

Jared Bielby:

Global Digital Citizenship

In ancient Greece, the concept of the citizen was intricately connected with the city-state, a relationship implicit in the etymology of the term itself. It was from the ancient Greek idea of economy that the first concept of democracy arose, where citizenship began in the organization of one's home and worked outward through levels of engagement with *other* towards the public life, the democratic principle being intricately connected with the face-to-face encounter. Because of the structure of such economy, Plato capped a viable democracy at a maximum of 4000 citizens; any more than 4000 citizens, Plato deemed, could not share in true democratic engagement because they could not truly engage in a face-to-face encounter. Later developments in citizenship arose to incorporate the notion of citizen as encompassing the rights and duties of the nation-state. Further still, with the dawn of the Internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), a new complexly connected globe entered a common citizenship, a citizenship that is only now beginning to be understood.

Faced with the imminent onset of a post nation-state world, global public life is beset with numerous considerations of citizenship under the certainty of an Information and Communication Technology driven reality. Not only has citizenship long since exceeded Plato's ideal 4000, but because of a nearly complete digitally-based economy (the term economy used here in the traditional Greek sense), digital citizenship has also negated, or nearly negated, the face-to-face encounter necessary to democracy and to citizenship. If the ability to participate in a face-to-face encounter — the key to Plato's determination of a viable democratic citizenship — is no longer a foundation to democracy and to citizenship, whether in terms of the nation-state or the digital-state, one must delineate anew the terms of citizenship, and of democracy itself.

Where perhaps ideal democracies were once marked by limiters of thousands, dependant on the face-to-face-encounter, a modern digital citizenship looks to delimiters of viable connections, swapping the face-to-face for Facebook, the 4000 for the commonly understood "connections"-principal of the supposed 150 maximum that marks authentic friendships in a digital social realm of six degrees of separation. In one of the below chapters of this special edition of IRIE, João Antonio de Moraes and Eloísa Benvenuto de Andrade ask the very pointed question of who it is we are referring to when we refer to the digital citizen.

The concept of global citizenship is as old as civilization, and in classical terms is referred to as Cosmopolitanism, a philosophy that transcends or redefines the Greek idea of citizenship signifying duty and rights as bound to the city-state. Cosmopolitanism posits that all belong to one society. A very deterministic conclusion, and a philosophy very accommodating of the exploration of a digital citizenship, one must question whether such a society is even optional. Can one choose to opt out of a digital citizenship? The question is explored herein by Andrew Iliadis who looks at the right to nonparticipation for global digital citizenship.

Diogenes the Cynic uttered the first cosmopolitan refrain when queried as to where he was from; "I am a citizen of the world," he replied. Diogenes stands out as the founder of cosmopolitanism, claiming an existential duty to his own being. His claim is none other than the assertion that he is both a stranger and himself wherever he is, not beholden to the constraints placed on him by location at any particular time and place in the world. One could posit, especially as it pertains to the existential foundations of digital citizenship, that one is always a stranger when it comes to citizenship in the world.

Both Plato and Diogenes represent the western tradition, where even the terminology of global citizenship is couched in Greek ideals and philosophy. It seems somewhat ironic that considerations of world citizenship are yet monopolized by western tradition and language. One of the foundational tenets to global digital citizenship is the exploration of how ICTs impact the nature of power structures pertaining to the life cycle of information control, where information becomes the star player in the global-wide confluence of tradition and technology. A critical concern of global digital citizenship is the nature of the ebb and flow of knowledge access, exemplifying a phenomenon whereby all information, however initially equally accessible to all citizens of the world sharing a common globe, eventually becomes monopolized, restricted, censored, or controlled. One of the most overlooked barriers to equitable global citizenship is the more than ever prevalent monopoly of English speaking (and writing) access and control over, and to, knowledge — especially in terms of academic literature

where the expected medium of communication is proficient English. Little consideration has gone into the significance of this assumed bias in terms of the barriers and limitations placed on non-English speaking academics and writers. Perhaps one of the most poignant expositions of the discrepancy is the herein contained treatment of the matter by Laurie M. Bridges and Kelly McElroy in their profoundly necessary essay, *Access to Information is (Not) a Universal Right in Higher Education*.

Bruno Macedo Nathansohn, writing in Portuguese, weighs in on the political arena of Global Digital Citizenship in his chapter, *A busca pela cidadania global no ciberespaço*, where he compares and contrasts the driving intentions of the warring extremist factions dividing the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, arguing the case that a common desire exists for seeking citizenship in a digitally connected globalization, a commonality that unites both sides in citizenship. Nathansohn's chapter should help us remember that the more information that becomes available to the citizens of the world, the more efficient societies are at making collectively beneficial democratic choices, and that whenever information can assist citizens of democratic states to make informed choices and politically engage in the decisions that affect them, that information is best utilized when made openly available through transparent means.

And yet even in the above determination, the bias of western tradition emanates, inhibiting an equitable global voice whereby a Euro-centric presumption that more information is better for society and individual citizens prefaces digital ethics, as it prefaces the very western-born idea of *information literacies*, an idea founded in democratic and humanist principles whose tenets have again been presumed and globally layered as one size fits all (cultures), foundations to citizenship that are not necessarily shared at an intercultural level. If democracy is forced onto the world as necessitating a global digital citizenship, then a paradox ensues, or at least hypocrisy does, whereby the very freedoms that democracy would allow for now become negated by their insistence. Global digital citizenship works towards untangling such complexities.

Situated in a historical framework of unmatched information flow and the power structures at play therein, and timely manifested in a moment of unguarded information where accountability to digital *being* not only becomes a choice but a necessity, global digital citizenship manifests itself as the prevailing authority in a culture of appropriated knowledge. The Fifth Estate, a neologism designating citizen journalism, is telling in terms of the dissolution of information, whereby every citizen becomes a journalist. What happens to information when every citizen is a journalist and all information is available en masse to be disseminated? Breilla Zanon touches on such questions in her below article, *Transparency for Institutions, Privacy for Individuals*, where she teases out the implications of the cypherpunk philosophy and the WikiLeaks phenomenon.

In *Trolling the Global Citizen: The Deconstructive Ethics of the Digital Subject*, Ben Staunton takes the reader deeper into the murky waters of online psychology, exploring the intricate pathways of digital being and outlining the sometimes subtle nuances of the constructions of online authenticity. Employing the philosophy of Levinas as a foundation to his essay, Staunton explicates the above noted contrast between traditional citizenship as necessitating a face-to-face engagement and digital citizenship, a new form of being that will perhaps end up relying on alternative forms of authentication, especially against inauthentic digital encounters as exemplified by the Internet troll. Indeed, seeking the foundations to digital citizenship becomes complex, especially as traditionally understood through terms of the rights and duties of citizenship. In light of the masses of information available, of exponential information saturation, where does one even begin to try to understand their responsibilities to a digital world? Marina Pantoja Boechat and Débora de Carvalho Pereira attempt to explore the practical elements of this information saturation in terms of big data and its implications towards Global Digital Citizenship in their *Reverse mediations: digital methods of social research for digital citizenship*. Their proposal of reverse mediations outlines a methodology for deciphering the above noted murky waters of online psychology.

While definitions of Global Digital Citizenship remain in flux, and applications of digital citizenship seem, to some, unlikely, the importance of exploring the age-old phenomenon of cosmopolitanism through digital terms is critical. In a world where both localization and globalization have usurped traditional assumptions of nation-states and nationalism, and patriotism holds little sway over a digitally informed citizenry, a new accountability is called for. Who is the digital citizen? What is his or her role? Perhaps the below collection of monumentally critical pieces can help inform the subject.