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The Path of Cyberlaw

Lawrence Lessig

If you're not a cyberspace maven, but mill around a bit among those who talk about this cyberspace stuff—if you surf, as it is said, the information superhighway—there are two questions that you might ask about how this new space will get regulated.

The first question goes roughly like this: Should this new space, cyberspace, be regulated by analogy to the regulation of other space, not quite cyber, or should we give up analogy and start anew? In Bruce Ackerman's terms, should we muddle into this new space as ordinary observers, just applying our old ways of thinking, or should we enter this world as scientific policymakers, armed with a comprehensive view, structuring the environment of this world to fit with this comprehensive view?

The second question follows the first: Is cyberspace really anything new? Is there really a form of life here that we haven't known before, or is cyberspace just an electronic version of ordinary space, where the electronics might add something, but not really very much?

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2. This schema is set out in BRUCE A. ACKERMAN. PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE CONSTITUTION 10–15 (1977), as the product of two dimensions of opposition. The first dimension ranges between an ordinary versus scientific perspective on legal discourse and the second between an observer versus policymaking perspective. In the former, the ordinary perspective believes "legal language cannot be understood unless its roots in the ordinary talk of non-lawyers are constantly kept in mind" while the scientific believes that "the distinctive constituents of legal discourse [are] a set of technical concepts whose meanings are set in relation to one another by clear definitions without continuing reliance upon the way similar-sounding concepts are deployed in nonlegal talk." Id. at 10–11. By contrast, in the latter approach the observer believes "the test of a sound legal rule is the extent to which it vindicates the practices and expectations embedded in, and generated by, dominant social institutions" while the policymaker believes that the legal system contains "a relatively small number of general principles describing the abstract ideals which the legal system is understood to further." Id. at 11–12. The two dimensions together make four possible approaches—the ordinary observer, the ordinary policymaker, the scientific observer, and the scientific policymaker. Ackerman's focus in Private Property is on the two extreme ideal types of this matrix, the ordinary observer and the scientific policymaker. But as I suggest here, what is interesting about cyberspace regulation is the progression that it suggests through these four possibilities before one gets to the option of choosing between Ackerman's two types. One might, that is, need (epistemically) to pass through the ordinary observer stage to build a world within which scientific policymaking is possible. Or so I suggest here.

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These two questions are interesting, I suggest, not just for what they will
tell us about the regulation of cyberspace. They are significant too for what
they will suggest about the regulation of ordinary space. For they will suggest
what we must know, or where we must be, before we can regulate in ordinary
space with a comprehensive view.

Consider the first question first: Will we regulate by analogy, or by
something else? It should take just a second to see the strangeness in such a
question. For just how could cyberspace be regulated except by analogy? Just
what is it—cyberspace—apart from what we can describe by analogy? This is
not a space that we know, in the sense of a space that we have inhabited.
Indeed, in one sense, it is just a pattern of electrons skimming a net of
computers, a construct that describes a location where a collection of activity
occurs.\footnote{Its contours are actually far more complex. For an introduction to various conceptions of
cyberspace, see Michael Benedikt, \textit{Introduction to CYBERSPACE: FIRST STEPS} 1, 1–3 (Michael Benedikt ed.,
1991).} But described like this, the space could not be understood, or at least
it could not be understood by us. It is understood by us only when we put
things into it, when we carry into it our own language, when we colonize it,
when we domesticate it. It is no accident that we speak of \textit{e-mail}, or that we
describe postings on “electronic \textit{bulletin boards},” or that we wonder about the
dynamics of real-time discussions in “\textit{CB-chat}” areas. We have no choice but
to take control of this space at first with our ordinary terms, if indeed we are
to understand it. And it is through a practice of analogy that this occupation
occurs.

The same point focuses the second question as well—whether there is
really anything new here. For if we will understand this new realm at first by
importing the old, then one way to understand the “new” is just that which
does not fit old ways of speaking. The new will be that which we have to
construct to describe—the gap between our old language and new experiences;
the place where the ordinary observer’s language gives out. We will discover
what is new by applying, and failing to apply well, what is ordinary or old to
this new space.

These two points suggest something important about how we should
expect the regulation of cyberspace to proceed. For if the new in this new
space is created as we use up the old, if we do not start with a world to
regulate, but must build it, then what the system of cyberspace regulation will
need is a way to pace any process of regulation—a way to let the experience
catch up with the technology, a way to give the ordinary language a chance to
evolve, and a way to encourage new languages where the old gives out.

This is the practice of the common law. But my plea here for the common
law has little to do with common love for the common law: It is not because
the common law best reflects some truth about the nature of cyberspace, or
that the common law best reflects the customs of inhabitants of cyberspace,
or that the common law most efficiently orders the behavior of individuals in
cyberspace. What is special about the common law here is its constructive
function. What recommends it is the process that it offers, with its partial
answers, to repeated if slightly varied questions, in a range of contexts with a
world of different talent and ideals. If, as Levi said, the common law is
democratic, it is democratic not because many people get to vote together on
what the law should mean, but because many people get to say what the
common law should mean, each after the other, in a temporally spaced
dialogue of cases and jurisdictions. Unlike other lawmaking, what defines the
process of the common law is small change, upon which much large change
gets built; small understandings with which new understandings get made.
What counsels it here is the way this process will function to create in an as
yet uninhabited, unconstructed, world.

Thus in a sense what recommends the common law to cyberspace is not
its efficiency, but its inefficiency. But to praise inefficiency, or better, a way
to slow the regulation of cyberspace down, is not to say that cyberspace will
need no regulation. Nor is it to say that we cannot yet see what the new here
will be. In large part (I think) we can see what will be most important—what
will be best—in this new space. What will be best ties directly to the questions
addressed by this Symposium—associational and speech interests. To say that
we need time to catch up is simply to note the extraordinary gap between what
these associational interests are, or will be, and the world’s present
understanding of what exactly is at stake. Put another way, if we had to decide
today, say, just what the First Amendment should mean in cyberspace, my
sense is that we would get it fundamentally wrong.

What is this gap? Let me say something about what these associational
interests will be, and something about the dark ages within which we now live.
What is new, or to be consistent with myself, what will be new in this
cyberspace stuff is not so much the new markets that this space will permit.
They will be important, but they will not be importantly different from the
markets we now know. What will be new are the communities that this space
will allow, and the constructive (in the sense of constructivist) possibilities that

(William W. Story ed., 1852) (discussing notion of common law as truth).
(discussing view of common law as custom).
theory of common law); E. Donald Elliott, The Evolutionary Tradition in Jurisprudence, 85 COLUM. L
REV. 38, 63 (1985) (comparing evolutionary theories of law, including efficiency theory).
8. Eugene Volokh’s account is an excellent prediction. See Eugene Volokh, Cheap Speech and What
these communities will bring. People meet, and talk, and live in cyberspace in ways not possible in real space. They build and define themselves in cyberspace in ways not possible in real space. And before they get cut apart by regulation, we should know something about their form, and more about their potential.

We know enough to say a little about what these new forms of association are. They divide into three classes. The first we could call association in public. Here participants add to a common conversation, but with no real knowledge about who will read what they write. The best examples of these are postings to public bulletin boards. Usenet newsgroups are the most common on the net, where some 4000 different subjects are available for conversation, and participants either add a new message within a topic or append a comment to comments previously made. While subjects are to be self-limiting, there is no formal mechanism for punishing those who violate subjects. Crossing subject borders may open one up to community sanction—flamings for violating rules of the Net—but there are no Net police who make sure that the proper words fit in the proper place.

What results from this association is a dialogue of sorts, but one very different, I suggest, from dialogues that we now know. Like a town meeting, this is a dialogue contributed to by a wide range of people. But unlike a town meeting, because each response is appended to what went before, there is a relatively effective constraint to ensure that responses are responsive. Put another way, there is less return from being nonresponsive than in the drama of a town meeting. Moreover, because these dialogues go on over time and with relative anonymity, there is time for reflection and contribution from a wider range of participants than any single meeting would allow. Here is a place where discussion produces something, if indeed there is anything to produce.

A second form of association is more private. Call it an association in private. It functions like this: People link through the Net and chat (in real time) with others of their choosing (whether one or many) about a topic (or set of topics) of their choosing. What distinguishes this kind of association from the association in public is that this exchange is among known parties, and it lasts only so long as people are in the room. What is the same is that conversations are in texts, proceeding responsively.

Because the conversations here are (usually) in real time, the identity of the conversants is more significant. But identity is not fixed. Depending upon the service the participant gets to select whether he or she will be a she or he.

what he or she does, and so on. The chat room allows individuals a kind of
individual plasticity—like a bar where you select your person before entering
the room—and this plasticity allows individuals a kind of association unknown
in real life. Here the ugly can speak seductively, or the shy can speak—period.

A third form of association mixes something of the last two, adding
collective plasticity to individual plasticity. This we could call an *association
in construction*. Like associations in public, these associations extend over
time; but like the association in private, at any one time you know (again, as
much as one can know) with whom you are associating, or more simply,
playing. In this form, participants enter a virtual room, the structure and
contents of which are subject to the community’s control. The typical form is
something called a MUD, or MOO,\(^\text{11}\) where people not only speak, but they
act, or more precisely, emote; where they not only engage in conversation, but
also move around, where they touch, they assault, they construct. Players build
the world within which they will then live, and these constructions survive
over time, for others to play with or to change. This is a world where
individuals not only are individually plastic, but a world where the world itself
becomes plastic.

None of these forms of association is fundamentally new. (Again, how
could they be?) Each has links with older analogs. The association in public
is a kind of electronic town meeting; the association in private is a form of
private club; the association in construction is a form of game or role playing
made concrete in a virtual realm—Dworkin’s chain novel, for the common
man.\(^\text{12}\) But however significant the similarities, we should see enough to
know their potential to be something quite different. How different, how
significant, we cannot yet quite see. We stand in relation to them as Alexander
Graham Bell stood in relation to the telephone. Just as he, however visionary,
could not have understood the idea of a “long-distance relationship,”’ so too we
will not yet understand the significance of these associations in cyberspace.\(^\text{13}\)
To understand them will require living them, in a world where these
associations are real.

Thus there are these communities, nascent today, of possibly great
potential tomorrow. Yet there is also an extraordinary blindness to this
potential. The blindness comes in two forms, one from the techies who give
us the machines upon which cyberspace gets built; and the other from the

\(^\text{11}\) “MUD” stands for multiuser dungeon. Rheingold, *supra* note 10, at 145. A “MOO” is a MUD.

\(^\text{12}\) Dworkin’s chain novel lives in *RONALD DWORKIN, LAW’S EMPIRE* 228–32 (1986).

\(^\text{13}\) “When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, he envisioned sending music over the
wires. ‘No one in their right mind, he thought, would tolerate something as intrusive as unannounced phone
calls.’” Michael Antonoff et al., *The Complete Survival Guide to the Information Super Highway*, 244
*POPULAR SCI.*, May 1994, at 97, 100.
regulators, who have their own special blindness to exactly what their regulation would take away.

First the techies: The same technology that will make possible this experiment in humanity can also, if allowed, destroy the very essence of what now defines individuality. I report here a conversation with the computer system administrator at a major university concerning information available to users about what other users at the university are doing on the computer system. As one can imagine, 7000 students and faculty members, plugged into the Net as they have been for a while, have begun to discover something of the potential that this world promises; they have begun to practice some of the forms of association I have just described. Most of this interaction is done through a UNIX-based machine.14 UNIX offers users (ordinary users—I am not speaking of hackers) an extremely powerful ability to monitor just what others are doing. At any time, any user can type the command “w” at his or her (mainly his15) console, and the system will report what every other user of the system is doing at just that moment. On this listing, conveniently displayed for all to see, is an indication of, for example, with whom others are e-mailing, or with whom they are “chatting,” or, more amazingly, what newsgroups they are reading. Hit the “w” command, and the system will report to you that user 123C is reading alt.politics.radical-left, or alt.sex.foot.fetish. And once you discover what 123C is reading, you can then use the “finger” function to discover who 123C is in real life, and then, using a phone book function, find out what 123C does, where 123C lives, and even when his or her birthday is.

If one can do this once, one can do it repeatedly. So that one could write a simple UNIX routine to scan the system every five minutes, and collect a profile of just what everyone is reading, to whom everyone is talking, and what everyone is thinking.16

14. "UNIX" refers to the operating system of the machine, like DOS refers to the operating system of a primitive IBM PC, or Windows to the operating system of the more recent (and futile) efforts of Microsoft to mimic the Apple Macintosh. Cf. Andrew S. Rappaport & Shmuel Halovi, The Computerless Computer Company, HARV. BUS. REV., July-Aug. 1991, at 69, 71 (chronicling Apple/Microsoft competition).

15. Peter H. Lewis, Exploring New Soapboxes for Political Animals, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 10, 1995, at C6 (asserting most Internet users are male).

16. Imagine you wanted to watch what user 123C was doing. The commands you would need are as follows. First, you would build a file called, for example, “check.” The file would have the following lines in it:

```bash
date >> look.list
wgrep 123C >> look.list
```

Each of these lines is a UNIX command. The first line executes a command that produces the date, and then puts it in the file “look.list.” The second line executes the “w” command and then pipes the result through a filter (a function called “grep”) that will extract all information related to 123C, and append it to the file “look.list.” Finally, with a command called “crontab,” you can set the “check” file to be invoked at anytime during the hour. Say you wanted to execute the command at the hour, and 15, 30, and 45 minutes past the hour. You would need the following entries in a crontab file:

```bash
00 * * * * check
15 * * * * check
```
I report this here—among lawyers, among people who for example have read *NAACP v. Alabama*—because I trust this should be quite striking. Striking since no doubt very few of the users on the system actually realize that what they read, or with whom they speak, can so easily be monitored. And striking because the potential for abuse here, especially for vulnerable groups, is so great. Perhaps more surprising, however, was that the administrator with whom I spoke just couldn’t understand the problem. I was, he said, the first person who had ever questioned the fact that this information was available to anyone and everyone. And the first person he had ever spoken to who even raised the possibility that there may be privacy issues at stake here.

The “techies” understand the potential of these forms of association, but it is as if they imagine associations of just techies—extremely smart, inquisitive, a bit counterculture, but deep down not such a bad lot. They have known cyberspace longer than we have, but they imagine cyberspace populated by people other than us. The systems they have given us have extraordinary potential, but they were not designed to protect individuals against this extraordinary potential for others to abuse. The invasion of the “w” command is just one example of a more general problem—the same technology that makes cyberspace possible also makes it extremely easy to monitor an increasingly large scope of individuals’ lives.

The same technology, of course, can also help restore the privacy otherwise stolen. Two techniques in particular—in essence the same technique—allow users some ability to repurchase their privacy. One is the technique of anonymity, which enables individuals to control what about themselves is known by those with whom they interact—control, for example, whether others know a user’s name or association or, more generally, any feature of that individual. The other is the technique of encryption, with which users are able, in effect, to speak a language that only intended recipients can understand. Both techniques are the same, for both are simply ways that the

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30 *** check
45 *** check

So programmed, at 0, 15, 30, and 45 minutes after the hour, the program check would be run, and would search on the activity of 123C and pipe the results to the file look.list.

I am grateful to Larry Gryziak for outlining the routine for me. I include it here on the principle that it should exist only if most know about it, and in the hope that if most know about it (and others like it) it won’t exist.

17. 357 U.S. 449 (1958) (striking down statute requiring disclosure of membership lists as violative of Due Process Clause of Fourteenth Amendment and its protection of right to privacy of association). Of course the activity of the university in disclosing such information is not proscribed by *NAACP*. My claim is just that the interests that motivate *NAACP* should carry over to the university context.


19. I don’t mean to suggest that the function of the “w” command is necessarily problematic. In a world where people are not using machines for personal use, the command is legitimately useful. The problems begin once the machines enter aspects of life in which privacy is critical.
user can control what about him or her is knowable by others on the system, whether it be the user's identity, or the meaning of the words spoken. Both techniques give users the ability to recreate something of the privacy that the technology would otherwise have taken away.

The techniques of anonymity and cryptography themselves, however, have given rise to an extraordinary debate among legaloids. For both are getting to be far too good. Begin with anonymity. Given the range of associations that I have just surveyed (i.e., newsgroups, chat groups, and MUDs), we can see many good reasons why someone would want to remain anonymous or pseudonymous. One wants to contribute to a political discussion without suffering the cost of unpopular views; one wants to find information without revealing that one needs that information; one wants to assume a role in a certain discussion group to explore an alternative identity. All of these are relatively harmless (to society) uses of anonymity.

Not all anonymity, however, is so benign. Perfect anonymity makes perfect crime possible. The ability to appear invisibly on a network and slander, or harass or assault, certainly will increase the incidence of those on the network who slander, or harass or assault. Thus those who police worry that there may be real reason to prevent or regulate this technologically granted anonymity—to license it, or register it, to control how much about oneself one may not say.20

The same problem is raised by cryptography. As I have described it, cryptography is the ability not so much to hide who you are, but to hide what you say, by encoding it in a way that no one except intended readers can understand.21 With public key encryption, it becomes extremely simple to make one's words truly private.22 Then only with the proper key could someone unlock these thoughts.

The value of some encryption is the same as the value of some anonymity; indeed, it may be more pressing: a lawyer speaking to her client; two lovers on a public network; a purchaser sending credit card information over the Net. But the costs of encryption are also the same as the costs of anonymity: For just as there are perfectly good reasons why someone would want to hide her

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21. For an extraordinarily complete account of this debate, see Froomkin, supra note 20.

22. With public key encryption, messages require two keys to be decrypted, one public key, and one private key. With the public key, a user can encrypt a message that then can be read only by the holder of the private key. See EDWARD A. CAVAZOS & GAVINO MORIN, CYBERSPACE AND THE LAW 30 (1994); BENJAMIN WRIGHT, THE LAW OF ELECTRONIC COMMERCE 17 (1991). So, for example, a hitman could advertise his willingness to commit some crime, and publish the ad with his public key. Then, someone could accept the offer, encrypting the acceptance with the public key, and be assured that only the hitman could read the acceptance. A separate problem, however, is whether the offeree can tell if the offeror is who he says he is.
or his words from unwanted eyes, there are perfectly evil reasons why someone would want to do so. Again, encryption makes possible criminal activity (a conspiracy) without any possibility of the government tracking it down.

One should not exaggerate the government's or society's loss here. No doubt it has always been possible for people to find places where their words can be understood only by the intended recipient. An encrypted conversation is just the 1990's version of a walk in the park, or a chat on the subway. But even unexaggerated, the government's fear here is real: With perfect encryption or perfect anonymity, the return to crime certainly does increase. And this increase certainly does justify the government's interest in finding ways to regulate both.23

23. To date, the government's policy with respect to encryption has been to assure the success of its own encryption technology—the Clipper Chip—which provides encryption for voice communication while providing a back door with which the government can listen to the conversations it believes it must listen to. Clipper has excited an extraordinary reaction in the cybercommunity, the vast majority of it passionately devoted to stopping Clipper. NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL ET AL., RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTICIPANTS IN NETWORKED COMMUNITIES 25 (Dorothy E. Denning & Herbert S. Lin eds., 1994); see Froomkin, supra note 20, at 798 & n.371; see also CAZAZOS & MORIN, supra note 22, at 31 (noting that Clipper Chip is controversial). The aim, the cybercommunity worries, of the government's policy is to assure that the only encryption technology out there is the government's, which, the cybercommunity worries again, means that the government will be in the position to listen to whatever conversations it chooses.

Subject to two important qualifications, I confess that I don't quite get the fear. If every telephone in America had a Clipper Chip on it as of tomorrow, there can be no doubt that net privacy in America would increase. Froomkin, supra note 20, at 742-44. For today, the vast majority of conversations are not encrypted, which means that today, anyone (whether government or not) can tap into and understand most of what is being said. If Clipper were on every phone, then the only people who could listen to telephone conversations would be those who have, or could break, the Clipper code. No doubt that since the government controls the Clipper code, this would tilt the balance among eavesdroppers clearly in the government's favor. But so what? While it would be easier for the government to eavesdrop than for my neighbor or competitor or enemy, it still would be extremely hard for the government to eavesdrop illegally. More precisely, it still would be much more difficult than it is today for the government to eavesdrop illegallY, which would, one should think, decrease the amount of illegal governmental spying, while nearly eliminating illegal private spying.

What the opponents of Clipper really oppose is a government monopoly on encryption technology—both because of a (legitimate) fear that the technology of Clipper is not very good, and because of the concern that only the government holds the keys. This latter concern again seems exaggerated. Even if every phone had Clipper, one could still encrypt the conversations that the Clipper Chip would then encrypt again—double encryption, that is. And while the government might someday want to ban this double encryption, this possibility seems remote, not only because democrats abhor a government monopoly, but also because it just seems so technically infeasible. See id. at 795, 808. In any case, that seems to be a battle that should be fought on its own terms, not fought in the context of government support for a technology that will on balance increase individual privacy. That, it seems to me, is just what Clipper now is.

As I said at the start, however, there is good reason to be concerned about this particular encryption regime. As Michael Froomkin well outlines, id. at 764-93, the present regime provides no real protection against the improper release of escrowed keys. As he explains, there is, first, no structural assurance that the Executive could not evade the limitations on access to the keys, and second, no guarantee that a second copy of all keys is not being held by, for example, the National Security Agency. Assurance against the second concern is not easy to give. Assurance against the first would exist if, for example, one-half of each key were given to the judicial branch to hold, to be released only upon the issuance of a warrant. Froomkin argues this would violate principles of separation of powers, id. at 783-85, because it would be imposing nonjudicial duties on judges—a violation of the Hayburn's principle. This is, I believe, a mistake. Requiring that the judicial branch hold the keys is distinct from requiring judges to hold the keys. All sorts of duties
With both, a constitutional balance will have to be drawn between these increasingly important interests in privacy, and the competing interest in collective security. Already the extremes are well staked out, with some arguing that no regulation of either should be permitted, and others arguing that only with regulation should either be allowed. 24

My point, however, is not about what the balance should be. 25 My point is about timing—when the balance should be drawn. There are many who now see the extraordinary expressive and associational potential that cyberspace offers. Most, however, do not. If the many prove correct, the most will eventually see the same—as the space becomes more common, as their children become transformed by it, as life takes root within it. But this seeing will take time. It will require that individuals gain an experience with this new space that gives them the sense of what this new space is. Only when this experience is common should we expect to be in a position to understand its significance. When the technology, when the experience, when the life in cyberspace presses us, only then should we expect law to understand enough to resolve these questions rightly.

To meet this point about timing, I have suggested that we follow the meandering development of the common law. Let me end by returning to this theme in the specific context of the First Amendment, to ask how, just now, First Amendment doctrine should respond.

My suggestion is that it shouldn’t. Or at least it shouldn’t just now. Or at least it should do everything it can to stand back from deciding these conflicts until the nature of these conflicts is well mapped, well constructed, well understood. A prudent Court—Supreme Court, that is—would find ways to let these questions simmer for a while, to let the transition into this new space advance, before venturing too boldly into its regulation. Not that no court should decide these issues—for again, there is a great value and an important need for lower courts to wrestle with these questions, if only to create a body of legal material from which others may draw in considering these questions.


25. Of course, I have my own view. I can see nothing wrong with requiring that all systems attach encrypted fingerprints on all transactions, such that it is always possible, with a key, to trace a transaction back to a particular individual, though impossible, without the key, to decrypt the fingerprint to identify that person.
But no court should purport to decide these questions finally or even firmly. Here especially should be the beginning of a dialogue, which perhaps more than others is meant to construct its subject more than reflect it. And since it is easier to correct lower court mistakes, or second-guess lower court intuitions, it is at this lower level that the dialogue should occur. Constitutional law is fundamentally concerned with who should decide what constitutional questions when. My suggestion here is that we rely for the moment on lower court judges, to give the law the material with which to understand this new realm.

The point should be especially salient at Alex Bickel’s Yale. It may already be latent in the Court’s most recent venture close to the boundaries of cyberspace and the First Amendment, *Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. v. FCC.* In my view the most important passage in *Turner* comes right at the beginning, where Justice Kennedy writes:

> The role of cable television in the Nation’s communications system has undergone dramatic change over the past 45 years. Given the pace of technological advancement and the increasing convergence between cable and other electronic media, the cable industry today stands at the center of an ongoing telecommunications revolution with still undefined potential to affect the way we communicate and develop our intellectual resources.

Exactly. And what should follow from this “undefined potential” is lots of room for democratic experimentation. Experimentation, because stable doctrine is only built upon the ground of long-standing experimentation. What any review of the history of First Amendment law should suggest is the contingency of present First Amendment doctrine. For most of its history, the amendment had nothing of the bite that it now has. For most of its history, it was little more than an aspiration, rarely latched onto by the courts to limit the democratic (or not so democratic) branches. Somehow this legal culture got beyond that contingency, and fortunate for us that it did. Though we live in a post-realist, post-New Deal age, there is little impatience in First Amendment law with formalisms that other domains of constitutional law could not account, and little hesitancy in First

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28. *Id.* at 2451.
Amendment law to interfere with democrats in the name of the values these formalisms manifest.

We should take note of this anomaly, stand back from it in a bit of post-realist awe, and then be very careful to understand the conditions under which this judicial power has been made possible, and careful about how much of a burden we can expect this amendment to bear. Already we can see the structure slowly being drawn into question. Hate speech and pornography regulations are forcing into the foreground the presuppositions that had cemented the formal structures of First Amendment law in the first place. These challenges may succeed in dislodging the dominant mode of analysis. But until they do, we should move slowly in applying the First Amendment elsewhere.

Cyberspace is elsewhere, and before carving the First Amendment into its silicon, we should give the culture a chance to understand it. By “we,” again, I mean the Court. A prudent Court would let these issues evolve, long into this revolution, until the nature of the beast became a bit more defined. If there is sanction to intervene, then it is simply to assure that the revolution continue, not to assure that every step conforms with the First Amendment as now understood.

Turner suggests there may be such room, though I am not as optimistic as Cass Sunstein that the room left is indeed very broad. What the Court should do when turning Turner on cyberspace proper is mark out the deference even more clearly. While the nature of the domain is so fundamentally contested, no clear command from the Court should be heard. Instead, while


32. To say that we should move slowly makes it sound as if there is an unregulated world, one that is slowly getting regulated. This is of course false. Cyberspace is regulated everywhere, and its current faddish appeal will no doubt ensure more legislative regulation. Why not, then, the regulation of the First Amendment? Or, more precisely, why not apply the anti-regulatory judicial power of the First Amendment to limit current efforts at legislative regulation? One answer would point to the unruliness of judicial rules and the unintended consequences of regulation, especially in a world not well understood. See, e.g., Eugene Bardach & Robert A. Kagan, Going by the Book: The Problem of Regulatory Unreasonableness 58-92 (1982). My argument, however, is more about timing and the relative plasticity of Supreme Court precedent. The scope of judicial protection cannot help but be affected by the common understanding of the nature of cyberspace. A lack of common understanding will skew this influence. And because the Court is relatively slow to revise its precedent, this skewing effect may be a significant block in cyberspace’s development. The following comparison may make the point: If the Supreme Court cannot yet understand the social meaning of the modern American airport, cf. International Soc’y for Krishna Consciousness, Inc. v. Lee, 112 S. Ct. 2701 (1992) (holding that airports are nonpublic fora), is there reason to expect that it will understand the social meaning of cyberspace?


the nature of this domain is contested, the Court should find ways to let the contest resolve itself. There will be time enough for principle when the dealing, associational or not, is done.