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Writing Ethnicity on the Internet:
Communicative Practices of the Ukrainian Virtual Community

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of
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ABSTRACT

Writing Ethnicity on the Internet:
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Luba Krekhovetsky

This thesis examines the process of ethnic identity formation through computer-mediated communication. In so doing, it inquires into the relationship between ethnicity and computer technology. It explores the ways in which ethnicity is expressed and articulated through the writing practice of computer-mediated communication, and investigates how a particular ethnicity is constituted, negotiated, and reified through the practices of computer-mediated communication. The research centres on a specific ethnocultural formation: the Ukrainian diaspora. It analyzes the discursive formation of the InfoUkes mailing lists, a series of Web-based discussion lists accessible through the InfoUkes Web site. The research method, a combination of discourse analysis and ethnography, entailed interpreting and explicating a number of the discussions on the InfoUkes lists. Analysis of these discussions demonstrates that the communicative practice of the InfoUkes mailing lists constitutes an inquiry into ethnic identity. This thesis posits that ethnicity is continually rearticulated and renegotiated through communicative practice. It concludes that the discursive formation of the InfoUkes lists fostered the emergence of an ethnically-based virtual community within which participants were able to negotiate and inscribe their ethnic identities both individually and collectively.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my mother Oksana for her boundless encouragement and support throughout the many months of research and writing.

CONTENTS

Prologue

On Visiting St. Onufry Church
The Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec

In the early 1950s, Ukrainian Catholic priests were urgently needed in rural parts of Western Canada. My maternal grandfather, the second youngest in a priestly family of twelve, was brought to Canada by the Ukrainian Catholic eparchy of Alberta to serve the parishes of northern Alberta. My mother and my aunt, young girls at the time, and my grandmother, accompanied him to Radway, Alberta, a small town north of Edmonton. They came from Paris; they were city folk. Radway, Alberta was as foreign to them as the tropics might have been, had they immigrated to South America like some other DPs of that era.

I remember my mother telling the story of their arrival: for the first few days in eastern Canada the weather was relatively mild, and they laughed off the horror stories of the fabled Canadian cold. They had crossed the ocean from France with a boatful of other Ukrainian immigrants, most of whom they left behind in Halifax or Montreal. Some urged them to stay in the east, but my grandfather was resolute: there were churches in Western Canada that needed priests. As they moved west, the weather got colder. Within the first three days of arriving in Edmonton, my grandmother frostbit her hands and face; it was –60° Fahrenheit. This part of the story is always told with a smile, and I can just imagine my fiercely proud grandmother suffering quietly, furious with the elements. From that point on, my grandfather started petitioning to be relocated to the east; six years passed before the bishop relented, and they finally moved to Toronto. But it isn't this part of the story that interests me; it's their life in the hinterlands of Western Canada that I find intriguing. It's exotic, this idea of my mother as a young girl living on a farm; it doesn't correspond to the person I know. There's a rupture between my childhood memories of growing up in Toronto and this image of her in northern Alberta. It's that rupture between living memory and family narrative that always draws me back to the story, curious.

I've never been to Radway, Alberta, but not too long ago, I went to the Canadian Museum of Civilization in search of my family history. During my grandparents' sojourn in Radway, my grandfather had six parishes in the surrounding area and he spent his days travelling from one to the other, serving the local communities. One of these churches—

St. Onufry Church of Smoky Lake, Alberta—has been dismantled, transported, and reconstructed in the museum as part of the Canadian history exhibit.

I started with the Native houses on the ground floor, staring intently at the totem poles and trying to let their weathered faces speak to me. Then I proceeded to the third floor, to the section labelled 'Canadian history'—that strange trajectory that begins with the Norse arriving in Canada and ends with the present, although the last few exhibits are still unfinished. I walked through the various sections slowly, pensively, trying to take it all in, trying to pretend that I'd come for the whole of Canadian history, not just for my small piece of it. I tried to reflect on the wider historical scope in order to contextualize the building that I was eager to happen upon as I turned every corner of the winding exhibit. But five hundred years of history are not easily compressed, and I began to grow impatient, casting a cursory glance at the farm houses, the *coureurs de bois*, the military uniforms.

Almost unexpectedly, I came upon a small structure tucked in a corner against the backdrop of a fake azure sky. It was across from the Slavic bookstore. I had missed it—walked right by it, in fact—as I beelined for the familiar Cyrillic script in the window. St. Onufry Church. It was tiny, like a little toy church. I stopped and gazed searchingly, conscious that my long-anticipated moment had arrived. With my boots softly tapping the floor, I entered the tiny church. Spare and dimly lit, it seemed even smaller on the inside. It looked the part of a prairie church, although I have no conception of what a prairie church should look like. I was welcomed by the sounds of a modest choir; I hummed the familiar melodies, formed the words voicelessly with my mouth. Alone in this tiny structure, I tried to connect with the history of the place. I imagined myself a parishioner here, some forty odd years ago, standing in the centre, or ascending the narrow steps to the diminutive choir loft. An older couple entered the church. I asked the woman to take a photo of me standing in front of the iconostasis. I tried to look casual, nonchalant. I wanted to share with these people, to tell them that this church is part of my history, but I felt awkward, locked away in a meditative state. They left. I stood near the front, crossed myself, and gazed at the icons bathed in pink light. I was searching for clues. I was dismayed that there weren't any historical photographs: I wanted some kind of proof that my grandfather had been here. I tried to imagine him performing mass while my grandmother conducted the church choir, but I just couldn't visualize it; the image had no correlation to my living memory.

I kept staring, soaking it all in, trying to be aware of all my sensory perceptions. I thought of praying, but I decided instead to listen to the sounds of the place, to long-forgotten

history. I waited, hoping for that revelatory moment, expecting something to awaken within. What was I searching for? The music, a brief audiotape, had finished its ten minutes of play and started over again. This was disappointing..."why not record the whole mass?" I thought. I sat there trying to absorb the aura of the past, knowing that my expectations were somehow absurd. It was a lovely church, quaint, but what exactly did I expect to find? My grandparents' initials engraved in the wood? I'd been planning to visit this church for some time, so I suppose I'd built it up to be some epiphanic moment. I did feel something, it just wasn't as clear or sudden an epiphany as I had anticipated. It was ambiguous, puzzling. I went outside again, lingered, took a few photos, went back inside, and decided to say goodbye. I wandered off slowly, moving on to other exhibits.

I'm not sure what it is that I found at the museum—not sure what I was looking for, really. I suppose I was looking for clues to my own identity, but I still don't know how to interpret what I saw there. Where am I in this grand narrative of my ancestry? I love to hear the Radway story told and retold, but I still don't know where I fit in this admittedly familiar story of transplantation and expectation. Even when I tell it, there's an element of romanticism; the story changes every time. It's a natural evolution, I think: it becomes stylized, pared-down to its barest, most revealing elements. Somehow the story feels intensely personal, mine, *усвоіне*, even though I'm not really in it.

So why this desire to see the church, why this longing for history? I suspect that I want to bear witness, I want to *be* there, zooming in like an angel from above. I want to enter the narrative *in medias res*, 'in the middle of things'; I want time-capsule access to the past. But the closest I ever get, it seems, is to recover this history by retelling the story, appropriating it, linking myself to past generations by remoulding it into my own.

Chapter 1

Mapping out the research question

Many researchers agree that the impulse behind one's research is often a nagging personal question that drives one to academic inquiry. As the intellectual manifestation of the researcher's fascination with a particular phenomenon, the research question often carries a strong personal resonance. The research question that underpins this thesis was borne of the intersection of my own often ambivalent search for identity, and the potential of Internet technology to serve as a site where individuals can express and construct their subjectivities through computer-mediated communication. I have included my reflection on St. Onufry Church not only to highlight my particular experience as a hyphenated Canadian, but also to foreground my positionality by making explicit the personal resonance of my research. I have often found that my endeavour to reconcile, understand, and articulate a hybrid identity echoes the experiences of others for whom the pull of memory, history, and tradition is ever-present and persistent. By sharing my story, I hope to inform and contextualize the quintessential search for identity that is the subject of my research project.

When I initially got on-line, some of the first World Wide Web sites I visited were Ukrainian sites. As I asked myself the obvious questions—what kinds of Ukrainian Web sites are there? how is Internet technology being used by Ukrainians?—I recognized this as a fruitful area of research. I began with a few assumptions: that identity itself is relative and changeable; that computer-mediated communication makes the boundaries of identity infinitely more fluid; that the locus of identity is difficult enough to locate without the added complication of a medium that transcends global distances. In the course of my research, I realized that my academic exploration into the emergence of a Ukrainian virtual community was in itself a self-reflexive, computer-mediated search for identity

and community. My positionality as a Ukrainian Canadian armed me with an insider's knowledge of the Ukrainian diaspora and its concerns, while invariably complicating my position as a researcher. As a member of the Ukrainian diaspora, I am an insider; as something of a technological neophyte, I remain an outsider. This dual positionality was, in fact, advantageous: it allowed me to explore the issues from both sides of the fence. And, as a hyphenated Canadian, I am well-acquainted with occupying a liminal space.

This thesis investigates questions of ethnicity, identity, community, and culture in the context of an emerging communications medium. It is an exploration of the ways in which individual identities, expressed through the computer-mediated practices of Internet communication, coalesce into a virtual community where the members of a pre-existing ethnocultural formation reconstitute their community electronically.[1] On an individual level, it is about the intersection of the ethnic subject with computer networking technology; on a communal level, it is about the construction of collective identity and the formation of virtual community. Like my reflection, this thesis explores how ethnic subjectivities are expressed, negotiated, and manifested within the specific context of an ethnically oriented discussion forum. My research question may be summarized as follows: How does a pre-existing ethnocultural formation, such as the Ukrainian diaspora, articulate and negotiate its individual and collective identities through the practices of computer-mediated communication? The following is "by way of an answer" (Kostash 1993, 2).

[1] An 'ethnocultural formation' is a social formation that is premised on shared ethnicity and culture. The term 'ethnocultural' encompasses broader cultural aspects of ethnicity, including cultural artifacts, symbols, customs, and traditions.

The Ukrainian diaspora and computer-mediated communication

Predictably, the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state in 1991 had profound reverberations on the over 2.5 million members of the Ukrainian diaspora worldwide (Subtelny 1988, 559). Not only did the collapse of the Soviet Union shift the international balance of power; it also dramatically altered the cultural landscape of the diasporic communities that found their respective homelands in one of the former Soviet republics. For many members of the Ukrainian diaspora, Ukraine's newly attained independence forced them to reconsider and, in many cases, reconceptualize their role with regard to Ukrainian culture, ethnicity, and political self-determination. It is in this historical context that the quest to define and articulate a Ukrainian diasporic identity has gained new significance and immediacy in recent years.

The term 'diaspora'—traditionally used to refer to the dispersed Jewish population scattered around the world—has been adopted by other displaced ethnocultural groups who, like the Jewish diaspora until 1948, were without a homeland. 'Diaspora' thus refers to a dispersed ethnocultural group; it is used throughout this thesis to refer to the global community of Ukrainian immigrants and their descendants who live beyond the borders of modern-day Ukraine. A large proportion of the Ukrainian diaspora is found in North America, with smaller pockets in Western Europe, South America, and even Australia. Given this degree of diffusion, computer-mediated communication seems well-suited to the needs of a diasporic community that is so widely scattered around the globe. Indeed, there is an unusual but perhaps not unexpected correspondence between the concept of a diaspora and the structure of the Internet, a global computer network: both are, by definition, without a centre. The concept of a diaspora is central to this thesis because the research question centres on how the diaspora's identity is articulated through computer-mediated communication. How does the Ukrainian ethnic subject, living in the diaspora,

constitute and negotiate his or her identity through the practices of computer-mediated communication?

Throughout this thesis, computer-mediated communication is treated as one particular site of conjuncture between computer technology and the diasporic ethnocultural formation. The notion of a conjuncture implies that technology and culture are inextricably linked. Rather than conceptualizing the research site as an intersection, which implies that culture and technology are autonomous forces that intersect but once, I prefer to think of ethnically oriented mailing lists as merely one point of conjuncture between the "nearly seamless web which joins culture and technology" (Game and Carey 1998, 118). Culture and technology are parallel vectors intertwined in a complex relationship, continually informing and reflecting one another. The objective of this thesis, then, is to trace the relationship between culture and technology by examining its manifestation within a particular site of the Ukrainian virtual community.

The body of the thesis is organized in two pairs of chapters. The first pair addresses relevant theoretical issues, while the second engages with the research site. Chapter 2 examines the concepts of ethnicity and identity from the perspective of the Ukrainian-Canadian ethnic subject. It sketches the history of the Ukrainian community in Canada and describes the ways in which ethnicity has been written about by Ukrainian Canadians. This chapter submits that ethnicity be conceptualized as a writing practice. Chapter 3 completes this pair of theoretical chapters by examining various theorizations of computer-mediated communication. It investigates the concept of virtual community, identifies its defining characteristics, and elucidates the central issues surrounding computer-mediated communication. Together, these two chapters map out the main theoretical concepts that pertain to the actual research site.

The following two chapters turn from theoretical issues to investigation of the research site itself. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive review of the various Ukrainian Web sites currently on-line, effectively contextualizing the main focus of research, the InfoUkes mailing lists. It characterizes different types of Ukrainian-related Web sites, describes the InfoUkes site in detail, and outlines the history of the InfoUkes mailing lists. Chapter 5 engages with the actual research site, offering a detailed rendering of the discussions that have transpired on the InfoUkes mailing lists. It isolates some of the representative conversation threads and analyzes them in terms of the aforementioned theoretical concepts. Together, these chapters examine the communicative practice of articulating ethnicity through computer-mediated communication. Finally, Chapter 6 offers some conclusions on the implications of computer-mediated ethnic identity formation and suggests possible areas for further research.

Methodology

The lack of established methodologies for conducting computer-mediated research enabled me to borrow and adapt methodologies from various research paradigms. The result is a hybrid methodology consisting of methods from two complementary research traditions, discourse analysis and ethnography, that complement each other both methodologically and epistemologically.

Text...

Discourse analysis is premised on the epistemological assumption that we can learn about a culture by treating it as a discursive formation. It is a textual approach that seeks to identify thematic patterns of speech or expression that emerge within a given social field. Thus, discourse analysis is primarily text-based; its object of study is discourse itself, as expressed and embodied in textual form. Its primary methods involve reading, coding, and interpreting discursive texts. Foucault describes discourse analysis as an attempt to

write or reconstruct a "history of 'things said'" by undertaking "an analysis of the discourses in the dimension of their exteriority" (Foucault 1978, 63; 60). Discourse analysis, then, focuses on the literal level of text—the outward manifestation of 'things said'—with the objective of analyzing its surfaces and identifying recurring terms and concepts.

Discourse analysis is appropriate to an investigation of computer-mediated communication because it treats the electronic texts of the InfoUkes mailing lists as an ethnically based discursive formation. According to Foucault, a discursive approach is "neither a formalization nor an exegesis, but an *archaeology*: that is to say, as its name indicates only too obviously, the description of an *archive*" (Foucault 1978, 59). The research site is, literally, an archive of all prior discussions on the InfoUkes mailing lists: all postings are logged in an electronic archive of each individual list arranged by month and year. Thus, the research site lends itself to an examination of on-line communicative practices as they are embodied in electronic texts. A discursive approach is well-suited to the particularities of computer-mediated communication precisely because its epistemological foundation—that of treating documents as discursive texts—is consonant with the nature of the research material. The research project, therefore, was conceptualized as an archaeology of 'things said' in an ethnically based on-line discussion forum.[2]

...and context

While discourse analysis provides a viable method of dealing with text, it lacks the necessary tools for situating this analysis within its broader context. Every discursive

[2]It was, however, deemed necessary to broaden Foucault's definition of discourse to include not only dominant, institutionalized discourses, but informal discourses as well. The discourses of computer-mediated communication are produced by the list participants rather than legitimized, institutional voices. Thus, these types of on-line discussion forums may be characterized as colloquial or grassroots discursive formations.

formation exists within a particular social field. While discourse analysis deals with text at a micro-level of inquiry, ethnography deals with cultural practice at a broader level, thereby situating a given discourse within the social context of its enactment. Ethnography is premised on the assumption that we learn about a culture by observing, participating, interpreting, and rendering it in an ethnographic account. In ethnography, the object of study is culture itself, which includes, but is not limited to, discourse. Geertz defines culture as a *context*: "Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described" (Geertz 1973, 14). Culture, then, is a social field, a context within which "cultural forms find articulation" (Geertz 1973, 17). Communicative practices cannot be separated from the specific contexts of their enactment; they are inextricably linked to the social fields in which they occur and the social actors who produce them.

The textual bias of a discursive approach poses the danger of objectifying the text. Some computer-mediated researchers have observed that the tendency to objectify text may predispose one to treat the texts as actual interactions, rather than as electronic records of past communicative practices. Dennis Waskul and Mark Douglass urge researchers to maintain an awareness that recorded on-line discussions are not discrete textual documents, but "the remains of interactions that once transpired" (Waskul and Douglass 1996, 137). In order to prevent such objectification during the research process, discourse analysis was supplemented with some ethnographic methods. While the electronic texts were treated as records or expressions of the participants' ethnic subjectivities, these texts were contextualized within the specificities of their social field through a triangulation of methods. Participant observation and interviewing, two of the principal methodologies used in ethnography, were used to provide an understanding of the social context within the InfoUkes mailing lists. By attending to the larger contextual elements of computer-

mediated communication, these methods effectively complemented the use of discourse analysis.

This combination of discourse analysis and ethnography resulted in a methodology that attended to both text and context. While discourse analysis provided the sort of detailed, interpretive approach that the electronic texts required, ethnography served to contextualize and complement the communicative practice of the lists by mapping out the larger social field in which they occurred.

Participant observation

Participant observation was conducted over a period of three months, from October to December of 1997. During this period, I subscribed to six of the 13 available InfoUkes mailing lists: announce, arts, computers, history, politics, and social. My observations and impressions of interactions on these lists were recorded in a journal. This preliminary participant observation was viewed as a period of familiarization with the research site: it served as the basis for designing both the research methodology and thesis proposal. During the participant observation phase, I engaged with the methodological and ethical issues of how to study on-line communicative practices. While grappling with the ethical challenges of computer-mediated research, I deemed it unnecessary to seek informed consent of the participants of the six mailing lists. Subsequent inquiries into the ethical issues of studying computer-mediated communication led me to conclude that 'lurking' or observing on-line interactions does not constitute a breach of ethics. The accepted convention in computer-mediated research is to treat open-access forums, such as newsgroups or mailing lists, as public, and personal emails as private.

Informant interviewing

The second method employed was an in-depth interview conducted in January of 1998. The key informant was Andrew Ukrainec, president and founder of InfoUkes Inc. During this meeting, I learned about the history, development, and mandate of the InfoUkes Web site and mailing lists, and negotiated access to the proposed research site. This interview was invaluable not only in familiarizing myself with the particularities of the research site, but also in exploring some of the methodological and ethical issues involved in designing the research project. This initial interview was supplemented with subsequent meetings and consultations.

Discourse analysis

The third and predominant research method was discourse analysis. In order to conduct an 'archaeology' of an electronic archive, it was necessary to read and sift through a large number of postings within the mailing list archive. Based on my knowledge of the types of conversations that occurred within this electronic space, I chose lists that were likely to contain discussions relevant to questions of ethnic identity and community. Within the archives of each of these lists, I randomly selected certain months and examined the conversation threads within them. The primary selection criterion was that discussions had to deal with issues of identity, ethnicity, or community. Because the subject headings of on-line discussions are often misleading, I discovered that it was necessary to investigate not only postings with obvious headings, but also those with odd or unexpected subject headings. Although this process of searching the archives was far from exhaustive, I eventually isolated a number of conversation threads that were relevant to questions of identity, ethnicity, and community. I chose a variety of discussions from different lists and loosely categorized them according to various topics. From this preliminary group of postings, I selected a number of representative discussions that elucidated some of the germane issues. The reading and selection of various discussions

was a cyclical process, as I periodically returned to the archives in search of other discussions. Eventually, I focused on three broad topics that are representative of the ways in which participants constitute their individual and collective identities on-line. These topics are language, media, and history, and they serve to structure the discussion and interpretation of the selected postings.

Limits of the research

Given that the principal methodology was discourse analysis supplemented with ethnographic methods, is was necessary to bracket out examination of the role of lurkers on the mailing lists. Those who simply read the discussions without posting cannot be studied within the confines of discourse analysis because they do not contribute to the discursive formation of the lists. Although excluding lurkers was a function of the chosen methodology, this does not mean to imply that these silent readers do not contribute to the social formation of the mailing list; at the very least, they serve as an audience for those who regularly post messages.[3] Indeed, the role of silent participants within on-line discussion forums would make for an interesting ethnographic study of lurkers.

Initially, I had also intended to conduct email interviews with some of the regular list participants to further enrich my understanding of the research site. Unfortunately, space constraints dictated that this part of the methodology be relinquished. Due to the sheer volume of postings on the InfoUkes lists—some of the more active lists contain between five and six hundred postings within a single month, while others range from two dozen to two or three hundred—it was necessary to circumscribe the research method in order to do justice to the electronic archive. This modification to my original methodology effectively shifted the balance from a combination of discourse analysis and ethnography

[3]In fact, lurkers are often known to appear during a critical debate, as when a controversial topic or event stimulates heated discussion within the group.

to an emphasis on discourse analysis. Nevertheless, this tighter focus on the discursive formation of the lists yields a more detailed and insightful understanding of the process of identity formation as it is inscribed through computer-mediated communication.

Chapter 2

Ethnic identity, community, and culture

The Ukrainian diaspora is unevenly dispersed around the globe. Any attempt to address the question of Ukrainian ethnic identity, therefore, is met with the lack of a recognizable body of literature that deals with issues of ethnicity and identity on a universal scale. There is, nonetheless, a series of literatures—some more extensive than others—that detail and theorize the experience of the Ukrainian ethnic subject in various parts of the world. In Canada there is a considerable body of literature on Ukrainian culture and ethnicity due to a variety of factors, including Ukrainian settlement in Western Canada, Canadian multicultural policy, and related funding structures. This body of literature, which includes fiction, poetry, and academic writing, not only traces the history of Ukrainian immigration to Canada, but also engages with issues of ethnic identity. While the diasporic experience varies from country to country, there is nevertheless a degree of commonality that characterizes the experiences of the ethnic subject. In exploring the ethnic subject's search for identity, I extrapolate from the specificities of the Ukrainian-Canadian experience. Thus, the body of literature on Ukrainian ethnicity in Canada is taken as representative of the larger diasporic experience.

Ukrainians in Canada

The trajectory of Ukrainian immigration to Canada typically begins with the arrival of Wasyl Eleniak and Ivan Pylypiw in 1891. Although Eleniak and Pylypiw were two of the early Ukrainian settlers, there is considerable evidence to suggest that other Ukrainians had settled in Canada prior to 1891.[4] Eleniak and Pylypiw were part of a large wave of mass immigration that began in the early 1890s and ended with the start of World War I.

[4]In her study *The Ukrainians in Canada*, Ol'ha Woycenko suggests that the first settlers may have been either "military men in Lord Selkirk's contingent" of 1817, or Ukrainians who immigrated with the Mennonites from Ukraine in 1874 (Woycenko 1968, 17).

This period is typically referred to as the first of three waves of Ukrainian immigration to Canada. Given the meagre prospects of living under a feudal system with limited political freedom and few educational opportunities, large numbers of Western Ukrainian peasants responded to Sir Clifford Sifton's promise of free land in Canada. As part of a massive campaign to settle the prairies, Sifton courted "the sturdy peasants in their sheepskin coats" with pamphlets "praising the soil of the Canadian prairies" (Woycenko 1968, 12). The second wave of Ukrainian immigrants arrived during the interwar years. These immigrants were predominantly from Western Ukraine. Unlike the first settlers, however, they were more educated and urbanized; the struggles for Ukrainian independence during World War I, which resulted in the brief establishment of the Ukrainian National Republic from 1917 to 1921, imbued these immigrants with a stronger sense of national consciousness. Following World War II, the third wave, consisting mostly of political refugees and displaced persons, immigrated to Canada from Western Europe. Owing to renewed struggles for independence during World War II, these immigrants were more politically active and nationalistic than the second wave. With each successive wave, the influx of new immigrants reinvigorated the cultural, religious, and political institutions of the established Ukrainian-Canadian community.

The history of Ukrainians in Canada is replete with descriptions of the struggle between old and new, between preserving the language, customs, and traditions of the homeland, and adapting to a Canadian society that was far less heterogeneous than it is today. As Ol'ha Woycenko observes

> The history of the Ukrainians in Canada offers continuous evidence of a strong and spontaneous will to preserve their identity. This is evident in the group's endeavours to retain its religious traditions, language, and folk customs through such media as the family, church, public and vernacular schools, secular organizations, the press and publications (Woycenko 1968, 19).

This impulse to preserve Ukrainian culture and identity, however, bristled with sincere expressions of allegiance to the adopted country. Indeed, the early Ukrainian settlers were under pressure to demonstrate their loyalty to the Dominion, as their cultural and linguistic otherness evoked distrust among English-speaking Canadians. During an early debate over bilingualism in Manitoba's school system, the Ukrainian press asserted the community's loyalty to Canada, while also expressing a desire to maintain its ethnic identity:

> We wish to know and speak our language, but not only our own. English is our first language here, and our own is native to us and a sacred one... Our only desire is to be co-citizens of Canada and good ones at that, industrious and loyal... true Canadians together with the other peoples who came here... We do not intend to retain all the customs and traditions which we have brought with us from the Old Country; some of them will have to be modified and adapted to meet the needs and circumstances here... But give us freedom in this field as our traditions and beliefs are matters of intimate concern (quoted in Woycenko 1968, 20).

The inherent complexity of mediating between the culture of the homeland and the "desire to be co-citizens of Canada" recurs throughout the history of Ukrainian Canadians. During World War I, Ukrainians were viewed with great suspicion; because many of them had immigrated to Canada with Austro-Hungarian passports, they were considered enemy aliens and interned in labour camps.

A constant source of uneasiness, the question of the immigrants' loyalty to Canada provided the impetus for numerous studies of the Ukrainian-Canadian community. Charles A. Young's 1931 study, entitled *The Ukrainian Canadians: A Study in Assimilation,* was undertaken by the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene to ascertain whether Ukrainians posed a political, racial, or "mental health" threat to Canadian society. The foreword noted: "[W]e consider that the Mental Hygiene Committee is rightly and definitely concerned with the mental health of immigrants

entering Canada, because Canada cannot have a strong and healthy nation unless its people are mentally as well as physically sound" (Young 1931, x). Despite its blatant prejudice and ethnocentrism, the study provides a rich ethnographic account of Ukrainian settlers in Canada. Part of Young's project was to understand and rationalize the tendency for immigrants to preserve their culture.

> They come with a culture more or less intact, with sentiments, attitudes and customs already established...It is inevitable that with this past and with the vivid recollection of intimate and stirring associated events, the Ukrainian immigrant on his arrival should join those of his own kith and kin of like tradition, and with them, form groups and institutions. This he is bound to do, for without such associations he would be a lone individual in an alien land, conspicuously foreign in the language he speaks and the clothes he wears, without the means of communication necessary to obtain the most meagre information and, therefore, hopelessly handicapped for participation in any form of activity in our society (Young 1931, 130-131).

In other words, the existence of an ethnocultural formation predisposed the immigrant to interact and associate with others of the same ethnic origin.

The recuperation of the homeland's culture and institutions was viewed as a transitional phase that would lead to the gradual integration of the ethnic subject into Canadian society. By virtue of their linguistic, cultural, and visible difference, Ukrainian immigrants were constructed as the ethnic 'other,' chastised for their allegiance to the homeland and pressured to assimilate. Young observes that, through the gradual process of acculturation, Ukrainian immigrants created a hybrid community that integrated the old culture with that of the adopted society.

> With the passage of time, groups were formed on the basis of old associations, and there came into being what might be termed a Ukrainian-Canadian society; neither Ukrainian nor Canadian, but with features of both—a marginal society with institutions peculiar to itself—its roots in the soil of the Ukraine but its structure and content increasingly modified

> in their adaptation to the new situations, arising out of the transition from the old world to the new (Young 1931, 131-132).

By creating a hybrid culture, Ukrainians were effectively negotiating the tension between preservation and assimilation, between private and public identity. Like most immigrants, they attempted to retain their ethnic identity while also adapting to Canadian society.

Ukrainian-Canadian literature

The history of Ukrainian immigration to Canada is documented not only in historical and academic writings, but also in a body of literature—some of it Ukrainian, some written in English—comprised of memoirs, folklore, poetry, short stories, and novels. While the accounts of historians, statisticians, and government officials provide an abundance of information on immigration and settlement patterns, they fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ethnic experience largely because they are written from the position of the outsider. In contrast, the writings of Ukrainian émigrés and Ukrainian Canadians, though uneven in literary merit, constitute a body of literature that more accurately reflects the experiences of diasporic Ukrainians simply because it is the product of the ethnic subject's search for identity. Written from the perspective of the ethnic subject, this literature constitutes a discursive site for the ethnic subject to express his or her own sense of identity. This body of literature, driven by "the ethnic subject's continuing engagement or fascination with her or his country of origin," traces the process of negotiating ethnic identity in the adopted country (Kulyk Keefer 1996, 92).

In Canada, the three waves of immigration are reflected in three analogous periods of literary production. The first period corresponds to the first wave of immigration: it describes the hardships of settling the Canadian prairie, as well as the immigrant's persistent longing for the homeland. Folkloristic in tone, many of these early works are fictionalized memoirs or amateur writings; nonetheless, they constitute an important

contribution to Ukrainian-Canadian literature because they address some of the salient issues of alienation and acculturation that recur throughout this body of writing. The second period, which corresponds to the immigration of the interwar years, is characterized by greater sophistication of both theme and literary technique. The poetry of Mykyta Mandryka is representative of this period:

> Mandryka's moods are typical of an émigré poet....one finds poems full of nostalgia and patriotism for the homeland; others are characterized by their search for heroism or by their philosophical dissertations on man; and the usual poetic expressions of gratitude toward and appreciation for the adopted country (Struk 1982, 96).

The third period, which coincides with the arrival of political emigrants after World War II, reflects a greater concern with issues of dual identity and divided loyalty. As Danylo Struk observes: "the post-Second World War era brought a large influx of new immigrants, including a significant number of writers. Many had already established literary careers in Ukraine and most suffered from the shock of the uprooting" (Struk 1982, 96). The struggle between ethnic origin and adopted culture pervades the literature of this period. The émigré poet Yar Slavytuch, for instance, is "much concerned with the homeland but consciously tries to synthesize his Ukrainian past with his Canadian present, as is evident in his collection entitled *Zavoiovnyky prerii* (Conquerors of the Prairies)" (Struk 1982, 97).

Struk concludes that Ukrainian-Canadian literature is characterized by "the plight of émigrés in their persistent longing for the lost homeland and their inability to fully enter into the new culture" (Struk 1982, 102). The emergence of a body of Ukrainian literature that described the shared experiences and commonalities of the ethnic subject not only established Ukrainian Canadian as an ethnic category; it also constituted a discursive site for the expression and articulation of hybrid identity. While Struk draws a distinction between Ukrainian-language émigré writers and Canadian-born ethnic writers who write

in English, this distinction is superfluous to the purposes of this thesis. What is required is a more inclusive definition of ethnic literature concerned not only with questions of émigré identity, but with related questions of hybridity, acculturation, and assimilation that reflect the concerns of the wider diasporic community. For it is not just the immigrant, but also the Canadian-born ethnic subject, who experiences dislocation, alienation, and a split sense of identity. Contemporary Ukrainian-Canadian writer Janice Kulyk Keefer points out that, aside from immigrant status, there are other ethnocultural signifiers that define the ethnic subject.

> Although I grew up in a premulticultural Canada, I was always aware that I was a split subject with multiple selves, always crossing borders between languages, cultures, histories. Even my tongue was fissured, since I could never decide what my native speech was supposed to be: Ukrainian as my Saturday schoolteachers insisted, or English. Even my handwriting bore telltale traces of my doubled situation: I was forever mixing up alphabets, putting a Cyrillic 'g' or 'm' where a Latin 'd' or 't' should be. Then there was the public, immutable inscription of my split identity: a first name that my grandparents couldn't wrap their tongues around, and Ukrainianized to 'Hanya,' and a last name that non-Ukrainians could never pronounce or spell (Kulyk Keefer 1996, 86).

This "multiplicity of cultural signifiers and historical referents" points to the complexity of articulating and negotiating the hybrid identity of the diasporic ethnic subject (Kulyk Keefer 1996, 86). Although questions of identity, community, history, tradition, and culture are less polarized for the Canadian-born diasporic subject, they are also more subtle, more multivalent, and consequently more complex for the ethnic subject to negotiate. Thus, ethnic literature is here defined as either Ukrainian- or English-language literature that addresses questions of ethnic identity in relation to both the émigré and the diasporic Ukrainian.

Frances Swyripa observes that the three phases of literary production mirror not only patterns of immigration, but, perhaps more importantly, the cultural climate against which these works were written: "the major contributions to the literature on Ukrainians in Canada [reflect] an evolving concept of the role, contribution, and status of Ukrainian Canadians against the background of changing views of Canada's national identity" (Swyripa 1978, ix). By defining the ethnocultural group as a recognizable ethnic category, ethnic literature serves to establish and maintain the symbolic boundaries that distinguish that ethnicity from others. In addition to providing a relatively unified conception of the Ukrainian-Canadian ethnic subject, ethnic literature also engages in a dialogue with changing conceptions of the dominant national identity. This is particularly true of the contemporary body of literature that was borne out of Canada's discourse of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity.

The cultural debates that accompanied celebrations of Canada's centennial in the late 1960s and early 1970s had a significant impact on contemporary conceptions of ethnicity. These debates, which centred on the question of Canadian identity—whether it was bilingual and bicultural or multilingual and multicultural in nature—led to a greater awareness of the dual identity of the hyphenated Canadian. Prominent Ukrainian Canadians and Ukrainian-Canadian organizations, who were active participants in the biculturalism-multiculturalism debate, advocated a conception of Ukrainian and other ethnic minorities as a valuable 'third force' or 'third element' in building Canadian society.[5] In so doing, they were advancing a conception of the ethnic subject as capable of balancing dual commitments to both ethnic community and Canadian society at large.

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[5]The concept of the 'third force' operates on both social and political levels. Some felt that by promoting greater awareness of ethnic diversity, the 'third element' could "serve as a unifying bond between [Canada's] two founding races." Furthermore, given the political climate of the Cold War era, Ukrainian Canadians, particularly third wave immigrants who fled the Soviet Union, felt an obligation to "inform the government and their fellow citizens of the dangers of communism and the necessity of vigilance to prevent its expansion" (Swyripa 1978, 101).

The introduction of multiculturalism, combined with the gradual acculturation of Ukrainians, invariably informed the increasingly English-language body of ethnic literature as heightened awareness of the hybridity of the ethnic subject introduced greater self-consciousness and self-reflexivity into questions of identity. Thus, the quest for ethnic identity, as embodied in the literary output of Ukrainian-Canadian writers, is characterized not only through an articulation of shared experiences; it is simultaneously constituted through an awareness of difference, of Ukrainian identity set against evolving conceptions of Canadian national identity.

Thus, to the three periods of literary production, one could add a fourth, contemporary phase characterized by an increasing preoccupation with ethnicity in relation to the larger Canadian context. Among the contemporary Ukrainian-Canadian writers whose works engage with questions of ethnicity and identity is Myrna Kostash. Kostash's seminal book, *All of Baba's Children*, recounts the experiences of first-generation Ukrainian Canadians struggling to mediate between the old country and the new world.

> The book is not about the immigrants; it is about their children — my parents' generation — the ones who had to find their identity, their purpose, their community and their pride somewhere between Galicia and downtown Canada. In the choices they made, in their self-definition and explanations, in their experiences between 1920 and 1950, I believe lie not a few clues to my otherness (Kostash 1977, 8).

The unresolved tension "between Galicia and downtown Canada," between preserving the ancestral culture and assimilating to mainstream society, produces a hybrid ethnic subject who is consciously aware of her otherness. The struggle to locate and articulate this hybrid identity permeates much of the literature of this period.

Similarly, Kostash's more recent book *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe* describes her struggle to renegotiate and rearticulate her subjectivity in relation to her

ancestral and ideological roots in Eastern Europe. *Bloodlines* may be characterized as a work of the 'been-to' genre—a memoir or travelogue of the ethnic subject's impressions upon returning to the ancestral homeland. For Kostash, the journey represented a quest to understand the role of her roots in constituting her ethnic subjectivity.

> How does the 'old country' live on in the citizen of the new? How may I understand these people and their extraordinary history – my blood relations, as it were, from whom I was separated by the accident of being born into the new family line in Canada? How do they imagine the place I come from? Can I trust what I see of theirs? What is the source of my feelings – feelings I didn't even know I had – about their history, their landscape, their languages, their sites of collective memory? What is their claim on me? Mine on them? In other words, what has this part of the world got to do with me? (Kostash 1993, 2).

By examining the relationship of the diasporic subject to the place of origin, Kostash is investigating the source of her ethnicity. Her search for identity, however, is complicated by her multivalent positionality as writer, ethnic subject, and socialist. Kostash also recognizes that the search for identity in indelibly tied to memory, both individual and collective: "This is a book about memory. About the territories that exist in the imagination of a Canadian writer, in that of her interlocutors, and in the space between them" (Kostash 1993, 1). The figurative "space between" is the site of negotiation between self and other, between personal history and collective memory, identity and community.

This body of contemporary Ukrainian-Canadian literature, of which Kostash's work is representative, examines not only questions of ethnic identity, but encompasses related questions of history, culture, tradition, language, and politics. By examining the ethnic subject's relationship to both homeland and adopted country, these works attempt to elucidate the constituent elements of hybridized identity. The issues of language, ethnicity, history, identity, culture, and community still carry powerful resonances with

diasporic Ukrainians today. In fact, many of these issues are addressed in the on-line discussions of the InfoUkes mailing lists. This brief survey of the trajectory of Ukrainian-Canadian literature demonstrates the continuing relevance of these issues from early Ukrainian immigrants to third- and fourth-generation Ukrainian Canadians.

Ethnicity and computer-mediated communication

But how is the history of Ukrainian-Canadian writing connected to the chosen research site? The connection lies in the act of writing itself. As Laurel Richardson observes, writing is a method of inquiry, an exploratory act in search of knowledge: "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn't know before I wrote it" (Richardson 1994, 517). The research site in question—a series of mailing lists accessible through the InfoUkes Web site—is a text-based medium that allows the individual Internet user to write his or her own text. Writing is the principal means through which participants communicate and interact with one another; indeed, the effectiveness of a mailing list is dependent on the frequency and quality of written contributions from its participants. As a method of inquiry, writing enables the Internet user to explore, articulate, and express his or her identity. By inviting the user to participate in the production of on-line texts, the technology of the mailing list enables the individual to *write* his or her identity through the keyboard.

Further, if the mailing list addresses issues of ethnic identity, culture, and community, then participating in such discussions becomes a way of inscribing ethnicity through writing. Just as the writer embarks on an exploration of identity through literary devices, so the member of an ethnically based mailing list explores and articulates his or her ethnic identity by writing and responding to other list members. The act of producing an electronic text for this type of discussion forum constitutes a self-conscious inquiry into one's own ethnic subjectivity, thereby enabling participants to inscribe their ethnic

identities on-line. For Kulyk Keefer, the practice of 'writing ethnicity'[6] entails an engagement with the individual and collective history of her community: "part of the aesthetics of writing ethnicity is the writer's ethical need to confront and struggle with the history, both private and public, of her 'ethnos'" (Kulyk Keefer 1996, 101).[7] Similarly, an ethnic discussion list compels the participant to engage with questions of ethnic identity, history, memory, culture, and community. By defining the limits of the discourse as ethnically oriented, such a discussion forum invites participants to examine, confront, and reflect on their own ethnic identities. Despite variations in form, writing style, or depth of analysis between literary writer and Internet user, the preoccupations of writing ethnicity remain the same. Indeed, the computer-mediated discussions on the InfoUkes mailing lists echo many of the issues addressed in Ukrainian-Canadian literature. The act of writing ethnicity, then, constitutes a way of expressing, articulating and inscribing one's ethnic identity.

The writing of ethnicity is further complicated by the fact that ethnic identity is relational and continually evolving. Winfried Siemerling observes that ethnicity is a "relational identification that requires more than one identity to exist" (Siemerling 1996, 2). The ethnic is typically defined in relation to other ethnocultural groups, particularly the dominant group of the adopted country. The writing of ethnicity in a heterogeneous, multicultural society thus entails an investigation of the interplay between ethnic and dominant cultures. Ethnicity, which is premised on the "maintenance of identities and cultural boundaries circumscribed by traditions of the past," continually redefines itself through and against the identities and boundaries of the adopted culture (Siemerling

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[6]The expression 'writing ethnicity,' which encapsulates the central argument of this thesis and serves as its title, is borrowed from a collection of essays on ethnic literature entitled *Writing Ethnicity: Cross-Cultural Consciousness in Canadian and Québécois Literature*. Janice Kulyk Keefer's essay appears in this collection.

[7]The word *'ethnos,'* from the Greek, means 'nation' or 'people' (Kulyk Keefer 1996, 101).

1996, 2). Stuart Hall contends that identity is constructed not only through articulations of commonality or sameness but, more importantly, through "critical points of deep and significant *difference*" and in opposition to the 'other' (Hall *n.d.*, 225). Since identities are negotiated both within and without boundaries, identity constitutes a continually contested terrain of sameness and difference. Similarly, the process of writing ethnicity occurs both within and in opposition to the literature of the dominant culture; as Canadian literature becomes increasingly more canonized, the body of Ukrainian-Canadian literature becomes more recognizable as a distinct category of ethnic writing.

Ethnicity, therefore, is not an absolute or fixed entity; it is a 'relational identification' that is continually expressed, articulated, inscribed, negotiated, and even contested. Hall conceptualizes identity as a continual process or production:

> instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact,... we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall *n.d.*, 222).

The process of identity formation is one of continual articulation, negotiation, and production between self-constituting subject and discursive practice; in other words, subjects actively construct their identities through communicative practice. Moreover, the boundaries of identification are, by definition, fluid and changeable. Drawing on the metaphor of a tree, Canadian writer Harvey Kreisel describes the process of identity formation as a continual evolution:

> Identity [is] not something forever fixed and static. It [is] rather like a tree. New branches, new leaves could grow. New roots could be put down, too, but the original roots need not be discarded (Kreisel 1982, 8).

Because the boundaries of identification are variable, identity is subject to constant reinvention and reproduction. The combination of original roots and new growths produces a new, hybrid identity that incorporates elements of both. The ethnic writer—

and, by implication, the ethnic subject—occupies a liminal state between past and present, between ethnic origin and adopted culture, yielding a literature that is fundamentally concerned with cultural hybridity. Given this process of continuous renewal, ethnic identity must be continually rearticulated. As a consequence, ethnic identity exists only through articulation or expression of its ever-changing incarnation, whether that articulation occurs through communicative practice or material culture. The process of writing ethnicity, therefore, is a constant rearticulation and renegotiation of the ethnic subject's continually evolving position. As Hall observes: "Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*" (Hall *n.d.*, 226)

It is precisely this fluidity of boundaries that facilitates the emergence of new, hybrid ethnicities. The significance of ethnic hybridity is that it reproduces, in part, the pre-existing ethnic identity while also producing a new hybrid identity that incorporates elements of the adopted culture. Herein lies the essence of writing ethnicity: because identity is fluid, ethnic writing embodies this process of evolution and negotiation, effectively rearticulating and reinscribing the shifting position of the hybridized ethnic subject. The reproduction of the old, combined with production of the new, implies a reincarnation of ethnicity.

> Because ethnicity thus arises with the construction of cross-cultural identification, every notion of ethnicity implies an act of "ethnogenesis," a communal identification whose emergence is marked, at least for those who wish to be thus affiliated, precisely as different from the previous, seemingly unmitigated cultural identity to which it refers—yet which it cannot but name, remember, and construct from its new perspective. Because such acts of ethnogenesis imply simultaneous identification by both contrast and cross-cultural implication, they are marked by hybridity and invention (Siemerling 1996, 2).

The process of reinscribing a dynamic, evolving identity in literary or other texts is characterized by invention simply because of the fluid boundaries within and through which identity is constituted. Thus the writing of ethnicity is invariably complicated by the "dynamism inherent in ethnogenesis and in the construction of ethnic boundaries" (Siemerling 1996, 18). It is the dynamism and fluidity of ethnic identity that provides the impetus for investigating and articulating that identity anew, whether through literary production or computer-mediated communication.

The practice of writing ethnicity is defined by an engagement with questions of ethnic identity. Although I have treated Ukrainian-Canadian literature as representative of the Ukrainian diasporic experience, I recognize that there is a fundamental difference between a body of ethnic literature and the body of electronic texts that comprise an on-line discussion forum. While the former is a localized body of literature grounded in the specificities of place, the same cannot be said of the discursive formation of diasporic Internet users whose discussions transcend the limitations of physical space. This disjuncture of writing practices—one of which is local and geographically bound, while the other is global and extra-geographical—is reflected in a concomitant disjuncture of two groups of writers: Ukrainian Canadians and diasporic Internet users comprised of a potentially global membership.

The distinction between Ukrainian-Canadian and diasporic writing, of which the former is a part, constitutes a fruitful disjuncture because it highlights a specific characteristic of computer-mediated communication: namely, that it is networked, and therefore divorced from geographical space. Because Internet communication is extra-geographical, it creates a 'virtual geography'[8] of intangible and imagined spaces. It globalizes

[8]The concept of a 'virtual geography' is borrowed from McKenzie Wark, who uses it to characterize the effect of international media flows on spatial and sensory perceptions of news events. He describes virtual

communication, subordinating local specificities to broader universalities. As such, it serves as an ideal communication medium for the diaspora, which is, by definition, global. Thus the discursive practice of computer-mediated communication subordinates the specificities of the Ukrainian-Canadian experience to the globalizing tendencies of the medium, substituting the specificities of shared ethnicity for the specificities of place. The Internet frees communicative practice from the specificities of place, effectively relocating it in a virtual geography characterized by the commonalities of the diasporic experience. By privileging the shared experiences of the diasporic ethnic subject, computer-mediated communication fosters the development of a diasporic community of interests. It creates a virtual space where the diaspora can communicate and interact, thereby transposing the practice of writing ethnicity from a local to a global context.

The particularities of computer-mediated communication have significant implications on the ways in which ethnicity is articulated, negotiated, and inscribed on-line. The communicative practices of an ethnically based discussion list represent a specific form of ethnogenesis, for it is at this particular conjuncture of a pre-existing ethnocultural formation and a new communication medium that the new ethnic identity emerges. Thus, any analysis of ethnogenesis through computer-mediated communication must be contextualized in order to recognize the ways in which the particularities of the medium inform the writing of ethnicity. Hall asserts that the process of identity formation is necessarily situated and contextual: "because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices" (Hall 1996, 4). Because the ethnic subject constitutes his or her ethnicity within the boundaries of a specific discursive formation, it is necessary to situate an analysis of ethnogenesis within

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geography as "a different kind of perception, of things not bounded by rules of proximity, of 'being there'" (Wark 1994, vii).

the bounds of that particular formation. Thus, the process of ethnogenesis as it occurs through computer-mediated communication serves as the principal framework for interpreting the research site. The particularities of computer-mediated communication and their implications on communicative practice will be examined at considerable length in the following chapter.

Ethnogenesis and computer-mediated communication

This need for contextualizing ethnogenesis within the particularities of computer-mediated communication is itself a function of the research site. Because the InfoUkes mailing lists represent a conjuncture of ethnicity and communication technology, it is necessary to adopt a theoretical orientation that is attentive to elements of both ethnogenesis and computer-mediated communication, or, in broader terms, culture and technology. Though it is often treated as an autonomous force beyond human intervention, technology is actually indivisible from culture. James Carey observes:

> Whether we think of culture as a "way of life," a web of meanings in which we are all suspended, or a set of practices for producing the real, technology embodies, realizes, and expresses such ways, meanings, and practices (Game and Carey 1998, 118).

Technology and culture are intimately and inextricably linked: technology is the instrument through which culture is expressed and embodied, while culture in turn influences the ways in which technology is developed and applied. Indeed, Carey argues that technology is the dominant epistemology and master symbol of North American culture: "it operates not as an external and causal force but as a blueprint: something that makes phenomena intelligible and through that intelligibility sets the conditions for their secondary reproduction" (Game and Carey 1998, 120). The pervasiveness of technology in contemporary culture illustrates the necessity of adopting an integrated approach to the study of culture and technology.

To this end, Carey advocates a cultural studies approach that repairs the perceived rupture between culture and technology by reuniting them under the rubric of communication. Technology—itself a product of human creativity and invention—is the primary instrument of cultural practice:

> Technology is a creation of human practice and ingenuity. It embodies concrete life ways and therefore anticipates and constructs forms of life rather than passively mirroring them. In this sense, technology is a symbol of (it represents how the world works) and a symbol for (it coerces the world into behaving in terms of the representations embedded in the technology) (Game and Carey 1998, 119).

In other words, technology is both constitutive of, and constituted by, culture. Similarly, the technologically enabled communicative practices of an ethnic discussion list are indivisible from the culture that they articulate and inscribe. Thus, an exploration of ethnogenesis in the context of computer-mediated communication is a micro-level inquiry into the broader relationship between culture and technology.

The central link between culture and technology is communication itself. Carey conceptualizes communication as cultural practice, as the means through which culture is articulated and constructed: "language—communication—is a form of action—or, better, interaction—that not merely represents or describes but actually molds or constitutes the world" (Carey 1989, 84). Communication, therefore, is constitutive. It is "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (Carey 1989, 23). Reality is not exogenous to human activity; it is a subjective construction, "a product of human action in and upon the world" (Carey 1989, 73). Communication is a social and cultural practice embedded in everyday life and intimately bound up with the technology through which it is enacted. Individually and collectively, we constitute our culture through communicative practices and rituals, thereby reaffirming or modifying our

constructed realities. Communication is thus conceptualized as a cultural practice that actively produces and transforms reality through its very enactment.

In privileging the cultural aspect of communication, Carey advocates a humanistic, culturally oriented approach to communication studies that centres on the ritualistic and community-building effects of technology. This 'ritual view of communication,' which constitutes a theoretical realignment from the more prevalent 'transmission view of communication,' treats communication as "a sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality" (Carey 1989, 18).[9] Communication is regarded as a process that represents, articulates, and reproduces shared cultural meanings. Drawing on the "common roots of the terms 'commonness,' 'communion,' 'community,' and 'communication,'" it focuses on the concepts of sharing, participation, association, and fellowship (Carey 1989, 18). The ritual view submits that community is collectively constituted through ritual forms of communication among its participants:

> This projection of community ideals and their embodiment in material form—dance, plays, architecture, news stories, strings of speech—creates an artificial though nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to provide not information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process (Carey 1989, 19).

Whatever their form, these rituals of communication effectively construct community because they produce a symbolic order that is relevant and meaningful to its members. They confirm shared values, articulate a common ontology, and, in embodying the ongoing social processes of the community, reaffirm its collective identity. Echoing Carey, Heather Menzies characterizes the ritual view as a 'community-building' model of

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[9]In contrast, the 'transmission view of communication' treats communication as "a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people" (Carey 1989, 15). This model, which is premised on spatial metaphors of geography and transportation, has been institutionalized as the dominant approach to communication studies in North America.

communication that privileges conversation, interaction, social relationships, and culture over that of commodity transportation (Menzies 1998). Communicative practices, therefore, serve as both the source and embodiment of collective identity as they articulate and reproduce shared meanings. The ritual model of communication attends to the ways in which community is fostered and reproduced through communicative practices. Just as the collective ritual of communication fosters a sense of community, so the ritualistic practices of computer-mediated communication foster the emergence of an ethnic virtual community.

This view of communication as a collective ritual is attentive to issues of community, collective identity, and ethnogenesis: communicative practices serve as the unifying rituals that both foster and reproduce a sense of collective identity. The power of communication is evident in its capacity to foster a sense of community through the collective sharing of a ritualistic practice or communion. According to Benedict Anderson, the ritual of communication is achieved through the shared experience of mass media consumption: "the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction" results in an "extraordinary mass ceremony" that facilitates a collective identification among its readers (Anderson 1991, 35).

> It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion (Anderson 1991, 35).

Participation in the collective and anonymous ritual of mass communication provides users with a strong sense of identification, although the ritual is premised on communication between countless strangers. Thus, it is through the ritualistic practice of communication that collective identity is constituted. The process of collective identity formation involves a continuous interplay between individual and collective conceptions

of identity, between the self-constituting subject and his or her reference group. These conceptions of identity are articulated, negotiated, and reinscribed through the communicative practices of the social formation. Anderson observes that traditional mass media, such as novels and newspapers, create a community of readers by providing a "remarkable confidence of community in anonymity" (Anderson 1991, 36). Similarly, the discussions of an ethnically based mailing list articulate and embody the shared experiences that form the basis of collective identification.

The collective ritual of communication effectively unites the social formation into what Anderson terms an 'imagined community.' The ritual of communication is premised on collective, imaginative constructions that articulate and constitute an imagined community. Anderson posits that a community

> is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson 1991, 6).

Through the ritual of communication, the members of a community effectively imagine it into existence: the "image of their communion" is a shared imaginative construction that resonates with their individual self-conceptions. Due to constraints of physical distance and anonymity, the community must be imagined as an entity; that imagining is then mediated through a communicative practice or ritual. Imagination is central to this process of collective identity formation, for it is through their imaginative constructions that individuals constitute themselves *as community*. Anderson contends that "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson 1991, 6). What is most salient, then, is not the accuracy or authenticity of a community's self-conception, but rather, the style in which it is imagined and the willingness with which these imaginings are accepted as real. Elizabeth Reid observes that "the illusion of reality lies not in the machinery itself but in

the user's willingness to treat the manifestations of his or her imaginings as if they were real" (Reid 1995, 166). Indeed, these manifestations of collective identity *are* real and authentic: because communication is constitutive of reality, the members of a social formation both reify their collective imaginings and, having done so, recognize these imaginings as authentic. The construction of community, therefore, is a creative act through which individuals actively constitute their collective identity.

The concept of an imagined community constituted through ritualistic practice parallels that of ethnogenesis occuring through computer-mediated communication. A virtual community, much like Anderson's imagined community, is characterized by distance and anonymity; as such, its collective identity is constituted and reified through the communicative practices of its participants. The collective ritual of computer-mediated communication enables the participants of an ethnically based mailing list to articulate and inscribe their ethnicities through the act of writing. While the unspoken and anonymous ritual of reading unites a newspaper readership into an imagined community, the shared ritual of communicating and interacting on a mailing list unites participants more directly by inviting them to actively construct their imagined community. By facilitating the negotiation of individual and collective conceptions of ethnic identity, computer-mediated communication fosters the process of ethnogenesis. The ethnic virtual community is not simply imagined 'in silent privacy;' through the articulation and negotiation of its collective imaginings, it is reincarnated as a new manifestation of ethnicity.

Carey observes that the boundaries of identification in contemporary culture have collapsed, resulting in a profound sense of confusion and social disorganization that effectively reinvigorates the ubiquitous search for identity.

> We are suffering a cultural meltdown as a consequence of losing a stable structure of social interactions, however unsatisfactory that structure might have been. With that meltdown, the traditional coordinates of identity have lost their capacity to galvanize action and new ones have to be invented or older ones recast, and that accounts for the eruption of identity politics (Game and Carey 1998, 125).

The collapse of symbolic boundaries serves as the impetus for the reinvention and rearticulation of "traditional coordinates of identity." The recent emergence of computer-mediated communication has provided a new site for the process of identity formation where new boundaries of identification are being generated while old ones are being recast. In the face of new communication technology, there is always need to examine its impact on culture. In Carey's words, we must investigate the relationship between culture and technology by asking "How do changes in forms of communications technology affect the constructions placed on experience? How does such technology change the forms of community in which experience is apprehended and expressed?" (Carey 1989, 64). By treating computer-mediated communication as a site of identity formation where ethnic identity is rearticulated and reinvented, this thesis is posing essentially the same questions about technology: how do the practices of computer-mediated communication affect conceptions and articulations of ethnic identity and community?

Ethnicity is articulated, negotiated, and constituted through the practice of computer-mediated communication; as with any communication medium, the Internet is embedded with assumptions and characteristics that inform *how* that ethnicity is constructed. The following chapter explores the specificities of computer-mediated communication with a view to understanding how they inform the process of ethnogenesis.

Chapter 3

Toward a theory of ethnic virtual community

Any theorization of computer-mediated ethnogenesis, if it is to be comprehensive, must attend to the ways in which the medium informs the processes of communication, interaction, and ethnic identity formation. One of the central theoretical concepts used to examine the practices of computer-mediated communication is that of the 'virtual community.' The concept of a virtual community is fundamental to the question of an ethnically based social formation because it is the principal way in which on-line social formations are understood and theorized. The following is a review of the literature on virtual community and an investigation of the communicative practices that engender virtual communities. These characteristics of computer-mediated communication, as observed and documented by computer-mediated researchers, serve as the foundation for examining the specificities of an ethnically oriented discussion forum. The chapter concludes with a theorization of what constitutes a specifically ethnic virtual community.

Virtual community

Although the concept of a computer-mediated social formation can be traced back to the early days of networking technology, Howard Rheingold is widely credited for coining the term 'virtual community.' Rheingold's definition is often treated as seminal simply because his was one of the first comprehensive articulations and theorizations of the concept. As a result, much of the subsequent research on virtual community draws on, expands, clarifies, and even contests his definition. It is for this reason that Rheingold's conception of virtual community is here taken as representative.

Rheingold defines virtual community as a social formation of geographically dispersed individuals who, through their computer-mediated discussions, comprise a new kind of on-line community.

> Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace (Rheingold 1993).[10]

Implicit in this definition are the two salient features of virtual communities: first, they consist of public discussions based on common interests, and second, they entail a degree of personal involvement on the part of their participants. According to Rheingold, the evolution of virtual communities constitutes an ongoing social experiment: "virtual communities are likely to change our experience of the real world, as individuals and communities" (Rheingold 1993).

Rheingold's work is significant because of his attempt to characterize what he considers the immeasurable potential of computer-mediated communication to foster new configurations of society; in his view, technology empowers us to think and create collectively. Focusing largely on grassroots uses of networked communications, Rheingold grounds his theorization of virtual community in actual usage. The result is a perspective that emphasizes the role of human agency in the design and use of computer technology, effectively rejecting the technological determinism favoured by futurist prophets. By drawing on his own experiences with the WELL (the Whole World 'Lectronic Link, a computer conferencing system based in the San Francisco Bay area) as the basis of his exploration, Rheingold formulates a conception of virtual community that locates agency with the programmer and the end-user rather than the technology itself.

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[10]All references to Rheingold are taken from his book *Virtual Communities: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. However, because I downloaded my copy of the book from Rheingold's Web site, page references are not available. This, and all subsequent quotations, are taken from the chapter entitled "The Virtual Community: Introduction." The full text of *Virtual Communities* is available at http://www.well.com/user/hlr/vcbook/index.html.

This recognition of the role of human agency in the implementation of computer technology reflects a concern with the societal implications of technological change. His investigation into the concept of virtual community incorporates larger political, social, and cultural issues of technology. For instance, lamenting "America's loss of a sense of a social commons," Rheingold envisions computer-mediated communication as a potentially democratizing force:

> The technology that makes virtual communities possible has the potential to bring enormous leverage to ordinary citizens at relatively little cost—intellectual leverage, social leverage, commercial leverage, and most important, political leverage. But the technology will not in itself fulfill that potential; this latent technical power must be used intelligently and deliberately by an informed population (Rheingold 1993).

Virtual community thus represents a 'new commons' where all citizens can actively engage in civic life.[11] This conception of virtual community as the site of a renewed public sphere is representative of the more futuristic strain of computer-mediated discourse, with its promise of a better and more just society. Rheingold tempers his desire for a reinvigorated public sphere with a recognition of the need for an "informed population" of computer users. While most futurists eulogize the democratizing possibilities of computer technology, Rheingold rejects the technological imperative, emphasizing instead the importance of human agency in the uses and applications of technology. Nonetheless, his writing tends to overemphasize the positive effects of computer-mediated communication. For instance, he observes that "the political significance of CMC [computer-mediated communication] lies in its capacity to challenge the existing political hierarchy's monopoly on powerful communications media,

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[11]Here Rheingold is echoing a recurring trope in American political thought, that of the 'town hall' meeting as the site of discussion and democratic debate. The notion of the town hall as public sphere, which finds its ideological roots in classical conceptions of democracy, is evoked by several contemporary philosophers, political thinkers, and communications scholars. For a comprehensive description of recent experiments in electronic democracy, see Paul Grosswiler's "Historical Hopes, Media Fears, and the Electronic Town Meeting Concept: Where Technology Meets Democracy or Demagogy?"

and perhaps thus revitalize citizen-based democracy," though without any elaboration on how these citizens might be mobilized to political action (Rheingold 1993).

Although Rheingold resists succumbing to technological determinism, he tends to overstate the revolutionary potential of the virtual community as a political and social force. In addition to its political potential, Rheingold submits that virtual community is the solution to what he perceives as the fragmentation of society and the resulting loss of community. Drawing on seventeenth-century tropes of the local coffeehouse or salon, Rheingold posits: "I suspect that one of the explanations for this phenomenon is the hunger for community that grows in the breasts of people around the world as more and more informal public spaces disappear from our real lives" (Rheingold 1993). Echoing the futurist discourse on computer-mediated communication, Rheingold frames the concept of virtual community as a *return* to community, a recuperation of something lost. Typically, and perhaps paradoxically, this lament for the past finds expression in perpetual exhortations to a better future: thus Rheingold's theorization of a new, computer-mediated form of community that recuperates the lost sense of community.

In this sense, the discourse on virtual community can be seen as an updated expression of futurism and its telos of technological progress. The futurist discourses that accompany any new technology typically envision fundamental improvement in all spheres of life; the introduction of electricity in the early twentieth century, for instance, was accompanied by promises of decentralization, democratization, and increased political participation. Carey describes this tendency as the 'futurean mirage': "the future is a continuously receding horizon; it is never actualized and always just beyond one's grasp" (Carey 1989, 198). Futurist rhetoric persuades us that the utopian future is always imminent, although it remains ultimately elusive. While exhorting us to embrace the image of a better future, the futurean mirage draws on romanticized and idealized notions

of the past. The concept of a virtual community echoes Alvin Toffler's conception of the 'electronic cottage'—a theory of technologically enabled remote work—in its evocation of pastoralism. The longing for an idealized past is thus reconceptualized in the form of a virtual community.

Rheingold's conception of virtual community is consonant with the notion of a diasporic community. Like a virtual community, a diaspora is founded on the expression of shared interests and experiences including ethnic origin, language, and culture; and, because expression of these shared interests is intimately linked to individual and collective self-conceptions, there is a considerable degree of personal involvement in such discussions. Moreover, the notion of virtual community as a recuperation also resonates with that of a diasporic community: the recurring evocation of an idealized community parallels the tendency for the diasporic subject to romanticize the homeland. Heightened by the alienation of living in a foreign land, the diasporic subject's loss of community manifests itself in nostalgic images of the homeland. The diaspora is, by definition, without a geographic centre; it is a displaced community striving to retain and recuperate the source of its identity, searching for a spiritual centre to anchor and sustain it. Divorced from its place of origin, the diasporic community typically romanticizes pastoral images of the homeland; consequently, its self-conception as a community is founded on an idealized and imagined homeland. In the case of the former Soviet Union, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was inaccessible to most diasporic Ukrainians, particularly those who did not support the communist system. This sort of forced exile exacerbated the tendency to romanticize the homeland. Thus, given the close correspondence between a diasporic community and Rheingold's conceptualization of virtual community, it is appropriate to examine how the Ukrainian diaspora uses computer-mediated communication to foster an ethnically based virtual community.

Rejecting the futurean mirage

Like many of the futurist writers, Rheingold betrays a certain romanticism in his conception of virtual community, its role in people's lives, and its potential to foster new forms of social and political organization. As Stephen Jones observes, "it is clear from the comparisons that Rheingold makes to other forms of community that what he calls 'virtual communities' are predicated on nostalgic (and romantic) ideals" (Jones 1995, 32). This tendency to mine the past for images of the future, to frame the new in terms of the old, exposes a fundamental flaw in much of the writing and theorizing on computer-mediated communication: it is predictive and prescriptive, rather than grounded in actual usage.

Instead of categorizing our understanding of a new medium according to old metaphors, we should strive to understand new communicative practices by examining current uses and applications of the medium.[12] As Jones observes, the futurist promises of computer-mediated communication are both problematic and unfounded:

> The manner in which we seek to find community, empowerment, and political action all embedded in our ability to use CMC is thereby troubling. No one medium, no one technology, has been able to provide those elements in combination, and often we have been unable to find them in any media. CMC has potential for a variety of consequences, some anticipated, some not (Jones 1995, 33).

Although computer-mediated communication is presented as a panacea for a host of social problems, it is unlikely that it could ever fully realize its perceived potential. It is far more likely, rather, that different configurations of computer-mediated communication may fulfill different needs or purposes. For instance, it is possible that computer-mediated

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[12]Two of the central metaphors used in futuristic conceptualizations of computer-mediated communication are those of the pastoral community and the network. The prevalence of the extended metaphor points to a central deficiency of most futurist discourses: although the metaphor is a useful conceptual tool, it has a tendency to obscure the actual uses of a given technology by subordinating them to the power of its imagery.

communication can serve the specific needs of a diasporic community by fostering the development of an ethnically based virtual community, without also providing a means of empowerment or political action. Jones rightly points out that "a critical awareness of the social transformations that have occurred" as a result of computer-mediated communication is needed to counter the futurist rhetoric. In order to theorize what constitutes a specifically ethnic virtual community, it is necessary first to understand the communicative practices that characterize a typical virtual community. Thus, the following section examines the characteristics of computer-mediated communication with a view to understanding how they inform the emergence of virtual community.

Characterizing computer-mediated communication

Academic researchers from various disciplines including sociology, psychology, ethnography, linguistics, and communications are steadily contributing to a rapidly growing and heterogeneous body of literature on computer-mediated communication. This emerging body of literature constitutes an intervention into the futurean mirage of the virtual community because it examines the relationship between potential and actual uses of computer-mediated communication. Researchers and theorists alike tend to reject the technological imperative, treating computer-mediated communication as a site of interaction and culture. Elizabeth Reid contends that virtual environments are less about technology than they are about shared cultural meanings:

> I do not wish to talk about cyberspace or virtual reality as technological constructs but as cultural constructs. Along with Howard Rheingold I do not see virtual reality as a set of technologies, but as an experience. More than that, I believe that it is primarily an imaginative rather than a sensory experience. I wish to shift the focus of attention away from the gadgets used to represent a virtual world, and concentrate on the nature of the user's experience of such worlds (Reid 1994).[13]

[13]Page references are not available for this particular source. As with Rheingold's book, Elizabeth Reid's M.A. thesis was downloaded from the Internet. This is also true of Luciano Paccagnella's article, cited later.

Most researchers concur, focusing their research on the ways in which technology is used and attempting to theorize these uses. This sort of critical examination not only mitigates the romanticism of futurist discourse; it also contributes to a more grounded and contextual theorization of computer-mediated communication.

While most research corroborates Rheingold's basic definition—that a virtual community is characterized by shared interests and personal involvement—there is, nonetheless, need for greater elaboration of the communicative practices that characterize a virtual community. Researchers have identified several other characteristics of virtual community, and, due to the variety of social formations on the Internet, there is considerable debate as to their importance and priority. Indeed, one of the strengths of Rheingold's work is his insistence on the diversity of computer-mediated social formations: he continually refers to virtual communities in the plural, noting that "there is no such thing as a single, monolithic, online subculture; it's more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious" (Rheingold 1993). This recognition of the various manifestations of virtual community highlights the need for specificity in articulating the various characteristics that comprise a particular virtual community.

One of the often-cited characteristics of computer-mediated communication is the absence of contextual cues—body language, sight, sound—typically associated with physical presence. Because it is primarily text-based, it is assumed that interaction on the Internet is an impoverished form of communication. Fortunately, computer-mediated research has done much to refute this assumption. Indeed, the research demonstrates that this dependency on text actually fosters the construction of new computer-mediated contexts through creative use of the tools at hand. The act of producing an electronic text through a computer keyboard is constitutive, enabling Internet users to participate in the creation of their own sociocultural context. As Reid observes: "users have devised

methods of incorporating socioemotional context cues into pure language itself. They use text, seemingly such a restrictive medium, to make up for what they lack in physical presence" (Reid 1995, 167). One of the primary means of creating new conversational cues is through 'emoticons,' combinations of characters and punctuation marks that convey feeling, emotion, and humour. Actions are often conveyed by enclosing a word in asterisks, effectively dramatizing or emphasizing the specified action. What computer-mediated communication lacks in terms of a traditional context is, therefore, compensated through creative and evocative use of keyboard characters. In the case of MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons or Domains), language is used to construct a physical, as well as social, context: the virtual environment of the MUD is conceptualized as a physical space, typically in the form of a large house or building, through which users navigate and interact with other users. The physical context of the MUD is established through detailed textual descriptions of the virtual environment authored by the creator, or God, of the MUD, though users are invited to create their own rooms or build their own houses within this virtual space. Essentially, "MUDs create their own context out of language" (Reid 1995, 169). The constitutive nature of text thus enables computer users to actively contribute to the creation of a sociocultural context on-line. Computer-mediated communication, therefore, does not lack a cultural context; it merely occurs in a context that is qualitatively different from that of more traditional media.

The construction of a sociocultural context occurs not only through common symbols and textual descriptions, but through the very process of interaction itself. Writing is constitutive, and the act of producing and distributing a written text enables an individual to contribute to the tone and direction of a given discussion. As the researchers behind *ProjectH*—an international collaborative project on consensus formation—discovered, even a group of one hundred strangers can construct their own sociocultural environment through interaction, dialogue, and debate. Through discussion of their common interests

in mediated communication and consensus formation, these hundred or so academics were able to establish a cultural context suited to their particular interests. One project participant described this context as follows:

> There is a sense of cohesiveness with ProjectH exchanges that I don't apprehend on lists....our interactions have created a group culture, complete with norms and values. As a group, we seem to value collegiality, mutual respect, and a sense of humor, while devaluing flaming and argumentativeness. For me, at least, that makes ProjectH a very comfortable place to pursue some interesting questions (Sudweeks and Rafaeli 1996, 128).

The members of *ProjectH* were thus able to shape an on-line 'group culture' that, predictably, was imbued with values that reflected their academic interests. The establishment of common norms and values within the *ProjectH* mailing list is demonstrative of the constitutive process that occurs in most on-line forums, though levels of homogeneity and consensus vary considerably. Although the process of consensus formation was long and arduous, the project's participants were eventually able to reach consensus through ongoing discussion and debate, resulting in the establishment of the norms and values that governed their virtual space. Interestingly, there was a considerable degree of reflexivity in the *ProjectH* study—as a collaborative project on consensus formation, it simultaneously operationalized the process of seeking consensus through discussion on how to conduct the research. Although relative consensus was achieved, the researchers concluded that "complete consensus is elusive and not even desirable" (Sudweeks and Rafaeli 1996, 132). The fact that complete consensus was deemed undesirable attests to the fluid nature of the on-line sociocultural formation: the common cultural norms and values that are established through interaction and discussion are subject to continual renegotiation and re-evaluation. *ProjectH* demonstrates that computer-mediated interaction produces a new sociocultural context that ultimately

eludes closure because it is continually being re-created by its producers, the participants of the on-line forum.

Computer-mediated communication thus enables participants to imagine and realize their sociocultural communities in a virtual environment. The creative aspect of producing text is augmented by the anonymity of computer-mediated communication, which encourages a considerable degree of disinhibition. The fact that users are able to construct their own alternate identities by ascribing themselves pseudonyms and imagined personality traits empowers them to say whatever they wish under the guise of an *alter ego*. The disinhibiting effect of anonymity can have both positive and negative repercussions: it may engender greater intimacy and emotional involvement, or alternately, increased aggression and abusive behaviour. Reid observes that the freedom of anonymity and the perceived absence of social controls "encourages some people to use MUDs as a forum for airing their resentment of individuals or groups in a blatantly uninhibited manner" (Reid 1994). Indeed, although the anonymity of on-line communication is often touted as a mechanism for absolute freedom of expression, most research debunks the characterization of the virtual environment as an anarchistic space.[14]

While on-line communication does afford individuals a substantial degree of freedom, virtual communities, like other sociocultural environments, rely on the maintenance of social norms and values to regulate behaviour. Thus, the creation of an on-line sociocultural context also entails the development of social and technical mechanisms for maintaining established social norms. Reid's research on MUD communities corroborates

[14]Because absolute freedom of expression entails tolerating abuse, invective, hostility, obscenity, and hate literature, many Internet users advocate the establishment and observance of some social norms. In fact, "the failure of the ideal of complete freedom in cyberspace" was evidenced as early as the mid-1970s when the uncensored CommuniTree bulletin board "collapsed under the onslaught of messages, often obscene, posted by the first generation of adolescent school children with personal computers" (Reid 1994).

the consensus among computer-mediated researchers that "in practice, controls have proved to be necessary adjuncts to maintaining order in virtual communities" (Reid 1994). The policing of accepted social norms is accomplished variously in different Internet forums, although Internet users have collectively developed a code of etiquette referred to as 'netiquette.' In MUDs, disruptive players may be punished by means of 'toading,' whereby the God of the MUD can change the player's appearance to that of a toad, subjecting the player to public humiliation and ostracism. On a newsgroup, the offending user's mailbox may be flooded with email from other users demanding adherence to the established norms of the forum. A similar form of social punishment may also be inflicted on the member of a mailing list, although the ultimate form of punishment is removal from the list by the administrator. Thus, the possibility of aggressive behaviour and 'flaming,' the colloquial term for abusive and obscene postings, demands the establishment of social or technical mechanisms for policing behavioural norms and values. The sociocultural context of the on-line community, though constituted through interaction, is also maintained and reproduced through a series of controls designed to regulate participants' behaviour.

Another one of the often-cited promises of computer-mediated communication is its capacity to foster democratic and egalitarian forms of social interaction and organization. Numerous futurist writers have embraced the new medium as the potential site of a renewed public sphere, accompanied by promises of democratization, empowerment, and political activism. Indeed, some researchers corroborate the suggestion that computer-mediated communication facilitates the creation of a virtual public space. For instance, the researchers behind a MOO colloquium on rhetoric (a MOO is an Object-Oriented Multi-User Dimension) found that computer-mediated communication did indeed serve as a new public space where participants could "form limited or local communities of belief" (Zappen *et al.* 1997, 401). The researchers concluded:

> Though we recognize the current limits to the access and use of this technology, we nonetheless believe that the MOO has potential to become a contemporary rhetorical community—a public space or forum—within which local communities and individuals can express themselves and develop mutual respect and understanding via dialogue and discussion, and we believe that the graduate students who participated with us in our colloquium demonstrated this possibility through their own positive action in making this space their own (Zappen *et al.* 1997, 415).

While the colloquium began with the hierarchical structures of a traditional classroom, these structures were gradually challenged and subverted by the students, resulting in "orderly and serious, egalitarian, and often carnivalesque exchanges of views on substantive issues" (Zappen *et al.* 1997, 407). Overall, the research supported claims that computer-mediated communication fosters "egalitarian participation and less centralized and stable leadership," although the researchers temper their optimism with an acknowledgment of some of the obstacles to such a forum (Zappen *et al.* 1997, 405). Interestingly, they note that the equalizing tendency of computer-mediated communication instigated a cyclical process that "helped to destabilize and disunify traditional hierarchical structures and mechanisms of control" while also serving to "stabilize and unify local communities of belief and value" (Zappen *et al.* 1997, 405). In other words, on-line interaction effectively establishes new social structures in place of traditional hierarchies; it flattens hierarchical structures and replaces them with communities of shared beliefs.

The question of this equalizing effect, however, remains controversial.[15] While some researchers have found that computer-mediated communication has the effect of diminishing status differentials, others contend that virtual communities develop their

[15]References to the 'equalizing effect' or 'equalization model' abound in studies of computer-mediated communication. See Russell Spears and Martin Lea's "Panacea or Panopticon?: The Hidden Power in Computer-Mediated Communication" for a well-substantiated challenge to the assumption that "CMC tends to equalize status, decentralize and democratize decision making, and thus empower and liberate the individual user" (Spears and Lea 1994, 427).

own hierarchies and social structures. Reid's research on MUD communities documents the continual process of social stratification among MUD users: the fact that the MUD's creator is referred to as 'God' and the expert user as 'Wizard' attests to the persistence of social structures within computer-mediated spaces. Though primarily meritocratic—a Wizard earns his or her title by attaining a certain level of play and by acquiring a general proficiency with the system—there is nonetheless a process of social stratification, determined largely by one's degree of participation. Similarly, Luciano Paccagnella observes that there is a considerable range of identification and personal involvement within an on-line forum.

> The total readership of a computer conference is always somewhat larger than that of the actual active users; computer conferences are for some people just unidirectional information sources. Only a few persons (and it would be interesting to identify who) come to appreciate the conference as a social environment, where they acquire friends and enemies and build their own unique on-line identities (Paccagnella *n.d.*).

The degree of participation ranges from active users or experts who dominate virtual spaces to those who simply observe or 'lurk.' Whereas the virtual community, as an ideal type, promises to democratize communication, research shows that traditional processes of social differentiation persist. Paccagnella notes:

> Social-oriented ethnographic studies on CMC have appropriately identified the existence of strategies of visibility of the actors which make up for the lack of traditional interpersonal cues and which indeed permit the development of a status differentiation: the newcomers to a computer conference or a MOO are immediately recognized as such and the same holds true for the leaders. Both acquire and use symbols that make them different one from the other even if they are all apparently hidden beyond the keyboard of one's own computer. Such a status differentiation, of course, may not match a pre-existing differentiation in the off-line life (Paccagnella *n.d.*).

Social stratification within virtual spaces thus undermines the notion of the virtual community as inherently democratic and egalitarian.

Furthermore, it is necessary to make a distinction between the democratizing influence of computer-mediated communication in a social, versus a political, sense. Although the equalization effect may have an impact on social dynamics, the flattening of hierarchies does not ensure the development of a vibrant and politically active public forum; to equate the two is to conflate the political with the social. Political participation and empowerment do not necessarily flow from social democratization. Thus, the emergence of an on-line community does not entail the birth of a renewed public space for political participation and debate. As Jones points out: "The question remains, though, whether or not the communities we may form by way of CMC will, or even ought to, be part of our public culture. If so, then perhaps it would be best to not understand them as communities (Jones 1995, 32). Thus, the concept of a virtual community is not interchangeable with that of a computer-mediated public forum; indeed, the suggestion that a computer-mediated social formation can serve as both community and public space is highly problematic.

Reconceptualizing space and community

Invariably, the concept of a virtual community problematizes traditional notions of communication and community just as it attempts to elucidate them. Jones suggests that computer-mediated communication problematizes our notions of community, forcing us to question accepted—and often unchallenged—definitions of what constitutes community. The concept of virtual community is based on the paradigm of a traditional community mediated through face-to-face communication. As Michael Schudson observes,

> When we criticize the reality of the mass media, we do so by opposing it to an ideal of conversation which we are not inclined to examine. We are not really interested in what face-to-face communication is like; rather, we have developed a notion that all communication *should* be like a certain

> model of conversation, whether that model really exists or not (quoted in Jones 1995, 27).

Indeed, if we are to base our conception of virtual community on a particular model of communication, we are obliged first to investigate this model. Paccagnella argues that "the very authenticity of communities developed on-line should not be taken for granted without an effort to come to a commonly accepted definition of what a community really is" (Paccagnella *n.d.*). Fay Sudweeks and Sheizaf Rafaeli, two of the *ProjectH* participants, criticize this tendency to privilege face-to-face interaction as the ideal form of communication: "Face-to-face communication is hailed as the communication standard against which all others are found inferior. The ideal of face-to-face conversation, though, is precisely that: an ideal" (Sudweeks and Rafaeli 1996, 116).

But why is it that face-to-face conversation should serve as the paradigm for communication? Jones ventures: "The most likely answer is that it is a form of communication that we identify and associate with community, with Gemeinschaft, and face-to-interface communication we associate with impersonal communication" (Jones 1995, 27). Indeed, this privileging of oral, face-to-face communication is a recurring phenomenon: it appears not only in Rheingold's conception of virtual community, but in McLuhan's notion of 'retribalization' and Ong's notion of 'secondary orality' as well. By problematizing our privileging of face-to-face communication, these researchers are interrogating the very concept of community, thereby implying that community can be premised on alternate forms of communication. Thus, the concept of virtual community effectively unseats the paradigm of face-to-face communication.

By interrogating traditional notions of community premised on the ideal of face-to-face interaction, the concept of virtual community also challenges traditional notions of space. Community is typically viewed as a social formation determined not only by face-to-face

communication, but also by geography. In their study of the sociology of community, Bell and Newby identified the following as the elements common to most definitions of community: "social interaction based on a geographic area, self-sufficiency, common life, consciousness of a kind, and possession of common ends, norms, and means" (quoted in Jones 1995, 21). Among these elements, however, physical proximity is paramount; within its physical boundaries, geography encompasses all the other components that comprise a community. Space both produces and informs social relations; it exists a priori and serves as the context for the development of community.

A virtual community, however, defies traditional notions of space; it is an extra-geographical community unencumbered by the constraints of physical space. Licklider and Taylor, two of the scientists involved in early research on networked communication in the late 1960s, envisioned on-line communities as follows:

> They will be communities not of common location, but of *common interest*....life will be happier for the on-line individual because the people with whom one interacts most strongly will be selected more by commonality of interests and goals than by accidents of proximity (quoted in Jones 1995, 23).

Virtual community thus circumvents the arbitrariness of geography to facilitate a social space of shared interests. This notion of community inverts our notions of space. Rather than a product of geography, a virtual community is a socially produced space *without* a physical location; computer-mediated communication is said to occur in cyber*space*, an intangible, virtual environment. Thus, the very concept of virtual community challenges traditional notions of both space and community. In so doing, it advances a conceptualization of community premised on computer-mediated means of communication, and a conceptualization of space premised on a computer network of intersecting nodes or nexus points.

The strength of the virtual community concept lies in its challenge to accepted notions of community premised on physical proximity. By interrogating and unseating traditional notions of space and community, the concept of virtual community facilitates a reconceptualization of the on-line social formation as a new form of communication and a new type of community. This, in turn, allows for the emergence of new paradigms of what constitutes communication, community, and space. Similarly, the notion of a diasporic community also defies traditional notions of community premised on physical proximity and face-to-face conversation. The worldwide distribution of a diasporic population requires alternate modes of communication: in this way, the concept of computer-mediated communication is ideally suited to a diaspora, which is, by definition, without a geographical centre. A.R. Stone defines virtual communities as "incontrovertibly social spaces in which people still meet face-to-face, but under new definitions of both 'meet ' and 'face'....Virtual communities [are] passage points for collections of common beliefs and practices that united people who were physically separated" (quoted in Jones 1995, 19). Echoing Licklider and Taylor's notion of a community of interest, Stone's reference to a "physically separated" community with "common beliefs and practices" also evokes the concept of a diaspora.

Furthermore, a diaspora not only defies traditional notions of community; by virtue of its distribution patterns, it also contests accepted notions of what constitutes an ethnic community. Traditionally, an ethnocultural formation was indivisible from both geography and nationhood. However, as the locus of ethnicity has shifted from the shared physical space of the nation to the imagined spaces of the diasporic subject, the conception of an ethnic community has also changed. For instance, Anderson's conceptualization of imagined community centred on the nation as its prototype; the emergence of an imagined community was premised on national systems of mass communication that mediated the shared imaginative constructions of the nation (Game

and Carey 1998, 124). The emergence of a global communication network, however, suggests the possibility of a new prototype not only for the concept of imagined community, but also for that of ethnic community. The globalization of communication, particularly through the Internet, facilitates the formation of communities that defy the boundaries of state and nation in favour of communities based on common interests and shared experiences. Thus, the diaspora could potentially serve as the new paradigm for an ethnically based, computer-mediated community; it is a community premised not on nationhood, but on ethnicity. Here the concept of an ethnic diaspora converges with the concepts of both virtual community and imagined community: all three are divorced from geography, mediated in intangible, imagined spaces, and contingent on the shared interests of their members.

Conceptualizing ethnic virtual community

Thus, the notion of an ethnic virtual community founded on imaginative constructions of collective identity provides a new vocabulary for exploring the ways in which ethnicity manifests itself through computer-mediated communication. An ethnic virtual community is dependent on the presence of an existing ethnocultural formation. In her study of a Usenet newsgroup of soap opera fans knows as 'r.a.t.s.' (rec.arts.tv.soaps), Nancy Baym identifies "external contexts" as one of the primary factors of that comprise a virtual community. Baym observes that all virtual communities are to some extent premised on pre-existing social formations:

> All interaction, including CMC, is simultaneously situated in multiple external contexts. The preexisting speech communities in which interactants operate provide social understandings and practices through and against which interaction in the new computer-mediated context develops. CMC use is always nested in the national and international cultures of which its participants are members. From this they draw a common language, usually but not always English, common ways of speaking, and a good deal of shared understandings (Baym 1995, 141).

Although they remain external to their on-line manifestations, these pre-existing speech communities inform the emergence of their respective virtual communities by providing a common foundation of shared "social understandings and practices." In this way, the pre-existing speech community of soap opera fans facilitated the emergence of the r.a.t.s. newsgroup: by seeking out an on-line forum where they could express and articulate their shared interest in soap operas, the members of this pre-existing social formation gave rise to a specific type of virtual community. One of the salient characteristics of a pre-existing social formation is the tendency for its "participants' communicative styles [to be] oriented around common social practices before they even enter into CMC" (Baym 1995, 141). The external context of a pre-existing social formation or speech community thus predisposes its members to rearticulate and reinscribe their shared social practices on-line.

Baym's emphasis on the role of national and international cultures in serving as potential speech communities is particularly relevant. Together, the "common language," "common ways of speaking," and "shared understandings" of a pre-existing formation provide the basis for a virtual community. Just as the pre-existing speech community of soap opera fans fostered the development of the r.a.t.s. virtual community, an ethnic diaspora is a pre-existing ethnocultural formation that could serve as the foundation for an ethnically based virtual community. Thus, the shared ethnicity and culture of a diaspora predisposes its members to use computer-mediated communication to articulate and express their common ethnocultural background.

Furthermore, Baym combines this emphasis on pre-existing social formations with the notion of appropriation. She contends that the outcome of computer-mediated communication is partially determined by the degree to which participants are able to appropriate available technological resources:

> My argument is that the distinct cultures that emerge in CMC are grounded in communicative practice. Community is generated through the interplay between preexisting structures and the participants' strategic appropriation and exploitation of the resources and rules those structures offer in ongoing interaction (Baym 1995, 139).

The collective appropriation of the resources of computer-mediated communication occurs through communicative practice itself. The process of appropriation involves the emergence of new social dynamics and practices, developed by the participants themselves, for their own purposes. These dynamics and practices include innovative forms of expression, anonymous or fictitious identities, new forms of on-line relationships, and evolving behavioural norms. By recognizing the importance of appropriation in the emergence of virtual communities, Baym emphasizes the role of human agency. The formation of a virtual community, therefore, requires not only the presence of a pre-existing speech community, but also that the members of this community use their communicative practices and cultural resources to "achieve and validate [the] cultural meanings" that define their community (Baym 1995, 150). Thus, the formation of an ethnic virtual community is dependent on the ability of its participants to constitute and reify their collective cultural meanings through communicative practice. The distinct ethnic culture that emerges is a product of the computer-mediated articulation of individual and collective identities.

The emergence of virtual community, therefore, is determined by the relationship between pre-existing social formations and communicative practices. These two elements, in combination, provide the basis for virtual community to evolve:

> Social meanings are found in communicative practice....Social organization emerges in a dynamic process of appropriation in which participants invoke structures to create meanings in ways that researchers or system designers may not foresee (Baym 1995, 150).

This theorization echoes Jones's assertion that a computer-mediated social formation emerges from "between the two poles of production and reproduction" (Jones 1995, 14). The 'production' of a new formation, through the active appropriation of technological resources, combines with the 'reproduction' of pre-existing structures to produce a new type of sociocultural formation. The ethnic virtual community, therefore, emerges at the conjuncture of the reproduction of a pre-existing ethnic community and production of a new, computer-mediated manifestation of community.

Given this fusion of ethnic community and communicative practice, the ethnic virtual community may be characterized as an 'emergent formation,' as defined by Raymond Williams. Williams describes "emergence" as a continual process of constitution and articulation: "By 'emergent' I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created" (Williams 1977, 123). "Formations," accordingly, are defined as "conscious movements or tendencies (literary, artistic, philosophical or scientific) which can readily be discerned after their formative productions" (Williams 1977, 119). The emergent is constituted in relation to both dominant and residual elements. Each of the three elements represent a particular point in an evolving process: for instance, the emergent formation represents the manifestation of numerous residual and dominant elements intersecting with one another. An emergent formation, therefore, is a conscious movement or tendency in a continual process of constitution and articulation. Approaching the concept of ethnic virtual community as an emergent formation effectively emphasizes the constant and fluid interaction of residual, dominant, and emergent elements.

In terms of an ethnic virtual community, the shared ethnic origin, language, history, tradition, and culture of its members constitute the residual elements, and the technological aspect of computer-mediated communication, the emergent. The residual

elements of an ethnic virtual community are powerful and affective precisely because it is shared ethnicity that distinguishes it from a generic conception of virtual community. Similarly, the emergent elements are also influential due to the constitutive nature of computer-mediated communication, which effectively transforms the participant into producer. The emergent formation of the ethnic virtual community is, consequently, in a continual process of renegotiating and rearticulating ethnicity. Like any virtual community, the ethnic virtual community is always emerging, always in flux: there is no fixed or final incarnation, just ever-shifting "points of identification" (Hall *n.d.*, 226).

Thus, the ethnic virtual community is distinguished by the presence of a pre-existing ethnocultural formation. Its emergence is premised not only on the existence of an ethnic community, but more importantly, on that community's use and appropriation of the medium. The ethnic virtual community, therefore, is constituted through the interplay of a pre-existing ethnocultural formation and the communicative practices of computer-mediated communication. The specificities of that ethnocultural formation—in this case, the Ukrainian diaspora—distinguish it from other forms of virtual community. The participants of an ethnic virtual community construct and reify a specific type of subjectivity, one that coalesces around collective articulations of ethnic identity. Thus, the production of a new computer-mediated formation, combined with the reproduction of a pre-existing ethnic community, constitutes a particular type of emergent formation.

Like the process of ethnogenesis, which involves the reinvention of a pre-existing ethnicity, the emergence of an ethnic virtual community involves the reproduction of an existing social formation combined with the production of a new form of community. Thus, there is a strong parallelism between ethnogenesis—the incarnation of a new ethnic identity, and ethnic virtual community—the manifestation of a new form of community. The result is that this new incarnation of ethnicity manifests itself within the context of

the new virtual community. In other words, the process of ethnogenesis transpires within the context of the ethnic virtual community, for it is here that the common ethnic origin and shared interests of the diaspora are articulated and negotiated.

In order to contextualize this process of ethnogenesis through computer-mediated communication, it is necessary to delineate the contours of the ethnic virtual community. Thus, we now turn to a site review of the Ukrainian-related electronic spaces on the Internet, followed by a description of the research site.

Chapter 4

Contextualizing the research site: Ukrainians on-line

Thus far, this thesis has focused on the theoretical aspects of ethnicity and computer-mediated communication. But what is the context within which computer-mediated discussions of ethnicity transpire? The following chapter contextualizes the research site by delineating the variety of Ukrainian virtual spaces that populate the Internet.

The Internet is typically defined as a network of computer networks. Until the 1990s, most computer networks were comparatively autonomous systems. In recent years, computer networking technology has enabled computer networks to "communicate with one another and share information between networks" (Balka 1997, 54). The result is "a vastly interconnected and loosely organized system of computer networks worldwide, composed of local area networks (LANs), citywide metropolitan networks (MANs), and huge Wide Area Networks (WANs)" connected through a variety of technologies, including telephone lines and fiber-optic links, and commonly known as the Internet (Shade 1994, 54).

The InfoUkes mailing lists that constitute the subject of this research project are part of a larger InfoUkes Web site on the Internet. The World Wide Web, commonly referred to as the Web, is a graphical user interface application that enables users to view computer documents with graphics, video, or sound in addition to text. The Web uses HTML, or hypertext mark-up language, to facilitate easy connection between Web documents residing on various servers. Though Web technology is only one of many Internet technologies, it is considerably more accessible due to the graphic presentation of the Web interface. A mailing list, or listserver, is a computer application that automates the distribution of email to all subscribers of a given list. Because the InfoUkes lists are

accessed through the InfoUkes Web site, they combine the technology of the mailing list application with the platform of the World Wide Web to produce Web-based mailing lists. Before examining the InfoUkes lists in their specificity, however, I begin with a site review of Ukrainian Web sites on the Internet.

Ukrainian Web sites

Given the considerable number of Ukrainian-related electronic spaces on the Internet, it is necessary from the outset to distinguish between two basic types: sites originating in Ukraine and those originating in the diaspora. Since the research project centres on the role of computer-mediated communication in the Ukrainian diaspora, the following survey of Ukrainian Web sites focuses on description of the latter. Of these diasporic Web sites, the majority are North American in origin, with several notable exceptions from Western Europe. Most are English-language sites, though a number of sites also offer Ukrainian versions.

Predictably, there is considerable diversity within this broad category of diasporic Web sites ranging from comprehensive informational sites to homepages of individual users. In addition, there are numerous on-line publications, organizational sites, and even a few Ukrainian search engines. While some sites exemplify these admittedly loose categories, others incorporate elements of each, resulting in a considerable overlap. The unifying thread among all these sites is a shared commitment to providing Internet users with information about Ukraine and Ukrainians. For instance, the objective of the *Ukrainian Information Centre* of Hilversum in the Netherlands is "to inform the general public in Western Europe by means of accurate and recent information on all aspects of life in Ukraine."[16] Some sites combine a concentration on Ukraine itself with a commitment to

[16]http://www.euronet.nl/users/twc/index.html.

diasporic organizations, events, and culture. *TryzubSite*,[17] a Web site that finds its host in the United States, describes its objectives as follows:

> TryzubSite was established in 1994 and is focused upon matters Ukrainian, with a concentration in the North American Diaspora. The contents of the site are **dynamic** and **alive** showing the vibrancy of today's Ukrainian culture - be it in Ukraine herself or especially abroad. Please visit the HOMEPAGES section to begin your journey of exploration and discovery![18]

Unlike the *Ukrainian Information Centre*'s site, *TryzubSite* is more committed to serving the needs of the diasporic community.

Regardless of their emphasis, most sites exhibit a commitment to providing information about both Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora. By attempting to address both the ingroup of diasporic Ukrainians as well as the larger outgroup of non-Ukrainian Internet users, these sites engage in a dual discourse. The distinction between an ingroup built on "past relationships, common interests, shared practices or common national heritage" and an outgroup of global Internet users is significant not only in its characterization of various Ukrainian Web sites, but also in its wider implications on computer-mediated communication (Mitra 1997, 159). Ananda Mitra describes this dual discourse as "a unique discursive problematic where most WWW pages have to simultaneously address a small community as well as the global audience" (Mitra 1997, 159). Some sites attempt to balance the two, while others clearly privilege one audience over the other.

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[17]The *tryzub*, a golden trident on an azure background, is a Ukrainian national symbol. As a state emblem, it dates back to the 10th century when it was the coat of arms of the Riuryk dynasty that ruled the Kievan Rus' state. The trident was also adopted by the government of the short-lived Ukrainian National Republic in 1918 as its coat of arms. Following Ukraine's independence in 1991, the trident was again reinstated as part of Ukraine's coat of arms. Variations of the trident are used by numerous Ukrainian organizations.
[18]http://www.tryzub.com/.

General information sites

There are several comprehensive sites dedicated to providing general information on a broad range of topics, including: arts and culture, business, Chornobyl, computing, current events, economics, entertainment, geography, government, history, language, law, media and publications, organizations, social issues, sports, and travel. The awareness of a global audience informs much of the content on these sites: introductory information, such as a map of Ukraine, a picture of its azure-and-yellow flag, or an image of the trident, often signals that the site is presenting the global Internet audience with a 'cyberface' of Ukraine and Ukrainians.[19] In some cases, information specific to Ukraine is isolated in an "About Ukraine" category; at other times it is subsumed into the above categories, with information about the diaspora restricted to a separate "Ukrainians Abroad" or "Ukrainian Diaspora" category. These general information sites often act as indices of other Ukrainian Web sites, providing long lists of hypertext links organized by either region or subject. One of the most extensive compilations of links to other sites finds its host in Canada. Oleh Baran, the administrator of the *UKRAINE WWW Page*, describes its mandate as follows:

> This page is an attempt to create a single unified access point to electronic resources pertaining to Ukraine, its people, geography, economy, social, scientific and political developments and many other areas. The main goal of this initiative is to increase general awareness about Ukraine in the global networking community, as well as provide specific up to date information to interested individuals and organizations, to designe [*sic*] an access point to data in various multimedia (digital audio/video, animations, graphics, etc.) formats.[20]

With extensive lists of links to other sites under headings such as "Chornobyl and its consequences," "Cultural items," and "Publications on-line," Baran's *UKRAINE* site is a

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[19]The term 'cyberface' is borrowed from Ananda Mitra's article "Diasporic Web Sites: Ingroup and Outgroup Discourse" (Mitra 1997, 159).

[20]http://www.physics.mcgill.ca/WWW/oleh/about.html.

prime example of those sites that serve as collections of links on various Ukrainian-related topics. The orientation is relatively balanced between the "global networking community" of non-Ukrainians who may be interested in learning about Ukrainian issues and the ingroup of "interested individuals and organizations." In contrast, the aforementioned *TryzubSite,* which hosts the homepages of several prominent diaspora organizations, displays a greater orientation to the ingroup audience. Among *TryzubSite*'s homepages are those of the Children of Chornobyl Relief Fund, the Shevchenko Scientific Society, The Washington Group (a professional association), Ukrainian America Veterans, The Ukrainians (a musical group from Britain), Suchasnist' (a Ukrainian-language publication of contemporary literature), the Ukrainian National Association (a fraternal-benefit organization) and its English-language newspaper, the *Ukrainian Weekly.*

Additionally, there are several comprehensive general information sites that combine lists of hypertext links with original content. *UKRAINE: the Homeland Page*, a Web site originating in Austria, provides an eclectic mix of original content about Ukraine and Ukrainian culture, including a 'Picture Gallery,' maps of Ukraine, and a sound file of the Ukrainian National Anthem. Aside from its original content, *UKRAINE: the Homeland Page* offers a fairly extensive compilation of links on media, politics, history and culture, science and education, official institutions in Ukraine, music, sports, and personal homepages. Another comprehensive informational site is *BRAMA - Gateway Ukraine*; the term "*brama*," meaning 'gate,' announces the site's objective of serving as a centralized point of entry for things Ukrainian. *BRAMA* is well-organized and easy to navigate; it offers a Ukrainian version of the site, as well as Cyrillic fonts for downloading. *BRAMA* supplements its comprehensive hypertext links with original content: it contains articles on law, language, culture, and history that have been reproduced for the site. Both *UKRAINE: the Homeland Page* and *BRAMA - Gateway Ukraine* are comprehensive sites

that serve as excellent resources for information about Ukraine and the diasporic community. The availability of general information demonstrates their orientation to a global Internet audience, while the availability of more specific information about organizational activities also serves the interests of the ingroup Ukrainian audience.

By presenting themselves as comprehensive information resources, the above-mentioned sites actively address the global Internet audience: they serve as an entry point to almost any Ukrainian-related topic. The prevalence of Ukrainian flags and cultural symbols demonstrates the degree to which these sites attempt to make Ukrainian culture accessible to a wider audience. At another level of signification, the use of national and cultural symbols also addresses the ingroup audience: while it familiarizes outgroup members with Ukrainian symbols, it simultaneously serves as a source of identification for diasporic Ukrainians. Such images and symbols serve as anchors around which a virtual community can coalesce. In this way, these comprehensive Web sites embody a dual discursive strategy of addressing both ingroup and outgroup audiences.

Organizational sites

These larger general information sites often host the Web sites of various diaspora organizations. Because these organizational sites are designed to provide information about a specific organization, they are more geared toward Ukrainians in the diaspora; generally, organizational activities and community events are of greater interest to ingroup members who may want to participate in their local communities. These sites typically contain information about the organization's history, mandate, services offered, past projects, upcoming events, and references for further information or local contacts. For instance, the homepage of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University provides information on the Institute's summer programs, publications, library, professional seminars, research opportunities, working papers, special announcements,

and related Harvard courses. Other educational institutions or publishers with Web sites include the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre, the Encyclopedia of Ukraine, the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, and the International Ukrainian Economic Association. There is also a wide array of sites representing cultural organizations, ranging from the Yara Arts Group (a theatre troupe), to the *Syzokryli* Ukrainian Dance Ensemble of New York,[21] to the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art in Chicago. Individual artists are also represented on-line: among them is a site describing the art of '*pysanky*' or Ukrainian Easter eggs by Sofia Zielyk. Youth and student organizations have also established their presence on the Internet: *SUSK*, the Ukrainian Canadian Student Union has a Web site and a mailing list; and *Plast*, a Ukrainian scouting organization, has Web sites representing various chapters around the world. There are also several professional associations on-line, such as the Ukrainian Canadian Professional and Business Federation, the Ukrainian Medical Association of North America, and the Ukrainian National Association. In addition to the above-mentioned organizational sites, there are numerous other sites representing religious organizations, museums and art galleries, financial institutions, sports organizations, and charitable or non-profit organizations; indeed, the above description is only a brief survey of the countless Ukrainian organizational Web sites on-line. Despite this diversity, these sites are remarkably similar in their endeavour to provide information about their organization's role in diasporic life. While they do occasionally offer links to other sites, these are not as extensive as those of the general information sites. Where these organizational sites differ most is in their depth of information and graphic sophistication. Unfortunately, some sites do not seem to be regularly updated, so that information on events and activities is sometimes outdated.

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[21] '*Syzokryli*' translates as 'of the grey-blue wings.'

Search engines

Search engines have also been incorporated into a few of the general information sites, though these vary considerably in the quality of their search results. For instance, *TryzubSite* offers an internal search engine that tends to yield information on its own content. In some cases, the search engines are no more than links to other commonly used search engines. The *UKRAINE WWW Page* offers a "Search" link that connects to the *Excite* search engine. *BRAMA - Gateway Ukraine* provides links to *Yahoo!*, *Excite*, *AltaVista*, *Lycos*, and *WebCrawler*. Similarly, *UKRAINET: the Ukraine Information Resource Directory* offers a "Search" link that collects a number of common search engines into a single page. The *SESNA Ukrainian Search* is specifically dedicated to Ukrainian topics, though *SESNA*'s database seems limited to Web sites from Ukraine, as most searches yield only Ukraine-based sites. Despite the relative lack of specifically Ukrainian search engines, there is nonetheless a wealth of information about the Ukrainian diaspora accessible largely through the links compiled on general information sites as well as through various search engines.

Homepages

In contrast, the homepages of individual Internet users are considerably more personal and sociable in tone. These homepages are created either by diasporic Ukrainians, or by individuals from Ukraine studying or working abroad. One such site is Andriy Ostapenko's homepage entitled *Welcome to my Home Page: [the] Blue and Yellow Page.* Ostapenko describes his colour scheme as follows:

> Some of you may wonder why is this page blue and yellow? Well, the answer is pretty simple: blue and yellow are the two colors of the flag of Ukraine. And Ukraine is the country I am from, the country I love, and the country I dedicate this page to. For long it was part of USSR and now it is independent and optimistic.[22]

[22]http://www.eng.usf.edu/~aostapen/.

Ostapenko's page includes links to a "clickable map of Ukraine," the Kiev State University where he studied, some of the Web pages he has created, and links to his friends' homepages in Ukraine. Similarly, Nick Golego's *Ukraine* homepage reveals a loyalty to his homeland. The subheading of his page reads "I think it's natural for a person to be proud of the country she or he was born in. I am," accompanied by a picture of the Ukrainian countryside.[23] Like Ostapenko, Golego provides links to other Ukrainian sites, many from Ukraine. Most individual homepages are in English, although *Bohdan Skrobach's Ukrainian Homepage* offers a Ukrainian version. In addition to a variety of information ranging from Ukrainian Olympic athletes to Ukraine's economy and election results, Skrobach also has a counter of the number of days since Ukraine's independence was established in 1991: "Ukraine Independent for [...] days."[24] These homepages serve as excellent examples of a dual discourse operating simultaneously: while their expressions of ethnic identity and loyalty to the homeland are aimed primarily at the ingroup audience, they also strive to make information about Ukraine accessible to a wider, non-Ukrainian audience.

Most of the diasporic homepages tend to be lighthearted in tone; they are less about organizational activities than they are about their creator's interests, hobbies, and acquaintances. *Danyo's Home Page* is a good example: it includes a "Photo Album" of Danyo and his friends, a "Cool Links" list of friends' homepages, and a "*Zabava* Listings Page" of upcoming dances across North America. Although they do provide hypertext links to other sites, these homepages are primarily aimed at encouraging and fostering social interaction among Ukrainians on the Web; most encourage readers to email them with comments or to sign an electronic guestbook. The fact that these sites offer scant information about Ukraine or the community at large suggests that they are intended for

[23]http://www.chembio.uoguelph.ca/golego/ukraine.htm.
[24]http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/bohdans/.

ingroup members who have some prior knowledge of both Ukraine and the diaspora. Unlike the more formal organizational and informational sites, these personal homepages enable Internet users to create a more socially oriented Ukrainian electronic space that supplements the informative element of other Web sites. Whether expatriates living abroad or members of the diaspora, these sites provide a way for people to express their commitments to Ukraine, Ukrainian culture, and their local communities. Though they offer less in the way of information, these sites nonetheless constitute an important element of the Ukrainian networking community.

What the foregoing survey demonstrates is that most Ukrainian electronic spaces are, in fact, Web sites. While there are various other types of on-line forums, very few are dedicated to the discussion of Ukrainian-related subjects. There are a few Usenet newsgroups dealing with Ukrainian topics, including *soc.culture.ukrainian*, *ukr.netnews*, *ukr.politics*, and *alt.current-events.ukraine*, but the quality of discussion on these newsgroups is considered relatively poor due to frequent 'flaming.' Thus, despite the relative abundance of information on the Internet, there is little in the way of interactive spaces where both ingroup and outgroup members can communicate with one another to discuss Ukrainian topics. Aside from the InfoUkes mailing lists, there are a few Ukrainian mailing lists, but these are somewhat limited in terms of their appeal to a general audience. The Ukrainian Folkarts list, a U.S.-based mailing list for Ukrainian artists and those interested in folkarts, is dedicated to discussion of embroidery, costumes, music, folklore, and traditions. *Tovarystvo* (meaning "association") is another North American mailing list dedicated to fostering intellectual discussion of Ukrainian issues. In both cases, subscribers are asked to provide a brief biography outlining their interest in the specific topic of the list. Despite their appeal to a particular target audience, these lists are

likely to interest a relatively narrow group of Internet users and, as such, they provide limited scope for on-line communication among Ukrainian Internet users. This comparative lack of Ukrainian interactive spaces heightens the role of the InfoUkes mailing lists in facilitating the development of a Ukrainian virtual community.

InfoUkes

InfoUkes Inc., an Internet-based information resource about Ukraine and Ukrainians, is one of the most comprehensive of all the general information sites. InfoUkes' on-line brochure describes its services as follows:

> The InfoUkes web server provides information on Ukraine and Ukrainian people throughout the world. The topics range from history, culture, maps, genealogy, software, thru [*sic*] media and new publications on the Internet. InfoUkes also maintains links to websites in Ukraine and other Ukrainian-related web pages worldwide. InfoUkes contains the largest data base (600 megabytes as of April 1st 1998 and growing) of information on Ukrainian related topics.[25]

InfoUkes claims to be the "best known and most heavilly [*sic*] used such resource on the Internet."[26] The present incarnation of the InfoUkes site was officially launched on June 10, 1997, although it has actually been on-line since April 16, 1997. Its mandate is to serve as an on-line information resource:

> The purpose of the InfoUkes internet server is to provide a website of information about Ukraine and Ukrainians. The web site is designed primarily for people of Ukrainian descent, particularly English speaking North Americans, who wish to learn more about their heritage, but is also directed to anyone interested in Ukraine, Ukrainians and people of Ukrainian heritage.[27]

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[25]"InfoUkes Inc.: An Internet Information Resource about Ukraine and Ukrainians," InfoUkes Inc., accessed 25 May 1998, http://www.infoukes.com/corporate/brochure/.

[26]"InfoUkes Celebrates First Anniversary in Operation," (30 April 1998). InfoUkes Inc. Media Release, accessed 25 May 1998, http://www. infoukes.com/corporate/press_releases/pr980430.html.

[27]"InfoUkes Launches New Website," (10 June 1997). InfoUkes Inc. Media Release, accessed 25 May 1998, http://www.infoukes.com/corporate/press_releases/pr970610.html.

Like the other general information sites, InfoUkes is aimed not only at Ukrainians in the diaspora, but also at the wider audience of Internet users who may have some interest in learning about Ukraine or other Ukrainian-related topics. It addresses both ingroup and outgroup audiences simultaneously.

In addition to hosting Web pages for a wide variety of diasporic organizations and cultural events—ranging from Canada's National Ukrainian Festival to the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program to Radio Free Europe's Daily News about Ukraine—InfoUkes also offers a listserver and an extensive search engine. The listserver consists of a series of mailing lists where "individuals who sign on can make inquiries, voice concerns and discuss issues related to Ukraine, Ukrainians and people of Ukrainian heritage."[28] The search engine

> catalogs major North American based sites. It is a major resource that is updated on a monthly basis. The InfoUkes web site itself is mapped out with a powerful search engine, and is updated on a weekly basis.[29]

Thus, the InfoUkes search engine is able to conduct both external and internal searches. The external searches, however, are drawn from a database of five Ukrainian-related sites in North America, thereby limiting the scope of their search results: while these searches do not yield as wide a variety of links as other Internet search engines, they do tend to be more targeted to the specified topic.

The history of InfoUkes

The InfoUkes Web site is the 'successor site' to the original *Ukes* site founded by Andrew Ukrainec at McMaster University. In the early 1990s, during Ukraine's drive for independence, there were only two on-line forums for Internet users to discuss Ukrainian issues. The Usenet newsgroups *talk.politics.soviet* and *soc.culture.soviet* became "a

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[28]InfoUkes Inc. Media Release, 30 April 1998.
[29]*Ibid.*

hotbed of discussion and battles when Ukraine declared its intention to separate from the Soviet Union."[30] Some of the participants became disenchanted with the quality of discussion on these newsgroups. In order to counter the misinformation and flaming that tended to characterize these discussions, a few interested participants decided to form their own mailing list, one where the conventions of netiquette would be observed. Andrew Ukrainec, then a Ph.D. student at McMaster University, and Gerry Kokodyniak, a Ph.D. student at the University of Toronto, founded the *ukes* mailing list in November of 1991: "The McMaster University Ukes site was created during Ukraine's drive for independence from the Soviet Union to counter misinformation in the media, and particularly on the Internet, about the ramifications of Ukrainian independence."[31] Although it was conceptualized as a forum for "discuss[ing] tactics to counter disinformation in news groups, in time it became a discussion group on Ukrainian topics itself."[32] According to Ukrainec, the *ukes* list "started as a grassroots kind of way to respond to the public lists" (Ukrainec 1998). Initially, it was a moderated restricted-access list with only six members. While anyone could join simply by making a request to the administrator, some perceived it as exclusionary and pressed for open access. As the number of both participants and postings increased, the *ukes* list was split into two lists: a *ukes-news* list to deal with news and politics, and a *ukes-social* list to serve as an "open free-for-all discussion forum" for more socially oriented topics.[33] In addition to the two mailing lists, Ukrainec also created a file server "to allow members to obtain or exchange images, Ukrainian fonts, access to archived articles and other Ukrainian materials."[34]

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[30]Melnyk, Andrew, "InfoUkes," *Forum: A Ukrainian Review*, No. 97 (Fall 1997), accessed 25 May 1998, http://www.infoukes.com/corporate/articles/forum/.
[31]InfoUkes Inc., corporate brochure.
[32]Melnyk, "InfoUkes," Fall 1997.
[33]*Ibid.*
[34]*Ibid.*

With the advent of the World Wide Web, a Web server was added to the Ukes site in 1995. However, "as the website expanded and attracted more visitors, it became clear that the site could no longer be based on a university owned Internet connection."[35] The administrators eventually decided to incorporate InfoUkes, in part so that the site could accept advertising, an important source of income on the Internet. Incorporation also enabled InfoUkes' founding members to maintain control over the content of the site; by remaining independent of any community organization or institution, InfoUkes Inc. was free to follow its own mandate without being subject to the organizational imperatives of a sponsor. The name was changed from 'Ukes'—a colloquial term for Ukrainians that was considered too frivolous—to 'InfoUkes,' in order to better reflect the content and objectives of the site.

Given the rapid and unabated growth of the year-old InfoUkes site, Ukrainec is confident of InfoUkes' ability to fulfill its mandate. The site continues to expand, with new content and features constantly being added. As Ukrainec observes:

> We outgrew the McMaster site. It became clear that we needed an independent site that we could expand. The demand for new materials and services is phenomenal!...We created the site with the intent to present a positive, accurate understanding of historical and current events regarding Ukraine and Ukrainians. This is accomplished through the dissemination of relevant information around the world, and an active participation in on-line discussion.[36]

InfoUkes' two main services—the Web server and the listserver, or mailing lists—are seen as playing equally important roles in realizing its mandate. Their commitment to providing accurate and relevant information about Ukraine and Ukrainians reflects an orientation to the larger non-Ukrainian Internet audience. By facilitating on-line

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[35]InfoUkes Inc., corporate brochure.

[36]"InfoUkes: Global Village for Ukrainians," *Online*, Ukrainian Canadian Professional and Business Association of Toronto newsletter, 62: 4 (April 1997), accessed 25 May 1998, http://www.infoukes.com/organizations/ucpba-toronto/online-9704/infoukes.html.

discussion of Ukrainian issues, InfoUkes is also addressing the ingroup audience of diasporic Ukrainians without restricting access to outgroup members who may want to participate in such discussions. Although incorporation enables InfoUkes to raise revenues, it is seen primarily as a means to an end:

> We hope to raise revenue to pay for the site by renting web space, providing mailing lists, and creating web pages for individual[s], groups or organizations. In this way a virtual community is created for Ukrainians around the world.[37]

InfoUkes' role is thus conceived as a community organization that, through its various services, is able to contribute to the development of a Ukrainian virtual community. This evocation of the concept of virtual community reveals the degree to which InfoUkes' founders are cognizant of their role in facilitating greater computer-mediated communication and interaction within the Ukrainian diaspora. This nascent virtual community, "created for Ukrainians around the world," represents a new, electronically mediated manifestation of the diaspora.

The history of the InfoUkes listserver

The evolution of the InfoUkes mailing lists from the original *ukes* list to their current incarnation corroborates some of the predicted effects of computer-mediated communication. The development of the *ukes* list—which fulfills Rheingold's basic criteria of shared interests (in Ukraine's struggle for independence) and personal involvement (in the form of a reaction to misinformation)—demonstrates the role of human agency in the formation of a virtual community.

The splitting of the original list into two, *ukes-news* and *ukes-social*, was followed by increasing fragmentation of the listserver into a total of sixteen lists at this writing. This

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[37]*Ibid.*

process of fragmentation highlights some of the power dynamics that characterize computer-mediated communication. In most cases, the impetus to create new, more subject-specific lists came from participants themselves. Initially, because the restricted-access *ukes-news* list was perceived by some users as exclusionary, the administrators made it into an open-access forum. New lists were added when a participant proposed creating a list dedicated to a particular subject; depending on the level of interest and feedback from other participants, the administrators would then create a new list. As the volume of participation increased, the range of discussion topics also increased. Several of the new lists grew out of the 'social' list, which often served as a catch-all for discussions that did not fall into other available categories. The creation of new lists thus enabled participants to assert their agency in directing the development of this electronic space.

The gradual fragmentation of the lists had two significant and contradictory effects. Splitting the lists into ever-narrower categories had the effect of decreasing the total audience of any given list, since not all participants subscribe to every list. The result was that fewer people read and participated in each conversation thread. Fragmentation thus created a barrier to communication and interaction among the subscribers of different mailing lists. Conversely, the splitting up of the lists also had several positive effects. Fragmentation facilitated more pointed and topical discussions within the lists as the conversation threads became more targeted to their specified topics. Theoretically, participants of a given list should only receive email pertaining to the list's topic, thus reducing the number of postings that fall outside their area of interest. The result is a "more focused discussion" among participants with the potential for a higher, more in-depth quality of conversation (Ukrainec 1998). The availability of a greater number of lists also enabled subscribers to be more selective: instead of sifting through a flood of

email on numerous unrelated topics, participants were able to read and respond more readily to discussions of interest to them.

Fragmentation also had another significant impact on the power dynamics within InfoUkes' lists. Computer-mediated researchers have observed that, despite the equalization effect of on-line communication, virtual communities still exhibit processes of social stratification. Paccagnella maintains that, regardless of the lack of social context cues, hierarchies persist: 'lurkers' and 'newbies' ('newcomers' in the language of cyberspace) are immediately recognizable on-line, as are the often self-appointed experts of a given forum. In some cases, computer-mediated communication can reproduce or even exacerbate power and status differentials (Spears and Lea 1994, 446). Predictably, the InfoUkes mailing lists exhibited some degree of hierarchical stratification. Over time, regular participants established themselves as experts within this electronic space. At times, some of the dominant personalities engaged in flaming, thus demonstrating the disinhibiting effect of computer-mediated communication. At one point the administrators temporarily suspended three participants by placing them on a separate 'flame' list for a period of two weeks. These developments serve as a demonstration of numerous computer-mediated phenomena: the disinhibiting effect of anonymous communication, the persistence of social stratification and differentiation, and the need for mechanisms to maintain the social norms and values of a virtual community.

The fragmentation of the InfoUkes lists, and the concomitant fragmentation of their audience, effectively diminished the hierarchical stratification within the lists. Dominant personalities could no longer reach the broadest possible audience of subscribers without contravening the policy against cross-posting, or posting the same email message to several lists. Though unintentional on the part of the administrators, this aspect of the fragmentation had a somewhat positive impact on the power dynamics within the lists.

While more lists meant that there were more barriers to interaction, the increased number of lists also served as firewalls between lists, effectively diminishing the total audience and circumventing the flame wars that occasionally took place between some of the participants. Fragmentation thus mitigated against the reproduction of status and power differentials. This brief history of the lists demonstrates the tension between agency and power within a computer-mediated forum: the empowering and equalizing potential of the medium is counterbalanced by the ability of some users to exploit this characteristic to not only establish themselves as 'experts,' but, in some cases, to dominate and appropriate the electronic space for their purposes.

The research site

Currently, there are sixteen lists residing on the InfoUkes listserver.[38] Of these, two are recent additions: the 'education' and 'scieng'[39] lists were added in June of 1998. The other fourteen lists are: 'announce' for announcements and current events; 'arts' for discussions about fine art, music, art history, and crafts; 'business;' 'computers,' which deals with fonts and programs; 'flame;' 'genealogy' for those wishing to search their family trees; 'history;' 'humour,' with the proviso that participants "keep it clean;" 'medicine;' 'politics;' 'religion;' 'social,' described as "rebuttal, recipes, rants, raves;" 'sports;' and finally 'travel.'[40] Only the 'announce' list is moderated, to ensure that announcements are posted "to the exclusion of discussion and commentary."[41] The policy requires that announcements and

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[38]This figure excludes two other mailing lists available on InfoUkes for its clients: the Friends of Radiology in Ukraine (FRU) and the Ukrainian Canadian Professional and Business Federation (UCPBF), both of which are open-access lists.

[39]This list is dedicated to discussion of science, engineering, and technology; the term 'scieng' is a combination of the words 'science' and 'engineering.'

[40]http://www.infoukes.com/lists/list-ann.html. The social list serves as a catch-all for discussion topics that do not neatly fall under the other lists. Originally, when there were only two lists, *ukes-news* and *ukes-social*, the social list was considered the proper forum for responses, comments, or rebuttals to news items distributed through *ukes-news*, which was strictly for news and announcements. The news list has since been renamed the 'announce' list.

[41]"Policy for mailing lists," InfoUkes Inc., accessed 20 June 1998, http://www.infoukes.com/lists/policy.html.

news items be posted to the 'announce' list, while follow-up discussions should "take place in one of the other lists."[42] Thus, participants are encouraged to subscribe to the 'announce' list, as well as other lists of interest, in order to remain well-informed. As a result, 'announce' has the highest number of subscribers, 354 at this writing.[43] Those with the fewest subscribers are the two new lists, 'education' (with 18 subscribers) and 'scieng' (16), followed by 'medicine' (29), 'religion' (55), 'humour' (63), 'computers' (64), and 'sports' (78).[44] The more active, higher volume lists are: 'arts' (112), 'business' (136), 'genealogy' (122), 'history' (142), 'politics' (122), 'social' (122), and 'travel' (117 subscribers).[45] With the exception of the 'flame' list, all of the lists are logged on InfoUkes' electronic archive. Unfortunately, the number of subscribers to a given list does not indicate how many are regular participants and how many are lurkers (those who read messages, but rarely post). Predictably, some lists provide more sustained and dynamic discussion, while others may be dominated by a few active users.

The mandate of the mailing lists is to serve as on-line discussion spaces where both ingroup and outgroup members can communicate with one another through email postings. An InfoUkes press release describes the lists as

> forums where individuals who sign-on can make inquiries, voice concerns and discuss issues related to Ukraine, Ukrainians and people of Ukrainian heritage. This electronic global village ("selo" in Ukrainian) is open to anyone who abides by the rules of the service and net etiquette.[46]

The evocation of the electronic global village as a metaphor for computer-mediated communication is significant: it reveals InfoUkes' commitment to creating an electronic public space where Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians from around the globe can share their

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[42]*Ibid.*

[43]Figures are updated regularly by the system as individuals subscribe or unsubscribe to the lists. As such, they are subject to change between the time of writing and time of publication.

[44]"Mailing Lists," InfoUkes Inc., accessed 20 June 1998, http://www.infoukes.com/lists/.

[45]*Ibid.*

[46]InfoUkes Inc. Media Release, 10 June 1997.

common interests in things Ukrainian. The linking of McLuhan's famous phrase with the Ukrainian word for 'village' situates this particular virtual space within the specificities of the Ukrainian diaspora. This virtual forum, created for the diasporic community, is intended to be both local and global—specifically Ukrainian in its issues and concerns, yet global in scope and unrestricted in access. This orientation toward a dual discourse emphasizes InfoUkes' goal of fostering the development of a vibrant and inclusive Ukrainian virtual community. This conception of the InfoUkes lists as the potential site of a Ukrainian "electronic global village" echoes not only McLuhanesque visions of modern communication, but also the more recent conceptualizations of computer-mediated virtual communities.

Given that the concept of virtual community is so prevalent in the discourse of computer-mediated communication, it is not surprising that InfoUkes aspires to facilitate the development of a Ukrainian virtual community. Rheingold's basic definition of virtual community as a computer-mediated social formation characterized by shared interests and personal involvement neglects to mention one fundamental element of virtual community that is evident in the foregoing description of the InfoUkes lists: communication between its participants. Rheingold's numerous examples of on-line discussions on the WELL attests to the importance of communication in the development of virtual community. Indeed, most computer-mediated research is based on social formations in which participants interact with one another on-line. What is missing in Rheingold's discussion of virtual community is an all-important distinction between a readership and a community.[47] In other words, a readership of Internet users—people who navigate and

[47]It is important to recognize, however, that Rheingold's definition of virtual community is historically situated. The networking technologies of the listserver, community bulletin boards, and MUDs, for instance, precede the establishment of the World Wide Web; these various applications have since been subsumed under the Web, so that like InfoUkes, many are now Web-based. The fact that Rheingold's definition is premised on interactive, pre-Web technologies emphasizes the role of interaction in fostering virtual community: his conceptualization of the virtual community was borne out of a context in which one-to-one communication between participants was the paradigm of computer-mediated communication.

surf the Web—does not constitute a community in the sense that he describes. Much like the readership of a newspaper or magazine, or even a television audience, the readership of Internet texts does not constitute a community unless these readers are also active participants in a given communicative practice. Whereas a readership consists of a mass audience reading the same media text, a community is premised on interaction and communication within its collective readership. The possibility of one-to-one communication among participants is what distinguishes the concept of a computer-mediated virtual community from other mass media, which adhere to the broadcast model of one-to-many communication. Thus, to Rheingold's definition, one might add the distinction between readers and participants, with the caveat that many of those who engage in computer-mediated communication alternately act as consumers of Internet texts and active participants in Internet forums.

This is a significant distinction because, in spite of all the Ukrainian Web sites available on the Internet, there are few virtual spaces where those interested in discussing Ukrainian issues and concerns can actually communicate with one another. A virtual community is founded on communicative practice; even the most comprehensive collection of Web sites does not constitute a virtual community without the all-important feature of communication among participants. Thus, despite the diversity and abundance of Ukrainian Web sites described above, these sites cannot be equated with an ethnic virtual community. The following chapter examines the InfoUkes mailing lists with a view to ascertaining how the communicative practice of the lists facilitates the emergence of a Ukrainian virtual community through the process of ethnic identity formation.

Chapter 5

Interpreting the archive: the InfoUkes mailing lists

This chapter investigates the process of ethnogenesis by examining and interpreting a variety of computer-mediated discussions on the InfoUkes mailing lists. It is intended to elucidate and concretize the theoretical concepts of ethnogenesis and virtual community as they have been explored in preceding chapters. The articulation and negotiation of Ukrainian ethnic identity coalesces around discussions of various issues including language, politics, history, culture, tradition, ethnic origin, and the diaspora. Due to a considerable overlap of the issues, I have organized the following discussions around three principal conversation topics—language, media, and history—with the recognition that these categories are almost infinitely fluid. They are intended merely as metaphorical hooks on which to hang this inquiry into the construction of ethnic identity through computer-mediated communication.

'Мова' / *Language*

'Мова', pronounced '*mova,*' is the Ukrainian word for language. Because it is a text-based medium, language is an appropriate place to begin an analysis of computer-mediated communication. Written language is fundamental to the construction of the electronic texts that populate the InfoUkes mailing lists because language informs the way that communicative practices are enacted. Laurel Richardson maintains that language is a constitutive force that links subjectivity, social organization, and power.

> Language does not 'reflect' social reality.... Language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves, our *subjectivity*, is constructed (Richardson 1994, 518).

Language, therefore, serves as the both the building block of identity formation, and the site where identity is negotiated and constructed.

The use of language on the InfoUkes lists introduces another level of complexity: because many of the participants are at least partially bilingual, they have the option of communicating in either Ukrainian or English, the dominant language of Internet communication. Indeed, English seems to be the default language on the InfoUkes lists. What are the implications of an ethnocultural community discussing its concerns in a language other than its native tongue? This is a question that the lists' participants attempt to address in some of their discussions about language and identity; often these discussions are conducted in a mixture of English and Ukrainian. The question of language raises a range of issues that speak to the relationship between ethnic language and ethnic identity. These discussions provide insight into the ways that the diasporic community constitutes and reproduces itself in this virtual space.

The question of whether to use Ukrainian or English highlights the relationship between the capabilities and applications of computer technology. Those who wish to communicate in Ukrainian have two options: Ukrainian fonts or transliteration. In order to read postings in Ukrainian, it is necessary to install Cyrillic fonts on one's computer—there are several versions available on-line—and change the encoding on one's Web browser to the appropriate font. Without the proper encoding, email messages contain unintelligible groups of characters. The other option is transliteration.

Transliteration refers to the transposition of Ukrainian words into Latin characters, or groups of characters, that approximate the sounds of the Ukrainian language. For instance, the pronoun "I," 'Я' in Ukrainian, is transliterated as "*ia*;" similarly, the word "what," or 'що,' is transliterated as "*shcho*." Transliteration is often used in discussions about the translation of English words or idioms into Ukrainian, as well as discussions about Ukrainian grammar and usage. Because most Internet communication employs the standard 'QWERTY' keyboard, and because not all list participants have Cyrillic fonts,

transliteration is a viable way of communicating in Ukrainian. By using transliteration to facilitate discussion in Ukrainian, the participants of the InfoUkes lists have adapted to the constraints of computer-mediated communication.

Ethnicity and language

Because English is the default language of computer-mediated communication, deliberate use of Ukrainian reflects a certain commitment to maintaining and nurturing the Ukrainian language. Some participants write deliberately and quite consistently in either Cyrillic or transliterated Ukrainian. One particular conversation thread, which examined the relationship between language and ethnic identity, elicited some insightful responses about the role of language, many of them written at least partly in Ukrainian.

The discussion was sparked by a posting about the Canadian Census of 1996. The Census information documented the changing composition of Canada's linguistic groups in terms of mother tongue, home language, and general knowledge of languages. The statistics showed that both the number and proportion of Ukrainian speakers in Canada has declined over the last twenty-five years. The posting was prefaced with the following comment:

> In short, Ukrainians in Canada are a quickly aging (dying) demographic cohort, with not enough new immigrants or new births to maintain the viability of the community.

By implying that language is the principal criterion that determines the "viability of the community," this message effectively framed the discussion of ethnicity in terms of language. The responses ranged from traditionalist exhortations to preserve Ukrainian language to more assimilationist views advocating Ukrainian-English bilingualism in the community.

Although a fair number of the postings on InfoUkes are transliterated, some participants seem reticent about writing in Ukrainian. One participant posted a transliterated response that ended with the following statement:

> *Vybachtu shcho tak slabo po-ukraiinskomy hovoryu. :-(*
> *Rozumiyu bilsh' hizh mozhe hovoryty!*
> Please excuse the fact that I speak Ukrainian so poorly. :-(
> I understand it better than I can speak it![48]

The apology seems to anticipate objections to the participant's imperfect Ukrainian. This comment, however, elicited an encouraging reply from another list member:

> *Ne perel'jakajsia. Ya by skazav shcho bil'shist' ljudej hovorjat' ne pyrfektno po Ukrajinske (ya sebe vklutchaju v t'im sensi)....Dobre shcho ty khotch starajessia rozmovlliaty po Ukrajinske.*
> Don't worry. I would say that most people don't speak perfect Ukrainian (I include myself in this sense)....Good thing that you're at least trying to converse in Ukrainian.

Another participant wrote a section in transliterated Ukrainian and concluded with the following comment:

> Sorry for the butchered Ukrainian. Now you know why I don't use it often on this list.

The apologetic tone of these postings reflects not only regret at the lack of proficiency, but also a particular conviction about the place of language in ethnic identity. The fact that two list members apologized for their limited knowledge of Ukrainian suggests that, despite the relative dominance of English on the lists, there is a shared belief that language is central to ethnic identity; they would not have apologized for their "butchered Ukrainian" if they did not perceive a strong connection between knowing the language and identifying themselves as Ukrainian. It seems that the tone of the discussion was influenced by the warning that "Ukrainians in Canada are a quickly aging (dying) demographic cohort" in the initial posting. Because the Census figures suggested that

[48]This posting, as well as all subsequent transliterated postings, were translated by the researcher.

Ukrainians are losing their linguistic ability, some participants felt compelled to apologize for their lack of proficiency.

One of the regular list participants copied the above apologies into a message with the following reassurance:

> *Druzi! Nema za shcho pereprosyty! Kozhna osoba pyshe na "svoyim rivni". Otak i ya zaokhochuyu Vas pysaty po-ukrayins'ky pry nahodi j bazhanni! Nikhto bude kepkuvaty z Vas! A yakshcho khtos' starayet'sya, to ya budu yoho byty po holovi! Nareshti, zavzhdy zatrymaj u pam`yati, shcho slid pochaty *des*, i shcho chym bil'sh vzhyvayete ukr. movu, tym bil'she polipshuvatymetesya.*
>
> Friends! There's nothing to apologize for! Every person writes at "one's own level." Thus I encourage you to write in Ukrainian whenever you have the desire or the opportunity! No one will scoff at you! And if someone does try, then I will strike them in the head! Finally, always remember that one must start *somewhere*, and that the more you use the Ukrainian language, the more it will improve.

This participant's encouragement reflects a deliberate attempt to construct a discussion forum where participants feel free to write in Ukrainian regardless of their level of proficiency. The conscious effort to facilitate a Ukrainian-language forum illustrates the constitutive power of language: in his view, the InfoUkes lists serve as a virtual space where participants can construct both their subjectivities and their collective identity in the native tongue. The same list member also posted a message asserting the interdependence of language and identity.

> *Mova -- neobkhidna, neviddil'na chastyna kul'tury. Koly mova danoyi kul'tury ne bil'sh vzhyvayet'sya, ta kul'tura perestala isnuvaty.*
> *Otak ukrayins'ka kul'tura ne isnuye bez ukrayins'koyi movy.*
>
> Language -- is an indispensable, indivisible part of culture. When the language of a given culture is no longer used, that culture ceases to exist. Thus Ukrainian culture does not exist without the Ukrainian language.

For this participant, maintenance of the mother tongue is pivotal to the maintenance of ethnic identity. Thus, his deliberate use of transliterated Ukrainian is underpinned by a strong conviction about the centrality of language to ethnic culture and identity.

This viewpoint, however, bristles with the fact that several list members identify themselves as Ukrainian, despite their limited knowledge of the native language. Although they lack the linguistic proficiency—they may "understand better than [they] can speak"—they still consider themselves members of the Ukrainian ingroup. This points to the central question of what constitutes ethnic identity: is identity located solely in language, or is it located in a composite of ethnic origin, culture, practices, history, tradition, and language? This is a tension that resonates throughout the conversation thread. Responding to the assertion that "Ukrainian culture does not exist without the Ukrainian language," one list member argued that there are other components of ethnic identity besides language:

> *Ale, chy Indijanska (native American that is) cultura ne isnuje krim toho shcho majdge nikhto ne vdgyvaje movu kolyshnykh Indijaniv?*
> *Meni zdajetsia shcho tzil' ottrymatty udgyvannja ukrajinskoji movy v Kanadi i Ameriky je ne real'na. Odynytzi budyt' staratysia udgyvatty ridnu movu, ale bil'shist' perestanut' hovorytyme po Ukrajinske tomu shcho je malo modglyvosty jiji vdgyvatty u shchodennomy dgytti (u pratzi, na vulytzi, etc.). Z praktychnoho ohl'jadu, nasha hromada musyt' staratyssia ne rozdylytisia na dvi chastyny - ti shcho hovorjat' i ty shcho ne hovorjat'. Ja bachu leshe odyn vykhid: vse u hromadi, tobto tzerkvy, ukrajinski shkoly, pressa, etc., musyt' skoro perejty na dvi movy (Ukrajinske, Anhliske).*
> But, does not Indian (native American that is) culture exist despite the fact that almost no one uses the language of former Indians?
> It seems to me that the objective of maintaining use of the Ukrainian language in Canada and America is unrealistic. Individuals will try to use the native language, but the majority will stop speaking Ukrainian because there are few opportunities to use it in everyday life (at work, on the street,

> etc). From a practical standpoint, our community must try not to divide itself in two - those who speak and those who don't. I see only one solution: everything in the community, meaning churches, Ukrainian schools, the press, etc., must immediately convert to two languages (Ukrainian, English).

While recognizing that language is an important part of culture, this participant feels that preserving the Ukrainian language in North American society is unrealistic and, to some extent, futile. Rather, he argues for an inclusive approach that would integrate the English language into community organizations and thus facilitate a more united diasporic community. Another participant agreed, citing an example of bilingualism in a local Ukrainian church.

> *Ne znayu chy shche tak robitsya v Manchesteri v Anhlii, ale kolu bula tam odyn nedilyu para rokiw tomy, malu u tzerkvu, odnu sluzhbu bodzhu po-anhliiskomy dla tsykh khto ne znalu malo chu zahali ne znalu ukrainsku movu, todi odnu Sluzhbu Bozhu po-ukraiinskomy.*
> I don't know if this is still done in Manchester, England, but when I was there one Sunday several years ago, the Church had one mass in English for those who barely know, or don't at all know, the Ukrainian language, then one mass in Ukrainian.

For this participant, incorporating the use of English is a feasible way of maintaining the viability of the community. Another list member replied by describing the use of English in the churches of his community.

> *Vidnosno udgyvannja Anhliskoji movy u tzerkvakh; tak jak u vas, my vdge majemo anhlomovni sludgby u bahattiokh parafiji. Takshcho dekotri tzerkvy je prohresyvni v tomu aspekti.*
> Regarding the use of the English language in churches; as with you, we already have English-language masses in many parishes. So some churches are progressive in this aspect.

The characterization of bilingual churches as "progressive" indicates this member's agreement with an inclusive approach to language within the diaspora.

Thus, although language is, for some participants, an essential and indivisible part of ethnicity, it is not so for others. In their study of ethnicity in Canada, Anderson and Frideres observe:

> If the linguistic factor is *usually* important for most ethnic groups, it is not *always* an important, much less the *only*, component of ethnic identity. It is quite possible, then, for an ethnic group to lose its traditional mother tongue without losing its sense of identity (Anderson and Frideres 1981, 40).

This conception of ethnicity is echoed in another posting that challenges the view that the "viability of the community" depends on maintenance of the ethnic language.

> There are some positive ways that one can look at the numbers yet to be released on ethnic origin. With more assimilation, there are many people who are partially of Ukrainian background....
> In Windsor, at least, those of partial Ukrainian background, or even with no Ukrainian background (usually with a Ukrainian spouse), make up a very important part of the community. I can think of one priest (Ukr. Cath.), two people involved with the Saturday Ukrainian school, a past president of the Ukrainian Canadian Business & Professional Association, plus LOTS (a large majority) of over a hundred people taking Ukrainian dancing in Windsor....
> The real question is how to retain interest in Ukrainian Canadian culture and activities, if the Ukrainian language is no longer used, or how to create interest in a group which may have had no conection [*sic*] with the Ukrainian Canadian community for a generation.

This participant emphasizes several of the other components of ethnicity, including ethnic origin (those of partial Ukrainian background) as well as shared interests and cultural activities (those involved in community organizations such as Ukrainian school, professional associations, and dance groups). The fact the this posting is written entirely in English demonstrates this participant's belief that ethnicity is not located solely in language; his insistence on the role of other criteria illustrates that some of the list members locate ethnic identity outside of language. Indeed, he suggests that the strength

and the viability of the diasporic community lies in its ability to be receptive to Ukrainians of mixed heritage or spouses of Ukrainians. By advocating a more inclusive and assimilationist view of ethnicity, this participant effectively raises the issue of hybrid identity: he promotes the notion of a hybrid Ukrainian-Canadian culture that will welcome Ukrainians of mixed heritage. Thus, he advances a conception of Ukrainian ethnicity that is more assimilated and 'Canadian' than the more homogeneous conceptions of some other participants.

This argument for linguistic integration within the diaspora challenges the view that language is an inextricable part of ethnic identity. This tension resonates throughout the conversation thread. The issue of language, therefore, serves as a site where the components of ethnic identity are expressed, negotiated, contested, and rearticulated. Although the debate begins with an assumption that language is crucial to ethnic identity, that assumption is alternately reinforced, questioned, challenged, and rejected. This conversation thread, which begins with a posting of Canadian Census statistics and evolves into a lively discussion about language and ethnicity, encapsulates the tensions and negotiations that result from the intersection of English-speaking and ethnic cultures.

Furthermore, the fact that individuals can choose to construct their subjectivities in either Ukrainian or English introduces an important linguistic dimension into the process of constituting the self through language. The choice of language not only reveals an individual's conviction about the place of language in ethnicity; it also enables the individual to express his or her agency in constituting the self as ethnic subject. Language, therefore, is the site where one's subjectivity and ethnic identity is constructed. On one hand, the possibility of choosing the language of communication gives participants greater agency in determining the type of virtual space they wish to create. Conversely, the decision to use Ukrainian introduces linguistic and technical obstacles:

for instance, do all the participants understand and read Ukrainian? do all the participants have the technical requirements for encoding a text in Cyrillic characters? These issues resonate at the wider level of collective identity formation: participants may choose their language individually, but they must also negotiate their respective choices collectively.

Thus, the language debate operates simultaneously on two levels: first, at the level of content, wherein participants discuss their views on the role of language in ethnicity; and second, at the level of form, wherein participants enact their subjectivities through their chosen language of communication. As Richardson observes: "Understanding language as competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world, makes language a site of exploration, struggle" (Richardson 1994, 518). Similarly, the InfoUkes mailing lists constitute a contested terrain where two principal languages act as competing discourses through which ethnic identity is explored, articulated, and reified. Furthermore, these discourses are in a continual state of negotiation as new voices enter the debate and other discussion threads complement or further elucidate the issues. As participants construct their subjectivities, with or without the native language, they also deliberate the criteria of ethnic identity in a self-conscious and reflexive manner.

The issues raised in this conversation thread mirror larger debates of diasporic identity, assimilation, and multiculturalism. This discussion also speaks to the question of how to maintain a vibrant and progressive community, albeit indirectly. Implicit in this discussion is an awareness of ethnic hybridity: by addressing the difficulties of mediating between the two poles of assimilation and otherness, the participants are engaging in the process of ethnogenesis. By expressing their subjective views on ethnic hybridity, and by attempting to negotiate them collectively, the participants of the InfoUkes lists are effectively reinventing and rewriting their ethnic identities.

Ukrainian ethnicity and the media

A substantial number of the discussions on InfoUkes deal with media coverage of Ukraine, Ukrainians, and Ukrainian issues. These discussions range from commenting on media coverage to debating reported events to posting hypertext links to news items. In some cases, members of the lists actively applaud, or alternately challenge, media portrayals of either Ukraine or the diaspora, resulting in lengthy and dynamic discussions. In other cases, postings describing Ukrainian-related media coverage generate little, if any, response. The majority of the media organizations cited are either American or Canadian in origin, suggesting that many of the lists' participants are North American. What emerges from these discussions is an impression of how diasporic Ukrainians respond to various representations of themselves, their culture, and their place of origin in the media.

One such posting notified list members of a Canadian talk show that discussed the teaching of ethnic languages in school. The message framed the topic of discussion as a Ukrainian-related issue, though it provided little indication of the participant's opinion on the subject. The posting states, in full:

> Today at 3:00 pm the CBC talk show Benmergui Live! discusses teaching second language and nationality in society. During the opening the host related a story that he was discussing with someone that speaking Ukrainian was actively supressed [*sic*] in the west of Canada. The other person commented that "That worked out well." The host commented that obviously that [*sic*] it certainly didn't work out well for those who spoke Ukrainian, of which there were quite a few in the west.

Although the participant failed to articulate his views on the issue, the simple act of posting the message demonstrates an assumption about the nature of the mailing list's audience. By informing other list members of this program, the list member was addressing a particular type of audience: one that presumably shares his interest in the

issue of ethnic language teaching in the diaspora. This posting evokes the concept of the audience as interpretive community. Mitra observes that "the act of interpretation is dependent on the specific skills and predispositions that are brought to [the reading of] a text;" in other words, implicit in the act of interpretation is a set of shared values and meanings that inform how the message is written and read (Mitra 1997, 176). The message is framed in such a way that anticipates a readership of shared predispositions and attitudes. Thus, the writer assumes that other members of the interpretive community will draw from it a common understanding of the issue based on their shared attitudes and experiences; in the case of this posting, the predisposition of the list members may be characterized as dismay at the "active suppression" of the Ukrainian language in Canada. Although this posting received no response from other list participants, its significance lies in the way that it addresses a particular conception of the audience.

The existence of common interests and predispositions is fundamental to the process of collective identity formation, for it is through the communication of shared attitudes and meanings that participants are able to negotiate their subjectivities with other list members. One such conversation thread concerned media coverage of Ukrainians on an American talk show. It began with a description of a television program that recounted the story of a Ukrainian family hiding Jews from the Nazis during World War II.

> In today's monologue, among Charles Grodin['s] current news stories, he included a story about a Ukrainian family who successfully hid a mother and her 13 year old daughter under the floor boards of their barn from the Nazis. The girl has since become an opthamologist (eye doctor) and is now treating one of the Ukrainians who saved her for eye problems.
> It is so rare to hear such a positive story, that I thought it was significant enough to post here. If someone knows a reference to the full story, it would be interesting to read it.

Here the participant gives some indication of his opinion by expressing his appreciation of "such a positive story." This response implies that, in this participant's experience as an

ethnic subject, positive coverage of Ukrainians and Ukrainian history are comparatively rare in the news media. The comment is framed in such a way that assumes some degree of consensus among the other list members. By implying that this view regarding Ukrainian-related media coverage is shared by others, this participant is addressing a specific conception of the Ukrainian interpretive community. The suggestion that "the full story" would be of interest to other list members also reflects an assumption about the list's audience. The assumption of shared attitudes and experiences is, effectively, an expression of a perceived 'sameness' or commonality within the ethnic ingroup. By responding positively to the program's portrayal of Ukrainians, the participant is articulating his experience as a diasporic ethnic subject.

The characterization of the media story as positive is one that resonates with other members of the mailing lists. One participant responded by describing the story in detail:

> The story was an AP piece that ran 11/26. In summary, it was about how two elderly Ukrainian brothers (Mihail, 73, and Nikolai Vavrisevich,71) were reunited in New York at Thanksgiving with the woman whose life their family had saved -- Nechama Singer Ariel, now 68. Nechama Singer was 12 when the Germans occupied her small town of Vladimir-Volynsk in Western Ukraine in 1941. The local Jews were rounded up into a ghetto, and most were killed within a year during two Nazi raids. Nechama and her mother, who'd survived the first raid, heard they could get help from a Christian family, the Vavriseviches, who were already hiding five Jews under the floorboards of their small house. The family eventually saved 15 Jews, all of them strangers to the Vavriseviches. Though Germans came to the house several times, they never found the hidden fugitives. Nechama and her mother eventually made their way west at war's end, and then emigrated to the United States. Nikolai now works as a physician. Mikhail, a university professor who still lives in Vladimir-Volynsk, is legally blind and will be evaluated for possible medical treatment while during his New York visit. "This Thanksgiving is going to be my longest dream come true," Mrs. Ariel said. "I've ordered a big turkey and told all my friends to

> come and bring wonderful foods. Finally I can do something for the men who did such an unimaginable thing for me!"

Although the posting does not offer any commentary, it elaborates on the story for the benefit of other interested list members. Without directly commenting on the news item, the act of recapitulating the original story reflects a tacit agreement that such stories are deserving of media attention. Another list member reaffirmed the need for positive coverage of Ukrainians:

> There are many such stories, and one collection well worth having is Yakov Suslensky's _They Were True Heroes_, stories of Ukrainians who assisted Jews during the Holocaust, and who are remembered in the Garden of the Righteous Gentiles in Israel. ISBN 5-7707-6778-2

This participant agrees that similar stories are "well worth having" on one's bookshelf. By providing detailed information about the book, he is also enabling others to further explore the issue. In effect, this participant is addressing what he assumes is a community of readers who share his interest in these stories. Thus the expectation of shared predispositions is fulfilled: the two participants that replied to the original posting affirm the existence of shared attitudes and interests.

Subsequently, the participant who initiated the discussion posted a message requesting more information on the recommended book: "Thanks for you [*sic*] note. I looked for this book on Amazon.com, and its [*sic*] not there. Do you know who the publisher is?" This response effectively brings the conversation full circle, demonstrating that there is indeed an interpretive community within the InfoUkes lists: the writer of the initial message assumes the existence of like-minded individuals who share his interest in Ukrainian-related media coverage, and their responses substantiate this assumption. Therefore, the perception of common interests and shared predispositions—in other words, the perception of a 'sameness' within the list membership—is corroborated by subsequent replies to the conversation thread. This discussion thus confirms that there is some

measure of consensus regarding Ukrainian-related media coverage among the list participants. By assuming the existence of a 'community of interest,' and by expressing their 'sameness' of views, the list participants are able to constitute their collective identity through articulation and affirmation of shared attitudes and interests.

Although this 'sameness' is not fixed or static—indeed, it is continuously subject to challenge and dissent—it serves as the foundation for the discussion of Ukrainian-related media coverage. Ukrainian ethnic identity is constituted internally through the articulation of 'sameness' within the virtual space of the discussion forum. By responding to various media reports, the participants reveal not only how they perceive themselves as individuals, but also how they negotiate their collective identity in relation to media representations of their ethnocultural group. This phenomenon supports Hall's contention that identity is constructed through articulations of both 'sameness' and 'difference.' In the case of media representations, ethnicity is largely constructed through expressions of 'difference' as media processes construct the ethnic 'other' in opposition to the dominant culture. These externally constructed media articulations of 'difference' and exclusion often bristle against internal articulations of 'sameness' within the ethnocultural group. As a result, the shared internal conceptions of the ethnic subject are set against external conceptions that are imposed from without. Ethnic identity is, therefore, negotiated and constituted both within and without boundaries of the self. In negotiating one's identity as a diasporic ethnic subject, one must contend with and respond to media representations of Ukraine, Ukrainians, and Ukrainian issues.

While some of the media coverage discussed on InfoUkes generated a supportive and generally positive response from list members, other more controversial discussions coalesced around objectionable media reports. These conversations often centred on media representations of a newly independent Ukraine and its economic and political

development. One particular discussion was sparked by a negative magazine article about Ukraine. The article, which implied that present-day Ukraine is plagued by "simmering ethnic flames," was reproduced in full on one of the lists. The article suggested that reintegration with Russia, Ukraine's principal trading partner, "would alleviate many of [Ukraine's economic] problems, but the electorate is of two minds on the subject." The implication was that ethnic tension between Russian-speaking Ukrainians (portrayed as an oppressed linguistic minority) and Ukrainian nationalists (portrayed as xenophobic militants) could potentially lead to genocide. This posting generated a relatively unified response from the list members, demonstrating a 'sameness' of views and attitudes. One participant described the article as clearly biased against an independent Ukrainian state:

> I would like to thank [list member] for attracting our attention to Mr. Klebnikov's article about Ukraine, published recently in Forbes magazine. It seems to me that this article is a typical version of events and tendencies in today's Ukraine which is [*sic*] heavily biased: the author just hates to see Ukraine independent.

Another participant concurred, stating that "Klebnikov is notorious for his bias[ed] journalist[ic] skills. I think the blinkers he wears are bigger than those that the horses parade at the hippodrome." The consensus was that the article was blatantly pro-Russian or pro-Soviet in its bias. The participant who first posted the article evidently anticipated some level of consensus: by titling the message "Re: A very anti-ukrainian article," he assumed that the InfoUkes interpretive community would agree with his appraisal. This expectation of a unified and supportive response was realized by subsequent responses to the article. The list participants thus constituted their collective identity through expressions of shared views. However, this expression of 'sameness' within the group was largely articulated against a representation of 'difference.' The article imposed an external representation of Ukrainians that effectively 'othered' them by defining them as a marginalized ethnic group that is committed to outmoded notions of nationalism and political self-determination. The fact that the article defines the Ukrainian ethnic 'other' in

terms that the list members are unwilling to accept—indeed, that they actively reject—highlights Hall's notion of identity as a contested terrain. By challenging this particular media representation of Ukrainians, the participants articulate and express their collective identity in opposition to media constructions of the Ukrainian 'other.'

The boundaries of 'sameness' and 'difference,' however, are fluid and continually subject to negotiation. Although there is a relative consensus regarding the article's anti-Ukrainian bias, this consensus is challenged by another list member who expresses agreement with the article's portrayal of Ukraine.

> have I missed something? Is it not plain for everyone that Ukraine really is in the toilet? Or does anyone out there think the place is a raging success?
> I don't know that its [*sic*] any worse than Russia or other places and I do know that its [*sic*] better -- quality of life wise -- than some places that seem to be doing better economically. Especially places like Indonesia that a year ago were considered asian tiger cubs. Now they shoot students dead in the streets.
> But let's be realistic -- Paul Klebnikov is not that far off the mark on some things. Would it irk us less if Paul Kennedy wrote the article?

Rather than focusing on the perceived bias of the article, this participant argues that its depiction of Ukraine's economic woes is accurate. By posing the question "Is it not plain for everyone that Ukraine really is in the toilet?" this participant effectively challenges the group's negative response. Moreover, the posting questions this response by suggesting that it is the author's Russian-sounding surname, rather than content of the article, that irks the list members; the implication being that the shared negative response is fuelled by an anti-Russian bias.[49] By interrogating the established consensus on the article, this participant demonstrates that list members do not necessarily share the same viewpoint.

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[49]Generally, the "ov" ending denotes a Russian surname, while an "iv" ending would indicate a Ukrainian surname.

A subsequent posting responds to this challenge by drawing a distinction between Ukraine's economic struggles and its independent status.

> I think Mr. Klebnikov's point is not that Ukraine is in the toilet, but that things are bad over there *BECAUSE* it chose independence. He tries to imprint this notion into you that should [the] Ukrainian economy (and possibly, political system) be tied to Russia, things would be much better. Ukraine certainly is not a 'raging success', it is in big trouble. But re-union with Russia will not achieve anything: look at Belarus'. Alyaksander Lukashenka, a big proponent of 'unity' with Russia, is an aggressive and short-sighted autocrat, democracy and human rights are oppressed, [the] economy is in shambles, Byelarussian language [has] all but disappeared. If Klebnikov wants this scenario for Ukraine, I am not with him!

While acknowledging that "things are bad over there," this participant takes issue with the article's suggestion that the solution lies in reunification with Russia. Citing the example of Byelorussia, he suggests that a struggling economy is insufficient rationale for reunification with a former colonial power. Thus, within the space of this conversation thread, the perception of a shared viewpoint or 'sameness' is effectively affirmed, interrogated, and renegotiated. Not only do the participants constitute their collective identity through expressions of their shared attitudes; they also articulate their 'difference' through a shared, though incomplete, contestation of this magazine's portrayal of Ukraine. In this case, the collective response is, effectively, a rejection of an external construction of Ukraine as 'other.' In this sense, the communicative practice of the mailing list entails an engagement with media representations of Ukrainians. The process of ethnogenesis thus involves reacting to, questioning, and re-evaluating the media's construction of the ethnic 'other.' This conversation thread not only demonstrates an awareness of how the Ukrainian ethnic is externally constructed by dominant media voices; it also demonstrates how such constructions catalyze discussions that involve the collective articulation and negotiation of ethnicity.

In part, the mailing lists serve as an informal media watchdog. By notifying others of negative or objectionable media representations, the list members demonstrate a commitment to identifying (and in some cases, correcting) inaccuracies, errors, or biases in the media's coverage of Ukraine and Ukrainian issues. The article in question was actually published nearly two years before this particular conversation thread appeared. The participant who posted the article prefaced it by speculating whether the magazine had since reconsidered its position regarding Ukrainian independence.

> Yes, this is the same article published in 1996.... Subsequently, Forbes reply to many critical letters in defending this article stated that: "We are of a different opinion about Ukraine's future. Time will tell if we are correct or not." I wondered if anyone asked Forbes recently (or should we bother to ask?) whether this "Time will tell..." has expired for their "different opinion..."; if yes then what is it and if not then when?

Although it seems that no new action was taken to challenge the magazine's portrayal of Ukraine, this posting nonetheless reflects an awareness of the media's power in influencing popular opinion and framing public debate. The desire to contest objectionable media coverage reflects a desire on the part of the diasporic community to speak for itself, rather than allow itself to be 'othered' by dominant media voices.

Furthermore, this conversation thread illustrates another significant aspect of negotiating ethnicity on-line. The majority of InfoUkes' list participants are members of the diasporic community; thus, in responding to Ukraine-related media coverage, these participants are effectively re-evaluating their ethnic identity *vis-à-vis* the ancestral homeland. On one hand, there is a tendency for diasporic Ukrainians to identify with Ukraine, whether they are immigrants themselves or descendants of immigrants. On the other hand, there is an equally pervasive tendency for members of the diaspora to differentiate themselves from both past- and present-day Ukraine by emphasizing their own hybridized identities. By objecting to Klebnikov's portrayal of contemporary Ukraine, these list participants are

expressing a degree of identification with the homeland. Yet, while they claim an allegiance to Ukraine, they cannot escape their position as members of the diasporic community. The participant who challenges the group's negative response to the article is not only differentiating himself from the others, but also distancing himself from his country of origin. By implying that Ukraine is far from "a raging success," this participant is highlighting his subjective position as a diasporic subject. Thus, the ethnic subject's relationship to the homeland demonstrates a critical and insightful disjuncture between diasporic and native ethnic subject. The discussion in question illustrates that while there is a considerable degree of identification with Ukraine, there is also an inescapable degree of physical and psychic distance between diasporic and native Ukrainians. Although shared ethnic origin is one of the principal components of ethnic identity, origin—like language—is subject to challenge, negotiation, and reinvention by the diasporic ethnic subject.

Ethnic identity and history

Many of the discussions on InfoUkes examine questions of history, as well as related issues of historiography, politics, nationhood, and ethnicity. These discussions range from innocuous questions about historical facts to political debates about Ukraine's independence to more controversial issues. Like the discussions about language and media, these discussions also constitute a meaningful site of ethnic identity formation. Kulyk Keefer maintains that the practice of writing ethnicity necessarily involves engaging with history (Kulyk Keefer 1996, 101). Furthermore, because the lineage of the ethnic subject is invariably linked to ancestors in the old country, the process of identity formation is indelibly tied to the history of the homeland. The history of the diasporic ethnic subject is located, both physically and imaginatively, in the homeland; indeed, historical developments in the territory of present-day Ukraine often provided the impetus for emigration to the West. Inevitably, the history of the homeland informs the process of

ethnogenesis. As Kostash observed during her travels to Eastern Europe, the relationship between homeland, history, and the self is central to the diasporic ethnic subject: "How does the 'old country' live on in the citizen of the new?" (Kostash 1993, 2). The following discussions examine the process of identity formation in relation to both history and homeland.

One such discussion addressed the issue of Ukraine's early history. It began with a question about the accuracy of a statement made on the Usenet newsgroup *soc.culture.ukrainian*.

> Recently on scu someone claimed that "Kievan Rus started in Novgorod. Only 20 years latter [*sic*] capital was moved to Kiev. So, if you take 'who come[s] first' Novgorod rules...."
> I have not found anything to indicate that the above statement is true in the books I have on hand. Can anyone verify/refute the above comment? With citations? : -) Thank you.

For most Ukrainians, the trajectory of Ukrainian nationhood begins with the medieval kingdom of Kyivan Rus', of which Kyiv was the capital city.[50] As the first incarnation of a Ukrainian state, Kyivan Rus' is not only of great historical significance; it is often valourized as a golden era of the Ukrainian nation. As Kostash observes, Kyiv itself is "freighted with meaning. Kiev is not just a capital city; it is the mother lode of Rus;" for instance, it was here that, in the tenth century, Volodymyr the Great introduced Christianity to Ukraine and baptized the Ukrainian people in the Dnipro river[51] (Kostash 1993, 168). By suggesting that the original seat of Kyivan Rus' was Novgorod, a city in present-day Russia, the newsgroup posting insinuated that the rulers of Kyivan Rus' were ethnic Russians rather than Ukrainians. The implication that the first Ukrainian state was

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[50]'Kyiv,' as well as the adjective 'Kyivan,' is transliterated from Ukrainian; 'Kiev' is the more common Russian pronunciation. The apostrophe at the end of 'Rus" represents the Cyrillic character 'ь' and indicates a softening of the consonant preceding it, much like the cedilla in French. There is no analogous character in English.

[51]'Dnipro' is the Ukrainian pronunciation of the more commonly known 'Dnieper.'

actually Russian is tantamount to a revision and appropriation of Ukrainian history. Thus, the list participant posted a message requesting clarification on what, to many Ukrainians, would be an important historiographic question. Another participant replied by providing a synopsis of the historical writings on early Ukraine. After surveying the early rulers of the city of Kyiv, this participant concluded:

> What one has to decide is whether the origins of Rus' go as far back as to Kyj and his brothers or even further to Pervozvannyj Apostle Andrij [The First-called Apostle Andrew] who as the Litopys [*The Chronicler*] has it travelled northward along the Dnipro to the Kyivski Hory [Kyivan Hills] and it is believed as far northward to where Novhorod stands today.

This participant maintains that Kyivan Rus' can be traced back either to the legend of three brothers, Kyj, Shchek and Khorek, who founded Kyiv in the latter half of the fifth century, or further back to the Apostle Andrew. While this reply does not provide a definitive answer to the historiographic question—indeed, it highlights the complexities of historiography—it does indicate that the issue of Kyivan Rus' has some resonance for modern-day diasporic Ukrainians. If it were established that Novgorod, and not Kyiv, was the original seat of Kyivan Rus', then this would have profound implications on the trajectory of Ukrainian history. By exploring questions of historical accuracy and historiography, these participants are attempting to negotiate their collective identity in relation to Ukrainian history.

As with medieval history, issues of contemporary Ukrainian history are also of interest to the list participants. One particular discussion debated the precise moment of the Soviet Union's demise. It began with a posting that asked: "When did the USSR break up"? One participant responded with the following:

> In 1991. But, it is up to you to decide the celebration day.
> It might be:
> 1. The day of the abortive coup-de-tat [*sic*] of the soviet hardliners.
> 2. The Ukrainian referendum day.

3. The day when Belovezskaya pushcha accord was signed.

By citing three critical moments that contributed to the dissolution of the USSR, this participant is illustrating that the answer is not as straightforward as the question implies. Although he states the that USSR broke up definitively in 1991, he also points out that the question of the pivotal "celebration day" is open to debate. Similarly, another participant replied by offering a variety of possible dates:

> For YKPAIHA it was 24th August 1991![52]
> I was in front of the Verhovna Rada [Ukraine's Parliament] in Kyiv.
> ...The Baltic States were earlier.
> Some might say the USSR broke up when Solodarnost [Solidarity] in Poland was elected
> In Moscow, the Junta's tanks rolled in 18th August 1991.

Thus, what begins as a simple question of historical fact evolves into a discussion about the complexities of historiography. By portraying the fall of the Soviet Union as a long process attributable to numerous events, this participant demonstrates the difficulty of pinpointing a definitive date.

Subsequently, the participant who initially posed the question replied:

> Wow! Thanks for the quick reply! :)
> ....Ok, but the year is 1991, NOT 1990 - correct? I got into an argument with someone regarding this - they said in 1990 the USSR did not "exist" and I said it broke up *after* that.

Here the participant reveals the reason for her question: her interest is not in establishing the correct day of celebration, but rather, the correct year to which the USSR's demise can be attributed. One of the above participants responded by confirming that the correct year is indeed 1991.

> The year is 1991. The USSR, which is now as dead as a tree log in my backyard, did exist in 1990 but had some internal political problems. For example, Ukraine declared "Sovereignity" [*sic*] in July, and the Baltic

[52]'YKPAIHA' is 'Ukraine' written in Cyrillic.

> republic[s] were drifting away with a full speed. Gorbi was trying to save the empire by initiating so called "Novo Ogarevo process" of negotiating a new union treaty which thought to eliminate that degree of autonomy of the soviet republics that already existed [but] only on paper. Ukraine was persistent [in] stressing its "observer" status during the negotiations.

In the course of this conversation thread, the participants reach a relative consensus about the correct year of the USSR's dissolution, even though no consensus is achieved regarding the proper day for celebrating Ukrainian independence.

This discussion thus highlights the process of the diaspora negotiating its identity in relation to the homeland. Several of the participants express a sense of gratitude at the Soviet Union's demise and Ukraine's resulting independence. One participant reveals his delight by exclaiming: "For YKPAIHA it was 24th August 1991!" Another triumphantly describes the USSR as a "dead...tree log in my backyard." These responses illustrate a shared sense of gratitude at the fall of the Soviet Union and its implications.[53] The promptness of the participants' replies demonstrates the relevance of contemporary Ukrainian history to members of the diasporic community. Within the course of one day, the initial question generated several responses, thereby illustrating the importance of the homeland in defining diasporic identity. Furthermore, the fact that nearly every posting offers different explanations or rationales reveals that every individual participant interprets the events of history from his or her own perspective. Although the day of celebration remains an open question, the implication that this event should be celebrated by the Ukrainian diaspora demonstrates a strong degree of identification with the homeland. By debating the correct date of the USSR's demise, the list members are articulating their identification with historical and political developments in Ukraine. Their collective identity, therefore, is inextricably tied to the history of the homeland. This conversation at least partly answers Kostash's question about the relationship

[53]Many Ukrainians viewed the former Soviet Union as an oppressive and exploitative colonial power.

between the homeland and the ethnic subject: the 'old country' effectively lives on through the diaspora's remembrance of historic events in Ukraine. The relationship between homeland, history, and self is evident in the detailed and often effusive responses of the members. By engaging with questions of Ukrainian history, both medieval and contemporary, the participants express and negotiate their ethnic identities both individually and collectively.

Moreover, the nature of computer-mediated communication is such that outgroup members have access to the InfoUkes discussion forums; as a result, the InfoUkes lists constitute a sort of public space where the global community of Internet users is invited to participate in dialogue and discussion with members of the Ukrainian ingroup. This characteristic of open-access mailing lists, like InfoUkes, speaks to the potential of computer-mediated communication to serve as a public forum. The discussions of Ukrainian-Jewish relations on InfoUkes provide some insight into the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of the Internet as the site of a new public space.

One such discussion about the contentious question of Nazi collaboration generated a spirited debate about prejudice, slander, and hate literature on the Internet. While it addresses media representations of Ukrainians, this debate also speaks to issues of history, historiography, and ethnic identity. This particular discussion began with a message titled "Ukrainophobic hate on the Net," which quoted an on-line magazine article that portrayed Ukrainians as overzealous Nazi collaborators:

> "In Warsaw there was a saying: 'The whole world will throw stones at Hitler's grave, we will send flowers, grateful for removing the Jews from Poland.
> In the Ukraine, crematoriums were superfluous, the Ukrainians made sure that no Jew survives [*sic*]. With vengeance, Ukrainians killed Jews hiding in the forests. The Ukrainians were actively involved in all phases of the

> Holocaust from raiding the ghettos, guarding the transports, operating the gas chambers and were known for their cruelty. Ivan the Terrible, a Ukrainian, cut the women's genitals with a sword, before they were pushed into gas chambers. Torturing people, before their execution, was his greatest pleasure,"
> ... This kind of crap only encourages bigotry on both sides. I hope most people see it for the 'garbage' it is.
> *Ja viru shcho rozumna l'judyna zrozumije shcho tse brekhnja.*
> I believe that the intelligent person will understand that this is a lie.

This message provided a hypertext link to the Holocaust Web site that posted the article, enabling other list members to visit the site. The use of both English and Ukrainian illustrates the dual discourse operating in this discussion: the message is addressed to both outgroup and ingroup audiences. One participant responded by copying one of the other "similarly 'great' passages that belong to the same online author"—this particular passage implied that "the worst of the Nazi collaborators...the Ukrainians, the Poles, Croats, and Lithuanians" were motivated by both xenophobia and Catholicism. This participant concluded that such slanderous postings must not remain unchallenged.

> This should not be taken lightly. Hundreds of thousands of people, if not millions, read Internet materials, many of them have no knowledge of history and can be easily lead [*sic*] into hatred. One can not [*sic*] generalize the way Mr. Kimel [the author of the article] does and get away with this. We all know that there are limits to the freedom of expression. Racist generalizations are a good example of crossing this limit. I think Alexander Kimel must be officially charged with slander and tried.

This awareness of the global outgroup audience being exposed to such "racist generalizations" about numerous ethnic groups reflects a desire to challenge disinformation and excessive generalization. The emphasis on "limits to the freedom of expression" suggests that even computer-mediated communication requires the existence of some norms and values to ensure accuracy and accountability. By expressing a commitment to countering disinformation, this participant is also echoing InfoUkes' mandate of ensuring accurate information in the context of 'civilized discussion.'

Predictably, responses to this article were angry and resentful. Aside from expressing their outrage, some of the list members attempted to establish contact with either its author, or the administrators of the Holocaust Web site. One participant wrote the following to the editors of the on-line magazine, and reposted it to the mailing list:

> Your article...is a good example of misinformation and hate mongering (certainly not literature). As one reader commented "this is garbage". Your attempt to incite hatred with lies and exaggerations is antisemetic [*sic*] in nature and only encourages confrontation.

Another participant wrote to the author demanding an apology, and also reposted it to the list.

> I read some of your recent passages in the online 'Holocaust' bulletin, and it strikes me that you make generalizations which no one should be allowed to make. Thus, you refer to Ukrainians, Croats and Lithuanians as 'worst offenders' against the Jews during the Holocaust. While there were certainly anti-Semites and Nazi collaborators among these people, you cannot refer to Ukrainians, Croats and Lithuanians this way, because you create the impression that ALL of them were Nazi assistants and criminals. Why do you do this? Why do you stir hatred? My grandfather, a Ukrainian, grew up in a village where both Ukrainians....and Jews lived in hardship and poverty, side-by-side.....
>
> There is no reason and no excuse for your awful, offending generalizations. PLEASE STOP YOUR BIGOTRY IMMEDIATELY AND APOLOGIZE!!!

By conceding that "there were certainly anti-Semites and Nazi collaborators among these people," this participant is exhibiting a willingness to engage in dialogue and reach some degree of compromise, provided the author of the offending article qualify his generalizations. While the tone of the first message is more conducive to sober discussion of an admittedly heated and emotionally charged topic, the fact that at least two list members attempted to establish some degree of intergroup dialogue points to the possibility of computer-mediated communication serving as a forum for public debate.

Their actions demonstrate a willingness to move beyond the Ukrainian ingroup toward an intergroup discussion of the issues.

Judging from subsequent postings, it appears that neither the author nor the administrators of the site responded to these attempts at dialogue. However, one of the above participants also contacted a regular list member of Jewish descent regarding this controversy. This particular member responded by intervening in the debate in an effort to clarify some of the historical inaccuracies.

> I went up on the site and wrote a letter to the person who has organized the material. I thought it would be more effective for my comments to come from myself as a member of the Jewish community and as a child of a Holocaust survivor....
> I will let you know what the outcome is of my message.

Effectively, this participant volunteered to mediate between those responsible for the offending article and concerned list members. His subsequent posting asked other InfoUkes participants to allow him to negotiate on their behalf: "I would ask that until I can see what the resolution of this might be, to restrain any attempt to force changes [to the text of the article] because that will only stiffen the resolve not to change anything." These efforts were met with a number of enthusiastic 'thank-you' messages, including the following.

> I just want to express my big THANKS a.k.a. DYAKUYU to [list member] for his balanced and scholarly approach to the discussion with Mr. Alexander Kimel re: his Web site. Dear InfoUkes, would you join me? Also, I cherish the dream that Mr. Kimel will remove some of his emotional generalizations, which are hurtful and insulting to Ukrainian, Polish, Lithuanian, and Croatian people, from the Net....I am ready to take back my claim for legal action. Least of all am I bloodthirsty, I was just concerned with public display of views for a huge and heterogenous [*sic*] audience of WWW browsers.

Indeed, the Jewish participant's willingness to mediate between the list members and the article's author is pivotal to the establishment of intergroup dialogue. As he points out, his position as "a member of the Jewish community and as a child of a Holocaust survivor" may make the author more inclined to consider clarifications or changes to the text of the article.

Overall, this discussion follows a trajectory from outgroup to ingroup to intergroup: it begins with an outgroup Web site, migrates to a predominantly ingroup discussion, and reaches out again to include members of a specific outgroup, the Jewish diaspora. What is significant here is the movement toward intergroup discussion. This conversation thread demonstrates how computer-mediated communication facilitates intergroup discussion between the ingroup of InfoUkes participants and outgroup members of the Jewish community. Writing about Ukrainian-Jewish relations, Kulyk Keefer echoes this desire to resolve some of the historical tensions between the two diasporic communities through intergroup dialogue.

> I know now that Jewish-Ukrainian relations are as complicated as they are traumatic,...It was discussion for which I felt most starved: discussion that could traverse the boundaries between self and other, us and them, so that new and far more open ways of knowing and being could be explored. It was only in this way, I believed, that my hyphenated state could be conceptualized in terms other than those of two discrete ethnic or national identities, forcibly stapled together; could be reimagined as a hybrid condition (Kulyk Keefer 1996, 87).

For Kulyk Keefer, the negotiation and anticipated resolution of ethnic tensions is integral to the process of reconstituting her ethnicity, for it is only through some sort of resolution that her "hyphenated state" could be reinvented as a hybrid identity. Essentially, she posits that it is only through a continual process of negotiation and reinvention that the ethnic subject can re-create a new identity that transcends old prejudices. Thus, the InfoUkes mailing lists serve as a forum for discussion and negotiation of the often-contentious

issue of Jewish-Ukrainian relations. They provide a virtual space where Ukrainians and Jews, as well as other interested groups, can challenge misconceptions, question inaccuracies, and, ideally, arrive at some sort of compromise.

Because this new hybrid identity is constituted through the negotiation of intergroup tensions, those outside the Ukrainian constituency effectively contribute to the reinvention of a new diasporic identity. Ukrainian ingroup members and global Internet users alike are implicated in the process of Ukrainian ethnic identity formation. Thus the process of ethnogenesis is itself a reflection of the hybridity and heterogeneity of the on-line discussion forum. By engaging in a dual discourse with both ingroup and outgroup members, the InfoUkes lists serve as a liminal space where ingroup and outgroup interests overlap. In a sense, the anonymity and physical remove of computer-mediated communication acts as a buffer for heated and emotionally charged discussions of common interest, such as the preceding conversation thread. Because they are open to both ingroup and outgroup members, the InfoUkes mailing lists constitute a sort of public space where the global community of Internet users is invited to participate in the ongoing process of ethnogenesis.

This analysis of the InfoUkes mailing lists demonstrates how the practices of computer-mediated communication facilitate the ongoing process of ethnogenesis, or ethnic identity formation. It shows that ethnicity is not only constituted through communicative practice but, more important, that this ethnicity is continually rearticulated, renegotiated, and reinvented through the continuous production of electronic texts. The discussions about language demonstrate the ways in which the choice of language is embedded with questions of ethnicity: by negotiating their identities in relation to the native language, the participants of the InfoUkes lists express their ethnic subjectivities. Similarly, the

discussions concerning media coverage investigate the process of negotiating ethnicity through articulations of sameness and difference. By addressing and contesting media representations of Ukraine and Ukrainians, the list participants effectively forge a collective identity that serves as the foundation of their ethnic virtual community. Finally, the discussions about history demonstrate the process of ethnogenesis in relation to the past. The historical events discussed on the lists serve as points of identification, thereby enabling participants to re-evaluate and reinscribe their ethnic identities. By engaging with their shared memories and histories, participants effectively renegotiate the collective identity of their community. Thus, the virtual space of the mailing lists constitutes a figurative space for the articulation and negotiation of self and community. Through the act of writing ethnicity the participants first articulate their individual ethnic identities, then negotiate them collectively, thus creating a new manifestation of Ukrainian ethnic identity. In this way, the practices of computer-mediated communication engender a Ukrainian virtual community where Ukrainian ethnicity is rewritten and reinscribed through the communicative practice of the mailing lists.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

The foregoing chapter offers a rendering of selected discussions that transpired on the InfoUkes mailing lists and were subsequently logged on the InfoUkes archive. As such, it represents an interpretation or exegesis of an electronic archive. This interpretation, however, is by no means representative of the whole body of electronic texts that comprise the InfoUkes lists; rather, it reflects a theoretical approach that is underpinned by questions of ethnic identity. Nor is it an exhaustive interpretation of the discussions on InfoUkes, since the volume of postings is prohibitively large. Instead, this thesis represents a particular rendering of the communicative practices on the InfoUkes mailing lists—one that is driven by a preoccupation with ethnicity. The intention was to inquire into the constitution and evolution of ethnic identity and community through computer-mediated communication; consequently, only the conversation threads that address issues of ethnicity, identity, and community were selected for examination. This thesis, therefore, is representative of the kinds of on-line discussions that deal *specifically* with issues of ethnic identity. As a result, it necessarily excludes other types of discussions, though this does not mean to imply that computer-mediated practices cannot be examined from a different interpretive stance.

This thesis inquires into the relationship between ethnic identity formation and computer technology within the context of a particular ethnocultural formation: the Ukrainian diasporic community. It demonstrates that the communicative practices of the InfoUkes discussion lists facilitate the process of ethnogenesis, defined as the reinvention of a hybrid ethnic identity. Ethnogenesis occurs when the participants of an ethnocultural formation such as the InfoUkes lists express, articulate, negotiate, and reconstitute their ethnic subjectivities through on-line communication. This process not only gives rise to a

new computer-mediated manifestation of ethnicity; in so doing, it also engenders a new incarnation of community, an ethnically based virtual community. This investigation of the communicative practices of the InfoUkes mailing lists reveals, therefore, that the lists serve as a site of both ethnogenesis and virtual community. The processes of ethnic identity formation and community-building converge to form an ethnic virtual community—the InfoUkes virtual community—based on a pre-existing diaspora. This twofold process evokes Carey's ritual view of communication, which holds that the evolution of culture and community are not only parallel, but inextricably intertwined. Communication constitutes culture, and culture, in turn, delineates and informs the nature of communicative practice. Thus, ethnicity and community are simultaneously reinvented and reinscribed through communicative practice.

However, given the specificity of the research site, how much can one generalize these observations of ethnogenesis and ethnic virtual community? Although this thesis focuses on a specifically ethnic social formation, I maintain that these observations about the practices and outcomes of computer-mediated communication are generalizable to other manifestations of virtual community. I submit, therefore, that the negotiation of individual and collective identities is similar across the range of computer-mediated social formations. In the same way that ethnically oriented discussions enable the InfoUkes participants to reinscribe their ethnic identities, so the general practices of computer-mediated communication enable computer users to rearticulate, renegotiate, and even re-create their subjectivities on-line. Furthermore, just as an ethnic virtual community is reified through ethnically oriented communicative practices, so another type of virtual community may be constituted through on-line communication among its members.

This has potentially far-reaching implications for other research into computer-mediated communication. The emergence of a virtual community, ethnic or otherwise, highlights a fundamental characteristic of the virtual community as a social formation—namely, that it necessarily entails communication and interaction between participants. In other words, the communicative practice of computer-mediated communication actually constitutes and reifies virtual community. Because computer-mediated communication actively involves participants in the process of constituting their subjectivities, it also endows them with considerable agency in constructing their own virtual community. By enabling participants to produce their own messages and inscribe their own subjectivities, the ritual of computer-mediated communication effectively constitutes a new form of community. Through investigation of the ways in which communicative practice enables individuals to articulate and construct their identities as diasporic ethnic subjects, this thesis demonstrates the constitutive and community-building nature of communication.

Although I have centred on one particular aspect of computer-mediated communication, a great deal more research is needed to address other related questions of power, politics, and language. Given the potentially democratizing or equalizing effect of computer-mediated communication, it may be fruitful to explore the question of power dynamics in virtual communities. Despite existing research, the relationship between regular users and lurkers within discussion forums is deserving of greater attention, though this entails something of a methodological challenge. Similarly, the often-cited capacity of computer-mediated communication to impact on contemporary political life constitutes a relatively untapped area of research. The Internet's potential to serve as the site of a renewed public sphere, a means of empowerment, or a medium of political participation and teledemocracy, defined as "direct democracy based on...electronic media," demands further research (Grosswiler 1998, 133). Because computer-mediated communication is generally considered more anarchistic and less easily controlled than other

communications media, it may be interesting to conduct an exploration into its uses in societies ruled by repressive or dictatorial regimes. In addition, the question of language constitutes another potential area of inquiry. Given that the dominant language of Internet communication is English, there is a need for more research into the uses and applications of computer-mediated communication with regard to language. This question is particularly relevant for on-line communities that are not predominantly English-speaking. In short, due to the diversity of communicative practices and social formations currently on-line, there are countless other theoretical and interpretive approaches that may be applied to an investigation of computer-mediated communication.

Fortunately, research tends to engender further research. I anticipate, therefore, that this thesis will not only contribute to the body of literature on computer-mediated communicative practice, but that, in so doing, it will also encourage others scholars to recognize computer-mediated communication as an intriguing area of research. As a site of identity formation and community-building, computer-mediated communication—perhaps more than other forms of communications technology—has the potential to impact on our conceptions of self, identity, and community. However, the abundant and often exuberant potential of computer-mediated communication demands that researchers remain cognizant of the fact that new technology is never the panacea that it proclaims itself to be. Communications technology is nothing more that a set of instruments for thought and action. In Levi-Strauss' words, technology is a collection of "things to think with;" it is an instrument of action embedded with an epistemology (quoted in Game and Carey 1998, 119). Its impact on culture, however, is in large part determined by the ways in which we use that technology. Thus, despite the moving images, sophisticated graphics, and audio capabilities that characterize the World Wide Web, even the most comprehensive aggregate of Web sites does not constitute a virtual community unless computer users appropriate the medium for their own purposes. Even with its interactive

capabilities, computer-mediated communication does not, in and of itself, constitute a community without the active involvement of human actors communicating and interacting with one another. Carey maintains that the euphoric promises of new technology must always be tempered with realistic expectations: "In approaching technology, then, it is best to have something of a tragic attitude and to realize that there is always something bitter in the bottom of the cup" (Game and Carey 1998, 128). While the phenomenon of the virtual community is certainly well-established, it is not as extensive or prevalent as the statistics of daily Web traffic might suggest. This study of communicative practices explores merely one type of virtual community. Although the InfoUkes virtual community is relatively small in number, it nonetheless represents an important site of computer-mediated communication where the members of a pre-existing diasporic community have recognized the potential of the medium and appropriated it for the purposes of articulating their ethnic subjectivities and re-creating their own ethnic virtual community.

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