

# **“Do We Have A Sign That Says 'Weirdos Welcome?’”: Urban Libraries and the Control of Access**

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## **Abstract:**

This ethnography positions public libraries in Washington, D.C. as sites of struggle in the politics of internet access, where what internet access means and what it is good for is contested daily. Here, librarians act as gatekeepers to informational capitalism for those whose access to it is otherwise blocked. Here, library patrons use the access provided to bridge the ‘digital divide’ that shapes the common sense of social mobility in the U.S. today. Or they carve out a space for their own uses and refuse the links that librarians enforce between library technology and social mobility.

Describing the actions, beliefs, and technologies which link both sides of the so-called ‘digital divide’, and contextualizing it within a rapidly gentrifying city, moves the consideration of digital inequality beyond the binary framing of the ‘digital divide’ and towards the complex social relations that link haves and have-nots within informational capitalism.

## **Keywords:**

digital divide; liberalism; libraries; cities; control

## **“Do We Have A Sign That Says 'Weirdos Welcome?’”: Urban Libraries and the Control of Access**

This ethnography positions public libraries in Washington, D.C. as sites of struggle in the politics of internet access. These are spaces where what internet access means and what it is good for is contested daily. Librarians act as gatekeepers to informational capitalism for those whose access to it is otherwise blocked. Library patrons use the access provided to bridge the cultural and material ‘digital divide’ that shapes the common sense of social mobility in the U.S. today. Or they carve out a space for their own uses and refuse the links that librarians enforce between the library space and social mobility.

I focus on the politics of internet access at the level of everyday life, situated within the broader political economy of a rapidly changing urban space, in order to move the analysis of inequality and internet access beyond the framing of the ‘digital divide’. This builds on a series of interviews with librarians who have been trained in iSchools in the last 15 years, as well as their patrons, and months of fieldwork in DC public libraries. The idea of a “digital divide” frames the politics of internet access as a clear binary where owners of internet service and PCs must send similar commodities to those lacking them. But the experiences of library patrons who struggle with lengthy online applications to jobs which themselves require no digital literacy shows that the politics of internet access are not just about providing connections and commodities, but learning specific skills (Warschauer, 2003) and struggling with the reduced demand for others (Selywn, 2004, p. 349).

The digital divide is just as much about the haves as the have-nots. My librarians feel pressured to preserve the space of the library as one dedicated to the possibility of social mobility, just as they did in the Progressive era when ‘readers advisors’ coached new immigrants away from dime store fiction and towards American classics and literacy aids (Luyt, 2001). Alongside social workers and Peace Corps. volunteers, the current generation of librarians are part of a long line of liberal, white, middle-class, often

female, helping professionals who prepare the poor and working class to be good citizens and good workers (Stevenson, 2011; Goldstein, 2012).

What we call ‘the digital divide’ is another historically specific crises in the mode of production which liberalism has attempted to solve. The ‘digital divide’ is never only about getting online, but what people, practices, and spaces benefit within informational capitalism. Through an ethnography of the complex relationships between “information haves and have-nots”, as Al Gore called them in the 1990s (Gore, 1994, p. 6), I encourage researchers forgo the simplistic framing of the ‘digital divide’ and instead situate these particular inequalities within contemporary social relations.

### *Libraries, Librarians, and the Political Economy of Internet Access*

While the Clinton administration hailed the extension of internet access as a way to “ameliorate the constraints of geography, disability, and economic status” (Department of Commerce, 1993), the decision to classify internet infrastructure under a rubric of universal access, instead of universal service, removed the federal government’s obligation to subsidize internet access for isolated or impoverished homes and instead ushered those without access towards “public access points’ such as libraries (Stevenson, 2009). This at a time where e-government troubleshooting, job training, and after-school care services are increasingly offloaded onto libraries as other public sectors are closed (Jaeger and Bertot, 2011). As one librarian, Rachel said that during her tenure at one large D.C. library, “I was less of a librarian and more of a social worker.” Within this context, libraries are positioned as a privileged site of entry to informational capitalism and librarians are identified as idealized knowledge workers on the right side of any digital divide. They are using their access, their literacy, and their resources to access social mobility and extend it to others. They are doing it right. They become the model their patrons aspire to reach--even as they participate in the gentrification wave which is increasingly displacing working-class black and Latino residents from D.C. Compared to older colleagues, my librarians are more likely to be trained in technology-intensive iSchools, to think of their patrons as customers to be served, and to have the flexibility demanded under austerity conditions. Katherine estimates that at least 40% of her day is spent outside of her specific section, but says these are “just the staffing realities.”

Librarians must also regulate the link between social mobility and internet access. Recalling Fordist liberalism, the American Library Association’s motto “the best reading for the largest number, at the least cost” mandates professional values of sharing, openness, and outreach. These values sometimes clash with the need to make sure that patrons are, as Elena hopes, “there to use our services as more than just a building to sit in for the day.” The days of these mostly white, liberal and female librarians are thus filled with confrontations with much older or younger people of color who have not accessed the mode of production and who violate modes of knowledge worker propriety. These patrons might confuse socialsecurity.com for [socialsecurity.gov](http://socialsecurity.gov), but they might also watch porn in public or sleep in the bathroom overnight. The politics of internet access thus force a precarious balance between professional ethics of care and openness and the need to regulate misuse of the physical and informational space of the library. Elena, for example, calls in the armed library police if any sleeping patrons smell of alcohol.

### *Controlled*

But if a patron is napping with a book in their lap, Elena gives them a pass. To her, this signals an attempt to link library materials with library values. Urban libraries in informational capitalism are not disciplinary spaces that hail and transform potential knowledge workers. Rather they are spaces of control, wherein regulation is local, individual and modular (Deleuze, 1992). Various library materials act as interfaces to the common sense of internet access as a driver of social mobility, but the variable relationship between technology, user, regulator, and library culture means results may vary. D.C. Public

Libraries' log-in system automatically regulates the long lines for computers, but each of my librarians said they'd happily intervene to extend time to those using the workstation for job applications rather than YouTube videos. Similarly, while firewalls are supposed to block pornography, it is "child's play" to circumvent them, according to Rachel, who added "[I]f they don't have access to a computer in another spot and it's an outlet, it doesn't really bother me." Currently homeless patrons will partner up at a particular computer with an application page open, but spend their time discussing how to maximize food stamp benefits. Others spend hours researching old films online and then copying films onto DVDs. Urban public libraries become sites where social mobility is up for grabs in informational capitalism, but what that means and whether it's refused or embraced is determined at the level of the individual computers, software, books, and desks situated within complex social relations linking haves and have-nots within the mode of production.

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# When the Inmates Run the Asylum: Grief Play, Surveillance, and Hacktivism in Second Life

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## Abstract:

This paper will sketch out how governance is negotiated through grief play when surveillance becomes a form of governance in virtual spaces, particularly when mediated through third-party companies. In order to sustain order, most platform owners including Linden Lab, the parent company of *Second Life*, have relied on surveillance as the primary technique of governance and worked with local organizations who themselves have gathered information on others. This paper will argue that third party-surveillance operations result in power asymmetries and abuses and manifests surveillance society in its most dystopic form insofar as it fragments surveillance into a number of loci of power. Expectedly, this exacerbates the conflict among user groups. It is in this political climate that grieving in *Second Life* developed from a set of practices that manifests itself as irreverent language and dicey pranks into a tactical strategy used to negotiate power in the form of leaking operations.

## Keywords:

grief play; surveillance; governance; second life; hacktivism

## When the Inmates Run the Asylum: Grief Play, Surveillance, and Hacktivism in Second Life

In the early days of *Second Life*, those who were convicted of grieving would be temporarily sent to an isolated region, the Cornfields, as a form of punishment where there was nothing but a tractor, cornfields, some hay bales and a TV. This was the only place where the miscreants would be allowed to log on for the duration of their sentence. Started as a creative form of punishment through which the Lindens (employees of the parent company, Linden Lab) hoped to modify virtual behavior, the concept bore traces of Jeremy Bentham's vision of a Panopticon, later revisited by Michel Foucault (1995). In their vision, the inmates were placed in isolation, where they could be watched, and thus, being in a position of vulnerability, they could be rehabilitated through self-norming. The strategy somewhat backfired as some users, curious to experience this rumored space, grieved purposefully to see what it was all about. As the world grew in numbers, this experiment was abandoned all together. Confronted with the influx of new users, the Governance Team (G-team) of Linden Lab implemented mechanisms that empowered the user against grievers and worked with local governance organizations to sustain order. What seemed like a sound decision at the time, i.e. open-sourcing governance by shifting the burden of detecting unrest onto the society at large, soon created power inequality among user groups as these groups began collecting information on others and datamining under the banner of security. Expectedly, this approach ultimately led to even more conflict in-world. It is in this political climate that grieving in *Second Life* developed from a set of practices that manifests itself as irreverent language and dicey pranks into serious initiatives with hacktivist undertones (Bakioğlu, 2012).

This paper will sketch out how governance is negotiated through grief play when surveillance becomes a form of governance in virtual spaces, particularly when mediated through third-party companies. This study implements ethnographic and interpretive methodologies that makes use of interviews, direct observation, and content analysis of key blogs, forums, and other sites.

Considered to be a play style that involves the “intentional harassment of other players” whereby the game structure is used in unintended ways to cause distress for others (Foo & Koivisto, 2004; Warner & Raiter, 2005), grieving manifests itself in a number of ways in social worlds like *Second Life*. Such

activities include trolling, raiding, crashing sims (regions), and even causing monetary damages to businesses by way of theft of content, defamation, or disruption of customer experience. No doubt, the expansion of virtual worlds and their uses render the efforts to manage griefing a pressing concern for virtual governance (Bartle, 2003, 2006; Foo & Koivisto, 2004; Rossingol, 2005; Warner & Raiter, 2005; Foo, 2008; Chesney et al., 2009). The biggest challenge of managing these disruptive activities is the profound deterritorialization and the reordering of social relations by technology (Jarvis, 2005). No longer organized by a spatial component that can be traced to a territorially-based sovereignty, but rather, organized around a common social practice --in this case, griefing-- these activities pose a direct challenge to virtual governance.

In the efforts to overcome this challenge, platform owners have relied on surveillance as the primary technique of governance. For example, the G-team of Linden Lab monitors in-world chatlogs of suspecting accounts, scans online forums where the culprits convene, and blacklists textures that depict notorious images/memes used by these groups. Grieferers, in turn, have learned to hide in plain sight: they create throwaway accounts in the form of alternative accounts, jump IP addresses to avoid detection, and have backups of their inventory in external servers lest they get banned. Amidst this turmoil, *Second Life* residents have formed *banlists* as a form of public service that compile a list of the likely culprits and even formed security organizations which not only have trained the virtual public in security and but also actively penetrated griefing groups to leak information. These vigilante groups have built their own surveillance operations using bots and any other tools that are available to them to gather information on the avatars as well as the users behind them, which is a blatant violation of the Terms of Service. Thus, an open society based on peer surveillance emerged under the pretext of keeping the undesirables out and giving the appearance of definite action (Brin, 1998). At the same time, it gave rise to gross inequalities of access and opportunity among the users (Lyon, 2001). As a response to the privacy violations, lack of transparency and consistency of governance, perception of favoritism among user groups, and aggressive abuse reporting that led to unjust bans, a new griefing group, The Wrong Hands (TWH), emerged in *Second Life* and made it their business to expose the shady dealings that occurred behind the scenes.

The focus of this paper will be TWH's scandalous exposé of Modular Systems, a third-party company that developed an alternative viewer (browser) for *Second Life* called Emerald. The client provided enhanced usability, while at the same time boasted of a set of permissive functionalities that allowed its users to engage in questionable activities. The rumors that two of its lead developers had in fact been banned for griefing led to the notoriety of the client as the "griefer client." Following Linden Lab's approval of Emerald as one of the official viewers and a series of run-ins with the developers, TWH hacked the Modular System's database and leaked incriminating documents. The leaked documents revealed that the Emerald had compiled a database of avatar names, IP addresses, and geo-location information for players who created accounts through the ModularSystems.com site. Additionally, the documents contained e-mail exchanges, a database containing over 39,000 entries tracking 16,740 users, detailing avatar name, avatar key, and IP address, source code for portions of a datamining application, and a picture of the Emerald developers in a meeting with the Linden Lab representatives. The incident proved that the company was engaging in a clear case of dataveillance where users' activities or communications are monitored and checked in automated ways (Lyon, 2001). This unexpected revelation not just cemented the close relationship between the Lab and the Emerald developers, but more significantly, casted doubts on Linden Lab's attitude towards user privacy.

While the intentions of Modular Systems in conducting dataveillance on *Second Life* users are not clear, it stands to reason that such an operation goes beyond maintaining security for governance and spills into the hands of third-party companies who have no vested interest in the world itself. It is at this juncture that surveillance society in virtual worlds manifests itself in its most dystopic form insofar as it is fragments into a number of loci of power and generates enviable power asymmetries and abuses. In this struggle, griefing bears the possibility to develop into a tactical strategy used to negotiate political power very much in the style of Wikileaks.

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# Deception, Propaganda and Epistemology on the Anti-Social Web

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## Abstract:

The internet enables new discursive strategies that are simultaneously deceptive, difficult to detect and potentially effective at eroding the epistemological foundation of progressive political action. I examine cloaked sites used by white supremacists and anti-abortion activists as a way to explore epistemology in the digital era. White supremacists have for years owned the URL *MartinLutherKing dot org*, which appears to be a tribute page but is in fact, a form of white supremacist rhetoric intended to undermine civil rights. Anti-abortion activists use cloaked sites such as *Teen Breaks dot com* to inform young women about the fictitious medical diagnosis of “post-abortion syndrome.” I argue that this range of struggles over “truth,” and “facts” are ultimately epistemological questions raised by the ‘anti-social web.’

## Keywords:

social movements; race; gender; digital literacy;

## Deception, Propaganda and Epistemology on the Anti-Social Web

The internet enables social movements to deploy discursive strategies that are simultaneously deceptive, difficult to detect and potentially effective at eroding the epistemological foundation of progressive political action. In this paper, I examine the practices of deception used by white supremacists and anti-abortion activists as a way to explore central issues for social movements in the digital era. Specifically, I examine the social movement strategy of cloaked sites, that is, websites published by individuals or groups that conceal authorship in order to disguise a political agenda.

The reality of the current popular internet is that search engines, web addresses, and interfaces represent a new kind of battleground over ideas and politics. For example, a candidate running for office today may be the target of a “Google Bomb” that games search engines to undermine a carefully crafted public persona. Or, a woman who is supposedly an average mom appears in a cable television and YouTube spot voicing her concern about “big government interfering with her grocery shopping.” She may actually be a spokesperson for the beverage industry and part of a multimillion dollar “astroturf” campaign. In the rest of this paper, I will examine the way that social movements use a variety of new media tools to shape public debate and push forward a particular political agenda.

### *MartinLutherKing (dot) org*

For the savvy web user, it seems clear that there are a number of things amiss at this site. The first clue is the subheading a “A True Historical Examination.” The use of “true” here suggests an uncovering of some formerly untold truth about Dr. King. The main page features an unflattering quote of clandestine FBI audio tapes recorded while King was engaged in sexual activity with a woman other than his wife.

It is possible to read the transcript of King’s conversations taped by the FBI within the larger context of systemic white supremacy in which nascent civil rights movements are routinely stamped out by the government (Feagin, 2006); however, within the context of this cloaked site, the quote is intended to undermine King’s legitimacy as a civil rights leader, and with that, the goal of racial equality that he stood for.

Once on the website, there are a number of additional indications as to the source of the information, including a link in the right margin that reads “Jews and Civil Rights,”<sup>1</sup> that leads to a page that includes a chapter called “Jews, Communism and Civil Rights” from white supremacist David Duke’s book *My Awakening*. Scrolling down to the very bottom of the first page, there is a link that reads “Hosted by Stormfront,” and clicking on that link takes the user to Don Black’s “White Pride World Wide” at Stormfront.org. Although these clues might seem fairly obvious to savvy web users or those with the necessary historical knowledge, other users can easily miss them.

What makes this cloaked site archetypal is only partially about what is on the site itself; just as significant is the domain name and the place the site appears in search engine results. A Google search for “Martin Luther King”, regularly returns this website in the first page of results. Before even viewing the content of this site, the URL makes it appear to be legitimate, in part because the main web reference is made up of only the domain name “martinlutherking,” and the URL ends with the suffix “.org.” The decision to register the domain name “martinlutherking.org” relatively early in the evolution of the web, was a shrewd move for advocates of white supremacy; failure to do likewise was a lost opportunity for advocates of civil rights.

Recognizing that domain name registration is now a political battleground, a number of civil rights organizations have begun to reserve domain names to prevent them from being used by opponents of racial justice. For example, the NAACP registered six domain names that include the word “nigger” and the ADL registered a similar number of domain names with the word “kike” (Festa, 1998). However, registering offensive epithets is only a small part of the struggle. The move by opponents to register the esteemed symbols of civil rights as domain names, such as Martin Luther King, and use them to undermine racial justice is one that was clearly unanticipated by civil rights organizations. To be effective, cloaked sites with domain names such as [www.martinlutherking.org](http://www.martinlutherking.org) rely on the *naïveté* of their target audience, a predominantly white audience that each year moves further away from the experience of the civil rights era.

By concealing authorship and intention, such sites combine old forms of “black” and “grey” propaganda with digital media. This combination of racist propaganda and digital media constitutes a new method of distributing social movement rhetoric.

### *'Post-Abortion Syndrome'*

Pro-life social movement actors conceal website authorship in order to deliberately disguise their pro-life politics. Compared to Martin Luther King (dot) org, “Teen Breaks” ([www.teenbreaks.com](http://www.teenbreaks.com)) makes sophisticated use of domain name, interface, design, and moderate sounding rhetoric. To all but the most astute political observer and experienced internet veteran, the site appears to be a legitimate source of reproductive health information. Nowhere on the site does it reveal the political affiliation of the publisher, nor even who the publisher is beyond a vague mention of the “Rosetta Foundation,” which is a front for a pro-life activist.<sup>2</sup> On a page called “Complications for Girls,” the site quotes literature from the conservative Focus on the Family to support the notion that there are many (and exclusively) negative physical and emotional consequences from abortion,<sup>3</sup> part of “post-abortion syndrome”, which is not a medically recognized disorder. This cloaked site is in many ways a digital version of the brick-and-mortar “Women's Health Clinics” advertised in the phone book alongside legitimate clinics and intentionally concealing the fact that all the counselors and information are designed to prevent women from accessing abortion services (Ginsburg, 1998) The danger in a cloaked site of this type, as with the

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1 Here again, context is the key. The word “Jew” is not, by itself, anti-Semitic; but when that term is used rather than “Jewish people” or “Jewish tradition,” it raises suspicions.

2 According to several online sources, Sandra Choate Faucher is president of “The Rosetta Foundation”; however, so little information is available about her or the “Foundation” online that it’s possible she is a sock puppet, that is, a fictional character created by someone else.

3 See <http://www.teenbreaks.com/abortion/complicationsgirls.cfm>



brick-and-mortar locations, is that young girls or women looking for reliable reproductive health information might be persuaded that “post-abortion syndrome” is a reality, and, in the worst case scenario, that they would endure an unwanted pregnancy and childbirth rather than end a pregnancy for fear of the fictitious syndrome and lack of access to services. The tautological strategy here of using conservative sources to substantiate conservative “facts” is a commonplace tactic of the right-wing propaganda machine in the United States (Goldberg, 2006, p.80-105). Whatever one’s personal politics might be concerning the right to abortion, the fact that this site presents itself as neutral and conceals its authorship and political agenda qualifies it as a cloaked site.

Deception is not a new feature of social movement rhetoric, but some features of the digital era can make it more difficult to discern which sites are legitimate and which sites disguise a hidden political agenda. Of course, designating a site as legitimate or cloaked is at some level a political distinction, similar to calling some organizations “front groups” and others as legitimate social movement activism (Mayer, 2007). Shying away from such political distinctions in evaluating information online only serves to obfuscate the key issues.

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# Social Engineering Electoral Campaigns

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## Abstract:

Political campaigns increasingly use technology as a means of voter targeting to gain a competitive advantage. In *The Victory Lab*, Sasha Issenberg argues that this technological advance is healthy for a democracy. Drawing on the work of theorists on the public sphere, and contemporary scholarship on how digital tools change political campaigning, this paper argues that the significant advances in data mining, and behavioral targeting suggest a problematic future for the polis, especially in terms of elections and campaigns. While we often think of social media tools as increasing voter participation, there are significant ways in which these technologies can also be used for the reverse, as a method of engineering elections. There is a substantial threat here, and we ought to begin to question and consider cultural and legal solutions to preserve balance between technical tools designed to engage voters and those whose purpose is manipulation of the electorate.

## Keywords:

democracy; publics; big data; surveillance; marketing

## Social Engineering Electoral Campaigns

When critics analyze late twentieth century electoral politics they often frame it as the rise of the broadcast politician, characterized by image laden politics and sound bite messaging in an effort to manipulate and “control the message.” In this analysis Ronald Reagan's victory in the 1966 California Governor's election serves as a key moment. However, there was another election that same evening, a much smaller one, one which in the long analysis might prove to be an even more instructive event, especially in analyzing twenty first century electoral politics.

Don Riegle, a former IBM executive, won the election to Michigan's 7th congressional district. What is important about the Riegle story is the method by which he gained a competitive advantage. Riegle was a Republican running in a traditionally Democratic district. Initial polling indicated that he was trailing his opponent by over 30 points, yet he eventually managed to close that gap, winning by a margin of eight points. And although Riegle was certainly a charismatic figure who played well to the developing broadcast political mediums, his strategic advantage came in the form of leveraging data driven politics. Indeed, his campaign is perhaps the first example of a rigorous data driven political campaign, wherein he deployed data analysis to identify which voters in which precincts were the most persuadable, thus allowing him to focus his efforts in those areas, securing the requisite 50% of the electorate.

While mass media, particularly television, has been a powerful force in elections, enabling engagement with broad segments of the electorate, the other half of the story here, the ability to use data to treat individual members of the electorate as discrete units, rather than a general public is of equal importance in the late 20th century; perhaps evolving into the key feature of 21st century campaigning. To be sure, targeted political persuasion in the service of generating votes has a long history, one which certainly pre-dates computational data. However with the increasing prevalence of the digital network as a communicative media and the rise of computational power, the ability to track, store, and share information has exponentially increased, altering the relations between electoral institutions, political parties and the public.

My underlying theoretical claim is that technology changes our relation to democracy, not in a simple deterministic way, but rather the technological medium which forms the substructure for political communication and organization certainly informs and shapes our democratic practices. A particular

medium both constrains and enables social formations, communication, and power relations. Thus with a change in the means of communication, comes a change in the way that we practice democracy. The medium is the social message.

In Philip Howard's, *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*, he documents what he calls the rise of the “hypermedia” campaign, which adopts digital technologies. Published in 2006 the book covers how the prior ten years were influenced by the adoption of digital tools. Read in conjunction with Daniel Kreiss's *Taking Our Country Back* (2012) one begins to gain a picture of how startling the shift in digital data driven politics has been. Indeed, one of the key narratives that emerged following the 2012 campaign was not only the amount of data that the Obama campaign collected and used, but the rather stark computational and data advantage he enjoyed over the Romney campaign.

From the beginning, those working on the digital side of the campaigns realize that these tools harbor both the potential to engage a wider range of citizens, and gain a competitive advantage in elections. Importantly, those within the campaigns begin making normative assumptions about data use. Deciding the limits and ethics of data use. Unfortunately the dial is tipped in favor of collecting and leveraging as much data as possible, wherein a “data arms race” is birthed.

There is a clear parallel here to the attempt by corporations to collect, store, and analyze data in an effort to capture market share (indeed the Obama campaign's chief data scientist came from the corporate sector with a background in maximizing supermarket sales). The ultimate goal here is behavioral targeting, attempting to persuade individuals below the level of conscious awareness, persuade either to purchase a product, or in the political case choose a specific candidate. This type of large scale data collection, aggregation, and modeling is fast becoming a focus of electoral campaigns, representing a significant shift in the political relations between citizens and campaigns.

Particularly powerful is the ability to merge political data (voting records) with data collected by credit card companies and businesses, while also adding information gleaned from tracking digital interactions. Campaign Grid for instance claims to have an 80% success rate at matching voter records to online databases, with a goal of getting that to 100%.

There are two broad reasons that I think this type of data driven politics ought to concern us.

The first is a practical set of concerns. As Howard highlights in his work on hypermedia campaigns, the degree to which citizen attributes or data is now bought and sold on the marketplace has rather significant consequences. There is little transparency in how this data is used, and while in the early days of hypermedia campaigns the suggestion was that the digital campaign would lower the cost of running for office, this type of data drive, social engineering campaign does precisely the opposite, creating powerful new players in the political landscape (many of them online trackers or social media services).

The second concern is to consider carefully how this almost exclusive focus on the voting function as indicative of citizen engagement damages democracy. In a democracy citizens perform multiple roles, from discursive engagement to outright resistance, all of which are marginalized by direct voter targeting. Indeed, voter targeting works precisely on condition that it eliminates the discursive function, red lining the electorate. While this type of voter targeting might increase voter turnout, such an increased turnout does not guarantee an increase in civic engagement broadly conceived.

Big data social scientists are rapidly moving to making social science an engineering discipline, to treat humans as groups of actors to be engineered. What happens when politics becomes a matter of engineering? We are moving there, and what is worse we are moving there with little to no regulation, with little or no discussion about the costs of this shift. Winning a campaign is not the same as fostering a democracy, indeed these are often heterogeneous goals. Technology can enable and empower both,

ultimately as a public we ought to recognize this and have discussions about the role of technology in democratic elections and public formations.

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