UNPICKING THE SEMES: POWER, RESISTANCE, AND THE INTERNET

by

Elaine Tay

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University

2002
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to Kathy Trees, my supervisor, whose advice, intellectual support, and confidence in me made the completion of this dissertation possible.

For their friendship, intellectual discussions, and much needed light relief, my appreciation goes to Denise Woods, Carolyn Abbs, Debbie Rodan, and all the postgraduate women in the SIN (Shes Informally Natter) group. Also, many thanks to Lyn Dale, Cheryl Miller, Jenny Edmonds, and Vicki Wilkinson for their help in administrative, technical, and other matters.

I also wish to thank the following for their contributions along the way: Richard Tanter, David Bouchier, John McCarthy, Ariel Heryanto, Charles Coppel, Hugh Webb, Marianne Hester, Nicola Piper, Anne-Marie Medcalf, and Carolyn Brewer. In particular, my thanks to Brett Nielsen, who played a major role in the early stages of conceptualising and writing the dissertation.

I especially wish to thank my family for their whole-hearted support, patience, and faith: Momo Tay, Tay Woo Seng, Terry Tay Chong Leng, and, last but not least, Anthony Pracy.
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ABSTRACT

The Internet was a catalyst for refiguring the previous models of media relationships. For many, the Internet is a medium that liberates individuals from the centralised and asymmetrical power structures of traditional mass media and other social institutions in particular, the boundaries set by the nation and the state. For other people, the Internet increases the capacity for surveillance and control. This dissertation argues for a fluid conception of the operations of power and resistance on the Internet that takes into account the various discourses which play a part in determining agency and subjectivity. It examines and balances the narratives of liberation and oppression against each other: for, just as the developments in Internet technology contribute to changes in discourse, so too existing or prior discursive limits and relations of power affect Internet culture and technology.

In the process of analysing the interplay of different discourses on the Internet, this dissertation takes into account transnational and national cultural flows and the insights that conceptual work on globalisation, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism can provide. The case studies are concerned with change and centre on the use of the Internet to effect this change; they include: the Singaporean Internet, a ‘thread’ about Asian culture and Australia, the representation of oppression and the formation of Chinese diasporic collectivities, and anti-capitalist networks. Through these case studies, the dissertation examines the degree to which the nation-state can regulate and affect the discourses at play on the Internet as well as the agency of participants in countering and maintaining these discourses. This dissertation also analyses activists’ use of the Internet to form transnational networks. It discusses the limitations of their work including problems with representation.
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Elaine Tay