

Chapter One

Digital Monsters: Show and Tell on Capitol Hill

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On the morning of Thursday, May 4th, 2006, the United States House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence held an open hearing entitled “Terrorist Use of the Internet.” It was the same day that convicted September 11th conspirator Zacarias Moussaoui was to be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, just a few miles away in Alexandria, Virginia. The Intelligence committee meeting was scheduled in the Longworth Office Building, a Depression era structure with a neoclassical facade, in Room 1302, a few doors down from a series of Seth Eastman paintings of Native Americans from the nineteenth century. Because of a dysfunctional Longworth elevator, some of the congressional representatives had been delayed on their way to the meeting, including ranking minority member Jane Harman. During the testimony about the latest political applications for cutting-edge digital technology, the microphones periodically malfunctioned, and witnesses complained of “technical problems” several times.

By the end of the day it seemed that what was to be remembered about the hearing was the revelation that terrorists were using videogames to recruit young jihadists. The Associated Press wrote a short, restrained article that only mentioned

“computer games and recruitment videos” in passing, although it did give some column space to a distinctive digital hiccup allegedly used by the insurgents in their online materials: “‘This crusade - crusade - crusade - is going to take awhile,’ President Bush says in one video, edited to make him repeat the word ‘crusade’ six other times.”¹

Eager to have their version of the news item picked up, Reuters made videogames the focus of their coverage with a headline that announced, “Islamists using US Videogames in Youth Appeal.” The article that followed, written by David Morgan, was quickly re-run by several Internet news services, including *Yahoo News*² (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The Terrorist Video Game from Yahoo News

As in the AP story, Reuters highlighted the sampling and remixing of the president’s voice around the word “crusade.”

"I was just a boy when the infidels came to my village in Blackhawk helicopters," a narrator's voice said as the screen flashed between images of street-level gunfights, explosions and helicopter assaults.

Then came a recording of President George W. Bush's September 16, 2001, statement: "This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while." It was edited to repeat the word "crusade," which Muslims often define as an attack on Islam by Christianity.³

The Reuters story also described the deviousness of the country's terrorist opponents, who were now apparently modifying popular videogames and inserting anti-American, pro-insurgency content through their digital wizardry.

One of the latest video games modified by militants is the popular "Battlefield 2" from leading video game publisher, Electronic Arts Inc of Redwood City, California.

Jeff Brown, a spokesman for Electronic Arts, said enthusiasts often write software modifications, known as "mods," to video games.

"Millions of people create mods on games around the world," he said. "We have absolutely no control over them. It's like drawing a mustache on a picture."

"Battlefield 2" ordinarily shows U.S. troops engaging forces from China or a united Middle East coalition. But in a modified video trailer posted on Islamic Web sites and shown to lawmakers, the game depicts a man in

Arab headdress carrying an automatic weapon into combat with U.S. invaders.⁴

Although the Electronic Arts executive dismissed the activities of modders as a “mustache on a picture” that could only be considered little more than childish vandalism of their off-the-shelf corporate product, others saw a more serious form of criminality at work.⁵ One Internet news service that picked up the Reuters story warned, “The makers of combat video games have unwittingly become part of a global propaganda campaign by Islamic militants to exhort Muslim youths to take up arms against the United States, officials said on Thursday.”⁶ Fox News re-titled the story to emphasize that the alert about technological manipulation was coming not only from government “officials” with general knowledge of public policy but also from recognized specialists in the anti-terrorism surveillance field: “Experts: Islamic Militants Customizing Violent Video Games.”⁷

According to the news reports, it would seem that the key piece of evidence before Congress was a film by “Sonic Jihad,” which – according to the experts – was widely distributed online. During the segment that most captured the attention of the wire service reporters, eerie music plays as an English-speaking narrator condemns the “infidel” and declares that he has “put a jihad” on them, as aerial shots move over flaming oil facilities and mosques covered with geometric designs. Suddenly a rocket is launched, and a helicopter explodes, and the action accelerates. Much of the subsequent game play takes place from the point of view of a first-person shooter in the role of an armed insurgent, but the viewer can also see third-person action in which a running avatar in a red-and-white checked keffiyeh, the head garb already associated by the

news media with jihadists on the Internet,⁸ dashes toward the screen over the virtual terrain with a rocket launcher balanced on his shoulder. Significantly, another of the player's hand-held weapons is a detonator that triggers remote blasts. As jaunty music plays, helicopters, tanks, and armored vehicles burst into smoke and flame.⁹ There are no complicated rhetorical formulae to explain the causal rationalizations of a just war imbedded in the game play: exclamations in Arabic are limited to simple phrases like "thank you" and "God is great." At the triumphant ending of the video, a green and white flag bearing a crescent is hoisted aloft into the sky.

Within twenty-four hours of the sensationalistic news breaking, however, a group of *Battlefield 2* fans were crowing about the idiocy of reporters.¹⁰ The game play footage wasn't from a high-tech modification of the software by an Islamic extremist; it had been posted on a *Planet Battlefield* forum the previous December by game fan, who had cut together regular game play with a Bush remix and a parody snippet of the soundtrack from the comedy film *Team America*.¹¹ The voice describing the Black Hawk helicopters was the voice of Trey Parker of *South Park* cartoon fame. Much to Parker's amusement, even the mention of "goats screaming" did not alert spectators to the fact of a comic source.¹² The man behind the "Sonic Jihad" pseudonym was apparently a twenty-five-year-old hospital administrator named Samir,¹³ and what reporters and representatives saw was nothing more exotic than game play from an expansion pack of *Battlefield 2*, which – like other versions of the game – allows first person shooter play from the position of the opponent as a standard feature, which fans of the actual game immediately realized.¹⁴

In an interview with the creator of the fan-film, Sonic Jihad reveals that much of the rest of the soundtrack came from the 1981 Anthony Quinn film *Lion of the Desert*.¹⁵ He describes himself as a largely secular, assimilated European Muslim of Moroccan extraction, reared in Holland. By his own account, he created what he considers to be primarily a low-tech homage to the experience of game play. Unlike the digitally composited smooth motion that correlates “different senses” that “simulate human experience,” described in Lev Manovich’s *The Language of New Media*,¹⁶ the Sonic Jihad video is characterized by abrupt cutting and montages made up of iterations of similar sequences – such as a shots of different tanks exploding – from different times of day and even in night vision mode, which are presented in discrete, mutually exclusive spatially and temporally disjointed contexts.

While Sonic Jihad joins his fellow gamers in ridiculing the mainstream media in this early interview, he also expresses astonishment and outrage about a larger politics of reception. He argues that the media illiteracy of Reuters potentially enables a whole series of category errors, in which harmless gamers are demonized as terrorists.

It wasn't intended for the purpose what it was portrayed to be by the media. So no I don't regret making a funny video . . . why should I? The only thing I regret is thinking that news from Reuters was objective and always right. The least they could do is some online research before publishing this. If they label me al-Qaeda just for making this silly video, that makes you think, what is this al-Qaeda? And is everything al-Qaeda?¹⁷

Although Sonic Jihad dismisses his own work as “silly” or “funny,” he expects considerably more from a credible news agency like Reuters: “objective” reporting, “online research,” and fact-checking before “publishing.”

Of course, what is most extraordinary about this story isn’t just that Reuters merely got its facts wrong; it is that a self-identified “parody” video was shown to an august House Intelligence Committee by a team of well-paid “experts” as key evidence of terrorist recruitment techniques. Moreover, this story of media illiteracy unfolded in the context of a fundamental Constitutional debate about domestic surveillance via communications technology and the further regulation of digital content by lawmakers. Furthermore, the transcripts of the actual hearing show that much more than simple gullibility or ignorance was in play, because legislators demonstrated that they actually were not naïve about the cultural landscape of the Internet or digital media. Based on their exchanges in the public record, elected representatives appear to be keenly aware that the digital discourses of an emerging information culture are challenging the authority of longstanding institutions of knowledge.

I have named this principle of reaction *Virtualpolitik*, one of the pragmatic, provisional political forces that govern the virtual state. In this book I will be arguing that the peculiar behavior of legislators reflects the anxieties and defensive interests of traditional stakeholders engaged in governance who are grappling with distributed networks and peer-to-peer forms of community organization that further destabilize an already fragmented representational structure. Obvious fissures emerge during face-to-face political exchanges whenever issues are debated, thus solidifying forms of oppositional loyalty and foreclosing opportunities for genuine deliberation across

communities constituted by difference. Beyond party politics, public institutions have long contained many different cultures, and these cultures reflect particular ideologies about concepts like "freedom" or "honesty" that are in turn shaped by factors like national, linguistic, or theological identity, societal attitudes about ownership and authorship, and cultural categories of gender, race, and class. Furthermore, the introduction of technology, from either the margins or from the center of political deliberation, will not necessarily usher in a definitive era of a neutral technocratic public sphere, because conflicts can actually be intensified when competing parties are no longer separated by time and space and when messages are condensed and expanded during the course of travel through possibly distorting, noisy, or overly constrictive channels for communication.

I am claiming that these hearings are symptomatic of a historical moment, in which the transformation of traditional institutions by digital media in networked societies may no longer be hyped by the utopian or dystopian narratives of a decade ago, but emphatic declarations about prohibiting or stimulating specific discursive practices in this new public culture still occupy a prominent place at the podium, news desk, or official web portal. Furthermore, many civic institutions – government agencies, libraries, public universities, and managers of common infrastructure – have created virtual counterparts with many of the same rhetorical conventions or inverse forms of those very same rules. In other words, the official discourses of institutions that provide digital information often function like those of the traditional institutions of knowledge that they emulate.

This argument is designed to explain why policy makers' reaction to *terrorists'* use of networked communication and digital media actually tells us more about *our own* American ideologies about technology and rhetoric in a contemporary information environment, which does not easily correlate to familiar institutions of knowledge. As I will argue, this also shows why attempts to constrict the behavior of *pedophiles* actually tells us more about legislators' anxieties about the communicative powers of *the young themselves*. When the experts come forward at the Sonic Jihad hearing to "walk us through the media and some of the products,"¹⁸ they present digital artifacts of an information economy that mirrors many of the features of our own consumption of objects of electronic discourse. Indeed, the word "products" appears twenty-two times in the hearings to describe jihadist materials.

From this one hearing we can see how the reception of many new digital genres plays out in the public sphere of legislative discourse. Web pages, videogames, and web logs are mentioned specifically. The main architecture of the witnesses' presentation of messages to the committee is organized according to the rhetorical conventions of the electronic slideshow, generally known by the trade name PowerPoint. Moreover, the actual arguments made by expert witnesses about the relationship of orality to literacy or of public to private communications in new media are highly relevant to how we might understand other important digital genres, such as electronic mail or text messaging.

In Bruno Latour's tome on *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, "making things public" in the visual culture of civic life means much more than the common idiomatic meaning that the phrase might suggest. Latour is also interested in exploring the broader, more traditional notion of *res publica* and considering how "things

public” are literally constructed for and received by political audiences. Using the language of software development, Latour characterizes a range of political and scientific representations, which are “representative” and “realistic” to varying degrees, as manifestations of what he calls “object-oriented democracy.”

I am claiming that government websites, government-funded videogames and virtual reality simulations, national digital libraries and databases, e-mail to and from agency officials, and electronic slideshows by public representatives that employ new presentation technologies can similarly serve as “things public.” They can even reveal conflicts and contradictions from which civilian voters and taxpayers are otherwise shielded.

Latour is largely writing about public spaces in the physical world, but his claims also have been adapted to virtual environments. By building on the work of Habermas, his catalogue of manifestations of the public sphere emphasizes activities of deliberation and purposive communicative action.

Scientific laboratories, technical institutions, marketplaces, churches and temples, financial trading rooms, Internet forums, ecological disputes – without forgetting the very shape of the museum inside which we gather all those *membra disjecta* – are just some of the forums and agoras in which we speak, vote, decide, are decided upon, prove, are being convinced. Each has its own architecture, its own technology of speech, its complex set of procedures, its definition of freedom and domination, its ways of bringing together those who are concerned – and even more

important, those who are not concerned – and what concerns them, its expedient way to obtain closure and come to a decision.¹⁹

Hearings about the Internet and videogames put similar issues about the function of political and civic rhetoric in the digital age on display, and publicly funded projects to create digital artifacts and architectures with hypertext or virtual reality environments can tell us a lot about how we construct shared truths about medicine, science, economics, government, or the arts. These new media may be showcased as part of distracting political spectacles, or they may function to complement the traditional tropes of the *res publica*. For example, virtual objects, social puppets, built environments, navigable terrains, and perceptual spaces of computer-generated sites of conflict, such as the battlegrounds of the current Iraq occupation, can take the user into the realm of public matters while also exploring the private spaces associated with certain forms of cultural intimacy and rituals of affiliation.

The hearing also invites consideration of privacy, intellectual property, and digital “rights,” because moral values about freedom and ownership are alluded to by many of the elected representatives present, albeit often through the Looking Glass of user behaviors imagined as radically Other. For example, terrorists are described as “modders” and “hackers” who subvert those who properly create, own, legitimate, and regulate intellectual property. To explain embarrassing leaks of infinitely replicable digital files, witness Ron Roughead says, “We’re not even sure that they don’t even hack into the kinds of spaces that hold photographs in order to get pictures that our forces have taken.”²⁰ Another witness, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and International Affairs, Peter Rodman claims that “any video game that comes out, as soon as the code is

released, they will modify it and change the game for their needs.”²¹ Thus, the implication of these witnesses’ testimony is that the release of code into the public domain can contribute to political subversion, as much as covert intrusion into computer networks by stealthy hackers can.

According to the transcripts of this open hearing, legislators on both sides of the aisle express anxiety about domestic patterns of Internet reception. In their questions, lawmakers identify web logs (blogs) as a particular area of concern as a destabilizing alternative to authoritative print sources of information from established institutions. Representative Alcee Hastings (D-Florida) relates the polluting power of insurgent bloggers to that of influential American muckrakers from the political Right: “And I might add -- maybe my question is rhetorical -- because, quite frankly, we have a lot of garbage on our regular mainstream news that comes from blog sites, that's -- you know, Drudge ain't the truth every day when he writes something, and then it winds up becoming a story that does considerable damage.”²² Representative Heather Wilson (R-New Mexico) also attempts to project a media-savvy persona by bringing up the “phenomenon of blogging” in conjunction with her questions about the “hottest sites.”²³ Wilson clearly understands how Internet traffic can be magnified by cooperative ventures among groups of ideologically like-minded content-providers: “These websites, and particularly the most active ones, are they cross-linked? And do they have kind of hot links to your other favorite sites on them?”²⁴

Even the legislators’ own static HTML pages are electronic artifacts about which they are self-conscious, particularly when the demands of digital labor create disruptions in the smooth function of their duties as lawmakers. Representative Anna Eshoo (D-

California) bemoans the difficulty of maintaining official congressional websites. As she observes, “So we are -- as members, I think we're very sensitive about what's on our website, and if I retained what I had on my website three years ago, I'd be out of business. So we know that they have to be renewed. They go up, they go down, they're rebuilt, they're -- you know, the message is targeted to the future.”²⁵ Certainly, congressional representatives recognize that their public presentation to their constituents and other interested parties now depends on these forms of new media display, particularly as more Americans visit government websites after the September 11th attacks.²⁶ Recent legislation actually requires Federal elected representatives to publish information about gifts from contributors on their personal, public sites, and this trend toward mandating public disclosure via official website is likely to continue.

Of course, legislators may cast themselves as webmasters personally engaged in “rebuilding” and “renewal,” yet clearly they are aware of the fact that they depend on the resources and expertise of web designers to produce the institutional sites that represent the *ethos* of their political personae. Elected officials have been made well aware of the organizational and technical specialization involved in designing and maintaining websites and the role of the “webmaster” in contemporary digital communication. For example, Representative Wilson asks witness Rodman if he knows “of your 100 hottest sites where the webmasters are educated? What nationality they are? Where they're getting their money from?”²⁷ It is perhaps indicative of the contractors’ anachronistic worldview that the witness is unable to answer her question and explains that his agency focuses largely on the physical location of the server or ISP rather than the social backgrounds of the individual actors who might be manufacturing objectionable digital

texts. As I will explain later, this premise may be related to the fact that many of the government's witnesses also expressed beliefs that jihadist websites were collectively produced and spontaneously emerged from the indigenous, traditional culture, instead of assuming that Iraqi insurgents had analogous beliefs, practices, and cultural awareness associated with particular technologies to those in first-world countries.

In the wake of these hearings, I visited the websites of the House Permanent Intelligence Committee members and found a range of institutional styles (Figure 2). Chairman Hoekstra's site used established institutional color schemes and standardized design elements in a generic, non-dynamic website with a children's page added as an appendage.²⁸ Ranking minority member Harman's site announces itself as a "Virtual Office" and used a layout which showed cutaway views of the private spaces of her public office, in which each room represented a realm of relevant information for the visitor to explore.²⁹ The rank-and-file committee members were a varied group who often adopted competing strategies of web design. Despite her claim to regular updating, Representative Eshoo's site used stodgy navigation, demarcated with stars, and followed the impersonal e-newsletter format of many institutional early adopters rather than a bloggier, individuated commentary style.³⁰ Congressman Hasting's site was perhaps the most visually arresting from a web design standpoint: he presented gray rather than congressional blue, broke up rectangular spaces with wavy lines, used his own handwriting as a design motif, and offered an extroverted "video greeting" to website visitors.³¹ In contrast, Congresswoman Wilson probably had the most static page with a lot of white space and a mustard palette that was divorced from the usual visual appeals to patriotism that are characteristic of political sites.³² Representative Thornberry's site

(not shown) emphasized his electronic slideshow with a photo gallery,³³ Representative Tiaht (not shown) foregrounded a newsroll in a large font right below his main banner,³⁴ and Representative Silvestre Reyes (not shown) pointed readers to his blog, which said nothing about the embarrassing Sonic Jihad hearing.³⁵



Figure 2: Home pages of Committee Members

Despite the fact that the design scheme of committee maverick Rush Holt (D-NJ) was remarkably staid and used the same blue as many other legislators, the line of sight into the opening photo on his home page was oriented so that the user literally seemed to be seated at the table with Holt and his staff. Although such icons had already become institutional clichés, Holt's file folder tabs and prominently displayed open mailbox still suggested an imagined hands-on quality to his constituents' interactions, so that a website visitor could leave mail or browse through the Congressman's file cabinets without a policing receptionist or security guard to impede access to the information channel.³⁶ Unlike Representative Harman's website, which emphasized the presence of walls through cutaway diagrams, Representative Holt's site generally signaled their absence.

I'm a rhetorician, which means that I both study and teach rhetoric. Despite the fact that rhetorical knowledge was the ostensible subject of this hearing, I couldn't help but notice that my discipline did not come off particularly well and that it was often associated with destructive counter-cultural forces. For example, witness Eric Michael explains the problem that rhetoric poses to national security:

It's also the use of poetry, the use of language, the use of rhetoric, the use of imagery and metaphor. When we translate their products into English, you lose the true impact. It's the difference between reading the Gettysburg Address in English and a paraphrased translation of it in another language.

And they use this rhetoric to hammer home two big themes. The first is victimization, their grievances, why they fight; and the second one is a call to action, which is what they can do to respond to self-actualize

themselves. And what I will argue to you and show you in the products that we're going to show you is that in terms of victimization, it is emotionally set up to evoke a response. They distort the truth, they use selective pieces of the truth, they assemble it in such a way that it is a distortion, or in some cases they create new truth. And they use that emotion then in call to action where they romanticize the struggle and turn it into the most important thing going on in the world today.³⁷

Although the witness initially presents “rhetoric” as the use of particular figures of speech, which may be untranslatable and thus culturally specific, he quickly moves away from commenting on the presence of discrete tropes and topoi to outright castigation of the entire communicative mode. Rhetoric, he tells us, is designed to “distort the truth,” because it is a “selective” assembly or a “distortion.” Rhetoric is also at odds with reason, because it appeals to “emotion” and a romanticized *Weltanschauung* oriented around discursive configurations of “struggle.”

The film by Sonic Jihad was chosen as the final clip by the contractors from SAIC witnesses, because it allegedly combined many different types of emotional appeal, and thus it conveniently seemed to tie together all of the motifs and truisms that the witnesses presented to the legislators about unreliable sources:

And there you see how all these products are linked together. And you can see where the games are set to psychologically condition you to go kill coalition forces. You can see how they use humor. You can see how the entire campaign is carefully crafted to first evoke an emotion and then to

evoke a response and to direct that response in the direction that they want.³⁸

To understand what rhetoricians call the larger “cultural conversation”³⁹ of the hearing, it’s important to keep in mind that the argument that “games” can “psychologically condition” players to be predisposed to violence is one that was important in other Congressional hearings of the period, as well as in bills and resolutions that were passed by the full body after a process of political deliberation. In the witness’s testimony an appeal to anti-game sympathies at home is combined with a critique of a closed anti-democratic system abroad in which the circuits of rhetorical production and their composite metonymic chains are described as those that command users to produce specific, unvarying, robotic responses.

Of course, there is nothing new about many of the objections that Pentagon and SAIC witnesses lodge against rhetoric more generally. Emphasizing the “craft” of the wily rhetor and the somatic responses of a malleable audience have been standard clichés from the foes of the traditional arts of persuasion for centuries. Several of the accusations made against rhetoric during the hearing are the same ones emphasized by the character of Socrates in Plato’s dialogue *Gorgias* against the practices of the Sophists. For example, Plato compares rhetoric to “cookery,” which serves as a form of “flattery” for “gratification and pleasure” that is organized into a manipulative “routine.” Unlike “justice,” which serves the state’s interests like “medicine,” rhetoric only appeals to evanescent appetites. According to Plato, rhetoric is also a form of “beautification,” which only attends to superficial improvement, unlike a useful cultural activity like gymnastics, and so is thus “mischievous, deceitful, mean, and ignoble activity, which

cheats us by shapes and colors, by smoothing and draping, thereby causing people to take on an alien charm.”⁴⁰

However, this sharp criticism of the artful use of a presentation style that is “crafted” is particularly ironic,⁴¹ given that this “compilation” of jihadist digital material is staged in the form of a carefully structured PowerPoint presentation, one that is paced to a well-rehearsed cadence of “slide, please” or “next slide” in the transcript.

Congressman Tiahrt (R-KN) is especially impressed with the rhetoric of the consultants and reviews the text on the witnesses’ electronic slides in scrupulous detail. This allows for the following jihadist slogans to be included in the Congressional Record: “In Abu Ghraib they rape us every day. We have their bastards in our wombs. Most of us are pregnant.” and “If they leave Iraq, we will find them and kill them.”⁴² At one point Tiahrt expresses his wish to replicate particularly persuasive elements of the witnesses’ presentation for his own purposes by having copies of their slides. As Tiarht puts it, “I’d like to get a copy of that slide sometime, because I don’t think people realize the breadth and depth of this threat. This is a battle of cultures.” Like many post-September 11th policymakers, Tiahrt alludes to Samuel Huntington’s thesis about an inevitable “clash of civilizations” between the developed West and the Orientalist East.⁴³ By borrowing segments from the witnesses’ rhetoric, Tiahrt plans to magnify this particular aspect of the “threat” to national security. Thus, in copying the slide, he actually would make their words distinctively his own by emphasizing one aspect of the consultants’ message.

To a rhetorician, there is another important Platonic subtext about the competing cultures of orality and literacy that is useful for a more complete understanding of the hearings. According to the experts before Congress, the Middle Eastern audience for

these videogames and websites is inevitably infantilized because it is limited by membership in a pre-literate culture that – like the emerging Internet society that complements its abortive cultural production – supposedly doesn't rely on knowledge that is archived in printed codices.

Sometimes the witnesses before Congress seemed to be unintentionally channeling the ideas of the late literacy theorist Walter Ong about the character of “secondary orality” associated with electronic media such as television, radio, audio recording, or telephone communication. Later followers of Ong extended the concept of secondary orality to hypertext, hypermedia, e-mail, and blogs as genres that share features of both speech and written discourse.⁴⁴ Although Ong's disciples celebrated this vibrant reconnection to a mythic, communal past in what Kathleen Welch calls “electric rhetoric,” the defense industry consultants express their profound state of alarm caused by the potentially dangerous and subversive character of these hybrid cultural artifacts.

The concept of an “oral tradition” is first introduced by the witnesses in the context of modern marketing and product distribution:

The Internet is used for a variety of things -- command and control. One of the things that's missed frequently is how and -- how effective the adversary is at using the Internet to distribute product. They're using that distribution network as a modern form of oral tradition, if you will. And we'll talk about oral tradition in a little while.⁴⁵

Thus, although the Internet can be deployed for hierarchical “command and control” activities, it also functions as a highly efficient peer-to-peer distributed network for disseminating the commodity of information. The witnesses before Congress want to

emphasize the latter, supposedly underreported feature, which they claim is “missed frequently.” Throughout the hearings, the witnesses imply that it is this possibility for unregulated lateral communication among social actors who aren’t authorized to speak for nation-states or to produce legitimated expert discourses that is potentially destabilizing.⁴⁶

Later, witness Michael continues with his analysis of the “oral tradition” and the conventions of communal life in the Middle East to emphasize the primacy of speech in the collective discursive practices of an alien population:

I'd like to point your attention to the media types and the fact that the oral tradition is listed as most important. The other media listed support that. And the significance of the oral tradition is more than just -- it's the medium by which, once it comes off the Internet, it is transferred.⁴⁷

Of course, as a polished presenter, he is conscious of the “attention” of his audience, which must be “pointed” appropriately in his rhetorical display to recognizing the oral tradition as the “most important” among a list of multiple channels of communication, because it most facilitates the functions of transference, far more so than the technology at issue.⁴⁸

Furthermore, this “oral tradition” can contaminate other media because it also functions as “rumor,” the traditional bane of the stately discourse of military leaders in classical and Early Modern texts.⁴⁹

The oral tradition now also has an aspect of rumor. A(n) event takes place. There is an explosion in a city. Rumor is that the United States Air Force dropped a bomb and is doing indiscriminate killing. This ends up

being discussed on the street. It ends up showing up in a Friday sermon in a mosque or in another religious institution. It then gets recycled into written materials. Media picks up the story and broadcasts it, at which point it's now a fact. In this particular case that we were telling you about, it showed up on a network television, and their propaganda continues to go back to this false initial report on network television and continue to reiterate that it's a fact, even though the United States government has proven that it was not a fact, even though the network has since recanted the broadcast.⁵⁰

In this example, many-to-many discussion on the “street” is formalized into a one-to-many “sermon” and then further stylized using technology in a one-to-many broadcast on “network television” in which “propaganda” that is “false” can no longer be disputed. This is an “oral tradition,” like digital media, in which elements of discourse that can be infinitely copied or “recycled,” because it is designed to “reiterate” content.

In contrast, Plato argues that it is literacy, not orality, that is the greatest threat to cultural norms by virtue of its alienation from its author, whose potential absence from the text means that written discourse can not be always verified as coming from a credible source. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato speaks in the voice of Socrates to explain why the productions of literacy are so subversive:

The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive, but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words; they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a

desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever. And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, it drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it does not know how to address the right people and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself.⁵¹

While “oral culture” is considered to be infantilizing by the witnesses before the Intelligence Committee, Plato presents a different image in which it is the *written text* presented an immature agent who is personified as a parentless child.⁵² Thus Plato’s skepticism about a society based on the written codex runs entirely counter to the interpretation of the paid consultants with their collection of jihadist digital materials. The witnesses before the Intelligence Committee would elevate Western society on the grounds of its supposed foundations in authoritative and stable printed texts and tablets rather than transient and mutable oral utterances.

From the hearing we also learn that the terrorists’ websites are threatening precisely because they manifest a polymorphously perverse geometry of expansion. For example, one witness before the House Committee compares the replication and elaboration of digital material online to a “spiderweb”:

The numbers and the -- and the actual websites change from day to day. They come up and down, and so the researchers are constantly going back and looking at this list of sites that they've got. Over the course of the last year and a half, we've been asked a couple times which websites we found

to be most offensive; that list will also change based on the material that's published. Perhaps the most interesting thing to do is watch a piece of material that is posted to one of the websites, and then it literally spiderwebs across the Web as other websites pick it up. And they are all interlinked . . . Back to the previous comment I made: it's difficult, therefore, to determine if there's central coordination or not.⁵³

Like Representative Eshoo's site, the terrorists' sites go "up" and "down," but the witness is left to speculate about whether or not there is any "central coordination" to serve as an organizing principle and to explain the persistence and consistency of messages despite the apparent lack of a single authorial ethos.

In the hearing, the oft-cited solution to the problem created by the hybridity and iterability of digital rhetoric appears to be "public diplomacy." Consultants and lawmakers seem to agree that the damaging messages of the insurgents must be countered with U.S. sanctioned information,⁵⁴ and the phrase "public diplomacy" appears in the hearing seven times. However, witness Roughhead complains that the protean "oral tradition" and what Henry Jenkins has called the "transmedia" character of digital culture,⁵⁵ which often crosses several platforms of traditional print, projection, or broadcast media, stymies their best rhetorical efforts: "I think the point that we've tried to make in the briefing is that wherever there's Internet availability at all, they can then download these -- these programs and put them onto compact discs, DVDs, or post them into posters, and provide them to a greater range of people in the oral tradition that they've grown up in. And so they only need a few Internet sites in order to distribute and disseminate the message."⁵⁶

As this book will show, public diplomacy is not the only example of a carefully produced, state-sanctioned multimedia campaign that manages digital content, because there are a number of alliances between what Jane Fountain has called the “Virtual State” and the advertising and marketing industries that create and coordinate messages. Social marketing, risk communication, and institutional branding occupy different niches in this larger marriage of convenience between government and persuasive commerce. As I will show, many of these forms of discourse have research communities or academic centers devoted to their practices, and digital media are critical to their delivery strategies. Although SAIC specialized in the reception of information rather than its production, their paid consultants obviously benefited from a similar union of private enterprise and public interest upon which their claim to rhetorical expertise is predicated.

Amazingly, Representative Tiahrt commends not only the government’s “public diplomacy” effort, but also argues for outright “propaganda” in an information war with jihadists dictated by the spirit of populism and the mission of the founding fathers.

The average citizen wants us to do something about this. And yet now we hear concerns about propaganda going on here in the United States government. There ought to be propaganda going on. We need to counteract this kind of blatant lies and misleading.

And we've heard reference to our truth versus their truth. We believe there's a fundamental truth, and it's something that was laid out by our founding fathers and it's this nation's birth right, that we hold certain truths self-evident; that among these truths is that we're all created equal.

And we consider them inalienable rights -- the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And those things need to be talked about worldwide on the Internet.⁵⁷

By making appeals to natural law that would contradict claims of relativism or competing truths, Tiahrt asserts that a “fundamental” set of epistemological values can be disseminated to jihadists. He also ascribes the character of secondary orality to this affirmative, pro-U.S. use of Internet, since these patriotic appeals can be “talked about worldwide.”

In some ways the people who didn’t speak at the hearing about how terrorists were using the Internet were just as significant as those who did. Specifically, a number of nonprofit, freelance groups with well-articulated web and mainstream media presences weren’t represented at the hearing. The SITE Institute, Global Security, and a number of other center-right organizations were not invited to speak, despite extensive coverage of their activities and profile pieces in the weeks and months that followed in publications like *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*.

Perhaps the most obviously politically motivated omission was the absence of representatives of The Crisis Group, such as spokesperson Robert Malley, who only a few months earlier had released a report critical of the U.S. government about jihadist Internet rhetoric. This report on the transmedia capabilities of jihadists with access to sophisticated digital tools and production facilities, “In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency,” reached a very different conclusion from the SAIC witnesses despite access to similar evidence. The Crisis Group argued that anti-occupation forces were chiefly a serious threat because they were able to respond verbally to events in the theatre

of combat or statements from U.S. or British policy-makers much more rapidly than their Western counterparts.⁵⁸ Furthermore, according to the Crisis Group, much of the opposition's rhetorical efficiency had to do with quick turnaround time in Arabic-English or English-Arabic translation, a problem with which U.S. intelligence and public diplomacy experts were continuing to struggle, as a result of the persistent shortage of speakers of Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages on U.S. government payrolls. The Crisis Group also pointed out that the jihadists were very conscious of their audiences and would immediately change their rhetorical strategy if a particular approach, such as showing graphically violent filmed segments of the beheading of hostages on the Internet, was alienating their core viewership. The fact that the Crisis Group was on record for saying that human rights abuses and civil liberties violations committed in the name of the U.S. government had to end in Iraq, in order to deprive the enemy of their chief rhetorical asset, may have played a role in their exclusion from the panel.

The transcript also reveals that the members of the House Intelligence Committee were not, in fact, the original intended audience for the witnesses' PowerPoint presentation. Rather, when it was first created by SAIC, this "expert" presentation was designed for training purposes for the troops on the ground, who would be facing the challenges of deployment in hostile terrain.⁵⁹ According to the witnesses, having the slide show showcased before Congress was something of an afterthought. Yet SAIC and Pentagon witnesses apparently seized upon the opportunity to repurpose their electronic presentation to appeal to multiple decision-makers in different branches of government.

REP. SILVESTRE REYES (D-TX): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you for sharing the presentation with us. I'm curious, has this presentation been seen -- or have you shared it with the leadership of DOD, leadership of the intelligence community from the National Director of Intelligence on down?

MR. RODMAN: Yes, we have. I mean, it was developed for the Marine Corps, as we mentioned. But in recent weeks we've shared it with the State Department, Karen Hughes. I called Mike Hayden to let him know about it, and we provided the briefing to some people at the Open Source Center. So it is available. And within DOD, as I mentioned at the beginning, it's available to other units --

REP. REYES: Has the secretary of Defense seen this?

MR. RODMAN: No, I don't believe he has seen it.⁶⁰

Rodman's mention of "Karen Hughes," the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy, acknowledges the connection between intelligence, training, and nationalistic public relations efforts. Contrary to expectations, the "Open Source Center" Rodman mentions is an organization with a password-protected site to provide "foreign media reporting and analysis to policymakers, government institutions and strategic partners." Certainly, many would consider it a misnomer, given that "open source," as a software development term, is often associated with transparent communication and a participatory non-hierarchical model of cultural production that has been symbolized by Eric Raymond as more "bazaar" than "cathedral."⁶¹

Obviously, in order to maintain its government influence, the Science Applications International Corporation has had to foster effective practices of publicity and promotion in its own use of the Internet and digital media. At the time of the hearing, the rhetoric of the website of SAIC emphasized their motto “From Science to Solutions.” After a short Flash film about how SAIC scientists and engineers solve “complex technical problems” (Figure 3), the visitor is taken to the home page of the firm (Figure 4) that re-emphasizes their central message about expertise.⁶² The maps, uniforms, and specialized tools and equipment that are depicted in these opening web pages reinforce an *ethos* of professional specialization that is able to respond to multiple threats posed by the “global war on terror.”



Figure 3: SAIC Flash Film



Figure 4: SAIC Home Page

A promotional video on the website, dated March 31, 2006, demonstrates the company's attention to careful orchestration of multimedia elements and the conventions of corporate rhetorical styles. The film opens with a desolate, windy moonrise that is interrupted by the sound of boots on the ground. During the course of less than two minutes, the company film provides what appears to be a comprehensive overview of its corporate services: "Research and Development," "Commercial Services," "Systems Engineering and Integration," "Homeland Security," "Intelligence," "Logistics," "Defense Transformation." The entire presentation is orchestrated to stirring music, and a new melody in a new key is introduced during the "Intelligence" section, so that the emotional appeals of the video are conveyed through auditory as well as visual means. During the montage of images, at one point the American flag transforms into the flag of SAIC, so that the symbols of patriotism and corporate brand identity are merged. At the

end, the film returns to soldiers in uniform, this time focusing on their faces rather than on their feet, before cutting away to a shot of the earth from space.

Of course, even as the hearings were taking place, not all of the representatives were accepting the authority of the SAIC analysis. Although he may have been the lone voice of explicit and sometimes strident dissent, Congressman Rush Holt openly criticized the way that many domestically produced videogames presented the political enemies of the United States as dehumanized virtual objects to be destroyed.

REP. HOLT: Okay. I guess, you know, as I look at computer games that are out there, I don't think of them as our finest and proudest output. I'm wondering, are U.S. computer games regarded in some cases as anti-Muslim and supporting a crusading point of view? Is there commentary on U.S. computer games and that sort of thing?

MR. RODMAN: I think I would have to go back and say that we're looking at computer games that are being used for development of materials on the web, and we don't actually spend a lot of time looking at -

REP. HOLT: But if you're looking -- if I may jump in here, you're looking at how the United States is portrayed.

MR. RODMAN: Yes.

REP. HOLT: And one of the ways that I suspect they might present deleterious information is by saying, "Look, here in the United States the kids are playing games that are anti-Muslim or crusading." And I'm just wondering if you see that kind of presentation.⁶³

Representative Holt points out that the “recycling” of digital content in the Islamic world may actually involve the repurposing of the norms of already violent commercial videogames from the West. As Holt may have been aware, some of this violent digital content in commercial games that may seem to glorify battlefield violence was originally produced for military training in games and simulations. As Gonzalo Frasca argues, videogames like the recruitment game *America’s Army* could also be taken as a form of political propaganda that celebrates a particular form of allegiance to what Holt characterizes as “crusading” political and cultural violence.⁶⁴

Close reading of the transcript reveals that other legislators were expressing some skepticism about the authority of the SAIC experts. With search engine technology available to regular citizens, access to specialized knowledge about arcane subcultures once far removed by geography no longer seems to be in the exclusive purview of trained professionals. At one point Representative Eshoo observes, “Well, I mean, you can Google, too, and see what's there.”⁶⁵ In retrospect, her comment becomes particularly ironic, because Sonic Jihad later points out that a simple Google search would have correctly identified both the benign source and the jocular character of his *Battlefield 2* fan film, had the government authorities bothered with such a prosaic approach to basic intelligence-gathering.

Furthermore, the use of statistical hyperbole by the SAIC team may have made the witnesses vulnerable to suspicion by potential naysayers. One witness explains the slippery numbers to an inquisitive Eshoo in his defense: “The numbers that we used, our initial list was 200, it grew to 550, and as I said, we're now to 1,500 that we sort of track on a regular basis.”⁶⁶ Eventually, the number at issue grows to 5,000 in the witnesses’

testimony. Despite the daunting regulatory task that witnesses describe, legislators seem to have difficulty accepting that surgical strikes on the network or useful data mining operations to identify suspects are impossible, given the importance of particular nodes where large and consequently vulnerable servers are located.⁶⁷

Despite her pro-Administration Republican political identity, Representative Wilson is especially persistent in asking for specific web traffic information that is commonly tracked in by network administrators in both the public and private sectors, such as the country of origin of visiting IP addresses or the discrete number of unique page visits recorded. Despite the astronomical number of sites that SAIC contractors claim to be monitoring, Wilson still insists on the utility of concrete metrics and urges them to winnow down the numbers to achieve measurable goals. She appears to grill the witnesses at one point: “I -- have you in your research identified where the servers are? If you take -- I know you've got 5,000 websites, but if you -- you said you've got between 25 and 100 that are the most active and the most virulent. Where are their servers located?”

Nonetheless, other lawmakers accept the hyperbolic statistics at face value and even encourage the numbers to be magnified. For example, Representative Tiahrt makes the quantities comparatively even larger by minimizing the number of “moderate” oppositional sites in a vast galaxy of anti-American Internet opinion.

REP. TODD TIAHRT (R-KS): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding these hearings. I think a lot of people were not aware that this was out there in the universe, in the Internet. And so it's very important that we talk about this.

I heard earlier in testimony that you believe there's somewhere between 1,500 and 5,000 of these web sites out there that are put out by this radical form of Islam. Is that the range we're talking about in the universe?

MR. RODMAN: I think the total range we're talking about of sites that we would consider to be hostile is over 5,000. And the 1,500 -- (inaudible) -- the number of sites -- (inaudible).

REP. TIAHRT: If somebody was to go explore the universe of these web sites, would they come across the web site that appears to be in this same vein but is instead a voice of moderation? And, if so, how many would they stumble across in the 5,000-plus web sites?

MR. RODMAN: There are -- in the web forums that we look at, there are people who do sign on who will provide some points of moderation.

REP. TIAHRT: What percentage would you guess?

MR. RODMAN: I don't have that answer for you. I'm sorry.

REP. TIAHRT: I mean, is it matched one for one, for every -- (inaudible) -- negative?

MR. RODMAN: Definitely not.

REP. TIAHRT: Is it one for 100, one for 1,000, one for 5,000? It's not very much.

MR. RODMAN: A very small amount.

REP. TIAHRT: Very small amount.

“5,000” is soon elevated to “5,000+” by Tiaht, and the word “universe” is repeated three times to express the enormity of the project with which SAIC grapples. By emphasizing incommensurability of scale, he also attempts to improve the audience’s appreciation of the fact of their limited understanding of what he considers to be an incomprehensible jihadist Internet Sublime that verges on the statistically infinite. Thus, comprehensible “moderate” parts may be encountered when we “come across” or “stumble across” them, but they poorly represent the gigantic whole.

Three weeks after the hearings, Reuters itself ran a story about “Sonic Jihad” / “Samir.” Entitled “Dutch Gamers Clash with U.S. Government,” the story continues to assign Samir’s gameplay footage status as an oppositional artifact, even if Samir himself – who is described by the reporter as a “clean-cut youth” interviewed at a Burger King over fries and a milkshake – obviously doesn’t merit the title of terrorist.⁶⁸ Samir asserts again that “it was just for fun, nothing political,” and that his footage is not a “serious game” intended for education or indoctrination: “It has nothing to do with recruiting people or training people.” Nonetheless, the new Reuters story continues to validate the view that Samir’s game feeds an agenda of violence and propaganda: “‘You can see where the games are set to psychologically condition you to go kill coalition forces,’ said Eric Michael of Science Applications International, which is being paid \$7 million by the Defense Department to monitor 1,500 militant Web sites.”⁶⁹ Although Reuters uses a lower number of “militant” sites than the 5,000 emphasized by Tiaht and implicitly acknowledges the pressure for measurable intelligence results in return for the SAIC employees’ high salaries, the testimony of the witnesses is still given a weight of expertise.

By June 26th, the incident finally was being described as a “Pentagon Snafu” in connection with the online video edition of *Nightline* from ABC News.⁷⁰ From the opening of the broadcast, established government institutions were put on the spot: “So, how much does the Pentagon know about videogames? Well, when it came to a recent appearance before Congress, apparently not enough.”⁷¹ In reporter Jake Tapper’s coverage, the very language about “experts” that was highlighted in the earlier coverage is repeated in mockery. Although the obscured face of “Sonic Jihad” / “Samir” on the *Nightline* webcast continues to confer upon him an air of criminality, the chief talking head in the segment is “independent expert” Ian Bogost of the Georgia Institute of Technology, who has studied the rhetoric of “persuasive games” in depth.

If the Pentagon’s “experts” deride the legitimacy of rhetoric as a cultural practice, Bogost has been occupying himself with its defense. In his upcoming book, *Persuasive Games: Videogames and Procedural Rhetoric*, Bogost draws upon the authority of the “2,500 year history of rhetoric” to argue that videogames represent a significant step forward in performative discourse.

I will attempt to articulate a new form of the art of persuasion that is distinct from both verbal and visual rhetoric. I call this form procedural rhetoric, the art of persuasion through rule-based interactions rather than words or images. This new form of persuasion is deeply tied to the core affordances of the computer: running code. But unlike some forms of computational persuasion . . . I argue that videogames have a unique persuasive power. Not only can they support existing social and cultural positions (the purpose of so-called “serious games”), but also they can

disrupt and change these positions themselves, leading potentially to significant and rapid social change.⁷²

Given that Bogost and his *Watercooler Games* weblog co-editor Gonzalo Frasca were actively involved in the detective work that exposed the depth of professional incompetence involved in the government's line-up of witnesses, it is appropriate that Bogost is given the final words in the segment that call upon the ethos of a collective "we." As Bogost says, "We should be deeply bothered by this. We should really be questioning the kind of advice that Congress is getting."⁷³

Although Bogost and I agree about many issues of interpretative approach in studying persuasive games, perhaps it is important to point out that my position on the rhetoric of government-funded and government-monitored videogames is still significantly different from Bogost's. Bogost contends that participation in certain operations during interactive game play fundamentally differs from inhabiting the conventionally passive position of an audience member in a rhetorical situation organized around traditional verbal and visual appeals that date back to the classical era.⁷⁴ Instead players are the recipients of messages organized by "procedural rhetoric" in which they experience the constraints and causalities dictated by software, and in certain cases they can even read against that rhetoric and question the algorithms in play. In contrast, I claim that many government-supported and government-derived videogames have significant "secondary" audiences among the taxpaying public, who never actually *play* the games but only *see and hear snippets* that are presented to them through conventional oratory, because they are supposed to be particularly edifying or offensive. Furthermore, I contend that because the news media may be limited to displaying the visual and verbal

elements of these games, they may serve as political spectacles that reinforce rather than subvert existing ideologies.

On the *Nightline* segment, Pentagon spokesman Daniel Devlin argues that secondary audiences seek out content that gratifies their violent urges. He points out that the *Battlefield 2* footage was discovered on insurgent websites and thus was evidence of related criminal intent: “They are on hostile Web sites. That's where we found them, and that's all the research team is looking for.”⁷⁵ In response to Devlin’s assertions that intention can be construed relative to its audience rather than to its author, “Sonic Jihad” / “Samir” points out that a “ten-year-old kid” could do a “Google search” to discover the original audience and motivation behind the video, thus repeating his initial contention that a lack of “online research” skills was a core problem for Congress as it was for the Reuters reporter.⁷⁶

Of course, Samir continued to protest that his game doesn’t deserve any status as a rhetorical object in the *Nightline* segment, and the gameplay’s persuasive content is also downplayed by reporter Tapper as “not an advertisement for anything.”⁷⁷ But those interested in a rhetorical reading of this particular form of “cultural software” might not accept the author’s claim of ideological and communicative neutrality.

Some educational specialists praise games like *Battlefield 2*, precisely because they allow players to assume the identity of other political and social actors, even when that identity position might be conventionally seen as an opponent or enemy position. For example, literacy theorist James Paul Gee has defended the pedagogical opportunities in even widely reviled first-person shooter games, by pointing out how they manifest situated learning in semiotic domains that encourages risk-taking, discovery, and the

transfer of acquired skills. In his reflections about what he learned from playing as the malevolent “Shadow” in *Sonic Adventure 2*, Gee points out the value of more complicated “cultural models,” even if they entail a recognition of moral ambiguity: “Of course, video games are just as easy to design to allow you to play a sinner as a saint. Indeed, this fact has generated a good deal of controversy. While the video game world is replete with heroes who destroy evil, it also contains games where you can be a mob boss, a hired assassin, or a car thief.”⁷⁸

Because they present villains as well as heroes, the domestic production of videogames is always potentially regulated, particularly in the environment surrounding the “Sonic Jihad” hysteria. Just two weeks after this montage of game play was shown, the House unanimously voted in favor of H.R. 1145, a bill to ban the sale of violent and sexually explicit videogames to minors.

Certainly, consternation over the youth of potential consumers of anti-American multimedia punctuated the May 4th hearing. Specifically, the age of “seven” among potential audience members for jihadist Internet materials was mentioned several times. Even nominal critics of administration policy accept the legitimacy of cultural norms about majority when it comes to online participation. For example, Representative Hastings claims that “on the Internet a child can learn how to make a bomb,”⁷⁹ and Representative Harman makes an explicit play to the paternalism and maternalism of legislators by commending the witnesses and saying, “Peter, to the extent that you can share with us what you're doing about this, it would be helpful and finally -- we're all parents here, and some of us are even new grandparents -- the comment made that the

target audience is 7 or perhaps younger than 7 is truly chilling, so if you could include that in your response, I'd appreciate it.”⁸⁰

The rhetoric surrounding the concept of a “child-safe” Internet has a history of legislative consequences.⁸¹ In July 2005, both the Senate and the House passed resolutions against the videogame *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* that urged the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the rating of the game, which makes it accessible to minors, as a case of possible fraud.⁸² These sentiments about digital threats to children date back to what the Clinton White House called a “Family Friendly Internet,”⁸³ which was the motivating factor behind the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998,⁸⁴ which is still struggling to overcome Constitutional challenges, although it continues to drive legislative agendas today.

Of course, Plato similarly privileges the interests of the young in the regulation of cultural media. He argues in *The Republic* that dangerous forms of public discourse – like immoral tragedies or chaotic epics – can corrupt the *polis* by encouraging mimetic behavior among immature members of society who may be moved by virtual spectacles, mere imitations of imitations. By arguing in favor of having a virtuous philosopher-king banish corrupting poets, Plato prefigures many of the same arguments against allowing terrorists and pedophiles to use the Internet freely that appear in Congressional transcripts. As Plato puts it, “And in the case of sex, anger, and all the desires, pleasures, and pains that we say accompany all our actions, poetic imitation has the very same effect on us. It nurtures and waters them and establishes them as rulers in us when they ought to wither and be ruled, for that way we’ll become better and happier rather than worse

and more wretched.”⁸⁵ Virtual imitations are similarly of special danger to impressionable youth.

The day before the House Intelligence Hearing about Sonic Jihad, there was a hearing in the Rayburn Office Building on “The Sexual Exploitation of Children over the Internet: What Parents, Kids and Congress Need to Know About Child Predators.” This May 3rd, 2006 hearing was convened by the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations from the Committee on Energy and Commerce. It was the third hearing on the subject of how sexual predators use technology to prey upon their victims, and it was assembled in a more capacious room than the Sonic Jihad hearing. The room was even equipped with a semicircle of fixed leather chairs that contributed to an environment that suggested ceremonious deliberation rather than a mere briefing. Although generally the discourse about pedophiles necessarily excludes children themselves, because it is assumed to be preferable to shield the young from objectionable content, some minor constituents outside the regular circuits of adult rhetorical production are deemed capable of bearing witness in the public sphere by virtue of personal first-hand experience with victimization.⁸⁶

The star witness for the day was former Russian orphan Masha Allen, whose story may be as much about the failure of the social safety net that allowed her to reside with an adoptive father with a history of abuse as it is about the traffic of images of exploited children on the Internet.⁸⁷ Yet, in the webcast of the hearing, young Masha makes a compelling witness in favor of focusing on cyber-regulation. Her awkwardness as a speaker seems to only add to her credibility. Her hair is pulled back by a large barrette, and she peers through off-kilter glasses at the prepared comments she is holding. On the

webcast, she is dressed like a typical teenager in an informal scalloped white top, pink button-down sweater, and simple necklace and earrings. Yet she speaks fluently and expertly in this high-pressure rhetorical situation.

“You have to do something about the Internet,” Masha insists.⁸⁸ She compares overcoming the technological challenges of surveiling illegitimate online exchanges to the scientific and territorial accomplishments of the space program. As Masha declares, “If we can put a man on the moon, we can make the Internet safe for kids.”⁸⁹

Although this request seems patently unrealistic to anyone who understands how a global distributed network operates, Masha asserts her authority from the standpoint of victimization and comes off as an articulate and credible spokesperson nonetheless.⁹⁰ She begins her narrative with her life in Russia by depicting an alcoholic mother who tries to kill her, which is followed by misery in an institutional orphanage where the other children are themselves abusers and thieves.⁹¹ After arriving in the United States, she describes a life in isolation of captivity, starvation, sexual assault, and humiliation with her adoptive abuser in which her tormentor kept her physically pre-pubescent: “the size of a five year old when I was ten.”⁹² She only begins to stammer once, over the question of how “anyone could let a pedophile over a little girl,” because the phrasing was mistyped in her printed statement.⁹³ As Masha points out, much of the adoption procedure, including her abuser’s selection of her from photographs of potential candidates for adoption took place online, and in some of the digital images supplied by the orphanage to her abuser via the Internet she was “naked.”⁹⁴ Like the terrorists who change the names of their operations and move to other websites, the adoption agencies that handled cases like Masha’s are represented as entrepreneurs in perpetual flux.

Traditional mass media channels are shown as considerably less threatening than the distributed networks of the Internet in Masha's discourse. For example, Masha says that television exposure was considerably less traumatic: "A lot of people are surprised that I wanted to go public with my story. But I've been on the Internet since I was five years old. Going on a television show wasn't going to hurt me."⁹⁵

Surprisingly, this hearing is as much about the rhetoric of "illegal downloading" of copyrighted music as it is about child pornography on the Internet. Before the committee, Congressman Phil Gingrey M.D. of Georgia argues for the updating of a "twenty-year-old civil statute" with Masha's Law:

Current civil law allows victims of child sexual exploitation to recover damages of no less than \$50,000. However, federal copyright law provides statutory damages of no less than \$150,000 to be awarded to the copyright holder when a song is illegally downloaded from the internet. Masha's Law allows the civil remedy for the dissemination of child pornography to be equal to other illegal downloads.⁹⁶

The Kerry-Isakson bill that takes up "Masha's Law" in the Senate also makes explicit the connection between downloading music and viewing child pornography. On Senator John Kerry's website, in a press release on how "Downloaded songs carry a penalty three times greater than exploited children," he exclaims "It's wrong that we have tougher penalties for downloading music than for downloading sick images of infants and children."⁹⁷

Masha herself serves as an advocate for this equation of unauthorized online behaviors in her testimony before the committee:

Usually, when a kid is hurt and the abuser goes to prison, the abuse is over. But because Matthew put my pictures on the Internet the abuse is still going on. Anyone can see them. People are still downloading them – we get notices from the FBI every time someone is arrested for it. I want every single one of them to go to jail and really be punished. But that’s a problem too.

I found out last summer that if someone downloads a song off the Internet the penalty is three times worse than if someone downs child pornography. I couldn’t believe it! How can this be? That’s when I decided that we had to change the laws about downloading child porn. Senator Kerry and Senator Isakson and Congressman Gingery and Congressman Tierney introduced bills in Congress that make the penalty the same as downloading songs. That was a few months ago. There hasn’t been a vote on it. I want every single member of Congress to sponsor these bills and I want the Congress to pass them right away.⁹⁸

Despite her expressions of impatience with the progress of elected representatives on passage, her desire for speedy legislative action was ultimately gratified. Masha’s Law became law on July 27 that same year, as part of the omnibus Adam Walsh Child Safety and Protective Act, which passed both houses of Congress unanimously.

In her essay “Surfin’ the Net: Children, Parental Obsolescence, and Citizenship,” Sarah Banet-Weiser has argued that it is children’s technological competence and the associated fear of parental obsolescence that spurs constituents fears and anxieties about

the online cultural practices of the young. She points out that the ideology of the sexually innocent child who is also disengaged from productive participation in corporate capitalism can be historically situated as a relatively recent phenomenon, as Michel Foucault, Philippe Ariès, and other theorists of childhood have done.⁹⁹ Banet-Weiser believes that blocking and filtering software emphasizes the deployment of covert strategies to maintain structures of authority “if adult guidance is no longer needed to navigate the complex ways of the Internet,” because other forms of moral and intellectual hierarchy might also be threatened.

However, in her testimony, Masha often seems to desire overturning the status of adult authority as well. For example, she claims to want to reverse the position of the viewer and the viewed, so that professional adult voyeurs can become objects of an inquisitive public gaze themselves.

There are a lot of cases of people who downloaded my pictures and I want every single one of them to be punished as much as possible . . . The people who are doing this should be afraid. We know who they are. A lot of the people downloading these pictures are professionals. They are doctors and teachers and ministers. We’re going to put THEIR pictures on the Internet and tell people what they are doing. People stopped downloading songs when they found out they could be sued. We’re going to sue these guys too – every single one we find out about. I want to tell them, “You’re not doing this in secret anymore. Everyone can find out who you are!”¹⁰⁰

Despite their relative positions of social power as “doctors and teachers and ministers,” Masha, with her cohort of abused victims, wants to turn the tables on sexual offenders taking part in covert Internet practices by making them “afraid” and exposed to view.

Masha is correct that pedophiles are now the ones featured on websites from state and federal authorities. Unfortunately, this circulation of images of pedophiles in the interest of surveillance and retribution has been the cause for vigilante justice, such as a 2006 case in Maine in which two sex offenders were slain by an outraged Canadian dishwasher, who subsequently shot himself when cornered by police.¹⁰¹ Unlike other government websites, which can be remarkably difficult for visitors to navigate, federal and state registries that map the location of sex offenders are remarkably user-friendly, with east-to-read Mapquest-style representations of neighborhoods and arteries of transportation.¹⁰² As additional visual aids, mugshots may be posted along with other personal information.

By making the status quo of draconian penalties for the downloading of music justification for harsher consequences for pedophiles, rather than focusing attention just on those who traffic in a visual economy that depends on the sexual exploitation of children, debate about downloading and new digital practices is stifled. Rather than allow an opportunity for the public to question the justice of the existing system in which astronomical federal fines are levied for relatively petty individual intellectual property crimes these consequences are taken as a norm. In other words, the logic goes like this: the penalty for this minor crime is really punitive, so we should make it the standard by which we judge major crimes. Of course, that reasoning makes no sense, even on the level of the simple if-then causal statement. Furthermore, a law designed to protect the

rights of minors to have control over their own persons is connected to another law that disproportionately targets these very minors' digital practices, because teenagers are particularly likely to be skeptical about claims from the film and recording industries that everyday file-sharing constitutes piracy.¹⁰³ Despite Masha's claim that "People stopped downloading songs when they found out they could be sued," as of 2006, there appears to be little evidence to support her assertion that litigation has significantly affected the frequency of peer-to-peer file-sharing.¹⁰⁴

Unfortunately, by equating two dissimilar user behaviors, the common practice of downloading digital music and the extra-societal transgression of downloading child pornography, Masha's Law sets the stage for new regulatory attempts by the Department of Justice to control file sharing practices. Like the Sonic Jihad hearing, Masha's hearing also uses a form of statistical hyperbole in which the number of digital files and cash proceeds from transactions are magnified in each iteration, as the adult witnesses from law enforcement agencies add their own expert testimony to hers.

Although ostensibly aimed only at pedophiles and terrorists, in late May of 2006, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales formally requested that Internet Service Providers and search engine companies keep records of online behavior for up to two years. Not drawn to the public's attention was the fact that once records are kept, they can be subpoenaed for any legal proceeding, including civil cases involving intellectual property disputes. Thus, the prosecution of those who believe that their replication of digital materials for creative, critical, or pedagogical purposes is covered under "fair use" could be further facilitated by a government agency.

Furthermore, it is worth examining the actual surveiling technologies that are being funded by these programs and praised in the epideictic rhetoric of the Department of Justice. For example, among those being commended by the Attorney General in 2006 was Wyoming agent Flint Waters who developed software designed to catch sexual predators, software that could also be used to monitor other prohibited peer-to-peer transactions. Dubbed Operation Peerless and later Peer Precision, the system targets file sharing specifically, although such technical specifics were glossed over in Gonzales' speech honoring "his extraordinary contribution to cybercrime investigations."¹⁰⁵

Advocates for "free culture," "the creative commons," or "digital rights" may be troubled by this subtext. In *The Anarchist In the Library* Siva Vaidhyanathan has argued that a dangerous conflict between oligarchy and anarchy is putting deliberative discourse in the public sphere at risk. Although Vaidhyanathan believes that file sharing only represents one recent manifestation of peer-to-peer activities that have been perceived by prevailing institutions as subversive for centuries, he argues that powerful interests who would like to control intellectual property are fostering fundamentally undemocratic practices of litigation and legislation through oppressive copyright law. These interests are controlling the discourse of the "bruits publics" by which exchanges of information normally take place in democratic public spheres.

I have had the luxury of similar conversations with composers, musicians, record company executives, and hackers. Few of these rather subtle and complicated terms of debate have worked their way into the rhetoric of policymakers in Washington, D.C., or Brussels, Belgium. Most newspaper accounts of peer-to-peer battles have changed from sports or crime to

business stories. It's not yet a cultural story, an ethical story, or a political story.¹⁰⁶

In other words, Vaidhyathan documents patterns of discourse from an informal culture oriented around a communal secondary orality, which is sending a very different message about free culture and copyright than the one in the “rhetoric” of policymakers about illegal downloading.

The other problem with treating child pornography as an object of discourse is that it is by definition *not visible* and *not public*. Discourse about exploited children shows this even in its use of certain paradoxical forms of Orwellian language. For example, the FBI program for collecting data is called “Innocent Images.”¹⁰⁷ If Latour is talking about making “things public,” child pornography makes only the pedophile into the anti-social monster who can be shown, while the products which he manufactures and exchanges can only be witnessed by designated experts. Assistant Attorney General Alice Fisher testified to this effect during the Masha’s Law hearing:

I have seen some of these images, and, just like the Attorney General said, they make your stomach turn. I don't think many people realize how difficult it is for the law enforcement professionals who have dedicated their careers to this difficult work. It is revolting to view even one of these images. Imagine having to view hundreds and thousands of them - repeatedly, on a daily basis - in order to build the cases against offenders. That is what these dedicated professionals do, and it is challenging and traumatizing on a deeply emotional level. I join the Attorney General in

personally thanking all of those in law enforcement and elsewhere who are enduring those challenges and working hard to protect our children.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, the discourses of terrorists are relegated to the work of expert analysis, such as the witnesses in the Intelligence Hearing from SAIC.

In “The Promises of Monsters” Donna Haraway suggests a possible interpretation of the rhetorical function of these atypical Internet users who are outside society and its norms and yet central to its signifying functions, those who are the justification for these hearings and yet never appear as witnesses. In her essay, which is designed to question fundamental assumptions about subjectivity and society, she situates the modern cyborg without accepting traditional critiques of the creature’s artificiality¹⁰⁹ and observes that “nature” itself is “a topos, a place, in the sense of a rhetorician's place or topic.”¹¹⁰ She analyzes a range of contemporary rhetorical figures that serve as *objects* of political discourse rather than speaking *subjects* – astronaut, fetus, cells under “attack” by the HIV virus – and considers how certain social actors can be appointed to speak for those not designated as capable of bearing witness in their own names. In one of her footnotes Haraway points to the etymology behind the word “monster”: “Remember that monsters have the same root as to demonstrate; monsters signify.”

Terrorists and child molesters are similarly monsters that *show*, although perhaps what they show is our anxiety about the cultural slipperiness of digital rhetoric and the fact that electronic communication is a hybrid, composed of public and private practices, characterized by modes of orality and print, oriented toward production and consumption, and coded both for user and machine. In political discourse, these monsters are often used to merely *tell* citizens that there are threatening dangers to public security, which must be

dealt with by the institutions of the political state, even as the state apparatus becomes increasingly more virtual.¹¹¹

Of course, when you look for them, monsters are everywhere. In an April 20, 2004 speech about the PATRIOT anti-terrorism act, President George W. Bush explains the need for new digital and procedural tools to fight crime. He justifies these new practices by the presence of such “monsters” among us:

We couldn't use roving wire taps for terrorists. In other words, terrorists could switch phones and we couldn't follow them. The Patriot Act changed that, and now we have the essential tool. See, with court approval, we have long used roving wire taps to lock up monsters -- mobsters. Now we have a chance to lock up monsters, terrorist monsters.

(Laughter and applause.)¹¹²

The linguistic play between the word “monster” and “mobster” suggests a substitution of terms, as one surveiling technology, the wiretap, is supplanted by another, Internet monitoring. Similarly, Congressman Gingrey talks about the “monster who adopted” Masha and sexually abused her, and Masha herself says, “For five years, I was held hostage by a monster.”¹¹³

As massive archiving projects, these initiatives are also fostering inverse forms of the digital public library projects that have been stymied by a series of policy decisions. Now private corporations are pursuing large scale scanning, digitizing, and indexing of print texts that some may see as part of the public trust. The order of responsibility has been inverted: private companies handle the public record, and public agencies generate a

private record. For example, the FBI's "Innocent Images" program to combat child pornography specifically calls itself as a form of "National Archive."¹¹⁴

During a short period of twenty-four hours in the spring of 2006, two Congressional hearings showcased many of the public's anxieties about digital rhetoric and the subversive potential of an emerging information culture. Certainly, this anxiety about digital rhetoric is understandable. The transformation of traditional institutions by digital media and networked societies has been hyped with utopian or dystopian narratives about a new public culture. However, many public institutions like universities, libraries, or government agencies have created virtual counterparts with many of the same rhetorical conventions or inverse forms of those very same rules.

It's important first to define what "digital rhetoric" is, as an object of study. Digital rhetoric provides an interpretive framework in which information and the means of its communication the chief objects of study. Yet many who purportedly study the rhetoric of digital discourse ignore its informational dimension, so that a conventional rhetorical view of the study of hypertext, virtual environments, or networked communication directs attention only to the computer interface rather than to the theories behind its continuing development. In the standard model of digital rhetoric, literary theory is almost always applied to technological applications without considering how technological theories could conversely elucidate literary texts. Rhetoricians of digital culture debate about the merits of MOO's and MUD's or blogs and wikis but rarely address how fundamental paradigms of the public sphere have been reshaped by new ideas from the discourses of codes and algorithms.

In his 1959 essay *The Two Cultures*, C.P. Snow famously described the “intellectual life of the whole of western society” as divided between “two polar groups”: those of the sciences and those of the humanities. In this book I will be arguing that our central institutions may be divided between two even more fundamentally incompatible communities of association: the culture of knowledge and the culture of information. Yet, this dichotomy also has a long history, since at least the 4th century B.C.E. when, as Dilip Goankar observes, “Aristotle replaces Plato’s binary opposition between reality and appearance with his own binary opposition between the necessary and the contingent.”

“Hacking Aristotle” looks at four possible meanings for the term “digital” rhetoric: 1) the rhetorical conventions of new digital genres in everyday discourse, 2) public rhetoric via electronic distributed networks or hypertext, 3) the rhetorical analysis of new media in scholarly communities, and 4) the rhetoric of information theory (as opposed to rhetoric grounded in traditional epistemologies and institutions of knowledge). I argue that this new linguistic ideology, which is articulated in mathematical theories of communication published after World War II, also feeds back to influence the norms and generic conventions of everyday digital discourse.

I begin my survey of digital genres by considering how videogames and virtual reality simulations persuade users and communicate ideological messages. In “The Desert of the Unreal,” I analyze two military-funded projects at the University of Southern California: *Tactical Iraqi*, a computer game designed to accelerate a soldier’s acquisition of spoken Arabic to assist in volatile tactical situations, and *Virtual Iraq*, a virtual reality simulation intended to lessen the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among combat veterans. Of course, there are significant design differences between the

two projects. One is a game, and the other is a simulation; one is pedagogical in its orientation, and the other is therapeutic; one uses third-person perspective, and other uses first-person. Yet, there is also significant overlap between these virtual Iraqs, which were developed by research and development teams in close physical proximity to each other in Marina Del Rey, California. Both use pre-existing, off-the-shelf game technology that has a history in the consumer market, and both initiatives have received extensive national media coverage. Finally, both appear to serve rhetorical as well as pedagogical or therapeutic ends by making individual, private digital experiences aimed to effect the personal education or rehabilitation of military personnel accessible to a wider public. Because such games and simulations also make manifest certain politically uncomfortable aspects of the war in Iraq and otherwise hidden vulnerabilities in the soldier's readiness for combat, there has been a lively debate in the serious game development community about working on behalf of government-funded projects that support current military efforts.

“The War from the Web” presents the next category of new digital genre: the website organized by the layout of an HTML page with hyperlinks. Despite the fact that early advocates of e-government celebrated the liberatory potential of hypertext, and the architects for digital democracy purported to be inclusive in their development practices, institutional websites deploy many forms of manufactured interactivity, such as “virtual tours” or “turning the pages” exhibitions, which can deflect participatory challenges by using the ideological authority of certain cultural metaphors such as the museum. Furthermore, according to the Pew Center for the Internet and American Life, increasing numbers of Americans rely on government websites for information, so official web

designers are able to deliver particularly potent institutional messages. Yet, official rhetoric about September 11th on the Internet and its reception history shows how the public face of “e-government” can be more heterogeneous than its boosters would like to believe. There are many different instantiations of state authority from the vantage point of any individual user’s screen. A partial survey of websites from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the White House, the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Central Command in the weeks and months that followed September 11th suggests that official idealism about the promise of a user-friendly, authoritative, and direct digital democracy can not account for the many mixed messages from different sectors of the branches of U.S. government about race, class, gender, and nationality in the virtual aftermath of the attacks of September 11th. Even presidential oratory has been shrunk down to the busy desktop crammed with open windows so that the reception history of that oratory may now include attention to competing digital documents.

“Power Points” uses Jane Fountain’s concept of the Weberian “virtual state,” which exists primarily to maintain files, to extend the analysis of government websites from the previous chapter to look at other forms of rhetoric, such as electronic slideshows. Alliances between e-government and the advertising industry in fields like “public diplomacy,” “risk communication,” or “social marketing” are further commodifying traditional civic discourses in cyberspace. Yet the genre of the electronic slideshow can be used by political opponents and activists, as two recent documentaries – *The Yes Men* and *An Inconvenient Truth* – demonstrate.

While the virtual state becomes increasingly associated with particular signifiers and conventional topoi in visual rhetoric, such as authorized “brands” or stock genres like

the “photo essay,” netizens are appropriating that same iconography into subversive digital artworks, which include “Photoshopped” images, photo mosaics, and remixed audio and video files. In “Revolt of the Netizens,” I describe how these digital ephemera circulate in an unregulated gift economy. These circuits of exchange are potentially subject to rules governing intellectual property, and thus their status as constitutionally protected political speech may be threatened. Yet these forms of gift-exchange can also promote the development of Internet theaters of cruelty, in which disenfranchised political subjects can take revenge on the virtual bodies of the leaders of the body politic.

For stakeholders inside institutional systems, e-mail would seem particularly well-suited to the aims of policy change, since would-be whistleblower intent on could expose government corruption or avert disaster as quickly as possible. As a medium for instantaneous and intimate global communication, e-mail initially appears to be far superior to traditional epistolary discourse, because letters are vulnerable to delays and acts of confiscation by hostile parties. Yet because the genre of e-mail is often perceived as closer to speech than to written communication, its juridical authority is undermined by its status as a virtual artifact, as I explain in the chapter on “Whistle Blowers.” Ideally e-mail would serve as electronic testimony but often it functions as mere evidence, if not hearsay. When *Time* magazine named three women as its “Persons of the Year” of 2002, as icons of public rhetoric, it is worth noting that none of the featured whistleblowers used e-mail as the primary vehicle for their well-publicized rhetorical acts. In fact, FBI Special Agent Colleen Rowley devotes a significant section of her thirteen-page letter to Chief Robert Mueller to metadiscourse about e-mail. Rowley asserts that the e-mails of others “speak for themselves,” while her own e-mails require more explication, because

they were constrained by compositional pressures of time and written space characteristic of spoken conversation. In another scandal involving the federal government, the NASA crash of the Columbia space shuttle, engineers worked in a panopticon of virtual surveillance, but project managers were still unaware of the technical concerns being expressed by their subordinates via e-mail. Edward Tufte traces this disaster back to a poorly-designed PowerPoint presentation, but I also locate the communication breakdown in the demi-realm of electronic epistolarity. Finally, it is worth considering how e-mail exchanges involving Hurricane Katrina became ammunition in a battle of partisan politics and competing disclosures.

Digital rhetoric also can be observed in databases, which have long been recognized as aesthetic objects as well. The basic thesis for “Reading Room,” based on my own research in European and American institutions, is that just as the physical building of a national library can serve as a tangible expression of political and cultural philosophy, a given digital archive manifests ideological features of the national legacy it preserves and disseminates electronically. For example, millennial discourses have influenced national library building projects in both physical and digital archives. However, a simple analogy between conventional and electronic spaces is inadequate, because national policies on digitizing documents and regulating access engender contradictory impulses in archivists and policy makers. Although critics like Lessig, Stallman, Warner, and Samuelson focus on the centrality of the “right to read,” the physical space of a document archive is actually constituted by prohibitions on reading. In the case of the *bibliothèque nationale*, the French government makes its digital collection widely and anonymously available, but closely surveils readers in its physical

space. In contrast, the Library of Congress celebrates democratic access to its reading rooms and its “open source” approach to the collective labor of cataloguing, but corporate business models for web development undermine the authenticity of these rhetorical appeals to the public interest. Finally, the British Library offers an interface that emulated turning pages of rare tomes but comes late to prioritizing searchable text encoding. Alongside these three eminent national libraries, I consider how the Danvers Archival Center offers a model of a “local” physical/digital hybridized archive that asserts its social function in a particular community of literacy experiences but also claims legitimacy in cyberspace. Now that Google Print and the competing efforts of Yahoo are appropriating the cultural work of the state archive and consigning it to the sphere of corporate privatization, it is important to reconsider the obligation to the public for information access. At the same time, metadata factories are emerging all over the country, even in small New England towns like Chester, Vermont.

I examine the competing trend to make things private in more detail in “Waiting Room,” where the topic is public health websites, videogames, and simulations. I consider how expertise is constituted in several virtual reality projects that simulate terrorist acts, which are being developed for medical providers and emergency first-responders with funding from government agencies. Many see this as a logical extension of work already being done with virtual reality in the training of medical doctors and public health workers to decrease the incidence of human error, with the aviation industry as a model of successful implementation. I argue that these games and simulations can also be read in the context of the genre of public “risk communication,” which achieved particular importance after World War II during a period of heightened fear of nuclear

attack by the Soviet Union. The Interactive Media Laboratory at Dartmouth Medical School has been the flagship for research on these pedagogical applications for virtual reality technology: their teams are producing both the Virtual Terrorism Academy and several software projects in the Virtual Clinic series. Researchers, under the leadership of project director Joseph Henderson, explicitly describe themselves as disciples of the theories of “John Dewey” and “constructivism.” Yet I have argued that these simulations serve rhetorical as well as pedagogical purposes and that their central tropes invite questions, particularly when they model what Noah Falstein has called “simulations of simulations.” For example, the “Virtual Clinic” series that provides the model for the “Virtual Terrorism Academy” emphasizes representing the *clinic* in the virtual reality environment rather than representing the actual *body* of the patient, and this clinic is understood to be within another institution of practice, which is also situated in virtual space.

Finally, to understand the context for our emerging information culture, I return to a prior historical moment from the period after World War II, when the U.S. government invested heavily in an emerging discipline called “information science” and communications engineers were solving the technical problems that would make widespread access to television and eventually other digital video and audio networks possible. The Shannon/Wiener papers of 1948 and 1949 articulated the axioms underlying a new worldview based on probability, contingency, and information. This worldview also had ideological consequences for language, rhetoric, and politics that still shape public culture today and in the near future. How the virtual state responds to the “War on Terror” and how real acts of terrorism produce virtual simulations are ongoing

dramas in both lived experience and cyberspace that reflect cultural norms in which information has been commodified. It remains to be seen whether public or private interests will dictate the circulation of videogames and virtual reality simulations, webpages, electronic slide shows, digitally altered images, and e-mail as rhetorical objects.

¹ http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/C/CONGRESS_TERRORISM?SITE=NYROR&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

² http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20060504/us_nm/security_videogames_dc_4

³ http://today.reuters.com/news/ArticleNews.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2006-05-04T215543Z_01_N04305973_RTRUKOC_0_US-SECURITY-VIDEOGAMES.xml&pageNumber=0&imageid=&cap=&sz=13&WTModLoc=NewsArt-C1-ArticlePage2

⁴ http://today.reuters.com/news/ArticleNews.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2006-05-04T215543Z_01_N04305973_RTRUKOC_0_US-SECURITY-VIDEOGAMES.xml&pageNumber=0&imageid=&cap=&sz=13&WTModLoc=NewsArt-C1-ArticlePage2

⁵ For more on how users can employ digital tools to alter, improve, customize, and satirize commercial products, see the work of Siva Vaidhyanathan and Lawrence Lessig.

⁶ http://news.zdnet.com/2100-1040_22-6068963.html

⁷ <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,194416,00.html>

⁸ <http://www.tampatribune.com/News/MGB24YNJ4GE.html>

⁹ In actual insurgent video posted on the Internet, the targets are generally lightly armored Humvees from the U.S. armed forces or the civilian automobiles of those assumed to be collaborators with the occupation.

¹⁰ <http://cagematch.dvorak.org/index.php/topic,130.0.html>

¹¹ <http://www.forumplanet.com/planetbattlefield/topic.asp?fid=13670&tid=1806909&p=1>

¹² <http://www.treyparker.com>

¹³ <http://www.ggl.com/news.php?NewsId=3090>

¹⁴ <http://www.forumplanet.com/planetbattlefield/topic.asp?fid=7419&tid=1888667>

¹⁵ <http://gamepolitics.livejournal.com/285129.html#cutid1>

¹⁶ Lev Manovitch, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001) 143.

¹⁷ <http://gamepolitics.livejournal.com/285129.html#cutid1>

¹⁸ May 4 Hearing, 5.

¹⁹ Bruno Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public," *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005) 31.

²⁰ May 4, 2006 Panel I House Select Intelligence Committee, "Terrorist Use of the Internet," Federal News Service, 9.

²¹ May 4 Hearing, 21.

²² May 4 Hearing, 13.

²³ May 4 Hearing, 21.

²⁴ May 4 Hearing, 21.

²⁵ May 4 Hearing, 18.

²⁶ Pew Internet and American Life Project, "The Commons of the Tragedy: How the Internet was used by millions after the terror attacks to grieve, console, share news, and debate the country's response,"

http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/46/report_display.asp

²⁷ May 4 Hearings 21.

²⁸ <http://hoekstra.house.gov/>
²⁹ <http://www.house.gov/harman/>
³⁰ <http://www-eshoo.house.gov/>
³¹ <http://alceehastings.house.gov/>
³² <http://wilson.house.gov/>
³³ <http://www.house.gov/thornberry/>
³⁴ <http://www.house.gov/tiaht/>
³⁵ <http://wwc.house.gov/reyes> and <http://www.reyesblog.com>
³⁶ <http://holt.house.gov/> I was also impressed to see that his “kids’ page” actually addressed the information literacy issues of his young constituents by directing them to many grown-up pages that would likely be useful in doing required school reports, unlike many federal children’s sites, which emphasize only cartoon characters and vacuous online games. Of course Holt’s focus on information literacy isn’t a partisan marker of political affiliation, because conservative Senator Rick Santorum also had an exceptionally research-oriented children’s site.
³⁷ May 4 Hearing, 5.
³⁸ May 4 Hearing, 8.
³⁹ See the work of Richard Lanham, Steven Mailloux, etc.
⁴⁰ Plato, “Gorgias,” *Plato: Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) 247.
⁴¹ Jihadists also have “the power to craft this stuff,” according to witnesses. May 4 Hearing, 10.
⁴² May 4 Hearing, 22-23.
⁴³ See also counterarguments from Said, Rushdie, and Žižek.
⁴⁴ Of course, many rhetorician celebrate the oral turn that the Internet supposedly represents in contemporary culture. Richard Lanham has made much of the new rhetoric that will flourish in the absence of the printed book, William Joyce capitalizes on the destabilizing of authorship by new constructs of “voice” in his writing workshops, and other Internet scholars, influenced by the work of Walter Ong, celebrate what they believed to be a new orality that will enrich a culture that has grown anemic without the mythic and epic vitality of shared verbal narratives.
⁴⁵ May 4 Hearing, 4.
⁴⁶ See Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Anarchist in the Library*
⁴⁷ May 4 Hearing, 5.
⁴⁸ See Richard Lanham on the “economics of attention.”
⁴⁹ See *Henry IV*, Part 2, I.1 and *The Aeneid IV*, among others.
⁵⁰ May 4 Hearing, 6.
⁵¹ Plato, “Phaedrus,” *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) 521.
⁵² Plato also claims that writing fails to function as an aid to memory because it encourages practices of forgetting.
⁵³ May 4 Hearing, 11.
⁵⁴ Although once stigmatized as information warfare, since the attacks on the World Trade Center, the field of public diplomacy has received broad institutional acceptance in all aspects of government. Even legislative challenges to the executive branch, such as S-266, which attempts to strengthen prohibitions against “government funded propaganda,” only apply to materials distributed within the United States. There have been a series of designated functionaries serving as Undersecretary of State in charge of public diplomacy efforts, and in the past few years, academic centers devoted to public diplomacy have appeared at research universities, such as Duke and the University of Southern California.
⁵⁵ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
⁵⁶ May 4 Hearing, 9.
⁵⁷ May 4 Hearing, 23.
⁵⁸ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3953&l=1>
⁵⁹ The Reuters story was also picked up by the Air Education and Training Command news service. See <http://www.au.af.mil/au/aunews/generalJune06/VideoGames.html>.
⁶⁰ May 4 Hearing, 15.
⁶¹ <http://www.opensource.gov>, accessed July 27, 2006. Those who study the history of the Open Source movement would consider this use a misnomer. See Eric Raymond *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*.

⁶² Yet, in the “History & Timeline” section, inquisitive visitors can learn that the company was founded in 1969 by a physicist from the Los Alamos national laboratory with “no grandiose plan,” who launched his company in the space next door to a ballet studio in La Jolla, California and emphasized improvisation and informality in his corporate practices.

⁶³ May 4 Hearing, 21.

⁶⁴ <http://www.watercoolergames.org/archives/000526.shtml>

⁶⁵ May 4 Hearing, 18.

⁶⁶ May 4 Hearing, 18.

⁶⁷ See *Linked* on the vulnerability of computer networks with large hubs.

⁶⁸ http://news.com.com/Dutch+gamers+clash+with+U.S.+government/2100-1043_3-6076255.html?tag=nefd.top

⁶⁹ http://news.com.com/Dutch+gamers+clash+with+U.S.+government/2100-1043_3-6076255.html?tag=nefd.top

⁷⁰ <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/Technology/story?id=2105128&page=1> The online edition of *Nightline* is itself an interesting way to see how already hybridized television “news magazine” shows are being repurposed in online environments for digital feeds, Podcasts, and other devices for both stationary and mobile computing

⁷¹ <http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=2105341>

⁷² Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: Videogames and Procedural Rhetoric* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), forthcoming manuscript.

⁷³ <http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=2105341>

⁷⁴ In a reference to *Tactical Iraqi*, a military-funded videogame to teach soldiers Iraqi Arabic, which I have also written about, Bogost directs his reader’s attention to precisely this difference in our methods of analysis.

⁷⁵ <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/Technology/story?id=2105128&page=1>

⁷⁶ <http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=2105341>

⁷⁷ The use of the term “advertisement,” as in “advertisement for terrorism” occurs several times during the ABC *Nightline* broadcast. For more on genuine “advergaming,” see the work of Ian Bogost.

⁷⁸ James Paul Gee, *What Videogames Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) 141.

⁷⁹ May 4 Hearing, 12.

⁸⁰ May 4 Hearing, 11.

⁸¹ This urge to protect children from objectionable media content is an important theme. Unfortunately, as I will explain, this interest in the well-being of schoolchildren rarely extends to any serious commitment to improving their educations in information and media literacy, which I will argue is a perhaps a more serious threat to democratic institutions. A survey of kids’ pages on government websites will illustrate my point that children are not taken seriously as consumers of public information.

⁸² http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getpage.cgi?dbname=2005_record&page=S8987&position=all and http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_bills&docid=f:hr376eh.txt.pdf

⁸³ <http://clinton5.nara.gov/textonly/WH/New/Ratings/>

⁸⁴ <http://www.ftc.gov/ogc/coppa1.htm>

⁸⁵ Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992) 277.

⁸⁶ Twelve-year-old Danielle Shimotakahara testified before Congress in 2000 against the presence of violent videogames in public places. See <http://commerce.senate.gov/hearings/0321shi.pdf>.

⁸⁷ A witness in a second, earlier hearing, Justin Berry, who was profiled in the *New York Times*, also had a father involved in his sexual exploitation via Internet webcam.

⁸⁸ Testimony Submitted by Masha Allen, p. 4, <http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/05032006hearing1852/Allen.pdf>

⁸⁹ Testimony Submitted by Masha Allen, p. 4.

⁹⁰ Law involving the testimony of juveniles in sexual abuse cases that use digital technology has a complicated legal history. See Supreme Court decisions, such as *Coy v. Iowa* and *Maryland v. Craig* about the confrontation clause, the role of *res gestae*, and established thresholds for the admissibility of videotaped or close circuit testimony. To be a witness in the tradition of English Common Law, it is not enough to have seen a crime, you must also bear witness and in turn be seen by the accused, given the

Constitutional right of confrontation. Justice Antonin Scalia, in dissent, wrote that he was “persuaded...that the Maryland procedure is virtually constitutional. Since it is not, however, actually constitutional I would affirm the judgment of the Maryland Court of Appeals reversing the judgment of conviction.” The use of “virtual” constitutionality in Scalia’s discourse will also be important for forms of digital evidence discussed elsewhere.

⁹¹ Testimony Submitted by Masha Allen, p. 1.

⁹² Testimony Submitted by Masha Allen, p. 2.

⁹³ Testimony Submitted by Masha Allen, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Testimony Submitted by Masha Allen, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Testimony Submitted by Masha Allen, p. 4.

⁹⁶ <http://gingrey.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=43005>

⁹⁷ <http://kerry.senate.gov/v3/cfm/record.cfm?id=250302>

⁹⁸ Testimony Submitted by Masha Allen, p. 3-4,

<http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/05032006hearing1852/Allen.pdf>

⁹⁹ Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Surfin’ the Net: Children, Parental Obsolescence, and Citizenship,” *Technological Visions: The Hopes and Fears that Shape New Technologies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 270-292

¹⁰⁰ Testimony Submitted by Masha Allen, p. 3-4,

<http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/05032006hearing1852/Allen.pdf>

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Mehren, “Sex Offender Site Back Up,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 2006

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-maine19apr19.1.1485753.story?coll=la-headlines-nation>

¹⁰² See the federal site at <http://www.nsopr.gov/> and state sites at <http://www.meganslaw.ca.gov/> and <http://sor.informe.org/sor/>.

¹⁰³ Another law that actually limits the rights of children while claiming to be regulating those who exploit them is the Deleting Online Predators Act, which requires schools and libraries to bar access to social networking sites and chatrooms. It passed the House by a landslide, despite the protests of distance learning experts, such as Henry Jenkins and Dana Boyd. See <http://www.danah.org/papers/MySpaceDOPA.html> for their discussion, which is geared to parents and other laypeople.

¹⁰⁴ See the studies cited by Siva Vaidhyanathan in “The Assault on Mixed CDs” at

<http://www.nyu.edu/classes/siva/archives/003393.html>

¹⁰⁵ Alberto Gonzales, “Prepared Remarks at the National Missing Children’s Day Award Ceremony,” May 25, 2006 http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/speeches/2006/ag_speech_060525.html

¹⁰⁶ Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Anarchist in the Library: How the Clash between Freedom and Control is Hacking the Real World and Crashing the System* (New York: Basic Books, 2004) 63.

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.fbi.gov/innocent.htm>

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/ceos/AAG%20Testimony%205032006.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ Donna Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics of Inappropriate/d Others,” Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York; Routledge, 1992), 295-337.

¹¹⁰ Haraway 296.

¹¹¹ For example, in one case, the President of the United States videoconferences with officials about a hurricane in New Orleans, and in another, he confers with his cabinet via video feed during a surprise visit to a war zone in Iraq.

¹¹² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/04/20040420-3.html>

¹¹³ <http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/05032006hearing1852/Allen.pdf>

¹¹⁴ <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/innocent.htm>