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Thursday, August 17, 2006

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Dave Hughes (2): Heddy Lamar and spread spectrum

Notes

posted by J. @ **11:15 AM**   **0 comments** ✉️

Monday, February 06, 2006

Dave Hughes (1): BBS, Democracy and Rogers Bar

(in progress)

JW comment

My first posting to Historia concerned Eluned Hurn's pioneering BBS, proto-

Internet, cybercafe activities at the Honey Cafe, Brecon (-Bronllys, to be precise), Wales.

The Honey Cafe cybercafe had been remembered excitedly by two friends (RA and DS) in conversation recently, with that deep sense of respect held for a real pioneer who, engaged with solving a practical problem, had found themselves at the frontier.

On hunting out the 1996 Wired Magazine article on the Honey Cafe that RA had mentioned in our conversation, it struck me how relevant to today's agenda still was Eluned's focus on the communications needs of rural communities. (add)

I was conscious also of the Welsh-internationalist dimension, how emerging-technologies-and-counter-culture-California-style were translated into a Welsh, rural and peace-activist (counter- Cold War) context. Cymru-Californacation, cyberculture-style.

When my friends had mentioned Eluned's pioneering cybercafe activities, I had responded by mentioning Dave Hughes' Rogers Bar BBS/cybercafe pioneering in Colorado Springs (or Old Colorado City, to be precise). And how Japanese tourists would roll up in the city seeking out "the Cursor Cowboy" and Rogers Bar many years later, long after it had gone.

When I set up Historia I knew that my first posting would be the Honey Cafe, followed by a second post on Rogers Bar. Both exemplary cases of social vision leading to technology pioneering (and not the other way around).

Over the weekend I e-mailed Dave Hughes to say I'd started this blog, knowing his memory would be fired by Eluned's BBS activities. "Those were the REAL pioneering days", Dave replied in an e-mail full of significant tech-head details and, responding to my brief reference to "ricochet radios", a full confirmation of the breakthrough role of the Ricochet wireless modem.

And sure enough, Dave's reply soon had my own historical imagination fired. Just as in reading the Wired magazine article on Eluned's activities, so in reading Dave's words I reflected on how a certain clarity of focus and achievement on the ground were lost in today's more highly evolved- and chaotic- "Broadband" environment. Pioneering, harsher climates and clarity of vision go hand in hand of course.

I will probably end up having to compile a list of Dave Hughes links- which will be no small task, so prolific have his activities been, from early BBS to spread-spectrum radio to Mt Everest Wi-Fi pioneering. And I guess at some point it will be appropriate to add to public record something of Dave Hughes' advocacy of licence-exempt wireless as a first mile broadband solution for rural communities in Wales, following my partnering up with Dave in 2000.

Both Eluned and Dave shared a vision for the democratic and peaceable role of community-based, digital, networked communications. Mavericks both, shunning retirement years and the role of a settled grand-parent, for what must to close family have looked like a second youth and quite possibly embarassed the younger generation as the generational stereotype of radicalism was reversed.

Maverick-ism is a real American sport and our American Infantry Colonel

does not disappoint, turning his back on further military honours to retire early, moving to the wrong side of the tracks, and enlisting himself into a deep-insertion into community regeneration and grassroots telecoms; tho to be sure it was less a certain little red book than the intellectual troika of Schumacher, McCluhan and Toffler that informed the vision.

The year 1982 emerges as something of a moment of conjuncture in matters BBS, linking the BBS activities of Eluned Hurn at the Honey Tree BBS, Bronllys and the BBS activities of Dave Hughes' distance learning Colorado-Boston-Alaska connection via The Source. Perhaps there's also a link in the Tex-Mex food (I have fond memories of Old Colorado City XXX). I also notice that 1982 figures in the annals of Internet sociologist and frontiersman Howard Rheingold, "I first ran into Dave Hughes during my first session online to the Source in 1982-1983" (see [3] below).

We may use Brecon as a link to imaginatively bridge the worlds of Eluned Hurn in Bronllys, in the shadow of the Brecon Beacons, and Patriotic Welsh-American Dave Hughes, in the shadow of Pikes Peake, Colorado Springs (- or should I say Old Colorado City; tho to be sure Dave was brought up on the famly's Colorado ranch). For relating his Everest trip, Dave excitedly informed me,

> "and guess what, when I did my Everest site survey and studied the map of Everest, I recognised the Welsh place names- the cwms and so on- and I quickly drew the link that Sir George Everest had come from Brecon!" (my paraphrase)

Sources

By way of introduction to the pioneering, true-Western melodrama that is Dave Hughes, "The Cursor Cowboy", I begin with the following documentary sources- from the ricochet modem in Rogers Bar, to America's most celebrated online figure "the Cursor Cowboy", to Colorado Springs' Tom Paine of the BBS, to a Maverick who was honoured with the West Point Distinguished Graduate Award:

[1] Dave Hughes' BBS and "Ricochet modems" article in Wired Magazine
"I'm thrilled with my Ricochets. They're the technology of freedom".

[2] The celebrated "Cursor Cowboy" article, also in Wired

[3] Howard Rheingold's Chapter from The Virtual Community
(Homesteaders on the Electronic Frontier)

"Ben Franklin would have been the first owner of an Apple computer. Thomas Jefferson would have written the Declaration of Independence on an IBM PC. But Tom Paine would have published Common Sense on a computer bulletin board," Dave Hughes insists. If you want to talk about grassroots activism, Hughes is a good place to start. He's an old infantryman: you don't always wait for headquarters to give you permission to cobble something together in the real world; if it might save your ass, you just do it.

[4] Biography and testimonials for David Ralph Hughes, prepared for the

West Point Distinguished Graduate Award

[1] Dave Hughes' BBS and "Ricochet modems" article in Wired Magazine, "Unplugged and Online"
I'm thrilled with my Ricochets. They're the technology of freedom.

Wired Magazine

Issue 3.01 | Jan 1995

Street Cred series

Unplugged and Online

By Dave Hughes

I gave a pair of Metricom's revolutionary small Ricochet wireless modems the acid test the night they arrived. Putting one on a serial port of our Internet service in place of a dialup modem, I walked down the street about 600 feet to my local hangout, Rogers Bar, plugged the other battery-powered unit into my laptop computer serial port, and voilà! I was online, wireless, as fast as the serial port on my laptop could go. If I had high-speed ports, the Ricochet could have sustained 77Kbps throughput - faster than a 56Kbps dedicated circuit.

Metricom's development of a family of wireless modems, which operate in the no-license 902-928 MHz range, are the first real end-user products of their type in the world. In Cupertino, California, Ricochet modems can be rented at a monthly rate of US$20, with flat-fee service at $10-$30 to connect to Metricom's citywide "mesh" of pole-top modems. The result is seamless, wireless Net service. Metricom also sells the Ricochet modems separately at $495 each.

Ricochets "peer" with other units as pairs or in a local "StarMode" network. They even include point-to-point protocol (PPP).

But these are no digital cellular phones. Ricochet's wireless modems operate over "free spectrum": local digital-radio communications set aside by the FCC for low-power devices. If you choose to set up independent Ricochet networks, there is no cost for communications between modems.

Ricochets are tiny to boot - less than 8 inches long, 2 inches wide, and an inch deep. Almost half of the body is taken up by a six-hour battery. In addition, there is a small 9-volt, DC-output wall transformer with typical power plug and 6 feet of cord. And you can order them with either a 9-pin PC or Mac Din serial cable. Plug and play.

With 4-inch omnidirectional rubber-duck antennae, Ricochets have a range of about 1,500 feet. (Limited range is the trade-off for the free spectrum, 1-watt modems.) But if you slap on some Yagi antennae, it is technically possible to give them much greater range. In fact, some 1-watt spread-spectrum setups have operated over 20 miles' line of sight!

I'm thrilled with my Ricochets. They're the technology of freedom.

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http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.01/streetcred.html?pg=3

[2] The celebrated "Cursor Cowboy" article, also in Wired

[3] Howard Rheingold's Chapter from The Virtual Community
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Thomas Jefferson would have written the Declaration of Independence on
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just do it.

Available online at rheingold.com **here**

Chapter Nine: Electronic Frontiers and Online Activists

Chapter Nine: Electronic Frontiers and Online Activists

"Ben Franklin would have been the first owner of an Apple computer.
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grassroots activism, Hughes is a good place to start. He's an old
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to cobble something together in the real world; if it might save your ass, you
just do it.

Since he retired from the military and decided to use technology to change
the world, Hughes has been acting out an ongoing online melodrama of his
own devising. The scenario: Hughes rides into town--and "town" can be an
actual small town on the prairie, or a hearing room on Capitol Hill, or the
political structure of his hometown, Colorado Springs. He meets the locals,
who are frustrated by the old ways of doing things. Hughes takes out his
laptop, plugs it into the nearest telephone, reveals the scope and power of
the Net, and enlightens the crowd. He tempts them into putting their hands
on the keyboard, and they're hooked. When Hughes rides out of town, the
town is on the Net.

Installments of Dave Hughes's stories of electronic political pioneering in America have proliferated by way of his online proclamations, manifestos, and seminars on a dozen different public-access CMC networks for more than a decade. Dave's modus operandi is straightforward and uncomplicated: First he brags shamelessly about what he is going to do, then he does it, and then he shows everyone else how to duplicate his feats. Then he brags shamelessly some more. If you want the hard information about how to put your own system together, you have to listen to his stories.

I first ran into Dave Hughes during my first session online to the Source in 1982-1983. I saved his 1983 self-introduction to the online world because I had a hunch this electronic vanity publishing business might be important some day:

Hello.

I am "Sourcevoid" Dave. Dave Hughes otherwise.

I was born in Colorado, descended from stubborn Welshmen who were never too loyal to the king, which is probably why I am content being a maverick of sorts, with a Welsh imagination.

I live in Historic Old Colorado City at the base of 14, 114 foot Pike's Peak.

I work out of my 1894 Electronic Cottage with a variety of microcomputer and telecommunications tools. . . .

I am a happily married middle-aged family man who has seen enough of Big Government, Big Wars, Big Industry, Big Political Causes--either of the left or right--to now prefer to operate a small business out of a small house, in a small neighborhood, working with small organizations, using a small computer to make it all possible.

Hughes is a believer in teleports--communities like his own, where people can enjoy a small-town atmosphere and work from their homes by using computers and modems. When it looked as if the Colorado Springs city council was going to make a decision that would effectively prohibit telecommuting from his home in nearby Old Colorado City, Hughes went into action.

"The city planners of Colorado Springs decided to tighten the ordinance that regulates working out of the home," Hughes recalls. "I was the only person to stand up in front of the planning commission and testify against the ordinance; the planners tabled the matter for thirty days. I then brought the text of the ordinance home with me and put it on my BBS."

Hughes sent letters to the editors of his two local papers, inviting people to dial into his BBS and read the ordinance. Two hundred and fifty callers above the normal traffic level for his BBS called within the next ten days. What Hughes did not realize at the time was that many of those callers worked in large high-tech plants, and they downloaded, printed, copied, and circulated hundreds of copies of the ordinance throughout the city. At the next city council meeting, more than 175 citizens, representing every part of the political spectrum, showed up to protest the ordinance. It was defeated. Hughes pointed out that "ordinarily, the effort needed to get involved with local politics is enormous. But the economy of effort that computers

provided made it possible for me to mobilize opinion."

Hughes made his next foray into online activism in Colorado Springs because he wanted to find a way of letting local vendors air their complaints that they had been shut out of bidding on the county computer contract for fourteen years. The press dialed in to Hughes's BBS, asked questions online, and confronted the county commissioners with the complaints and the facts they had compiled.

"It got so hot that county staff members were reading from BBS printouts at the podium during formal meetings," Hughes recalled when I interviewed him in 1988. "In the end," he added, "the commissioners knuckled under, went to bid, the whole inefficient and incestuous system was exposed, and today there is a whole new approach to information management in the county."

For his next venture into BBS politics, Hughes invited a candidate for city council to post his views on Hughes's BBS and to respond to questions from voters. The candidate was elected, and the councilman continued to use the BBS to communicate with his constituents during his tenure on the council.

Dave tries a lot of things, and when something works, he pushes the pedal to the metal. Next, he prodded Colorado Springs to create a City Council Telecommunications Policy Advisory Committee, which does its business on the city's new BBS; the committee is proposing recommendations on how to make elected officials publicly accessible online. Penrose Public Library in Colorado Springs, working with the city, now has City Hall Online, which includes all agendas, announcements, and minutes of meetings. Then Hughes decided to see what he could do for candidates on a countywide scale: "I used my personal computer to dial into the county clerk's computer and download the entire registration list of all the voters in my precinct. Now anyone can dial me and go into the world's first political precinct BBS." Then he told his local branch of the Democratic party that he could put 100 percent of the voters in every one of the 120 precincts of the county on a public BBS. The cost would be nominal, considering that his county normally charges $800 to print out their list.

Big Sky

It isn't hard to imagine the light bulbs going on in their heads when Frank and Reggie Odasz, educators and activists from Montana, came to Hughes in the late 1980s with some ideas about hooking up inexpensive BBS systems in rural Montana schoolhouses, to help overcome the educational isolation of some of the widest open spaces in America. They called their project Big Sky Telegraph. Dave had spent enough time and money in his retirement, learning how to operate the equipment that linked his electronic cottage with his worldwide constituency. He knew how to cobble together BBS systems from the cheapest hardware, and how to get it to work with the telecommunications system. And he was burning to demonstrate how his "great equalizers" could revitalize real communities.

Frank and Reggie Odasz were computer-literate change agents who were eager to use the kind of technology they had encountered on Hughes's own online system to enhance educational resources and other aspects of life in rural Montana. They had in mind practical ways of helping real people with down-to-earth problems, and they also had big dreams. Like Hughes, Frank and Reggie Odasz felt that they had found something more than a

communication tool with CMC. It was, to them, a means of trying to fulfill their hopes of improving their community. It was part of a new way of thinking that technology made possible. CMC technology was the means to the end of enhancing human relationships in a rural area where long distances made traditional face-to-face community-building more difficult. The possibility of using CMC to extend all kinds of Montana citizens' power to build relationships with each other was the feature of virtual communities that drew together the principals of Big Sky Telegraph.

This idea of many-to-many communications as a framework for collective goods is a powerful one that many who are familiar with previous communication revolutions are often slow to grasp. Most people think of mass media as one-to-many media, in which the mass represents a large population of consumers, who pay to be fed information by the few who profit from their control of that information conduit: the broadcast paradigm. For years, educators and political activists have not taken advantage of the power inherent in CMC networks because they failed to take advantage of the power of a many-to-many or network paradigm.

In terms of the high expectations of a microchip revolution in our badly ailing schools, computer education was a failure in the 1980s. One reason dispersal of personal computers to schoolrooms failed to check the deterioration of traditional public education in the media age was that the computers were so often seen as just another channel for transferring knowledge from the teachers to the students (broadcast paradigm) rather than providing an environment in which the students can explore and learn together (network paradigm). Only a very few pioneers in the early 1980s thought of plugging their schoolroom computer into a telephone line, and few could have afforded the online resources available at the time.

To Frank Odasz, CMC wasn't just a shift from the broadcast paradigm of educational technology to a network paradigm, it was a consciousness shift on the part of the people who took to the technology. As he told researcher Willard Uncapher:

It's more a consciousness thing than anything else. And I'm in the business of teaching new ways, new levels of thinking, new levels of intellectual interaction. . . . When I e-mail with Dave, or when I e-mail with you, that is more consciousness than any other single thing. So we are not just computer networking, when you and I share comments back and forth. It's in a context that to me is much more a consciousness thing. It's literally, as I have said tongue in cheek before, working as an electronic analogy for telepathy. I don't even think that's right. I think it's something more. I think, in a sense, it is shared consciousness.

In the 1980s, Frank Odasz and his wife, Reggie, worked in rural Montana as educators who were determined to improve the living conditions for their community by "thinking globally and acting locally," as Buckminster Fuller advised. They were enthusiastic about the educational potential of computer technology, especially the kind of CMC technology they had seen through Chariot, the conferencing system Dave Hughes and his partner Louis Jaffe ran in Old Colorado City as a successor to Dave's original "Rogers' Bar" BBS.

Frank and Reggie Odasz had been looking for ways to use new technologies to improve the communication problems inherent in an area where very small schools are spread out over a large amount of

countryside. Teachers are on their own, without the kind of personal as well as pragmatic support network that is available even in impoverished urban schools. Communication costs are high in that part of the country, and transportation costs are even higher. The Big Hole Valley, part of the territory included in Big Sky Telegraph, has the longest school-bus route in the United States.

When Frank Odasz talked about his hopes for using something like Chariot to encourage resource-sharing among the schools, Dave Hughes pointed out that they were already ahead of the game because so many rural schools probably had old computers sitting around from the first failed computer revolution in education, when everybody thought computer literacy was a great idea and many school districts purchased computers. Indeed, they did.

In the early 1980s, the only affordable computers were pathetically underpowered compared to what is available today, which severely limited their usefulness. The initial computer literacy grants that purchased the computers, however, usually did not include training and continuing support, so most of the computers were never used. And those teachers who did learn how to use the machines had trouble sifting out the few examples of genuinely useful educational software from the large amount of crap. Many schools abandoned the attempt, but few threw away the old Apple IIs or Ataris or Commodore-64s.

Although none of the old computers in storage rooms all over Montana could hold a candle to the kinds of graphics and simulation that are available on today's computers, Dave Hughes knew that they are all perfectly serviceable terminals for a telecommunications network. You don't need fancy graphics or a color screen to run simple terminal software. Even one-room schoolhouses usually have a telephone line. The modem--the piece of hardware that plugs the PC and the network together--used to cost $500 or more; now they cost $50. So the actual physical infrastructure for most of what Frank and Reggie envisioned for Big Sky Telegraph (BST) was already in place when they got together with Dave Hughes.

Hughes just happened to know the right things to say and used the Net to discover the right people to say it to at U.S. West--the regional telephone company for both Colorado and Montana. Frank and Reggie Odasz knew the where (rural Montana) and the who (schoolteachers, students, local change agents, and ranchers) of Big Sky; the rural teachers they trained to use the technology provided the what; and Dave Hughes came along with the how. They obtained two grants, of approximately $50,000 each, to equip and train rural teachers to communicate with a central BBS and information database.

Students of CMC are fortunate that social scientist Annenberg School of Communications, "Rural Grassroots Telecommunications," reflects the most important aspects of BST: it was a rural, populist effort, rather than an urban, top-down design.

Uncapher went to the Big Hole Valley, in the heart of BST territory, for two weeks, after BST had been operating for a short time. He interviewed the teachers, ranchers, local social activists, Hughes, and Frank and Reggie Odasz. This was not strictly a study of CMC technology, but a study of the social changes that were triggered, or failed to be triggered, by introducing the technology to a largely nontechnological part of American society.

Uncapher declared his intention to observe the impact of CMC technology in the context of the community the technology was entering. His thesis was that you can't predict the way people will use communications technologies without knowing something about the social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances of the specific environments in which the technologies are introduced. Uncapher hypothesized that the skills necessary to use the new technologies and the inspiration to adapt them to new uses would be unevenly distributed in each community. Some groups would lack the skills, some groups would resist the changes, and the reasons for those reactions would be rooted not in technology but in local culture, economics, and politics.

Western Montana offered an interesting mix of people for observations to test such a thesis. There were the teachers, mostly women; the ranchers who supported the schools through taxes, controlled the school board, and were traditionally conservative about newfangled technology; and the students, who were far away from the world's centers of learning. There were also environmental groups, domestic violence support groups, and other nonprofit organizations who might also make good use of CMC, if somebody could show them how. The organization most important to the early success of BST, as it turned out, was the Women's Resource Center in Dillon, where the vital ingredient of a highly motivated population of early adopters was found.

According to Uncapher, Hughes sought to broaden Frank and Reggie Odasz's involvement with the wider community. "While Frank Odasz had come up with the idea, and had apparently discussed it with some of the rural teachers, Dave Hughes sought to involve the broader community in an effort of rural self-development," says Uncapher. "His idea was not to bring specific ideas to the area (other than interactive telecommunications), but to provide an augmented means by which the rural communities could acquire and exchange their own ideas and resources, beginning with the rural teachers. The Big Sky Telegraph represented an extension, thereby, of his own online efforts."

Big Sky Telegraph went online January 1, 1988, at

Teaching computer skills to some of these women was a good idea, Jody Webster, director of the center, noted, for reasons related to their sense of themselves. Could this be an example of the "change in consciousness" that Frank Odasz was trying to describe? Jody Webster, as quoted by Uncapher, put it this way: "Some of it is attitude. All your skills aren't the physical skills, like typing or shoveling. A lot of it is attitudinal skills, communication skills: how to ask for a raise, or how to ask for a job or not to ask for a raise; the fact that you need to sell yourself; the difference between self-esteem and conceit."

Through Big Sky, women across western Montana were given an opportunity to teach and support each other emotionally as well as a way to impart skills. "The Women's Resource Center . . . would get funding, often project by project, primarily to aid the women in the region to get new jobs, to learn new self-esteem, and to protect women and their rights;" Uncapher reported. "In fact, to a great extent the use of the Telegraph took off first in the general community in the hands of women, and the kinds of issues this center addressed revealed why. Indeed, most of the rural teachers were women. . . . When I visited a woman who ran her connection to Big Sky

Telegraph from the Lima Stop 'n Shop gas station, which she and her husband ran near the Idaho border, it turned out that the computer had been loaned to them by the Women's Resource Center."

Frank Odasz, in an article about BST, also mentions the same woman at the truckstop, although he has a slightly different name for the gas station: "Sue Roden, the woman in Lima, was able to learn computer skills from the Gas 'n Snacks truckstop between fillups. When she got stuck on Lesson 2, a trucker named Windy looked over her shoulder and got her going again." You can bet that as soon as Frank told Dave about Sue and Windy, the story started spreading through the Net.

Hughes and Odasz knew enough about the power of citizen-to-citizen (lateral) communications to set up common discussion areas and BBSs as well as databases of information and software. There is power in the broadcast paradigm when you can give people access to large bodies of useful information, such as agricultural and meteorological data that can be critically important in the real lives of Montana rural populations. But the community-building power comes from the living database that the participants create and use together informally as they help each other solve problems, one to one and many to many. The web of human relationships that can grow along with the database is where the potential for cultural and political change can be found.

By 1991, the success of the system enabled BST to meet goals of getting online "forty rural schools, including ten Native American schools, twelve rural public libraries, twelve rural economic development offices or chambers of commerce, twelve women's centers, twelve Soil Conservation Service or County Extension offices, five handicapped organizations, and five rural hospitals," according to Frank Odasz.

Besides the local connections that formed the core and real-life community of BST in western Montana, Hughes and his net-weaving cohorts were plugging places like the Big Hole Valley into the vast rich turmoil of the Net. First, they established a connection with FidoNet, and through FidoNet's gateway, to Internet. Then they looked for ways to take advantage of more direct Internet connections at universities. Dave is the kind of guy who will walk into the county commissioner's office or MIT or the Pentagon and shake down everybody he can find in the cause of an educational crusade. He found a lot of sympathetic Netheads at key power points, as he always does. As he was wiring BST to the world, Dave Hughes also was zeroing in on the kind of distance-education prestigidation he could brag about on the Net: connecting a professor at MIT's Plasma Fusion Laboratory to the BST to develop a course on chaos theory for gifted science students in rural Montana.

After Big Sky was working, and bright kids in Montana were learning physics from MIT professors, Hughes and Frank Odasz started doing demonstrations for another kind of community in that part of the country. Hughes brought a color laptop computer and a modem; all he needed was a telephone line. Hughes has always insisted on including ways for people to create and share graphics as well as text online. He had the notion that the Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, Crow, and Blackfoot who gathered around his computer might be interested in the way the graphics software would enable them to create and transmit text in their native alphabets.

As he had done with the teachers and change agents at BST, Dave

encouraged his audience to get their hands on the equipment as soon as possible and teach each other how to use it. After his performance, Dave turned the computer and software over to the graphic artists among the assembled Native Americans and challenged them to create one of their tribal designs on the computer screen and upload it to BST.

By 1990, one of the groups who were inspired by Hughes's first demonstration had opened the >Native American Share-Art gallery on the Russell Country BBS in Hobson, Montana. The idea was to make people outside the immediate geographic area aware of tribal culture, and to generate income for tribal artists. The artists used graphics software to create tribal designs that could be viewed on a computer screen. People could dial in to Russell Country BBS and view different designs; for a small fee, dial-up BBS users could download the designs and display them.

Their motivation behind these projects, as Hughes explained it online in 1990, was to "use telecommunications to help Native Americans learn the skills and knowledge they will need, by getting them first to be the teachers of the rest of us about their culture, and in their preferred modes (graphic art, storytelling, native language expression) rather than just feed the white man's view of the world into them by satellite educational feeds, or impose upon them only white man's ascii text."

Dave Hughes and Frank Odasz certainly weren't, and never claimed to be, the first to teach Native Americans to use telecommunications. John Mohawk and AInet (American Indian Network), and other ventures by American Indians to use networking, were also happening. But Hughes was a kind of Johnny Appleseed. It's far easier to operate a well-set-up BBS or network than to set one up. Dave's strategy has always been to come to town, dazzle them with possibilities, show them how to do it on their own, and move on.

Although he believed in working at the local level, Hughes, who had once written a major policy speech for Secretary of Defense McNamara, always showed up in online debates on national and international telecom policy. In 1991, when then-senator Albert Gore began talking about government sponsorship of a National Research and Education Network, Dave started spending as much time online in D.C. as in Dillon.

The budget for a National Research and Education Network to link scholars, scientists, government workers, students, and business people into a national high-speed information superhighway was built into the High Performance Computing Act of 1991. There was only one problem, as far as Hughes was concerned: if NREN was going to be a superhighway, there were no on and off ramps for elementary and secondary (K-12) schools. Hughes and others insisted that unless it provided for a truly broad-based educational component, with affordable access by the already-impoverished public schools, NREN could lead to even greater gaps between the information-rich and the information-poor. Dave started haunting hearings on the Hill. He and his cohorts were heard; 1992 amendments to the bill made provisions for the beginnings of K-12 access.

As Dave puts it, in his own inimitable online style:

It's ramp-up time in America, for telecom. And education is going to ride the wave--with all kinds of fools, charlatans, gold-counting houses, clowns, trying to get on their boards.

Its going to be messy. Just like America.

But as they say on Walden Pond.

Surf's up.

Dave Hughes is a formidable spokesman and activist. But he's far from the only one. Online education has been pioneered by Paul Levenson's Connect Ed since 1985, and by Andrew Feenberg and others at the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute before that. Entire networks, such as the Institute for Global Communications, use CMC as a political tool. There are municipalities such as Cleveland, Ohio, and Santa Monica, California, where citizens are using CMC to set the political agenda. And organizations such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation are forming committees in defense of the political freedoms previously enjoyed in cyberspace that now are threatened by powerful political interests.

Source **here**

[4] Biography and testimonials for David Ralph Hughes, prepared for the West Point Distinguished Graduate Award

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(...) Declining to return to Washington DC and the Pentagon, Hughes chose to retire after 23 years commissioned service, and was determined to participate in the coming of the Information Revolution and saw the importance to the US for bottom-up, rather than top (Washington) down societal change. He retired as a colonel with a Legion of Merit award.

A New Direction - Society and Telecommunications

And so Hughes became one of the earliest American pioneers in using microcomputer and modem elecommunications to make local communitites - societies work better economically, socially, politically, and culturally. But he brought the enormous education, military and military-civil experience of West Point and his first 45 years to bear on the problems of society in a troubled and changing country.

Hughes swiftly became known world wide for his pioneering in the use of the new tools, inventing grass roots neighborhood systems that empowered ordinary small business, small organizations, and small and remote towns with global connectivity. Starting in 1977, long before most Americans knew modems and personal computers existed, he was operating, in business for himself, the earliest computer communications service in Colorado Springs.

Roger's Bar - World's First Electronic Democracy

Using the most primitive - by today's standards - personal computing tools, he created the first free, modem dial-up, electronic democracy bulletin-board system in the world. It soon challenged and altered the way local city wide politics was conducted. It was based on his profound understanding of

the part person to group 'communications' played in the uniquely American political process.

It was colorfully named 'Roger's Bar' after a local neighborhood watering hole which is a center of local political discussions. Within 5 years the world's press had beaten a path to Hughes' home to report on, and encourage others to adopt an entirely new model of 'electronic democracy' - a model which could be adopted in any small town in America. The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Germany's Stern Magazine, Japan's Yomura Shimbun newspaper- with 21 million daily readers reported in the early 1980's on his work, which was emulated world wide. The McNeil-Leher News Hour on PBS explored his success. WGBH Boston incorporated his practical innovation into a NOVA national television series. The Electronic Frontier Foundation founded by the greatly successful Lotus spread sheet company founder Mitch Kapor gave him the 1993 Pioneer Award where he shared the dias and recognition with two giants of the computer revolution Vint Cerf, the father of the Internet, and Paul Baran the inventor of packet switching, first used by the Defense Department.

1993's Most Recognized Personality on the Internet

He has been in demand as a keynote speaker and participant in both highly technical and general public policy forums world-wide ever since. Wired Magazine, the avante garde flagship publication of the Information Age called him, in 1993 'The most known personality on the net in the world.' While being a partner in an Internet communications company from 1984, he did large amounts of his work voluntarily, without compensation. And used his publicity as a effective tool to get his message out about 'community networking' long before public interest foundations, or mass media even knew what the term 'internet' meant.

While it was his pioneering that struck people, given his age - over 60 by this time - he was always introduced as a West Point graduate, who had fought the nations wars before blazing new trails on the Electronic Frontier in much the same way as the Army blazed trails in America's move westward.

Community Leadership in Colorado

Hughes used his extensive background to lead, voluntarily for 10 years - 1976 to 1986, the comprehensive and novel revitalization of an entire run down historic neighborhood of Colorado Springs, called 'Old Colorado City.' Using both his technologies and early grasp of the return of the significance of 'small' business to communities long before the idea was popular, and his 'community leadership' skills he is credited for giving business opportunities to hundreds of small business persons, making the run down residential 'westside' of Colorado Springs highly desirable to live in, achieving the goals of the City of Colorado Springs there, and unified the entire project by researching and appealing to its unique History as a frontier town. The project has been cited by the Small Business Administration as one of the most successful implementations of several of their programs, the Governor of the State used it to supportColorado's 'Main Street' project in scores of towns and cities in the later 1970s, and it greatly assisted the then Mayor of Colorado Springs, a 1951 West Point graduate, win for the city the All American City Award. The current Mayor and City Council of Colorado Springs have recently honored Hughes for that, and his pioneering use of computer technology to improve a part of the city, by formally renaming and

marking in Bronze a public right of way in Old Colorado City 'Dave Hughes Cyberpath.'

He has remained involved and influential in City public affairs, and for 20 years has helped build up the Old Colorado City Historical Center, in which the vision of an ex-graduate, the Territorial Governor of Colorado in 1862 helped stop a Confederate effort to capture Colorado Gold during the Civil War. Hughes has educated the public on this little known, but decisive 'Little Gettysburg of the West' episode involving a West Pointer. Hughes has also donated money and expertise so that the History Center has such an impressive, wirelessly connected, web site, that the national television History Channel has named it one of their preferred national sites. Always Hughes accomplishes traditional purposes with novel applications of future technologies, at the lowest possible cost.

Electronic Distance Education Pioneer

During this period Hughes, extremely concerned that American education, particularly early education K-12 in remote and rural areas adapt to the new modes of teaching and learning, focused part of his effort on developing modes of distance education - again decades before it was being practiced by universities. Some scholars credit Hughes with teaching the first college courses in the world via public telecommunications networks.

His landmark 'Electronic English' course for Colorado Technical University in 1983, whose remote students included the Lt. Governor of Alaska, and persons as far away as Australia. His success at this led to it being emulated widely. And in 1990, he was approached by faculty and researchers of MIT who were concerned about the state of education in math and the sciences. In a series of nationally celebrated experiments, teamed up with theoretical physicist Dr. George Johnson of MIT, Hughes designed courses in the Math and Science of Chaos, which were delivered - in one case - to a virtual classroom of 40 high school students scattered from one-room school houses in Montana, through small schools in Cody, Wyoming, to include large schools in Colorado Springs such as Air Academy High. Once again he applied his military-honed ability to go from the most abstract and theoretical application of the new information tools, in the public interests of the US, to the most practical and grass roots uses in the least sophisticated or well endowed places in America. This work culminated in his doing work for the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment on request of then Senator Al Gore's staff on how the Internet could be used to improve the quality and relevance of American Education. And upon the White House staff's urging, Hughes has testified before the Federal Communcation Commission - FCC - on how even newer technologies can be used for more effective education.

Listed in 100 Most Influential of the Computer Age

The most read technical publication in California, Microtimes Magazine named Hughes one of the 100 most influential individuals in the Computer Age, six times between 1990 and 1996.

At least two Doctoral theses have been pursued (Annenberg School of Communications and Nova University) examining Hughes theories of how public interests can be best served by grass roots up digital telecommunications.

Walking Point - Defending the Military on the Well

1984 saw the first appearance of an influential online computer
conferencing service in the Bay Area of California called 'The Well' It was,
and still is, used by up to 10,000 subscribers who can be classed as
extremely liberal, highly Silicon Valley technical, and many of whose
members have been frankly anti-military. They include reporters, editors,
and writers from Time Magazine, the Washington Post, People, US Today,
Newsweek, New York Times, National Public Radio, MSNBC and score of
other regional or national publications and media. Col (R) David Hughes has
been a very high profile guest member of that community since its
beginning. He has been only one of less than 25 members who had serious
military service, much less combat experience, and for 14 years has
engaged this influential sector several times a week in extended debates on
military and foreign policy, the nature of the US Military and what it takes to
maintain readiness, the values and value of West Point and our other
Military Academies and interpretations of high profile military news items
from wars such as Desert Storm and Yugoslavia, and military sex scandals.
In spite of being attacked frequently for his military and West Point
supporting views he has won the respect of thousands of influential
information age citizens for what he represents, and in turn has not only
educated thousands of citizens about the US Military, but challenged in
interactive ways, hundreds of false rumors, tortured dismissals of the US
Military, and poor or simply sensationalist reporting about things military. In
effect Hughes has been, electronically, right in the camp of the highest
concentration of the anti, or ignorant of, military, and carried on the public
information war for the things he holds dear about West Point and honorable
military service.

Early Advocate of Spread Spectrum Radio

In the early 1990's, anticipating the spread of the Internet accross the world,
but having worked with such difficult projects as the connecting up of 114
one-room schoolhouses in rural Montana, where continuous
conmmunications costs done in traditional ways can get prohibitive, he
turned to, and quicky mastered the most advanced form of digital
communications - spread spectrum wireless which had been used since the
early 50's for secure military communications and began to apply it to the
problems of linking very remote communitites and their schools to the
Internet at high speeds at the lowest possible costs.

National Science Foundation Seeks Hughes

The National Science Foundation, since 1984 has called upon Hughes 5
times to accept substantial grants to pioneer the model of wireless
connectivity to the Internet from remote schools, businesses, governments,
and people. This has included assistig the Mongolian government connect
up its institutions in UlaanBataar to the Internet in places that local PTT's
(telephone companies) are totally unable to provide digital connectivity. This
work publicized by MSNBC television has attracted global attention - and
Hughes has been solicited for advice and consultations by representatives
of scores of 3d world countries - Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Uganda,
Venezuela, Mexico, Cambodia, Puerto Rico, and Turkey on how to employ
low cost, solar powered in many cases, secure, and non commercial digital
wireless to connect up places which will never see the wired infrastructure
of the United States.

His $400,000 NSF Project, 'Wireless Field Tests For Education' which assisted both urban, rural, and rural poor schools in Colorado, New Mexico, and Montana between 1995-1999 has been emulated by dozens of states, and the $1.5 Billion Texas Infrastructure Fund designed to assist Texas schools, libraries and health centers become connected has called on him repeatedly to advise them and show applicants for those funds how to use both terrestrial spread spectrum and satellite services to serve at affordable rates the smallest entities in that very large, very rural, state. Much of Hughes work takes him to the places which are avoided by corporate America because there are only high costs and low returns from such places.

Scientific American and the MIT Press have both solicited treatises from him, and both, in April 1998 and May 1999 have published his work.

Wired Magazine - 1 of 25 Most Innovative World Leaders

In 1998 Wired Magazine named Hughes one of the 25 most innovative 'Wired' leaders in the world. He shared that distinction with billionaire George Soros who funded telecommunications in ex-communist countries, and Steve Jobs of Apple Corporation. His citations clearly identified Hughes as a West Point graduate and highly decorated military warrior in his younger years. This has reflected favorably on West Point and its ability to produce, not only leaders, but men who have a sense of 'public interest' apart from 'private interests' (amassing fortunes or building companies via technology) for the betterment of mankind through technology.

Reporters, astounded at how much energy he has shown and just how far his reputation has spread without him being the head of, or backed by any large organization, have helped him calculate just how much he has been 'online' over the past 20 years during the infancy of the Information Age. They calculate he has read over 200 million words online, and produced over 8 million of his own. Which accounts in part for his very wide, and global, influence. And while he is known colorfully as 'The Cursor Cowboy' his reputation is always accompanied by the knowledge that he is a "West Pointer" and exhibits the values it represents.

For 2 years since becoming active in the West Point graduates Web based online 'Forum' he has brought his extensive and unprecedented - among graduates - knowledge of Internet communications to educate and advise both the sponsors of the growing online service to graduates (15,000 of 40,000 living graduates use the service now) on how effective interactive telecommunications can be used to better educate Americans, the Congress, the Press and Media, about West Point and its current importance to the nation. He has directly assisted some graduates, using the online medium. Example - he became a Faculty Advisor to an active duty Major, graduate, attending the Romainian Defense College as he prepared his graduate thesis. But performing this function entirely online over months of time.

Source **here**

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See also:

http://www.west-point.org/academy/dgrad/Quotes.htm as retrieved on 24

Jan 2006 23:39:15 GMT.
"In 1982, Dave Hughes pioneered the first 'distance learning' course in the world online, via The Source.It was at the formal College level, from Colorado Technical University in Colorado Springs.I became one of his online students, from Alaska, so that I could learn how this technology could be used for the education of Alaskans, no matter where they were."

"David Hughes helped me showcase one of the most striking examples of the power of wireless, before an influential gathering of Washington insiders at his 'Emerging Wireless Technologies' conference at George Washington University, in Washington, D.C. in May of 1998. I was able to show government officers from the FCC, Department of Commerce, White House, NSF, and other agencies, how the wireless devices that Dave champions, were deployed in severe Arctic weather condition in Toksook Bay, Alaska a tiny Eskimo village on the Bering Sea. This has resulted in this remotest of Alaska communities being connected to the world of information known as the worldwide web. With Dave's help Project Toksook has been featured in numerous publications including the Outlook section of the Washington Post on August 8, 1998.

"Most recently, Dave is once again helping Alaska, by agreeing, to undertake the support of Alaskan Environmental and Biological Scientists at the University of Alaska to better collect data from some of the most severe weather places on the globe. At 72 years of age Dave will be traveling, into the Alaskan field on power boats, ATVs, snowmobiles, snowshoes, and his own footgear to both deploy advanced data radios and satellite systems- and more importantly - teach everyone in Alaska how to do it for themselves, and their communities...

"I will continue to follow his technical lead, and will publicize his efforts on my weekly statewide television show "Alaska On-Line".Dave Hughes is an outstanding representative of the kind of men West Point produces, and he definitely should be recognized as a Distinguished Graduate!"
Inclosure 30: Email from H.A. "Red" Boucher, former Lt Governor of Alaska

"In the late summer of 1987, when I was first campaigning for elected office, I became acquainted with its electronic counterpart: a computer chat-room called "Rogers Bar' hosted by a local "Westsider" named Dave Hughes.I didn't know him and he didn't know me, but I (along with all the other candidates for City Council) was invited to put my platform "on-line" and to discuss my opinions with anyone who visited the Chat-room. "I won that election by a mere twelve votes, and there is no doubt that "Rogers Bar" and its neutral host, Dave Hughes, had a defining impact in that outcome.

"After taking office I convinced other members that the City Council, City staff and the citizens of our community should be linked electronically (this was Dave's idea) and Colorado Springs became only the second city in the country to allow electronic communications between citizens, staff, and elected officials.The impact this had on decision-making and public policy was tremendous, even affecting a state election!"
Inclosure 22, Letter from Wayne Fisher, Colorado Springs Officeholder

"In the meantime six years earlier in the spring of 1989 I had visited Big Sky Telegraph and his home in Colorado Springs.There he told me for the first

time of his West Point experience and military career.Never having had exposure to the military beyond the two dimensional experience of a John Wayne movie, it made a profound impression on me.I was profoundly disillusioned by a military that seemed to have chosen the wrong side on which to fight in Vietnam.In Roger's Bar and at Hughes dining room table I began to see that instead of an irrational evil, the military in general and West Point in particular was responsible in many ways for the very characteristics about Hughes which I admired.West Point wasn't there just to train men how to break things and kill people.It was there to instill in its graduates the ability to lead their countrymen and to do so always within the context of an innate understanding of how what they were doing furthered the values and beliefs on which our nation was founded.Hughes seems always to have been guided by what is in the public interest and not by what will get him higher rank, a bigger house or a fancier car.

"Hughes' example of being able to focus on and illuminate the public interest and the dedication of his life to those public values make it imperative, that he - a maverick, given the tenor of our times - be recognized with the distinguished graduate award.Traditionally you honor the captains of industry, generals of Armies, pilots of state, and seers of science and I suppose you should.Yet atthis moment you must also demonstrate your own leadership by understanding, how singular, how rare, how special is the character of David Ralph Hughes.The qualities that he possesses and not material goodsand self-interest are the ones needed to fuel the future of our country.You must show the cadet corps and those to come after him that you understand this by making the award and breaking the mold.These are the qualities that are worth dying for and worth a giving a life time of military service for.We go forward rudderless because material success is so plentiful and public values so scarce.You owe it to us all to show by your honoring Dave Hughes that public values are still worthy of pursuit." Inclosure 29: Letter from Dr. Gordon Cook, The COOK Report on the Internet

posted by J. @ **10:00 PM**   **0 comments**   ⧉

Friday, February 03, 2006

1996 How Wired is My Valley/Wired UK/Eluned Hurn/Brecon

Wired UK
F E A T U R E S
Issue 2.06 - June 1996
By Hari Kunzru

You'll already have passed through Bronllys before you've really registered its existence. It's an unremarkable Welsh village: a pub, a post office, a cluster of cottages, a new estate of box-like houses. Only the Honey Cafe, with its gift shop and ample off-road parking, stands out - mainly because of its incongruous sign offering Tex-Mex food. The Honey Cafe is the best place to eat in the area - though, to be fair, there's not much competition - and every evening people will be happily sipping margaritas and tucking into chicken fajitas. But its reputation as a centre of innovation does not depend on the guacamole. The premier eatery of Bronllys has a claim to being

Britain's first cy-bercafe, beating Cyberia and the others not by a few months, but by eleven years. It was wired up in 1983 by its owner, 66-year-old peace activist, community leader and grandmother Eluned Hurn, one of British Internet culture's unsung heroes.

Eluned Hurn, known universally as "Lyn", is a pioneer. She remembers the covered-wagon days of the Net, when communications ran at 300 baud and the online world was a new frontier, rather than the topic of jaded Sunday supplement articles. Like any other old-timer, she can tell stories the young will scarcely credit about what things were like before the railroad came to town. It's not that she looks particularly intrepid. Sitting by the fire with her unruly gaggle of granddaughters, she could be any elderly woman, enjoying a peaceful retirement. But Lyn is not content simply to relive past glories. Apart from my visit and an important meeting about her latest project, the regeneration of the local village of Talgarth, she also has a TV crew coming to film a Welsh-language cyberculture programme, not to mention a number of engagements promoting a local currency scheme she is helping to implement. All this comes on top of a heavy January snowfall, which means that one daughter's family can't get back up the mountain to their farmhouse, and is camping at the cafe until the weather breaks. There will be eleven for supper tonight - and Lyn is in her element.

Lyn's life has turned out the way it has in part due to disasters. "The war was what did it. It seems there's always war in one's youth," she reminisces. "That's what drove me to seek for something better." But it took a more personal tragedy, the premature death of her architect husband, to turn her desire for peace into action. "When you're married, especially if you started out in the '50s, you're expected to be with your husband. For 24 years we had a pretty creative time, but with him dying it released me to think about what I could do on my own." What she decided to do was to work against nuclear war.

In 1982 Lyn was sitting on a bright yellow double-decker bus, parked in London's Victoria Park. It was a grim summer. The cold war was as cold as ever, and the Falklands adventure had left a residue of jingoism in the air. The government's infamous "protect and survive" leaflet advised people to shelter under tables in the event of a nuclear strike. Jets were flying regular practice bombing runs over Bronllys, passing so low over the cafe that Lyn worried they would crash into the roof. At the CND peace festival in Victoria Park everyone feared that war was imminent while hoping desperately that it was not.

The yellow bus was owned by a Buddhist group and had been loaned to Sabine Kurjo, a German-born peace activist and computer expert who had given up a safe job at CERN to promote her own vision of salvation through computing. She was in the park to demonstrate the Internet, a new communications medium which was causing a buzz among peace activists. Rumours were circulating that it had the potential to be truly global, and that it was very difficult to censor, but as yet very few people had any hard information, let alone hands-on experience. Sabine understood the level of ignorance only too well - although the bus was hooked up to a generator, the organisers hadn't thought to get her a phone line. To compound her problems, the rather unreliable vehicle had also broken down. It seemed like she was stuck.

Lyn had turned up to watch the demonstration, since she was "interested in anything that would help people communicate with each other", and the

missing phone line was not going to stop her. Lyn is used to getting things done, a talent she attributes to her years working with a local Guide troop. Within a few minutes, the caterers had been persuaded to lend their phone line for an hour, and a number of people had been drafted to help manoeuvre the bus over to the meal tent. "We actually had to hot-wire it," she chuckles, showing the mixture of pride and amusement with which she faces the ridiculousness of the world.

When they had finally set up a connection, Lyn watched Sabine log on to a conferencing system called the Electronic Information Exchange (EIES). One of the first fully-fledged online conferences - dating back to 1976 and thus preceding Compuserve and The Source by some years - EIES was developed as an experiment by Murray Turoff of the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and it rapidly acquired a community spirit. Its membership resembles a hall of fame, including Whole Earth Catalogue founder Stuart Brand and futurologists Alvin and Heidi Toffler, and many of its members were involved in peace work. It was an obvious first port of call for the Net novices in Victoria Park. To Lyn's amazement, the participants in this particular EIES discussion were American and Russian nuclear scientists. At the height of an arms build-up, with troops on the Polish border and a US president with an itchy trigger finger, here were a bunch of supposedly implacable enemies swapping information and ideas - actually chatting. She couldn't believe what was scrolling down the screen before her.

From that moment Lyn was hooked. But what do you do when you're in rural Wales, it's ten years before Demon will be established and you want to get online ? Well, you go into the sitting room, unplug the kids' Spectrum, get yourself a Prestel modem and set to work. "It came through the post. I read the instructions, fiddled with it for a while, and hey presto - Prestel !" Prestel was Britain's own "videotex" service, a way of receiving data over phone lines using your TV. It was a bit like the French Minitel system, except without the ubiquity - which is why, unlike the French service, Prestel never really caught on. But in 1982 it was the nearest thing to a commercial ISP that Britain possessed. At a time when BT had never heard the word "modem" and most of the Wired staff were pustular teens thwarted in their attempts to go online by sheer technical complexity, Lyn read the instructions, fiddled about and got it done. She still puts it down to the Guides. Soon she had begged or borrowed an Apple IIe and a BBC micro and become a fully-fledged member of Kurjo's NetReach organisation. NetReach was a typical example of Britain's palaeoNet culture. An informal group dedicated to spreading the message of computer networking, it was based on Sabine's "vision of a network of people and computers protecting our planet". NetReach soon became a grass-roots campaigning organisation, spreading the word to groups and communities throughout Britain. Sabine ran the operation from a church in St James's, taking rickety vehicles like the yellow Buddhist bus and a ramshackle caravan round the country on her personal quest to wire the world for peace.

The emphasis on local communities was strong in NetReach, just as it was in EIES, The Well and so many other first-wave networking projects. That suited Lyn Hurn down to the ground. Her Welshness is very important to her. "This is not England," she admonishes me sternly when we first meet. "This is Wales. You have crossed a border." Inevitably, it wasn't very long before the idea of travelling to London for meetings began to rankle. Since she couldn't take the people of Bronllys and Talgarth to England to show them the Net, she decided to bring it to them. And so the wiring of the Honey Cafe began.

The cafe itself is an old malt-house, built in 1885 by David Davies, Lyn's grandfather. He quarried the stone himself and made the bricks from ground clay dug out of the malthouse orchard. Malting finished in 1955, and during the '60s the malthouse basement became the Honey Cavern, Bronllys's very own nightspot and music venue. It was there, under a fading psychedelic mural of the Beatles, that Lyn set up the weekend training sessions which, by hook or by crook, earned the Honey Cafe the title of Britain's first cybercaff. Looking at photos of those early meetings, it all seems a million miles away from the chrome and steel of the fashionable '90s cyberhaunts. Snaps show groups of local people and NetReach volunteers huddled around a tangle of wires and terminals under a homemade peace banner - not a cappuccino in sight. The scene looks like a cross between a village council meeting and a hacker pad, which in a way is exactly what it was.

The Honey Cafe was becoming the centre of a little community, and Lyn wanted to extend it beyond the physical confines of the village. Luckily, someone in Net-Reach had been to California, and brought her back a piece of software which allowed her to do just that. CommuniTree was a BBS package developed by a group called the Community Memory Project. Formed by Berkeley computer science students who had dropped out after the 1970 American invasion of Cambodia, Community Memory was the first electronic bulletin board; it went online in a Berkeley record shop in 1973. From offering people a simple small-ads service, it rapidly expanded into a prototypical online community. Its Communi-Tree operating system had been developed by trial-and-error over some years, and could have been custom-designed for Lyn's needs. Back in Wales, all this Berkeley history was just a handful of floppy disks, but unwittingly Lyn was making Bronllys part of a global village that had been developing slowly since the late '60s - a village that fitted her ideals as well as the software fitted her needs.

The Honey Tree BBS went online in December 1982. It was dedicated with a poem and a jar of the 200 pounds of honey the hives behind the cafe produce each year. "Bees," explains Lyn, "are very intelligent creatures. They know how to find their way back home, even if you move the hive." The bees gave the cafe its name, and the cooperative spirit of the hive has imbued every one of Lyn's community projects. For some months the BBS was silent, and Lyn began to worry that no one was interested. Then a Scottish sound engineer, marooned in France, left what she describes as "the most romantic message. He said it was like the Three Bears' Cottage: all quiet and nobody home." The lonely Scot was followed by other users, and the system grew rapidly, helped by the parallel growth of Net- Reach, which at one point numbered over 800 people.

Lyn and her helpers set up the BBC micro in the main cafe area, with a carousel display telling the story of the BBS and inviting people to come and try the Net. Locals who had turned up for afternoon tea would find themselves holding online discussions with people all over the world. "I think we opened a lot of people's eyes," says Lyn. Certainly the local community has since become impressively wired. Nearby Talgarth now boasts a "telecentre", another Lyn Hurn initiative. Offering community Net access and IT training, every afternoon it fills with children who drop in on their way home from school, either to do their homework or just for fun. It is one of a series of such centres throughout Wales, all of which have benefited from her boundless energy. Lyn remembers the early days with fondness. She liked the small-scale feel of the Net, the sense of building something from

scratch. "Home-brew. That's what bulletin boards were like: electronic home-brew. I think that's quite an appropriate image for an old malt-house." She seems distinctly less comfortable with the all-singing, all-dancing, high-bandwidth Internet of the '90s. There's more than a hint of the cyberconservative in some of her opinions. "9600 baud should be enough for anyone," she says to me. "I don't see why you need all this video and graphics business. It just seems to get in the way." To me, the clunky, green-screen interface of the old Honey-Tree BBS seems dull and lifeless, but thinking about it you can see that she has a point. In the race for faster connections and greater information flow, the basic purpose of it all - getting people to talk to one another - is often forgotten. While she likes the Web, Lyn is far less excited about it than most. "It's getting so full of advertising, you can't go anywhere," she grumbles.

A certain disillusionment may go some way towards explaining why Lyn has been concentrating less on the Net recently - that and a need always to solve the next problem. The Internet is not enough like hard work to satisfy Lyn; the main part of the job has been done. The public knows about the Net, and people like her and Sabine don't need to shout to get their message across. While we talk at the cafe, a man at another table is explaining HTML to his friends, a living illustration of the point. And it's not as though Lyn doesn't have other things to get on with. The improbable list of her works in progress includes the Wales Council of Women and the Taliesin Centre, a project to build a massive community centre on the site of an old hospital. But her current obsession is the Brecon Local Exchange and Trading Scheme, the currency of which - denominated in "Beacons" - is valid at the telecentres and in the cafe. It's obvious that this is where her heart lies at the moment.

"We've got into the local Women's Institute," she tells me excitedly. "It's a real breakthrough." In the political life of the Welsh valleys there are two organisations you need to get on your side: the WI and the Young Farmers. Persuade both these groups of the importance of your cause, whether it's the Net or the local ramblers' association, and you're made. Antagonise them, and you will be tarred as a no-hoper, a radical, or - worse - an outsider. Lyn is expert in such micropolitical complexities, explaining to me the difficulties of integrating a community cleanly divided between those who have been there for generations, and those who have moved from elsewhere as a result of the greatly increased social mobility of the last thirty years.

Lyn sees the local currency and the micropolitics of its reception as necessary parts of her overall project - forging a working community from the crumbling infrastructure of the area she has lived in all her life. Events like the closing of Talgarth's mid-Wales hospital, which prompted the Taliesin plan, have brought home the need for Powys to reorganise itself radically if it is to avoid the crippling drain of businesses and people that is striking so many rural areas. In trying to do something about it, Lyn is fighting both the inertia of local authorities and the conservatism of the people she is trying to help. It sounds so local, so detailed, it's hard to believe the Net that mattered so much in peace activism is still needed. So has she abandoned it ?

"Heavens, no. It's terribly useful. When you're working on community things, it's not easy to get messages to people. You have meetings and you have about 15 or 20 people at them, whereas there are 5,000 out there you'd like to have feedback from. At the moment, only the local paper will give you that

kind of feedback. What we need is the letters page of the local paper extended into every farm, every cottage."

It's a difficult task. The sheer isolation of many of the people of the Black Mountains and the Beacons makes it very hard to involve them in community projects. Sitting in the Honey guest-house's toast-warm parlour with a tribe of Lyn's children, spouses, grandchildren, friends, lodgers and pets, this seems the tightest-knit community imaginable, but it is one achieved within real physical isolation. Modern agri-business has altered farming in the area beyond recognition. Jobs that once upon a time were done by teams of people can now, with the aid of heavy machinery, be performed by one person. The loneliness and isolation have driven an increasing number of Welsh farmers to suicide.

For Lyn, this is yet another argument for a distributed community. Ironically, it is the farming families who have been most resistant to her ideas, seeing them as an unwelcome English import. Still, it's hard to see them staying Netless for much longer. It's not that the global megatrend towards connectivity will force them Netward; megatrends have missed Wales before. It's more that Lyn will find a way to make it happen, a way to knit them together against the cold. She is tough to stop. Lyn now wonders how useful it is, but the Honey Tree BBS is still online. Soon she may set up a Web site, though for the moment it's not a priority. When I ask whe-ther she might turn the cafe into a "new generation" cybercafe, she makes a face and points to the pay-phone nestled in one corner. "You want somewhere to come and meet people, not to have the Internet shoved at you.It should be like that telephone - there if you want it." In one of the downstairs rooms, by the old oak sideboard and the display of antique Welsh dolls, two of her granddaughters are learning ana-tomy on a multimedia PC. Like the telephone, the computer is tucked away. In the Hurn household, technology is firmly in the service of people, rather than the other way around. Which doesn't mean it's not an object of wonder, as much so to Lyn as to little Megan and Maisie. "When you think about it," she muses, "a modem is a wonderful thing." In the right hands, it certainly is.

Hari Kunzru (...) is a section editor at Wired.

Source **here**

posted by J. @ **7:40 PM**   ➥

Historia

This is a place to record fragments of the history of the Internet

I've set this up following two people (RA, DS) mentioning to me in the past two weeks the same cybercafe in Brecon :

> *"the first cybercafe in the world, I think it was..."*

I have a basic aim to document some of the people, things, places and events that go towards making the history of the Net.

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Some musings on "Historia", in the world of the Web, Google and Wi-Fi

The Janus face of history and technology, in our passage of the present,looks backwards to the Enlightenment and forwards to Dystopia?

> ***HISTORY, in general signifies an account of some remarkable facts which have happened in the world,*** *arranged in the true order in which they actually took place, together with the causes to which they were owing, and the different effects they have produced as far as can be discovered. The word is Greek **istoria** (in greek alphabeth); and literally denotes a search of curious things, or a desire of knowing, or even a rehearsal of things we have seen; being formed from the verb istorein (in greek alphabeth), which properly signifies to know a thing by having seen it. But the idea is now much more extensive, and is applied to the knowledge of things taken from the report of others. The origin is from the verb ishmi, 'I know'; and hence it is, that among the ancients several of their great men were called polyhistores, i.e. persons of various and general knowledge.*
>
> *(...) With regard to the study of history, we must consider, that all the revolutions which have happened in the world have been owing to two causes. 1. The connections between the different states existing together in the world at the same time, or their different situations with regard to one another; and, 2. The different characters of the people who in all ages constituted these states, their different geniuses and dispositions, &c. by which they were either prompted to undertake such and such actions of themselves, or were easily induced to it by others. ("History", The Encyclopaedia Britannica, Third Edition,1788-1797: source **here**)*

> *"Of course," he says, "we have no idea, now, of who or what the inhabitants of our future might be. In that sense, we have no future. Not in the sense that our grandparents had a future, or thought they did. Fully imagined cultural futures were the luxury of another day, one in which 'now' was of some greater duration. For us, of course, things can change so abruptly, so violently, so profoundly, that futures like our grandparents' have insufficient 'now' to stand on. **We have no future because our present is too volatile.** (...) We have only risk management. The spinning of the given moment's scenarios. Pattern recognition."* (William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition*,2003)

1
Documenting the present

I have long felt that the flow of current events was escaping documentation, authentication and understanding.

In the flow of daily projects one is always making "the next" happen. Today's narratives evaporate into yesterday. The flow of data overtakes us. Important facts get lost. The activities of seperate years begin to merge, with a tendency towards the fragmented, the fractured or the forgotten. Writing a CV suddenly becomes a crisis. One's mind can feel more familiar with "the Victorian period", than with our own shifting present.

The history of the Internet- and of the digital communications revolution - is largely invisible. Nineteenth century Industrialism dominated all in its monumentality- landscape, body and soul. We may nowadays speak of "The Invisible Wealth of Nations". The digital revolution is emerging within the plethora of the everyday, subtly transforming our ways of doing things, insinuating itself into our assumptions and our daily rythms. I am struck by the sense of a lack of documentation, of a fugitive history, whilst the status quo of the present is assisted by its eclipse of any pre-history. A history and a map of the terrain which might place us at a different crossroads.

2
The networked Muse?

The Dystopian Muse speaks of contingent times as the certainties of the Enlightenment give way to the uncertainties of Modernity (in this later, liquid and speeded-up phase).

The Utopian Muse? There are those who have dared to dream of space and light and speed. Of satellites orbiting the heavens, of Maxwell's Rainbow, and of glass threads lacing the ocean floors. Of a universal conversation, weaving a web of words and images.

The networked Muse? In the world of the Web 2.0 the classical *agora* meets the Web, the conversation of the many-to-many, the Bazzar versus the Cathedral?

3
Feed your head

The thoughts inside the Janus god's head lie dispersed across the network. The *otaku* collector's impulse- pattern recognition, or apophenia?

As we negotiate our continual crossroads of choice, may we engage the historia muse and wisdoms (-innovations, options) of past travellers to assist us in seeing beyond the poverty of the present horizon(-empiricism, economism)? Can we even trust the signs we are presented with at the crossroads?

What chronicle or collector's cabinet, mnemonic device or memory palace, database or archive can we depend upon?

posted by J. @ **2:30 PM**