Chapter Six

Project for Life: Cyborganic's Creative and Communitarian Imaginaries

> In a self-sufficient agrarian economy a good deal of the extraordinary demands at special occasions, during natural calamites and social emergencies are met by social action that transcends the individual household: the assistance of the neighborhood. For us, the neighborhood is not only the "natural" one of the rural settlement but every permanent or ephemeral community of interest that derives from physical proximity; of course…we refer most of the time to the neighborhood of households settled close to one another.
>
> Max Weber, Economy and Society, Vol. I (1978:361)

> Community use of the Internet had been pioneered in the rave scene, on listservs like the Well, and in a frankly noncommercial climate of experimentation. The city was home to *Wired*, which cast a glamorous fervor around all things high-tech and was heir to a legacy of homegrown utopia in influential publications, from the *Whole Earth Review* of the 1960s to the *Mondo* 2000 of the 1980s. Everyone who was not a Bay Area newcomer could say, "It was a culture before it was an industry," and it was common among scene veterans to make a distinction between Web people—devoted to the ideals of transforming communication, shareware, and free information—and dotcommers—who were widely regarded as gold diggers.
>
> Andrew Ross, *No-Collar* (2003:127)

Thus far, discussion has focused on Cyborganic's contributions to economically significant firms, products, and practices; and on the group's innovations in the production and consumption of networked media. While this analysis is accurate in demonstrating the workings of milieus of innovation, it is also incomplete. Looking at Cyborganic's communitarian practices and imaginaries only as bases for innovation and productivity fails to engage them ethnographically as

meaningful in themselves. The dichotomy Ross describes above between "Web people" and "dotcommers" is an emic one that reflects imaginaries and practices referred to in my ethnography of Cyborganic as utopian and communitarian. By looking specifically at these phenomena, I seek to provide both a sense of their emic meanings, and the analysis that informs my characterization of them as utopian. I also argue that the creation of the Cyborganic community was itself innovative, productive of value, and *expressive of values*, apart from the development of Web publishing, though it is clearly difficult to separate these phenomena. Cyborganic's social experiment in combining residential, professional, and online community was one in which individuals, most in their early twenties, drew on the network form and Bay Area culture of social and technological innovation, to invent and build independent lives and livelihoods—independent of their parents and suburbia, and independent of mainstream America in terms of work, media consumption, forms and practices of leisure, sexuality, marriage, household, and domestic life.

Though the Cyborganic project took the form of a business and that was central, this elides the fact that most community members had no involvement with the business, either as paying customers or paid labor, and no clear sense of how it planned to make money, even some of those who worked for Cyborganic.

> When I first started going to Thursday Night Dinner people would ask me "What do they, what does Cyborganic actually do?" and I couldn't really give them an answer, 'cause I didn't really know, and even when I was working there, it took me awhile to figure out, you know, what does Cyborganic actually even do, where are they getting money from…what's the deal? (Kat Kovacs, interview, October 8, 1996)

I didn't have too much involvement with the company side of things. I was one of the member's of the company's Geek Cereal project, for which I was never paid. That was my main experience with the company side. My impression was there wasn't a rational business plan and people in the company were not that interested in business ideas or running a real business. (Wayne Bremser, questionnaire response, September 17, 2004)

It wasn't always clear to me who was involved in Cyborganic Corporation and who wasn't, although I knew of Jonathan's [Steuer] role and who the full-timers were and such. One could guess that their business plan was not as good as their community plan, but who knows? The community plan was pretty good, anyway. (Nick Montfort, questionnaire response, September 19, 2004)

Though it was widely known that the start-up business provided Cyborganic's technical and social infrastructure, for most in the community that project remained obscure. Cyborganic's online and offline forums—TND, space bar, the cc list, and Ramona neighborhood—were not constituted as spaces of business, but as spaces of informal sociality. While the business vision was not generally shared, the ideals of "transforming communication, shareware, and free information" that Ross reports were common. They represent a vision of turning technology to social and creative ends inherited from the New Communalists and the "culture of the creators of the Internet" (Castells 2001:37). The legacy of the New Communalists who "stepped away from agonistic politics and sought instead to change the world by establishing new, exemplary communities" endured in the words and practices of my Cyborganic informants (Turner 2005:493).

Cyborganic's utopian dimensions are best understood as a response to the economic, social, and cultural transformations of network society. I have called this

response a "project for life" to distinguish it from the business project of making a living, and to propose that Cyborganic be understood as a cultural commune aimed at producing a "local utopia" addressed to "the real issues of our time" (Castells 1997:61). In the second volume of his trilogy on network society, Castells argues that cultural communes are the main alternative for the construction of identity and meaning for those who seek to resist "the individualization of identity attached to life in the global networks of power and wealth" (1997:65). Whether organized around Islamic or Christian fundamentalism, nationalism, or the local community, he argues, such communes have three main features. They are: 1) "reactions to prevailing social trends;" 2) "defensive identities that function as refuge and solidarity," and; 3) "culturally constituted; that is organized around a specific set of values." As defensive projects, they represent reactions against "three fundamental threats, perceived in all societies, by the majority of humankind, in this end of millennium" (Castells 1997:65).

> Reaction against globalization, which dissolves the autonomy of institutions, organizations, and communication systems where people live. Reaction against networking and flexibility, which blur the boundaries of membership and involvement, individualize social relationships of production, and induce the structural instability of work, space, and time. And reaction against the crisis of the patriarchal family, at the roots of the transformation of mechanisms of security-building, socialization, sexuality, and, therefore, of personality systems. (Castells 1997:65-66)

Though Castells characterizes them as primarily defensive formations, and cautions that their cultural resistance may never move outside the commune; he suggests nonetheless "that from such communes, new subjects—that is collective agents of

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social transformation—may emerge" and, thus they are a potential source of social change (1997:67). While Cyborganic differs in important ways from the cases Castells examines, it shares the central features of a cultural commune. It is in this context that the community's utopian dimensions are most significant. To illustrate this view, I draw first on the vision of those who led the Cyborganic project; then turn to show that the participation of the community overall can also be read as a response to the economic, social, and cultural transformations of postindustrial society and suburban life.

The Cyborganic business concept itself was articulated explicitly as a reaction to the lack of informal public space and sociality its organizers perceived in the "increasingly suburban landscape" of middle-class American society.

> Cyborganic Café—Why now?
>
> People patronize coffee houses, pubs, and malls because they provide a place to meet and engage with others on an informal basis. These locations serve as "third places" for, as Ray Oldenberg describes in *The Great Good Place*, they offer an alternative to home and work. However, as citizens and critics alike complain, our increasingly suburban landscape lacks informal public spaces—thus adults retreat into elaborate home entertainment systems and teenagers "hang out at the mall."
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> Online services offer "third place" opportunities to meet and interact with people but are limited in their ability to provide a context for these interactions. Successful "virtual communities" arrange some way for online friends to meet "in real life" (IRL), for example, both the WELL in Sausalito and ECHO in Manhattan host monthly parties.
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> As a cross between traditional and digital "third places" the Cyborganic Café will use the latest communications media to fulfill the unchanging human need for community. (Cyborganic brochure 1993)

In its vision of virtual community, Cyborganic drew on the example of the WELL and also on the writings of influential WELL members Howard Rheingold and John Coate. The metaphor of innkeeping Coate employed in his essay "Cyberspace Innkeeping: Building Online Community" (1992) is especially evocative of the New Communalist legacy in its combination of social and economic activity in an idealized image of pre-industrial village life ("butcher," "blacksmith," "tavern") in cyberspace.

> For the term "village" (as in "electronic village" or "virtual village")
> to be applied to an online scene with any accuracy at all this blending
> of business and pleasure must be present. Because that's what a
> village is: a place where you go down to the butcher or the blacksmith
> and transact your business, and at night meet those same neighbors
> down at the local tavern or the Friday night dance. (Coate 1992)

Coate's essay, which, like the Cyborganic brochure, also cites Oldenberg's "third places," was widely read on the Web in the 1990s and established parallels between traditional hosting businesses of European folk society (inns, pubs, taverns) and the work of hosting people online. The concept of an "online village" that the creators of Cyborganic inherited from the virtual-communitarian stream of Internet culture serves to bring the complexities of life in globalized society back to a human scale in the manner typical of cultural communes. For, as Castells has put it, "When the world becomes too large to be controlled, social actors shrink it back to their size and reach. When networks dissolve time and space, people anchor themselves in places, and recall their historic memory" (1997:66). The historic memory of village life in

pre-industrial Europe that Coate recalls from the popular imagination was also

recalled in the words of my informants.

> Cyborganic is a place for people to come together, it's a meeting
> place, a friend of mine called it, I showed him all this and he said a
> village 'cause it's still pretty small and he grew up in the country, in
> France, and it's small and there's this tight-knit community, but it's
> online, it's an online village. (Kat Kovacs, interview October 8, 1996)

The imaginary of the virtual village surfaces so frequently in interviews and research

notes that it is easy to overlook as a figure of speech. However, it reveals a collective

longing for simpler times, as does the notion of contemporary society being

organized in life-style "tribes" in both emic (Raymond 1999, 1998) and etic

(Maffesoli 1996; Lévy 1997) discourses.

Cyborganic was also constructed as a defensive identity around preserving

the values of an earlier generation on the Internet at a time when uninitiated users

("newbies") where flocking online in greater numbers every day. In the early 1990s,

the Internet was often spoken of as an electronic frontier with homesteading and a

wilderness to be tamed[1], but also a cultural legacy to be defended.

> I think Cyborganic is trying to retain some of the original notions,
> well, not original, but earlier notions of what the Internet community
> was about 'cause up until a couple years ago you know the Internet
> community was just *wild* and creative, inhabited by people who were
> on the cutting-edge of technology and were interested in the
> technology for itself, and not necessarily thinking in terms of, "Oh,

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[1] For example, The Electronic Frontier Foundation, started in 1990; and
"Homesteading the Noosphere," an influential essay on project ownership, reputation
economies, and gift culture by self-described "hacker anthropologist" Eric Raymond
(1998).

how can I sell a product on here." *In fact*, you know, there was a
whole big movement, back around '89/'90 of people trying to *squash*
the commercialization of the Internet, people trying to keep
advertising and businesses out of the Internet, of course that didn't
happen [laughs], but I think Cyborganic is trying to rekindle that idea,
that sense of community. (Brian Calhoun, interview October 9, 1996)

Many Cyborganics had prior online experience and a number had been socialized

into Internet culture in forums like the WELL and Usenet. The core of the group's

mission was to bring the kind of community people had found in these earlier forums

to a new generation that had come to San Francisco to work in the developing

Internet industry.

Like the Cyborganic business, the residential patterns and communal

households of Cyborganic members express a reaction to the "increasingly suburban

landscape" of middle-class American society. Though most members of the

community worked in Silicon Valley at some point in their careers, the vast majority

chose to live, and preferred to work, in San Francisco. Some referred to the offices of

Mountain View, Cupertino, Palo Alto and other Silicon Valley cities as "Cubeland"

(a reference to office cubicles) and scorned its lack of cosmopolitan chic and urban

activity. Rather than live near jobs in the Valley's economic hub, they sought a

dense, urban environment in which to build multiple overlapping social networks.

Rather than spread-out residential patterns, dozens of Cyborganic members chose to

live in joint-households in the six-block radius of the networked Ramona

neighborhood. In this sense, the Cyborganic project should be analyzed, not simply

in commercial terms, but as a resistance project that embraced technological

innovation even as it sought to counter the lack of social interaction and

neighborhood community its members perceived in contemporary suburban life.

Scholars of the city have long recognized the cultural pattern of "the so-called 'back to the city movement' that, in the United States, sees a tendency for middle class professionals to dwell in places of active urban life" (Castells 1982:39 n. 16). Cyborganic and its wider SOMA community might be seen as the evolution of this movement in the 1990s in the context of the Internet. Many Cyborganic members were newcomers to the Bay Area in the early 1990s and the group formed explicitly as an attempt to build local community using the Internet. The "twenty-somethings" who came to San Francisco to work in the Web industry had grown up in the increasingly competitive, highly volatile era of "Reganomics" and the "Go-Go Eighties." They had no expectation of a social safety net from the state, nor that a college education would provide entrée to a life long job. However, drawing on the virtual communitarian stream of Internet culture, those who came together in Cyborganic built a community to address a range of basic needs and to experiment with new social and cultural forms.

> So monogamy didn't work at all for our parents, obviously, right. That's interesting, what can we play with there? How can we make that, how can tug on that? The idea of not having a community that is close to you physically, that didn't work so good, how can we change that? We've got this group of people that we would spend all our time together with, if we could. Why don't we find a place together? Co-housing is becoming a huge thing in the community, everybody at Chillitz [a weekend-long festival of techno-music in the country], there were two independent groups, there were stacks of co-housing books around and two different sets of people had brought them

> 'cause they were trying to find out how to live with each other.
> (James Home, interview, September 24, 2004)

The co-housing trend (i.e., tenancy in common, joint property ownership) that Home

describes above only began to emerge in the late 1990s and early 2000s—when some

community members had (a) sufficient earnings to purchase housing, and (b) were,

on average, in their late twenties and early thirties. Yet, the practices and imaginaries

of everyday life it expresses clearly extend those with which Cyborganics

experimented in the early days of the Web. These include, not only the group

households and local community described in the last chapter, but also practices of

polyamory[2], group and open marriage, which, though documented in my field

research, were not the focus of the Cyborganic project nor of participant-observation.

They are, thus, simply mentioned in this ethnography as one of the alternative

subcultures found in the Cyborganic community that, as their antecedents in the

1960s and 70s, included countercultural practices and imaginaries of "sex, drugs, and

rock and roll."

As a community, Cyborganic was akin to the immigrant organizations of 19th

century America, a social group for those in a new land both online and in the City.

It was a project aimed at countering the individualizing forces of network society.

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[2]"The fact of having simultaneous close emotional relationships with two or more
other individuals, viewed as an alternative to monogamy, esp. in regard to matters of
sexual fidelity; the custom or practice of engaging in multiple sexual relationships
with the knowledge and consent of all partners concerned" (OED Online, s.v.
"polyamory," http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/30006709, accessed August 29,
2008).

The great majority of Cyborganics were migrants who came to the Bay Area for

college, graduate school, or work. The theme of Cyborganic as a support system for

a particular age cohort appears throughout my research, but especially in response to

the question of what motivated people to participate in the community.

> I think the motivation was rooted in a few factors: general
> socialization, common interests, young people in a new city immersed
> in a fresh wave of technology that they were helping to shape, and
> communal/joint education about these new technologies and
> possibilities. TNDs played an interesting and important role for many
> of the people in the community because so many of them were new to
> San Francisco. It was a time when many (myself included) were
> making that transition from high school or college into being an
> "adult" and striking out on your own career-wise, financially, new
> city, etc. (Heidi Swanson, questionnaire response, September 19,
> 2004)

> I think people were attracted to it because it offered a social group of
> like-minded individuals. It had the warm social feeling of a college
> social club or student center that appealed the newly graduated,
> especially in San Francisco where everyone was just arriving. (Wayne
> Bremser, questionnaire response, September 17, 2004)

Even those who had grown up in the Bay Area were beginning careers and making

the transition to independent adult life. For people at this stage of life Cyborganic

provided a ready-made community addressed to a host of human needs—from

housing, employment, and "communal/joint education," to dating and recreation.

Indeed, one way Cyborganic expanded its membership was by providing such

support to people who had just arrived in the City.

> Meeting all of people's human needs, the breadth of human resources
> really can't be stressed enough. These people really take care of each
> other. In an industry where your employer really doesn't take care of
> you anymore, and in a world where people are separated from their

extended families as a rule rather than as an exception, these people manage to support one another…We have 20 year old kids dropping out of college to come to SF to get a job working on the Web who find and apartment and a job and a group of friends to hang out with inside the community, with very little effort. Fabulous, the kind of support people need. (Caleb Donaldson, interview, October 7, 1996)

My friends moved here for the summer. They arrived Wednesday night. On Thursday night they went to a TND. On Friday night, they had housing in a good place, near public transit, and soopah cheap. That's the fastest (and cheapest) housing I've ever seen anyone get. Thanks TND! (John Shiple, e-mail to *sf@cyborganic.com* mailing list, May 11, 1996).

Time and again my informants spoke about Cyborganic as a "support system." Whether members were new to the San Francisco, or simply new to the challenges of making a living and making a life, Cyborganic offered the type of support provided by kinship groups, ethnic organizations, and employers in the past—and by Weber's "neighborhood of households settled close to one another" (1978:361). Though Weber identifies "an unsentimental economic brotherhood," "practiced in case of need" as "the essence of neighborly social action," he also writes: "The neighborhood is the natural basis of the local community (*Gemeinde*)" (1978:360-363). The social action of the Cyborganic community extended beyond the necessary and beyond the local neighborhood. Aid and comfort were given in times of need; but birthdays and holidays were also celebrated (e.g. Cyborganic Seder 1996); and partnerships of all kinds—from intimate to professional—were facilitated, within a community whose collectivity extended from the household, to the workplace, and into life as a whole. People participated to "feel like a part of

something,"[3] but also to explore and experiment with collaborative resources "for imagining and managing life in the network economy" (Turner 2005:491). For this reason I call Cyborganic a project for life and regard it as a cultural commune addressed to resisting the individualizing forces of globalization, networking, and the crisis of the patriarchal family. It shares the three features Castells identifies as central to such groups: (1) as a reaction against prevailing social trends in the organization of labor, the crisis of the family, and crisis of legitimacy of mainstream culture as a source of meaning and identity; (2) as a defensive identity as "geeks," and (3) as a geographically and historically specific community organized around the cultural values of the creators of the Internet.

Cyborganic was not merely a defensive project, but also a creative one that can be understood in the context of "urban social movements (not quite revolutionary), through which common interests are discovered, and defended, life is shared somehow, and new meaning may be produced" (Castells 1997:60). This creative project was apparent in the Valley section of the website which was devoted to the art and activist projects of community members. It was also apparent in a variety of other undertakings not represented on the Cyborganic Gardens website. There was, for example, Salon Medusa, a monthly "forum for women artists to share their creative work, receive feedback, and network with other members"[4] that met

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[3] Ian McFarland, questionnaire response, May 11, 2005.

[4] M. Mara-Ann, e-mail to author, March 11, 2008.

every month for nine years. Founded in February of 1997 by M. Mara-Ann, the salon

was hosted on a rotating basis at members' homes.

> Salon size was limited to ten, and then later twelve members, with
> required regular monthly attendance in order to maintain a "critical
> mass" for quality sharing and critique of work. Meetings were
> structured with an initial open mic for brief member updates, then
> followed by a half hour feature for an in-depth look at a member's
> creative work, and ended with a brief thematic presentation
> introducing a piece of theory or another artist's work for
> consideration during the interval between meetings. (M. Mara-Ann, e-
> mail to author, March 11, 2008)

Many of the women in Salon Medusa[5] initially met through Cyborganic, and

some—Mara-Ann, Francis, Kreuter, Krylova—were part of the community that

preceded the growth of the business. Salon members worked in photography, poetry,

fiction, non-fiction, new media, and performance. During the 1990s, these women

worked at *Wired* (Sanders), *Hotwired* (Yates), CNET (Francis, Mara-Ann, Shindler),

Computerworld (Mills Abreu), for the Burning Man arts festival (Kreuter), in

graphic design (Hoffman), film production (Howe), and teaching (Francis, Krylova).

Communication outside Salon Medusa's monthly meetings was conducted largely

over e-mail and the majority of early correspondence streamed over the Cyborganic

servers and neighborhood LAN.

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[5] The original members of Salon Medusa were: Elinor Mills Abreu, Alison Yates,
Anne Francis, Lisa Hoffman, Jaynee Howe, Holly Kreuter, Zoe Krylova, M.Mara-
Ann, Stacy Sanders, and Stephanie Shindler; with Devra Edelman and Laura Paulini
joining in 2002 (M. Mara-Ann, e-mail to author, March 11, 2008).

Cyborganic's techno-communitarian ideals and practices are nowhere more apparent than in the many Tibet-related IT projects supported by the community since 1996. These include: (1) Tibet.net, the official site of the Central Tibetan Administration (the Dalai Lama's government in exile); (2) Tibet.org, an umbrella website for organizations of the Tibetan community in exile and Tibet support groups internationally (e.g. Tibetan Youth Congress, International Tibet Support Network (ITSN)[6]; (3) mailing lists for these groups; and (4) the project to set up a LAN and e-mail system for the Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala. Cyborganic's involvement with these projects was the work of Dan Haig whose life history illustrates vividly the way educated young people were drawn to San Francisco's growing Web industry in the 1990s and, in turn, used their Web jobs to support a variety of creative, social, and activist projects.

Haig studied Tibetan medicine at the University of Wisconsin, Madison before moving to California where his girlfriend (now wife) Krylova was living.

> I took up driving a cab while I was in grad school, and so I came out here with virtually no job experience whatsoever, didn't know how to use a computer. (Dan Haig, interview, October 4, 2005)

Though he arrived in the Bay Area with few computer skills, Haig was already connected to Cyborganic through his younger brother's high school friends, Steuer

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[6] Since 1997 the ITSN website has been hosted on Cyborganic's servers—first at http://www.tibet.org/itsn/ and now at http://www.tibetnetwork.org/. At the end of 2007 it was in the process of being transferred off the Cyborganic server.

and Nelson. Even before Haig moved to San Francisco, Nelson had begun talking to him about working in the emerging Web industry.

> I remember when I came out here actually to go camping with Zoe [Krylova] around Halloween 1993, we went to see something at The Great American Music Hall and Nelson had a computer, a laptop with a version of Mosaic one point O point three [1.0.3] with some little prototype website for Knitting Factory Records or something like this, and he's clicking on pictures and some other page comes up. So, I look back and Nelson's, you know, like "Well, it's the wave of the future, dude, what do you think? Do you want to do all this stuff and build websites?" And, I'm like "Sure, man, plug me in." You know, whatever, being a Luddite, I wasn't really thrilled but I'm also fairly practical about things, so I thought I'd give it a whirl, and now look at me [laughs]. (Dan Haig, interview, October 4, 2005)

Haig learned "how to use computers and got sucked in to the Web explosion" becoming Organic's first employee and later working at other SOMA Web ventures (CNET, Third Age). In 1995 he quit his contract job at CNET and, using money saved from building websites, traveled to India for five weeks of study at the Tibetan Medical and Astro Institute in Dharamsala.

In Dharamsala, Haig met Phuntsok Namgyal, director of the Tibetan Computer Resource Centre and learned about the IT projects he was working on as "sysadmin for the Tibetan government in exile." Realizing the challenges Namgyal faced working with old, un-networked computers, frequent power outages, and no other technical staff, Haig decided he could help using skills and connections he had developed in the Web industry. On January 3, 1996, shortly after his return to San Francisco, Haig asked Jon Drukman (Ramona Empire's resident sysadmin) to

register the domain Tibet.org on his behalf. A few weeks later, Haig received e-mail

from someone in Palo Alto asking about the domain.

> This guy down in Palo Alto ping[ed] me, not too many weeks later,
> saying "Hey, I wanted that domain name. Can I have it? What are you
> doing with it?" And I'm like, "Well, no, but let's talk." So, I meet this
> guy over at the office on Ramona and after talking to this guy for half
> an hour, I was like, "Okaaaay, sure I'll be going to D.C. next month
> for this big Tibet conference to take over the Tibet movement's
> Internet development planning. Sure, I can go do that, um. I'm going
> to meet the Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile next
> week to show him the website I'm going to build between now and
> then, right! Okay." And this guy, Fred, Fred Shepardson, Committee
> of 100 for Tibet President, kind of just plugged me in, he just was
> like, "Dude, take the ball and run with this, please, somebody's got to
> do something." And, I know a magic carpet ride when I see one, so I
> stepped on it and, still kind of hovering a little bit. (Dan Haig,
> interview, October 4, 2005)

Thus, Haig's connection to Tibetan Internet projects came about through two

unplanned meetings (with Namgyal and Shepardson); his access to Cyborganic

resources (technical expertise, infrastructure, and office space); and the regional

proximity that enabled him and Shepardson to meet face-to-face in San Francisco.

Haig put a world address book for all Tibetan relief organizations online on

July 6, 1996 as a birthday gift to the Dalai Lama. He worked with dozens of Tibet-

support organizations and NGOs, in the Bay Area, New York, and internationally,

helping them set up their first websites, many initially hosted by Cyborganic. At

first, all these groups needed help getting online and figuring out how to build

websites. But as soon as they learned how to use the new medium, those who lived

in places like New York and London, with good network access, moved their

operations to a local server. Predominantly, it was the Tibetan organizations that stayed on Cyborganic's servers. One reason was cost, given that "25 bucks a month for bandwidth is a lot of money" for organizations like the Tibetan Youth Congress, and other non-profit groups.

Through this experience Haig came to realize that all the online initiatives for Tibet would be far more effective if the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala had a local network of its own. In 1997 he began organizing to build a direct, high-speed network connecting the offices of the CTA's seven ministries and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives to one another and the Web server. First, Haig asked Donaldson, Cyborganic's Gardener-In-Chief, to go to Dharamsala to measure distances between buildings and record specifications for the LAN. Haig paid his airfare, but Donaldson volunteered his time and other expenses. On April 3rd 1997 a team of four Cyborganics and Jack Burris, a University of Wisconsin computer administrator, each took a month off work to travel to Dharamsala and set-up the network[7]. The Cyborganics paid their own airfare and expenses, and Haig covered Burris' and his own. The Cyborganics were: Haig; Rick Schneider, a telecommunications engineer and the Ramona Empire's resident "hardware infrastructuralist;" Stefan Lisowski, a Web developer and volunteer Cyborganic sysadmin; and Ari Salomon, a graphic designer and Macintosh specialist. Other than

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[7] Stories about the project appeared in the *San Jose Mercury News* (Jung 1997) and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (Heinen 2001).

Haig, none of the team had any prior connection to or special knowledge of Tibetan culture and history.

The Cyborganic team made the journey to Dharamsala carrying motherboards, processors, cable (800 feet of steel, 2,400 feet of coaxial), drill bits (to bore through walls), and other hardware[8] purchased by Haig. In addition to laying cable and installing hardware (computers and hubs), they set-up an e-mail system and intranet for the CTA's staff of 200, with dial-up service for governmental and cultural institutions too far away to be on the LAN. Personal accounts on the system "were a big hit" rising from seven to over forty within a few months. After working for a month with old computers (Macintoshes with 1 MB RAM) and challenges such as regular power failures, the network was operational and four members of the team returned to the U.S. Haig, however, stayed on for four months to teach the CTA computer staff how to use and maintain the new systems.

In 2001, the Dalai Lama spoke of his hopes for Tibet.net and the many websites for Tibetans in exile and their supporters that had been developed with the aid of Cyborganic's community.

> "With the sudden proliferation of Tibet-related Web sites, it is my
> hope that a virtual Tibetan community can be created in cyberspace,
> to be freely accessible to everyone interested in Tibetan Buddhism,

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[8] "10 network cards, 10 network hubs (distributed 2 of these in each backpack to allay possible suspicions at Delhi Int'l customs, a few dozen very heavy lag bolts, a star repeater hub, and a modem for the Dalai Lama's office to use to dial in to the network from two km up the mountainside, as well as zip drives and other assorted utility devices." (Haig, e-mail to author, April 1, 2008)

Tibetan culture and Tibet's present tragic fate," the Dalai Lama said in a message on one of the site's pages. (Heinen 2001)

While the Dalai Lama emphasized the websites' value to the preservation of Tibetan

Buddhism, culture, and the political struggle for Tibet's sovereignty, Haig spoke of

Tibetan culture as a remedy for fundamental threats to humankind and the planet.

> "Tibetan Buddhist culture has fostered something that the rest of the world needs very desperately in order to make it through the next century—compassion for all living things and realistic ways to develop such compassion," Haig said. "So they give us compassion and we give them, well, a Net connection. Hopefully, we will give them more than that in the end." (Jung 1997)

> "Many people feel that Tibetan civilization holds the key to wisdom that the 'developed' world has lost—respect for the environment and a focus on developing the potential of the human spirit, for instance—and must regain before we destroy the world we live in. My work is to help provide the means for this ancient wisdom to survive and propagate throughout the world," Haig added. (Heinen 2001)

The loss and need Haig perceives in the "developed" world are the very threats

against which, as Castells has argued, the social movements of the information

age—opposing globalization, ecological destruction, and the micropowers of

patriarchy—defend (Castells 1997:60-67).

As Haig describes, San Francisco's flexible and distributed "new economy"

created the conditions that enabled him to contribute time and money to these Tibet-

related IT projects.

> The hardware that we brought to take with us to Dharamsala to build their network, and the plane tickets and all this other stuff that I basically sprang for, I made that money in about six weeks when Third Age was being built, heavy overtime, contract, getting paid by

the hour, 60 hours a week, kind of money. But it was *great*, you
know, go to India, come back, have a new job, or have your old job,
it's your choice really, and make your money, save your money, go
back to India to do some of the work there, then come back have your
job back again, no matter how long you were gone, it seemed. And
then we went again, Zoe and Tashi and I once, for a whole year, and
when we came back, Booph! No more work. It was like, "Oh, now
I'm in trouble, I shouldn't have done that." But who knew, at the time
it seemed like a simple thing, in fact, I was kinda banking on getting
work I could just telecommute and do from India, but you know,
everything changed. (Dan Haig, interview, October 4, 2005)

In 2001, Haig returned to the Bay Area from a year in Dharamsala with his

wife and three-year-old daughter to find the dot-com bubble had burst. After failing

to find a job on the West Coast, he moved with his family to Ann Arbor to work on a

medical software start-up with his eldest brother, a physician. The company never

got off the ground and Haig returned to driving a cab for a year and a half during the

economic downturn. Though Haig's Tibet work included a handful of contract jobs,

for the most part he labored on a volunteer basis and used his Web industry earnings

to underwrite his participation and other costs. Haig estimates having spent $10,000

of his own money, and

at least six figures of missed income during the peak of the dotcom
days while I volunteered in India, and that doesn't count the thousands
of volunteer hours I did in the Bay Area when I could have been
asking $60-$75 an hour. (Dan Haig, e-mail to author, April 13, 2008)

Though the Cyborganic business had just closed when Haig returned from his first

stint in Dharamsala, Steuer donated server space and bandwidth for the Tibet Online

initiatives (websites and mailing lists); and with a cooperative of volunteer

sysadmins from the community kept the Dalai Lama's CTA site and other Internet

services online from 1997 until 2008. Over the years these Tibet websites have

received a good deal of traffic, averaging a million hits (68,000 visits) per month in

2004,[9] and there was sometimes talk in the cooperative about asking them to

contribute to Web hosting costs. But this never happened.

> Haig: between Tibet.org and Tibet.net it's about a million page
> views a month. Tibet.net gets like 600,000. No wonder they
> [the Cyborganic cooperative] wanted them to pay for
> bandwidth.
>
> Cool: How's that working out?
>
> Haig: No one's sent me a bill yet?
>
> (Dan Haig interview, October 4, 2005)

With the Chinese government continually reporting Cyborganic's mailhost to "spam

lists" and "crackers" working to bring them down, maintaining the servers hosting

the CTA's website and many pro-Tibet political mailing lists has been a unique

challenge for Cyborganic's volunteer sysadmins.

Cyborganic's Tibet projects also drew attention from the Pentagon. In 1997,

Haig received e-mail "from an address @osd.pentagon.mil" (Office of the U.S.

Secretary of Defense) saying they had heard about the trip "to India to wire the Dalai

Lama" and wanted to know

> about Tibet Online and what we did in Dharamsala as an example of
> how sub-state actors can have disproportionate affects on geo-politics
> by utilizing technology. (Dan Haig, interview, October 4, 2005)

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[9] These averages are based on Cyborganic's server logs for 2004.

The e-mail came from Captain Dick, a retired army officer who founded the

Highlands Forum in 1995 to keep Pentagon personnel abreast of technological

developments. Steuer and Haig were asked to come to Washington, D.C. to address

the forum in the fall of 1997.

> They'd *just* closed Cyborganic, and I knew [Steuer] was down, so
> "Hey, Jonathan, man, check out this invitation, want to go to DC and
> talk to these people?" And he was like, "yeah … that'd be great,
> actually, let's go do that" and I think he quite enjoyed the fact that
> Cyborganic, by virtue of being this synergistic thing had created *one*
> little flurry of activity sufficient to attract interest of the Pentagon and
> to be asked to go speak at their top-level information technology
> forum. He was amused and then he had the letter from the Secretary
> of Defense taped to his rack[10] for quite awhile. (Dan Haig, interview,
> October 4, 2005)

In terms of helping "sub-state actors," cultural groups, and activists adapt their

missions to the information age, Cyborganic's communitarian practices and

imaginaries have been as innovative as the entrepreneurial ones discussed earlier.

The group's commitment to self-publishing and the utopian promise of online social

networks, together with its flexible structures of cooperative action, enabled

Cyborganic's influence to reach beyond SOMA and other tightly circumscribed hubs

of digital culture, to the mountains of northern India and around the world.

These contributions to Tibetan and pro-Tibet IT initiatives, not only attracted

attention from the Pentagon, they also drew new recruits to the Cyborganic project

after weekly TNDs had ceased, the business had closed, and the community had

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[10] A rack is metal shelving used to hold hardware devices such as servers, hard disk
drives, modems, other computer and network equipment.

shifted to the more attenuated, less regularly face-to-face form it took after 1997.

While the group's Tibet work served a community of interest that already existed, it

also served as a vehicle through which Cyborganic's communitarian ethos, utopian

practices, and imaginaries of techno-sociality, have continued to propagate in the

decade since the business closed its doors. For example, Locke Berkebile, a network

security architect, learned about Cyborganic in late 1998 and was the group's

primary sysadmin from 2001-2007. Prior to his association with the group, he had no

experience with non-profits or with Tibet. After working for years as a volunteer for

the Tibetan Administration—first as a sysadmin on Cyborganic, later as a technical

advisor flying to India to meet with CTA officials—Berkebile started his own non-

profit in 2005, California Internet Cooperative, "a member-run ISP" for non-profit

groups on the model of Cyborganic's cooperative.

> I think Cyborganic showed me that technologists can make real,
> meaningful contributions to important causes. Before I encountered
> Cyborganic, I didn't think in terms of applying my Internet expertise
> to activist and humanitarian projects. I thought of these pursuits (if at
> all) as activities to be undertaken outside of the domain of my work. I
> am now making plans to start a new nonprofit that offers online
> communication services to other nonprofits. So the lesson was a
> profound one! (Locke Berkebile, questionnaire response, September
> 11, 2004)

Berkebile connected to Cyborganic through Scient, a successful Internet

consulting company founded in San Francisco at the height of the dot-com bubble.

Both he and Steuer began working there in 1998 and their association served to

propagate Cyborganic's techno-social vision long after the community's largest,

most visible incarnation between 1994 and 1997. Berkebile never attended a TND,

never had a homepage in Cyborganic Gardens, and, when he joined, the group was being reconstituted as a bandwidth cooperative, separate from the community that continued on the mailing list. Yet, he and the others in that cooperative—which became Cyborganic.org (instead of .com)—sustained and propagated Cyborganic's communitarian vision of techno-sociality beyond the Web publishing industry and the dot-com period of the 1990s.

Over the years, many in the community took the path Berkebile followed from sysadmin to activist (or artist). It appears, for example, in the words of Steev Hise, another late recruit to the project who served voluntarily as the last sysadmin for the business, and as a community sysadmin for the Cyborganic mailing list and Ramona LAN for several years (1996-2001).

> My role: at first I was really excited about learning new stuff and just totally geeking out. I soon evolved into the position that my geeky career was something to fund what I really cared about, which was my art, and more recently, activism. the work was better than most ways to make a living and allowed, and still allows, me to make quite a bit of money in a pretty small number of hours, leaving me plenty of time to do what really matters. my time has always been more important than money. I'd prefer to do this work for a cool nonprofit or other cause I believe in, and have made many attempts at moving in this direction with not much success. Really I'd like to get completely out of IT work, or anything to do with computers, but I haven't figured out how or what I'd do instead. I think computers are ultimately unhealthy, part of the vast, unhealthy (in many senses of the word) culture that we're stuck in. But they're one of the master's tools that we need to use to bring down the master's house. (Steev Hise, questionnaire response, September 22, 2004)

Just as the significance of Cyborganic's business project can be seen in its connection to innovations in the production and consumption of new media, the

significance of the group's communitarian projects, practices and imaginaries can be seen in the continuing influence of Cyborganic as an exemplary community for imagining and managing life in the network society.

After the business failed in 1997 Cyborganic persisted in a variety of forms. The physical neighborhood of apartments continued to be occupied by people who were part of the community and connected to the Ramona LAN. These residents organized as the Church of the Immaculate Connection (CIC) bandwidth collective in 1998 to share Internet connectivity, technical infrastructure, and administrative labor, but disbanded in 2001 in favor of individually purchased commercial ISP service. Within a year of the Corporation's demise, Cyborganic was reconstituted, albeit in significantly curtailed form, as a group of nine volunteer systems administrators (sysadmins) sharing servers and sponsoring a community of approximately one hundred users with over a hundred separate domains. This incarnation of Cyborganic—which I call "the tech list" or Cyborganic.org because interaction on the mailing list and server constituted it—existed for almost five years (1998-2003). Each sysadmin sponsored a number of users for whom he was specifically responsible, and users ("sponsorees") only contacted their sponsor, they did not send e-mail to the tech list. Thus, it was not a direct membership organization for all its users, only for the administrators who maintained the server and were on the mailing list. No longer confined to San Francisco, these Cyborganic sponsors were at different times in New York, Los Angeles, Ann Arbor, Sealand, London,

Dharamsala, and Australia. In 2003 the Cyborganic.org cooperative was again re-

constituted when, in the process of migrating to a new server (*oz.cyborganic.org)*,

they lost two systems administrators in a split over whether to upgrade to Linux or

the FreeBSD operating system. The seven volunteer systems administrators who

remained in the Cyborganic cooperative, supported well over a hundred users in

some capacity. The servers and systems they maintained hosted several dozen e-mail

accounts, mailing lists, personal, and business websites: for example, Greenhome[11],

an online store for environmental products. Cyborganic also continued to host

approximately a hundred virtual domains, including the Web presence for the

Tibetan Government in exile, until April 2008.

Another significant legacy of Cyborganic's cultural commune can be seen in

the many communities its members have joined or formed which are similar to

Cyborganic in their practices and imaginaries, but without the central business

project and dedicated physical space. These Bay Area communes cum bandwidth

cooperatives include: SuperDeluxe (now Nanolux), maintained by James Home,

which "exists to provide our friends and family with a reliable conduit for their

electronic communication;"[12] Saturn5, run by Steve Simitzis, which serves

approximately a hundred and fifty users with "hosting for artists, online

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[11] The Greenhome website is at: http://www.greenhome.com/

[12] Superdeluxe website, http://superdeluxe.com, accessed November 25, 2005, site
now discontinued.

communities, activist organizations, and locally owned businesses;"[13] and The Spore

Project, "a non-profit, community hosting service."[14] While some of these groups

center on electronic music and arts gatherings (e.g. Cloud Factory[15]), others are, or

were, simply friends hosting their personal and professional e-mail and websites

together (e.g., Maz, Vigilante, arctic[16], The Hungry Programmers[17]). For

approximately eight years after Cyborganic closed its doors—that is, its physical

venues (TND and the business offices)—the Maz "pals list" and server, maintained

by Brian Moseley connected several dozen people who had come to know one

another through the community. In addition, space bar[18], the online chat forum

launched as part of the Cyborganic project, continues to operate today, hosted by

Home and moderated by Donaldson.

All these collectivities integrate online and face-to-face interaction and

express overlapping sub-groups of people who came to know each other through

Cyborganic and started, or joined, similar communities of their own. Many also

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[13] Saturn5 website, http://www.saturn5.com/, accessed November 25, 2005.

[14] The Spore Project website, http://www.spore.org/, accessed November 25, 2005.

[15] The Cloud Factory website, http://www.cloudfactory.org/, accessed November 25, 2005.

[16] Arctic website, http://www.arctic.org/, accessed November 25, 005.

[17] The Hungry Programmers website, http://www.hungry.com/, accessed November 25, 2005.

[18] The space bar website, http://www.spacebar.com/, accessed August 13, 2008.

came together in other social, personal, creative, and recreative online and off-line

collectivities: for example, the numerous Burning Man theme camps, such as The

Irrational Geographic Society, bianca's Smut Shack, and the Illuminaughty.[19]

> Burning Man became a big umbrella to all of the different cultural
> groups in SF. Cyborganic could be considered like a little pod of this
> umbrella. Burning Man welcomed and was a platform for
> crossbreeding of groups. The artists talked to the techies, who hung
> out with the musicians who would do stuff for, and so on… My friend
> from Berlin always told me of the scene there that the artists would
> only talk to the artists and the musicians would only hang out with the
> musicians, this was very untrue in San Francisco. Cyborganic also
> had this feeling, too, the graphic artists would chill with the digital
> musicians, etcetera. (Susie Kameny, questionnaire response, October
> 5, 2005)

Burning Man is an annual festival that takes place on the playa of Nevada's

Black Rock Desert. For 8 days before the U.S. Labor Day holiday[20], the dry lakebed

is transformed into Black Rock City—complete with a system of roads, Department

of Mutant Vehicles (DMV), daily newspaper, security force (Black Rock Rangers),

and portable toilets. Described by its organizers as an experiment in "community,

participation, self-expression, and self-reliance,"[21] the event brings together

bohemians primarily from the Bay Area, but also from other hubs of digital and

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[19] The Irrational Geographic Society website, http://lsdworld.com/igs/, accessed August 31, 2008; the Bianca website, "The History of Bianca at Burning Man, http://bianca.org/history/burn.html, accessed August 31, 2008; the Illuminaughty website, http://www.illuminaughty.org/, accessed August 31, 2008.

.[20] Labor Day in the United States is the first Monday in September and the three-day weekend is a major national holiday marking the culmination of the summer season.

[21] Burning Man website, "What is Burning Man?," http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/, accessed August 29, 2008.

alternative culture. Participants stay in "theme camps" and many work year-round

designing and crafting art, architectural, and performance pieces for the festival,

which culminates in the ritual burning of a large wooden figure ("the man") on the

Saturday night before the Labor Day holiday.

Burning Man began in San Francisco in 1986 with twenty participants. By

2007, participation had swelled to 47,366 (Berton 2007). Since 1995 it has been an

important gathering for many in the Cyborganic community. In a 2004 interview,

Home relayed a powerful image of the way Burning Man theme camps reflected the

various San Francisco bandwidth collectives that formed within Cyborganic's

membership.

> The thing that struck me about Burning Man in went I went in '96 was that it was all of these host names physically instantiated, like I could walk around to each of the machines and see a physical manifestation of the machine in the desert, right, because the camps and the hosts where you got your e-mail were the same thing, right. People who all had their e-mail addresses at one domain, they all camped with each other, right. Like the little, we had that little hub and you could literally walk around and feel the same gradient that you experienced online of people on their websites talking about each other, with how they physically camped. And *that*, that was powerful, that was a very powerful, um, it just, it made it a more solid thing. Some of the solidity that these communities have had and *still* have, I think *stems* from that physical instantiation. If you can walk around in something, you know. The virtual is so powerful, but it still isn't as powerful as being able to walk around in something. (James Home, interview, September 24, 2004)

The camps set up in the ritual time and space of Burning Man mirrored on Black

Rock Desert the social collectivities and connections of everyday life in the Bay

Area. In 1999 when the Cyborganic.org, Ramona LAN, and SuperDeluxe

cooperatives were having problems with security breeches and disruptive attacks to their servers, Home set-up a mailing list to coordinate the response. That list remained active in 2005 as a forum for systems administrators supporting hundreds of users in these San Francisco bandwidth collectives.

In this network of groups and projects, the vision, practices, identities, and connections forged through Cyborganic live on. As Home put it, "Cyborganic is still a very strong community brand" that carries "a lot of meaning for a lot of people." The phrase "community brand" evokes the tight fusion of entrepreneurial and communitarian imaginaries characteristic of these cultural communes. Talking with Home in 2004 about the groups that were still active, I asked if they focused on recreational gatherings and found eloquent corroboration of the argument I make for the influence of Cyborganic's communitarian and social innovation.

> They're communities as much as, the parties themselves are not what it's about any more, I would say that Cyborganic was a proto-version of what they've become. They're communities of people who are extremely close to each other, who collaborate on all kinds of projects together, who, you know, their job to each other is essentially to keep life interesting, right, which is what Cyborganic, Cyborganic established that as something to do, right. (James Home, interview, September 24, 2004)

It is not that Cyborganic invented the techno-sociality practiced and imagined in these communities, as the cultural history in chapter 3 details, but that they reinvented it in San Francisco at a time when e-mail and the Web were starting to become the mass social phenomena they are today. By establishing its vision of community "as something to do," Cyborganic fueled the rise of new "mediated

imaginings" (Warner 1990:xiii), drawn from an early generation of Internet culture

but adapted to network society.

In addition to starting new cultural communes in the form of bandwidth

cooperatives, those who had been part of Cyborganic also pursued personal projects

for life expressive of the group's utopian social imaginaries. For instance, responding

to the question of whether or not he wanted me to use a pseudonym for him in my

ethnography, Home replied:

> You can attribute anything that I say to me. I'm extremely open with
> my life. I don't judge people who aren't that way negatively at all but
> I'm not happy with the direction that the world is going in, as far as
> just general culture goes, and I feel like one of my jobs as someone
> who's really happy with their life is to be as, not *foist*, right, but be as
> open with what I'm doing as I possibly can so it might be a little
> infectious. So, there's not much I'm quiet about, you know. I'm pretty
> open about sex and drugs and rock and roll, you know, like you said.
> (James Home, interview, September 24, 2004)

Here the utopian vision is articulated in terms of the individual life as exemplary

project in a manner consistent with Castells's description of "the culture of

communal hyper-individualism" (1997:67-68). It is individualistic because "only the

individual can be the proper accounting unit," but it is also communal, clustering, in

the case of Cyborganic's membership, in groups formed on the basis of identities and

values inherited from Internet culture and the broader countercultural movements of

the 1960s and 70s. The model of online-onground community and vision of turning

computer technology to human ends that Cyborganic pursued has since been taken

up by my informants as a resource for imagining and managing their daily lives in contemporary, U.S. society.

Though many business relationships connect those in the communities Home described in 2004, none is itself a start-up company. This may well reflect lessons learned from tensions between the entrepreneurial and utopian dimensions of Cyborganic. In the second part of this chapter, I turn to discuss these tensions, the conflicts in which they were expressed, and contradictions they bespeak, thereby addressing my second objective of elucidating the relation of Cyborganic's entrepreneurial and utopian aspects. While earlier chapters emphasized the productive synergies of business and community, here I bring to the surface "gaps and paradoxes" (Holston 1989:13) apparent in the ethnographic material presented throughout the work. This analysis initiates my critical consideration of the Cyborganic case, that is, of gaps and contradictions in my informants' self-understandings, specifically, in their imaginary of turning computer technologies to communitarian ends and projects for life. This consideration, in turn, readies the way for me to complete my third objective in the final chapter: grounding the narrative of social revolution through technology as a cultural legacy that has passed through generations and draws on quintessentially American attitudes and practice. While my concluding chapter focuses in etic terms on the limitations of the community form in realizing such social change, my focus here is on "tensions" immanent in Cyborganic's entrepreneurial and utopian images, narratives, and practices, by which

I mean phenomena experienced and reported from an emic perspective. Talk of limitations in the final chapter engages theoretical questions of social morphology and social action. Talk of tensions in this one engages ethnographic evidence of the paradoxes and complexities entailed in Cyborganic's project for life. Discussion of these tensions is organized around three themes, or provisional angles of analysis: (1) working time; (2) status and status group; (3) modes of allocation and mechanisms of social order.

Working Time

Cyborganic was a project for life in a social order dominated by work. This, I would argue, was the most basic paradox of its entrepreneurial-utopian hybrid. Many researchers have observed that high-technology product-cycles and work practices compress temporal experience (e.g. Barley 1988; Harvey 1990). In this context, the logic of work spills over into other realms; "life is colonized by work and technology…boundaries between home and work blur; and the self becomes another project to be streamlined" (Davidson 2004:187). This view and my theme of "working time" draw on the work of J.A. English-Lueck who, in a rich ethnography of Silicon Valley culture (2002), develops "compressing," the use of "digital technologies to shape space and time," as a central theme. In doing so, she articulates several points about middle-class families in "the Valley" that apply to my Cyborganic informants as well. The first is that the pace of life in technopoles is tied to the increasingly rapid product development cycles of information technologies.

In high-technology work the networks are maintained not only across space but also within time…Products are born, developed, and pushed to market in increasingly short time frames. Noel, a software engineer, speaks of the luxury of the old days, when a product cycle might have taken five years…the devices he designs are increasingly complex…Despite this increased complexity, the time frame for the product cycle is relatively short…That is, eighteen months for a new product, with a novel design…Each product cycle consists of a whirlwind of activity. Diverse players—computer scientists, various different engineers, technicians, machinists, prototypers, tech writers, marketers, and support staff—all work at different paces…

The daily rhythm of work is dictated by "fire fighting"—managing problems that must be solved immediately and are usually somebody else's fault—and squeezing in progress on one's own product. (English-Lueck 2002:55-56)

English-Lueck's Silicon Valley informant, Noel, works with routers (devices that direct traffic on data networks) and refers to an 18-month cycle from design to launch of a new product. For my Cyborganic informants working in SOMA's Web publishing industry in the mid-1990s, an 18-month production schedule would have been inconceivably long. Most did not work a single job for that length of time, let alone on a single product or project. Among these workers, it was common to speak of a "Web year" as being about 3 months long. The term refers to the time it takes Internet technology to develop as much as technology in another context might develop in a calendar year. In common practice, however, it was used most frequently to speak of the experience of this rapid pace of development: for example, the sense of time passing; experiences accruing; technologies, styles, and skills obsolescing at a rate greater than calendrical time.

As English-Leuck observes, one of the "unintended consequences" of yoking "the daily rhythm of work" to product development cycles in technology-intensive industries, is that the pace and logic of work tend to spill out over the rest of life.

> Everyday life in Silicon Valley becomes transformed into a series of projects, and the underlying logic of outsourcing extends beyond the workplace into family and civic life. As people push harder to meet the obligations of "work-work" and the commitments of "life-work," even changing the oil in the car oneself, or shining one's own shoes, becomes impossible. …
>
> This colonization of life by work has been remarked on by many. But it is more subtle than merely answering an e-mail or writing a report at home. Financial management, household maintenance, and continuing education take on aspects of work. Just as a tech writer learns new multimedia specifications in order to develop a CD-ROM manual, parents seek out skills for managing "difficult toddlers." Knowledge workers seek out courses for how to work with people they dislike, or learn Italian to prepare for the next vacation. (English-Lueck 2002: 58, 67)

The insights English-Lueck presents of everyday life in Silicon Valley "transformed into a series of projects" that entail both "work-work" and "life-work" are well suited to my informants and the Cyborganic case. Everybody had many kinds of work. Cyborganics not only labored for pay ("work-work"), "schmoozed" (an emic term for professional networking), and performed the domestic and personal "life-work" that English-Lueck describes (household maintenance, self-learning), they also undertook a variety of entrepreneurial, creative, and communitarian projects (e.g. Cyborganic, Salon Medusa, Tibet websites) in "their own" time.

The figure of the "day job" looms large in the history of the Cyborganic project in chapter 4, as it did in the lives of many members of the community. The

term "day job" points indexically to night work, generally on artistic projects (e.g.

self-publishing) and start-up companies, but also on ventures such as Haig's many

Tibet-related Internet initiatives. The context for this ceaseless activity during the

dot-com era was not a lack of paid employment, but quite the opposite, as my

informants describe.

> I think it's really easy in Silicon Valley/San Francisco area to kind of just work ridiculous hours all the time. I know from working at other companies that 60-hour weeks are not uncommon with other companies, *now* it's like 80-hour weeks are not uncommon, or even more and, you know, if you're giving up that much of your personal life, there better be some pay back, not just in the long term, but even in the short term in terms of where you lose that community time, that social experience, that you're giving up. There still *has* to be a component of their lives which fulfills that socialization need and I think there's a great amount of *power* in being able to tie that into a work environment. (Dave McClure, interview, October 7, 1996)

> It was crazy—so much money floating around and so many amazing projects outside of industry, so many intelligent and creative people working on their own dreams. I hear SOMA is a ghost town now. Glad I was out of the country when it all came crashing down. I don't miss the insane pre-launch phase of so many start-ups. The summer I built *tibet.org* I also was contracting well over 40 hours a week at E!Online to get that off the ground and also had a side gig working for a VRML browser company, not to mention the Cyborganic education stuff. I think I worked 16 hours a day 6-7 days a week for two months, not to mention living in Oakland and taking BART back and forth. You can only do that kind of thing for so long before your mind and health fail. (Dan Haig, questionnaire response, September 15, 2004)

In this milieu of 60- to 80-hour work weeks[22], both the pace and logic of work

extended beyond the workplace into life as a whole—setting the tempo and tone of

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[22] Joke recorded in fieldnotes: "I'm self-employed which means I can work any 80-hours a week I want." (Ian McFarland, personal communication, March 9, 1996)

social interaction; and creating conditions that supported the pursuit of projects for life, yet simultaneously subverted their human-scale aims.

In addition to the toll on physical and mental health and the issues of sustainability that Haig raises, the extension of work time and work rationalities to all domains posed other paradoxes for Cyborganic's project of turning entrepreneurial practices and imaginaries to utopian, human ends. Work mediated life, by which I mean the extension of its pace and logic imposed constraints (on self and social interaction) that were at once material and socio-cultural. Material constraints included the limits of the human body and physics more generally, in that even knowledge work takes place in time, only so much can be done in a day. During the Web boom, both limits were regularly tested by Cyborganics and often "overclocked."[23] Cultural constraints entailed porting entrepreneurial values and practices—efficiency, multi-tasking, directness, conciseness, and rational activity[24]—to most practices of communication. These included: (a) norms of participation on the mailing list: in an "attention economy" people were expected to deliver high "signal to noise ratios" and were "flamed" for sending "off-topic" posts, or wasting other people's time in some way; (b) new genres of micro-communication

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[23] Overclocking means operating a processor (CPU or other digital logic device) at a rate higher than that for which it was designed.

[24] "Continuous rational activity of a specified kind will be called an enterprise… The concept of the enterprise covers business conducted by political and ecclesiastic organizations as well as by voluntary associations in so far as it has rational continuity" (Weber 1978:52).

(e.g., the bite-sized messaging described in chapter 5); and (c) aesthetic values of formalism, brevity, newness, and regularity (e.g. the 54-word stories, "prose sushi," and ideal of updating websites with something new every day). In addition to being antithetical to the human-scale ends of a project to defend life against the world-economic orders that structure product cycles, the spillage of "working time" over life as a whole contributed in a variety of ways to the other tensions I describe below between Cyborganic's entrepreneurial and utopian dimensions.

Status and Status Groups

Status, in Weber's terms, is "an effective claim to social esteem…typically founded on a) a style of life, hence b) formal education, which many be α) empirical training, or β) rational instruction, and the corresponding forms of behavior" (1978:305-6). Cyborganic was a status group within a larger status group of geeks who rose to prominence along with the Internet on the basis of technical knowledge, occupational prestige, and style of life. Though without the wealth and status of the baby boomer "digerati" (e.g., John Perry Barlow, Steward Brand, Mitch Kapor, Ester Dyson), Cyborganics were connected to this elite through Stanford, the WELL, Apple Computer, *Wired*, and *Hotwired*. Besides entrée to jobs, projects, and the latest industry developments, this status entailed privileges such as free passes to events (conventions, conferences) and inclusion on guest lists for corporate parties. *Wired* parties were notable for their rituals of status, often with "A-list," "B-list," and "C-list" invitees admitted to events at successive intervals, and long lines of people

awaiting entry (as at popular urban clubs). I refer to this phenomenon among the Cyborganics as geek, or "technorati," status to distinguish Web geeks, who were on the whole a generation younger, from the "digerati," though both words are similarly coined from "literati" to connote a cultural elite based on mastery of a particular media.

Geek status was of value to Cyborganic's communitarian project in attracting volunteers as well as media attention,[25] which further bolstered the group's prestige and membership. In this sense, the rise of the geeks story ("revenge of the nerds") that was a fixture of 1990s popular culture might have advanced the project in relation to the outside world. Yet, within the Cyborganic community claims, to "technorati" status were not equally distributed and, thus, distinguished in-groups and supported informal hierarchies that were sometimes at odds with community-building efforts. Space bar, for example, exemplified the in-group, or status clique, in the practice of "toying with newbies in channel one." The practice was sanctioned not only by the participation of Cyborganic staff, but also by those who endured it and became members of the community, via space bar or other channels. Even those who spoke about "getting burned" in the chat curbed personal resentment, expressed embarrassment, or apologized for trespassing, in view of the status of space bar regulars, both in that forum and in the community more generally.

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[25] Cyborganic was featured in *Rolling Stone*, on cable television (CNET, MSNBC), and in the book *Net Voice in the City* (Kaneda 1997) that profiled the San Francisco Net rave community.

In terms of the communitarian project, I see two significant tensions in the fact of geek status as a key differentiator in the community. First, work for Cyborganic had no bearing on it, except in so far as the work itself was accorded geek status (i.e., was technical). This may be one reason growth of Cyborganic's TNDs, mailing list, and media coverage was not accompanied by a sustained increase in volunteers for "non-geek" tasks (cooking, cleaning, accounting, public relations[26]), yet Cyborganic continued to attract volunteer sysadmins a decade after both the community and attention to it had faded. What I point to here is that the group's central practices and imaginaries of status fostered contributions of the *same kinds of labor and skills* fostered by the entrepreneurial milieu, rather than those specifically required by the project for life. The second tension I note is that in-groups and informal hierarchies entail practices of communication, inclusion, and exclusion that often appear opaque, idiosyncratic, unfair, or irrational to those outside them. They, thus, become fault lines in conflicts, but are also the context for breakdowns in communication and trust in which conflicts arise.

Modes of Allocation and Mechanisms of Social Order

In the history of Cyborganic presented in chapter 4, I observed that as the community grew and the business gained momentum in 1995 and 1996, the tensions inherent in its entrepreneurial and communitarian projects became more pronounced.

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[26] There is, of course, a gendered dimension to this division of labor and status, but this was not a subject of my research and is not taken up in this ethnography.

Conflicts emerged around the incorporation of the business and, more broadly, the transition to market relations from the reciprocity and volunteerism of Cyborganic's early phase.

> The dilemma [was] due, in part, to the fact that volunteers have created and sustained the heart and soul of the community which is, in some sense, what the corporation is selling. Feelings of exploitation and resentment about payment, and for what kind of effort, [have] yet to be resolved" (IFTF 1997a:31).

As I described, the decline in TND volunteers shortly after the Cyborganic Corporation moved to Mission Street (SOMA) was associated with these feelings of exploitation and resentment. Kirkland captured the social atmosphere keenly in her e-mail to the TND mailing list initiating discussion of the problem, calling it "a dominant dissatisfaction with TND and what it is seen as representing," and noting "a grumpy apocalyptic taste of brimstone in the air."[27]

Conflict and resentment over compensation also developed around Geek Cereal leading to its discontinuation and, ultimately, to Donaldson's resignation from the company. The geeks who wrote the serial were to have been paid for their work and had signed a contract agreeing that the work itself (i.e. Geek Cereal) would be the Corporation's property. While the start-up had just received a round of funding when Geek Cereal launched in the last quarter of 1996, overhead costs at the new location were high and further promises of investment never materialized. After a year of publication none of Geek Cereal's writers had been paid. Acting

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[27] Jose Kirkland, e-mail to TND mailing list, December 12,1996.

independently, one of them filed a lawsuit against Steuer personally, rather than the Corporation. Notice of the suit was served to Steuer on the playa at Burning Man in September 1997. The event is notable, not simply for its incongruity, but also for the fact that a San Francisco judge subsequently dismissed the case for improper service: the playa is in Nevada and notice must be served in the state in which a suit is filed. Though Geek Cereal's other writers did not take action to pursue payment for their work, Donaldson began talking to Steuer "about letting the Geeks take over their Cereal." These talks "fizzled out" amid "haggling over legalese" and "arguing about intellectual property." In his last post to the serial, Donaldson resigned as Cyborganic's Gardener-in-chief and as Secretary of The Cyborganic Corporation. (Donaldson, *Geek Cereal*, October 24, 1997) [28]

Resentment over contributions made on the basis of Cyborganic's community vision and feelings that it was being subordinated to the goal of raising investor capital had factored in my own departure from the business two years before, as the excerpts below from my e-mail resigning make clear.

> My life at Cyborganic for the last months has been a continuous
> stream of error messages: No route to host. Server not responding.
> Link dead…
>
> Suffice it to say that there is no longer a place for me at Cyborganic. I
> am a community-oriented person, someone who needs human factors,
> someone who needs respect, who needs common decency, and a

[28] After the Cyborganic Corporation filed for bankruptcy its assets were turned over to creditors. However, intellectual property claims for Geek Cereal were not awarded to anyone in the bankruptcy. A copy of the project remains online, hosted by Rocky Mullin, one of the Cereal Geeks, at http://www.sharon.net/gc/.

sense of common purpose to work at *any* job. Certainly I need these to work the hours I have under the conditions I have—stress, verbal abuse, non-payment of wages. It's especially disappointing because such "human factors" are what I thought Cyborganic was about, what differentiated it from other places, like HotWired, AOL, or c|net. This vision of a community service business is certainly what motivated me to join you in the Cyborganic project at the end of 1993, and has been the basis of my tireless efforts since. I thought Cyborganic was a place where people actually mattered. How can we hope for this to be true when the well being of even the principals is not looked after, not tended to, ignored?

…I won't go into the value that I have added to the organization, the value that TND has brought, other than to wonder what Jeff Goodell would have written about [in the *Rolling Stone* article], if not TND. Despite the inaccuracies of his article, the story he tells is centered on this event, the community it draws and the ideals behind it.

I won't go into the value that my work has brought in terms of funding being present for salaries and computer equipment. I may be the humanist in this bunch, but I'm also the person who negotiated the Getty investment. (Jennifer Cool, e-mail to Steuer, January 12, 1996)

What we have here—in my own case, as in that of Geek Cereal and the wider community of TND volunteers—is a failure to communicate about vision, goals, incentives, and rewards, to say nothing of responsibilities and sanctions. That is, the project of creating Cyborganic on an entrepreneurial-communitarian basis was undertaken without identifying and organizing rules of participation within the community. For example, there were no explicit mechanisms to keep track of members' voluntary contributions and thus no system of valuation or recognition beyond TND Dispatches and reputation. Thus, when the business sought to convert to a fee basis the user accounts of members who were not contributing to the project, their methods of determination were unclear to the community as a whole. Moreover, other than free accounts and the stock options issued to Cyborganic

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employees, there were no means of valuing voluntary contributions within the business, either. Despite much deliberative discourse over standards on the Cyborganic mailing list, there was no public discussion over these broader principles of participation, allocation, and reciprocity, and no consensus emerged by which to maintain administrative and regulative order.

In the absence of organized modes of allocation outside the business enterprise, control over and compensation for individual contributions became the key sources of conflict within the project. Yet, allocation and reciprocity were only one aspect of what I here call mechanisms of social order, by which I mean administrative and regulative rules governing social action.

> Rules which govern organized action constitute an administrative order (*Verwaltungordnung*). Rules which govern other kinds of social action and thereby protect the actors' enjoyment of the resulting benefits will be called a regulative order (*Regulierungordnung*). (Weber 1978:51)

The omission of rules governing social action and constituting "administrative and regulative orders" in the Cyborganic community as a whole was not an oversight. It reflects the "culture of freedom," as Castells has called the hacker layer of Internet culture, in which freedom is the "paramount value" (2001:17, 46). Thus, after informal mechanisms such as dialog and complaint discourses were exhausted, Cyborganic members had no formal recourse in conflicts, other than to quit the group (or the particular forum of conflict, e.g., the cc list or space bar), or appeal to State law.

Both the paramountcy of freedom and paradox it posed for Cyborganic's communitarian vision with regard to mechanisms of social order are vividly illustrated in my analysis of the raucous debates, or "flame wars," that characterized the community mailing list throughout its eight-year run from 1995 to 2003. Flame wars were a given on the cc list and, at times, divided the community and caused people to unsubscribe. Yet, they also stimulated intense reflection and discussion about what the mailing list was for, what sort of speech and topics were appropriate, whether a person should be kicked off the list, and under what circumstances. In this way, flame wars served to define and discipline participation on the mailing list and in the community. In general, it was these crises, rather than organized action, that brought questions of list norms and community standards to the fore. It was these crises in the mailing list forum that provided the means for members to articulate, question, and reflect on their practices and imaginaries of community.

Through ethnographic and discourse analysis of the three longest, most contentious flame wars in cc list history,[29] I made two discoveries relevant to my argument here regarding the Cyborganic community's lack of all but the most informal mechanisms of social order. First, in all these major debates, norms of participation on the list itself were the focal issue. Second, I came to appreciate the strength of my informants' commitment to freedom: (a) in their disavowal of formal regulation as "censorship;" and (b) in the staunch refusal of the majority of members

[29] These were "cc conversations" in April 1996; "Same-sex marriage" in June 1996; and "on Michael Thomas and the cc list" in July 1998.

and administrators to expel even the most disputatious person from the list. Before I explain these findings and their relevance, let me present some background on the three flame wars. The first took place in April 1996, addressed the question of what "we are 'supposed to' be talking about on the cc list," and consisted of 30 messages, or posts, from 23 different people. The second started in June 1996 as an argument between two of the list's most outspoken members—Rebecca Eisenberg and Michael Thomas—and continued in a thread of 110 posts from 32 people. Argument centered on Thomas' use of what many regarded as extraordinarily abusive language (some called it "hate speech") and his practice of reposting private responses to his posts back to the public list. The third flame war, which broke out about two years later in July 1998, also focused on Thomas' invective, personal attack, and reposting of messages sent privately to him. But, more crucially, it raised the question of whether, after years of this behavior, it was time to kick Thomas off the list. The debate over whether he, or anyone, should be expelled from the cc list raged over several days in more than a hundred posts from 31 members.

The first pattern I noted in these flame wars is that posts tend to touch only initially, or tangentially, on the subject under debate and to focus, instead, on the way (or place) it was being debated. Whatever the topical tinder that sets them off, they generally focus on meta-discourse about what sort of posts and posting behavior are appropriate, alongside commentary weighing in on the original issue. Indeed, the cascade of "by-stander" commentary is precisely what magnifies arguments into

flame wars, and what made them one of my best ethnographic sources for insight into ideals and prohibitions among list members and the extent to which these were shared. Further, meta-discourse on the list was of three types. Most common were suggestions for managing electronic mail—client-side filters, subject lines, attention management—as techniques to avoid unwanted messages and effectively expel anyone from view as desired. Second were arguments that addressed expectations of list participation and conveyed a view, not simply of the cc list's purpose, but of the community *itself,* the purposes of their collectivity. Finally, when people are embroiled in intense clashes on mailing lists, as Thomas was, their status as group members is usually drawn into question. In extreme crises, the meta-discourse converges on whether they ought to be "booted" (removed) from the list. What I read in the preponderance of meta-discourse in cc list flame wars is the way informal mechanisms of social control (i.e., argument, ridicule, shame, avoidance)—rather than appeal to any administrative or regulative order—served to discipline list participation.

The second discovery that arose from my analysis of cc list flame wars was an intense appreciation for the strength of my informants' disavowal of censorship to the point of refusing to delete anyone from the list. "Eradicated" or "de-rezzed,"[30] were two words used in the debate that convey the sense in which deletion from a

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[30] The term "de-rezz" comes from "de-resolve," meaning "to disappear or dissolve," and was "invented as *fictional* hacker jargon" for the movie *Tron*, "and adopted in the spirit of irony by real hackers years after the fact" (The Jargon File, http://www.catb.org/jargon/html/D/de-rezz.html, accessed August 19, 2008).

mailing list is equivalent to banishment and was discussed with commensurate concern. In studying flame wars on the cc list, I came to see the absence of regulative rules as representing, not an omission, but the paramount value of freedom (and its corollary individualism). What emerged clearly in the third flame war was that the lack of a cc list policy was policy itself. Further, even though the dispute over expulsion resulted in the first statement of a "policy for the cc list" in that forum's history, no one was ever removed from the list and the policy itself, as I will show, was not articulated in terms of communally recognized standards or principles.

Hise, one of Cyborganic's volunteer sysadmins and, thus, a person with the technical permissions to remove others from the list, introduced the question of expelling Thomas when he put the proposition forward for an on-list vote. This drew immediate fire from the volunteer who had been administrating the cc list, Home, stating that he was "the only person who should be making threats about kicking people off" and that he had "no intention of kicking [Mike] or anyone else off this list." In a subsequent e-mail, Home identifies convention and the labor he contributes in maintaining the list as sources of his authority and explains his understanding of the list administrator's role in the community.

> All I actually said was I was the administrator of the list, and that as such, should be responsible for establishing the guidelines of the list, in the same way that you do as host of your conference on the WELL. Cyborganic lacks the background set of policies that the WELL does, so in theory, *Cyborganic list administrators are entirely on their own* in trying to understand the needs of the community that their list is supporting and establishing a working set of posting guidelines accordingly. *It was never explained to me that Cyborganic system*

administrators played a role in that; this is not common practice, as I understand it. I am the system administrator on my own machine, superdeluxe, and in the same way that I would never consider reading another user's email I would never consider dictating list policy to a user hosting a list on my machine. This situation is obviously different; the cc list has been around for a long time and has been maintained by several people before me. (James Home, e-mail to the cc list, August 4, 1998, emphasis added)

The conundrum Home expresses it that, though sysadmins do not usually establish "posting guidelines," because Cyborganic "lack[ed] the background set of policies" and the cc list was not moderated, it fell to him to "try to understand the needs of the community" and support them. When Home came down firmly against kicking anyone off the list, the vote to expel Thomas stood nine in favor, none against, and Home accordingly stated his willingness to relinquish the administrator role if "someone would like to take over that duty." Hise, who initiated the vote to expel Thomas, responded immediately, offering to "take over as list admin."

After Home entered the debate over Thomas on the cc list, speaking authoritatively in his role as administrator, there was a chorus of support for his move to stop the voting, opposition to kicking anyone off the list, and assertion that flame wars over Thomas were "part of Cyborganic history." Though voting ceased, the discussion of underlying issues continued for days. Discourse focused on whether the imposition of any sort of standard for participation was, at one end, tantamount to censorship or living in a racially segregated, "gated community;" or, on the other, necessary to the very notion of community itself. No consensus was

reached. Debate only intensified after Hise, in his new role as cc list administrator,

posted the list's first official statement of policy, excerpted below.

> Ok, this is going to be the list policy that gets sent out to all new
> subscribers. If anyone has problems with it, let's discuss it, but I think
> it's very fair. Please note the last paragraph. It is in force, as of now.
> …
> Controversy and debate are welcome and encouraged on this list, but
> personal attacks on individuals or groups, hate speech, and other
> socially inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated. The list
> moderator and the owners of the machine on which this list is hosted
> reserve the right to remove anyone from the list at any time. Such
> removal will be announced to the list membership. (Steev Hise, e-
> mail to the cc list, July 30, 1998)

This is essentially the same rule by which Home had operated: the list administrator

establishes the rules. The departure lies in having a formally articulated policy.

Rather than set a community standard, the policy reserved the right to regulate

"socially appropriate" behavior for "the list moderator and the owners of the

machine" hosting the list. Though the message came from Hise (who uses the

pronoun "I"), Steuer's signature block (identifying and contact information

automatically appended at bottom of e-mail messages) appeared at the end of it.

Whether this inclusion was intentional, or a mistake from cutting and pasting, it

implies that Hise sent the policy statement to Steuer for his approval before posting it

to the cc list.

What is anthropologically interesting in this flame war and the policy it

produced is what it reveals about Cyborganic's mechanisms of social order. In the

conflict between systems administrators, Hise appealed to democratic legitimacy and

procedure in calling for a vote, while Home drew on his authority as list

administrator and knowledge of the community. Neither one, however, had any

ultimate authority over the cc list. Both the Cyborganic domain name and the

machine that hosted the list were Steuer's personal property and it was he who

authorized Home and Hise to serve as volunteer administrators. Steuer's approval of

the new list policy is implied by the presence of his signature on its announcement.

However, though he sent messages to the cc list on other subjects during this flame

war, Steuer never joined the public discussion about expelling Thomas. My reading

of this is that, while Steuer's authority over the list was both de facto and de juro (i.e.

legitimated by law), given the culture of freedom the very fact of this power requires

him to be especially "hands-off" about exercising it in the community. He must not

act like "the man" and must distance himself from even the appearance of

authoritarianism in community matters, not despite, but *because of* his ownership of

the machine and overall leadership of the Cyborganic project. As my analysis of cc

list flame wars indicates, Cyborganic's lack of rules governing social action

("administrative and regulative orders") was not an omission, but an articulation of

individual freedom as the paramount cultural value. However, as many vehemently

argued in these flame wars, granting priority to this value over all others makes it

difficult to "protect the actors' enjoyment of the resulting benefits" of their collective

action (Weber 1978:51). In conditions where it was challenging to establish any

regulative order on the mailing list—the only community forum that afforded public,

deliberative discussion—the difficulties involved in developing clear and common

principles for Cyborganic's community project become apparent. In this context, constrained by time pressures and concern for status, it would have been exceedingly difficult for members of the community to work out thorny issues of valuation and allocation and find innovative ways of bridging the gap between Cyborganic's entrepreneurial and communitarian projects. Given that the projects were, as I have argued throughout this ethnography, symbiotic and mutually defined, these were significant problems. The community's consensus against rules and policies, and preference for individual mechanisms of social control that were either (a) technical, such as filters, or (b) informal, such as public discourse and criticism, expresses the central paradox of Cyborganic's project for life. In an environment where life was mediated by work, community and business were symbiotic, and freedom a priority, it was clearly pragmatic to avoid unnecessary rules and the "administrative overhead" required to establish them. The paradox is that this leaves no basis, no place, for establishing protocols for community participation, let alone for the more utopian aspects of Cyborganic's project for life.

The same paradox, or gap, appears many times in my field study of geek community mailing lists, illustrating time and again a preference for technical rule (i.e., using filters or unsubscribing) or closing a community forum altogether over ejecting anyone by fiat, or establishing guidelines for posting. For example, Moseley, who ran the Maz server and "pals" mailing list for many years, reported that because everybody told someone else about the list, it was impossible for him to control

subscription. Twice he had found the list so large and unmanageable—"too much

noise, not enough signal"[31]—that he decided to close it down. This case repeats

another pattern both basic and paradoxical, namely that these community forums are

invariably hosted on machines that are the private property of individual men. While

custom and culture constrain the mechanisms of social order available to them, they

are ultimately the only owners of these mailing lists whose legitimacy is sanctioned

by the State. In these conditions, the options tend to be rather binary. People are

either expelled or not, but guidelines for participation do not emerge. Mailing lists

either survive without such explicit guidance, or are shut down. All the bandwidth

collectives and community mailing lists encountered in my field research were or are

run on machines owned by individual men. In this regard, they share a common

structure and character of personal power that I liken to "big-man" authority, a

concept drawn from Marshall Sahlins (1963).

Sahlins distinguishes the Melanesian "big-man" from the Polynesian chief as

political types, first by noting that while Melanesia and Polynesia have similar

economic bases, societies in these regions differ markedly in "scale, structure and

performance" (against Colonial incursions):

> a survey of Melanesian…societies [concluded] that ordered,
> independent political bodies in the region typically include seventy to
> three hundred persons; more recent work in the New Guinea
> Highlands suggests political groupings of up to a thousand,
> occasionally a few thousand, people. But in Polynesia sovereignties of

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[31] Brian Moseley, personal communication, March 15, 2008.

two thousand or three thousand are run-of-the-mill, and the most
advanced chiefdoms, as in Tonga or Hawaii, might claim ten
thousand, even tens of thousands. Varying step by step with such
differences in size of the polity are differences in territorial extent:
from a few square miles in western Melanesia to tens or even
hundreds of square miles in Polynesia….

So instead of the Melanesian scheme of small, separate, and equal
political blocs, the Polynesian polity is an extensive pyramid of
[ranked lineages] capped by the family and following of a paramount
chief…

Here is another criterion of Polynesian political advance:
historical performance. Almost all of the native peoples of the South
Pacific were brought up against intense European cultural pressure….
Yet only the Hawaiians, Tahitians, Tongans, and to a lesser extent the
Fijians, successfully defended themselves by evolving countervailing,
native-controlled states. (Sahlins 1963:287-88)

Sahlins draws from these "grand differences…a more personal contrast" between

two types of leader-figure, the big-man and the chief (1963:288). While chiefs have

many formal mechanisms of social order, big-man isn't so much a

political title…[as] an acknowledged standing in interpersonal
relations…a cluster of followers gathered about an influential pivot. It
socially implies the division of the tribe into political in-groups
dominated by outstanding personalities…what the big-man is doing:
amassing a 'fund of power.' (Sahlins 1963:289-92)

The comparison I make between the kind of social organizations that form around

Melanesian big-men and bandwidth collectives is structural, not an argument that

Cyborganic was a tribe. Yet the similarities are suggestive and point to my argument

in the next chapter about the limitations of communities like Cyborganic in effecting

the type of social change their communitarian projects aim to realize.

In this field—of work-work and life-work, complex negotiations of status,

and other constraints on establishing new mechanisms of social order—the tensions

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between Cyborganic's entrepreneurial and utopian practices and imaginaries emerge, not as superficial phenomena, but as structuring forces that produced a number of gaps and paradoxes in the project. Reflecting on these tensions in 2004, Haig explained one paradox in response to the question: "Can you say anything about the community/corporation dynamic?"

> Ah, well, that's the crux of the biscuit isn't it? The community outlasted the corporation, and it still exists in a very skeletal tattered form it seems to me. Cyborganic as group identifier is largely extinct, but from my own involvement on the tech list I know Cyborganic still exists. It seemed to me that all those people started out as raver friends and as they got older and the thrill started to wear a little thin Cyborganic provided a focus for continued fun and creativity and a wee bit of sobriety out of the bargain, insofar as they tried to make a bloody corporation out of a pack of friends and their talents. So in that sense, the Cyborganic Community lived on far longer than those group friendships might have without that drive to create the Corporation. On the other hand, the drive to create the Corporation damaged or destroyed many of the individual friendships. (Dan Haig, questionnaire response, September 15, 2004)

Constraints, tensions, paradoxes and all, Cyborganic's cultural commune and the many individually led projects for life it supported and seeded, testify to both the defensive and creative powers of community. The mutually constructive and conflicting relationship between commerce and community that Turner observed for the WELL, and that I have reported in the case of Cyborganic, are also reflected in the characterization Castells gives of urban social movements as "symptoms of our own contradictions, and therefore potentially capable of superseding these contradictions" (1997:61). Though the scale and terms in which these movements address the issues of our time are not "adequate to the task," and though they are

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based in resistance, they nonetheless "produce new historical meaning…by nurturing

the embryos of tomorrow's social movements within the local utopias" they

construct (Castells 1997:61).