

The Internet as a Venue for Scholarly Interaction with the Public

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Roundtable #89: **Making it Real: Intellectual Exchange, Virtual Space, and the Public Sphere**

- My focus for this roundtable on historians interacting with the public is on the role of the internet. Although film, television and other news media reach mass audiences, they tend to be more ephemeral and provide less opportunity for exchange--unless they are archived on the internet. Even reviews of research in scholarly journals have much greater potential for reaching a broader audience when they are published on the internet.
- I think scholars should make much more explicit and intentional use of the internet in order to foster public knowledge of their research results. I see three main ways this can happen:
 1. We can **publish our research** (and our teaching, and even our students' research) on the internet in appropriate formats. (These include: "chunking," with clear source and publication information, enlivened by graphics, with intuitive navigation, and being easily printable.)
See example web sites:
 - "German Propaganda Archive" <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/>
by Randall Bytwerk, Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences, Calvin College
 - "Olaudah Equiano, or, Gustavus Vassa, the African" <http://www.brycchancarey.com/equiano/>
Brycchan Carey, Lecturer in English Literature, Kingston University, UK
 2. We can **assess**, on the internet, **materials already available** there, by:
 - a) participating in on-line forums (esp. those that are archived, like H-German);
 - b) utilizing customer review features on sites like amazon.com and imdb.com, and
 - c) having annotated links on our own research pages.
This latter point is especially crucial, since search engines--the primary means most people use to access information on the internet--use links to rank pages. We need to transcend and "re-rank" search results, so that over time search engines will "come into line."
 3. We can **attend to public inquiries** about research we have published on the internet.
This would include:
 - a) monitoring which of our pages are accessed and how they were found (what search terms, links from which pages).
 - A student project about "Eva Braun" is one of my department's most frequent "entry pages" (top result in google image search): see "final student projects" at <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/33d/index.html>, and August 2004 user statistics at: http://www.history.ucsb.edu/stats/usage_200408.html#TOPENTRY.
 - b) responding to e-mail either personally or by making the requested information available.
 - Example: the origin of Martin Niemöller's quotation "First they came for the Communists..."
E-mail inquiries prompted me to create the page, which has evolved into an on-line research project: <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/niem.htm>
 - Contrast that with: Did the Nazis use the body fat of murdered Jews to make soap?
(subject of a GSA talk I commented on yesterday--even otherwise reliable institutional websites have misinformation). Published at: www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/dachau/legends