

ceutical industry occurred with little comment."

"Human essence came into existence simply because those with it could out-compete and kill those without it," writes Silver. "But if human minds have the ability to contemplate and direct changes in the copies of their own genomes that they give to future generations, the human

mind is much more than the genes that brought it into existence." Let's hope that humanity will not shrink from using this promising new brainchild, continuing what Francis Bacon called "the conquest of nature for the relief of man's estate." ♦

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Casting the Net

By Nick Gillespie

net.wars, by Wendy M. Grossman, New York: New York University Press, 236 pages, \$21.95

Near where I grew up in New Jersey lie the ruins of a 19th-century Fourierist settlement, a utopian experiment devoted to communal living that lasted about a decade before the participants realized that they simply couldn't bear the sight of each other anymore. My friends and I would ride our bikes past the historical markers and the old foundations and crack jokes about the folly of building paradise in New Jersey, of all places.

The utopian impulse is, of course, one of the bedrock elements of American history and culture. In a real sense, evocations such as John Winthrop's dream of the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a "city on a hill" helped create and sustain America,

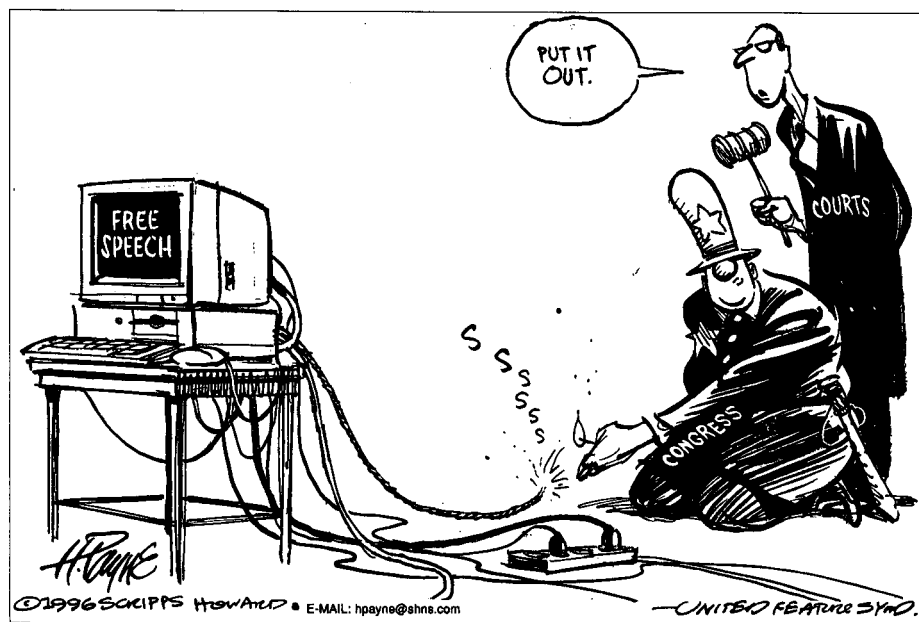
both as an actual historical place and as an imagined location where human beings would somehow be freed from the failings and imperfections they evidenced all too abundantly elsewhere in the world.

Utopias always fail to deliver fully on their promises—and their dismal success rate in American settings has energized memorable fictional treatments ranging from Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1852 novel, *The Blithedale Romance* (which details the author's disheartening experience with the famous Brook Farm commune in Massachusetts), to F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 book, *The Great Gatsby* (which in its final passages turns to a compelling meditation on the unfulfilled potential of the New

World), to Arthur Penn's wonderful 1969 film *Alice's Restaurant* (which is very loosely based on the Arlo Guthrie song and takes place at a fractious hippie commune). Different schemes fail for different reasons, but one of the main causes is that utopias are typically envisioned as complete, perfect just-so situations; as total, fixed end-states rather than as continuing processes of social evolution, adjustment, and change.

This isn't to say that utopian communities yield no benefits: They provide larger society with all sorts of models, examples, and possibilities for human interaction. The *perfect* union is perhaps impossibly elusive, but to the extent that America has delivered on its utopian promise, it remains inspired by the pursuit of, to echo the Constitution, "more perfect" unions. That recognition of process, built into the United States' founding document, underwrites whatever success the American "experiment" has enjoyed. Indeed, what my adolescent friends and I failed to recognize was that we *were* living in Utopia, or at least its kissing cousin—a voluntary association that benefited those who participated. Few of us were natives to either my hometown or even New Jersey. Our parents had moved there for basically the same purpose: the opportunity to build a better life. (For similar reasons, so too would I and most of my friends leave the area in a few years.)

Such an appreciation for process, for the pursuit of "more perfect" social arrangements, informs Wendy M. Grossman's *net.wars*, a nuanced map to the latest "place" to inspire grand utopian thinking: the Internet, that ethereal and increasingly important worldwide network of computer networks. In exploring the unfolding of cyberspace, particularly "the Net's convulsions over the years 1993 to 1996, as it tried to assimilate huge numbers of new users who didn't share the culture that had been developing over the previous decade," Grossman charts its customs and practices, engages the attitudes of its advocates and its critics, and suggests some of its more likely developments. She also documents how many of the same foibles that disrupt and undermine "real" human communities have been uploaded into our virtual ones, how Net users are groping



toward ever-more complex interactions, and how cyberspace is structured to encourage such efforts.

An American journalist living in London, Grossman brings a wealth of professional and personal experience to the material—and a clarity of style and analysis that is a welcome relief from both the hyperbolic prose of many Net boosters and the overwrought jeremiads of cyberphobes. In a characteristic passage, for instance, she writes, “Journalists who don’t use the Net themselves routinely make such egregious technological and cultural errors that you can only compare the results to what would happen if they were assigned to write about the interstate highway system based on their experiences at sea.... [I]f the police told you that prostitutes routinely and openly solicited truckers and other visitors to roadside rest areas and that therefore they were risky places for families to visit, you would probably believe them and write the story.... At the same time, after a while it’s easy to lose perspective and forget that behavior which is common and tolerated on the Net seems shocking to newcomers.”

Grossman also shares a widespread, perhaps even modal, mindset among longtime Net users. While cybergurus such as

But many digerati also tend to be very critical of the profit motive and to view the increasing presence of commercial activity on the Net with worry and disdain; while they are outraged by government attempts to regulate Net content and to collect personal data, they are often no less offended when private businesses behave similarly. Grossman shares this attitude, which makes her book a sort of double guide: Not only does she tell us about Net culture, she embodies it. “I would like,” she announces in her introduction, “to see the freedom of the old net.culture survive in the face of the many competing commercial and regulatory interests that might prefer to limit its reach and openness.”

net.wars revolves around a series of “boundary disputes” occasioned by the rise of cyberspace as a zone of meaningful human interaction. Grossman devotes chapters to topics such as government attempts to stymie the development of encryption programs that would allow computer users essentially perfect privacy; the Church of Scientology’s legal battle against former members who posted copyrighted materials to Usenet newsgroups (see “New World War,” April 1996); and the Internet community’s cam-

ment of Injustice”). Grossman’s expatriate status also heightens her sensitivity to the global implications of the heavy American presence on the Net (roughly 60 percent of Internet hosts are based in the United States). In noting that the CDA “would have criminalized the...transmission of indecent material to minors,” she writes, “The notion that we might have exported American Puritanism is ironic, because in the early 1990s the great fear outside the United States was that we would, via the Net, impose our tradition of freedom of speech on other countries who didn’t want it.”

As informative as such chapters may be (even to those already familiar with the subject matter), the more interesting parts of *net.wars* deal with less obvious “boundary disputes.” The chapter called “Make.Money.Fast,” for instance, chronicles the rise of commercial “spam”—bulk postings to Usenet newsgroups—in the mid-’90s and the way it affected the Net’s low-key approach and ambivalence toward electronic commerce. As Grossman tells the story, the deluge effectively began in 1994 when Laurence Canter and Martha Siegel, later the authors of *How To Make a Fortune on the Information Superhighway*, posted to every newsgroup they could find a message advertising their services in helping immigrants to apply for work visas. Canter and Siegel’s mass posting was done in such a way that it caused “maximum disruption,” recounts Grossman. “Each news-storing computer... around the world had to find space for 10,000 copies of the message instead of just one.... [The posting also] disabled the facility within most reader software to mark a post as read if it’s been seen in one newsgroup, so that you don’t have to keep re-reading the same post in newsgroup after newsgroup.”

The reaction among Net users was, says Grossman, “sheer fury”: Angry people flooded newsgroups with complaints and more technically adept net users bombarded Canter and Siegel with angry e-mail and massive files designed to clog up their Internet account. Despite such a hostile response, though, commercial spam’s time had come and, as Grossman laments, “There are very few areas of Usenet these days where you don’t have to

While cybergurus have characterized the Internet as populated by “50 million screaming libertarians,” the reality is more complicated and ambivalent. Many longtime Net users tend to be very critical of the profit motive and to view the increasing presence of commercial activity on the Net with worry and disdain.

John Perry Barlow, a co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a cyberspace-oriented civil liberties group, have characterized the Internet as populated by “50 million screaming libertarians,” the reality is more complicated and ambivalent. There is no question that in many ways, Net culture parallels much of libertarianism: It is individualistic and tolerant of diverse lifestyles and ideas, comfortable with rapid technological and sociological innovation, and intensely suspicious of government intervention in speech and privacy matters.

campaign against the Communications Decency Act, which was eventually declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court last year.

These discussions are populated with interesting characters (such as Bell Labs researcher Matt Blaze, who with almost casual expertise cracked the “Clipper chip,” the Clinton administration’s favored approach to government-friendly encryption) and moments (such as when some hackers, in a fit of pique over the CDA, doctored the Department of Justice’s World Wide Web site to read “Depart-

pick your way through piles of spam.”

Indeed, by 1996, junk e-mail sent directly to individual Net users had arrived. Though Grossman is even more bothered by this development, she notes that Internet service providers quickly adapted by making it fairly easy for users to block junk e-mail—the sort of rapid-response development that seems to define cyberspace. Subsequent court cases between commercial spammers and Internet service providers—some of which have led to spammers getting out of the business altogether—have also changed the cyber-landscape.

Along similar lines, in a chapter called “The Making of an Underclass: AOL,” Grossman investigates the hostility that many “Netheads” evince toward users of America Online, the world’s most popular online service. She traces the problem to March 1994, when AOL added a feature that allowed users to access Usenet newsgroups for the first time. At the time, AOL had about a million users (it now has more than 10 million), many of whom were unaware of the often-arcane etiquette of Usenet. For instance, a number of AOL users apparently blundered into the *alt.best.of.internet*, a newsgroup specifically designed as a place where people only reposted messages from other newsgroups. “The rule was and still is,” writes Grossman, “no comments, no original messages, repostings only.” The AOL “newbies” enraged Usenet veterans by constantly posting messages of the “Hello” and “Hey, is this working?” variety.

Compounding the negative reaction to AOLers, explains Grossman, was the “instinctive resentment of any hint of commercializing the Internet...the perception was that AOL neither knew nor cared about net.traditions but was only interested in sticking a meter on a free resource and billing its users extortionately.” As a subscriber since the early 1990s, I can corroborate the often shabby treatment leveled at AOL members for no apparent reason other than the *@aol.com* stuck at the end of an electronic address.

By the same token, such incidents are growing fewer and further between—a trend that underscores the way in which the Net is constantly changing, growing, and accommodating more and more people. It’s worth pointing out that AOL itself is constantly changing, too: Despite its

early emphasis on members-only discussion groups, proprietary content, and hourly rates, it has quickly responded to the development of the World Wide Web by giving its member Internet access, deemphasizing its exclusive content and forums, and offering flat-rate usage plans. (Like the Net itself, AOL has not always negotiated such changes easily.)

Somewhat reluctantly, Grossman can appreciate that convenient, easy-access services such as AOL have helped give the masses access to the benefits of the Internet, even as that great migration inevitably redraws the shape of cyberspace in all sorts of good, bad, and neutral ways. In any case, her ambivalence toward AOL and commercial activity doesn’t undercut her appreciation for how the Net is constantly developing in response to user needs and demands. In a chapter called “Networks of Trust,” for instance, she dis-

cusses how electronic “middlemen” are arising to help facilitate and certify electronic commerce.

It may well be that in the years, decades, or even centuries to come, we—or our descendants—will gaze upon the ruins of the Internet (whatever form they might take) and wonder what all the excitement was about. With this in mind, the great virtue of *net.wars* is its recognition that cyberspace’s utopian potential—its ability to enrich existing real communities while creating new, virtual ones—is directly tied to its ability to change, grow, and make itself useful to its inhabitants. In showing how that process works in both historical and cultural terms, Grossman has written an intriguing account of the Internet’s partial fulfillment of its seemingly limitless promise. ♦

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Atrocity Exhibition

By Carl F. Horowitz

The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II, by Iris Chang, New York: Basic Books, 290 pages, \$25.00

Ienaga Saburo had been an unusually busy man, and not out of choice. In 1965 the Japanese historian sued his government for forcing him to rewrite a portion of a textbook. The Ministry of Education was incensed over his brief denunciation of Japanese genocide against at least 300,000 civilians in the Chinese city of Nanking during December 1937 and January 1938. Just mentioning this World War II story would have been bad enough.

Luckily, in 1970 a Tokyo judge ruled in Saburo’s favor, saying textbook screening could not go beyond correction of factual and typographical errors. Japanese ultranationalists, in retaliation, fired off death threats to the judge, Saburo, and his attorneys. They also demonstrated outside his house, screaming slogans and banging pots and pans.

The lawsuit proved to be the snowball that led to the current avalanche of worldwide outrage over the Rape of Nanking

and its long cover-up. It also inspired a new generation of tenacious researchers, one of whom is Iris Chang, a 29-year-old Chinese-American author whose grandparents survived the slaughter. In writing this book, the first full-length, English-language account, Chang conducted interviews with survivors, reviewed film footage, and pored through official documents. Her work speaks much not only about genocide but about how a nation prepares its people to commit and whitewash it.

At least in America we know a lot more than before; in Japan, the dissemination mills grind more slowly. Not only is Nanking unmentionable, apparently in some quarters so is America. Early this decade one Japanese high school teacher expressed surprise that his students did not know their country had been at war with the United States. The first thing they’d wanted to know was who won. Whatever