Digital Technologies and The Notion of 'The Global'

Claire Taylor

University of Liverpool

Digital Culture and the 'Global'

- Circa 1990s: hype about the internet
- 'global village': Shah 'emblematic of globalisation' ; a 'planetary system' transforming the world into a 'single, global space' (Shah 2008: 9).
- 'globalized world'
- 'netizen': Hauben 'citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net makes possible' (Hauben 1997: 3)

= utopian vision of a limitless, free-floating realm, divorced from offline place.

Critiques of the 'Global Village' Concept

- 2000s: critiques of this utopian notion:

1. Offline, material inequalities do not disappear when users access internet

2. material concerns of access and infrastructure

3. government control and surveillance

4. geographies of exclusion whereby spatial inequalities are reproduced online

5. Language: e.g. many 'minority' languages under-represented online

6. Visibility of non-metropolitan cultures online

Net localities and Everyday Practice

→ more nuanced position – internet cannot be conceived of as purely 'global'

- in fact online technologies allow for re-connections with physical place
- 'net localities' (Gordon & de Souza e Silva)
- Everyday practice – more and more embedded in the local
- web 2.0 technologies allow for a variety of different forms of georeferencing

Key Issues in Latin(o) American context …

- Tactical media
- Tactical use of low-tech
- Issues of language
- Visibility of non-metropolitan cultures in digital media
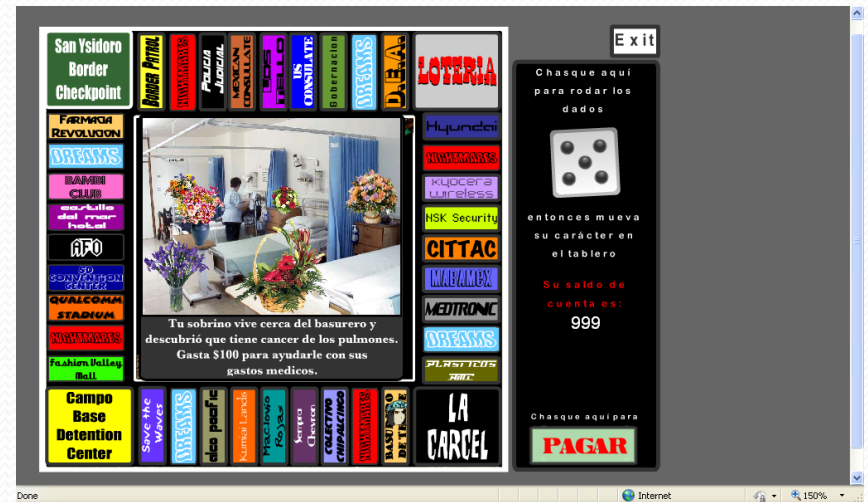
Tactical Media

- Term first coined in 1993 (at Next Five Minutes groupings and conferences
- Raley: projects not 'oriented towards the grand sweeping revolutionary event' but instead a 'micropolitics of disruption, intervention and education' (Raley 2009: 1).
- Lovink: 'tactical media are forced to operate within the parameters of global capitalism, despite their radical agendas. Tactical media emerge out of the margins' (Lovink 2002: 258).
- Latin(o) American groups some of the most high profile practitioners
- Includes attacks on websites, hactivism, and collaborative software

Use of Low-Tech

- Issues of connectivity, infrastructure, etc in Latin American context

→Deliberate use of low-tech as resistant gesture

- e.g. Ricardo Domínguez's *Transborder Immigrant Tool* (2009),

- mobile phone tool designed to work on cheap, low-tech phones

- uses GPS to aid illegal immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in finding water supplies.

Issues of Language

- Although Spanish and Portuguese widely represented on internet, indigneous languages of the Americas are not

- e.g. Google recognizes 30 European languages BUT only one African language and *no indigenous American* or Pacific languages

→ Problem of accessibility of materials

→ Problem of internet reinforcing offline inequalities/assumptions (we find what Google wants us to find…)

Visibility of non-metropolitan cultures in digital media

- Internet *content* predominantly reflects values of Anglophone hegemony
- Internet *search engines* predominantly provide access to Anglophone and European content
- Non-nation state identities have less visibility in internet structure
- Rural and indigenous communities often under-represented on internet

Challenges for Researchers with (Global) Digital Inequality in Mind

1. How can we take into account inequalities of access and infrastructure when we are planning research projects?
2. How can we avoid re-enforcing digital divides (both between and within countries) when we decide what to study?
3. How can we deal with issues of language?
4. How can we ensure that our projects take into account non-Anglophone/non-metropolitan/non-Western digital cultures?
5. How can we avoid neo-imperialism when discussing/analyzing non-metropolitan digital cultures?
6. To what extent can digital technologies prove to be re-embedding mechanisms?