

saying very little about the impact of these organizations in channeling resources to identity groups through “dense information and resource networks” (p. 213). In view of Olzak’s many contributions to resource mobilization research, this is a surprising turn, and it ignores the possibility that ethnic groups with a limited commitment to human rights might profit from INGO connections. Ethnic mobilization may not be “inherently destructive” (p. 219), but whether it has a broadly “democratizing, inclusionary” impact (p. 233) is open to debate and further study.

There should be little debate, however, over the value of *The Global Dynamics of Racial and Ethnic Mobilization* to scholars studying ethnic and identity-based conflict, social movements, and collective action. Because the analysis is complex—multiple models, data sets, and time periods all yielding slightly different results—the narrative thread of the work can be difficult to follow. However, the author’s intellectual range, highlighted in a superb literature review in Chapter 2, and the exceptional rigor of her work set a very high standard for future research. Ethnic conflict, as she notes, is a dynamic process, rendered difficult to understand not just because of limitations of method and evidence but also because of its protean nature. This study offers an important synthesis and sorting out of research to date and a persuasive agenda for future research.

Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines. By Mark Poster. Durham, NC: Duke

University Press, 2006. 393p. \$79.95 Cloth, \$22.95 paper.
DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707071393

— Jeffrey A. Hart, *Indiana University*

In this book, Mark Poster attempts to provide a philosophical framework for understanding the significance of the rise of computers, the Internet, and the other digital technologies. His argument is that the diffusion of these new technologies results in “complex couplings of humans and machines” (p. 9) that call into question some of the central ideas of our time. The discussion starts with postcolonial theory and then moves on to recent theories of empire, citizenship, identity, ethics, psychoanalysis, intellectual property rights, everyday life, and consumer culture. It is an ambitious work and difficult to read in passages, but the effort is worth it.

What, according to Poster, is wrong with postcolonial theory? It “presumes a proximate relation of colonizer and colonized that obscures the transculture of new media” (p. 31). This “transculture” produces “cultural objects (words, texts, sounds, and images) [that] are progressively removed from territorial space into physical realms of electrons, sound waves, and light pulses that are less palpable to the human senses and less subject to control by established institutions, especially the nation-state and the cor-

poration” (p. 35). As a result, “[i]ndividuals no longer form identities exclusively through local practices” (p. 36). Poster provides examples in India and the Indian diaspora, where Indian employees of call centers have adopted American accents and names and the Internet is used by diasporic Indians to maintain their identities and ties with one another across great distances.

In the Introduction, the author tells a story about a child who imagined that telephone operators who worked the “information please” switchboards actually had the answers to important questions. In Chapter 1, he explains how an image of Bert of Sesame Street fame came to be found on a political poster in Bangladesh extolling the virtues of Osama bin Laden. The point of these two interesting stories is to highlight the potential of digital technology for promoting both enlightenment and confusion.

Chapter 5 deals with identity in the digital age by focusing on a new form of criminal activity, identity theft. Poster argues that the concept of identity evolved from a notion first of consciousness (in the writings of John Locke) and then of personality (notably in the work of Eric Erikson) to the contemporary notion, embodied in laws about identity theft, that information about individuals stored remotely on computers constitutes an identity that can be stolen. According to Poster, “What’s stolen is not one’s consciousness, but one’s self as it is embedded in (increasingly digital) databases” (p. 92). The argument is that humans and machines are merging, that cyberspace is eroding the boundaries between public and private (p. 93), and that “we might search for new configurations of selfhood that keep open spaces of resistance” (p. 115).

In Chapter 7, Poster posits that the Internet forces its users to reexamine their preexisting ethical frameworks: “Networked, digitized information media cut across territorial boundaries of cultural groups. They juxtapose differences in a homogeneous medium. They bring together individuals with common interests but divergent nationalities and traditions. . . . They disrupt the narcissism of the familiar, the identifications with the same” (pp. 159–60). As a result, conventional or traditional notions of ethics are disrupted, and Poster is hopeful that a new less parochial ethics will emerge.

Chapter 8 reviews Freud’s ideas on psychoanalysis and argues that these ideas have to be updated in light of the new “bodies” that are coming into existence with the more intense human–machine interactions of the digital age—not just the Cyborgs featured in movies like *Terminator* and the books of Donna Haraway, but also the ordinary humans who cruise the Internet, carry cell phones, talk endlessly into BlueTooth headsets, and shop in bar-coded supermarkets. According to Poster, the body is now more plastic and less culturally constituted than it was (p. 162). Parents no longer maintain as much control over how children use and think about their bodies (pp. 171–75). Children also have their identities shaped by “stereos,

televisions, telephones, game consoles, and networked computers” (p. 175). This does not replace the influence of parents, and does not eradicate the Oedipus complex; it just makes the complex more complex (p. 180).

Chapter 9 deals with the issue of intellectual property rights, especially those connected with recorded music and films, and the difficulty of defending those rights when digital audio and video content is stored on networked computers. Poster takes a strong stand in favor of everyone’s rights to share cultural material digitally and in opposition to the efforts of the recording and film industries and their allies to protect existing revenue streams by proposing new laws to prevent file sharing. He belittles the arguments of the recording and film industries that intellectual property laws need to be enforced in order to create an incentive for creative and innovative activity. He claims that these industries are just protecting their own income streams and their control over artifacts created by others. He suggests instead that we “must invent an entirely new copyright law that rewards cultural creation but also fosters new forms of use or consumption and does not inhibit the development of new forms of digital cultural exchange” (p. 209).

Chapter 11 focuses on the theories of Michel de Certeau about the complexity and importance of consumption in postmodernity. Poster argues here that markets for noncultural commodities are or should be different from markets for cultural artifacts. In the former, the distinction between producers and consumers remains stable, whereas in the digital age, the distinction between producers and consumers of cultural goods is eroding: “In blogs, massively multiple online games, and peer-to-peer file-sharing programs, consumers are transformed into users, creating content as they download it” (p. 249). Better examples would be the networked collaboration that produces encyclopedia entries to Wikipedia, amateur videos on YouTube, or remixes of digitized audio tracks made available on Websites by performers. The point is that cultural markets should be regulated in such a way as to protect the sharing that is essential to innovation.

There is a brief and somewhat pessimistic concluding chapter that contrasts the liberating potential of digital technologies with the potential for greater central control (governmental or corporate) that may result from the erosion of the private–public divide. This argument is similar to that contained in Lawrence Lessig’s book, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (1999). I was surprised that this chapter did not return to the earlier themes of human–machine coupling, but I suppose that theme is implicit in the argument about the liberating potential of digital technology.

To summarize, this is a far-ranging and complicated book on a very important subject (the social impact of digital technology) by a major critical political philosopher. It breaks new ground in a number of areas and

provides some excellent criticisms of a variety of approaches that are likely to lead (or already have led) to conceptual dead ends. It is not easy reading and requires a certain amount of patience to get through passages that are filled with philosophical jargon that you may be excused for promptly forgetting. Nevertheless, Poster has written a book with a lot of interesting ideas that I am certain will be read with profit by the growing community of scholars trying to get a handle on the politics of cyberspace.

Peaceful Resistance. Advancing Human Rights and Democratic Freedoms.

By Robert M. Press. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2006. 227p. \$99.50.

The New Transnational Activism.

By Sidney Tarrow. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 258p. \$55 cloth, \$19.99 paper.

DOI: 10.1017/S153759270707140X

— Hans Peter Schmitz, *Syracuse University*

Two new books argue that recent claims asserting the power of transnational activism have overstated the influence of those external forces. Robert Press uses the case of Kenya to show that a domestic *culture of resistance*, not donor pressure or transnational activism, set the nation on a path toward democratization during the late 1980s and 1990s. Sidney Tarrow takes a more subtle approach by reminding us how exceedingly difficult it is to create and maintain transnational coalitions for social change in the first place. Whereas Press pits domestic against international factors, Tarrow incorporates both, theorizing a set of transnational processes to elaborate the opportunities and challenges of organizing for social and political change across borders.

Press combines an agency-centered social movement framework with an empirically rich case study of Kenya’s modern political development. The book advances its core arguments chronologically and views political change in Kenya primarily as the result of an expansion of individual and organizational activism (Chapters 3 and 4) and mass public protests and resistance (Chapters 5 and 6). The evidence for his core claims is based on roughly 70 interviews, archival work, and secondary literature. The study does not systematically evaluate competing international and domestic accounts of regime change. Instead, Press is content with describing in detail the domestic mobilization against the former Moi regime. The reader becomes familiar with the specific actions taken by domestic activists, but learns little about the comparative influence of external and internal forces, let alone the interactions between them in supporting or undermining regime change. This stands in stark contrast to the actions of the very “domestic” activists who framed their grievances in a universal human rights language (just as their predecessors during the 1950s and