**Mark Poster. *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*
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In accessing this review, you have engaged with an information machine. It is this engagement, that of the human and the machine, and how it has refigured our understanding of culture, politics and the self that is the central contention of Mark Poster's text. The text presents us with an exploration into the ubiquitous nature of information machines that permeate our daily existence. Technology has a profound effect on culture. He argues that "culture cannot be seen as separate from technology" and as such "many assumptions long held in modern society require revision" (9). This guiding principle frames debate throughout the text by interweaving the role that the advent of information and communications technology has upon globalisation, politics, identity, media, art and culture.

The text is divided into three sections, each taking a thematic approach to the role that information machines have had upon the human experience. In the first section, Global Politics and New Media, Poster explores the developments of the conjunction between media and technologies that refigure how we position ourselves within the world.

Poster suggests globalisation is brought about by the development of communications and information technologies. He draws on the example of "Evil Bert Laden," which comprised the image of Bert from *Sesame Street* with Osama Bin Laden in protest marches from across the Middle East and South Asia. The image of Bert was removed from its cultural context and refigured in a new way. A part of globalisation is then about the assem-

blage of images and ideas, which are fragmented across the globe. The mechanism that enables this transmission is the global information and communications network. Poster considers the ramifications not just of the way that information is transmitted but what role it plays in enabling a transformation of culture. He raises questions about the role that media plays in culture, focusing on new media. Poster seeks to explore the linkages between humans and machines, providing "the cornerstone of possible new planetary cultures," a globalisation (24).

Poster develops his position on contemporary globalisation in relation to postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory has been centred upon face-to-face communications, focusing on the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised. When rendered through the lens of global communications systems, postcolonial theory is problematised. In facilitating the deconstruction of Western ontology, the concept of the tool stood at a distance from the human, appearing as other, as pure object. However, information machines as tools refigure the relationship between human and machine, subject and object. This refiguration inserts itself into the process of culture and as such refigures the subject and object into a new formation that Poster defines as the *humachine* (36). The construction of a digital public sphere mediated by information technologies enables engagements with people to be mediated, not confined to proximate physical spaces. The self, given the advent of information machines and a global communications network, participates in global discussions. The advent of these digital subjects destabilise territorial identities, as subjects are free to construct themselves in any manner in relation to others. Poster sees this (re)construction as rendering new formulations of cultural exchange.

Poster turns to the political, engaging with recent work from Manuel Castells, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Their work proceeds from the position of emerging global integration. However, Poster's reading has a different angle, in that he sees globalisation as the assemblage of humans and networked digital information. The combination of human and machine is 'an intimate mixing of human and machine that constitutes an interface outside the subject-object binary' (48). Poster contends that networked digital information and human assemblages transform the fundamental conditions of culture (52). The internet presents a site that departs from the Newtonian space-time formulation of earlier communication to a site that represents virtual presence as space and time approach zero (55). Poster argues that new media produces a specific materiality, and as such any critique needs to be focused with this in mind, as opposed to a Marxist rendition that focuses upon labour power in relation to information technologies.

Poster explores the historical development of the citizen; he focuses

on how humans are transformed by information machines, with particular emphasis on the role that science and technology have had in relation to globalisation. It is not just figures of capitalism and imperialism that guide theories of globalisation; another central figure that needs to be considered is the connection of human to machine. Poster explores this connection through the "human-machine interface" that must be developed in order to formulate new political communities. It is not "a replica of the agora but … mediated by information machines" (72). The citizen today marries the "autonomous individuality of modernity with the postmodern neotraditional-ism of identity politics" (75). Poster argues that this is rendered concrete through the internet in that it deterritorialises exchanges from the body, yet reterritorialises them in a manner different from other media. Television, print and radio are fixed broadcast media and as such are easily controlled by the nation-state. The internet, by contrast, is decentralized; it does not lend itself to control by the nation-state, but is the site of production of postnational political formulations. This is due to its architecture, the shift in space-time it represents, coupled with the new relation of the human to the machine. Poster floats the concept of the *netizen*, a person that adheres not to nature alone, but to machines – the connection of local and digital identity.

The second section of Poster's text explores the culture of the digital self, developing from the refiguration of the political and the cultural brought about by information and communication technology. Poster turns his at-tention to the way the subject is reconstituted in light of information ma-chines.

Poster states that the formulation of the subject's identity is based on a Foucauldian framework of a technology of power, which regards identity as instituted by discourses and practices. The subject is transformed through the mode of information. Information machines problematise this relation by allowing the subject to exist outside of the boundaries of a corporeal space. Poster states that identity can be constructed by the whole nature of the technical apparatus that envelops the subject, but because of this very flu-idity, it is also open to attack. This is evident in the crime of *identity theft*. The changed nature of the 'online' self has divorced identity from the corpo-real nature of the subject; it is this very fact that can allow one's identity to be compromised, left vulnerable and open to theft.

Poster presents a relationship of human to machine that is more pro-nounced in the emergence of the refigured relationship to culture. The tran-sition from analogue to digital has problematised notions about art, aesthet-ics and media theory. Poster explores this first by invoking Benjamin's cri-tique of cinema before extending it to encompass information technologies.

Art cannot be seen as a delimited object, instead 'it is an underdetermined space in which subject and object, human and machine, body and mind, space and time all receive new cultural forms' (126). Information technologies facilitate a refiguration of aesthetics. Poster touches upon hypertext, which introduces new forms of narrative rupturing traditional linear forms. This is coupled with the ability to produce, distribute and consume data at high speeds replacing television, that one-to-many medium, with collective consumption and production. Poster outlines the nature of the internet as many-to-many such that it destabilises traditional conceptualisations of media.

Poster presents media as the site that transforms the way subjects engage with cultural objects. Information technologies have transformed the structure of information but also alter the way that humans relate to the reception and transmission of information. Poster explores the way that ethics have been refigured in light of information technologies. Drawing upon Levinas and the face-to-face, Poster claims that new media disrupts such relationships as people can engage without being in proximity to each other. Poster states that the engagement with new media alters the human condition, which has a profound affect on received notions of understanding while also destabilising traditional media in the process. He questions notions of the ethical in relation to information technology, inscribing a Nietzschean notion of a new formulation of ethics that accounts for the human–machine interaction. This is an ethics that has to move beyond merely good or evil, good or bad.

Moving on from ethics, Poster focuses on the body, more specifically the interaction between human and machine. Poster's analysis is developed from psychoanalytic theory, starting with the formulation of bodies and their categorisation and continuing through into formulations of media and the mediated body. It is this body, immersed in media from birth, which is involved in a different process of development. His case is the analysis of the television show *Teletubbies*. The show is targeted towards infants and plays out a virtual existence where villains are portrayed as objects such as vacuum cleaners. New media has resulted in children growing up in a more media concentrated environment, surrounded by information machines and immersed in mediated cultures.

Poster problematises the subject-object relationship by exploring the way that information machines transform the subject, breaking down this relationship. In the third section of his text, Poster turns his attention to the way that information machines transform commodities. Poster argues that information machines and networks destabilise traditional production and distribution of a number of commodities, especially cultural commodities.

Poster notes that the advent of digital cultures has been problematic for traditional renditions of property. The relationship of human to machine has opened up a wide range of new practices that are social, political and cultural. The attempt for modernist institutions such as governments to control virtual activities is problematised by the very nature of the connections that occur on the internet. When contrasting production and distribution on the internet, one finds that traditional models of looking at goods, especially cultural items such as music and films, are rendered obsolete by technology. Poster states that with the digitalisation of culture, traditional tangible goods such as records and videos are becoming less relevant with the instantaneous distribution and access to a range of goods made available through peer-to-peer file transfer. Media companies however are attempting to exert control over these commodities through recourse to the legal system in order to compel users to purchase the product. The developments of these technologies have brought about a new mechanism for the distribution of goods and enabled a reworking of space, which in Poster's construction resembles Foucault's concept of heterotopia.

Taking the new condition of the subject as a relation between media and technology, what then does it mean to explore the terrain of virtual existence that permeates the subject in the day-to-day? Poster explores Lefebvre's conception of the everyday and the role that new media play in relation to the transformation of the subject. The relationship between subject and object is central to the modern experience; however, Poster problematises this by stating that in between this division machines reside. The relationships between individuals and machines have developed over time. This is developed in the evolving relationship that humans have had from radio through to computers, evidenced by the increased use and central role of information processing machines in society.

Networked computing gives rise to digital objects and a new relationship between objects and the consumer. As such, Poster contends that the consumer is not just a consumer anymore; access to technology also positions the consumer as a producer. This puts into question the relation between producer and consumer, as the distribution and reproduction (copying) approaches zero cost. Evidence of new forms of commodities can be seen in the development of open source software.

The final area that Poster explores is the relationship between advertising and information machines. Drawing on the 1969 novel *Ubiq* by Phillip K. Dick, Poster states that this text presents the protagonist in a strange world of consumption. The extension of technology has enabled ubiquitous exposure to advertising and by extension consumption. Poster develops this position as a possible point of reference to the domain we are currently

situated in. It is media in *Ubiq* that develops connections between "religion, the ultimate spiritual force, and consumption" (261).

Poster provides comprehensive coverage of the effects that information and communications technologies have had, not just in transforming the way we conduct ourselves daily, but in destabilising a number of issues that have up until now been relatively fixed. New media has altered the human condition, which is evident in the refiguring of the human-machine interface. As the pace of technological development increases, we can only see more of the effects played out. The text as a whole is well written and engaging; its main limitation is that it will date fast. Poster's *Information Please* delivers an excellent foundation for those interested in the connection between theory and technology. It opens up a number of fields of research that revolve around the human–machine connection.