, thinkers such as Claude Henri de Rouvroy de Saint-Simon, while rejecting the rationalist view of capitalism still viewed work as the means by which the world might be improved.

Intimations of Work

As Industrialism was taking hold in the 19th century, work was understood as a public sphere activity for which payment or wages were paid, making work an element within a network of exchanges. The conception of work as a public activity was also linked with social activities and social identities leading to the view that industrial society, as distinct from previous forms, is a “society of workers.” During this period of Industrialism, Karl Marx considered the cooperative element of work. Although he noted that the division of labor resulted in increased productivity and efficiency, he also identified worker alienation as an acute effect of work in the capitalist system. For Marx, the human worker was effectively being alienated from the products that he or she created in a fundamental sense. That is to say, workers would eventually view work in capitalist society as a form of systemic coercion.

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75 See Voltaire, 1959 and Rousseau, 1953.
77 Smith 1937: 302.
80 Marx, 1906.
81 Applebaum, 1995: 60; see also Marx, 1906.
in which the pleasure, purpose and creativity derived from work are expunged. \footnote{Marx, 1959: 254.} Likewise, thinkers such as Hendrik de Man believed that technological automation prevented workers from enjoying the creativity and pleasure of their work. \footnote{De Man, 1929L 130-134.} Similarly, Hannah Arendt believed that the profit motive associated with work was intensifying its thrust at the expense of human purpose. \footnote{Arendt, 1958.} Following these perspectives, creative meaning associated with work is misplaced and replaced instead by quests for improved working conditions, extended benefits, more vacation time and various material benefits, for which real satisfaction can be sought outside the workplace. As exemplified by the perspective of CountryWatch employee AA in a previous chapter, work -- in and of itself -- is not necessarily experienced as an inherently meaningful and satisfying activity. Instead, pleasure and fulfillment is found outside the workplace, as demonstrated by AA’s concern about the number of paid holidays she would be entitled to have during the course of the year.

Contrasting views are offered by Thorstein Veblen and Henri Bergson who have written about the creative impulses and workmanship by artisans. \footnote{Bergson, 1930: 100.} For Veblen and Bergson, the creative value of workmanship could be connected with the meaning and purpose expressed through work itself. It is this element of meaning and purpose that influenced the growth of human relations within business and industry, as well as the analysis of corporate culture. \footnote{Yankelovitch et al: 1983: 52.} By way of example, the desire to derive meaning and purpose from work also appears to be the impetus for a number of CountryWatch employees and may well frame considerations of work in post-industrial society.
In the contemporary context, work is understood as a mixture of material necessity and personal interest. A number of CountryWatch employees mentioned the fact that they had been socialized to view work as a necessity in life and a source of livelihood. For example, AA and MH observed that the material means by which they could "make a living" or attend to their lives was a primary concern. Meanwhile, unlike BK who expressly stated that money was the primary measure of success, several CountryWatch employees like JR and VS expressed the view that financial considerations often were not principal sources of motivation. Yet despite this assertion that money or financial gain has not been the driving force behind their continued employment tenure at CountryWatch, it is simultaneously apparent that salaries and wages by which individuals "make a living" cannot be ignored. Life within a market economy entails monetary compensation for work so that the basic support and management of life can be undertaken.

Work in Western modernity has its own moral positioning and not all classes or segments of society evaluate work in the same manner.\textsuperscript{87} As noted in the previous chapter, the significance of work among CountryWatch employees and "bobo" culture appears to be linked with idealism, activism, socio-political issues and notions of work a kind of vocation. Still, in much the same way as the diligent student enjoys the mark of distinction for his or her efforts, so too is the diligent worker elevated in moral standing. An employee, for example, might receive a retirement party where his or her praises are sung and mention is made of the fact that he or she "never took one sick day off." In this way, he or she exists in

\textsuperscript{87} Etzioni, 1995: 256.
the work world with the honor of knowing that he or she did not shirk responsibility, thus exalting his or her moral positioning.

Work and work relations, therefore, touch upon the personal, cultural, and political dimensions of life that have psychological and cultural effects. In this way, the socioeconomic considerations aside, work is increasingly textured by confusion and ambiguity. 88 That is to say, the burdens of work coexist with its material and psychic benefits, thus contributing to varied, incongruous and contradictory meanings.

Identity, Psyche and Work

In free market economies and societies such as the United States, the sense of identity and psychic well being are often associated with the kind of work one does. Having “a good job” entailing hard work and reaping decent pay by which bills can be paid is part of the equation and comes from ethics regarding hard work, livelihood and identity. In the previous chapter, for example, JR states that he was getting paid to learn and enjoyed some responsibility of ownership for the material he produced. He contrasted his experience at CountryWatch with the cut-throat business dealings on Wall Street and concluded that the latter was a “soul-less” enterprise. Although his perspective was certainly influenced by the particularly negative permutations taken in working for Jack Grubman, JR’s perspective is influenced by certain ideas and expectations about workplace ethics.

The French word for “work” -- “travail” -- translates in English into both “hard work” as well as “extreme pain and agony.” In fact, “travail” comes from the Old Latin word “tripalium,” which was an instrument of torture. 89 As illustrated by the perspectives articulated by certain employees, in some cases work is viewed as a kind of “drudgery” that might well be regarded as torturous. Indeed, one employee even mentioned voluntarily poisoning himself or herself because of mind-numbingly boring work. Likewise, GP said that he did not believe that working at a department store could possibly be appealing, even though any job would pay the requisite bills. Another employee disparaged the idea of working up the management ladder in an “ordinary company.” In these cases, the idea of a regular job and a typical career path was not seen as symbiotic with self-imposed notions of life paths, considerations of livelihood notwithstanding.

The idea of livelihood appears to contribute to ideas about life and identity as well. In the previous chapter, MH focused on the revelation that one could follow a career path in which an affinity for work might be harmonized with the need to pay one’s bills. In contrast, AA’s identity was understood in opposition to the work undertaken, as she constantly reminded herself that sales was just a job to be performed for the purpose of paying bills. Even though it is an oppositional dynamic, it is still illustrative of the connection between work and identity.

In practical terms, work certainly “provides a temporal order for behavior” by setting forth a predictable “routine in daily life, that is, expected, regular, largely prescribed course of activities, reassuring and soothing in the face of all the challenges and anxieties of human

89 Gamst, 1995: 2.
existence." This routine of work is precisely what results in post-retirement identity crisis occasionally experienced by workers withdrawing from the workplace. This type of anxiety and crisis was expressed in BB’s fears of retirement earlier. The anxiety provoked by retirement and withdrawal from the world of work suggests that his sense of self has been linked with the kind of job he has held. Likewise, the title appearing on a business card serves as a psychological insignia to reinforce BB’s status and socioeconomic position as a successful participant within free market society. When one is no longer in possession of either a job or an attractive title within the workplace, one is unable to reflect power, authority, status and influence which may well mark the psyche. Meanwhile, although BK did not actually need the monetary benefits of work, he continued to participate in the free market society because he believed that wealth accumulation serves as the barometer of success which reflects upon his own sense of selfhood and identity. In this way, work yields not only material benefits but also associated symbolic capital manifest in social power, influence and status.

Work, Engagement and Expression of Identity

Work also functions not simply as a manifestation of power, influence and status but also as an expression of identity. Several employees cited in the previous chapter associated notions of intelligence, talent and “interesting work” with their self-identifications, suggesting that their work was an expression of identity in some measure. EW, for example, declared that it was imperative that one’s passion not simply be followed but expressed via one’s work. Implicit in EW’s understanding is the idea that work as passion rather than duty. In effect,

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work is understood as a repository for selfhood. In this particular regard, Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* has written the following: “I don’t like work – no man does – but I like what is in work – the chance to find yourself. Your own reality – for yourself, not for others – what no man can ever know.” Following Conrad, work may be understood as the expression of personal engagement.

Of course, there are dimensions of work that are exemplified by the notion of the “Protestant work ethic” as well as Christian-centric sensibilities about Satan making use of “idle hands.”

At the other end of the spectrum, however, work may be understood as a vocation and as something that imbues meaning to life. This interpretation of work clearly occurs in contrast the more painful experiences of work depicted as a kind of monotonous tedium. Meaning in work, therefore, is understood as something that is internally constituted as an inherent characteristic of certain kinds of work. Is related to notions of fulfillment, satisfaction and value – usually derived from the accomplishment of and engagement with work.

**Work, Pleasure and Meaning**

Neoclassical economists have often dichotomized work and pleasure. Pleasure, in this formulation, is enjoyed as a kind of reward for the suffering of work. In this way, pleasure is found outside the realm of work. Socio-economists, unlike neoclassical economists, tend to hold the view that there is some degree of inherent satisfaction or fulfillment that can be

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derived from work itself. 93 Along a similar vein, Hannah Arendt has distinguished between the drudgery of labor and the embedded rewards of what can broadly be called "work." 94 In each of these cases, work is conceived in terms of associated dimensions of personal meaning, value, and even, pleasure.

As suggested by Amitai Etzioni, learned academics belonging to communities of intellectuals are likely to expend substantial time and effort in their "work." 95 This substantial allotment of time and energy is motivated not by the sheer concerns of livelihood, but for the purposes of personal meaning, value, engagement and even, pleasure.

Among industrial workers and other professional arenas, similar qualities can be identified. As Etzioni notes, professionals such as locomotive engineers enjoy the responsibilities and skill of their profession to such a degree that they eschew retirement and often work during periods of vacation. 96 Even at CountryWatch, editorial staffers arrive at the office on weekends to "work on deadlines," while information technology employees also appear in the office to test technical processes or perform back-up procedures on the networking systems. They may complain about the fact that they must work on the weekend. Still, they simultaneously exhibit some degree of satisfaction or pride in the presence at the office for purposes of work. The technologist, for example, will boast that he was in the office until two in the morning, several hours longer than the editor who had been trying to finish a review on Tanzania. In these cases, the "occupational culture," which bears upon the

94 Arendt, 1958.
connection of colleagues, may well impact prevailing attitudes toward work, work ethics, and personal belief systems.

A study by Thomas Juster examines the correlation of meaning, value, pleasure and work and concludes that the intrinsic satisfaction derived from work exceeds the intrinsic satisfaction rooted in leisure. Juster also finds that "average" American workers (however that category might be conceived) tend to express a preference and desire for work with some measure of leisure, in comparison with full-time leisure. Certainly, they also express a desire for a greater amount of available leisure time.

**Work as Gratification and Self-Definition**

Walter Goldschmidt writes, "Work is more than labor. However irksome or exhausting, it is a source of gratification; it is often the most important source of self-definition." The centrality of selfhood, both in terms of gratification and definition, has been outlined by Studs Terkel's seminal *Working* in which meaning is infused into the work functions of the most menial workers, and as demonstrated by the frustrations felt by wealthy financial and technical professionals who feel as though their work lacks meaning and offers little non-material gratification. In trying to determine some of the issues and resonances surrounding these themes, I shared the following conversation with VS, a Vice President at CountryWatch:

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98 Goldschmidt, 1995: 86.
99 See Terkel, 1972. See also conversation between RC and MZ, transcribed above which illustrates the perspective of wealthy professionals frustrated by the lack of meaning and gratification in their work.
VS: When I first came on at CountryWatch, I wasn’t management. At the time, I just wanted to make a bunch of money. I was told I’d make X dollars and when I got here, I realized that the sales projections were wildly off the mark. So, firstly, I just wanted to sell and make money. People didn’t like me because I would just do my job and I wasn’t up to socializing.

DY: So when did you start becoming personally invested… assuming that you are…

VS: Yes, I am still here because of the emotional commitment. I’ve been here for three years, so it has happened over that course of time. I guess I have faith in the product and in the people with whom I work now. I like the diversity of responsibilities and I like that we’ve gotten rid of a lot of the toxic people so that it is a relatively healthy place to work now, even if there is dysfunction. I like the fact that there is a lot of room for development and personal growth that you can’t get in a larger organization.

DY: You’ve listed a number of reasons describing to some degree why you’re here, but I am not sure they exactly answer why you are personally invested. Being here and being personally invested is not necessarily the same thing. They could be… but you’ve actually talked about the fact that you like the workplace environment (despite some dysfunction), the people within it and the varied nature of the work itself. You’ve talked about having faith in the product.
VS: (laughs). I suppose you’re right. But I missed another item on the list. I think I am attracted to the dysfunction.

DY: So we’re still talking about why you’re here and you like the job? Okay… what do you mean by the “dysfunction?” I know what I think of as dysfunctional, but I am not sure it is your definition.

VS: Well, there aren’t really any clear objectives from the top and we seem to go in a number of directions at will. We have a core product and should probably spend our time working on that but whenever BK comes up with another scheme, like political markets, we’re up and running in a direction that we don’t even know much about. I think that’s dysfunctional but it also gives me the opportunity to both problem-solve and to set my own clear directions. I guess I like the opportunity to fix things.

DY: Would you have that opportunity if you were not upper management?

VS: I think it is possible, but not so likely. And actually, I think having the responsibility of management is possibly part of the reason why I became emotionally committed to the company… to finally answer the question you posed earlier. It is like having a kid thrust upon you. The responsibility is daunting but you can’t help but care and become increasingly involved. It isn’t a job or about making money anymore. It is about something more.
DY: Tell me more about that “something more…”

VS: I am not sure what to say… I guess I want to see the company succeed and I can see how my efforts have a direct effect on that goal. I think it helps to see how your efforts actually result in something real and quantifiable. I look at sales figures for a few years ago and I compare them with today and I can see an exponential difference. I feel good about that.

DY: So there is something gratifying about being able to gauge an effect or a result from your work?

VS: Exactly. It isn’t as if I think there is some great higher purpose or meaning that comes from increasing your sales and market share. I know there is a lot of popular business literature that tries to make that argument. I don’t go there. That’s a load of crap. But I do think that being successful and meeting or exceeding goals can be very gratifying.

DY: I want to go back to what you just said about the higher purpose of meaning not coming from meeting business objectives. Could you expand a little on that?

-- pause --

DY: I think you said that it was a bunch or a load of crap…
VS: Are you going to write that I said that? Yikes. I guess I just think that there is more to life than making money, even though I know I sound like a hypocrite for making that statement after confessing that I only arrived here for the money in the first place! I think that the success at work can be motivating and can help you feel good about yourself, but it isn’t as if it is a religious experience. It offers a sense of... fulfillment, satisfaction, and like I said before, it is gratifying. 100

DY: Okay, so having said that, how important is your work to you?

VS: I’d have to say that my work is the most important part of my life. I am consumed by it. Maybe it is because I am more successful at my professional life than my personal life...

DY: I can relate to that!

-- laughter --

VS: Work makes me feel good. I think I said that already. You know, it is really ironic because I think everyone’s objective is not to do it – to work, I mean, and some days, it sure feels as if my life is like a treadmill, but I would have to say that work is, maybe, 70 percent of my entire identity.

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100 According to the American Heritage Dictionary (2000), gratification denotes notions of pleasure, the pleasing of the mind or tastes, satisfaction, enjoyment, fruition, delight, and reward. Other definitions also mention that gratification is associated with a lack of boredom, specifically noting by example that “dull and repetitious leads to no gratification.”
DY: So you have an actual figure?

-- more laughter --

VS: I guess... I won't work endlessly hard for a pittance for the sake of it. And yes, I want to be able to take a trip or buy some earrings at Nordstrom's without feeling terribly stressed about it. And frankly, the money and commissions you earn are measures of success. But it isn't about the money, it really is about the job and how it makes me feel.

DY: Well, you said it was close to three-quarters of your entire identity?

VS: That sounded terrible, didn't it? I guess it really comes back to the fact that my professional life is where I have been most successful and so it is where I find my most favorable sense of identity and accomplishment. Some people, like BK, for instance, like "making the deal." They like the kill. For me, it is not the actual kill; it is how satisfied and gratified it makes me feel. (Maybe I shouldn't have used the word "kill.") You know, I don't have a family to go home to at night, so when for me, who I am and what I do for a living are pretty closely related. And feeling good about that person is part of the equation too.

DY: I think you mentioned the feeling of being gratified...
VS: Right.  \(^{101}\)

**Work and Esteem**

While work imbues a sense of identity to workers within this operational system, loss of work means loss of power and can result in the loss of a given worker's identity anchor in society.  \(^{102}\) As intimated above, the family house symbolizes the one particular culmination of working to make a living – the provision of shelter for one's family. The loss of a job compromises this capacity and is one of the frequent reference points for employees concerned about employment. For example, in the previous chapter, MH expressed concerns about paying her mortgage. By extension, being incapable of providing for her family translates in similar identity crises as those evoked by retirement.

Another way in which identity and work function together is shown through the experiences of unemployed "street corner men."  \(^{103}\) Elliot Liebow's depiction of "street corner men" in Washington D.C. is as follows: "The street corner man is under constant assault by his job experiences and job fears. His experiences and fears feed upon one another. The kind of job he can get – and frequently only after fighting for it, if then – steadily confirms his fears, depresses his self-confidence and self-esteem until finally, terrified of an opportunity even if one presents itself, he stands defeated by his experiences, his belief in his own self-worth destroyed and his fears a confirmed reality."  \(^{104}\)

\(^{101}\) This excerpt is taken from a conversation with VS and is transcribed here with her permission.

\(^{102}\) See Gamst, 1995: 13 on this matter.

\(^{103}\) Gamst, 1995: 4.

Closer to home, the connection of identity and work and the collapse of self-esteem was illustrated by AMS’ case of under-functioning in a job that did not suit her apparent talents and interests. AMS described herself as hopelessly terrible at performing the basic duties of a simple job role, which she described as “drudgery.” Fear and anxiety prevents the street corner man from excelling within a job that he barely is able to obtain. Meanwhile, the lack of identification with the work itself impaired AMS’ performance at a job she did not like and to which she could not relate.

A different case of under-functioning was recorded in the electronic mail correspondence between RC, an enterprise software architect and MZ, a financial analyst in Europe, both of whom consult with CountryWatch on technology and finance:

MZ: I’m sooooo bored. My butt is starting to hurt from all the sitting around. All I’ve done in the last two weeks in evaluate gold dealers. This is ridiculous.

RC: That’s a lot of hurting! Ha ha! I am still waiting to hear from Company X about that contract. I’ll string them along to the end on how much I’ll take. If they don’t hit six figures, I won’t go down, but they don’t need to know that until the other contractors are gone. I am pretty much just sitting and waiting as well. I could just take the contract as is, but I am bored myself and trying to make this moderately interesting. You know, setting higher hurdles for myself.
MZ: We’re getting paid to fuck around and wait.

RC: I can’t stand it. I’d prefer to be paid less if I could do more. BTW, gold was 395 last week and is now 412 thanks to Mr. Perpetual Credit Greenspan.

MZ: I know, they should fire me. But they won’t. I hate this. I am bored. Did I say that already?

RC: Yep. Let’s get back to our portfolios. 105

As demonstrated in this exchange, MZ and RC are well-paid professionals but frustrated by the lack of power and influence they are able to wield, despite their high earnings. In their particular cases, senses of identity are associated with active participation and engagement with their work. Recalling Conrad above, work is a venue and an activity by which one’s selfhood potentially might be found. Instead, MZ and RC are effectively under-functioning, yet they are still being rewarded with high salaries, despite their own assessments that they are not being challenged or exerted. As such, MZ and RC exemplify how the system of operations in the capitalist frame is configured to maintain a certain status quo, which stabilizes the location of individuals at certain echelons along the socio-economic hierarchy. Meanwhile, they negotiate the less than optimal professional conditions in which they exist by playing with contract terms and their personal financial portfolios.

105 This excerpt is taken from a Yahoo messenger conversation shared between MZ and RC – both of whom have had working relationships with CountryWatch in varying capacities. The text is transcribed here with permission from both RC and MZ.
Web of Rules and Workplace Norms

As discussed in the chapter on the New Economy, work exists within the capitalist frame as one of the means by which wealth is acquired, through a system in which productivity and profit are maximized. Yet the work of humans cannot be treated as efficiencies of exchange within the marketplace. In the United States of America, where the Enlightenment Era legacy concerning the marketplace, property rights, equity and legal processes all factor highly, work is an inherent component of this constellation of features. That is to say, work is to be understood as a social and cultural process that implies and involves practices, customs, laws, organizations, institutions, and interactions of society at large.

In contemporary society, the production of goods and services involves the web of work in the form of labor management regulations, recruitment practices, training programs, patterns by which occupations and industries are located, processing of tasks, standards of productivity, the pacing of work itself and the coordination and synchronization of all work flow processes.

In this way, the division of time is another characteristic of industrial society with a connection to the realm of work. The coordination of industrial work in North America, for example, is divided into standardized time zones, while industrial processing is itself synchronized precisely so that work is timed in terms of frequency and duration. This is because materials and products must arrive at destinations at particular times, in the correct sequence for planning, processing and production of goods and services. Without temporal

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106 Gamst, 1995: 5.
divisions and orchestrations of processes, work in industrial society would “become
dysfunctionally independent instead of functionally interdependent.” By way of example,
the public educational system in industrialized countries such as the United States, with its
structured timetables and events, serves as the training ground for workers of the future. The schedule of classes, breaks, tasks, and assignments, along with attendance roll calls and
consequences for tardiness collectively function to inculcate certain attitudes and practices
among young people, in preparation for the world of work.

The educational system represents only one of several mechanisms by which macroscopic
forces work together to formulate institutionalized attitudes, practices and norms among
workers, managers and employers, compensation, as well as the rights and duties of the
actors within this broader landscape of work in industrial society. Shared dispositions
about work and about authority are produced as a result of such mechanisms. Industrialization harkened the emergence of new distinctions between those who controlled
work and those who undertook the work. In this way, the fulcrum for industrial power
relations between employers and employees came into being.

Other mechanisms include the political and legal system, which govern work through
regulations and law, as exemplified by United States Labor Law, civil rights law and
regulatory standards within the workplace. As well, the historical, cultural and national
contexts, which bear upon parental and familial practices, such as discourses about “good

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107 As stated by Gamst, 1995: 5.
108 See Gamst 1995: 5, 6 as regards this matter.
neighborhoods with good schools” espoused by real estate developers, play into the aforementioned element of education as preparation for work. At the international level, global institutions and policies, such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) affect economic conditions and practices of work within countries and by extension, the lives, welfare and well-being of people in those countries affected. The politics of agreements on trade notwithstanding, international policies and regional trade agreements considered along with jurisprudence and education operate as wide-reaching and interconnected mechanisms influencing work. The network of these differentiated but interrelated systems of industrialized society, as well as the relationships and practices that exist within them, give rise to what John Dunlap referred to as “a web of rules.” That is to say, work, attitudes toward work, working relationships and work processes, are all reciprocally informed by this “web of rules.”

Within this “web of rules,” it would seem that there are three bodies of actors: businesses or employers, employees or workers and government regulators or policy-makers. The political or governmental level, it would appear, provides not only resources, but also the laws and prescriptions by which work operates. The businesses and employers seek to operate and profit from the establishment of enterprises, presumably within the context of legally acceptable parameters. Employees or workers within this operational system have their personalized agendas and motivations, as exemplified by some of the citations in this research, ranging from simply “making a living” to more esoteric meanings involving work

\[111\] Berg, 1995: 94.
\[112\] Dunlop, 1958. See also Berg, 1979.
as an expression of identity. Work, as has been discussed in this research, has its own trajectories of meaning.

At the microscopic level of the worker, the creation of the resume, with its focus on educational background and qualifications; working experience, intended to build on increasing responsibility; the litany of "duties" in each working capacity; and the delineation of other related skills function as a type of blueprint for the profile of the worker. Borrowing from business parlance, the "job interview" is an exposition of personality and good communications skills intended to "close the sale." That is to say, the dynamics of the job interview function to market the persona so that it appears as attractive as the resume on the paper in front of the interviewer. As such, the job interview embodies the way in which the worker must always externalize and express positive attributes. Once a worker is employed for a particular job, the actual job description, the design and redesign of "best practices" documentation, and the annual and bi-annual processes of evaluation operate in concert to reinforce a regulatory regime within the workplace.

Let us return to the network of systems within industrialized society and more specifically, the web of rules that produces something akin to the aforementioned regulatory regime. This interrelated and latticed model seeks to advance "norms of output, pace and performance" in the workplace. 113 As noted by Gamst, "the central function of all webbed rules is to govern the relationships and behavior of all the bodies of actors interacting in the workplace and work community in reaching an accommodation between workers and controllers of work."

113 Kerr at al, 1973: 52.
In this way, the rules and regulations that inform work also function to conduct the power relations of work in society at large. Recalling some of the examples cited in the previous chapter at CountryWatch, when VS, the Vice President of Sales, informs a salesperson such as AA, that she is not entitled to compensatory vacation days when official holidays fall on weekends, she draws upon the force of the employee handbook as the law or rule governing such instances. When the accounts administrator, MH, insists on taking her full lunch hour regardless of the unspoken rule that workers should eat lunch at their desks, she is in her own way bucking the established regulatory regime.

As shown by these two cases, regulatory regimes, themselves an effect of the “web of rules,” produce both integration and alienation of the worker within the workplace. Regardless of the fact that there may be genuine social ties that bind the actors at CountryWatch across power lines, and regardless of the engagement workers may have with the work itself that results in a sense of personal investment, the procedural and regulatory practices that frame the workplace simultaneously maintain boundaries between workers and the controllers of work. For example, following the downsizing exercises at CountryWatch, those in managerial positions were not easily accepted in normal social activities such as sharing lunch or smoking breaks “on the hill.” Likewise, interoffice relations tend to become more frigid when a memorandum on schedules and tardiness is disseminated. By virtue of management’s association with the executive branch of the company and the positioning as power brokers, they are viewed with suspicion and re-integration into the workplace community ensues only after a period of time. At play is an underlying sense of tension that can be evoked by practices and procedures that reify power differentials. After a memorandum on the

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114 Gamst, 1995: 149.
workplace schedule was published at CountryWatch, for instance, employee MAA queried, "Why do these things have to be sent out? I know the rules. Is this a reminder for employees to arrive at work on time and a warning for those who don’t? Why don’t they just talk to the people who break the rules instead of sending out a memo to everyone? This is such a small company... I don’t get it.”

Ultimately, there is a system of industrial relations at stake, operating in accordance with a set of ideologies that are socially and culturally learned, which bear upon not only the conduct of work, but also the control of work. ¹¹⁵ Although the term “web of rules” describes this prevailing system, the web or network is not a static matrix of modalities, but rather “an analytical perspective allowing inspection of the dynamic power relations among concerned bodies of sometimes self-interested and self-serving actors, and other individuals within these groupings.” ¹¹⁶ Returning to MAA’s observation above for a moment, it should be noted that the memorandum about schedules at issue had been publicized after the Chief Executive Officer telephoned the office from an out-of-town trip to find that the receptionist was not available. In conjunction with an assemblage of other similar incidents, he concluded that the reminder about the work day schedule was necessary. As seen here, employee MAA thought otherwise. Viewed together, the oppositional perspectives suggest that actors within the workplace tend to advance their own views of efficiency, equity, and fairness. ¹¹⁷ Competing views of this sort form the underlying tensions of the system of industrial or workplace relations.

¹¹⁵ Gamst, 1995: 159.
¹¹⁶ Gamst, 1995: 159.
Work as Performance

Given the inherent tensions within the system of industrial relations, one particular way in which work is regarded involves the notion of performance. By performance, I am not referring to the successful attainment of sales targets but rather the intimation of work as it relates to the German word “werk” and its connotations with action and performance.\(^{118}\) Indeed, the Indo-European root of the word “work” comes from the verbs “to do” and “to act.”\(^{119}\) Consider the text from the following electronic mail message sent by a colleague to EW at CountryWatch. EW had been reprimanded by her direct supervisor, VS, for exhibiting “a poor work ethic” following an incident in which she took a day off without pay. EW felt bemused by the situation since it was her belief that it would be acceptable to take unpaid time off. Her supervisor, VS, was troubled by the manner in which the situation was treated and was trying to come to terms with the situation by discussing it with another colleague. That colleague -- the sender of the following electronic mail message -- held a position of executive authority at CountryWatch. In the message that follows, the colleague is attempting to offer EW some insight into the disconnection of perspective between these two players on the CountryWatch stage. At the heart of her correspondence, however, is a call to performance on the work stage as a requisite aspect of survival within the corporate environs:

"E,

\(^{118}\) Gamst 1995: 2
\(^{119}\) Gamst, 1995: 2.
Let me give you an example -- I think it was probably a bad idea to take a day off around Christmas, without asking VS directly, sending the message via MH, and then informing VS that you would take it without pay. Even if you don't take the pay, the message you're sending out is problematic. It is, to be frank, imbued with entitlement issues about what suits you rather than what is appropriate for the workplace.

I'll leave it at that and say that those types of incidences collectively, are detrimental to the way in which you may be perceived and that's why every little thing you do may be scrutinized.

Here's the thing, a hypothetical employee might spend some money on a trip for work and submit their expense account the moment they get back. In FACT, they have that right, but the corporate law suggests that they should almost forget to submit their expenses because they're supposed to be working for the sheer love of it. Of course such an idea is bullshit, but you have to play the bullshit game. Likewise, all employees have an hour for lunch each day but the corporate law says they should eat at their desks and walk around fainting from the lack of food and sheer love of their work. Again this is completely insane bullshit and massively fucked up thinking ... but true.

I can make some suggestions in these regards (how to manage situations like this)...just let me know and we can chat.
I've perfected this whole "work comes first" thing. And yes, I say that in a self-mocking way. Partially it is because I really AM in love with my work, but also because I've been raised to be the model minority. So even though I know the whole system is freaking dysfunctional, anti-human and insane, I still "perform."

What I am telling you, woman, is perform, perform, and one day you can say fuck you to all the rules that constrain and all the people who don't let you bloom. But in the meantime, perform. Discipline can be instructive.

I may be philosophically against the idea of everyone performing like they are corporate robots... but my philosophical penchants find no place in real corporate life.

Believe me, I look from the outside at CW and I am horrified at times, but it is just like many other institutions and no matter where one goes, there is always going to be some aspect of the corporate bullshit. So we have to find the freedom and unbind ourselves from the chains mentally... even though we spend most of our lives in metaphoric iron cages.  

**Work as the Source of Alienation and Integration**

As discussed earlier, work can be a source of gratification and self-definition. This formulation suggests that there is a more complex arrangement of social, cultural and psycho-emotional investment in work than simply attachment to livelihood. Meanwhile, the

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120 This excerpt is taken from an electronic mail transmission from an executive at CountryWatch to EW. I have declined to specify the originator of the message for privacy reasons, and I am including it in the research with permission from EW.
web of rules and formalized procedures that also operate in the workplace result in the sense of being trapped in “metaphoric iron cages” as noted just above. These elements frequently produce feelings of alienation which in the sphere of work is sometimes termed “bureaucratic alienation.”  

The positive effects of work, such as the senses of identity, gratification and meaning, or the cultural value of work performance and ethics, or even the personal satisfaction derived from accomplishing certain goals and professional objectives, together contribute to the integrative qualities of work. In attempting to come to terms with the contradictory impulses of alienation and integration associated with work, I shared the following conversation with RM, a regional editor and writer at CountryWatch, who now works as a visiting professor at Yale University:

RM: I was hired as a regional editor because the coverage of Africa was pretty sparse at the time. I wanted to develop the historical background, the governmental coverage, particularly about constitutional processes, and real political analysis. We had sparse chronologies of events at the time but not something you could call actual political analysis. There was a lot of talk about making an EIU-type product for less, so that was what I was trying to accomplish. They have tons of writers and analysts across the globe and we would have to compete with that breadth and depth of people resources.

DY: That’s something CountryWatch did not have.

RM: Right. My goal was to improve the content on Africa, based on our limited resources. I came up with a plan that included the hiring of two writers who were actually writing from

121 Gamst, 1995: 158.
various countries in Africa. That was we had “in country” coverage. I think you need someone on the ground, with access to the local network. Without that, it is difficult to really create meaningful coverage.

DY: That’s very interesting... You know, I was never of the mind that we could actually produce something precisely comparable to the EIU, but I still believed – still do – that we can grab some of their market share with a lesser priced and less detailed product.

RM: I think you are correct, but that wasn’t how it was portrayed to me. Instead, it was all about creating something comparable, not competing on our own terms. So, based on what I understood, I was trying to build this incredibly sophisticated coverage of Africa. It came as quite a shock when some time later, it was decided that we wanted something cheaper, faster and timely.

DY: You’re referring to the fact that the approach to content shifted. It was marginal, then they hired you during the push to upgrade the content coverage, and following that, they changed to a more, shall we say, journalistic style?

RM: Yes, and it wasn’t just that it changed and it was that it was not the kind of thing that was originally presented to me. I just didn’t like the way it was framed. I’d get comments from the editor at the time like, “You don’t have to go into so much detail.” And then a few months later, I’d get “Say what you have to say.” And then that became, “Say what you have to say and if you’re right, then, good.”
DY: So, there was a gradual process of deterioration, then?

RM: Right. And the editor at the time, well, he didn’t have much vision or direction or control. He was just a mouthpiece for the executives who were really calling the shots. He was a kind of buffer and a conduit for them… not a real editor. And you know, that’s okay. They hired someone who wouldn’t have a conflicting perspective which certainly lacks vision. But it is very practical.

DY: I imagine that part of the reason for changing the approach to the content coverage was to minimize the payments and costs. I also think there were some issues regarding deadlines. And then there was the combined problem of all of this occurring on the downward slope of the dot.com era. Whatever the reason, the direction was one that took the product more in a journalistic direction…

RM: Well, it just seems as if it is simply about updating the current events in each country. It is not as if there is anything terribly egregious about the product quality now, it is just that it isn’t a particularly enlightening one. I don’t think that there is any intellectual agility in it.

DY: Well, if the product promises information and data, but not analysis, is it compelled to include elements of intellectual agility? I see it as information and data… which is not precisely the same thing as knowledge.
RM: You’re quite right. That’s true. I think it is difficult for those of us who come from academia to do this kind of work. It requires a very distanced viewpoint. I think you’re much more skilled at distancing yourself, well, your academic self from the corporate-styled work. Maybe it is that anthropological background.

DY: Well, this is supposed to be about you and not me, but for a moment, I’ll speak from R to D. In ethnography, you have the researcher and the subject and there is an inherent distance between the two. For me, the situation is more complicated by the fact that I play the role of the researcher seeking insight from subjects, most of whom are my colleagues; I also play the role of the employee with a job to do; the workplace is also my “fieldwork,” and I report to another field of engagement in academia. Sometimes I don’t feel as if I am playing a role in all these capacities. Yes, there is some degree of critical distance that is required or you don’t retain your perspective, but no performance will be a good one if you can’t identify in some way with the role. So there is a mixture of distance and identification for me. Now let’s get back to you...

RM: Wow, that’s schizophrenic.

DY: Yes, that’s been uttered a time or two.

RM: Okay, I see you want to get back to what we were discussing. I think my point is that, as an academic, I have trouble maintaining that distanced viewpoint and so the shift in content focus was really difficult for me. Made me feel like I was selling my soul for a buck.
And the way it was handled was upsetting. I mean, there was a big meeting to discuss the
direction of the company one day and a month later, we’re on that path headed in another
direction. I didn’t understand it then and I don’t get it now. Was it all an elaborate ruse?

DY: So why not quit? You had a job at Colby College. And then you got a position at
Princeton and now you are at Yale. You’ve never had trouble finding work in academia, so
why the continued relationship with CountryWatch?

RM: Well, part of it is that the corporate credentials are helpful. Yale is a client of
CountryWatch. Lots of universities use CountryWatch. I happen to know from my insider
status the problems with the content and, in my opinion, the quality. But that isn’t something
that most people realize with a cursory view. I really sound like a hypocritical jerk right
now, don’t I?

-- laughter --

DY: You don’t need to be apologetic with me. I still work here, remember? I am always
asking myself the question of why the heck I am still here after all this time.

RM: I guess, in some idealist universe, I have this idea that writing about the countries of the
world could be a noble cause. The EIU is elitist and expensive and if CountryWatch could
produce an inexpensive information product, then you’re essentially democratizing
information. I become infuriated when I see the value slipping or appearing to slip, because
then you are no longer democratizing information but, instead, selling a product. Ultimately, though, it is enjoyable work. And yes, I have had the occasional fantasy about launching a hostile takeover of the company so I could take it in the direction I think it should be going.

DY: It is distinctly possible that I may have had that fantasy on occasion myself. (That would be during my incarnation as employee and not as anthropologist.).

RM: Gotcha.

Post-Industrial Society and Work

RM’s perspective reflects frustration and a sense of alienation about his position as an information and knowledge broker within the corporate landscape of work at an Internet-based company. The corporate landscape of work in the New “Informational” Economy during a period of late-Industrialism, however, is to be distinguished is some measure from the earlier Fordist framework of the Industrialized economy.

The “Regulation” school had emerged as a result of governmental intervention and other institutional controls into capitalist operations and labor relations. The “Regulationists” who presided over these changes are to considered along with the labor mechanisms and management framework of “Fordism” which followed that of the Ford motor car company. Another element of Fordism included the restructuring of industry from traditional

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centers to other locations in Latin America and Asia, thus portending the global spread of corporate capitalism. ¹²⁴ Largely a result of declining rates of profit within traditional industries in the United States in the 1960s, multinational corporations looked to new low-cost centers in developing and peripheral economies across the world. ¹²⁵

Within a decade, with the rise of computerized technology, the Fordist framework would erode and the factory as the locus of labor relations conflict would recede. In effect, the (arguably) privileged position of unionized workers within corporate capitalism would rupture. Meanwhile, nation states would have less influence on their economies as capitalist hegemony would prevail, even leading to regional trading blocs. This shift would also prove to have an effect on the way in which workers related to their work.

Indeed, in the 1970s, classic notions of class struggle were altered with the rise of technocrats on the business and management scene. The rise of technocrats, the continued primacy of capitalism, industrial revenue, the growth of financial industries, and the effects of technology on commerce and business, collectively contributed to theories about post-industrialism and post-Fordism. Whereas Gramsci’s notion of Fordism refers to corporate power and welfare capitalism, post-Fordism denotes the changing landscape of labor and production, as well as accumulation and distribution that has occurred with the rising tide of technology and more recently, the emergence of the New Economy. ¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Applebaum, 1995: 201-203.
Alain Touraine has noted that post-Industrial society, with increasing emphasis on new technologies, is marked by a significant transformation in production mechanisms. 127 This transformation of production mechanisms has essentially resulted in changes in economic organization, to the extent that the society and the economy is no longer inhabited by the precisely the same type of workers. As noted previously, workers have been displaced and the privilege of unionized workers in the United States has been ruptured, although it is fair to state that the specific working conditions of workers in developing countries may not have improved. Touraine, as well as Daniel Bell, both tracked changes employment from the arenas of production and manufacturing, to service industries as well as technologies and communications modalities in production. From their examinations of these issues, they observed the devolution of organized labor in conjunction with the rise of technological elites. 128 In contrast to standard Marxist notions of exploitation and alienation, Touraine, notably, believed that technical workers and other employees in advancing economic sectors would struggle with social and cultural alienation. That is to say, they would be less concerned about economic exploitation and focus instead on the social and cultural effects of an increasingly technologically-driven professional terrain. 129

**Technology and Work**

The technological framework, discussed in previous chapters of the research, contains an inherent question of its control. That is to say, what part in the social order is played by science, machinery and technological innovation? For some social activists, technology is

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127 Touraine, 1971.
viewed as another means by which workers are displaced for the purpose of advancing profits within the capitalist system. For these people, the apparent advantages of technology simply obfuscate the continued relations of domination that form society. For others, however, technology is a form of liberation both from and for work. Following this line of thought, technology is understood as a means by which work is made more efficient and more rewarding. It alleviates the hazards and the monotony of work. Regardless of whether or not technology actually carries with it such an effect, Marcuse has noted that questions about the control of technology present a crisis in relation to human values. Does technology, therefore, represent liberation or enslavement of another order? While technology denotes progress and implies greater benefits, it concomitantly entails a kind of dependence.

Applebaum notes that technology influences “safety, health, comfort, nutrition, shelter, mobility, and even happiness has become instrument specific” and he goes on to state the following “the desire to move becomes the desire to possess an automobile; the need for communication becomes the need for a telephone; the necessity to eat becomes the need for a refrigerator, a stove, and a supermarket close by. Whether we like it or not, whether we can do something about it or not, the technological paradigm often gives meaning and affects our goals and values in modern society.” Outside the personal sphere and in the realm of work, online businesses such as CountryWatch illustrate how the production of work is not only reliant upon technology and technological innovation, but how technological modalities are constitutive of work and its meaning. In these regards, Jacques Ellul has suggested that

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technology has informed the new social environment and cultural context of modern society.\textsuperscript{133} Modern and advanced technologies have become more deeply ensconced within the fabric of daily life.

For a moment, let us return to the notion articulated just above about technology denoting progress. For the most part, the conceptual relationship of technology and progress revolves around the laissez-faire idea that prosperity and progress are derived from technological development.\textsuperscript{134} In this formulation, technology is a kind of remedy or elixir by which society unfolds in positive and progressive fashion. Technology is also understood as a kind of "tool system," which transforms the human environment via the use of information and knowledge.\textsuperscript{135} In this case, the relationship between technology and knowledge is identified. Whether technology is regarded in laissez-faire terms or as part of a complex of instruments and information, its result remains the same as that of work. Put simply, technology and work involve actions that transform the landscape.\textsuperscript{136}

Indeed, as noted by Marietta Baba, the relationship between work, knowledge and technology is so interconnected and intertwined that they may be difficult to unravel.\textsuperscript{137} The work undertaken by an employee such as SR or CR at CountryWatch would be difficult to describe without including technology. When SR or CR write computer coding for the CountryWatch website, they are simultaneously working and carrying out a technological function. Developing a complex code exemplifies both the process of working and an aspect

\textsuperscript{133} See also Ellul, 1983.
\textsuperscript{134} Gans, 1995: 24.
\textsuperscript{135} Baba, 1995: 120.
\textsuperscript{136} Baba, 1995: 120-121.
\textsuperscript{137} Baba, 1995: 121.
of the work – as a production of sorts. In fact, when I upload the Global News Update on a weekly basis, complete with HTML-coded text and JPEG imagery using the content management and website administrative systems, I am both working and carrying out technological functions. A third-party observer would be unlikely to separate the work from the technological dimension. Describing this type of scenario, Baba writes, “The operator and her machine interpenetrate one another; technology in its empirical form merges with an almost invisible seam into human work activity.” 138 Yet, without particular knowledge of the technological systems within which SR and CR work, the computerized equipment would simply be lifeless machines made of plastic, steel, plasma and silicon. As noted by SR and CR on separate occasions, the objective in their work is to “make the site come alive.” The transition from lifeless machine to a “live” website populated with information and data is possible only via the intersection of technology, work, information and knowledge.

As suggested just above, work and technology form a techno-social system and are connected principally via the knowledge base. There are, however, other shared elements such as the allocation and usage of time, the norms of techniques, tools and materials and the logistical coordination of tasks and responsibilities. There are also other items already mentioned in this research connecting work and technology such as expenditure of energy, interaction with the environment as well as identity formation, prestige, and distinction.139 In trying to come to terms theoretically with the interconnected relationship of work and technology, some writers observe that if work and technology are not differentiated, then

138 Baba, 1995: 121.
139 Baba, 1995: 123.
statements about the causal relationship between the two are prone to tautology.\textsuperscript{140} In order to resolve this matter, they propose strictly circumscribed definitions of the two, identifying technology with machinery, devices and instruments for human purpose as well as the actual products of such apparatus.\textsuperscript{141} It may be true that the basic variation between work and technology lies in the fact that work is something that is done while technology is something that is created or made. Within this particular point of difference lies the fact that technology is the product of the act of work.\textsuperscript{142}

That said, there are specific technologies that do not involve apparatuses \textit{per se}. Instead, they employ design programs for manufacturing or methodologies for supply chain analysis or quality control.\textsuperscript{143} Moreover, as demonstrated by the examples of SR, CR, and even this researcher, computerized technology is not simply a tool. The information products at CountryWatch are developed for Internet dissemination cannot be expressed simply as text. Considered as such, the computer is a glorified typewriter or technological apparatus but a core part of both the work process and the work product itself. Also, even in the case in the automated processing of news wire stories at CountryWatch, the knowledge, insights, and memory of the human worker force impose upon the technological process for the purposes of editing and refining the news wire coverage. The domains of work and technology not only function together, but information, knowledge, memory and insight collectively form the nexus for that connection. Thus, work and technology act upon one another as mutual forces.

\textsuperscript{140} See Bernard and Pelto, 1986.
\textsuperscript{141} Bernard and Pelto, 1986, as cited by Baba, 1995: 124-125.
\textsuperscript{142} Baba, 1995: 123-124.
\textsuperscript{143} Baba, 1995: 125.
Technology is neither merely a material phenomenon nor a determining force, but also a cultural construction. That is to say, its characteristics are informed by social and cultural factors including economic considerations. As observed in the chapter on the New Economy, technological innovation has not developed out of a profound interest in science and creativity, but rather from various economic forces. Following this line of thinking, Baba observes that technology has been designed and built to support, pre-industrial societies while in industrial societies, technology actually replaces work tasks originally undertaken by humans. ¹⁴⁴ The replacement of human work activity with industrial technology, however, presents a constellation of tensions. As labor was compartmentalized in the Fordist model, skill-based workers were often displaced. Even in a post-Fordist and late-Industrial context, this issue remains unresolved as technological expertise is frequently outsourced to emerging economies in other parts of the world. The result presents an ostensible social, political and economic dilemma, as well as a case for the economic considerations that inform technology.

Other social and cultural factors surrounding technology include the evolution and development of ideas, values and beliefs that take shape through the unfolding of time. The typical assembly line efficiently organizing labor stands not only as an economic and industrial modality, but also as a representation of class relations within capitalist society.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, the rise of technologically proficient workers (with stock options) in the last decade personifies not only the unfolding of a New “Informational” Economy as a late-Industrial form, but also a shift in social structure and relations. In both examples which

¹⁴⁴ Baba, 1995: 121.
¹⁴⁵ Baba, 1995: 131; see also Braverman, 1974.
prevail in the world of work today, technology possesses an indirect controlling influence. In this regard, Marietta Baba writes, “indirect control and domination is exercised through a process in which existing social class relations not only are reflected in technology, but also are created, maintained, and reproduced through technology.”

The Regime of Power in the Workplace

How are social and class relations created, maintained and reproduced through technology? How does power operate in this field of relations? Class relations in the Weberian sense may be produced by industrialization. It has also been said that various class segments (such as the blue collar segment of the middle class) contribute in varying ways to the process of industrialization. In the factory, the division of blue collar labor maximizes productivity while limiting the worker’s learning and skill development beyond the immediate functions of his or her job. The assembly line’s technological order fatigues the worker physically and numbs him or her mentally, ultimately resulting in a low level of job satisfaction. While the worker’s malaise and exhaustion are reinforced by the stress of labor itself, economic class and status structure are reinforced by the success of the factory line and the dependence of the worker upon the industry itself. Meanwhile, power and domination are embodied in the presence of the shop floor manager.

In corporations populated by the white-collar segment of the middle class the scenario can be similar. Although the work itself -- as in the case of CountryWatch -- may be more

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146 Baba, 1995: 134.
stimulating, the stress of the volume of work being undertaken by a small number of employees in companies today has its own effect. The precariousness of the economy means that downsizing and corporate restructuring are the norm, resulting in an asymmetrical dependence by overworked employees on the corporation for jobs and salaries. Meanwhile, technology that promises the democratized workplace is used as a tool of control and surveillance. 148 For example, at CountryWatch the automated process by which news wire stories are processed also provides a means by which managers can use the administrative network to quantify the number of new stories processed within an hour or the entire work day, thus quantifying productivity and creating a level of stress for the news wire staff. Consequently, although this example does not directly register the notion of class relations, it certainly demonstrates how power and control texture the social and professional relations within the field of work.

While the competitive thrust of the capitalism influences the development of new technologies, writers such as Ian Connell and Carl Gardner have warned against the privileging of “production and the commercial intentions of the producers.” 149 Economic processes and impetuses are only part of the picture. Kevin Robins and Frank Webster observe that “there is a sphere in which capital seeks to influence, not ideas or profits but the very rhythms, patterns, pace, texture, and disciplines of everyday life. Within our wider focus upon power relations in society, this represents -- to use Foucault’s term – the terrain upon which operate the systems of micro-power.” 150 For Robins and Webster, informational

150 Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Beyond Established Paradigms”). See also Foucault, 1979.
and technological transformations represent a restructuring of these systems of micropower.\textsuperscript{151}

Elsewhere in this research, I have considered the history of technological change as it relates to capitalist development. Throughout, the factory and its workforce were observed to have been emblematic of not only the division of labor, but also conceptions of time, the control of space, the moralization of work through religious notions ("idle hands are the devil's playthings"), and the routinization of work via the public education system. Together, they represent disciplinary efforts that not only control the workplace and its workforce but also achieve the goal of productivity. Critics of this Taylorist mode have observed that the machine is exalted over the worker, while the worker is left at the mercy of the fatiguing and monotonous procedures of automation. In this way, the Fordist plant "becomes an integrated and automated complex, a megamachine that paces and disciplines the workforce." Control is, therefore, structural. Indeed, the time clock and the assembly line hold sway. Meanwhile, relations of power are subsumed into everyday operations and become automatic and invisible."\textsuperscript{152}

It is the particular aspect of invisibility that characterizes structures of power and control. Invisibility contributes to the subtle creation and unfolding of a disciplinary regime not only in the factory but across varied spheres of life. That is to say, the disciplinary regime of work is reproduced psychically through invisible modes of reproduction including the appropriation of time and space. The Fordist assembly line "imposes its rhythm and tempo

\textsuperscript{151} Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called "Beyond Established Paradigms").
\textsuperscript{152} Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called "Mobilization, Technology and Everyday Life").
upon time and time consciousness” by separating and segmenting time in accordance with various productive tasks. As noted by Michel Foucault, “power is articulated directly onto time; it assures its control and guarantees its use.” Meanwhile, the Fordist system, by centralizing and concentrating work units into an efficient system of production and distribution, acts as a controlling mechanism. At issue is the prevailing Foucauldian “microphysics of power.”

The disciplinary regime is also reproduced materially through the material production and reproduction of goods. Certainly, Fordism was once viewed as a means of mass production. Nevertheless, through various invisible modes, it came to be understood as a social system of capitalist social relations that intruded into the realms of time and space. The entire system was thusly naturalized and became a “manner of life.” For this reason, Robins and Webster write, “Fordism puts social life under the dual regimen of productivity and discipline.”

Following this vein of thought, technology’s effects are constructed not only by social relations in which certain power elites dominate but also through the work activity of employees in the field of work and across a regime of power and discipline. As a cultural

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153 Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Mobilization, Technology and Everyday Life”).
154 Foucault, 1979: 160.
155 Foucault (1979: 141) states “discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space.”
156 Colby, 1981: 67-68; see also Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Knowledge, Information, Intelligence”).
157 See Alt, 1976; see also Granou, 1974.
158 See Granou, 1974.
159 Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75 (see section called “Mobilization, Technology and Everyday Life”).
construct, technology’s effects are dependent upon the context in which it resides and the agents functioning within. \(^{160}\)

**Technological Knowledge at Work**

Work holds its own influence over technology in this relational dynamic. Within the field of work, workers often possess a degree of technical “know-how” that comes from the particular understanding of their jobs and the equipment with which they work. For example, among users of Windows Operating systems, the well-known resolution to computer quirks is to “reboot” before actually reporting such problems to the Information Technology department. This “know how” cannot be described as technological expertise; it is simply a kind of understanding of the particular peculiarities of the system with which one works. It is hardly removed from the kind of familiarity a person might have with the quirks of his or her dishwasher at home.

There is, however, another layer of working knowledge that is not simply responsive but interactive, and which may advance the yield of production or solve production problems. This type of interactive working knowledge must be understood as a part of technology itself within the functions and operations of work activities. Stated differently, interactive working knowledge and work-based solutions become part of the technology itself and contribute to the effectiveness of technological operations. Kenneth Kusterer has described this interplay of working knowledge and technology as “an informal dimension of technology.” \(^{161}\)


\(^{161}\) See Kusterer, 1978, as cited by Baba, 1995: 135.
way of example, when I update or create new material for the CountryWatch website, I "know" that a word document cannot be imported into the database without creating a series of technical glitches, even though I should theoretically be able to do so in a seamless manner. As such, I "know" how to convert the material into text that can both populate the website in HTML as well as the database, without corrupting either dimension.

Ethnographic research such as that of Patricia Sachs and Sylvia Scribner on workers in an electronic components manufacturing form in New England, depicts similar examples of how workers override imperfect technology to achieve results and ensure productivity. In their research, Sachs and Scribner describe how a particular worker responds to the problem of three-day old computer records contributing to a processing bottleneck. The worker overrides the computer record and releases the records three days early to reconcile the time delay and avoid the procedural obstruction. 162

The Taylorist model of operations would have called for the precise and scientific application of the computerized instructions, resulting in the corruption of data in the CountryWatch example or delay in the case study by Sachs and Scribner. 163 Instead, creative problem-solving in both cases influenced the technological domain of the work activity. In this way, as noted by Baba, "work activity begins to constitute a creative frontier for (new) technology." Baba states that the creative frontier is "a domain of application in which new technology and its organizational/behavioral interfaces are further developed and refined in a

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dynamic manner by spontaneous problem-solving activity." That is to say, as workers encounter and confront the challenges of technological applications, their familiarity with the technology employed and their understanding of the real conditions of work contribute to their ability to negotiate the technological field, compensate for its limitations and manipulate its capabilities. Thus, strategies to accomplish the goals and objectives of their work roles are generated.

Early analysis of the effects of technology on work by James Bright, and later by Harry Braverman, found that as higher degrees of automation and technological sophistication were applied to work, human effort and skill development decreased. This perspective harmonizes to some degree with the belief that increased technology renders some work and work skills obsolete. In recent times, as ethnographic research has examined emerging computerized and information-oriented technologies, it does not appear that this precise formulation can be appropriately applied. In fact, the research of Howard and Schneider, as well as the work of Scribner and Sachs, suggest that more complicated technological applications in the realm of information technology require the engagement and interaction of the worker. As exemplified by the two scenarios outlined at CountryWatch and at the electronics manufacturing plant, it would appear that worker knowledge and involvement is vital to problem-solving within the workplace.

Knowledge and increased skill development are often required in order to operate technological applications, from the lower rungs of the business hierarchy to the uppermost

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164 Baba, 1995: 137. See also Orr, 1986; Howard and Schneider, 1988; and Sachs and Scribner, 1989.
165 See Bright, 1958a and 1958b, as well as Braverman, 1974, as cited by Baba, 1995: 138-139.
166 See Howard and Schneider, 1988; Sachs and Scribner, 1989.
echelons and the technologically oriented departments. Indeed, at CountryWatch, even the customer relations staff have to learn how to use fairly complex tracking software applications such as Goldmine, which keeps track of customer data, or WebTrends, which generates website usage reports. Moreover, as workers use technological applications in their daily professional lives, the issues, challenges and limits that they are faced with contribute to the development of new or improved technological developments. For example, new applications or coding can be developed to ameliorate WebTrends or Goldmine features, while baseline editing software can be used to develop proprietary software with sophisticated workflow features.

As such, work as conceived by Baba is a "creative frontier" in which the interaction with technology produces new types of work-technology relations. Work and technology, then, form a mutually interactive model. That is to say, they act upon one another, with technology influencing work and work relations, and with work activities touching upon the usage, deployment and development of technology. This mutually interactive model of work and technology is a crucial aspect of the New Economy.

New Considerations in the New Economy

As discourses about the New "Informational" Economy gained prevalence in the late 1990s and into 2000, the question of how to thrive in this newly emerging landscape also evoked interest. In a climate of datafication, several writers claimed that survival in the workplace

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167 See Adler, 1986.
required adaptation to a new professional context. Indeed, as noted by Tom Peters, survival depends upon understanding the rules of the New "Informational" Economy’s "ecosystem." According to Peters, these rules include attributes such as mastery (a specific and detailed skill set), a network of connections, an entrepreneurial instinct, the ability to handle ambiguity, an understanding of marketing and public relations, a personal passion for renewal (and possibly reinvention), but above all else, a love of the nexus of information and technology. In fact, has Peters stated that simply "dealing with technology" is insufficient; instead, a genuine love of technology is requisite. In this way, technology, particularly information technology, is not a new corporate department to be instituted, complete with a staff and a budget, and integrated into the new corporate workplace. Likewise, it is not a new arena of business consideration to be managed and operated. Instead, information technology is to be embraced.

Perhaps Peters is overstating the matter of loving technology. Still, the case of CountryWatch suggests that he may not be entirely incorrect. It is safe to say that most professions in the datafied New Economy have been both informed by and powered by technology. While one could ostensibly survive in this emerging milieu by adapting to technology, success in this environment, while perhaps not altogether requiring love, may, require engagement in addition to a capacity for ongoing learning. In some senses, in the world of technology, not unlike the realm of academia, work and learning coalesce in some

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168 “Datafication” refers to the increasing significance of data and information systems in business today, both in terms of infrastructural organization and in terms of operational processes and procedures.

169 I found Peters' term "eco-system" (see Peters, 2000: 172). to be strangely scientific and rationalist, and very similar to another term, "corporate climate" which is used in business discourses regarding corporate environments and organizations. Both expressions seem to suggest a shift from the mid-to-late 1990s' preoccupation with corporate culture and human relations to a more scientized, naturalized and rationalized variant.

strange alchemical way. (And yes, as one learns more of technology, there may be a strange and unexpected process of falling in love that does, indeed, take place, almost as a by-product of the survival instinct.)

The idea of engagement with information technology belies other aspects of survival in a changing social, cultural and economic landscape. Workers in the West, and particularly, in the United States, enjoy comparatively high wages and salaries. Confronted with global competition and lower cost workforces in the developing world, most business thinkers believe that employees (that is, the skill sets of employees) must be resourcefully leveraged in order to stay competitive. 171 Stated differently, workers must bring more value to the table than the ability to function along the metaphoric assembly line. Edward Lawler of the University of Southern California Center for Effective Organizations has asserted the following: “Businesses must ask more of the U.S. workforce. We have to let people contribute more and add value to the business in proportion to their wage.” 172

Couched in palatable jargon such as “contribute more” and “add value,” Lawler effectively calls for workers to expend greater effort in order to correlate with (or even justify) higher comparative wages on the global scale. Of course, it is implausible that workers in the United States will work harder and longer hours without incurring the wrath of labor activists. So, in order to compete with their lesser compensated counterparts in developing countries, they are expected to add greater value to their employers in other ways. In concrete terms, that means that they must bring additional knowledge and insight to the

172 Lawler, as cited by Davidow and Malone, 1992: 186.
businesses for which they work. Perhaps this kind of additional knowledge and insight can be identified as new technological development and innovation. It can also include employment training, which maximizes effectiveness and creativity within a given business or enterprise. I would suggest that new considerations in the New Economy include the notion of the knowledge worker or the idea of continuous learning in one's work life.

**Learning and the Knowledge Worker**

William Davidow and Michael Malone state that beyond the implementation of new communications and data processing, not to mention the revolutionary products of enterprises in the New Economy, the corporations that operate in the New Economy ultimately rest upon the individual worker.¹⁷³ As the old rules of mass production erode, only to be replaced by those of the New Economy, it is possible that the worker in this changing landscape has different priorities relating to work. In the Old Economy of mass production, scientific management was the standard. In such a structure, "managers were paid to think, and workers -- often illiterate immigrants or recent migrants from rural areas -- were paid to follow orders as unthinking extensions of a machine."¹⁷⁴

Today, however, the New Economy, powered by innovation and technological advancement, rests upon the intellectual capital of the workforce. In this context, the nature of work may not simply be a matter of harvesting a paycheck, but rather, about something less tangible. As suggested in the previous chapter on work, it may involve other sources of meaning and

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satisfaction. In this regard, one such source may be the psychological fulfillment of learning in a climate of creativity and innovation. In this regard, Michael Dell, CEO of Dell Computers, stated that "the winners in the next few decades will be the companies with the most empowered work forces." 175

The choice of the word "empowerment" is interesting here as it seems to resonate with the notion of an employee-favorable work environment. That is to say, it may denote the motivation of workers, perhaps by the promise of future wealth yielded by stock options and shares, but also by the sense of psychological gratification derived from the accomplishment of work. Following this line of thinking, one theory might be that success in the New Economy rests upon employees' desire to work on creative ventures and to innovate new ideas. Consequently, rather than be thought of as bodies working on an assembly line, the value placed on workers has shifted so that employers speak of the importance of employee empowerment.

The word, empowerment is itself illuminating by another measure. Empowerment gained currency in political usage, particularly around the time of the women's thrust for suffrage and during the civil rights movement. 176 Since then, its political usage has widened to include a myriad of causes and issues through which political empowerment for people may be sought. It has also been used in popular psychology as a kind of exhortation calling for personal power in self-help texts. 177 Still, the word can be traced back to the 17th century when its meaning was of a more juridical nature and defined the investment of authority or

175 Dell, as cited in Davidow and Malone, 1992: 187.
power, and the legal and official authorization of power. Taking this more durable definition into consideration, it would seem that the “empowered work forces” mentioned by Michael Dell are those entrusted with some degree of power and influence, perhaps through the official channels of formalized degrees or educational training.

Davidow and Malone observe that throughout most of American history, “the unwritten definition of worker included lack of education” and thus, the American educational system was organized around this presumption, with school tracks that steered students either in the direction of vocational training or a college preparation. A century ago, a high school diploma might have rendered a factory worker over-qualified for the job. Today, there are few new jobs that will not require a post-secondary qualification of sorts. Put simply, being a worker today demands that one also be a learner. Even if one holds a degree in an applicable field or discipline of practice, within the field of information technology, the need for further technical certifications exemplify how the learning process may be unending. At CountryWatch, for example, the Chief Information Officer has a degree in Computer Science, as well as a host of certifications in Microsoft applications, CISCO Systems specializations and various software products. He frequently attends training seminars in order to learn about new technological developments, thusly acquiring new certifications that can be applied at CountryWatch as its technological infrastructure grows and develops.

180 Davidow and Malone, 1992: 188.
181 Microsoft is a software system and Cisco is a technological infrastructure and hardware company.
Conventional wisdom stated that school -- be it high school, vocational training institutions, colleges or universities -- prepared one for work. Concomitantly, the acquisition of a degree and diploma signified the end of the learning process and the commencement of the work portion of one's life. A notable exception might be within academia where learning, which is often referred to as "being current on the reading," is required in order to be a respected researcher. This kind of thinking has in some ways been transposed into the workplace of the New "Informational" Economy, which also rests upon innovation, creation, research and development. Indeed, Davidow and Malone assert that being within the workforce today requires that one continually be educated and cite a number of corporations such as Motorola and IBM that have publicly declared continued learning to be a mandate for their corporations. \(^{182}\) In fact, a key corporate tenet of Motorola is that every employee has not only a right to training, but also to additional training or retraining as technology develops and as circumstances change. \(^{183}\) Given this pedagogical approach within the workplace, the empowerment of the work force, mentioned just above, occurs along a parallel process of enabling. In this regard, Joanne McCree, the personnel manager of IBM noted, "people must be enabled as well as empowered." \(^{184}\)

Apart from empowerment and enabling, another dimension might be the embrace of the spirit of technology. William Wiggenhorn, Vice President at Motorola and a principal of Motorola's University, remarked that his company has not only been committed to teaching people about new technologies, but also about anticipating new technologies. In this regard, Wiggenhorn noted that Motorola sought to "breathe the very spirit of creativity and

\(^{184}\) McCree, as cited by Davidow and Malone, 1992: 190.
flexibility into manufacturing and management." 185 Indeed, as noted above, in any field where technology is a factor, this tenet may be applied. In the case of Motorola, it has become part of the corporate philosophy. This knowledge-seeking environment at work is not unlike the emerging democratic nation states of the post-colonial world where understandings of democracy were not only learned, but also enshrined as an ethos through various nation building apparatuses. 186

At CountryWatch, learning -- as distinct from training -- is not treated as part of the ethos. Unlike Motorola or IBM, CountryWatch is hardly a pedagogical environment in which expanding the knowledge base of employees is officially articulated. That is to say, there is no expressed credo about the role of learning in the organization. Nevertheless, the self-education of most employees is intrinsically part of everyday operations. As exemplified by the case of the Chief Executive Officer, technological training and certification does indeed take place. Nevertheless, being trained on new technological applications is not the equivalent of fostering a work environment in which learning is understood and appreciated as a constitutive feature. Although learning is required and the learning curve for several employees is ridiculously high, the act of learning is an invisible dimension of work, interpreted as a "given" by those in positions of power to the extent that it is never mentioned on a daily basis. In stark terms, there are really few if any captivating quotes from the executive office of CountryWatch that can be cited in this research to illustrate or exemplify the themes of this chapter.

186 Independent Caribbean nation states embraced the notion of tutelary democracies where nationalist leaders were usually well-educated and "came home" to share democratic philosophies with the citizenry.
Reflecting on my own experience at CountryWatch, over time, not only did learning about complex issues facing the countries of the world ensue, but also peripheral learning about new technology. This type of learning occurred as a matter of necessity; I could not very well write about international accords on global warming unless I had some understanding of the science, the politics, and the policy implications therein. Much like the aforementioned reference to "being current on the reading" in academia, writing about the developments in the international sphere requires consistent attention to the broad range of geopolitical subject matter. Whereas academia compels intensive analysis of the corpus of work within a given discipline, editorial work at CountryWatch requires learning about a wider realm (rather than a deeper dimension) of subjects – from international relations and elections in obscure regions of the world to the transparency of legal frameworks and taxation codes in emerging democracies. Meanwhile, I could not conceive of how to disseminate such information on a website unless I had some working knowledge of the associated technology – from publishing software to database storage and transmittance. Along the way, I gathered a certain fascination for the various dimensions of the business. That said, the steep learning curve was made all the more difficult within an organization was not expressly cognizant of that very imperative.

My less than optimal learning environment notwithstanding, it became clear to me that favorable learning conditions -- called the "learning organization" by some business writers - can and do exist elsewhere. They may even exist in businesses that have information technology departments but which are not directly associated with the New Economy. For example, the progressively-administered "natural cosmetics" company, the Body Shop,
offers its employees a generous “love money” package, which can be used by the employee for non-vocational education and learning. Similarly, a prescription eye-wear company with over five hundred outlets across the United States has to function as a kind of “virtual corporation” because of its dispersed operations and decentralized decision-making. Sharing information across geographic boundaries to the network of Lenscrafters locations is considered to be a crucial part of the business. As such, Lenscrafters crafted a collection of core company values, which includes the encouragement of learning and innovation. Ultimately, as noted above, learning organizations do not simply train employees so that necessary skill sets are acquired to do given jobs or to make required sales. Instead, learning organizations endorse knowledge assimilation and the education of employees within a mentally stimulating and inspiring environment.

The Social Context of Learning

In writing about CountryWatch and reflecting upon this issue more attentively, I also realized that although there was no endorsed pedagogy, my colleagues and I had in some ways created a learning environment among ourselves, perhaps provoked by our shared concerns about survival in a start-up company, as well as our collective interest in both informational content and information technology.

For several months, I shared an office with my former colleague and director of the information technology department, SD. During that period, I regularly made requests and

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187 See the Body Shop Online.
posed innumerable questions with reference to the dissemination of content on the website. At first, he would dutifully answer my questions and then respond by “magically” making the newly-revised “Political Conditions” for Bosnia-Herzegovina appear on the website. Likewise, if he had to fix a coding or scripting error, which was perhaps causing the “Environmental Overview” for Brazil to load onto the website in an unreadable format, I would listen carefully only for the most directly relevant portions of his response and watch him resolve the problem by punching inexplicable digits, letters and slashes onto a keyboard. In other cases, when there might have been a networking error that prevented me from accessing the administration website to cross-check news coverage, I would get out of my chair to allow him to sit at my desk and resolve whatever problem had occurred on my computer. Over time, however, he would relay suggestions to me verbally, and I would make the necessary adjustments myself. Eventually, I acquired sufficient (albeit hardly comprehensive or extensive) indirect knowledge to be able to ask him the occasional question across the room, while I handled many technical issues myself.

Later, SD and I shared our office with a third person. At various times, these included EH, the former sales manager, AC, a former managing editor, and JB, the person in charge of electronic commerce. For the most part, shared space, casual conversations regarding our respective work domains, and even telephone conversations overheard (due to the shared space) facilitated a kind of informal and unintended cross-training for each of us. We all learned about technology and web development, marketing strategies and advertising models, the viability of electronic commerce ventures as well as java servlets used in transaction engines, not to mention modalities of syndicating and licensing content from and with one
another. In essence, the seemingly casual conversation between colleagues was akin to an unofficial professional education. Likewise, working together on particular projects (for example, the development of the co-branded Excite and Alta Vista websites in the late 1990s) was illustrative of how shared knowledge about content, technology, sophisticated web development, and marketing, collectively function and occur self-referentially. A co-branded website, after all, is not simply a technical endeavor, but also a matter of customer-friendly navigation and relevant content, as well as an aesthetic dimension.

None of us were so intensely educated about another’s job that we could actually perform functions seamlessly. Nevertheless, we each learned how our functions fit into the larger cycle of research, development, technology, marketing and market development, sales and feedback, into research and development once more. In fact, many of our shared conversations, if tracked, might well have tracked the flow of the company’s processes, as well as our mutual learning, where information and knowledge was generated, shared and deployed in other productive ways.

In this regard, some analysts suggest that talking about work and work itself are inextricable. Communication and practice function in tandem with one another, the former making the latter intelligible and vice versa. 189 This kind of paradigm is referred to as the “learning organization” (mentioned previously) where diverse information and ideas are shared, overlapping boundaries of knowledge are blurred, a common work identity is produced and a community of practice is constructed. 190 Brown and Duguid describe this system in the

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189 Brown and Duguid, 2000: 125; see also Orr, 1996.
190 Brown and Duguid, 2000: 90 and 127; see also Orr, 1996.
following way: "Become a member of a community, engage in its practices, and you can acquire and make use of its knowledge and information." \(^{191}\) They go on to note that those outside the community of practice will be unable to comprehend the internal learning dynamics. Additionally, they observe that "practice is an effective teacher and the community of practice is an ideal learning environment." \(^{192}\) Furthermore, they treat learning and knowledge assimilation in this formulation as a collective activity. Knowledge and information are inextricably connected with philosophical constructions of thought. However, in this case they are distinct from the solitary notion of "the thinker" depicted in Rodin's famous sculpture of the same name.\(^{193}\)

Recall for a moment an earlier observation that CountryWatch was not -- and is not -- a tutelary environment. That said, it is fair to state that CountryWatch in some small measure and as illustrated by my personal experiences, may have developed a community of practice. Evidenced by department-specific terminology and jargon, which by a process of accretion became familiar and intelligible to those of us who interacted together or worked on various projects, the simultaneity of communicating, working and learning forged greater inter-departmental understanding about both the nature of work we each performed, as well as the communication, coordination, and negotiation involved in getting things done and meeting certain objectives. \(^{194}\) In this way, the community of practice includes not only a social

\(^{191}\) Brown and Duguid, 2000: 126.  
\(^{192}\) Brown and Duguid, 2000: 127.  
\(^{193}\) Brown and Duguid, 2000: 126.  
\(^{194}\) See Lave and Wegner, 1993 for more on this subject.
context of collegial community and conversation, but also the application of practice within this enclave.\textsuperscript{195}

**Dynamics of Learning**

At the same time as we (the employees at CountryWatch) were entrenched in this process of unintentional learning, it became apparent to many of us in retrospect that our very jobs depended upon an ability to learn from one another. We reached this realization after innumerable musings about the nature of the Internet and its strange venue as a crossroads of technology, art, information and marketing. In conversations about this subject, we conceived of the Internet as a public domain, yet one destined (and perhaps doomed) to be commodified. For the most part, we concluded, survival in this business depended not just on an expanded skill set, but the constant accrual of information and the integration of knowledge.

Because the nature of almost all work on the Internet is so intensely informed by other interests and expertise, the consummate Internet-oriented employee may be the one with an affinity for learning. Certainly, as noted earlier, if a love of technology is mandatory for working within the realm of the New Economy, then one might also state that a penchant for interactive learning might be of equally vital import. Hence, learning in this way is not only about the acquisition of information, but also about the development of “the disposition, demeanor, and outlook of the practitioners.”\textsuperscript{196} Stated differently, if there is a landscape that

\textsuperscript{195} See Brown and Duguid, 2000: 141 – 143, \textsuperscript{196} Brown and Duguid, 2000: 126.
can be referenced in real terms as the New Economy, and an associated period that might be characterized as the Information Age or the Digital Era, then workers within this context not only learn about various functions, operations, processes, procedures and concepts, but also how to be the consummate employee mentioned just above.

In this sense, the art of “learning to be...” insists upon the capacity to engage in some sort of practice. For this reason, New York University psychology professor Jerome Bruner observes that the art of “learning to be...” (distinct from the utility of “learning about...”) may transcend the accumulation of information, making it more closely aligned with the concept of knowledge, its assimilation and further, its application. 197 In similar fashion, Gilbert Ryle distinguishes between “knowing how...” and “knowing that...”198 Whereas “knowing that...” involves the familiarity with certain facts, data and information, “knowing how...” is not gathered through the accumulation of data points and information, but rather via observance, preparation, application, exercise, repetition, correction, custom, performance and other elements of practice. In short, practice contours the assimilation of knowledge and sustains learning. By way of example, consider the following explanation by RC, a solutions architect for a complex enterprise software system, in regard to learning within institution:

RC: “You learn the most when a new technology has already been introduced and you’re working either in the start-up phase, for instance in pilot projects, or later on, when you’re trying to develop new applications. You also learn a lot when you are trying to find solutions

for some sort of applications problem. Training classes are fine, but they have a finite
duration and they can only cover a certain amount of information. When you’re actually
working on a pilot project or problem solving, you can cover more ground, and develop a
fuller understanding. Basically, you’re doing most of the learning — and quite possibly the
most valuable learning -- on the job. You can try one thing, test another, note successes and
failures. If there is a system failure, you can run the test again with modifications or even
radical changes. When you’re in a class or a training session, the exercises you are given are
designed to be successful. At work, you don’t have that luxury, so if you fail at something,
you have to change your parameters and retry. And that’s how the learning takes place.”

In this way, RC has described learning (and “learning how...”) as a practice that bears upon
speculative formulation and problem-solving techniques of a possibly heuristic process and
methodology. Regardless, it suggests an alternative procedure of learning in comparison
with traditional notions of learning as a kind of solitary activity that takes place at a distance
from the distraction and disruption of life and work. Brown and Duguid suggest that
Gilbert Ryle’s epistemological approach to this concept of learning, however dated it may
seem today, may in fact, clarify why the same stream of information, flowing at different
people provokes distinct individual responses. That is to say, because some people are
“learning to be...,” the assimilation of knowledge occurs in a context of engagement and
quite differently from people who are simply acquiring skills to accomplish specific
objectives.

199 Cited with permission from RC.
200 As noted by Brown and Duguid, 2000: 130.
201 Brown and Duguid, 2000: 129; see also Gilbert Ryle, 1949, for a more traditional philosophy of this concept.
Studies by educational psychologists George Miller and Patricia Gildea found that in early life, children build their vocabularies not by reading dictionaries, but in the everyday practice of conversation. 202 This immersion of language and vocabulary was deemed to be more successful than learning by dictionary definitions, where abstract terms and definitions prevented individuals from learning how to use words in contextually appropriate ways.

For adults, a similar principle seems to hold true, as exemplified by the case of a customer service call center, where the telephone service representatives become technological diagnosticians simply through the practice of their jobs. 203 In the examination of the customer service center, it was noted that the customer service representatives were neither hired as technicians nor were trained explicitly to become technicians. In effect, their transformation into technological diagnosticians occurred within the participatory context of work.

Specifically, in conversation with the actual technicians who dealt with the communications technology, customer service representatives learned about both customary and particular problems that might arise and accordingly, became more equipped to provide diagnostic insight during their interactions with customers. Meanwhile, in the case of a new customer service representative with no more than a high school diploma, it was determined that her ability to offer customers reliable answers was due to the fact that she was seated next to a veteran worker and overheard how he responded to customer inquiries. According to the study by Whalen and his associates, this customer service representative learned from her

202 Miller and Gildea (1987) concluded that by listening, talking and reading, the average 17 year old learned vocabulary at a rate of 13 words per day or 5,000 words per year over a 16 year period.
203 Brown and Duguid, 2000: 131, see also Whalen and Vinkhuyzen, forthcoming.
particular proximity to this resourceful colleague, who was himself well-informed after eight years on the job. In this way, the customer service representatives effectively transposed into secondary technicians, or as described just above, “they became technological diagnosticians.”

As noted by Brown and Duguid, “Learning is usually treated as a supply-side matter, thought to follow teaching, training or information delivery. But learning is much more demand driven. People learn in response to need.... When they have a need and if the resources for learning are available, people learn effectively and quickly.” 204 The demand-driven dimension of learning was illustrated in the cases of customer service representatives’ transformations into technological diagnosticians. The exposure to technicians and veteran colleagues functioned as resources of sorts in an inadvertent learning environment. Learning, however, certainly did not result from a formalized training session.

The incidental processes and conditions of learning produce unintended transformations that might well be viewed as the by-products of the dynamic. During my own tenure at CountryWatch, for example, I experienced a metamorphosis of sorts. For several months, after sitting through countless meetings with sales and marketing personnel, I loudly and emphatically stated that I was an anthropologist and not a businessperson, and I hated having to think about marketing and “bottom lines.” My moment of epiphany came when my colleague SD, just as loudly and emphatically retorted “Well, we work in this business, so that makes us business people. Deal with it. Don’t you talk about all that multiplicity stuff when we’re at lunch?” SD’s reference to multiplicity notwithstanding, it became apparent to

204 As stated by Brown and Duguid, 2000: 136.
me that in many senses, through the slow, accretive and invisible process of performing my employment functions, I had learned to become a businessperson. That is to say, as I carried out the functions of my job, regardless of how I may have personally felt about the business world, I had effectively learned "how to be..." In fact, my continued employment rested on my capacity to make this identity shift.

The assimilation of such learning, which in turn impels the transformations mentioned here, is contingent upon the uncalculated and subterranean nature of this process. Had I been explicitly told that I would become a businessperson, I sincerely doubt that I would have kept my job. I certainly saw no unequivocal or overt value in understanding how metrics factored into advertising revenues, how the valuation of technology stocks were calculated, or even that which was necessitated in writing a contract for a joint venture, yet I had learned how to do all of these things. That is to say, it may have been due to the very invisibility of the learning process that I learned. Referred to as "stolen knowledge" by Brown and Duguid, the tacit dimension of learning occurs through participation in work as well as via the social interactions surrounding work.²⁰⁵ Functioning as "tectonic social forces," these processes create "not only grounds for reception, but grounds for interpretation, judgment and understanding" in the workplace.²⁰⁶ Yet it was only through practice that I learned how such tedious -- and often oblique -- matters touched upon my efforts in content development. That is, only though the experiential realm of practice did I realize how business acumen, information, technology and content development are inextricably bound together because the business is based upon content and served over the Internet.

²⁰⁶ Brown and Duguid, 2000: 139.
Knowledge Management

The words “information” and “knowledge” are often used in an interchangeable manner, and they appear to reside in an overlapping lexical space of meaning. Nevertheless, as discourses about information and knowledge abound, there seems to be some suggestion that knowledge is “more” than information. In this regard, Brown and Duguid pose the question: “When people talk about knowledge, are they just clinging to fashion (as many no doubt are), or might some be feeling their way, however intuitively, toward something that all the talk of information lacks? Is there, we ask, something that knowledge catches, but that information does not?” \(^{207}\)

Although the word “information” often denotes facts and data points, the word “knowledge” seems to be imbued with connotations of comprehension, realization, familiarity, expertise, as well as concepts such as wisdom and learning. \(^{208}\) As such, despite the transposable usage of the words and their intrinsically connected meanings, the two must be distinguished. In answer to the question of what the particular points of differentiation between the two might be, Brown and Duguid offer the following three distinctions:

1. Knowledge entails a knower, while information exists irrespective of individuals who are endowed with the capacity for knowing. That is to say, knowledge seems to be located within an identity, while information is self-sufficient and self-contained.

\(^{207}\) Brown and Duguid, 2000: 119.
2. Because knowledge is connected with the identity of a knower, it is more difficult to separate or detach than information. Whereas information can be utilized, possessed or circulated, knowledge is not something that can easily be received, transferred or owned.

3. Knowledge compels assimilation and integration. Something must, in a sense, be processed, absorbed and incorporated, rather than simply held, owned or possessed, as in the case of information. The fact that knowledge is digested in this way suggests that there is some internal (psychological) commitment on the part of the knower that may not occur in the case of simply possessing information. That is to say, understanding is implicit in knowledge while one can have information without understanding.\(^{209}\)

Hence, information, usually unlike knowledge, may be moderately independent of meaning.\(^{210}\) Still, the connection between the two lies in the fact that as information increases (the usual observation in today's Age of Information), knowledgeable workers are needed to make sense of it. This reality has a direct effect upon transformations in the workplace today. Although the availability of jobs continues to challenge the United States economy, there remains a high value on certain segments of workers as a kind of intellectual capital. Since the late 1990s, fixed assets have given way to electronic and virtual business, particularly in the information industries. Business and financial information is available

\(^{209}\) Brown and Duguid, 2000: 119-120.
\(^{210}\) Brown and Duguid, 2000: 120.
immediately, in real time, and across the world with the click of the mouse via online services such as Bloomberg, Hoovers and Moody's, while real time news and information is available by media and online publishing entities such as CNN, MSNBC and even CountryWatch. Meanwhile, technological acumen (also a form of knowledge work) is required to organize, process and disseminate information. As such, there has been an emerging realization that information is a commodity whose value can only be realized via the intellectual capital of a given company. As observed by Brown and Duguid, this reflects the perception that knowledge lies not in databases of information, but in people. 211 The human aspect is emphasized by the aforementioned stance that knowledge entails a knower.

In the past, people were treated *en masse* as the interchangeable parts of the Industrial Economy. Contemporaneously, however, people are apt to be collectively regarded as consumers as well as creators and processors of information. 212 Often described as “the talent,” the new kind of (knowledge) worker is now regarded as the human intellectual capital of corporations and institutions. The term “human intellectual capital” is often nonchalantly deployed to refer to the workforce of a given enterprise. In the context of the material of this chapter, it particularly describes the intimate familiarity, proficiency, and overall knowledge base of employees, also referred to as “know how.” Indeed, it is this realm of knowledge that forms the institutional work memory within organizations.

If the depiction of knowledge as distinct from information has been sufficiently highlighted thus far, the significance of learning should not be ignored in today's economy and society.

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211 Brown and Duguid, 2000: 121.
212 Brown and Duguid, 2000: 121.
In fact, the central challenge of a concept called “knowledge management” might lie in the acquisition and transferal of knowledge through learning. As noted by Brown and Duguid, it is the learning component of this equation that makes knowledge usable.\(^{213}\) Knowledge management, therefore, according to Brown and Duguid, does not simply involve the protection and exploitation of innovations, inventions and patents; it must also embrace the nurturance and valuation of knowledge workers.\(^{214}\)

Before delving further into the notion of knowledge management, it might be useful to consider the particular area of management. Peter Drucker has said that “management is the distinctive organ of all organizations.”\(^{215}\) He has also noted that most organizations require management of some sort, whether or not the precise term “management” is used. According to Drucker, “All managers do the same things, whatever the purpose of their organization. All of them have to bring people – possessing different knowledge – together for joint performance. All of them have to make human strengths productive in performance and human weakness irrelevant. All of them have to think through what results are wanted and have then to define objectives. All of them are responsible for what I call the theory of the business – that is, the assumptions on which the organization bases its performance and actions... All of them must think through strategies – that is the means by which the goals of the organization become performance. All of them have to define the values of the organization, its system of rewards and punishments, its spirit and its culture.”\(^{216}\) In this way, management is to be understood as an organizing framework for the many dimensions

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\(^{214}\) Brown and Duguid, 2000: 122.

\(^{215}\) See section titled “Management in the Knowledge Society” in Drucker, 1994.

\(^{216}\) See section titled “Management in the Knowledge Society” in Drucker, 1994.
of operations and interrelations within a business or other such establishment. Knowledge management, therefore, might well include many of these organizational features.

In fact, "knowledge management," considered a buzzword by conservative analysts in the New Economy, Information Age and Digital Era, is described in the following manner: "Knowledge management is the use of technology to make information relevant and accessible wherever that information may reside. To do this effectively requires the appropriate application of the appropriate technology for the appropriate situation. Knowledge management incorporates the systematic processes of finding, selecting, organizing, and presenting information in a way that improves an employee's comprehension and use of business assets." 217 Following this line of thinking, some observers have suggested that given the emerging conditions in society, which are powered financially and commercially by the New Economy, the plethora of information available has resulted in a vital need for knowledge management, where information is transformed from data points into something more meaningful. Knowledge management is not, to be sure, a constellation of techniques and procedures. Peter Drucker's robust description of general management, which encompassed the orchestration of varied human and business elements within the organization, is not the equivalent of operational techniques and procedures to be followed.

In many senses, the existence of knowledge management may be a metaphor for the change from an industrially-based economy to that of one oriented toward information. That is to say, the very idea of knowledge management may symbolically denote a shift from "an economy of hands" to "an economy of heads." With this change, the management of

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217 This description was offered in a Microsoft community exchange discussion in 1998.
information by workers -- referred to as "bits" and "bytes" in technological jargon -- is forecast to become the most valuable aspect of the corporation, in comparison with its physical assets or "atoms." For this reason, other neologisms surrounding this shift have also emerged such as "the knowledge epoch," "the knowledge economy" and as discussed below, "the knowledge worker."

From Blue Collar Work to Knowledge Society

By the 1950s, industrial workers were the single largest group in developed countries and in addition, were highly unionized, thus enjoying the benefits of impressive wages, pensions, paid vacations, unemployment insurance and other such benefits. 218 Quite unlike the dismal situation for workers in the early 1900s, industrial workers commanded influence, economic security and political power. Less than forty years later, in the early 1990s, there was a resounding decline both in the number of industrial workers and in the authority of unions. Once accounting for 40 percent of the workforce during the height of their ascendancy, industrial workers numbered half that amount in 1990. Drucker, writing in the early-to-mid-1990s, predicted a further decline to less than 12 percent by the 2000s.219 Still, he noted that they would not disappear off the employment landscape, just as farmers still exist in developed countries. 220 Instead, like farmers, they would cease to be primary producers in contemporary economies, benefiting instead from subsidy programs. 221 Drucker also makes note of the fact that although domestic work, like farming, experienced a significant decline,

218 See section titled "Rise and Fall of the Blue Collar Worker" in Drucker, 1994.
219 See section titled "Rise and Fall of the Blue Collar Worker" in Drucker, 1994.
220 See section titled "Rise and Fall of the Blue Collar Worker" in Drucker, 1994.
221 The recent farm bill and steel protection tariff scheme promoted by the Bush administration in the United States and passed by the United States Congress are examples of such subsidies.
such workers were not entirely displaced, but instead transitioned into industrial work, which required little skill development or additional knowledge. Indeed, farmers were likely to have had possessed a far more extensive skill set in their work than that required for typical industrial (assembly line) work.

As discussed more thoroughly in the chapters dealing with the New Economy, work arenas related to information and technology appear to have dominated the 1990s. Even the decline of the valuation of technology stocks in 2001 does not appear to have stopped a wave of change in this regard. For industrial workers, this shift may be proving more traumatic than the transition from domestic and farm work to the industrial domain about a century ago. Principally, this may be because work in the realm of information and technology is challenging and requires some degree of specialized knowledge.

As far back as 1959, Drucker, in considering formations for the future, classified an emergent cadre as “knowledge workers.” At that time, Drucker predicted that knowledge workers would compose a significant portion of the working population. This cadre, like industrial workers, would enjoy the benefits of impressive wages and other benefits. The arena of compensation, however, is where the similarity would end. New jobs in the realm of information and technology would involve extensive skill sets as well as associated credentials and qualifications. As noted by Drucker, “They require a good deal of formal education and the ability to acquire and to apply theoretical and analytical knowledge. They require a different approach to work and a different mind-set. Above all, they require a habit

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222 See section titled “Rise and Fall of the Blue Collar Worker” in Drucker, 1994.
of continuous learning.” Following Drucker’s line of thinking, industrial workers find it difficult to transition along a changing landscape into knowledge work and knowledge-oriented services without attaining the credentials and qualifications of education. They would also have to undergo a revision of core outlook, impressions and ideals regarding work. That is to say, industrial workers would have to bear some degree of an identity transformation in order to take on the challenge of knowledge work. Such a transformation could not ensue without difficulty.

As noted by Drucker, the emerging knowledge society or knowledge-based workforce is distinct from predecessors primarily because workers do not make a living by the “sweat of the brow” and so-called “honest work” is not marked by the “callused hand.” Also notable is the fact that unlike industrial workers, the actual work performed by knowledge workers is varied. These changes notwithstanding, the actual number of knowledge workers may not explode into the majority of workers within society. That said, they comprise the largest work group force. Additionally, knowledge workers, might well endow the emerging knowledge society with many of its characteristics, social profile and cultural traits. By way of example, the depictions of “bobos” and “yuppies” discussed in the chapter on cultural change show how such cultural influence is taking shape. In this way, Drucker goes on to suggest that while this cadre of workers may not be the dominant, uppermost or ruling class of society, they constitute a vital and critically influential worker group.

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For Drucker, the element of distinction lies in the acquisition of knowledge through years of formal education and other related means of accreditation. The process may be as complex as years of medical education followed by difficult residency programs, or something less grueling like a four year graphic design course. Regardless, he specifically notes that such endorsement cannot be attained through apprenticeship. One supposes that he means that knowledge and formal education cannot be gained through experiential instruction in much the same way as workers learned trades or crafts. Likewise, knowledge and education cannot be derived only from the use of advanced science, information or technology, but rather the formalized understanding of these respective domains. By way of illustration, the Chief Information Officer may rely on the capital expenditures of expensive servers, computers and sophisticated software to manage and administer the information systems within a workplace. Nonetheless, part of the real intellectual capital is his formal training in computer science, certifications from various operating systems, ongoing training courses on advanced technologies and most importantly, their applications within the workplace. The result is a landscape in which education is the core of “knowledge society.”

Still, the educational process and the place of advanced education is not one with an identifiable plateau-like destination. Instead, the idea of constant and consistent learning is paramount, not unlike the idea of “keeping up on the literature” within academia. This ethos of learning extends well into the domain of professional employment where further learning and erudition, whether via formal courses or research, is a fact of life. This is especially true in arenas which deal with technical development and innovation such as medicine, science, biotechnology, and computerized sciences. The objective is not so much the achievement of

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degrees, certifications, and other measures of credentials but maximized performance capacity. In this regard, it is quite unlike the idea of learning or education for pragmatic reasons and sheer utility. Although Drucker rejects the purely practical rationale for learning, he also notes that education is a "tool of the individual" utilized to acquire knowledge of new technologies.\textsuperscript{230} The word "tool" is imbued with sensibilities of convenience and function. As such, one might well think of education as more of an instrument of identity crafting within a changing landscape.

It should thus be noted that the workforce within the knowledge society is highly specialized. That is to say, knowledge workers are to be viewed as specialists within emerging and advanced disciplines of information and technology.\textsuperscript{231} Specialization, rather than general information, is a constituent element. This is not to suggest that specialized knowledge is the core source of performance. Some degree of generalized knowledge is required from specialists in order to communicate and cooperate with colleagues. The work flow processes between departments involving the collaboration between web designers, content developers and marketing staff at CountryWatch, results in some degree of knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer that might deem each of the workers in these respective areas generalists. This is a new definition of the generalist, since it is as a by-product of specialization, for which advanced knowledge is a requisite element of effective operations. By way of example, at CountryWatch the web designer, content developer and marketing guru must all have some understanding of each other’s domains and priorities in order to work in symbiotic relation to one another. They also have to seek the same objective: a website that

\textsuperscript{230} See section titled "The Emerging Knowledge Society" in Drucker, 1994.
\textsuperscript{231} Here, I am referring to the technological specialist or technologist rather than the technocrat or manager.
disseminated hundreds of thousands of pages of text-heavy content and relies on licensing fees for usage. They all have to speak the same language: they must know the difference between simply changing HTML tags or hard coding an item and they need to know why flash applications might be a catchy feature, but ultimately a marketing nightmare.

The very notion of the “educated person” is also subject to change. The person holding a stock of formalized knowledge of what the Germans called “allgemeine Bildung” and the English and Americans call the “liberal arts” may not quite represent the exemplar of the educated person. Instead, the educated individual is understood as one with a penchant for learning and one who continues to learn throughout his or her lifetime. Moreover, the educated individual is one who has learned how to become educated, how to learn and how to embrace learning, knowledge and education itself. To recall a theme mentioned above, the educated person is one who “learns to be…” as such.

Intellectual Capital and the New Workplace Treaty

In any corporation in the New Economy, there will be an inextricable connection to information and information technology as well learning and knowledge management. In the case of CountryWatch, the central modus operandi of the corporation is that of global intelligence dissemination. Yet because its functionality is that of an Internet portal, its very infrastructure and systemization is constructed around the notion of information exploration. The value derived from such an exploration is ideally one of knowledge accrual and

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integration. Not unlike a university filled with professors and students, where constant erudition is paramount, workers in today’s society and economy are compelled to be full-time students or learners. Further, as noted previously, they are not trained in a certain manner, aimed at mere skill development. Instead, work and education become conflated so that one informs the other.

In a similar kind of environment, the employee and the employer enter into a new kind of working contract or relationship. The employee may always be dependent on the employer for a paycheck and esteem, while the employer might perpetually be reliant upon the employee to perform certain functions. In today’s society and culture where technology and information are highly valued, the employer may be further dependent upon certain employees because human intellectual capital might prove too costly to replace. In the late 1990s, influenced by relatively low unemployment rates and an employee-friendly market, concerns about employee retention replaced practices of workplace re-engineering and downsizing. In fact, in a climate of economic growth (despite recent signs of constriction), corporations in the New Economy and Information Age became highly reliant upon their employees for innovation and new developments in order to maintain and continue such expansion.

Writing about intellectual capital conjures up notions of data-to-wisdom hierarchies. Indeed, I have already discussed the possible areas of differentiation between knowledge and

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234 Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop, has often stated that while other companies “train for a sale,” employees of the Body Shop are educated for knowledge (www.bodyshop.com).

235 As has been noted elsewhere, unemployment rates have hovered far less than the 7% rate once claimed to be normative by Federal Reserve Chairman, Alan Greenspan, several years ago.
information. A more elaborate scheme might be one in which data is classified as a fact, information contextualizes that fact, knowledge constitutes the analysis and conclusions drawn from data and information and wisdom denotes sagacity and judgment as regards the rest along this ranking system.\textsuperscript{236} Is such a ranking system useful in thinking about intellectual capital? Perhaps not. In the end, categorizations are open for variable interpretations and as such, knowledge to one person may be simply information to another.

The term “intellectual capital” is also not to be confused with intellectual resources in the form of lengthy reports and delineations of ideas from a brainstorming session. As noted by Thomas Stewart, “an untethered idea or a piece of information is not an asset any more than a pile of bricks is a factory.”\textsuperscript{237} Intellectual capital is also more than the collective intelligence capacity of the workforce within a company. It is hardly the average grade point average of degreed persons within the organization. Intellectual capital might be viewed as a corpus of knowledge that arises out of the expertise, insight and understanding acquired in carrying out tasks and operations, as well as the people and organizations involved in so doing.\textsuperscript{238} In this way, intellectual capital is not simply the corpus of knowledge, but also the people who hold and use the knowledge and the organizations within which this process takes place.

At CountryWatch as with other organizations, there is a yield of human intellectual capital when workers within organizations share their knowledge and insights in ways that advance the enterprise. Routinized and low-skill work rarely generates human intellectual capital because the work being done may itself be replaced by automation, or the person could easily

\textsuperscript{236} Stewart, 1997: 69.
\textsuperscript{237} Stewart, 1997: 67.
\textsuperscript{238} Stewart, 1997: 71.
be replaced by another warm body. According to Stewart, the worker in such cases may be
talented, skilled and intelligent in his or her own right. Still, if his or her knowledge and
insights are not shared with the organization in a systemized manner, then it is simply a
private stock without distinctive value.\textsuperscript{239} Hence, it is the element of distinctive value which
is at stake.

In the last few years, even as the economy has slowed, and despite the fact that
apprehensions about employment have increasingly emerged, the significance of certain
highly skilled and proficient employees has remained high. This is particularly the case
among the “survivor” companies of the New Economy rage like CountryWatch. Having
invested substantial quantities of investor capital into the company for the purpose of
yielding a return at some point in the future, and having had to endure painful and difficult
retrenchment within the workforce, the result is twofold. First, financial investment also
entails some degree of emotional investment and the desire to succeed. Whereas in an earlier
chapter, BB said that he was not counting on getting his investment capital returned to him,
BK stated that his goal was to make the company successful in the marketplace because he
had an obligation to other investors and his employees. Ultimately, the more deeply
immersed in a venture one might be, the less likely it is that one will exit at any given
opportune moment. Second, although several employees were released for financial reasons,
the company continued to operate. The result was that there were less human resources to do
the same amount of work in maintaining functionality. As such, the company’s survival is
not only dependent upon a small workforce, but the individuals who form the workforce are
compelled to become extraordinarily proficient in a plethora of ways. In the late 1990s, there

\textsuperscript{239} Stewart, 1997: 86.
was a reliance on high levels of intellectual capital in a climate of expansion. In the early 2000s, the reliance on high levels of intellectual capital has continued as a result of the challenging economic landscape and the quest for corporate survival.

Meanwhile, as this core group of individuals amplifies their mastery of certain arenas (such as Internet-oriented technologies and geopolitical intelligence at CountryWatch), they simultaneously and incrementally foreclose other career possibilities. As such, they lose some flexibility in the job market of the future. Consequently, the matter of career management has become vital. Stock option plans are one way of compensating employees who take on inordinate burdens in start-up and high risk ventures. However, the reward system also includes greater worker power and autonomy, as exemplified by CountryWatch employee SR’s words statement that he enjoyed having the autonomy to do get the job done on his terms, rather than being part of a strict corporate system. Moreover, the rewards are also mental as exemplified by statements by CountryWatch employees to the effect that they like being able to “teach people about the world” and “make the website go live.” In this regard, SR said, “I don’t like having a boss who tells me what I should be doing every moment of the day. Here, that shouldn’t happen because everyone who works in the office already cares about doing a really good job. If I have a sense of freedom to do my job, I don’t mind so much that I have to work late or on the weekend in order to get the job done. In fact, I enjoy working if it is under the right conditions.”

While this element of satisfaction is not quite the same thing as deriving deep meaning from one’s work, it demonstrates the importance of intangible incentives for continued

240 Brown and Duguid, 2000: 204-205.
employment in a company where the compensation (not including stock options) is modest, the workload is burdensome and the career path may be limited in the long term. In this way, a kind of unofficial workplace contract is in place. 241 Referred by some as a “workplace treaty,” it frames an exchange system whereby work and productivity is compensated both materially and intangibly.

This exchange system suggests a level of interdependence between employer and employee. It is quite a different paradigm in comparison with those which locate the employer in a position of domination relative to the employee. As aforementioned, the employee not only becomes more indispensable to the functionality and operations of a company populated by a small workforce and funded with finite resources, but the employee also becomes indispensable to the long-term viability of the company as he or she may exist as a kind of “brain trust,” holding some portion of the organizational memory. For example, I know exactly how to publish the weekly global news features and imagery within three seconds (so there is no blank space on the website) using three different systems simultaneously, all of which have their particular quirks,. There is no manual with which another individual can refer and I have no available time to create one for a successor in the same role. Likewise, VS intimately understands the nuances of the corporate, academic and government markets. She knows how to market to each segment and she has learned how to communicate with them and how to craft proposals in such a way as to improve the chances of sales. This is a learned understanding that has accrued over time and with experience. Similarly, there is no CountryWatch-specific sales manual that a new employee could reference. As BK frequently said on his way out of the office, “Have a good night and drive safely home

because we can't afford for a bus to hit you.” While somewhat crass and highly morbid, his exit salutation nonetheless illustrates the fact that he is cognizant of the particular intellectual capital upon which the company is dependent.

I want to return for a moment to the intimation that as intellectual capital in one environment amplifies, it simultaneously and incrementally forecloses other career possibilities. As a result, the worker embodying human intellectual capital loses some flexibility in the job market of the future. In these regards, Stewart writes, “A paradox lies at the heart of the Information Age organization. At the same time that employers have weakened the ties of job security and loyalty, they more than ever depend on human capital. For their part, knowledge workers, because they bring to their work not only their bodies but their minds – even their souls – are far more loyal to their work (although not to their employer) than those tire makers whose first love was for the hobbies that waited for them at home.” 242 Consequently, this sense of loyalty, attachment and personal investment is not easily shed. Thus, the worker is likely to continue to function in his or her field, even if career management strategists would suggest that he or she move on to other arenas before entrenchment sets in. As noted by Davidow and Malone, “Many new skills will be so specialized as to be nontransferable.” 243 Nontransferable skills and abilities mean that a worker is expending effort in one work venue that may not be easily leveraged on the open job market.

Faced with this prospect, workers often experience some degree of anxiety and work to resolve it by calling for other demands to be met. In the dynamic that typically follows, the balance of power is effectively reproduced. First, realizing that he or she is relinquishing possibilities and foreclosing opportunities in the job market, the employee leverages his or her position by making certain demands of the employer, seeking to negotiate more acceptable terms of employment. For example, he or she may insist upon more flexibility to work as a consultant on outside projects. In this way, he or she can continue to hone certain abilities that might prove useful in other working capacities in the future. In another situation, the employee may demand greater compensation, additional authority or increased autonomy. The employer then accords the employee flexibility, compensation, authority or autonomy. Consequently, the employee derives greater fulfillment from his or her personal interests being met.\footnote{Although this feeling of fulfillment is quite unlike Marxist notions of worker alienation, as shown in this section, there are other aspects of anxiety that plague the worker in this environment.} As well, the employee becomes increasingly -- and crucially -- involved in the long-term success and viability of the company. That kind of highly intensified attachment and investment evokes anxieties about his or her professional viability in the wider job market, thus producing another revolution along the cycle of organizational power relations.

Vision, Learning and the “Road of Life”

Throughout much of this research, attention has been focused on the technological aspect and to a lesser degree on the informational features. CountryWatch functions as the nexus of both technology and information because both inform one another in the production of an
information-based website. The creators of geopolitical information at CountryWatch come from varied backgrounds and include Harvard and MIT-educated economists, a national security specialist from Georgetown University, a political scientist at Yale University, and a political-economist from Johns Hopkins University. For each of them, the involvement with CountryWatch has been rooted in some interest in the subject matter and the desire to research, learn and even write about the countries of the world. This engagement with the subject material, in conjunction with the embrace of education, appears to be a principal part of the learning ethos in organizations such as CountryWatch. As observed earlier, an informal learning ethos exists at CountryWatch even though there is no formal pedagogical environment or infrastructure that could rightly be called a learning organization.

Human relations gurus such as Peter Senge have connected the learning ethos with a concept called “personal mastery.” For Senge, learning is not synonymous with the acquisition of information, but rather the ability to produce the most desired results in one’s life. Meanwhile, personal mastery denotes neither dominance nor control, but instead an interwoven tapestry of personal and professional proficiency in realizing those desired results. Central to Senge’s formulation is the idea of productively using or leveraging the creative tension between one’s vision (that which is desired) and the reality of the present (that which happens to be). Senge notes that not everyone in life has a sense of vision or purpose as it relates to crafting their lives.

244 Senge, 1990: 142.
245 Senge, 1990: 142.
246 Senge, 1990: 141-143.
In thinking through this idea, I casually asked solutions architect RC how he conceived of "vision" as per Senge's formulation. He responded as follows: "When I think about vision, I think of that advertising concept on television. I think it is for Volkswagen. You see a car driving down this road and there is a voice over that says... on the road of life, there are passengers and there are drivers. When I think about vision, I think about the drivers on the road of life. A person with vision is a driver along the road of life. He's not going along for the ride but, instead, he is going somewhere." 249 The effectiveness of Volkswagen's advertising campaign and branding notwithstanding, this depiction clearly uses the open road as a metaphor for life and divides people into one of the two categories: drivers and passengers. (Apparently, the notion of the joyride does not fit into this particular case.) If RC's identification holds true and people with vision are "going somewhere," then it shares some connection with Senge's idea of those with vision, goals or purpose. Indeed, Senge notes, "People with personal mastery share several basic characteristics. They have a special sense of purpose that lies behind their visions and goals. For such a person, a vision is a calling rather than simply a good idea." 250 Senge also goes on to observe that "People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never arrive." 251 Had Senge used the symbols and metaphors embedded in Volkswagen's advertising slogan to depict this idea of learning and personal mastery, he might well have noted that the journey transcends the destination. In this way, Senge is depicting the learning mode of personal mastery as a kind of process within a lifelong discipline.

249 As stated by RC and transcribed here by permission.
250 Senge, 1990: 142.
251 Senge, 1990: 142.
Some of these conceptions, particularly the notion of a “calling,” have been discussed in this chapter and are illustrated in a conversation with an employee, BH, at CountryWatch. BH attended Georgetown University but went on to work at Merrill Lynch and AIM Management, before pursuing a career in public policy and national security. He worked for the United States Department of State in various posts across the world, most recently Albania, before arriving at CountryWatch to work as a content researcher and writer within the editorial department. Following is an excerpt from a conversation with BH:

DY: I still can’t imagine you working at Merrill Lynch even though I knew you were there for some time. Why did you leave?

BH: “I didn’t enjoy working there. I wasn’t fulfilled. I wasn’t using my skill set...”

DY: “Your skill set?”

BH: “Yeah, well, I wasn’t able to write and the job wasn’t contingent upon international affairs which was important to me. My travel experience was irrelevant and I didn’t think I was doing anything of public service. People who generally work in brokerage firms or financial planning are in it for the money, not that making money is a bad thing, but it just wasn’t – and isn’t – my goal.”

DY: “Money isn’t your goal? Why?”
BH: “I don’t think it is your goal either! But for me, I guess I just never bought into the idea that money is more than a means to an end. It isn’t a measure of success for me. It might be for some people... just not me. It is important to work and to have a good work ethic, don’t get me wrong. I just want to work in an environment where I can expand or enhance my knowledge. You know that phrase – healthy, wealth and wise?”

DY: “I think so.”

BH: “For me, the emphasis is on the wise. At the end of my life, the measuring stick won’t be a hefty bank account but a wise mind. Wisdom is the end goal. I’ve met so many people who have traveled and they are so damned interesting because they have learned so much about life. Some people get excited about meeting really rich and successful people, say, like Donald Trump. That kind of meeting can be inspiring for them. Me, I really don’t think I’d be inspired by a meeting with Trump, but I do feel something fairly profound when I talk to people who have done fascinating things around the world.”

DY: “I hear what you are saying but it doesn’t explain how you ended up in financial planning.”

BH: “I think I believed that I had to make a living. Then around me, I saw all these models of people doing meaningful things with their lives and I just wanted to get off the miserable corporate treadmill. Actually, at Merrill Lynch you have to set goals, so I used that principle and applied it to my objective of knowledge acquisition in the field of international affairs.”
DY: “So, is that how you ended up at State [Department]?”

BH: “Yes. Eventually. Before that, I took a lot of jobs with international focus, like managing the Houston Partnership’s international trade missions and then I started doing other things. I traveled to China and I worked in Japan for a while. Then, I was working with some Israeli language software and I started this language company in Chile. It is really was ironic because I had all these friends at big firms like Goldman Sachs and McKinsey calling me up and asking me if I had a place for them in Chile, or just to get updates so they could have the vicarious experience of doing the stuff I was doing. The funny thing was that these were people who were making a lot of money but they were really attracted to the fact that I was totally happy and invested in the work I was doing.”

DY: “I can understand that.”

BH: “Anyway, I eventually ended up at the State Department and worked in a bunch of places and as you know, my last mission was in Albania. I was writing briefing documents for the State Department on Albania from material on the agricultural sector to politics. I really enjoyed it because it was like being a professional student. I was being paid to learn while ‘in country.’ Actually, I met an anthropologist there doing fieldwork.”

DY: “Yes, well, we anthropologists pop up in a number of places don’t we?”
-- laughter --

DY: “I want to get back to this matter of being a professional student and being paid to work. Have you ever heard a term called ‘knowledge worker’?”

BH: “Sure. I gather it refers to the people working in info and tech or other info-heavy industries.”

DY: “Correct. I think its meaning probably could include any industry where learning and specialized knowledge is of premium value. I am just wondering if being a knowledge worker is something you actively sought to be or something that occurs along the way as you try to find the career path that suits you best.”

BH: “Well, I think I actively sought to work at CountryWatch because I liked the idea of the brain power, interesting academic interests, and the international focus. I thought about a position at the Baker Institute actually but I thought that would be a number-crunching role, so it wasn’t as compelling. I went to places like Japan, China, Chile and Colombia to work simply to learn the languages, about the countries and the people. I think I have a facility for languages but I didn’t want to learn them in academic settings. Really, I didn’t want to dissect the morphology of Japanese. So I did what I had to do to learn on my own terms.”

DY: “So there really is some consciousness to the process?”
BH: “Sure, pursuing a position at the State Department was absolutely conscious. First, I thought I would be a natural complement to my academic background in diplomacy and national security and also the State Department has endless resources that can facilitate the learning process. I also thought that I could benefit from the governmental advisors in that setting because they could help me move on to other positions where I could continue working and learning in the international arena.”

DY: “It is interesting that you’ve linked working and learning together.”

BH: “Interesting? Is that a bad thing?”

DY: “Hardly, and it might even be that I see things similarly. But the point is that I am not sure that working and learning are so clearly connected for everyone. Or maybe I am trying to figure out if they are.”

BH: “Well I can only speak for me. In my case, learning and knowledge are passions for me. I can’t say that work -- in and of itself -- is a passion, though, I think I recall mentioning before that a work ethic is important. Work is meaningless to me unless it is about learning and knowledge acquisition. And to be more precise – knowledge acquisition about the world.”

DY: “Oh, I understand that very well. There are a few people who do very well in the editorial department at a company like CountryWatch; those are people who have an
idiosyncratic fascination with learning about the countries of the world. It is almost like a fetishization!"

-- laughter --

BH: “I can certainly relate to the weird pleasure or curiosity that comes from the wide range of information about the world. I have a bunch of atlases and almanacs that I always keep close by, kind of like info toys. It is funny, I knew this guy in college and he had a passion for sports. He didn’t want to be an athlete but he was obsessed with sports trivia. He knew all the details. For me, it is the same thing about international affairs. That’s what I am drawn to.”

DY: “Right. And if you are like me, it isn’t regionally specific. It is the whole world. It isn’t just the facts but how the assemblage of facts is used as a source that pertains to other things.”

BH: “Exactly! It is about how all that international information, data, stats, stories, you name it, is interpreted, made into knowledge and then applied. It isn’t about parlor tricks and trivia but about how it can be used and that’s really where the work part comes into play. How do you use this knowledge in your work?”

DY: “In writing about this stuff, I came to the conclusion that it has something to do with the idea of a vocation.”
BH: "Oh yes, that's good. Vocation. I think the root of the word vocation is related to the word work too. But yes, if you interpret and apply that learning and knowledge, then yes, it is like a vocation, or even a calling. I think if you think about it that way, then you have a duty to perform at the top of your game because, you know, it isn't just a job but a part of your life and your life path." ²⁵²

²⁵² This conversation is transcribed with permission from BH.
THE INTERNET LANDSCAPE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

History and Background of the Internet

The Internet’s genesis lies in the computer network formed by the United States Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) in 1969. ARPA had itself been formed in 1968 to consolidate research resources and to build military technological superiority during the Cold War.

Intended to be a network infrastructure that would endure as a whole, even if parts of its construction collapsed, and built on specific standards that would be used by all participants, the Internet was created as an information exchange system that would, in effect, connect all its participants. The first nodes of this network were, thus, created by linking four computers across universities in California and Utah and would later evolve into today’s Internet. The ARPANET’s design had actually originated with several Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard professors, scientists and engineers. The successful demonstration of the ARPANET took place in 1972 at a conference in Washington D.C.

Following this, the ARPANET’s connection with other computer networks ensued. Although the ARPANET would first begin communication with its related communications networks (PRNET and SATNET), it became evident that standardized communications protocols would have to be established. In this regard, a 1973 seminar at Stanford University

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led to the design of the transmission control protocol (TCP). In 1978, the inter-network protocol (IP) was added, making way for the TCP/IP – the standard by which the Internet has operated for years.

In the early 1980s, the Defense Department grew increasingly anxious about security violations and as such, developed a military network called MILNET in 1983. Meanwhile, ARPANET became the ARPA-Internet and was consigned to the domain of research. By 1984, the United States National Science Foundation (NSF) had developed a computer communications network called NSFNET and four years later began to use ARPA-Internet.

By 1990, ARPANET was technologically no longer relevant, leaving the Internet in its stead. The National Science Foundation had been chosen to replace the Defense Department in managing the Internet, but the NSFNET ceased to exist in 1995. This meant that the Internet was to be placed into the realm of private operations. By this period, computers had networking capabilities and inter-networking activities began to emerge. With a number of Internet service providers building their own networks and gateways, and as commercial enterprises and operations began to proliferate, the Internet began to grow into a global configuration of computer networks.

In the early 1990s, Internet technology was more complicated than it is today. Powered by systems such as UNIX, and by programs such as "Archie" and "Gopher," and using

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255 Castells, 2001: 11.
256 Castells, 2001: 12.
257 Castells, 2001: 12.
connections like "telnet," Internet usage at the time was not nearly as ubiquitous as it has become in recent years. UNIX, an operating system that was conceived of by Bell Laboratories, became particularly popular in University computer science departments in the 1970s, where further technological development resulted in an intra-communications system for UNIX computers. This system, called Usenet News, was used quite frequently outside the ARPANET. Usenet News and ARPANET networks were linked in 1980 as a result of the work of graduate students at the University of California (Berkeley). 258 Another outcome of UNIX was the "open source" movement, and its provocative concept of "copyleft," which endeavored to keep the codes and information for software development open and accessible to the public. The idea was that software should be freely distributed throughout the Internet, for the purpose of collaboration and improvement. The Linux operating system is the result of this open source system of development. Created in 1991, today, Linux is regarded as one of the most sophisticated operating systems available, most especially in the area of Internet-based operations.

The explosion of protocols for the exchange of information during the 1990s increased Internet usage. Indeed, both the production and usage of technology largely influenced the widening Internet landscape. Many people use the terms "the Internet" and "the web" interchangeably, without realizing that the two are distinct entities. One of the protocols for the exchange of information, along with its browser/editor functionality, is the World Wide Web (WWW), which was developed by Tim Berners-Lee. The World Wide Web utilizes the hyper-text transfer protocol (HTTP) to both retrieve and add information from any computer

connected to the Internet.\textsuperscript{259} HTTP initials are found in front of a uniform resource locator or (URL). In effect, the URL is the numeric address used to represent a website on the Internet, while the actual (textual) domain name of a website may be prefaced by the WWW initials -- like www.countrywatch.com -- and functions as the humanly readable representation of the URL.

Aside from the World Wide Web's protocol enabling people to communicate with one another over the Internet, other protocols exist such as POP3, SMTP and IMAP, which allow people to communicate over email, or IRC, which permits people to chat online, and NNTP, which authorizes participation in newsgroups.

Once on the Web, the actual exchange of documented information is configured according to a specific format, using web-enabled languages or coding, such as the commonly used hypertext mark-up language (HTML) or in more recent years, extensible mark-up language (XML). Whereas HTML is the coding used to present information on the web, XML can be used for a variety of purposes, such as the communication and exchange of data.\textsuperscript{260}

Moving from Internet website to Internet website has also involved the development of browsers, such as Mosaic, which was designed at the University of Illinois. Particularly distinctive about Mosaic were its graphics and imagery capabilities, its interface techniques, and its ability to distribute and retrieve over the Internet.\textsuperscript{261} Mosaic became Mosaic Communications, and later Netscape communications, and in 1994, the company launched

\textsuperscript{259} Armor, 2000: 6.
\textsuperscript{260} Coleman, 1999: 53.
\textsuperscript{261} Castells, 2001: 16.
the first commercial browser called Netscape Navigator. In 1995, Netscape Navigator software was released for free in cases of educational use, and for a modest fee for business use. Meanwhile, Microsoft was in the process of developing its own applications for the Internet and also in 1995, it released its own browser called Internet explorer, along with its Windows 95 software. That very same year, Sun Microsystems designed a programming language called Java, which allowed applications called “applets” to move between computers on the Internet, thus allowing the computers to run programs that were downloaded from the Internet. With Java released for free, it was included in the Netscape Navigator suite. Given these various developments, the 1990s marks the period in which the Internet became a privatized enterprise. The year 1995 is associated with the time period in which the Internet came alive for non-technological specialists.

By the mid to late 1990s, Netscape Navigator could be found on computers, particularly in universities. Microsoft Windows programs, however, had also gained currency in businesses and on personal computers, thus advancing the usage of Internet Explorer. These user-friendly browsers increased Internet usage and “virtual travel” from website to website, making the Internet into something of a cultural and technological practice.

Technically, the Internet is a decentralized network, with distributed computing power located within the nodes of the network, and with redundancy features that prevent disconnection. In a sense, despite the public domain of the Internet, these features were reflective of the Department of Defense’s original objective to develop a sustainable system.

\footnote{Castells, 2001: 16.}

\footnote{Castells, 2001: 17.}
of connection that was (1) decentralized; (2) possessing maximum autonomy in each node; and (3) distinguished by flexibility. In this way, the Internet’s development was not the arbitrary evolution of a military research strategy that moved into the realm of science and technology. Indeed, it may well be regarded as the realization of the very objectives outlined by the Department of Defense to create a decentralized, flexible and secure communications network. Notably, the technological developments of the Internet were concentrated among universities, research centers and government departments and institutions, and not, at all, in the realm of business and commerce.

Returning to the issue of practice in the development of the Internet, it was in its very usage - from the days of the ARPANET to the present – that the Internet came into being. Moreover, its evolution has been the result of the open Internet architecture and the use of open source material. The Internet is an effect of what one might call, “self development.” That is to say, even as it was being produced, the Internet users were also in the process of producing its technology. Indeed, Internet users were also – and continue to be – the creators of the Internet network, its technology, and its culture.

Geographic and Cultural Terrain of the Internet

If the Internet has its own geographic terrain, it is one of new spatial configurations and it is one characterized by a matrix of networks. Despite futurological assertions that the Internet

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will render the notion of place useless, geography is not nullified but, rather, complicated by concurrent flows of decentralization as well as connection.

Across the shifting terrain, the infrastructural and technical element of the Internet terrain includes the structure of telecommunications networks and computerized systems, exemplified by the routers that manage Internet traffic and distribute bandwidth (telecommunications lines) available to accommodate Internet traffic.\footnote{Castells, 2001: 209.} Various studies have shown that the center of bandwidth usage and the locus of connections is the United States.\footnote{See Dodge, 2003. See also Cukier, 1999.} Although bandwidth and usage is substantial in the western parts of Europe (particularly in Scandinavia), and even as bandwidth and usage are increasing in Latin America and Asia, many Internet connections are routed through nodes in the United States before reaching destinations internationally. Of course, this is changing as bandwidth internationally increases (as telecommunications companies lay increasing volumes of fiber in the ground), and also as new nodes for routing are established.\footnote{Telegeography, 2003.}

The Internet's geography can be understood as global in scope, but its terrain is asymmetrical and unevenly defined with bandwidth capacity and usage concentrated in heavily networked metropolis area. Moreover, as noted just above, it is also concentrated in North America and Europe.\footnote{Zook, 2003.} Far behind are the countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa, suggesting that Internet domains are concentrated in regional and country-specific ways, with the United
States being the dominating force.\textsuperscript{270} Notably, large population areas, such as Asia, were home to less Internet connectivity, in spite of current attention to technical outsourcing in Asian technology centers, such as Bangalore and Kanpur in India.

This uneven terrain is illustrative of a world in which there is a disproportionate allocation of economic development, educational opportunities and technological infrastructure. This uneven terrain is, itself, complicated because within geographic regions and territories, there is further asymmetry as regards urban and rural areas, as well as upper and lower socio-economic classes of people. Generally, urban areas and more affluent segments of populations across the world tend to enjoy the benefits of technological development more than their less fortunate cohorts.\textsuperscript{271}

As noted by Manuel Castells, the geography of the Internet can also be regarded as the geography of development in some respects.\textsuperscript{272} Indeed, by way of example, when one considers the diffusion of the Internet in the United States, there is far less connectivity in poorer and more rural parts of the country. Likewise, in China, more than 60 percent of its user base and connectivity is concentrated in large cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, whereas the Internet’s penetration into the country’s entire population base was estimated at only 2 percent.\textsuperscript{273}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{270} Castells, 2001: 216.
\item \textsuperscript{271} Zook, 2003.
\item \textsuperscript{272} Castells, 2001: 212.
\item \textsuperscript{273} Castells, 2001: 212; see also Zook, 2003.
\end{itemize}
The concentrations of Internet connectivity appear to coincide with the spatial density of major technological corporations and start-up ventures in certain areas, possibly related to the fact that ancillary suppliers and vendors, as well as Internet software companies, Internet service providers, Internet media services, Internet portals, and Internet-oriented telecommunications enterprises, all tend to cluster around one another. The most obvious examples of such clustering include areas such as Silicon Valley in California, Manhattan, Austin, and the research triangle of North Carolina. Silicon Valley, for example, was not simply the center of early Internet technological development, but also the venue of entrepreneurial ventures that spun off from Internet development. 274 This clustering of Internet and technology based companies in specific parts of the country suggests that despite the promise of the Internet’s spacelessness, another effect has been produced: the concentration of technology (and Internet-based) hubs in specific areas of the country.

The Internet cannot, however, be understood as simply a collection of Internet-based technological and commercial companies, but, rather, a constellation of entities across the Internet. Content providers, for example, in the form of news and information disseminators, as well as identity groups (diasporas connecting globally via the Internet), also form part of the Internet universe. When one considers the types of entities on the Internet in accordance with their defining suffixes (dot.com, dot.org, dot.gov et al), it appears that this asymmetrical and uneven organization is reflected. 275 The United States accounts for the majority of Internet domains (over 50 percent), with specific countries in Europe, such as Switzerland, Denmark and Finland, with the next highest concentrations of domains (15 percent). South

274 Castells, 2001: 213.
Korea also figures highly (2.5 percent) and slightly higher than France (2.1 percent). Metropolitan centers within countries, such as San Francisco and New York in the United States, Stockholm in Sweden, and London in the United Kingdom, also registered highly, effectively reinforcing the rural-urban divide mentioned above.

Houston, the home of CountryWatch, falls below several other metropolitan centers in the United States in terms of number of domain names registered here. Not surprisingly, many users and customers express surprise that an Internet company exists in this city in the first place. The irony of Houston being home to a content provider may relate to an observation made by Matthew Zook that the location of the Internet’s content providers may not be so closely linked with the proliferation of technology-based companies and industries in places such as California and New York. Zook’s inquiry into the production of content on the Internet includes an examination of domain names and the types of websites that have emerged on the Internet. His research shows that there is no correlation between the development of content providers and commercial enterprises on the Internet. Perhaps it is enough to state that the location of CountryWatch in Houston is hardly ironic, given the fact that there are few connections that can be drawn in regard to information content providers and prevailing technological and commercial “clusters.” That said, Zook observes that there may, in fact, be a correlation between certain other industries and content providers that can be measured. In this regard, he has registered the relationship between information industries and content providers in territorial clusters. While hardly a causal relationship, the interest in specialized information in certain areas (such as health care or the military)

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may influence the development of content providers in those particular arenas. In the case of CountryWatch, which was formed by persons from energy sector backgrounds, the interest in forming a geopolitical information service may have sprouted from the desire to understand the political and economic conditions of countries in which energy sector development might ensue. In this regard, there may be an associative relationship at work.

Looking at the reception aspect of these findings, if one considers the volume of users accessing content (measured in terms of website visits and page views), it appears that the United States registers the greatest usage, with usage in South Korea and the United Kingdom also showing substantial usage. The usage of content may tell some degree of a story about technological and Internet adoption among the populations of these countries. In the last section of this chapter, for example, two studies are discussed. Both look at how certain groups within society possess notable attachments to technological devices and demonstrate preferences for Internet-based activities.

While the aforementioned findings simply detail numerical frequencies and are hardly analytical explorations of the Internet geography (such a task is beyond the scope of this project), it should be noted that there is a tendency to view the Internet geography (at this present moment) as one that may be tied to urbanization as well as technological and economic development. Indeed, the proliferation of the Internet had been forecast to end the primacy of cities by connecting people in rural areas, and across the world. As seen in the selected statistics cited here, such an outcome has not occurred. In fact, the Internet remains

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280 Castells, 2001: 225.
a largely urban venue, with Internet-heavy concentrations of clusters occurring in particular geographic locales.

In the specific case of San Francisco in the United States, one of the reasons for "clustering" in this area of Internet dominance may be the spatial distribution of Venture Capital companies, many of them with ties to New York. In summary, many investors who had already made substantial sums of money from arenas of technology were willing to take the risk of investing in emerging companies. Meanwhile positive developments on Wall Street led to the formation of investment units of New York companies, many of which were interested in exploring the opportunities of this emerging industry. Together, the efforts of these two cadres led to massive Venture Capital and individual "angel" investors who basically funded the Internet explosion.  

In this way, Venture Capital companies have been instrumental in the financing and development of the Internet industry in as it moved past its period of governmental sponsorship. In fact, Venture Capital companies that invest and contribute to the development of the Internet industry tend to become intimately involved in these companies because of the interest in their financial investments, but also because the nature of the relationship is one in which the Venture Capitalists advise and essentially work with the regular staff at given companies.  

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281 Castells, 2001: 221-222.
Back in Houston at CountryWatch, during the early days of the Internet, it was clear that Venture Capitalist and other investors were not particularly interested in Internet companies outside of San Francisco. Following several pitches to Venture Capitalists in the Bay Area in search of investment funding, the CEO observed that it was impossible to acquire investment funding for a company not on one of the two coasts. In fact, it was this realization that motivated the CEO to retrench and fall back on “angel” investors from the energy sector – the very same sector that has dominated Houston’s economy. Indeed, until recently, most of the outside investment for CountryWatch has come from individual investors who amassed their wealth from the booms in oil and natural gas. It has only been since CountryWatch has demonstrated viability that interest from outside investors has increased. That said, it is apparent that the relationships and shared information of players on the West and East coasts of the United States largely generated the explosion of the Internet industry in recent years.

The specific example of Venture Capital funding aside, several expected rationales lend themselves to the notion of the Internet as an urbanized venue. The crisis in the agricultural sphere, increased migration to cities as a result of the quest for economic opportunities, and the concentration of high-value services and industries in metropolitan centers, lend themselves to the further growth, development and enhancement of these areas. Rather than connect isolated areas, the Internet has deepened the technological connections from and within urban centers. If one considers the attraction to urban centers, it would appear as though the chasm between the less developed and more developed spheres is intensifying. In some ways, it is a perspective that may well share some similarities with arguments articulated by anti-globalization activists who have said that globalization (considered as a
force and not a trope) expands the gap between rich and poor. The globalization argument aside, it is possible to look at the Internet as an urbanized venue, inhabited by “techno-elites.”

Techno-elites can be divided into two segments: the developers of Internet technology as well as its users. These two groups are not carefully circumscribed and distinctive constructs. Instead, developers are also (typically) users, and although many users are of the pedestrian typology, there are several segments of users who also contribute to Internet development. For the moment, the attention is focused on the developers/users who actively work on Internet technology and may be considered the key players of agents who function within a techno-meritocratic culture. The roots of techno-meritocratic are located within academia and science, as detailed in the earlier section on the history of the Internet. The techno-meritocratic culture binds itself to a belief system in which science and technological development are aspects of human advancement and progress. It is in this regard that this culture and associated belief system can be regarded as products of the Enlightenment and features of modernity. The techno-elites within this context are informed by the shared pursuit of science and academic excellence, the acknowledgement of the authors of discovery, and a space in which peer review and open research is the norm. In these respects, techno-elites hold that technological advancement (as regards computerized and Internet-related endeavors) is to be valued above all else.

Technological advancement is located along a hierarchy of value in which the contribution to the entire field of computerized problem solving is conceived. That is to say, value is not

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284 The term “techno-meritocratic” was articulated by Castells (2001: 39-40) in regard to a specific cultural typology of the Internet and its evolution.

285 A version of this observation has been noted by Castells, 2001 and Tuomi, 2000.
attributed to knowledge along a theoretical axis, but rather with respect to applications and improvements of an existing technological item, system or network. The actual value, along these lines, is attributed via peer review and relates to performance and relevance of apparent discoveries. Open collaboration and communication within this environment is another key characteristic. It is this (largely scholarly) enclave that forms the developer/user faction of techno-elites within the techno-meritocratic culture.

Returning to the matter of the Internet and Internet-related technologies, Manuel Castells further develops the notion of the Internet as an urbanized venue. He suggests that technological developments flourish in what he terms a “milieu of innovation,” and he connects the this idea with places, such as New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, London, Bangalore, Shanghai.\(^{26}\) For him, these metropolitan centers are places of productive cultural creativity, sources of wealth, and they offer competitive advantages. These attractions draw more people, and specifically -- knowledge workers (a concept taken up more fully later but which may well include “techno-elites” mentioned above) who work with and within the Internet landscape to extend its capabilities. Referred to as something akin to “the spirit of informationalism and innovation,” this (for Castells) appears to drive an ever-increasing unfolding of Internet oriented businesses, industries and practices. Building upon Castells’ perspective, one might suggest that the uses, practices, engagement and work of the Internet by regular users, entrepreneurs, and most significantly, by techno-elites: (1) reproduces and reifies the Internet as an urban venue; and (2) reconstructs the Internet as a product of developing technologies and innovations. In this way, cultural, social and economic life

\(^{26}\) Castells, 2001: 227.
produces the technological dimension, just as the technological dimension is informed by the cultural, social and economic aspects within which it exists.

In the preceding section of this chapter, the governmental sponsorship of the Internet's evolution was discussed. In this section, the entrepreneurial aspect of the Internet's development has been considered, along with the techno-elites who also contribute to the Internet terrain. The reason for this attention has been the fact that the commercial interests of the Internet has functioned together with the user culture, and has been influenced and produced by techno-elites, to circulate practices, engagement and forms of work, as noted just above. The entrepreneurial impetus has been one of profits and money making and is to be distinguished from techno-elites (including hackers), who identify the Internet, as well as its technological spheres of development and innovation, quite differently. These perspectives and motivations notwithstanding (value of technology as a scholarly endeavor versus value of technology as a money-maker), they function together to create and recreate the Internet terrain.

A Note on Business and the Internet

Business or electronic business has been one of the main practices on the Internet. Although associated with "dot.coms," electronic business encompasses a much more extensive range of commercial and business activity on the Internet. As such, the focus here is not on Internet businesses as symbolized by "dot.coms," but on how the Internet and business influence one another. In effect, the Internet is transforming the way business operates, as
exemplified by business practices between suppliers and customers, in terms of production and process, in terms of distribution and sales, in the realm of customer service, and, as seen in daily news reports, in regard to the valuation of stocks in financial markets. In all these areas, the Internet is not only a medium or venue of communication between customers, businesses and vendors, but also the means by which information is processed.

At CountryWatch, for example, the term “dot.com” hardly represents the business operations and imperatives. In subsequent chapters, the various ways in which the Internet shapes business practices (as illustrated by the case of CountryWatch), will be addressed. For the limited purpose of addressing the Internet landscape of business, it should be noted that the concept of the network, which the Internet represents, has changed and contoured the organizational form of corporations, the way in which work is done, the manner in which businesses operate, and also, the role and understandings of workers.

Although there are several ways in which traditional forms and practices of business, work, labor relations, production and development occurs, even with the emergence of the so-called New Economy, there are also significant ways in which these very considerations are changing as well. These changes have been the result of what could be called a new “network enterprise” model, which is largely generated by the communication pathways and processes, as well as the information distribution systems, of the Internet. 287

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287 The term “network enterprise” was made famous by Manuel Castells in his book of the same name (1998).
Space, Time and Multiplicity on the Internet

In its post-ARPANet evolution, the Internet story has become one of storytelling, communication and connecting. To this end, many of the associated technologies have emerged in response to these utilities. Specifically, because the Internet is a virtual arena and a visual venue within which such functions may ensue, a large portion of technical attention is given to the design and navigation of this space.

Across the space of the Internet, information may be thought of as the destination, while web design -- color, line, typography -- may be analogous to directional mapping. Effective design, both in terms of the aesthetics, as well as in terms of navigational ease, entails using incremental steps that transpose the realm of the familiar into the realm of the new. For example, Jill Rosenfeld notes that "a good map...provides a frame of reference and then quickly shows you how to move from the recognizable (the Atlantic Ocean with Pennsylvania to the left of it) to the less familiar (a small country road)." That is to say, effective Internet design involves the use of familiar visual tools that can be used to maneuver through a world of increasingly advanced information systems, which are purportedly becoming more alien. Given these considerations, it is not accidental that CountryWatch, the center of this research, has experienced innumerable Website design changes over the last few years.

Spatial considerations aside, it is fair to state that Internet usage is a “24-hour-a-day, 7-days-a-week” enterprise, with no reference to time zones or geographic boundaries. For these

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reasons, this period marking the advent and increasing usage of the Internet, is often referred to as the Digital Era. Using the example of CountryWatch, survival as an Internet portal in this Digital Era necessitates constant awareness of the website’s functioning. Although there are technical requirements, such as “site server redundancy,” which ensure that the website operates regardless of glitches at any point in a given day, no feature on the CountryWatch Web site is more illustrative of the need for unremitting attention than the news wire service. In the Digital Era, cable news providers’ incessant and unbroken treatment of current events reigns as the benchmark, both on television and on its interactive website. With such a standard at work, news stories at CountryWatch can no longer be updated “on a regular basis,” but, rather, “real time” coverage is requisite in the current climate of media immediacy.

Another less frequently mentioned dimension of Internet usage is the matter of multiple views or apertures offered by the medium. That is to say, one is able to simultaneously view a number of web pages (perhaps on the same website, perhaps on distinct websites). By way of illustration, looking at an unlimited number of web pages by opening multiple windows on a computer screen enables one to view a plurality of "channels" at the same time, in much the same manner as one might switch television channels. Yet, unlike customary television viewing, one can manipulate window sizes, thus allowing a number of window views or vistas to appear on a computer screen at the same time. So, for example, if one wanted to look at (1) the CountryWatch homepage; as well as (2) one of its country-specific pages; and (3) a global marketplace page concurrently on one’s unitary computer screen, this would be possible in a way that television viewing does not permit.
Much of CountryWatch’s content is both served and processed via the Internet, before being uploaded to the CountryWatch website. Stated another way, although CountryWatch content is available for viewing, reading, and listening over the Internet, in fact, that very content is made available using Internet technologies. While CountryWatch has developed proprietary features, applications and software for its operations, much of the everyday work takes place across both standardized and newly developed Internet platforms. CountryWatch is not likely to be unique in this regard since many of the partner news wire providers and services operate in a similar manner, by using the Internet to access, accrue, analyze, parse, edit, brand, transmit, upload and ultimately publish content on the Internet. Thus, one might suggest that the Internet is creating and being created by the Internet, and is both producing and reproducing, the Internet in a fairly circular manner.

To offer a concrete example of how this process works, consider how news occurs on the CountryWatch website:

News sources:

CountryWatch forms alliances and partnerships with regional news services that permit the publication of their content. The content is either paid for via licensing agreements or through other arrangements, such as shared revenue agreements (x percent of revenue is given to the news agency in exchange for the rights to publish content.)
Access:

In some cases, the news from those entities is made available on a publicly available server on the Internet known as File Transfer Protocol or FTP. Such FTP websites are password-protected and partner companies such as CountryWatch will have access to the news on these FTP websites. In other cases, passwords or selected Internet Protocol ranges are used to identify users, who are then allowed to access “closed” websites (those not freely available to the public), where the news stories are located.

Accrual:

New stories can then be culled from the FTP or closed news websites, by CountryWatch staff, and placed on to the CountryWatch news administration website, which is also available on the Internet. The administration website is a closed website, accessible only by CountryWatch employees, but which connects to the public or “user” website at the URL: www.countrywatch.com. In essence, the administration website functions as a work site of sorts.

Analyze:

Using XML technologies, each news story goes through an automated analytical process, whereby the words are searched for relevancy, using certain cues. Because CountryWatch is a country-specific data and information provider, those cues are largely country-related and
include country names, capital cities, heads of state, as well as names of international organizations and regional blocs. The associations of these names and countries are coded, so that as soon as a story enters the analysis process, it is immediately associated with a given country or set of countries, on the basis of the cues and codes.

Parse:

Once the stories have been analyzed, they are parsed. That is to say, based on the cues that associate countries with stories, each news story is assigned a country, or a number of countries, which are deemed relevant.

Edit:

The process is never perfect, despite coding used to refine the process, so certain parsed stories have to be edited. Sometimes, the editing process has to do with formatting and language. For example, headings may be too long or incomprehensible; sometimes they may include language that has to be altered. Sometimes commercial information or translations are included that have to be removed. Editing also involves scrutiny in regard to the country selections for each news story. For example, a story about President George Bush flying to Iraq on Thanksgiving to serve turkey to United States troops may have been parsed and selected for the United States, Iraq and Turkey, due to relevant word cues. Thus, the country of Turkey (as distinct from the animal of the same name) will have to be removed from selection. Likewise, a story about Nigeria may be parsed and selected for both West African
countries of Nigeria and Niger, while a story about the Dominican Republic may be parsed and selected for both the Dominican Republic and Dominica, due to the name similarities. Likewise, a story with the word Guinea in it is usually parsed and selected for the three countries of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Papua New Guinea. And any story with the word woman is parsed and selected for the Middle Eastern country of Oman. In these cases, the non-relevant countries have to be removed. If this appears to be a simple enough process, it should be noted that after reviewing other news providers which fully automate the news story parsing process, it became clear that these errors are commonplace. WorldNews.Net, for example, has published stories about Trinidad in Colorado for news on the Caribbean country of Trinidad.

Brand:

Once the news stories are fully parsed and edited, then they have to be branded by news wire service. Since each story comes from one of many possible news providers and there are licensing agreements and revenue sharing contracts are at stake, the tagging process essentially associates each story with an originating news provider so that proper intellectual property and accounting issues are considered. In this way, each and every news story is branded.

Transmit:
The transmission process is twofold. Each news story has to know where it has to go. During transmission, the each news story is given a destination. Some stories are not breaking news, for example, and they cannot transmit in real time. In the case of an old story, belatedly coming across the wire, but deemed relevant in terms of general knowledge (for example the new cabinet selection for Estonia), it is given a transmission directive to go to the archive. Likewise, if a policy statement is issued but there is a specific publish date attached, it cannot go “live” immediately, so it has to have a transmission directive that stores it in a staging area, ready to be published at a specified time. The second part of the process allows stories to be transmitted to multiple destinations. Thus, the news wire administrator can decide that a given news story should not only be published on specified country-specific web pages, but should be featured on the news ticker on the front page of the CountryWatch website. The transmission feature “sends” the news story to its destination countries, as well as the news ticker.

**Upload:**

With its transmission destination defined, a news story is then given a directive to be “uploaded” on to the CountryWatch website for publication.

**Publish:**

The publication part is the final step in the work flow process which makes each news story appear on the website.
While the aforementioned process may take some time depending on the news wire administrator’s expertise and familiarity, the technical parts of the process occur in single digit seconds. Most of the time is taken up in culling and editing news stories. News Wire editors do all their work using one computer screen open with multiple windows. Using the computer mouse to move the story across the screen, a given news story moves from the FTP or closed website of the originating news provider to the CountryWatch administration website, where it is analyzed, parsed, edited, branded.

Although transmission takes place on the administration website, it is sometimes easier to open a third window of the administration website where one can check the archives or staging area to ensure that directives were transmitted properly. A fourth window is needed opening up to the CountryWatch “user” website to check that stories have successfully uploaded and published. A fifth window can be open to check the logs of all stories published in a given time period.

As such, the Internet may be regarded as a venue of communication, utilizing multiple technologies in one framework, where varying activities, collective convergences and enterprises will likely continue to reside. In additional, as noted above, and as demonstrated by the process detailed here, news publication on the Internet takes places using the Internet features, Internet architecture and Internet technology, to effectively create the Internet landscape.
Communication, Circulation and Multimedia

Thanks to the public attention of the United States government's case against the online music company, Napster, the delivery, storage and sharing of MP3 music files over the Internet is one of the most well-known forms of media circulation. Companies such as Freenet and Gnutella, have also facilitated the sharing, storage and delivery of music over the Internet. The legal issues notwithstanding, the notion of delivery, storage and sharing of music online have collectively contributed to the popularity of musical circulation on the Internet. Although new business models have had to be developed to pay for the music and to protect the intellectual property of artists, and although it is unknown as to whether or not these models will be successful, the technology and usage of this modality remains one of the most popular forms of Internet practice, adopted with enthusiasm among youthful users. Indeed, its popularity lies in the fact that it was once free and is now available for a nominal price, much lower than the average compact disc in a regular music store.

Television is a dissemination medium, not unlike a book or journal, but with visual and audio features that are so filled to capacity with vitality that a multi-dimensional experience is created for the viewer. What television may lack, however, is circulation. The Internet today features web pages and websites with interesting and rich content, complete with pictures (jpegs and gifs). Streaming video (using RealPlayer and Quicktime), WebTV, as well as audio sound clips (MP3s, wav files and their transmission via Windows Media Player) are new forms of dissemination used with increasing frequency over the Internet. Some websites even stream entire musical videos or "micro films," thus making the venue akin to television
and film. Storage of video files, however, is quite difficult due to their large size. As such, sharing of files is not technically easy. However, links to popular streams (for example, political advertising sponsored by activist and grass roots organizations that increasingly utilize the Internet) are often exchanged via email, directing users to view them.

One realm of online video that has become popular is pornography. This material is, ostensibly, considered to be offensive and cannot be distributed over mainstream airwaves. Although pornography is available in print, at video stores, and even on the telephone (telephone sex), Internet pornography has become one of the most significant developments on the Internet. Internet pornography offers an alternative venue for its consumers who crave privacy. A consumer of pornography need not walk into a video store and use a credit card or membership card with his or her personal information; he or she can do so in a faceless transaction over the Internet. Another appeal of Internet pornography is that it is relatively cheaper than telephone sex or the rental of x-rated videos. A third aspect of Internet pornography’s popularity is the fact that it can be accessed from anywhere, including the workplace. There is scant material available to show if policies implemented by many companies prohibiting the viewing of pornographic materials on company computers have stopped this practice. Using the example of CountryWatch, despite such a policy within the company, there have been several incidences when websites, such as “Asian Girls Naked” and “Extreme Tits and Ass in Action,” have been found on various (now ex-) employees’ computers. The ethics of such practices aside, Internet pornography appears to be an expression of people’s desires, however unpalatable they may seem. Internet gambling also
fits into this category, although it is considered expressly illegal, as specified in United States law. Its practice, however, has been registered in the United States.

Online video games are also a popular arena. Although offline video games are both popular and available in the United States (as exemplified by Sony PlayStation’s popularity which exceeds that of personal computers), online gaming devices, such as Dreamcast, are gaining currency. In the case of online gaming devices, the possibility of interacting and connecting socially -- while gaming -- is provided. As well, the dynamic nature of the “rules” of online games, as well as their open-ended formats, allow users to control the possibilities of both processes and outcomes, in a context of interactivity.

Many radio stations now broadcast over the website, while others feature disc jockeys “live,” broadcast via “Web cams” (digital cameras) doing their once-exclusively auditory jobs. Even “serious” websites offer such features. Many of the major news websites, such as Reuters, offer video and audio broadcasts, while CountryWatch has a weekly audio broadcast of the main international events. Although these features widen the purview of communication, they remain expanded modalities of dissemination. They do, however, facilitate the circulation and communication of information. While regular radio broadcasting and listening takes place within a certain geographic radius, online radio broadcasting allows listeners miles away to tune into the audio transmissions of news and events in distant places. As such, radio broadcasting over the Internet has much the same effect as newspapers (a form of print capitalism), by connecting peoples within countries.\(^{289}\)

Internet broadcasts of radio shows connect people across a given national landscape and

\(^{289}\) See Anderson, 1991 in regard to print capitalism, connection, identity and nation building.
beyond national boundaries into the realm of transnational diasporas, facilitating other modalities of connection.

Another reason for the popularity of online radio lies in the increasingly corporate nature of radio stations in the United States, many of which are owned by a small group of media conglomerates. Community and public radio (non-commercial radio) offer an alternative source of news and information; and in cases such as the Pacifica radio network, their website is not only a place in which their broadcasts can be heard in cities and communities without Pacific stations, but also an additional source of political and cultural information. In this way, the “radio-plus-website” model of communication has become increasingly popular among non-traditional types craving information and “an education” of sorts.

Online newspapers have a similar effect to Internet broadcasts of radio shows. Indeed, the Internet is one way for people to read the news from local newspapers across the world. This is because most newspapers are now available online. The Wall Street Journal is an exception and charges a subscription for its online service. However, several other newspapers in the United States and across the world can be accessed using the Internet. Presumably, most newspaper companies believe that the credibility and authority of the printed textual word will ensure that its revenue stream from regular customers will not be undercut by making news and information available across the Internet. Mainstream newspapers aside, as in the case of community radio, online journals and reporting services appear to be meeting a need in an increasingly commercialized venue of news in which people search out alternative sources of information. Journals such as Salon, The New
Republic and The Nation, for example, provide edgy and alternative views of the political and cultural landscape of the United States on the basis of subscriptions. Like CountryWatch, they are slowly increasing their revenues and viability, and the interest by readers/users lies in the fact that they are not mainstream news sources.

Regular books of all varieties tend to use the Internet purely for marketing or as a marketplace (for example Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble on line), and are unlikely to be superseded by Internet versions of novels, literature and non-fiction publications. There has been little interest by the public of purchasing books online. The authority of the printed word (exemplified by print newspapers), as well as the manageability of reading 200 pages of text within one material object, have not lost their appeal. Most online books that have had some success in readership have been published only in portions (by chapter) or they have been formatted with drop down menus and hyperlinks to make the length of the content manageable in an online format. Although it is possible to arrange books for reading online in this manner, there has been limited positive feedback from users/readers and as such, it is unlikely that the online novel will soon be the norm, effectively replacing the book. That said, printed versions of reference books and encyclopedias appear to be on their way out while the online versions of textbooks and scholarly journals are projected to increase as online learning increases. 290

Meanwhile, Internet features such as chat rooms and news groups, as well as up to the minute journalism on the websites of major news networks such as CNN and MSNBC (a joint venture of NBC and Microsoft), all function to make the Internet a new medium of sorts,

290 Borgman, 2000; Dumont, 2000; Ekman and Quandt, 1999.
where viewers/listeners/users literally participate in the production of the functionality, be it news or entertainment. Put another way, the transmission of a given message is intrinsically connected with its reception, since a user in a news group or logging on to CNN Interactive or BBC Interactive, might post a question or message, which when posted online is then part of the message which begs response. Once a response is garnered, another message is posted, making the cycle of transmission, reception, and ensuing transmission, a fully functional dynamic of this circulatory medium.

Other emerging venues and usages of Internet communication and circulation of media include instant messaging. Instant messaging provides similar communication capability as email. However, each message pops up on a computer screen in a small box with the latest message, and offers immediacy of communication, in contrast to the “write-send-retrieve-read-reply” structure of email, which requires a user to actually check his or her email inbox for messages. Much like the immediacy of the telephone, online messaging is a modality popular not only among youth but also among employees who work with computers and wish to communicate with others, without being perceived as talking on the telephone during work hours.

Yet another development is the usage of the Internet communication, Internet based websites, as well as email, to garner public support and activism for social and political causes. The success of websites, such as MoveOn.org (a grassroots political movement that emerged during the Clinton impeachment scandal and morphed into an institutionalized critique of the current Bush administration) is illustrative of this movement. With corporate control over
the messaging in what has been perceived as corporate-run media, some enclaves of people have been seeking not only alternative venues of information gathering (as noted above in regard to alternative news sources), but also alternative means of critical expression. Websites and operations such as MoveOn.org have captured popular interest by harnessing the Internet’s scope to communicate its messages. Moreover, it has used the interactive nature of the Internet as a fulcrum for its own organizational structure. Thus, it invited users/viewers/readers to submit their own political advertisements for the 2004 election, posted these entries for viewing on its website, and then used Internet technology to measure popularity of each submission, so that it could “democratically” select the final 15 of the lot. In this way, MoveOn.org has used the Internet’s communication and circulation capabilities to advance its particular political messages, and subvert the entrenched traditional media apparatus.

Collaborative art is also a way in which the Internet has been used for communication and circulation. Using the Internet, people can collectively and interactively create joint artistic creations online using what are known as “groupware practices.” These groupware practices can be used in the realms of painting, sculpting, designing and composing – all in an online format, via the Internet. Another example of online collaborative art is open source art. Open source art, as in the case of Escher World, is not only a showcase or an online gallery of the graphic designs and geometric patterns of Escher. Instead, people from across the world can use the Internet and graphic art technologies to create new and experimental formations of Escher’s geometric patterns.

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In exploring many of these varied forms of Internet-based communication and circularity, in conjunction with media, it appears that converging with various models of media, the Internet is becoming its own communications and circulation medium. That is to say, it is a specific medium that crosscuts all other forms of cultural and political expression, in effect transforming communication, circulation and cultural practice. It rests upon interaction; it is allows for decentralized and highly varied venues of dissemination; it invites cultural, political and creative expression; and although some versions exist for the purpose of entertainment, there are also highly purposeful aspects to the communication and circulation across the Internet landscape.

**Internet Intimations**

The Internet was really a fairly obscure technological framework, used primarily by scientists, and then eventually by hackers and counter-communities (as noted previously), before becoming a medium of public reception and transmission. Today, it is a form of mass communication hitherto unknown on global scale. Used by 16 million people worldwide in 1995, the number of Internet users increased to 400 million in 2001, and was projected to reach 1 billion by 2005.

Economic, social, cultural, political, activities are being structured around the Internet. In fact, the Internet is credited with mobilizing grass roots activism in recent years, as noted just above, transforming business and expanding growth, as discussed in the chapter on the New

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293 Castells, 2001: 3.
Economy, and has been discussed in regard to various cultural and counter-cultural groups seeking to connect ideas and people in the formation of identity.

Meanwhile, as it is used by individual people, institutions, corporations, governments, and by larger society, the Internet transforms those enclaves, and at the same time, is, itself, transformed as a result of the interactions and usage. That is to say, the capabilities of the Internet serve to change the people, institutions, corporations, governments et al, because of its usage, and particular communication and connection capabilities. Yet human and social practice has its own transformative effects, which are charted in the moment and via experience. Business practices also reflect this circuitous route. Although understood in the popular media as electronic commerce or e-commerce in the form of “dot.coms,” in fact, the use of the Internet in businesses and commercial operations has altered (but not eliminated) traditional modalities, precisely as a result – or as an effect – of everyday practice. That is to say, new changes in business and the existence of electronic commerce may be viewed as a result of technological change and the proliferation of the Internet. Yet, this new business and commercial arena has grown, and been further modified, precisely because of Internet usage and social practice. This circularity of process has been mentioned elsewhere in this research.

Manuel Castells has observed that the rapidity of on-going transformation in the technological sphere has prevented the possibility of scholarly research and empirical studies, which follow that pace of change. 294 Such research and studies would, ideally, pose the questions relating to the Internet, its usage, its impact on society, culture, the economy and

294 Castells, 2001: 3.
politics. It would also show how these realms have contributed to the shaping and evolution of the Internet. In the absence of reliable insights, Castells has remarked that futurological prophecies (based on facile understandings of the consequences of technological wonders), as well as ideology and gossip, have, instead, formed the perception of the Internet and its landscape of existence. 295 Likewise, media representations, most of which lack rigorous treatment, tend to either marvel about technological possibility, as exemplified by CNN’s weekly show called “Next,” or they cover the “bad news,” such as Internet predators or the failure of the New Economy and the collapse of Internet ventures. Indeed, the turmoil in the stock market has been linked with ambivalent attitudes toward the Internet and as noted by Castells, technological and new financial markets have been “strongly influenced by crowd psychology and information turbulences, rather than by a sound evaluation of the relatively new conditions under which business operates.” 296

Whether or not business actually operated under new conditions is a subject more comprehensively treated another chapter. However, the mixture of bewilderment, amazement and panic appears to have left some degree of a mark on how investment in technology and the Internet is regarded. Another dimension of perceptions of the Internet and its influence include the view that it is an alienating medium, an idea expressed in a number of what Castells terms “critical dystopias.” 297 That is to say, the Internet may be viewed as a medium that alienates even as it connects.

295 Castells, 2001: 3.
297 Castells, 2001: 3.
Peter Drucker, a student of both Joseph Schumpeter and John Maynard Keynes, has said that although the Internet eliminates distance, that particular impact is not necessarily new. After all, the railroad began this process of distance elimination is the 1820s. Likewise, he cautioned that the Internet may simply be another distribution channel, as regards the economy. Indeed, Drucker notes that the Internet is also just another recording system whereby the elaborate modeling systems for inventory, supply chains, transportation and shipping are made invisible. Logical systems analysis is still part of the picture. Thus, Drucker says, “The computer can’t do anything we could not do before; it just does it much faster and demands logical clarity that forces us to be rigorous. ... So the Internet — which depends on what the computer can do -- forces organization and clarity.” As such, its significance in the area of the economy may be overstated (this view is somewhat of a contrasting one with other writers, such as Castells.) Instead, Drucker suggests that the most important impact of the Internet is in terms of culture.

As discussed in this research, technology, and particularly the Internet, has significance resonance among specific groups of people – Americans and people from other developed countries, urban centers, and unexpected technological enclaves across the world. Yet there is certainly some similarity in terms of a more privileged education and class structure that could broadly apply to Internet users. In this regard, Drucker has observed that culturally, the Internet’s effect may be “the emergence of psychologically global middle classes.” The information discussed directly following may bear upon the characteristics of the Internet usership; it may also contribute to the spirit of Drucker’s comment about emerging

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299 Schonfeld, 2001
constellations and classes of people who share an appreciation for the possibilities offered by technologies, such as the Internet.

**Internet Zeitgeist**

Note: The following section is intended simply to be an exploration of the people and usage of the Internet landscape. It is not intended to be a measure of anthropological practice but its inclusion here is intended to further illustrate the Internet landscape.

While a large portion of this research looks at the Internet, the New “Informational” Economy and even “Knowledge Workers” as products of cultural, political social and economic tectonics, and as technology, information and culture are examined as both effects and influences, there are also a number of connotations associated with these terms that are sometimes left out of the discussion. In regard to the Internet, for example, I can discuss the Internet in terms of business and even information because the focus of my fieldwork is a commercial entity that has become largely constituted by the Internet. Yet I am left wondering about the other dimensions of the Internet.

In trying to come to terms with the meanings and interpretations of the Internet, I had to think about the question of the Internet’ significances, intimations, and sensibilities that are particular to this period of its emergence. This line of thinking led me to wonder the following: *Does it have a “zeitgeist?”* The term “zeitgeist” means “the spirit of the time; the taste and outlook of a period or generation” and comes from the High German linguistic
roots – with “zeit” referring to time and “geist” referring to “spirit.” 301 Here, I am not asking if there is an Internet zeitgeist per se, but rather how is the Internet a register of some virtual zeitgeist?

In searching to find some answers to my question on “zeitgeist,” I noticed that the term has been borrowed by the Internet search engine, Google, to register the meanings and patterns of the most requested searches on the Internet, using Google’s searching technology. 302 Presumably, Google believes that the subjects and topics for which further information is sought must depict in some way the spirit of the times in which we live, or the “zeitgeist.” Whether or not my supposition is true about Google’s motivation in delineating the frequency of search topics is not known. If it is true, then I am not sure what conclusions can be drawn from the random results of the frequency of certain searches on the Internet. Is the fact that Britney Spears was the most popular query in the United States in 2003 indicative of anything about contemporary culture and society? Is the fact that Iraq and North Korea were the countries registering the largest number of queries a reflection of contemporary events? What about the fact that the travel schedules for trains is the most requested query in France while telephone numbers in Italy were most frequently searched?

Clearly, my journey to find the Internet’s registers of “zeitgeist” was drawing no immediate conclusions from Google’s endless lists of the most popular queries across the world. My next step was to try to determine if I could grasp some registers of “zeitgeist” by considering some of the recent studies done on the people and practices of the Internet.

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302 See Google’s Zeitgeist Online.
The Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project is one of the most comprehensive and recent studies on Internet usage in the United States covering three years of research and analysis. The results of the research and analysis have shown that online activity has consistently increased during the period of research from 2000 to 2003, and that Internet users tend to find new (and seemingly more complicated) things to do on the Internet, as new technologies and applications emerge, and as users’ familiarity and confidence increase. This increasing pace and depth of change has the effect of consolidating reliance on the Internet in various facets of people’s lives. Put simply, increased Internet usage tends to produce further and intensified Internet usage, according to the Pew Research Center.

The research also shows that although there is a marked increase in Internet activity, the online population increased in the early 2000s, but in 2002, very little online population growth was registered, followed by a small surge in 2003. Still, from 2000 to 2003, the Internet population grew from just over 46 percent to over 60 percent of the total population. To be precise, of people 18 years and over, the online population is estimated at 63 percent in the United States, according to the study. This 63 percent is divided by gender into 65 percent of men and 61 percent of women. Internet adoption is also registered across demographic lines, although older Americans and minorities tended to use the Internet less than younger people and white Americans. The reasons for the variance across these lines

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were stated to be a lack of access to computers, lack of educational opportunities, and socio-economic status. 304

Among those 14 to 17 years of age, the online youth population is 75 percent. For those in their 20s, computers, and particularly Internet access, is becoming the most important communications mechanisms, perhaps even superseding the landline telephone and television. Particularly significant among this group is the fact that attachment to technological gadgets and devices is developed at a young age and appears to continue with age.

Above, there was a reference to “techno-elites” as regards technological developers. There is, as well, another segment of “techno-elites” whom the Pew Research Center describes as “high end technology adopters.” 305 Of the entire population of the United States, including the 37 percent of those who are not included in the online population, 31 percent have been classified as “techno elites.” 306 While many youthful members of the “techno-elite” were described above as being attached to technological gadgets and devices, they are not the largest segment of this group. Generation X-ers, averaging about 36 years of age, compose 60 percent of the “techno-elite.” 307

For the group, as a whole, the Internet, cellular telephones, digital video recorders and players, as well as digital organizers are commonplace items, or what we might call

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305 Pew Research Center’s Project on Internet and American Life, 2003.
technological artifacts. According to the Pew Research Center, one of the defining characteristics of this group is the technological primacy of new forms of communication. Cellular telephones, electronic mail and Internet connections are preferable to other forms of connection, while Internet-based news and entertainment are indispensable aspects of their lives. Indeed, while less than half of this group (48 percent) say that they would find it difficult to give up television, a range of 64 percent to 74 percent of “techno elitists” say that they would find it difficult to relinquish their computers. A range of 50 to 68 percent of “techno-elitists” also say that they would find it difficult to give up their Internet access (the lower number was applicable in regard to older segments of this group.)

CountryWatch, a workplace inhabited with Generation X type “techno-elitists” is typical of this trend which applies from the professional realm of employment duties to the personal predilections of individuals. When technological glitches or other problems stymie digital access at the CountryWatch office, the articulation of the sentiment “I cannot function like this” can be heard from most employees, including myself. Another characteristic of the “techno-elitists” is that they tend to eschew the likes of AOL as an Internet provider. In general, as noted by the Pew Research Center, they dislike the way in which such Internet providers pre-select content on homepages and, as such, they “don’t let the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) do the choosing for them.”

In so far as online activity is concerned, electronic mail appears to be the most frequently cited activity, with people noting that it has helped them stay more connected to others.

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Despite the negative performance of certain technological stocks and dismal economic conditions, online transactions (online banking and purchases) are the single fastest growing area of activity. The desire for fast coverage of breaking news stories also figures highly with the news-gathering Internet population. Meanwhile, as activity intensifies, concerns about Internet connectivity, speed and quality are also increasing.\textsuperscript{310}

In the chapter entitled "Paradigm Shift," there is a reference to the notion of "the spirit of information and technology." This notion has multiple interpretations. However, for the expressed purpose of considering the Internet as a register of "zeitgeist," it should be noted that the Pew Research Center's study showed that 62 percent of the overall American population ("techno-elitists" as well as the rest of the population) feel positively about computers and technology, while 67 percent expressed positive feelings about the abundance of information available today, particularly via the Internet.\textsuperscript{311}

The University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) also conducted a three-year Internet project.\textsuperscript{312} In its research, the UCLA Internet Project concluded that email was the most frequently cited online activity, reflecting the same findings as the Pew Center. In 2002, the online population was found to be 59.3 percent, as compared with the 63 percent number cited by the Pew Center for the following year, 2003. A unique measurement registered in the UCLA study was the number of people who said that they experienced technophobia when using the Internet (30.3 percent). In the same study, a majority of people who said that they did not use the Internet (a majority of the 28.9 figure) stated that their lack of

\textsuperscript{310} Pew Research Center's Project on Internet and American Life, 2003.
\textsuperscript{311} Pew Research Center's Project on Internet and American Life, 2003.
\textsuperscript{312} UCLA Internet Project, 2002.
technological knowledge as their reason. In terms of usage on the Internet, the UCLA study appeared to register similar trends as the Pew Center. For example, interest in television viewing decreased, particularly among those for whom Internet experience increased. Indeed, in 2002, Internet users watched 5.4 hours less of television than non-users.

The UCLA Internet Project also asked questions about information on the Internet. Responses seemed to present the view that, among Internet users, the Internet was viewed as an important source of information. Indeed, in 2002, 60.5 percent of Internet users said that the Internet was a "very important" or "extremely important" or "necessary" source of information.\footnote{UCLA Internet Project, 2002.} Of course, at the same time, a declining percentage of people (52.8 percent) also stated that the Internet was a reliable (vis a vis necessary) source of information. Elsewhere in this research, there is some treatment of CountryWatch as a source of information, and the quality of its offering therein. This research has expressly stated that CountryWatch's quality of information could be regarded as "mediocre." Thus, one could extrapolate that among Internet users, online sources of information such as CountryWatch are utilized not simply because of the quality of the information, but also because of the delivery of information using an Internet format.

**The Internet and the Public Sphere: Critiques and Challenges**

The registers of the Internet aside, I want to now look at the Internet as a venue for the exchange of information in a public space. The challenge to this conceptualization appears to be associated with notions of commercialization on the Internet. Specifically, the
commercialization of the Internet has come under criticism as a result of the anxiety felt about its level of commercial market activity. \[314\] For many, the notion of political participation implicit in public sphere models is at odds with market institutions and practices. \[315\]

Critiques have also included the claim that instead of informed debate, the interchange of ideas and the public exchange of knowledge promised by the Habermasian model, the public sphere has been filled instead with commercialism, consumerism and the collation of data (vis a vis information and analysis). \[316\] In particular, Kevin Robins and Frank Webster argue that there has been a decline of the public sphere and they criticize its substitution with a depoliticized commercial culture in which commodity circulation is understood as social interaction. \[317\] By extension, it might be said that the promise of the information revolution, complete with the voluminous flow of information, has been constrained by pervasive mindlessness and consumption.

Noam Chomsky has commented about the influence of corporations on the Internet, not only in terms of controlling access, but also as companies like Microsoft facilitate certain kinds of corporate-driven services due to their monopolistic power as regards computer operating systems. \[318\]

\[314\] Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75; see section titled “Knowledge, Information and Intelligence”.
\[315\] See Benhabib, 1994.
\[316\] Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75; see section titled “Knowledge, Information and Intelligence.” See also Habermas, 1997 and 1989.
\[317\] Robins and Webster, 1988: 45-75; see section titled “Knowledge, Information and Intelligence.”
\[318\] Chomsky, presented in an interview with Couey and Karliner, n.d.
Other critiques have centered less on the decline of the Habermasian public sphere and more on whether or not public sphere models can easily be applied to the Internet. Questions have arisen about the relationship between the Internet and the public sphere. In particular, can those who participate on the Internet claim to have access and equality of status as promulgated by public sphere models? Are computer mediated forms of communication on the Internet avenues for rational debate leading to consensus as expressed in models of the public sphere? Moreover, can democratic processes and associated political engagement be realized?

**Internet and the Public Sphere: Decline or New Possibilities?**

The Internet is often described as an anarchical structure bereft of regulation, characterized principally by its interlinked and interconnected structure, offering the freedom and possibility of the expression of opinions and ideas. Another characterization of the Internet has included its potential for democratization. Clearly, such a purpose offers a rather glowing view of the Internet's power of transformation, particularly with regard to its democratizing influence. That said, substantial amounts of information are able to be transmitted and circulated at rather modest costs because of the Internet. Its disposition as both a venue for the exchange of information, goods or services and a facilitator of communication, contribute to the view expressed by Christopher Hunter at the Annenberg School of Communication that the Internet may well be a “technology of democracy.” ³¹⁹ This ambitious potentiality notwithstanding, Hunter also suggests that the Internet might be a

³¹⁹ Hunter, 1998; see “Introduction.”
means by which the public sphere, possibly in decline as suggested above, might be revitalized.

The issue of whether or not understandings of the Habermas' public sphere can be precisely applied to the public spaces of the Internet remains unresolved. According to Habermas, a portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons form a public. Within such a public, necessary communication requires mediums of dissemination and influence such as newspapers, journals, radio and television. Notably, this list of public sphere media by Habermas did not include the Internet. Nevertheless, the Internet is a newly emerging public space within which the vast participation by many people is a fact of life. The Internet is also a venue by which other mediums can be disseminated, while news and information websites such as CountryWatch on the Internet may be regarded as new media forms. Likewise, Internet-based discussion forums and news groups, however removed they may be from the salons and coffee houses of the bourgeois public sphere, exist as arenas or virtual spaces for conversation. Whether or not they are precise models of public spaces and public sphere conversation is another matter entirely.

As such, in the following sections, I attempt to address understandings and models of the public sphere in terms of the Internet landscape. In particular, I endeavor to explore the Internet's influence and impact on the public sphere. As well, I examine some of the questions posed in the section above about the participants of the public sphere, especially given the expansion of Internet usage in recent years.

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The Public Sphere and Shared Information

The Habermasian model of the public sphere is, to some degree, predicated on the idea of people reading newspapers in coffee houses or other public spaces where conversations about society, politics, and other issues of import take place. During such situations, conversations are informed by information and public opinion (or general opinion) is shaped. Under the right circumstances following rational debate, consensus is reached and action might well be stimulated. 321 Crucial to the formation of opinion in the bourgeois public sphere model has been the role played by newspapers as a source of information.

In the present context, what are the implications for the expanding corpus of people online? Is the significant penetration of the Internet landscape by the public a sign that the populace will be more informed and thus capable of public sphere debate? Or is the escalating popularity of the Internet a foreboding of further consumerism and insipid pursuits, as discussed by Robins and Webster? Is it possible that the Internet might be illustrative of the tension that exists between these two scenarios?

In attempting to grapple with these questions, perhaps the first consideration might be of the public. It is believed that the press formed the notion of the public in the 17th and 18th centuries. Following the French sociologist, Gabriel Tarde, Christopher Hunter asserts that the notion of the public was not possible without access to regularly published shared text. 322 Likewise, Habermas has observed that the bourgeois public sphere emerged from the

322 Hunter, 1998 (see section on “The Press”); see also Tarde, 1898.
regular publication of financial information and merchant activities. As noted by Hunter, both perspectives highlight the significance of information sharing in the growth of the idea of a public. Meanwhile, access to regularly published information resulted in the awareness by individuals that other people were also consuming the very same regularly published information. This sense of shared information with a collective of unknown others gave rise to a sense of community. This shared sense of community, born out of print capitalism and across the expanse of geography, in conjunction with the cognizance that information was being consumed in simultaneity, gave rise to what Benedict Anderson termed the “nationally imagined community.”

Certainly in a post-Gutenberg landscape, the press played an instrumental role in informing public conversation. Yet Hunter calls attention to the fact that it also has two other crucial functions. Again, following Tarde, Hunter explains that the press standardized the information shared with the public and shifted the domain of conversation away from gossip. That is to say, the field of information by which people became informed was standardized and at the same time, conversation was itself transformed into something expressly purposeful. Another aspect of the press was its role in forming democracy. Today, most people associate democracy and free nation states with the idea of a free press. In this regard, it is believed that the fourth estate is vital for both good governance and democracy. In concrete terms, it is believed that a free press whose members could access the places and persons that regular people could not traverse, would act as emissaries for the public to

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323 Habermas, 1989: 16.  
324 Hunter, 1998 (see section on “The Press”).  
326 Anderson, 1991: 41. See also see also Febvre and Martin, 1776.  
327 Hunter, 1998 (see section on “The Press”); see also Tarde, 1898: 19-20.
gather, interpret and information. Building upon this idea, the press equips the public with the crucial information required to communicate and form opinions necessary for participation within democratic processes.  

If the press in the past acted as standard bearer for the sharing of information and insight with the public, in the contemporary scenario, the press is contoured quite differently and has diverse trajectories of dissemination. Today, there are multiple newspapers and countless other media which purport to inform the public. While many claim to be unbiased, others explicitly claim politicized terrain, as exemplified by publications such as the National Review on the political right or the American Prospect on the left. Seizure of politicized terrain has been a key objective of the media business for the purpose capturing lucrative niche audiences. Television programs such as Cable News Network (CNN)'s Crossfire polarize the political terrain of the right and left within its very structure and commands a popular following (and associated advertising revenue) precisely because of its fiery and antagonistic flavor. Such politicized terrain may well be soundly criticized for pontificating ideology, lambasting opposing viewpoints and failing to contribute to critical debate. Even television round table discussions such as CNN’s Capital Gang or MSNBC’s McLaughlin Group, although inclusive of multiple political voices, are not geared toward rational debate and consensus. Cordiality is offered in rationality’s stead, while consensus is replaced by offering each voice equal time for the expression of his or her point of view. In this way, standardization, integration and unification of information shared by the press have given way to diversification and personalization of news and information.

328 See Dewey, 1927.
By "personalization of news and information," I am referring to the trend toward preferential or personalized news coverage. By way of example, the Internet portal and electronic mail provider, Yahoo, offers users the ability to construct a personalized web page in accordance with their particular preferences. The weather in one's home city, stock quotes, television guide, sports results, online calculator and calendar, and favorite news sources and types are all stored in an individual's file called "My Yahoo" on a web server. Staying within one personalized sphere of information makes browsing outside almost unnecessary. At CountryWatch, an equivalent service is provided called "My CountryWatch" where user can self-select features and specific countries of interest which are made available to the user on a daily basis. This process of personalization has been dubbed the "daily me" by Nicholas Negroponte.  

This trend toward personalization has been criticized because instead of integrating communities (as per Anderson's "imagined community"), individuals are isolated within their insular spheres of life and integration takes place only within the domain of "a consumption community." Lost in this scenario, according to the critics, is the possibility of reading about other ideas and ways of life. Still, personalization must be understood also as a response to the availability of voluminous information. Personalization attempts to make available a manageable amount and a preferred range of information to be consumed by a given individual.

Instantaneous, unedited news coverage is another feature of the contemporary news and information landscape. As observed by Hunter, during the 1992 Gulf War, CNN became the premier purveyor of instantaneous and unedited news. Reporters like Bernard Shaw reported

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330 Hunter, 1998 (see section on "The New Press and the Internet").
from under desks at hotel windows as coalition fighter jets bombed Baghdad, describing sounds and sights but “unable to critically comment and add context to what was happening.”

In 2003 as in 1992, unedited news coverage in Iraq resulted in the transmission of inaccuracies, some of which later had to be retracted. Although reporting inaccurate information due to the demand for instant coverage does not fall into the category of gossip, it is not quite so different from the reporting of rumors. For this reason, Nicholas Garnham has posed questions about the material sources which feed debate and dialogue within the public sphere.

Even so, instantaneous and unedited news akin to streams of facts and visuals culled from a global network of reporters on the ground and transmitted internationally via satellite, may well be preferable to highly produced news prepared for segmented two-minute slots within a 30-minute nightly news broadcast. That said, the CNN “breaking news” model is quite different from the produced news story or edited newspaper article where commentary, context, and analysis are part of the process. It is also to be differentiated from the kind of newspaper likely to have been read in an 18th century salon or coffee house.

Internet-based news services such as that of CountryWatch are able to disseminate vast quantities news to millions of people across the globe with Internet connections with great immediacy. In the case of CountryWatch, the company has licensing agreements with regional news and media companies across the world. As news breaks on the ground across

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332 Stories such as the discovery of a mobile weapons lab in Iraq in 2003 proved to be inaccurate, but only after it had been transmitted across airwaves and cyberspace.
333 See Garnham, 2994.
the world and as local media coverage takes place, CountryWatch can publish that very news item before it makes it into mainstream coverage. For example, in 1999 when the United States accidentally bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in Serbia and Montenegro, CountryWatch was able to pick up the news story from Xinhua (the Chinese News Agency) and publish it on its website before much of the mainstream United States media covered the incident. In this regard, Internet news services can quickly publish and distribute a voluminous quantity of news. Whatever the criticisms of unedited news and information might be, there appears to be a public demand for this type of news. Contemporary media such as the Washington Post, CNN, Fox News, and the New York Times all provide electronic mail alerts to users, while Reuters provides live streaming video on its website whereby users can view live satellite broadcasts online. These types of service underscore the movement toward accelerated news coverage and dissemination. Whereas information was published regularly in the period of the emergence of the public sphere, today the Internet offers “hyper real time” publication.

The vast quantity of news is also not to be ignored. Most newspapers today offer websites where portions of their daily coverage can be accessed. Some news and information websites such as CNN and the Washington Post do not simply provide a chronologically and topically arranged offering of news items following a similar format as a physical newspaper. Instead, they deluge the user with information and access to further information. Consider the following: A story on the 2004 presidential election in the United States on a popular news website is located next to past articles about previous elections and articles about the candidates themselves. Next to the articles about previous elections is the breakdown by
state of previous election results, followed by hyperlinks to results for each of the 50 states. Next to the articles about the candidates are other articles about the candidates' positions on various current issues. Next to the articles about the candidates' positions on those issues are other articles about those very issues not necessarily related to any candidate or the election itself, but perhaps, about proposed policy positions or legislation. Also next to the articles about the candidates are articles about the candidates' voting records. Next to that is a hyperlink to the Congressional website and the actual voter records themselves. The coverage in CountryWatch's online portfolio follows a similar model of deluging the user with access -- originating from each of 192 country-specific web pages -- to social demographic, political, economic, investment, and environmental information, regularly updated news, a database of statistics and maps, educational applications, forecast models, as well as links to government, media, travel and health websites. The central idea is to provide as much information as possible to a CountryWatch user about every country in the world.

The vastness and expansiveness of this kind of coverage is clearly distinct from an 18th century newspaper read in a coffee house. Although it is possible to access news and information within a Starbucks franchise location offering Internet connectivity, whether or not conversation and rational debate takes place between the person reading about the election from his or her laptop and another individual is simply unknown. That said, it is clear that all measure of relevancy is presented to the Internet user on a website dealing with significant topics. In this regard, Hunter surmises "The aim of the sites is to make every last bit of relevant information available to voters in the hope that it will produce a more informed citizenry. All one has to do is surf through this content and voila, you are an
informed citizen.” Hunter, of course, is caustically commenting on the belief that the more information that is made available, the more informed the citizenry supposedly becomes.

A number of critics have registered quite a different effect. In the early years of television, some critics claimed that the increased availability of information contributed to “narcotizing dysfunction” whereby being informed passed for being politically astute and engaged. In more recent times, some studies have shown that increased information either has no effect or a decreased effect on political knowledge. Meanwhile, other critics have called attention to the abundance of information or what has been variously termed the “information glut” and “data smog.” Most of these critics concur with the view of Webster that although there is more information today, “the informational quality is suspect in the extreme.” This position recalls Nicholas Garnham’s comments about material resources.

Indeed, the highly-produced and professionally edited 30-minute nightly news broadcast on television, a full third of which is dedicated to advertising, sports and weather coverage, or the news-as-synopsis model of Headline News, is unlike to provide a particularly edifying effect or to produce rational debate and thoughtful engagement.

Returning to the aforementioned case of the information-laden website, the extensive coverage of the 2004 presidential election provides an interested user with an entry into the

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334 Hunter, 1998 (see section on “The New Press and the Internet”).
335 Hunter, 1998 (see section on “The New Press and the Internet”).
336 See Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948, as cited by Hunter, 1998.
339 Webster, 1995: 125.
340 See Garnham, 1994 generally.
laboriously detailed intricacies the new medical benefits bill, social security reform, national deficit date and other such matters in dizzying detail. Likewise, the extensive coverage of topics and news as well as access to related links on the CountryWatch website provides an interested user with a vista into matters as diverse as the health and travel advisories, transborder conflicts, stock market information, latest policies enacted, heads of government, and nominal rate of inflation for any country from Senegal to Singapore. Again, whether or not being informed actually translates into being engaged is unknown. However, if the Internet user moves from the dissemination medium of the news website into an online discussion group or news forum to converse with other Internet users about the political and social issues or import, is it not possible that engagement at some level is taking place? It is certainly significant that various forms of computer mediated communication are regarded as some of the most popular online activities.

Questions of Equality and Access

The Internet is not predicated on individuals. As its name suggests, it is an interlinked and interconnected entity where pathways occur at the moment when a person keys in an interest. Likewise, there is no centralized planning or central authority; there are simply millions and millions of pages hyperlinked together. The hyperlinks themselves have no sequential coherence, tidiness or symmetry. As regards hypertextuality on the Internet, there is an associative structure (if one can call it structure) that tends to characterize the Internet. In fact, in addition to being messy in design and arrangement, the Internet often functions as an imprecise system.
Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, noted that because it is a large and complicated network, the Internet would always be slightly "broken." Errors will invariably occur and imperfections are more likely to be the reality than a pretense at seamless systemization. The hyperlinks act as multiplicitous pathways. In addition, the Internet possesses the capacity to erode borders. While traditional information networks prioritize both security and access, the Internet was designed to be an open network and as such, it has evolved in a way that makes it difficult to discern borders and boundaries. In addition, the Internet provides connection to everyone else on the Internet and to all information that is posted. This type of borderless and connective configuration would suggest ease of access to all individuals on the Internet. However, connecting with others on the Internet does not mean that there is equality of access among potential online users.

With regard to access, Internet usage entails physical, material and logistical requirements as well as specialized skills. Such requirements include access to the physical hardware of a computer along with a modem, a connection with an Internet node, such as a dial up port, DSL, cable service or a T-1 line, software, including Internet browser and mail client applications, the material costs of purchasing these hardware and software items, payment for telephone, DSL, cable service or the T-1 line, payment for to an Internet service provider and the necessary skills used in computer operations, Internet navigation, and other related aspects of information technology literacy. Given this array of requirements, it is not surprising that accessibility to the Internet's public space is limited to a particularly privileged group of people -- usually educated, some scholars, financially advantaged, and

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usually from advanced capitalist societies. In fact within the United States, of the persons who have access to the Internet, approximately 70 percent have incomes of over $50,000.\footnote{MRI, 1997.} Obviously, the Internet landscape is one of relative privilege. Personal circumstances, however, tend to obfuscate structural issues of access such as those in developing and less developed countries.\footnote{See Slashdot, 2000: “Social Changes and Internet Access in the Third World.”} Although there have been significant changes in certain developing countries, institutional and infrastructural problems abound across the developing world, making it difficult to find an Internet node in a remote village in Madagascar. In this way, the structure of political economy has an exclusive effect.

Although access to the Internet remains a fairly privilege field, status and rank considerations on the Internet is another matter. With regard to status and rank, it should be noted that various modalities of online conversation, ranging from electronic mail to discussion forums, news groups, Internet relay chat (IRC) and other forms of computer mediated communication take place anonymously. That is to say, online conversation does not identify a person in any way other than via the identity created by the individual. This subject is further discussed below but for the purposes of this particular discussion, invisibility and anonymity, in many senses, remove the considerations of status and rank. As noted by Dery, “Incorporeal interaction creates a technologically-enabled, post-multicultural vision of identity disengaged from gender, ethnicity, and other problematic constructions.”\footnote{Dery, 1993, as cited by Hunter, 1998.} Hence, it is possible that freed from such “problematic constructions,” people may be more likely to be engaged and expressive in online conversation.
Questions of Identity and “Face to Face” Meetings

The Habermasian model considers “face to face” meetings to be part of the conversation and debate within the public sphere. The various media and forums available on the Internet are intended to connect people across geographic space, while other Internet-based capabilities such as news groups and discussion forums connect people for conversation about a plethora of issues, not limited to social, cultural political and economic matters. Conversation in these Internet-based settings is a far cry from “face to face” meetings.

Although video cams and auditory files are becoming more popular, meeting and conversation on the Internet occurs for all intents and purposes via textual form, in the words compiled in discussion forums and over email. Lost in textual conversation, even of the cyberspace variety, is context and social cues. Although emoticons (icons expressing emotion, such as 😊) or acronyms (such as LOL for “laugh out loud”) can help in transmitting such social cues, the more subterranean and nuanced social cues and gestures simply do not exist. The result can ostensibly be misinterpretation.

Meanwhile, identity in this context is variable. Although one user might consistently identify himself or herself with the same name and graphic icons, another person may use one of several online identities. Consider this point of view expressed by NR, for example: “When I am on the political discussion forum, I switch between my identity “Sublime,” who is thoughtful and open when discussing certain topics, to my other identity “Ziggy,” when I
want to blast someone who expresses a really ignorant point of view. I don’t want to fracture the idea of Sublime as being thoughtful by having her call someone an ignorant idiot, but when I get fed up, Ziggy can do that. I don’t use Ziggy just to dump bombs on people either. I want to be clear about that; I don’t flame people. Sometimes when I want to make a factual but possibly callow statement, Ziggy can do that better than Sublime who tends to weight through topics more thoroughly. People – I mean other people – respond differently to Sublime and Ziggy. In groups and forums, people can recommend posts online and Sublime gets heavy recommendations and comments like “extremely insightful comments.” Ziggy doesn’t get recommendations – obviously! But people are always commenting about the fact that Ziggy has her own strange combative charisma.”

NR’s identity shifts for debate purposes have a certain strategic effect and may be her way of negotiating the online community. Still, the idea of face to face meetings in conversation and debate in the Habermasian public sphere tends to be associated with the formation of a stable community within which politics and issues can be considered. That is to say, there are certain conditions that must be met for the formation of such a stable community. Compromise, rationality and respect, for example, are often regarded as necessary aspects of community stability and by extension, they also form the fulcrum for democracy. NR’s description of identities such as Ziggy may not embody these desirable sensibilities.

345 Poster, 1999.
Another element lost in the textual transmission of conversation as compared with personal contact is the element of what Anthony Giddens had termed "face." ³⁴⁷ Face, in the sense of the public sphere, can be understood as the public esteem that is acquired by a particular person and held by others in regard to that person within a community. Perhaps this esteem is related to notions of reputation, personality, even charisma. Yet, ironically, one might also argue that the expression of text, free of reputation, personality, charisma and other aspects of "face" provide a rational, objective and emotionally distanced context called for in Habermasian models of the public sphere.

Questions of Rational Discourse and Consensus

Notions of the Habermasian public sphere also rest on the idea of rational debate and practical discourse in which any topic might be considered and discussed until consensus is reached. Bruce Ackerman posits the idea that when varying groups differ on notions of that which is good or desirable, then they must "resolve the problem of mutual coexistence in a reasonable way." ³⁴⁸ Two key questions are evoked from this conception. First, what constitutes rational or reasonable debate. Second, how is consensus conceived? Moreover, in terms of the public sphere and the Internet, what new questions and considerations are evoked?

Conversation on the Internet, considered in terms of news groups and discussion forums, cannot all be regarded as rational. Newspapers and journals which link to forums via

³⁴⁷ See Giddens, 1989.
³⁴⁸ Ackerman, 1989: 9.
provocative articles and opinion pieces such as those of the New York Times and even topic-specific forums generated by the likes of AOL and email lists, are often filled with vivacious conversations and debates, many of which well argued. Lively, passionate and even compelling argument, however, is not quite the same thing as rational debate and it is certainly not the equivalent of rational debate reaching consensus. The Habermasian model rests on the notion that practical discourse, evaluated on the merits of argument, may lead to consensus and ultimately to political and social action.

As regards consensus, some critics of Internet discussion groups have said that the activity moves so quickly that some important threads of conversation disappear (further down on a screen or in an archive of discussion from a previous day). They also point to the high level of activity and volume of threads as well as postings in discussion groups. Both these considerations, it is argued, make it difficult for consensus to be reached in debate and conversation over the Internet. One counter-measure used in response to disappearing threads and posts that stop the flow of conversation is to post a new thread under a title that reads, “Bringing it up from below: X topic.” Under this new thread, a recapitulation of stated positions is offered for continued debate. Another consideration is that while certain threads may disappear or die off, the subject matter, topics and issues emerge elsewhere in other threads. Therefore even though threads and posts may not be available to explore a lengthy and chronologically arranged debate on a given matter, the matter itself still continues to be treated and debated through associated threads and postings as well as a range of discussions. Of course, the whole issue of whether or not consensus is actually reached remains unresolved.
Leaving consensus aside, the matter of rational debate is complicated by the anonymity of online conversation. Since participants in online conversation are protected by relative anonymity, they may indeed feel freer to express and engage in conversation. The freedom to express and engage does not necessarily mean that participants always chose the route of lucid and substantive exchanges. Instead, because there is no directly personal accountability at stake, some discussants may attack and even abuse others with whom they do not agree. Jon Katz goes so far as to suggest that anonymous communication actually encourages vitriol and verbal violence since “it is far easier to attack someone and question personal motives when the social consequences of face to face verbal assaults are removed.” 349 When such exchanges become increasingly vituperative, they are referred to as “flame wars.” A “flame war” context in which a person may feel violated and assailed is clearly not an ideal conversational environment envisioned in public sphere models.

Many online discussion forums and news groups today have moderators, ranging from those highly involved in the ongoing discussions and those who simply monitor groups and forums for violators (sometimes called “trolls”) of the “flaming” variety. Meanwhile, discussion forums and news groups also increasingly require registration whereby personal information of participants is gathered and Internet Protocol addresses and ranges are noted. With this type of background information, moderators can easily deny a violator from further participation. Registration information is also helpful in extreme situation where legal recourse may be needed. Several discussion forums and news groups tend to have “rules of engagement,” which participants must agree to before being allowed to converse.

Meanwhile, "netiquette" or the informal convention of norms and behavior on the Internet tend to act as a socially determined structure of sorts, not unlike the unspoken etiquette and standards of behavior by which human beings operate on a quotidian basis. One example, is that users should refrain from using capitalizations in text unless they want it to seem as if they are shouting to others. Another example of netiquette is to stick to posting only relevant subject matter on a given forum and news group. Personal ideas and opinions about prayer in public schools, for example, would not be appropriately posted in a discussion forum on the minimum wage. In effect, it would be as inappropriate as interjecting religion and politics into a workplace conversation regarding a new business development idea. Unrelated topics, however, can be introduced in some cases by adding "OT" to the title of the message posting. OT is the acronym for "off topic" and its inclusion on a title line warns readers that an unrelated topic is enclosed in that particular posting. It effectively affords the average reader the ability to either bypass the message entirely or enter the "OT" discussion. These measures collectively help in creating a climate of civility within online communication and conversation. While certainly not a formalized system of Internet jurisprudence, these mechanisms seek to negotiate the terms of conversation within the Internet landscape.

Unequal access on the Internet, as well as the incidences of vitriolic verbal abuse, together suggest that online conversation does not fit the ideal of a public sphere where rational and thoughtful engagement about social and political matters could take place and be open to any person. Rather ironically, the penchant for spirited debate in online discussion forums, news
groups and other Internet based communication venues suggest that the foundation for ideal public sphere debate exists. As such, Hunter notes that the “culture of argument embedded in the net culture has the potential to draw users into democratic conversation.”

Conversation, Public Opinion, the Public Sphere and the Internet

Various forms of computer mediated communication are regarded as some of the most popular online activities. In fact, the vast volume of online Internet-based communication has resulted in some suggestions that in relation to being a “technology for democracy,” the Internet is not simply a new media but “the most participatory form of mass speech yet developed.” Indeed, the Internet appears to be characterized by participation in conversation.

In terms of the public sphere, conversation performs the function of considering and processing ideas and conceptions arising from information learned in the press. Once the considering and processing of ideas ensues between more than two individuals, it is possible that public opinion is formed as a result. It is from public opinion that collective social or political action might arise. In the 18th century coffee houses and salons, face to face conversation about news, issues and matters of importance took place, leading eventually to the formation of general opinion. That general or public opinion is regarded as crucially importance in democratic governance because it roughly translates into the notion of “voice of the people.” The voice of the people mitigates the power and authority of those in

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350 Hunter, 1998 (see section titled “Conversation and the Internet”).
351 Stated in U.S. District Court, Civil Action No. 96-1458; cited by Hunter, 1998 and Bonchek, 1996.
political power and influences the direction and determinations of that very power base. This conception of the general or public opinion emerges out of conversation, rational discussion and engagement with pressing issues and concerns, which were publicized in the press, mass media and other shared sources of information.

Today, notions of public opinion are understood in terms of public opinion polls, lobbyist and activist groups, as well as elections. Internet polls can be found on almost every news and information website posing questions about issues relevant to the day’s events. Some people believe that public opinion is the aggregation of individual opinions into frequency distributions while others argue that it is a collaborative product of communication, growing out of mutual influence. Of particular note is the fact that opinion is not formed in isolation but through communication and conversation. It is also formed through association with others within the context of connection. For these reasons, scholars have rejected opinion polling since public opinion can rarely be gauged by asking individuals lists of questions and quantifying results.

A discursive notion of public opinion is understood as one which is formed in an emergent process of debate and discussion. Again, if conversation is the heart of public opinion generation, then the news groups and discussion forums boasting high rates of user activity and vigorous debate may well be illustrative of this process on the Internet. Whether or not active and vigorous debate actually results in the advancement of the best argument (as suggested in public sphere models) is unknown. After all active and vigorous debate can

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352 See Hunter, 1998 (see section titled “Public Opinion”) and Cooley, 1956 [1909].
353 See Blumler, 1948.
take place for the purpose of reifying existing viewpoints. Nevertheless, implicit within the idea of conversation lying at the heart of public opinion and democratic participation is a liberal model of public space as public dialogue.

**Focus: Active Participation, the Public Sphere and the Internet**

The Habermasian public sphere seeks to achieve political and social action as the outcome of rational debate, conversation and general opinion formation. Political and social action could include activism, contacting political figures and representatives in government, or more direct involvement in political and social campaigns. Other forms of action include voting, signing petitions, or symbolic actions such as participating in a parade or rally for a political or social cause. For Habermas, the objective is for the populace to be able to influence the political system. 355

Interestingly, a number of studies in recent years have shown that persons active on the Internet tended to concomitantly be active politically and socially. A study by Digital Citizen showed that people who heavily communicate on the Internet were more likely to vote. 356 Another study by Bonchek showed that people using online document delivery systems were more likely to vote in elections and their turnout rates exceeded those of the general population. 357 Perhaps, because they have relatively higher levels of financial security and education, Internet users are more likely to vote. As postulated by Hunter, there

appears to be some evidence linking education, income and voting proclivities. Of course it is also possible that people seeking information and news on the Internet become engaged and consequently active participation in the political and social process follows.

Voting aside, perhaps the most significant political activity taking place on the Internet is in the realm of online advocacy through Internet petitions. Groups such as Political Alerts and MoveOn.org have effectively mobilized politically active members of the Internet community to sign petitions which are sent on to Congress and the White House.

MoveOn.org regularly hosts funding drives to pay for political advocacy campaigns, in fact, earning several million dollars in contributions from the likes of financier, George Soros. MoveOn.org was created because its founding members believed that the “public was not being represented by representatives in office” thus leaving “democracy in peril.”

Returning for a moment to the idea that the voice of the people can both mitigate and influence the power and authority of those in political power, I want to again reference Bruce Ackerman’s statement as follows: “Whenever anybody questions the legitimacy of power, the power holder must respond not by suppressing the questioner, but by giving a reason that explains why he is more entitled to the resource than the questioner is.” Based on this perspective, MoveOn.org may well be reacting to issues of legitimacy and authority by calling for dialogue and democratic process.

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358 See Hunter, 1998 (section titled “Action and the Internet”).
359 See MoveOn.org online.
360 Ackerman, 1980: 4.
The group, whose insignia also includes the phrase “democracy in action,” has over two million participants and online activists. It claims to be a “responsive outlet for democratic participation” and has called for citizens to “find their political voice.” \(^{361}\) One might interpret the MoveOn.org language to be expressive of the principles of public sphere action. Consider, for example, the following statement by the group itself: “When there is a disconnect between broad public opinion and legislative action, MoveOn.org builds strong electronic advocacy groups.” \(^{362}\) The use of the terms “public opinion” in conjunction for a call to action is particularly illustrative. The founders of MoveOn.org – Wes Boyd and Joan Blades – had no political experience prior to the founding of the group and instead, had worked in Silicon Valley. They effectively leveraged the potential of the Internet, used available technology, and started a political movement in response to the disconnection between the policies of those in power and the actual “voice of the people.”

MoveOn.org is not the public space within which conversation takes place and public opinion is formed. Instead, the work of MoveOn.org begins once public opinion is formed and as the movement toward social and political action follows. That is to say, the work of the organization is focused on action and participation.

**Focus: News Groups -- Commodityfication of the Internet?**

News groups, discussion forums and blogs invite questions involving the source, structure, process and availability of resources in communication. Yet because they constitute a

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\(^{361}\) See MoveOn.org online.  
\(^{362}\) See MoveOn.org online.
somewhat new and emergent arena and remain relatively unregulated forms of communication on the Internet, the issue of mediation does not seem to be acute. While they do not exist literally, as in the case of face-to-face communication of the Habermasian public sphere, the technology involved in creating and participating in such online discussions involves interactive formulations and participatory architecture. Consequently, they must be viewed as different from most mediated communication such as television and radio. Stated simply, Internet-based news groups, discussion forums and blogs allow the participation in and circulation of public discussion on public issues. Unlike television and radio shows which are packaged and circumscribed within scheduled “on” and “off” time slots, and distinct from mediation by professional journalists, commentators, or even advertising produced by marketing experts, Internet-based news groups and discussion forums exist without regard for time, for as long as a given topic remains of interest, or produces a derivative topic (called a “thread”), and usually, with minimal intervention from a mediator. Blogs are somewhat different because they are controlled by the originating blogger and center on his or her agenda. Still, participation and the circulation of public discussion takes place within the blogosphere.

In conventional news reporting and dissemination, the journalist functions as the witness, eye-witness, or stand-in for events. Theoretically, the journalist is expected to maintain some form of objective rationality which allows him or her to maintain credibility. In this way, journalism is not unlike representative democracy where certain persons are entrusted to

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363 Some discussion forums and news groups are directed by moderators whose functions involve deliberate interventions into the exchanges among users, in order to keep issues relevant and topical, or to prevent tangential or offensive exchanges between users. Most discussion forums with explicitly educational orientations, such as CW.com and about geography.com, utilized moderators in their forums and news groups.
function on behalf of, and for the benefit of, the rest of the population. Following this framework of customary journalism, the journalist is rarely examined as a kind of media worker with his or her own interests, belonging to a socio-economic segment of his or her own. It would seem that the journalist may be, in some measure, imbued with self-abstraction, rationality, and even the notion of a "disembodied public subject," all bereft of specialized interests, consistent with the Habermasian account of the bourgeois public sphere.

As new developments in media technology have progressed, making it easy for a user to watch a DVD movie on his or her computer or to watch live news stories over the Internet using applications such as Quick Time, conventional mediated media may well lose its appeal. In the business world, such a development would translate into the loss of market share. This most ostensible consequence may occur at the market level where highly segmented and interest-specific market niches will replace the generalized markets, characteristic of the audiences of mass media. Even market revenue streams are forecast for alteration. Since advertising revenues have at times (and through varying cycles) constituted one of the most popular business models on the Internet, and as the freely coursing discussion forums and news groups command much of the most traffic on the Internet today, the most palpable outcome is that websites will target online communities (composed of

364 Clifford and Marcus (1986) and Marcus and Fischer (1986) have addressed the Foucauldian question of power and representation in anthropology, such that there is always a relation of power and a relation of knowledge between the representer and the represented. These tropes can accordingly be applied to the journalistic and political enterprises where representation is also inflected by matters of power and knowledge.


news groups, chat groups and discussion forums) for their most lucrative advertising space
and revenue. 367

As demonstrated by CountryWatch during the period in which news groups gained currency,
innumerable management and content meetings were dominated by discussions of how to
harness the current engagement with online communities for profit. Undoubtedly, websites
that function with some business component must have commercial viability, whether in the
form of advertising revenues, subscription income, or electronic commerce profits. This is a
line of thinking that reinforces the idea of the Internet as a purveyor of commodification.

Yet the existence of a profit motive and proprietary space seems counter to the notions of a
public space or venue. For the most part, this contradiction may be illustrative of "an
inevitable tension between the founding ideology of the public sphere and its grounding in
the social world." 368 Accordingly, as an extension of the public sphere, Internet spaces and
venues such as news groups and discussion forums may be corrupted by the onslaught of
consumer culture. 369 Accordingly, the Internet may be viewed concomitantly as a venue of
public sphere discourses and as a site for revenue generation. In much the same way that
eyear republican models of speeches were remade for printed distribution at the public level,
thus governing the domain of politics and the realm of literature simultaneously, the Internet
might be considered as having multiple levels of intent. 370 Despite the frequent references to
Internet commodification made throughout this research, the transformations and

contradictions in the public sphere are not to be viewed as varieties of corruption resulting primarily from commodification, commercial consumerism, and the attendant evils of capitalism. Instead, tensions between modes of communication may herald the emergence of different publics, public spheres, and public spaces, each with varying forms of communication. 371

**Focus: Linux, “Slashdot Effect” and CountryWatch**

Over a year ago, my colleague SD and I suggested that CountryWatch might wish to add an international forum or news group. Our thought was that it would be interesting to track the kinds of discourses that would be generated news groups’ discussions and debates around the world. In many ways, the discourses would be materially-driven, indicating countries and cultures that people were interested in talking about as well as the people themselves who were actually engaged in such discourses. Our suggestion was not one made from the perspective of good business or market analysis, but rather from the point of view that users might find it interesting to discuss the international events and developments that they were tracking on the CountryWatch website. Our suggestion, however idiosyncratic it may have seemed at a time when news groups were in relative infancy, was surprisingly well received.

Meanwhile, about two months into the forum effort, BB, a company executive, read an article in Forbes magazine about something called the “Slashdot” effect, regarding Linux systems’ news groups. 372 Linux, created by Linus Torvalds, is a free operating system (akin

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372 See Mann, 2000.
to Microsoft's usability which made computers much more accessible and ubiquitous to the public). Linux is interesting because unlike Microsoft or Mac Os, its underlying written code is available to anyone and there is no restriction placed on programmers from making modifications and innovations. In fact, Linux is protected by a "reverse copyright" (called a "copyleft") that prohibits programmers from taking their modifications and innovations out of the public domain and privatizing them. Today, Linux is used by a third of the world's Internet servers and even before Microsoft's anti-trust suit, it was considered to be a challenge to Microsoft's software hegemony.

Because this kind of freedom and accessibility is not particularly common in the realm of technology, Linux exponentially grew in popularity and even online news groups discussing Linux-driven modifications and innovations also proliferated in popularity at astounding rates. For the less technologically adept reader (also known as the "techno-peasant" or "techno-pedestrian"), this phenomenon would be the equivalent of an online discussion group where theory, concepts and ethnographic research would be discussed and shared in often-painstaking detail.

One of the most popular of these news groups focused on Linux systems and developments is called "Slashdot." Slashdot is a news group or forum that reflects its open source subject matter in its operational structure by being an online open source community. Its popularity as an open source forum sparked the notion that specialty discussion groups, without the journalistic filter, would in the future completely replace print media and transform broadcast media in the electronic age. This is largely due to its hyper-speed capabilities but it is also
because of the appeal of news emerging and proliferating "on the ground," rather than being reported and represented. For these reasons, Slashdot has evolved into something of a Web leviathan. Even for people who cannot understand the technological jargon of computerized operating systems like Linux, the "Slashdot" effect of online news groups sparks some interest at the level of Wall Street icons, simply because of the growing popularity of such forums and online communities.

With news groups and forums rapidly becoming a leading source of the most consistent return-users (usually due to users who wish to continue a discussion online), and with high levels on longevity while online (as they read or post new "threads" of conversation), these online communities have been regarded as the most promising (but relatively unstudied) avenue for revenue generation.\footnote{Online marketplace "E-bay," travel sites such as Expedia, Travelocity and Priceline, as well as pornography sites, are some of the most visited sites on the Internet today.} Indeed, the way in which advertising is used within news groups is crucial. Feedback from users at CountryWatch's discussion forum showed that while people are amenable to static sponsorship icons or banners on their screens even while in news groups, they recoil from more direct marketing and advertising. In fact, several people noted that they read threads on news groups for information purposes and were invariably infuriated to click on an interesting item only to find that find that it was an advertisement for a product. Principally, a news group's value, despite the high volume of traffic, was clearly the information and insight generated in the communication between users.
Returning to the scenario at CountryWatch depicted earlier, after the aforementioned article was circulated by BK, a flurry of discussions followed. The foci of these discussions included the following three items:

1. News groups=popularity=sticky eyeballs and tsunamis of hits=advertising revenue.

2. When Slashdot went IPO, the young and technically-savvy persons who founded it became multi-millionaires. Clearly, any discussion forum could potentially be highly favored on Wall Street, as one of the major futuristic trajectories of the web, and so we at CountryWatch should be on the same “dot.com”/news group bandwagon.

3. Wasn’t there a delicious irony about the fact that this company – dedicated to facilitating free information exchange – and based on a technology fiercely dedicated to free and accessible public technology, would be wildly profitable in the free enterprise arena?

After the repartee about potential advertising revenues from news groups subsided and we had speculative moments of hope that if we ever went the IPO route, we too could become multi-millionaires, we moved onto to the third matter above. BK, BB and several other executives were amused by the unintentional wealth and profitability garnered by a product/service dedicated to non-proprietary relationships. BB, for his part, pointed to the World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings where activists against economic globalization reported their perspectives using news groups as a medium to inform the world of injustice and exploitations. This, in his opinion, was where the delicious irony existed.
In response, I exchanged “the look” with SD and before I could censor myself or exercise good judgment, I heard myself saying that I was unsure as to precisely what was ironic. I went on to state the following: “It seems to me, that the Internet, email, and other technological capacities like these evolved in universities, by young people -- geeks, if you want to use that term -- using the Unix system, who were devising a network of communication. When I talk to my tech friends about communication on the Web, they seem to say the same thing. It is the network of information that is at stake. I think it has become a tool of capitalism and a source for profit, as a consequence and perhaps indirectly so... But if there is anything ironic here, it is that a technology that was intended for information-sharing across barriers and at the global level, (and I mean global in every sense), has become a commodity with a profit margin.”

I must state, in fairness, that my words were not entirely my own. I did not have a flash of brilliant lucidity in that moment. Rather, my commentary was a reiteration of a previous conversation I had shared with a colleague. In that conversation, I had observed that the Internet is a network of communication, based on principles of relational connection. Here again, my commentary was not original. I was reminded of an editorial in Business 2.0 called “The Feminization of the Net” which suggested that the Internet is based on the on-going stimulation (not satiation) of interests. Furthermore, relationship building, which is vital to the Internet, is characterized by the strength and longevity of relationships, and the capacity for connectivity. With these thoughts resonating in my mind, I thought that the commercial aspect seemed almost accidental. In response, my colleague stated, “There are certain things that the Internet does, more than anything. Instant transference of information

374 See Griffin, 2000.
is what it is meant for. Through capitalism it has become commodified.” Our collective observation was not specific to our conversation either. The publisher of another open-source company, Tim O’Reily of O’Reily and Associates, stated: “People are forgetting that a lot of core Internet technology was open source. The subject and content of the Internet was intended for mass proliferation as an open source as well.”

Returning to the scene at CountryWatch, following my deceptively original and seemingly revelatory comment, SD nodded furiously in agreement. Nevertheless, the executives reminded us all that the company was, in the final analysis, a business, and we were providing a service by potentially connecting people across the globe to communicate with each other. This discussion continued for some time but I could not remove from my mind the images of AT&T, or MCI, and even Coca Cola, with their international slogans and branding techniques.

Meanwhile, as I was experiencing my disenchanted mental ramblings above, a few colleagues expressed that profit should be regarded as the inadvertent and accidental by-product because technology was so highly valued (even overvalued on Wall Street at the time). I tuned in to hear that comment and recalling the “Slashdot” formula, I thought about my colleagues and our conversations over coffee or beer. Few of us were there at CountryWatch because of the stock option potential. In some ways we seemed more realistic than our superiors about the potential for the company, should it ever become publicly traded. Perhaps we may have been (foolishly) idealistic, and we just wished to learn as much as possible while we “extended our skill set” as young professionals often say. One

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375 O’Reily, 1999.
colleague said, "Perhaps our realism is directly related to the fact that few of us are personally inspired by the monetary considerations." For several of my colleagues, as noted elsewhere in the research, the motivation has been "love" based, because we have genuinely enjoyed learning about this innovative medium. Further, because so many of us come from international backgrounds, we enjoyed working in an arena where the transnational and transcultural realms are real. Here, theory and real life conflate via this technology.

Idealism or otherwise, our thoughts and feelings have been echoed elsewhere. John Partridge, a former Microsoft developer, and current associate with VC firm, Accel Partners stated "These people are going at this stuff out of a love of the product more than anything else." 376 Eric Raymond, President of Open Source Initiative and co-author of "The Cathedral and the Bazaar: Musings on Linux and Open Source by an Accidental Revolutionary" noted that while the Internet developer is perceived as being hostile to making money, the financial benefits are unintentional by-products; the central focus is the technology itself. 377 Like Partridge and Raymond, the economic motivation for my colleagues at CountryWatch is an inadequate explanation

Focus: Consumerism, Conversation and the E-Bay Model

"The Cluetrain Manifesto" asks the question that many of us who work in the Internet industry have quietly or silently asked ourselves. What if the virtual marketplace is not really based on "click throughs," "hits," and credit cards, but instead on conversations and

376 Partridge, 1999.
377 Raymond, n.d.
communication between millions of human beings, linked by a network that was created jointly by many and controlled by no one person.\textsuperscript{378} Pointing to the manner in which hyperlinked, matrixed and networked modalities have subverted corporate reliance on hierarchy, and the ways in which the Internet has connected people and allowed them to have conversations and interact in commentaries that join a wealth of knowledge from varying resources, the authors of “The Cluetrain Manifesto” declare that the Internet is ultimately about voice. More particularity, it is about the profusion of multiple voices.\textsuperscript{379} Rather than an extension of existing media (like television), the Internet is in fact a radicalizing and revolutionary medium because people can share relevant knowledge and information at blinding speed. Furthermore, as noted in the Cluetrain Manifesto, they can do so using natural, open, honest and sometimes irreverent language.\textsuperscript{380}

In corporations of the Industrial Economy, the language of mission statements and marketing brochures is used. Alternatively, in the emerging “Informational” landscape where technology-savvy “netizens” are jaded about overly-produced advertising that pretends to be responsive to customers, enterprises of the New “Informational” Economy seem highly cognizant that such advertising is symptomatic of uni-directional communication.\textsuperscript{381} The authors of “The Cluetrain Manifesto” state that all Internet interactions, including commercial transactions and online communities, should involve the cycle of communication: transmission and reception, circularity. They should also be reflective of

\textsuperscript{378} See Levine, Locke, Searles and Weinberger, 2000.
\textsuperscript{379} See Levine, Locke, Searles and Weinberger, 2000.
\textsuperscript{381} “Netizen” is Web jargon describing persons who frequent cyberspace and the domain of Internet technology.
dialogues with users, rather than being monologues delivered to the consumer. As such, information is not something to be managed, but rather as in the case of news group conversations, it is emergent, dynamic and materially driven, advanced and furthered by its open source system.

Returning to Linux, this non-proprietary approach (like the Internet itself) may be regarded as an embodiment of market conversations at work. Without the constraints of command and control management, Linux is demonstrative of the fact that an entire market can evolve out of mere conversation. Certainly, one of the emergent trends on the Internet is for certain companies to dispense with conventional advertising entirely, replacing it instead with rich and unfiltered information about the industry. Noting that markets today are nothing more than conversations, the authors of "The Cluetrain Manifesto" state that all forms of media, from CNN to magazines, are varieties of conversation and a failure to participate in conversation will inevitably mark the demise of a institution, corporation or enterprise. Undoubtedly, it is clear that web pages -- corporate or personal -- are designed to be conversational, despite the fact that they may appear to be publications. Usually including drop-down menus with descriptions of key management or an organization's philosophy, web pages have a more emotional and evocative quality than brochures, and according to "netizens," they seem to connect and communicate with users in an effective manner.

In fact, unlike the linear structure and form or regular text that associated with classical Western sensibilities of discipline, rationality, restraint, reflection and logic, new electronic

media and technology produces a different kind of sensibility referred to as “the mediated self.” 384 This new “mediated self” encompasses something of a balance between the disciplined and rational Western self and the feeling and sensualism of electronic media. Stephen Mizrahs described this “mediated self” as follows, “it is more oriented toward processing multiple synchronous inputs (signals), rather than one stream of data (say from a single text).” 385

Media scholars, such as Walter Ong, have suggested that new media and communications technologies have produced a kind of sensualism because of the engagement with visual and auditory senses. 386 Moreover, Ong and Marshall Mc Luhan have indicated that television and video have infused an oral dimension into communications media and technologies. 387 This infusion of orality broke the visual linearity of textual communications. Linearity is also ruptured through associative hypertext which uses more than logic and chronology to arrange and design features on a given website. As noted by Mizrahs, “Electronic media appealed to holistic visual pattern matching faculties... rather than the analytic linguistic sequence-forming faculties...” 388

Meanwhile, the multi-dimensional representations of television and video complicated the visual dimension. Further developments such as the Internet and the proliferation of websites across cyberspace have markedly ruptured conventional text visually and orally, through the dynamic use of vibrant images, graphics and sound capabilities. On a website, where each

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384 See Mizrahs, n.d. See also Hayward, 1990; Ong, 1982; Powers and Mc Luhan, 1989.
385 Stated by Mizrahs, n.d.
386 See Ong, 1982.
388 Stated by Mizrahs, n.d.
page is located within a graphical tapestry of sorts, design, imagery and placement -- the "look and feel" -- is of great significance. In this way, each webpage of information is a modern graphical equivalent of the elaborate and aesthetically pleasing documents that were hand-written by monks using complex calligraphy in the pre-Gutenberg days. Thus, not only are electronic media about conversation but they are constituted by varied sensibilities and evocations.

Returning to the matter of online business, online buying and trading platforms like E-bay and online audio forums like Audio Asylum are illustrative of conversational marketplaces. On E-bay, potential purchasers can send electronic mail to sellers and enter into conversations about products before an actual purchase takes place. As a purchase or sale is made, an online ratings apparatus effectively self-regulates the system. The conversation is continued since other potential buyers read those very ratings before entering into possible transaction-oriented conversations with sellers. Other substantive conversational qualities existed within the E-bay culture. For example, E-Bay sellers voluntarily staff the communications forum within which they give advice to new sellers about how to get established within the online marketplace, discuss strategies, marketing plans and business operations with one another. They also form community action groups to protest against commercial ventures that fly in the face of the community's philosophy. In this way, conversation leading to consensus and action are hallmarks of the E-Bay culture.

Audio Asylum is an online community of audiophiles who seek "sound" advice from one another of how to perfect the sound from their equipment, while also providing feedback and
insight about certain high end audio products. Ultimately, the audiophile community functions as a particularized sphere of conversation between individuals who share an interest in audio equipment but often have very different ideas and interpretations of "good sound." Through the ongoing conversation online, transactions may also take place. In this way, this conversational community is also a specialized marketplace.

Both examples demonstrate the notion of businesses that rely on conversation and dialogue rather than conventional business and marketing practices. Certainly, their commercial orientations may preclude them from inclusion in some understandings of public space. Broader (discursive) interpretations of public space that seek to recognize the complexity of modernity and its institutions (including capitalist institutions) may be applicable, yet the argument against the Internet due to its commercial thrusts continue to prevail.

Tensions and Correlations

It is apparent that the Internet remains entrenched in the unresolved tension between its original purpose as an open and networked system, and the society in which it is grounded where proprietary relations characterize the capitalist economy. Likewise, its disposition as both a venue for the exchange of information, goods or services and as a facilitator of communication and conversation, frame the Internet within the context of tension. Information based companies such as CountryWatch are simply other forms of media capitalism, while E-Bay may more accordingly represent this very tension between the commercial and conversational interests. Drawing upon Habermas, Seyla Benhabib notes
that the "emphasis on political participation and the widest reaching democratization of
decision making processes is one that Jurgen Habermas' critical theory shares with the
tradition usually referred to as that of republican or civic virtue. The crucial distinction
between the participatory vision of contemporary critical theory and that of the tradition of
civic virtue is that thinkers of the latter tradition more often than not have formulated their
views of participatory politics with express hostility toward the institutions of modern civil
society, like the market." \(^{389}\) In this way, Benhabib is describing the inherent anxiety
between an open public space in which political participation is crucial and the antagonism
with free market practice and institutions.

Meanwhile, Internet based activities such as news groups, discussion forums, websites,
online advocacy and action groups, online business communities and mass media
transplanted into cyberspace were not particularly conceived in terms of the typical models
of the public sphere. Limitations to access among participants, limitations of rational debate,
voluminous meaningless information, as well as excessive commodification and
consumerism, present challenges to the more optimistic views of the Internet as a place of
conversation and a technology of democracy. Nevertheless, new business communities such
as E-Bay and Internet action groups such as MoveOn.org suggest significant potential for the
Internet, particularly as it relates to the participatory practices and goals of the public sphere.
In particular, MoveOn.org appears to be illustrative of action phase of the public sphere
models where democratic participation is sought. The commercial objectives of E-Bay,
however, leave these enterprises in some degree of tension with some understandings of
public participation.

\(^{389}\) Benhabib, 1994: 86.
Broader meanings of public participation that do not simply rest on the political domain of action but also stretch into cultural and socio-economic considerations may be applicable. The result is a necessary reconceptualization of the public sphere with consideration to the many dimensions and contours of the Internet and the participants and publics on the Internet. A particular area of reconceptualization would include the notion of multiple publics. As noted by Nancy Fraser, multiple publics are “differentially empowered and segmented” and in some cases “enclaved and subordinated to others.” Likewise, broader meanings and understandings of multiple publics including those on the Internet might fall under Benhabib’s “modernist understanding” of participation. The diversity of persons within a given public translates into a plurality of perspectives and demands an unbounded and comprehensive understanding of public spheres with various publics.

This potential of the Internet is complicated by perils of commercialism and commodification which it at odds with the democratizing promise of this emerging form of mediation. In many senses, the Internet provokes many similar anxieties as the wider realm of information technology. The Internet and information technology are viewed as fairly revolutionary developments, yet they can also be interpreted as intensified forms of communication and technical machinery respectively. Likewise, the Internet and information technology are regarded with simultaneous promise and uncertainty. As such, the Internet, not unlike information technology, represents a landscape of transformation imbued by inherent tension.

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390 See Fraser, 1994 generally.
391 See Fraser, 1994: 137.
CONCLUSION

Regarding the Research...

In this research, I have attempted to explore the landscape of economic, social and cultural change through the specific experience of work at a start-up Internet-based company. The central themes of the research have included the promise and possibility offered by technology and innovation across this changing cultural and economic landscape, as well as the perils and doubts associated with such transformation. The “start up” Internet company was used as a microcosm to explore these themes in various contexts including the wider capitalist economy, the rise and fall of the New Economy, the emergence of the Internet and new technology in the public sphere, internal corporate operations and organizational structures, as well as the interests of an emerging knowledge worker class that defines the stakes of quite differently from the established players on the corporate landscape.

Through the fieldwork, I have tried to examine the evolution of the Internet and Internet-based business. I have examined the changing identity of CountryWatch as a corporation in conjunction with the shifts in the business world regarding dominant business models. The case of this company may be illustrative of the process by which businesses have tried to come to terms with the possibilities and perils represented by the Internet, as they try to understand how to leverage such technological innovations for productivity and profit. As shown by the research, in as much as businesses seek to use the Internet for revenue generation, the Internet itself shapes business practices making them more amenable to
online information-seeking, timely news gathering and interconnected information distribution. As such, the Internet-based business has been a product of the market economy and also the result of the Internet’s own particular networked character. The concept of the network, its communication pathways and processes, as well as the information distribution systems of the Internet have together changed and contoured the organizational form of corporations, the way in which work is done, the manner in which businesses operate, and also the role and understandings of workers.

In this research, I have also tried to come to terms with the very idea of the New “Informational” Economy as a real thing, as a case of so-called paradigmatic transformation and as a conception that is employed to describe the simultaneous experience of peril and possibility represented by changes to the economic, social and cultural landscape. I have not looked at the New “Informational” Economy as “The Next Big Thing,” but instead tried to answer questions about how this concept is expressed in contemporary discourses and perception. Having looked at the historical transformations, the economic development pathways, as well as the social and cultural conceptions that have occurred in conjunction with the emergence of this very New Economy, I conclude that while it possesses distinctive qualities, it is not an actual or complete departure from the industrial model. Indeed, it is hardly revolutionary in quite the same way as the transformation from agriculturalism to industrialism. Instead, it subsumes the logic of industrialization through technological deepening, embodying knowledge and information in all processes of material production and distribution within the circulation sphere. Industrialization remains the primary engine of the capitalist enterprise, while technological intensification and the associated
internalization of knowledge and information are integrated into the existing operational paradigm. Informationalism textures the New Economy uniquely as an emerging ethos within a late Industrial and post-Fordist landscape. The extensive and systematic processing and leveraging of information into intelligence and tradable data products characterizes another shift whereby an information-based company like CountryWatch becomes a site for a new politics of knowledge and a new economy of information.

In examining the intimations of work, I have looked at the mutually enforcing relationship between employers and employees within this technologically-based and information-centered company. In this regard, I observed changing sensibilities about the nature of work itself as well as the view of the worker. In the contemporary scenario, I examine the importance of learning, the role of the "knowledge worker" and the growing significance of intellectual capital. In workplaces particularly influenced by technology and information, ongoing learning was found to be crucial. Yet, while learning contributes to the knowledge acquisition of workers and builds the intellectual capital of the company, it also forges a kind of working contract between employers and employees. The employee may always be dependent on the employer for a paycheck while the employer might perpetually be reliant upon the employee to perform certain functions. This type of interdependence can limit rather than leverage career development.

In considering work from the perspective of workers and specifically from the viewpoints of the employees at CountryWatch employees, I found that most employees had been socialized to view work as a necessity in life and a source of livelihood. Although many of these
employees cautioned that money or financial gain was not the driving force behind their continued employment tenure at CountryWatch, it was simultaneously apparent that salaries and wages by which individuals "make a living" could not be ignored. Although technology and informationalism are constituent aspects of workplaces and even as the meaning derived from engaging work holds great importance for most employees, production and profit for the company still takes precedence over the plight of the worker.

At the same time, I found that notions of a vocation or calling operated as important registers for some employees deriving meaning from their work, representing necessary conditions of employment in a corporate setting that may be in conflict with personal ideals. Many employees repeatedly discussed the meaning derived from the personal engagement with their work, their preference for engaging work and the fact that work was helpful in crafting notions of selfhood. Meaning, purpose and value by this cadre of workers is understood somewhat differently from an executive such as BK who holds a more materialist view.

I also considered power relations within a small start-up company where information technology is widely used. Information technology was not been found to have yielded the democratizing influence to the extent that many technonutsethists may have envisioned. Instead, the workplace technology has become a technique of power and control. That is to say, the effects of technology in the workplace, although advancing efficiency in operations, has become a technology of surveillance by which employees' behavior and performance are regulated and disciplined.
From the many conversations with CountryWatch employees, I also found that the workplace culture of CountryWatch might be described as inherently conflicted. At CountryWatch, there is a progressive orientation with regard to technology while at the same time the company seems to function like a traditional, hierarchical, and even patriarchal entity in its structure. Its lack of interest in terms of official human resource management serves to complicate a workplace culture that might well be understood as being somewhat schizophrenic.

The regulatory regime of the workplace itself an effect of the operational "web of rules" has produced both integration and alienation of workers within the workplace. Regardless of the fact that there may be genuine social ties that bind the actors at CountryWatch across power lines, and despite the engagement workers may have with the work itself resulting in a sense of personal investment, the procedural and regulatory practices that frame the workplace simultaneously maintain boundaries. Every day operations, functions and situations have become coded in such a way as to indicate ossification of power relations. In this way, events and actions are often transformed into value-laden symbols attributing status and circumscribing positions. In effect, these events, encounters, measures and modalities of communication together form a system of signification in which power, authority, legitimation and domination are ascribed.

Moving from the workplace into the wider culture and society, I have examined technology as the effect of economic and business imperatives. I have posited the view that technological development and the informational thrust cannot only be understood in economic terms.
Technological mediation has become so pervasive that its effects are more widely cultural. Whereas capital not only advances production and profit but also shapes the rhythms and experiences of life through the segmentation of time and space, so too have new technological developments and informationalism textured and contoured everyday life. Meanwhile, normative activities in the workplace, such as the response of a customer service representative, have become disciplined and controlled through technology, despite technology's promise of the democratized workplace. In this way, although transformations are indeed taking place, workers exist in some measure as part of a regulatory regime where technology is a technique of power. Yet those in positions of authority, as exemplified by VS, are themselves trying to negotiate their own senses of self upon the shifting and complex terrain of the political economy.\textsuperscript{392}

Finally, I have looked at the Internet and its relation to the Habermasian model of the public sphere. Internet-based activities such as news groups, discussion forums, websites, online advocacy and action groups, online business communities and mass media transplanted into cyberspace were not particularly conceived in terms of the typical models of the public sphere. Limitations to access among participants, limitations of rational debate, voluminous meaningless information, as well as excessive commodification and consumerism present challenges to the more optimistic views of the Internet as a place of conversation and a technology of democracy. In this way, following notable public sphere thinkers who have called for broader understandings of public sphere models, I have concluded that the there must be a new reconfiguration of the public sphere that includes and considers the influence of the Internet as a growing space and modality of conversation.

\textsuperscript{392} See Kondo, 199: 307 as regards a similar dynamic in the Japanese work world and political economy.
Meanwhile, new business communities such as E-Bay and Internet action groups such as MoveOn.org, suggest significant potential for the Internet, particularly as it relates to the participatory practices and goals of the public sphere. Yet at the same time, it is apparent that the Internet remains entrenched in the unresolved tension between its original purpose as an open and networked system and the society in which it is grounded where proprietary relations characterize the capitalist economy. Likewise, its disposition as both a venue for the exchange of information, goods or services and as a facilitator of communication and conversation frame the Internet within the context of tension.

Regarding the Field(Work)

Clifford Geertz writes, “What a proper ethnographer ought properly to be doing is going out to places, coming back with information about how people live there, and making that information available to the professional community in practical form, not lounging about in libraries reflecting on literary questions.” 393

In this research, I have not “gone out to places” and returned with information about “how people live.” Indeed, I did not travel to a distant land and forge new relationships with people within my field of research and in the context of the New Economy. Instead, I tried to write about the intimations, meanings and resonances of work in people’s lives. I rose each morning when the alarm sounded and went to work like the millions of workers do each day across the world. Through the shared experience of work -- of “making a living” -- my

393 Geertz, 1988: 1.
colleagues and I would discuss life, work and meaning. Those conversations form not only part of the text in this research, but also informed the way in which the writing process unfolded. A proposed chapter on risk, for example, was left untended because the stories and experiences that were being shared about the organizational aspects of the workplace seemed to take the research in another direction. In that sense, the research might well be considered as materially-driven as it evolved from what existed and transpired "in the picture of research on a day-to-day basis."  

Likewise, I cannot claim to have lounged around in libraries or anthropology departments reflecting and cogitating on literary questions. Still, I have admittedly experienced occasions of angst about the intertwined relationship of my work and my fieldwork, my personal senses of self and how they bear upon my identities as anthropologist, editor and corporate player. Is this occasional angst, when stipulated, a measure of ethnographic reflexivity?  

(This is a question I do not venture to answer.)

The informants -- employees, executives, consultants and contractors at CountryWatch -- are also my colleagues. I endeavor to suggest that an interaction and interplay of anthropologist, field and informant has been written into this text. That is to say, in some moments the blurring of the lines of anthropologist and informant has occurred, just as the lines of my work or job and the fieldwork of my research have been occasionally obscured. Conversations and moments occurred naturally such as the shared "look" between a colleague and me during a management meeting about the creation of a discussion forum. At

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394 Marcus, 1995: 101-102
395 See Rabinow, 1977; Crpanzano, 1980; Ruby, 1982; and Dwyer, 1987, as examples of reflexive anthropology.
the moment it occurred, I experienced it as an individual with my own particular liberally-oriented beliefs shared with a colleague who also held similar ideas. Only in retrospect did I recount the incident in its ethnographic sense.

Ideally, anthropologists in the field are supposed to retain their critical distance, but for me, critical distance was sometimes misplaced (not entirely lost) when I was at work “being” an employee. Critical distance was also a technique I employed at times to separate myself from the more unsavory machinations and experiences of corporate life, as exemplified by the safe haven of my closet-sized and windowless office space. Along the way, an associated state that I have termed “emotional deadening” also occurred. Perhaps akin to an artist’s preoccupation with getting the precise contours of a depiction of a human thigh on paper, yet disconnected from the human being attached to the thigh, “emotional deadening” often occurred not so much in response to the frustrations of the job, but as a result of “the job” itself. As exemplified by my irritation in having to respond to critical feedback from users, I was preoccupied by the demands of the job itself and disconnected from the wider world within which the job resided. In this way, I learned experientially the difference between being a knowledge worker engaged with the intrinsic meaning of his or her work and being an employee with a job to do and a schedule to meet. In various moments, exemplified by my responses to comments from readers, I became the employee with a job to do.

396 I used this description in the chapter on work and I chose to re-use it here to emphasize some of the effects of the ethnographic process.
My personal experience in this regard was not unlike the personal identity conflict Dorinne Kondo experienced during her fieldwork in Japan. By her own description, Kondo noted that she looked Japanese, came from a Japanese-American background and was the subject of "Japanese crafting" by those around her in the field. During a stroll down the street one day, she caught a glimpse of a Japanese housewife in the window "clad in slip on sandals and the loose, cotton shift called home wear, a woman walking down the street with a characteristically Japanese bent to the knees and a sliding to the feet." Realizing that the Japanese housewife in the window’s reflection was actually her own, Kondo experienced what she referred to as a "collapse of identity" and as a consequence, she felt a need to reconstitute herself as an American. This reconstitution involved a process of distancing. Likewise, my awareness that I was responding -- like an employee with a job to do and a schedule to meet -- propelled a similar process of distance and disconnection from my CountryWatch role. In part, the disconnection came from my own discomfort with the idea of being a corporate worker and also for the purpose of being able to maintain the distance necessary to write about the fieldwork experience.

Although I tried to separate the work from the writing up process by staying away from the CountryWatch workplace so that I could write “in peace,” there have been times when it was necessary for me to be in the CountryWatch office. On those occasions, when colleagues / informants encountered me in the hallway, it was quite common for one of them to pose questions such as, "How is the writing coming along?" This was not a question about the content for the 2004 edition of the Australia review or the weekly Global Update. Instead, they were inquiring about the writing up process on my ethnographic research, thus

397 Kondo, 1990: 17.
suggesting a shift in their own consciousness about my positioning. A few years ago, the fact that I was an anthropology student working on my research only registered peripherally to some colleagues because there were so many other students also working at the company. They assumed that, like other students working at the company, I was there to “make a living” and pay my bills. For several others, particularly those in management, my academic identity placed me in a separate category, hence my closet-sized office, unusual levels of entry into decision making and management details, as well as the Chief Executive Officer’s penchant for treating me as if I were his personal psychotherapist and counselor. That scenario, in and of itself, was another entry point not afforded to many other employees. A few years later, it appears that the employees at CountryWatch have themselves made what might loosely be regarded as a conceptual transformation about my role as both a colleague and an anthropologist in the field. Apparently, they seem to be cognizant of the fact that I play both roles. Rather than being a conceptual anomaly (both an employee and an anthropology student), looking or appearing to be like the rest of them in one sense and yet not in another, they had resolved my selfhood by recognizing that I was both. As a result, they would actually pose questions to me about my “writing up” process.

So, despite my attempts to process and maintain the necessary analytical space between anthropologist and informant, work and field, as a type of procedural feature of ethnography, the slippage between personal, professional and academic realms has been written into this textual production and is inscribed in this textual practice. As with all ethnographic

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398 See Kondo, 1990: 11 on being a conceptual anomaly in Japan where she was viewed as both Japanese and yet not Japanese at the same time.
representations of fieldwork, the ethnographer is always implicated in his or her work and there are inevitable problems in the authoritative voice of writing up.\footnote{See Marcus and Fischer (1986) on matters of positioning. See Marcus, 1992 as regards ethnographic authority, problems of voice and positioning, and the call for critique.}

For my part, as the ethnographer and as the simultaneous employee, I have tried to write about work in the context of the work I am employed to do and across the transforming landscape of the New Economy.
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