

January 2003

# Sphericules and fragments: Minding the gaps

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## Recommended Citation

Ted M. Coopman. "Sphericules and fragments: Minding the gaps" *American Communication Journal* (2003).

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## Sphericules and Fragments: Minding the Gaps

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### Abstract

Michael McGee exemplified the scholar embracing all tools and ideas, the fragments that make up our existence, in exploring and explaining our world. I argue that bridging the gaps that separate these fragments, or what Gitlin (1989) called sphericules, is the essence of what constitutes public scholarship. Starting from Habermas' (1989) description of the public sphere I explore how interdisciplinarity holds the keys to bridging the gaps between publics. I supported this with a discussion of the history of academe in America and the brief survey of the new infrastructures being built to expand our fields of exploration and the dissemination of scholarly knowledge.

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### Preface

Gina McGee's invitation to write for this special issue on Michael McGee both honored and intimidated me. I worked with Michael on the [ACA](#) Board, jostled with and against him in the online arenas of the [ACA-L](#) and [CRTNET](#) lists, and considered him my friend. However, I was only tangentially aware of his scholarship. My background is in media and I don't know from rhetoric. Don't get me wrong, some of my best friends are [rhetoricians](#), but sometimes the whole criticism thing seemed a bit obscure and clannish, like the [Masons](#). My interactions with McGee mainly concerned politics, the state of academe, and the quasi-organizational wrestling matches on the ACA Board of Directors. To me, McGee was an inspired mind who embodied the best attributes of scholarship. I don't mean

this in the sense of his contribution to communication, while it is certainly immense, but in his embodiment of the ideal scholar. He communicated respect and support for other scholars, especially junior faculty and students. He treated my thoughts and ideas based on their merit, not my academic degree. This held true in our personal discussions, the intellectual threads on communication lists, and the operational battles of the ACA Board. We disagreed at times, and while I like to think I prevailed at least once or twice, I know I was moved to surrender on more than a few occasions. The ability of senior scholars to engage with students and junior faculty in a respectful, honest, and encouraging way is too rare a skill. I took McGee's gift for granted and lost the chance to thank him. I would like to avoid repeating the mistake by mentioning [Raymie McKerrow](#), [James Lull](#), and [Barbara Warnick](#) as other giants in communication whose sharp minds and encouraging words have shown me the best face of our discipline.

I particularly respected McGee for embracing the possibilities of new communication technologies as not only a way to communicate ideas, but as something that affected the fundamental ways we interact and understand the world. He was not afraid to take his scholarship into uncharted realms nor was he so bound to his past laurels to reject the implications of new media for his ideas. His belief in the new led to his instrumental role in creating this journal in particular and the concept of the online communication journal in general.

So this is how I came to know and view Michael McGee. All I can speak to is my interaction with him. I was not one of his students nor am I a rhetorician, yet he supported my endeavors and was kind enough to write several letters of recommendation for me when I applied to Ph.D. programs. He inspired me. Despite his health issues, he was a fighter to the very end. Two days before his passing he was on the ACA Board listserv fully engaged in organizational debate and still pressing for a vision of academe beyond expediency and petty politics. This is how I shall remember him, for his integrity and dedication for what he saw was right.

## Introduction: Public Scholarship, Interdisciplinarity, and Bridging Boundaries while [Minding the Gaps](#)

As I investigated McGee's writings, I began to observe connections between an emerging concept I have been exploring and his views of the shape of reality. As [Lance Bennett](#) my graduate advisor, likes to say, "We stand on the shoulders of giants." So I gladly accept McGee as inspiration for the following exercise. I developed the central theoretical construct of this article as part of a paper I wrote for an experimental course on public scholarship. This course was centered on constructing a definition of public scholarship. I settled on the idea of public scholarship as a sort of hyper-interdisciplinarity. A public scholar is one who seeks to bridge the confines of her/his professional sphere to engage with others. This is

the notion that there are separate, and distinct ways of doing and knowing (McGee, [2001](#)). McGee dismissed the idea that rhetoricians are one way, social scientists another, and that their endeavors are incompatible. He embraced the idea of reciprocity over [alterity](#), or interactive versus passive engagement (McGee, [1989](#)). More concretely, he argued that texts are bigger than their discourse and that discourse is more accurately conceptualized as discourses. Thus, any analysis is composed of "fragments" (McGee, [1990](#)). The basic concept of McGee's fragments fits within Gitlin's ([1998](#)) broader concept of "sphericules." Both fragments and sphericules represent the hyper-interdisciplinarity that is a trademark of the late (or perhaps post-) modern era.

The convergence of ideas and technology is exemplified by projects such as the [American Communication Journal](#). ACJ bridges multiple sphericules by bridging between the disciplines within communication and reaching beyond the field of communication to include other disciplines. Further, it allows for the re-imagining of what constitutes scholarship in the form of presentation while maintaining rigor. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it pierces the veil and shows the rest of world not only what we are up to but why they should care.

McGee ([1997](#)) discussed the nuances between post-modernism and post-modernity. He stated that "postmodernity keeps attention on the conditions, situations, and circumstances which determine, influence, prompt postmodernism. -It is stimulus, -ism is response" (para 15). He saw the -ism as the institutionalizing of the idea and the -ity as the spark that launches inquiry. He concludes,

"The life of the mind, once figured with images of isolation, of ivory towers, monasteries, and a hermit's cave, here assumes a more public, faster-paced visage. I hope to see a whirl of activity on these screens, not just the bloodless publication of scholarship, but the embodied and enacted, contested and appreciated, performance of scholarship" (para 20).

The "performance of scholarship" is a public act and I would argue key to my concept of public scholarship. I relate this concept to Gitlin's ([1998](#)) sphericules in the sense that we can be trapped into the "bloodless publication of scholarship" for our own narrow discipline (or sub-discipline) and for our own narrow needs. Sphericules that remain in isolation constitute the caves and towers of what has falsely been construed as "traditional" scholarly practice. McGee advocated for interactivity and the dialectic energy that can only come from stepping out to touch and investigate new worlds or new publics. The public in public scholarship is comprised of sphericules that have the potential of interacting. Public scholarship is therefore scholarship that transcends individual sphericules or social worlds to

reach a broader audience. Interactivity requires a bridging between sphericules of experience. To facilitate an interactivity that is not constrained by the closed systems of our disciplines, the availability of grants, or the forces of the media marketplace we must create a infrastructure to support public scholarship.

I make my case by first looking at how academe has developed in the United States. By exploring this we can see how we have developed the culture of disciplinary myopia that passes as traditional scholarship. This history constitutes the incremental construction of our ivory towers or sphericules. I then explicate the foundation of Gitlin's (1998) sphericules in Habermass' (1989) concept of the public sphere and how it relates to my broader definition for public scholarship. Following this, I explore interdisciplinarity and the importance of the sphericules of our disciplines in creating the dialectic energy for public scholarship. I conclude with a discussion of the practical issues of building infrastructures to facilitate the "performance of scholarship."

## Academe: [American Style](#)

While categories or divisions of study had emerged prior to the 18th century, the central tendency in academe was for an interdisciplinary approach (McKeon, 1994). The "social world" (Star & Griesemer, 1989) of academe was still more singular than plural by the time the Americas were colonized. [Harvard College](#) was founded in what was then the [Massachusetts Bay Colony](#) in 1636. Its mission was to train the leaders of the puritan community. While there was no practical distinction between religious and political life, the colonists' experience with the oppression of a state mandated that the church lead them to take steps to separate the political and ecclesiastical. In the years prior to independence many other colonies and religious sects established colleges. These institutions were designed to foster a sense of the public, a capacity for reflection, and to instill moral character. In the early 19th century the college was central to civic life and every community strove to have their own institution (Snyder, 1998).

[The Morrill Act of 1862](#) created the land-grant colleges and served to codify the idea of higher education as central to public life. The combination of the civic tendencies of the old college traditions with a practical infusion of technical and agricultural skills was designed to serve the emerging industrial and agricultural masses. The notion was to create an educated class that could return home and serve their communities. This was the embodiment of the American ideal of egalitarianism. Immigration and emancipation altered the nation's demographics as the industrial revolution took hold. This changed not only the role, but the perception of the role of higher education. One particular development helped to set the stage for driving divisions between the public and the university, the

professionalization of the professorate (Cooper, [1999](#); Snyder, [1998](#)).

Oddly enough, the egalitarian ideals of the [progressive era](#) progressive era that fostered the land-grant movement also fostered the harnessing the professorate for the betterment of civil society. This rested in the belief that highly trained professionals could operate society and "fix" social ills. The broader mission of faculty to educate students in the classical humanistic tradition and instill in them good moral character and a sense of the public good became supplanted by the notion of the production of knowledge (Cooper, [1999](#); Snyder, [1998](#)). This production required increased specialization among faculty, which was reflected by the rise of specific disciplinary organizations such as the [American Historical Association](#) in 1884 and the [American Political Science Association](#) in 1889, as well as the organization of faculty into separate departments (Berdahl, [2000](#)). At the time, some even predicted that many universities would dispense with teaching altogether and become pure research institutes. A combination of these and other factors during the first 20 years of the 20th century led to a standardization of academic disciplines and university organizational structures (Geiger, [1985](#)).

These trends continued throughout the 20th century. The primacy of research as a road to job security and the cult of objectivity had a tendency to socialize scholars into a sense of detachment from the public (Boyt, [2000](#)). Moreover, specialization helped to create distinct social worlds within the university itself. Scholars "dispensed knowledge" and "discovered truth" following the Germanic model of the production of knowledge for knowledge's sake (Boyt, [2000](#)). A series of counter-movements began to challenge many of the positivist traditions towards the middle of the century. Despite these new calls for reform, these challengers tended to be as elitist in their insular nature with totalizing epistemologies and use of specialized languages. The postmodern perspective further distanced academe from the public by its questioning of "basic humanist tropes such as the social contract, the common good, and the common welfare" (Cooper, [1999](#), p. 783). This further exacerbated the divide between the academy and public. Academe seemed to be by and for academics, and on a deeper level, only by and for academics within their respective fields (Boyt, [2000](#)). A more recent debate concerning the state and position of the university and the public was highlighted by the [Presidents' Fourth of July Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education](#). Fifty-one college and university presidents challenged the nation's academic leaders to take action against what they saw as a rising tide of civic disengagement. This is in many ways similar to the egalitarian drive of the 19th century. The Declarations' supporters cited studies that indicate that students are not connected to the larger project of the maintenance of American democracy. In a sense, this mirrors [Putnam's](#) ([1995a](#), [1995b](#), [2000](#)) findings concerning the American populace at large

as becoming disengaged with civic life. Butler (2000) continued this theme and found the issue of civic engagement:

"fraught with two overriding tensions: first, the pull between the professional role of faculty members and the public intellectual role each of us assumes to a varying degree and, second, the conflict between our national aspiration to be a democratic republic and the reality of our being a nation whose commitment to democracy is threatened by racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ageism, excessive materialism, and a peculiar numbness toward the suffering of others" (para 4).

Barber (2001) echoes this sentiment and adds, "The artificial chasm that too often separates colleges and their students from the problems and realities that define the subject matter of their studies desperately needs to be bridged" (para 8). In many ways, these views represent the reform movements that rose in the aftermath of the cultural wars that peaked in the 1990s. This involved the reconciling of the need for diversity and tolerance with the danger posed to our democratic society (Jensen, 1995). While problems with the system existed, the alternatives were even less palatable. "[The Democracy Collaborative](#)" as well as other organizations were established to build a national as well as an international network of faculty committed to their concept of the [engaged university](#). An engaged university was the reestablishment of the American university as once again a center for civic life and renewal. This movement for the reconciliation between the mission of the university and the mission of democracy is where much of American academe stands today. The issue is the actualization of those missions. Part of this actualization is the "[service learning](#)" trend seen on many campuses that integrates college instruction with community service (Gotllieb & Robinson, 2002). Service learning "is based on a reciprocal relationship in which the service reinforces and strengthens the learning, and the learning reinforces and strengthens the service" (Cooper, n.d.).(Cooper, [n.d.](#)).

This very brief exploration of the origins of our current system is important to our discussion because it illustrates two important factors. First, historically institutes of higher learning have had an interdisciplinary or internally open tendency. Second, the deeper traditions of American universities lie within close ties to their communities and the society as a whole. Internal divisions within the academy exacerbate divisions between the academy and the public. If we cannot communicate effectively across disciplines, how can we expect to communicate effectively with the general public?

## Public, Publics, Sphere, Sphericules

The concept of the ivory tower is normally invoked to describe the insular and elite nature of academe as well as the barrier between the academy and the public. In actuality, the tower is plural. Much like Gitlin's (1998) concept of sphericules as opposed to a monolithic public sphere (Habermas, 1989), the ivory towers not only separate us from the public, but disciplines from each other. Epistemologies and specialized languages form the foundations of these towers (Ramsey, 1997).

"Habermas' idea of the public sphere provides insight into the idea of public scholarship. Habermas (1989) suggests that "the public sphere itself appears as a specific domain  $\neq$  the public domain versus the private" (Habermas, 1989, p. 2). I use Habermas' concept in the most mundane and basic sense. Habermas discusses the variation within the public domain as not always open to the public, that is, the general population. It can include those institutions, such as the state, whose function it is to promote the common welfare. So the public is only a portion of the public sphere. Therefore, the public in public scholarship encompasses both the general public as well as public institutions including academe and the state. I extend this towards the other end of the continuum, the private sphere, with the contention that it contains multiple modes of privacy. In the context of my application of the theory, I simply differentiate between the public and the private by saying the public sphere has in its potential access by or service to the public. As Habermas (1989) contends "only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all" (p. 4). This brings us closer to the idea of public scholarship as perhaps a "realm of freedom and permanence" (Habermas, 1989, p. 4). Gitlin (1998) suggests an increasing trend towards the abandonment of "a" public sphere in favor of multiple public spheres that invite participation through the "development of distinct groups organized around affinity and interest" (p.173). Still, Gitlin seems unsure that this development of a fragmented public sphere is healthy. As a deviation away from the idea of a public sphere, the sphericule could simply be seen as the distinct units of that public sphere. The "public" being one such unit along-side the state. I identify finer gradations of sphericules within those, each separate but interconnected. This creates a more realistically functional explication of public scholarship.

Academe's ivory towers are spheres unto themselves. The university, as a totality of all institutes of higher education, is closer to a walled city and the individual disciplines are the towers within those walls. In some cases, there would even be distinct sphericules with these towers. In communication, as an example, areas of interest such as rhetoric, organizational communication, and cultural studies often operate in isolation from each other even under the broader description of communication and oftentimes within the same departments.

If we take the totality of the public sphere as a space filled with public sphericules, I believe we get a much more realistic picture. This illustrates how the university (writ large) and the disciplines not only view and interact with each other, but with the state and different constituencies. The history of the development of the college in America supports this contention. Gitlin's (1998) public sphericules are not isolated towers, but are connected by passageways and roads. Moreover, the walled city of the university must certainly have a gate or drawbridge - after all students and faculty must come and go.

The public in public scholarship is comprised of sphericules that have the potential of interacting providing there is a sense of affinity or interest in doing so. Public scholarship is therefore scholarship that transcends individual sphericules or social worlds to reach a broader audience. The primary act public scholarship is the bridging between sphericules.

## Praxis and Interdisciplinarity

To transcend our disciplinary sphericules is to become interdisciplinary. Not so much in the sense of embracing another discipline as the awareness of those other sphericules as resources and opportunities of exchange. Interdisciplinarity is the most fundamental form of public scholarship. This is of interest to the project of reaching sphericules outside the walled city because the efforts at interdisciplinary cooperation hold keys to bridging our sphericules. If we as scholars cannot successfully function interdisciplinary, then how can we expect to connect with sphericules beyond academe? There are benefits and pitfalls of scholars straying off the straight and narrow path. As with [public journalism](#), there is considerable resistance to the imposition of some standard of interaction with broader sphericules.

An examination of efforts at interdisciplinary cooperation provides useful insights into the construction of connections across sphericules. McKeon (1994) explains how the central historical tendency of scholarship is to be interdisciplinary. The pre-enlightenment division of religion and science, as well as the later divisions of the disciplines, can be viewed as a dialectic (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). The resolution or negotiation of opposites results in a negotiated meaning. The tension of creativity and interaction would not be possible without such divisions. Disciplinarity, therefore, becomes a virtue and strength if balanced by interaction. As Wohl (1955) observed "the occasion for interdisciplinary collaboration arises from the very fact of specialization and would be inconceivable without specialization" (p. 376). These observations are key, because the very divisions of public sphericules and the resulting dialectic tension provide fertile ground for public scholarship. Wohl (1955) also identifies the same elements that Gitlin (1998)

construes as the connective tissue between sphericules - shared interest and affinity between participants in an interdisciplinary endeavor. Moreover, the process is more a social and normative experience than a prescriptive one (Wohl, [1955](#)). Attempts to institutionalize interdisciplinarity are fraught with danger as broader epistemological and narrow theoretical territoriality can lead to factionalization. This was illustrated in the collapse of the long-term interdisciplinary project on conflict resolution in which a formal institutional structure was created (Harty and Model, [1991](#)). In terms of productive output, Birnbaum ([1981](#)) found better success in publication or post-graduate employment when researchers are loosely coupled, rather than tightly integrated. Similarly, Kast et al ([1970](#)) found that a "free form" method of organizational interaction could overcome traditional organizational constraints. This is when structural constraints enforce territoriality in the effort to achieve a pre-defined goal.

Allowing for different ways of interaction and density of connections to strengthen interaction has also been explored within the confines of Sociology by Smith-Lovin ([1999](#)) with similar results. The distance between disciplines as a strength is reinforced by Granovetter's ([1973](#), [1983](#)) concept of the strength of weak ties. The premise is that strong, or in this case intradisciplinary, ties carry less novel information than weak, or interdisciplinary, ties. Information within one's own sphericule is often redundant, where the likelihood is greater that information from another sphericule would be more novel. Sphericules could also be viewed as the nodes in a network. The social pay-off of exchange within a network of interaction is not so much a matter of output, as in the act of participation. Burke ([1997](#)) found that

"[i]ssues of interest concern how different actors, each of whom control varying amounts of different resources, that each needs or desires according to some utility function, can exchange those resources so as to improve upon his or her prior condition" (p. 134).

So, it appears that process and action in negotiating meaning and identity in a loose network of relationships is a benefit unto itself. The potential for interaction between sphericules, if linked by networks of connections, is beneficial beyond any product produced. That is, being part of a network is enriching even if no concrete material benefit exists. The existence of interdisciplinary connection and cooperation can benefit those inside a discipline simply by the fact that they are connected through a network that spans intra and inter disciplinary realms.

For the discussion of interdisciplinarity at the dawn of the 21st century, this concept is key. Major sources of conflict in the so-called culture wars are issues of diversity, identity, and identity politics. Process and action in negotiating meaning and

identity are key elements of identity politics (Calhoun, [1994](#)). The clash between multiculturalism and diversity and established canons of humanistic western traditions can be somewhat ameliorated if framed within the context of dialectic tension and interdisciplinarity (Bloom [1997](#); Jensen, [1995](#)). As Tannen ([1990](#)) observes, discussions between academics can almost be described as intercultural communication. If seen in a pluralistic fashion, sphericules of different modes of thought obviate the need to command one sphere, whether this is intradisciplinary, interdisciplinary, within the walls of academe, or in the broader context of "the" public sphere. These battles have, in large part, become counter-productive. Within the context explicated above, the elimination of oppositional forces, whether ideological or disciplinary, weakens individual participants and the system as a whole. Therefore the project that is public scholarship should be seen as an attempt to bridge and balance between public sphericules. The building of structures that facilitate the potential exchange of ideas while maintaining differences enrich participants as well as bystanders. This serves not only those who champion diversity, interdisciplinary cooperation, and exchanges between the many publics within the public sphere, but removes the coercive nature of imposing a standard or definition of the identity of scholars, disciplines, or academe at large. Projects such as ACJ are a step towards creating a physical infrastructure for exchange that combines local autonomy, network strength, and the potential for interaction that does not directly confront or threaten intellectual or ideological territories. The caveat is that this would not dissuade extremists whose identity demands the elimination of an oppositional viewpoint.

I have concentrated on the public sphericules as an illustrative point. The idea is that the divisions or sphericules within the academy are part of a larger public sphere. The sphericules outside the academy, the "general" public or more accurately the sphericules within the general public, as well as the sphericules within the state, are fundamentally the same. There are binding and dividing issues that make for thick and thin ties (to borrow from Bimber, [1998](#)) between sphericules but ultimately, they are all part of a larger complex public sphere. By bridging sphericules within a narrower, but still diverse, confines of academe, we see the emergence of a model to bridge more divergent sphericules. This would allow points of contact and interaction that can be accessed by, not inflicted on, different constituencies. To facilitate this interaction, there needs to be an easily accessible infrastructure that builds on past successes yet overcomes their deficiencies.

## Intra and Infra Structures

In order to distribute something, whether it is milk or intellectual property, there needs to be a supporting infrastructure. Outside the confines of individual academic institutions, the primary modes for the distribution of scholarly knowledge are

conventions and academic journals. Both of these venues are extremely limited. Using communication as an example, the [National Communication Association \(NCA\)](#), the oldest and largest communication organization, has approximately 7100 members. Of these, usually around 4000 attend the annual conventions (NCA, [2003](#)). Cost and geography limit access to these conventions. A majority of those who attend are directly associated with the discipline. However, within NCA there are also 55 units that divide the association into areas of interest within communication. NCA is a good general example within academe because it contains a wide variety of sub-disciplines ranging from Mass Communication to Rhetoric to Gay and Lesbian Studies to Public Address. A typical convention has about 1000 programs to divide up one's attention (NCA, [2003](#)). While programmers often bring in "practitioners" and other outsiders into these milieus, most exchanges occur between those within the discipline. This represents finer and finer gradations of isolation.

Journals are the primary mode of transmitting scholarly knowledge. A key component in the career tracks of academics, journals are where knowledge is archived and displayed. However, these journals have a very limited distribution. According to the [Iowa Guide \(2003\)](#), communication journals have a median distribution of about 1200 with a high of 25,000 and a low of 100. While many of these journals do go to university libraries, and are therefore available to a wider audience (of students and fellow academics anyway), the cost of these publications has resulted in a steady decline in distribution. The median cost is \$120 a year with the most expensive \$773. Many universities subscribe to services that allow access to past issues of journals online. However, these services require that access be limited to those with university affiliation. A hopeful trend is the appearance of the free online journal. Two examples are the [The Journal of Computer Mediated Communication](#) and the [American Communication Journal](#) which receive approximately 5 and 2 million hits, or visits, a year respectively (Iowa, [2002](#)). According to [Webalizer](#) tracking software developer "hits represent the total number of requests made to the server during the given time period." While it describes "sites is the number of unique IP addresses/hostnames that made requests to the server" and "visits occur when some remote site makes a request for a page on your server for the first time. As long as the same site keeps making requests within a given timeout period, they will all be considered part of the same visit" (Webalizer Quick Help). A visit would be the most conservative estimation of usage. Even so, according [ACJ user statistics'](#) visits still number an impressive 216,949, a number over eight times higher than the highest circulation paper journal.

This is not to say that scholars do not have other avenues for disseminating their research. [Robert McChesney](#) (broadcasting historian and critic), [Deborah Tannen](#)

(language and gender specialist), [Benjamin Barber](#) (political philosopher), and [Lawrence Lessig](#) (law and intellectual property expert) being some notable examples of scholars who have extended their research beyond academic circles. The ability of scholars to break into the public sphere via commercial mass media is often due to the marketability (topical, broad interest, etc.) of the subject matter or the association of the scholar with political or cultural celebrities. Moreover, many of these scholars are fully tenured and therefore secure in their positions. [Joanne Cantor](#), an influential researcher on television violence and its effect on children, remarked that the demands of "going public" were so intense that she elected to retire because she found it impossible to balance her public and academic life (Cantor, 2003). There is no particular infrastructure that allowed these scholars to access the public. Often, they reach the public at the sufferance of commercial media. McChesney's critique of commercial media relegates him, for the most part, to public broadcasting venues. Cantor found that placing a book warning parents of the effects of TV violence to be unexpectedly difficult. Many publishers are owned by or associated with media conglomerates that have the television networks she critiques.

Public scholarship, and the subsequent bridging of sphericules, can occur in other fashions. For example, applied research has the potential to affect public policy when it focuses on public policy issues. Often this is done under the auspices of funding grants from outside institutions. However, problems may arise in the payment for specific research concerning specific topics. This is not to say such an arrangement is tainted or unethical or that this does not "count" as public scholarship. This type of research has the potential to bridge sphericules and therefore would be within my broad concept of public scholarship. However, such funding is inherently restrictive, as it is a limited resource. Market and content forces are in play when successfully applying for grants. Another type of applied research would involve activism in conjunction with social movements or interest groups. This can be done through the willingness of the scholar to do applicable research and get it into the hands of those who can use it to (hopefully) further their cause. Some of my own research on media regulation falls into this category. Such work usually involves a certain degree of effort or luck in having an area of study that is obviously easy to apply. The existence of a connective network and that experience has facilitated my work and encouraged and reinforced the concept of public scholarship in this article. Still, it is important to move beyond the happenstance of individual specialties and chance and to build an infrastructure so scholars won't need to "reinvent the wheel" in perform public scholarship.

The concept behind building an infrastructure for public scholarship is that there needs to be a "third way" of connecting with those outside of our ivory towers. We need an infrastructure that is not constrained by the closed systems of our

disciplines, the availability of grants, or the forces of the media marketplace. Habermas (1989) might describe it as creating a discourse outside of state and economic concerns. In this case, our disciplines, institutions, and the restrictions of media that demand specific economic benefit as the price of admission. This would not supplant either system, as they both serve important functions. A new infrastructure of public scholarship would create a contact point where a meeting could take place, ideas exchanged, and understanding fostered.

McGee saw the potential of the internet to augment and influence scholarship. The internet is the key to building an infrastructure to facilitate the exchange between publics both within and without academe. ACJ is the most fundamental manifestation of this infrastructure. The next step would be to democratize the process by increasing the contact points of academe. The most economically viable and accessible medium to accomplish this is the internet. While internet access is still somewhat limited, it is steadily building to the point of pervasiveness. The idea is to build into the future. Through the use of open source software, the construction of sophisticated websites is well within the financial capabilities of many groups and organizations. Moreover, the technical expertise to operate these websites is becoming more and more common. The potential for the creation and expansion of interactive multimedia websites into complex networks is illustrated by the evolution of the [Independent Media Center \(IMC\)](#) movement. The original website, [indymedia.org](http://indymedia.org), was established in 1999 to coincide with the [WTO protests](#) in Seattle, WA. It was based on [Active](#), an open source software. The idea of the IMC movement was to spread the means of media production to the public by creating an open access forum for news and alternative views. The software allows for audio, video, photographic, PDF, and plain text material to be uploaded by anyone from anywhere. The constituency for contributors and operators are activist communities. These communities traditionally have very limited resources. The low cost and ease of use of this software and the power of the central premise is reflected by the exponential growth of the network from one website in 1999 to 114 websites in over 40 countries spread across the global north and south. Moreover, the original software has been modified and transformed into multiple versions. This was accomplished with far fewer resources than would be available at a typical educational institution.

A Public Scholarship Infrastructure Project could initially consist of two phases. Phase one would be the construction of a website "shell" that would have all the basic functionality and organizational components of the website built in. A flagship or prototype website would then be constructed on that shell. Organizational, content, and esthetic issues would be worked out on the prototype or "beta" website. As part of that process, a core technical support team would be assembled and guides and FAQ pages would be incorporated into a support

website. Again, this follows the IMC model and would include technical support listservs. This would comprise the seeds of a potential network. Once this website was operational and had gone through debugging "Phase Two" would begin.

Phase Two would be the propagation of the Public Scholarship website to other institutions. This would begin by using established disciplinary and interpersonal networks to spread the idea behind the project and to invite visitors to the website. Workshops and presentations would be organized and held as various conventions. "Road trips" could also be organized to visit different universities to introduce the concept of a Public Scholarship Infrastructure Project.

## Conclusion

The journal you are reading now exists in large part because of the efforts of Michael McGee. He envisioned the potential of the internet not only as a novel way to disseminate information, but as a phenomenon that would change the way we communicate. The internet has the potential to form bridges between the fragments of our existences. It is not an end all, be all, utopia nor is it the dystopian killer-app of hegemony. ACJ welcomes all scholars and is accessible to all users. It is part of an infrastructure of public scholarship, an overlapping point for sphericules both within academe and without. Situating our research within the context of an accessible forum has the potential to throw open the doors of the marketplace of our ideas to the multiple publics beyond our limited spheres. Bridging sphericules and collating the fragments of existence are a beginning, building the infrastructure to actualize this concept is what endeavors like ACJ and (potentially) the Public Scholarship Project are all about.

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## Other Resources

"Mind the Gap" sound file from: <http://www.angelfire.com/sc/loadreg/images/MindTheG.rm>

