

Power in the Slipstream: Blurring the Geo-Spatial and the Virtual

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The democratizing impact of the Internet and the range of communication fronts and fissures it creates represent both optimistic and pessimistic developments. Critics typically line up in opposing teams on this question: one side promotes the collaboration possibilities, enhanced vertical and horizontal communication opportunities, crowd sourcing joys and new modes of community afforded by the all of the Internet's applications, while the other side grouses about surveillance, manipulation, the vacuity of online discourse, the absent sense of political deliberation, the ongoing digital divide, and the displacement of meaningful interpersonal relationships and face-to-face endeavors by online interactions.

Attempting to discuss the impact of technologies in entirely white or black terms misleads us and deflects attention away from where it needs to focus: on our all too human institutions and values. The blurring of possibilities that occur in virtual worlds and in virtual transactions with those that occur in physical sites with physical communities is now a fact. The two domains are entwined. Our systems of governance and control therefore need to construct the institutions - be they focused on copyright, political deliberation, reporting - that espouse fundamental values and principles so that we focus less on the nuances of specific technologies and more on achieving shared social goals.