The Invention of a Public Machine for Revolutionary Emotion: the Boston Committee of Correspondence

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> "[A] new and, till lately unheard of, mode of opposition had been devised, said to be the invention of the fertile brain of one of our party agents, called a committee of correspondence. This is the foulest, subtlest and most venomous serpent ever issued from the eggs of sedition." (Daniel Leonard, writing as *Massachusettensis*, *News-Letter*, Jan 2, 1775).[1]

> "[I]n the mean time the Convention [of Pennsylvania] established the government of Committees in conformity with other Provinces. Thus the public Machine was at length organized & put in motion." (Joseph Reed narrative, from 1778-1779 about events in 1774: Thomson, 273)[2]

How are we to understand the relationship between humans and technology? In the eighteenth century Benjamin Franklin proposed that humans should be understood not as *Homo sapiens* literally, "man the knower," but as *Homo faber*, "the tool-making animal."[3] Franklin's modest proposal, and his use of the word "animal", delivers a gentle rebuke to the human pride in knowing. But with this suggestion, Franklin also speaks up for his own life as an artisan-printer, an experimenter, and one who loved to make things by tinkering. Kevin Kelly offers another, etymologically grounded way of understanding "technology" as a productive human activity: "'Technē' was the ancient Greek term for the act of giving form to matter, for making a pot out of clay, or a table out of wood. It is what we might call craft, although it meant more than simple handiwork. It was craftwork with a spirit of invention, more like art." This interpretation of technology suggests that it

is neither non-human nor anti-human; instead technology, in the words of Kevin Kelly, "reveals our humanness, *it is the way we are human*"(1) [4]. Kelly's definition suggests that the phrase "human technology" may be just as redundant as the phrase "human culture." To grasp the tight linkage between humans and technology throughout history, we need an appropriately inclusive and historically flexible concept of technology, one that is not restricted to the metal or plastic devices of the contemporary era, but also comprehends the techniques and tools of earlier epochs. Philosophers and anthropologists often link the evolution of humans—and our competitive advantage over other animals—to the use of various technologies: from speech and writing to the numberless tools made possible by the erect posture and opposable thumbs of *homo sapiens*. These technologies constrain the human practices they enable, shape the body and mind for which they become prostheses. Through habitual use, specific technologies may even merge with their human user, as when one who types becomes a "typist." Yet we never seem to stop trying to define us against it, our humanness against our technology, whether technology is characterized as a bright new toy, a bastard creation, or an unsettling familiar. We make technology alien to ourselves when we blame it for the bureaucratic rationalism it is often configured to serve (think of endlessly branching telephone menus), or when we confer upon technology a merely instrumental role, for example by understanding writing, print, or the post as functionally equivalent alternatives to face-to-face communication. Notwithstanding those ads for computers intended to allay the anxiety of consumers, technology is never "just a tool."[5] Perhaps the most grandiose way we separate technology from ourselves is through the self-conscious celebration of technology: as when technology is aligned with art, as the highest expressions of the designs and desires

of their human creators/inventors, and memorialized in museums of ever increasing grandeur. But what if technology is so mixed into what humans do or have ever done—through speech and writing, in making love or giving birth, in shaping tools or communication protocols—that it is futile to try to think the human without technology. Then attempts to separate human and technology are little more than reaction formations to the half conscious intuition that *we are technohumans.* Perhaps technology should not be understood as the opposite of human, or as something we 'do' or 'use'; rather it, and we, should be understood as joined in one enterprise, the long history of technohumans.[6] The essay that follows explores one episode in that history.

* * *

In this essay I will explore how, during the build up to the American Revolution, a new communications technology and the expression of public sentiments became constitutively co-implicated. To develop that claim, we must be alert to three biases in the popular historiography of the American Revolution. First, we have habitually *intellectualized the revolution*. Influential intellectual histories of the American Revolution separate ideas (like "liberty," "equality," and "popular sovereignty") from the affect that were so evidently fused with them during the revolution. The comparative neglect of emotion in relation to thought in the historiography of the American Revolution may result from the wish to build a nation upon the legal bedrock of supposedly stable ideas.[7] The notoriously obscure and changeable emotions that may have accompanied those ideas are then allowed to assume a secondary position in the

event. But John Adams' oft quoted 1818 comment on the nature of the American Revolution implicitly strikes a balance between idea and emotion: "the Revolution was affected before the American War commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people… *This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments and affections of the people was the real American Revolution.*" (*Niles' Weekly Register*, March 7, 1818; original italics)" Increasingly scholars of the long 18th century have come to understand the period less as an age of reason than one of sentiment. The period invented the vogue for what it called the "sentimental," popularized through the "sentimental fiction" of Richardson, Rousseau, Sterne, and Goethe and the sentiment-arousing style of preachers like George Whitfield and John Wesley. Even American revolutionary moments consciously modeled upon Cato's austere stoicism fuse affect and idea in one deliciously portable sentiment: Nathan Hale's "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country" and Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death."

Revolutions don't just depend upon the private emotions of individuals, they are fueled by emotions that are collectively felt and publicly expressed. This leads to the second bias that has permeated the popular narrative of how the revolution happened: *we have individualized an event that was essentially collective and distributed*. In Adams' account the radical change happens most crucially in the (note the plural) "mind*s* and heart*s* of *the people*." An example of this bias can be discerned in Garry Wills' widely read book on the revolution, *Inventing America: Jefferson's* Declaration of Independence. Wills' title, 'inventing America,' might seem to require attention to the vast set of social and historical and communication processes that most would agree are part of "inventing America." But, instead, Wills' subtitle bypasses that larger set of topics for something

much more restricted, *The Declaration of Independence*, the document many have read as marking the moment of America's achieving an autonomous existence. Wills not only offers a wide-ranging intellectual history of the *Declaration* of 1776, he also reads it under the sign of the author function as belonging most crucially to the one human who composed its first draft. Above all, the generative text under scrutiny is to be read as (note the possessive) *Jefferson's Declaration of Independence.* Wills follows this author-centered reading even though Jefferson later characterized his composition in these terms: "Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind." Why do Wills and most other contemporary readers of the *Declaration* bypass Jefferson's avowed intention to write for a general, collective "American mind?" Wills' book on "inventing America" is the inheritor of the discursive process by which complex collaborative acts are explained through reference to the agency, the opinions, the style, and the subjectivity of a much more restricted group of "founders": Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, etc. This individualization of the American Revolution began soon after the event—with the first histories, with newspaper interviews with surviving founders, and with huge 19th century projects to edit the letters and documents of the supposed authors of the revolution. It continues with the face of Presidents chiseled into mountains.[8]

While Wills' book offers a rich and wide ranging interpretation of the Declaration of 1776, it cannot account for the most crucial word used throughout the document: I mean the word "we" as in, "*we* hold these truths to be self-evident," or, as it is used in the document's crucial final paragraph, "*We*, the representatives of the united states of

America…solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states…" The American Revolution was dependent upon forging a "we" out of many individual "I"s. Where does that "we" come from? It does not come from Thomas Jefferson, nor is it created by the men assembled in Philadelphia as members of the Continental Congress. To explain how this happens we must take account of the technologies of enlightenment era communications: the voluntary association (from church and club to the learned society), the post system (which allowed regular public communication at a distance), and the printed periodical press (newspaper, journal, magazine) (Warner, "Communicating Liberty", ELH, 2005). What Kant dubbed "the project of enlightenment" was dependent upon, and in many ways was co-extensive with, the development of these new techniques and technologies of communication. This suggests the third bias associated with the historiography of the American Revolution, one that I have addressed in more general terms in the opening paragraph of this essay: we have *humanized the revolution by putting the human before technology*. In this way we downplay the intimate interplay of the human and technology at the origins of the American Revolution.

Idea before emotion, the individual before the collective, the human before technology: if we are to understand the American Revolution, we need to challenge and complicate this linked chain of hierarchical oppositions.[9] There are two ways in which the revolutionary situation in Massachusetts upsets these oppositions. As Massachusetts enters a revolutionary dynamic, the secondary term (emotion, collectivity, and technology) takes on new salience. The exigencies of resisting the ministry's effort to raise revenues in America pushed the Whigs of British America toward forging ever

tighter coupling of these oppositions. Thus, the sentiments that achieve the greatest currency were those that successfully fuse idea and emotion. Similarly, the most effective politics unfolds through a gathering of individuals into corporate bodies, like the town meeting or the committees of correspondence. Both these revolutionary developments—acting with passion and acting as one body—depend upon a consequential coupling of the third of our oppositions, the human and technology. In 1772 Boston, the technology of the committee served as the enabling catalyst of revolutionary sentiment. Rather than isolating individuals, the technology of committee writing makes possible the characteristic collective political performatives of the American Revolution, starting with *The Votes and Proceedings of the Town of Boston* of 1772 and climaxing with *The Declaration* of 1776. This technology enabled individuals to merge into a collectivity and feel as a collective body of citizens. Rather than merely channeling or representing emotion, technology became the condition of the possibility of feelings felt.

The revolutionary effect of the committees of correspondence seems to have been understood by the Whigs and Tories who lived through the American Revolution, and later commented on its course, from Whigs like John Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Charles Thomson and Joseph Reed to Tories like Peter Oliver, Thomas Hutchinson, and Daniel Leonard.[10] In the sentences quoted in the exergue to this essay, we see that the Tory polemicist Daniel Leonard of Massachusetts excoriates the committee as "the foulest, subtlest and most venomous serpent ever issued from the eggs of sedition" (Massachusettensis, Letter 3, 34). While this condemnation of the committees of correspondence may appear to be a flourish of polemical hyperbole, it neatly captures the generative power of the committees. It also expresses a technophobic response of a

conservative thinker to what he calls a "new and, till lately unheard of" "invention." While the Whig activist Joseph Reed of Pennsylvania approves rather than deplores the establishment of a "government of committees," his locomotive metaphor—"thus the public Machine was at length organized & put in motion"—offers a mechanical rather than organic metaphor for understanding the transformative power of committee organization and communication. It also expresses the Enlightenment's distinctive admiration for the curious and well-wrought machine.[11] In this essay, I will show how the Whigs of Boston, through the founding of the committee of correspondence, developed a powerful and flexible technology for articulating opposition political sentiment and directing revolutionary measures.

When Whigs throughout the colonies read in their newspapers how the committee system developed by the towns of Massachusetts aroused and expanded political participation, they imitated the committee form, and adapted it to local conditions, in Williamsburg, Annapolis, Philadelphia, Charleston, New York, and many other cities, counties and towns of British America. Because these committees communicated with one another, a de facto network of committees emerged. After the imperial political crisis precipitated by Boston's destruction of the tea on December 16, 1773, and the "shock of electricity" provided by the Boston Post Bill, which closed Boston harbor on June 1, 1774, material support for Boston and planning for the Continental Congress was conducted by a distributed network of these committees of correspondence. [12] The First Continental Congress was understood by some as a meeting of the committees of the respective colonies, and the Congress's most consequential political act was the founding of an "Association" to promote the formation of local committees to enforce the

embargos on British goods in every town and county in British America. With the dissolution of British authority in 1774, the royal courts and colonial assemblies lost their legal underpinnings, and British America was ruled by "the government of committees." In a very real sense, American Whigs learned to speak a collective "we" by entering the technical infrastructure of the committee and learning to think and feel, to write and to act *as* a committee.

Emotion-enabling technology: the invention of the standing committees of correspondence

The comparative neglect of emotion in accounts of the American Revolution may result in part from the sheer difficulty of defining what emotion is. Because it attempts an ambitious synthesis of the many different ways emotion come into cultural practice, William Reddy's book, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (2001), suggests the several different ways feelings become important in the American Revolution. First, at least since the eighteenth century, emotions have been valued because they are often assumed to be one of the kernels of the self, a profound aspect of every individual's nature. The apparently involuntary character of many emotions has made them seem all the more "natural" and significant. However, in spite of emotion's proximity to the self, it is in fact notoriously difficult to define emotion. Reddy notes, for example, that in many different disciplines (psychology, anthropology, history), emotion is inseparable from its apparent opposite, cognition. Secondly, Reddy argues that it is the task of every culture to develop a regime of emotional regulation, one that its successful members must learn; in addition, each culture develops a repertoire of

acceptable, normative ways to express and feel emotion. The Whigs of British America developed new ways to enable and regulate the emotions associated with their opposition to the British imperial policy. Crucial here was a shift of strategy, from an early reliance upon mob action, to a reliance on voluntary association and highly structured public assembly. Third, the very existence of an emotion is complexly entangled with the verbal or gestural expression of emotions; expressing an emotion often clarifies, intensifies, and confirms what may otherwise remain quite obscure. Fourthly, by entering language and being communicated to others, emotions spread, are imitated, or are rejected. In moments of political crisis like a revolution, emotion is often said to spread like fire, or, to be conducted instantly as if by electricity. Individuals may experience emotion as starting in the individual and then becoming communal, but in fact, scholars like Adela Pinch have suggested that emotions may begin as communal, and then spread to individuals.[13] Finally, Reddy defines emotion as "loosely connected thought material" that has "goal relevant *valence*," (that is, it may be positive/negative, pleasurable/ unpleasurable) and "intensity," and thereby may be suffused with a large or a small amount of psychic energy. Reddy's odd definition of emotion by its apparent opposite (as "loosely connected thought material") should give us pause. Perhaps the whole effort to separate thought and emotion, though a conventional move in disciplines like psychology, anthropology and political theory, is finally quixotic. This confusion resonates with eighteenth-century terminology, where the word "sentiment" sometimes means thought, sometimes means "feeling", and, also indexes the fusion of both into a thought-feeling. In most ordinary human situations it is difficult to think of a thought devoid of emotion or an emotion not tethered to a thought. This insight is consonant with Lord Kames' 1762

definition of 'sentiment': "Every thought prompted by passion is termed a sentiment" (OED).

If, as Adams claims, a "radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments and affections of the people was the real American Revolution," what brought about this change? After all, the political claims of the Boston Whigs in 1772—that Parliament did not have the authority to tax the colonies; that ancient English liberties were being abridged, that free men faced the specter of slavery—were hardly new. These political arguments had been fully developed in the colonial pamphlets written during the Stamp Act crisis in 1765 and during opposition to the Townshend Duties in 1767-8. If British authority in America was held together, as John Adams suggests earlier in the same passage, by the historical momentum of familial affection (where the Monarch is understood to be a father, England a mother), and these ties were memorialized in the habitual acts of prayer that were embedded in divine service, then in order to understand what changed those "sentiments and affections," one would need to find another powerful practice that would allow for the expression of sentiments that were as emotionally resonant and as habitual as the prayer for the King and his ministers. Here is where the emergence of a new technology for articulating and sharing emotion becomes decisive. The invention of the committee of correspondence entailed the development of a distinct new communication interface for speech and writing, of new communication protocols, and of a distributed network of committees that extended across the towns of the province of Massachusetts. Communication by committee had the effect of inciting and enabling, shaping and regulating sentiments that lay at the center of the Whig resistance to British administration.

The importance of the invention of the committee of correspondence, as a technology of political mobilization, was recognized by John Adams toward the end of the American Revolution in 1780 in a letter that he wrote from England to his remote cousin Samuel Adams:

> You will see by the public papers that your committee of correspondence is making greater progress in the world and doing greater things in the political world than the electrical rod ever did in the physical; England and Ireland have adopted it, but, mean plagiaries as they are, they do not acknowledge who was the inventor of it. (John Adams to Samuel Adams, from London, 1780)

A few days later, in a letter to Thomas Digges, a delegate to the Continental Congress, John Adams gives still more explicit credit to Samuel Adams as the inventor of the committee form: "The Committee of Correspondence is purely an American Invention. It is an Invention of Mr. Sam. Adams, who first conceived the thought, and made the first motion in a Boston Town Meeting" (John Adams to Thomas Digges, 1780). By using the word "invention" to describe the standing committee of correspondence, John Adams acknowledges its role in American mobilization. By comparing the committee to Franklin's lightning rod, Adams confers upon it the central traits of an invention: appearing at one time, it is new; but, after its invention it is open to imitation by others. But John's conferral of credit upon Samuel Adams for this invention, by putting the inventor before the "invention," the human before technology, recuperates the alterity and unintended effects of technology by emphasizing the priority of the designing, intending human inventor. While most historians acknowledge Samuel Adams' role as the prime mover in the formation of the committee of correspondence, I'd also like to

foreground the serendipity of this first experiment with the political standing committee of correspondence. It was developed as an alternative to other means of public communication: the circular letter, the convention of the towns of Massachusetts, and the controlled disorder of the public riot.[14] John Adams downplays (and may not have understood) the collaborative emergence of the Boston committee of correspondence: an early form of the idea first came to Samuel Adams in response to Arthur Lee's account of the workings of the London Whig "Society for the Preservation of the Bill of Rights," of which Lee was an active member (Sept 27, 1771; Writings, II: 232). Dr. Thomas Young was Samuel Adams' active collaborator in founding the committee (Brown, 45), and James Warren of Plymouth seems to serve as a consultant in developing the idea.[15] Finally, committees were of course hardly "new": they were a well-established feature of provincial and town government; and even the idea of a network of committees had been used by Presbyterian ministers in the colonies of British America. (Richard Brown, 45; and Bridenbaugh, 203-204)

In *The Boston Gazette,* Samuel Adams published two anonymous essays first to promote and later to justify the Boston Whigs' recourse to a committee of correspondence. The first essay immediately preceded the founding of the committee, while the second defended the committee from Tory attacks. When Adams learned in the fall of 1772 of a new administrative initiative to control the courts of Massachusetts—by paying judges from customs duties instead of from the appropriations of the Massachusetts House of Representatives—he published an anonymous essay in *The Boston Gazette* that calls upon his fellow subjects to channel public indignation into a wide-ranging exchange of sentiments:

> The next step may be fatal to us. Let us then act like wise Men; calmly look around us and consider what is best to be done. Let us converse together upon this most interesting Subject and open our minds freely to each other. Let it be the topic of conversation in every social Club. Let every Town assemble. Let Associations & Combinations be everywhere set up to consult and recover our just Rights." *Valerius Poplicola*. [an early consul of Roman Republic] (*The Boston Gazette*, October 5, 1772; Cushing, 2:337])

Crucial here is Adams' call to calm the passion of the moment by slowing down and coming together. Only as a group will the voluntary associations of private citizens have the strength and confidence to enable a "calm," "wise," "open," and inclusive "conversation" about this political crisis. But how does one organize this diffuse "conversation," so that it amounts to more than mere talk? How can these private opinions and feelings be made to count in a public manner?

After the evident success of the Boston committee of correspondence, and to parry Governor Hutchinson's claims that this involved an "unwarrantable" and illegal use of town government (Hutchinson, 260, 266), Samuel Adams offered a retrospective rationale for the Town of Boston's institution of the standing committee of correspondence. Writing as "Candidus" in *The Boston Gazette* of April 12 1773, Adams reviews the urgent issues that led to the town meeting of November 2, 1772, where news of the crown payment of judges, appeared "so daring an insult upon a free people, that it was difficult to keep our resentment within proper bounds. Many were ready to call for immediate Vengeance, perhaps with more zeal than discretion." Adams' language here

counter-balances the inflammatory terms of honor ("insult," "resentment," "vengeance"), which so often led 18th century gentlemen to acts of violence, with the moderating codes of civil society, where sentiments are kept within "proper bounds" and are expressed with "discretion." After his review of governmental tyranny and the specter of popular vengeance, Adams presents a "regular assembly of the people" as a saving recourse in a time of political danger.

> Amidst the general anxiety the memorable meeting was called, with a design that the inhabitants might have the opportunity, of expressing their sense calmly and dispassionately; for it is from such a temper of mind, that we are to expect a rational, manly and successful opposition to the ruinous plans of an abandoned administration: And it is for this reason alone, that the petty tyrants of this country have always dreaded and continue still to dread, a regular assembly of the people. (*Writings,* III: 30-31)

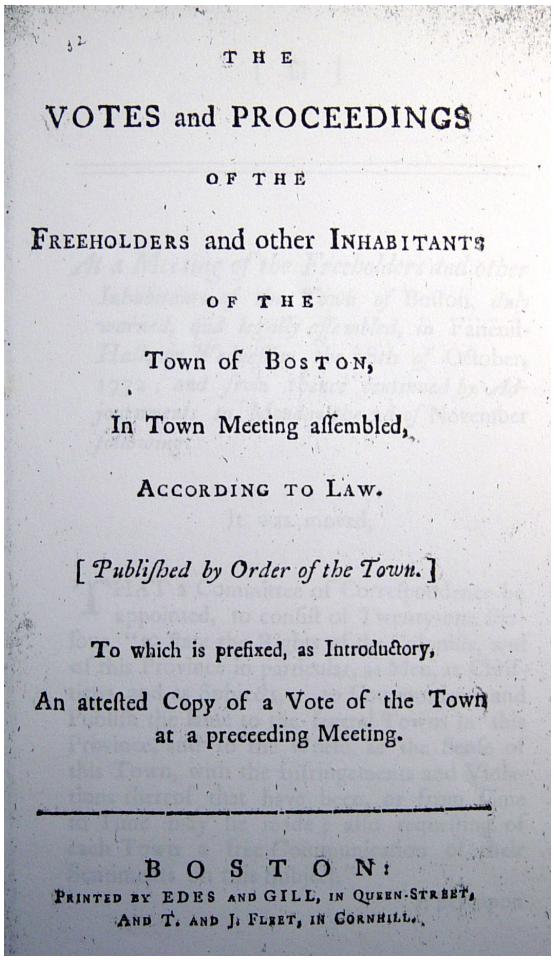
If "opportunity" here means "a time, condition, or set of circumstances favorable to a particular action or purpose" (OED), the purpose advanced by a "regular assembly of the people" is that of allowing the "inhabitants" of Boston a time and place for "expressing their sense calmly and dispassionately." What is remarkable here is Adams' self-conscious cultivation of a healthy, but also a politically effective, economy of sentiments. In Adams' own description of a talking cure, the people can best counter their own aimless feelings of "general anxiety" as well as the "ruinous plans of an abandoned administration" with "a temper of mind" that shuns violent resentment in favor of a "rational, manly and successful opposition." In place of the passionate gentleman's code of masculine honor Adams promotes a dispassionate consultation in a "regular assembly

of the people." But while Adams defends the Boston committee through an appeal to this "assembly of the people," he does not note the key innovation in Boston's strategy: they shift political action from the assembly into a committee and move their expression of sentiments from speech into writing. In this way, the town of Boston hopes to convene a "virtual" assembly of the towns of Massachusetts.[16]

The Committee as a Communications Technology for Distributed Politics

The committee of correspondence offers the context for a systematic articulation, focusing, and public sharing of sentiments. In October, 1772, Samuel Adams joined others in petitioning the selectmen of Boston for a meeting of that town so that the meeting could institute a standing committee of correspondence, with the charge of composing a pamphlet-letter to the other towns of Massachusetts. On November 2, 1772, the Boston Town meeting, boycotted by the Tories, appointed a committee composed of 21 prominent Whigs. At their first meeting on November 3, 1772, the committee appointed three sub-committees to compose the three parts of pamphlet-letter to the towns: the statement of rights (chair, Samuel Adams); the list of grievances (chair, Joseph Warren); the letter to the towns (chair, Benjamin Church). Over the next 17 days the committee repeatedly met to read drafts of each subsection and develop a draft of the 43-page pamphlet which was acceptable to the whole committee. On November 20, 1772 the letter-pamphlet was formally submitted for consideration at the town meeting, where it was read aloud twice, modified according to suggestions during the meeting, and formally adopted (in a unanimous vote). The pamphlet was published as *The Votes and Proceedings of the Town of Boston* by Benjamin Edes and Thomas Gill, the Whig

publishers of *The Boston Gazette*, as well as Thomas and John Fleet, publishers of *The Boston Evening Post*. Copies were sent to each of the 260 towns and districts of the Colony of Massachusetts, as well as to selected Whig leaders throughout the colony. Here is the title page of the pamphlet.



THE

VOTES and PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

FREEHOLDERS and other INHABITANTS

OF THE

Town of BOSTON,

In Town Meeting aſſembled,

ACCORDING TO LAW.

[*Publiſhed by Order of the Town.*]

To which is prefixed, as Introductory,

An atteſted Copy of a Vote of the Town at a preceeding Meeting.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY EDES AND GILL, IN QUEEN-STREET,

AND T. AND J. FLEET, IN CORNHILL.

To understand the implications of Boston's institutionalization of the standing committee of correspondence, it is useful to engage in strategic anachronism. The twentieth-century development of the computer has given us new concepts to understand Boston's innovative technology: they can be understood through the concepts of the *interface*, the *communication protocol*, and the *network*. My use of these terms in an eighteenth-century historical context will open me to various charges: that I am using anachronistic jargon; engaging in an over-loose expansion of terms that have a rigorous but restrictive sense in contemporary computing; and finally, developing an overly abstract formalization of specific Enlightenment era communication practices. Nonetheless, in this essay I join a large and expanding group of historians, critics, and communications theorists in making a retroactive application of concepts from

the networked computer to early epochs in the history of communication.[17] Here are some of the advantages of this analytical procedure. A retroactive application of computer concepts like interface, protocol, and network allows scholars to grasp the general traits of (techno)human communication across different historical epochs and very different media forms and practices. For example, by seeing the book, the typewriter, the film and the networked computer as different technologies for reading, writing, and watching, one can take account of the arbitrary conventions of each, and begin to interpret how each constrain and enable communication. Such a formal analysis allows us to grasp the crucial human dimension of each technology: that humans have to be trained and habituated to using them; but that once they do, humans internalize aspects of the interface into a bodily knowing. For example, by seeing the book, the typewriter, the film and the networked computer as different technologies for reading, writing, and watching, one can take account of the arbitrary conventions of each, and begin to interpret how each constrain and enable communication. Such a formal analysis allows us to grasp the crucial human dimension of each technology: that humans have to be trained and habituated to using them; but that once they do, humans internalize aspects of the interface of each. For example, by learning to touch type, the brain and body learns that the right index finger = “j”; “h”; “n”; “m”; “u”; “y”; “7”; “6”---but that the index finger “can not” touch other keys that it might be able to press. The typist who wanders from the “home row” loses the status of a competent techno-human ‘typist’ and descends instead to become an all-too-human hunt and peck non-typist. Because the

internalization of communication technologies are collective practices, there emerges what Lev Manovich has called a "cultural interface."[18] With the emergence of new media technologies, the interface conventions of earlier technologies can be extended into the forms and uses of new technology. In each case terminology instructs the users to carry the interface expectations from an old media to a new one: as in "the moving picture"; "the radio play"; "the TV show"; "the web page."[19]

Computer scientists developed the term "interface" to describe "a point of interaction or communication between a computer and any other entity" (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Computer culture has given a rich and diverse elaboration to this term because computer design makes the interface the crucial boundary, or zone of articulation and translation, whenever a computer needs to communicate with devices (such as printers, networks, monitors, machines) or human users. Between the computer, where algorithms are encoded and data stored within unintelligibly vast and fast flows of 0s and 1s, and the human, is the interface; the interface, as the surface of inscription and representation placed before the user, as screen and as control panel, is a source of information and an inscribing device. The interface—in the expanded cultural sense I'm using it—does not just consist in the "look and feel" of a book, a film, or a computer running software; it is also the placement of the body; the habitual actions and activities built into the interface; the inventive (and often unintended) uses to which users put a new technology; it is the range of communicative actions into which social humans take the technology. Because of the way an interface can becomes a zone of social possibility, an instrument for improving and augmenting human life, it stimulates utopian desires in its designers.[20]

Considered as a communications technology, the Boston committee functions as an interface, adheres to certain communication protocols, and (after its success) becomes the central hub of a network. As a communications interface, the Boston committee is composed of the minds and bodies of 21 members acting together. The official "user" of the interface is the Town of Boston whom the 21 members are selected to represent and if it fails in this representative function, it could be dissolved. The purpose of this communications device is to conduct two-way communication between the town of Boston and the other towns of Massachusetts. Certain features of the interface are crucial to its operation. The Boston committee is autonomous (it is a standing committee of the town that does not need permission from any other authority to hold its meetings; nor does it require periodic reauthorization); its conduct is secret (to protect itself from outside influence each member "does hold himself in honor, not to divulge or make known any part of the Conversation of this Committee at their Meetings to any person whatsoever." Brown, 62); the committee holds periodic meetings, customarily on each Tuesday evening, in the selectmen's chamber at Faneuil Hall; as noted above, the committee can function in a modular fashion by breaking itself into sub-committees for its central purpose of composing communications. The manuscript record of the committee is kept by its secretary Samuel Cooper. While Cooper does not record the content of the committee discussion (thereby preserving secrecy), he records the formal motions of the committee as well as making fine copies of the correspondence that the committee sends and receives. Periodically, the committee has recourse to one of several forms of written "output": the manuscript document (like the original manuscript of *The Votes*, which is read to the Boston town meeting), the printed pamphlet (like the copies of

The Votes that is sent to the towns), the manuscript letter (to the several towns), and the broadside (for distribution to all the towns of Massachusetts).

What, one may ask, is gained by describing the Boston committee of correspondence as a communications technology? Firstly, once put into use, the Whigs of Boston do not sustain an instrumental relationship with the committee form, for example by separating themselves as users from the interface.[21] Instead, for the purposes of communication, 21 Boston Whigs embed themselves in this interface and channel their speech and writing through it so all that all these communicating humans are subsumed into the committee. Once they are "in" the committee, members inevitably find that the committee of correspondence, like all other communication technologies, augments but also constrains communication. Anyone who has served on modern committees will recognize the built-in constraints on committee communication: the committee chair follows established procedures in guiding the committee's business (notifying members of meeting time and place, presenting an agenda, calling on all members who wish to be heard, etc.); the committee structure assumes the presumptive equality of its members by giving each a (formally) equal voice in its business; because even a single dissonant voice can paralyze its work, the committee interface habituates its members to show deference to the opinions of others. In all these ways, the committee could be understood as Joseph Reed did, as a "public machine" for producing consensus and unity. Here the committee aspires to the regularity, the elegant efficiency, and the power that the Enlightenment so admired about the machine. (Wills, chapter 7)

Ironically, once the committee begins operation, the separation of human user and technological apparatus that is embedded in the very concept of the "inter-face" begins to

become elided. At the beginning of a committee's operation, it may seem plausible to separate human users from the interface, the protocols, and the network they use, deploy, or link to. But after habitual use, aspects of the interface become internalized by the disciplined user so that the interface and its user blend; protocols cease to appear arbitrary or consciously utilized; the network of separate nodes congeals into a new unity. When humans become fused into their technology, the technology becomes invisible as a technology. It is useful to consider these new humans, these revolutionaries, the way the Tories and British did—as "committee men."[22] What results is most usefully considered as neither simply human, nor simply technology, but a techno-human hybrid.

We can observe the techno-human hybridity of the Boston committee by describing the protocols observed in setting their communications going. By protocols I mean the constraints voluntarily adopted by the Boston committee to facilitate felicitous two-way communication with the other towns of Massachusetts.[23] We can see these protocols at work in the third part of *The Votes and Proceedings*, the most innovative and operationally consequential section of the pamphlet, "the letter of correspondence to the other towns." This letter directly addresses the towns in an urgent and personal tone, and invites the other towns, either through their town meeting or through their own appointed committees of correspondence, to engage in a new species of multi-media public communication.

> The affair [of judicial salaries] being of public concernment, the town of Boston thought it necessary to consult with their Brethren throughout the province; and for this purpose appointed a committee, to communicate with our fellow sufferers, respecting this recent instance of oppression, …[In this document] this committee

> [has] briefly recapitulated the sense we have of our invaluable rights as men, as Christians, and as Subjects; and wherein we conceive those rights to have been violated, which we are desirous may be laid before your town, that the subject may be weighted as its importance requires, and the collected wisdom of the whole people, as far as possible, be obtained, on a deliberation of such great and lasting moment as to involve in it the fate of all our posterity. (*Votes*, 32-33)

While this passage utilizes some of the oppositional discourse of Anglo-American Whigs—it is addressed to "Brethren throughout the province"; it invokes "our invaluable rights"; and it indulges the pathos of endangered liberty—it is also cast in a strange new idiom we might call 'committee speak.' The speakers and writers of *The Votes and Proceedings* show they are embedded within the new committee interface by the communications protocols they observe. The committee speaks as a collective first person plural "we." In doing so, the committee strives to be representative: the ideas and feelings the committee members circulate represent those for whom they speak (the Town of Boston, whose meeting commissions and then has accepted the pamphlet in a formal vote). At the same time, they also aspire to be accepted as representative for those whom they address. In order to win over the largest possible number of their auditors and readers, the committee adopts a style that is simple and direct, and a tone that is sincere and earnest. Irony, double entendre, ornamental language, and obscure allusions are alien to the committee's writing. Finally, the committee shows deference to the opinions of those they address as presumptive equals.

These communication protocols are incipiently republican. The Tories quickly grasped the dangerous tendency of this communication technology. By submerging their

individual identities in the identity of the committee, by presuming the equality of all committee members, by striving to represent the people's sentiments, by speaking as "we," the committees of correspondence embodied an alternative to Britain's constitutional monarchy: the republicanism so despised by the Tories. Thus, after the news of the closing of the port of Boston (on June 1, 1774), and after the Philadelphia committee of correspondence joined other Pennsylvania county committees to organized a "convention" to elect delegates to the Continental Congress in 1774, the conservative Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, Joseph Galloway, writing as "Freeman," challenged the committees as "setting up anarchy above order---IT IS THE BEGINNING OF REPUBLICANISM" (Ryerson, 61). This warning proved quite correct.

The Performance of Emotional Liberty; or, Liberty in Distress

With the publication of their pamphlet-letter, the Boston Whigs invite the Whigs of Massachusetts toward a new kind of public sharing of sentiments. Expanding the range of permissible public sentiments seems crucial to the dynamism of the Enlightenment revolutions: in both the Boston pamphlet of 1772 and the Continental Congress's Declaration of 1776, a rhetorically satisfying reconciliation of affect and idea becomes a new pathway to happiness. In part, this resulted from lifting the monarchical protocols of political communication—like the deference integral to the genre of the petition—that framed the expression of sentiments. But the success of *The Votes and Proceedings* in changing the political dynamic in 1772 also results from the way it moved from the description to the performance of sentiments. Reddy suggests that the verbal expression of emotion, words like "I am angry with you," be called "emotives." Emotives have some

of the attributes of a performative as theorized by J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*: they *do* the emotion they describe, and modify the social context within which they are inserted. Like the "performatives" "I do" or "I declare war," the Boston committee's words—read aloud throughout most of the town meetings of Massachusetts—turn political theater into political action. In his London reprint of *The Votes and Proceedings*, Benjamin Franklin captured this transitive effect of the Boston Committee's pamphlet-letter by dubbing it the "Boston Declaration," because, as he explains in his Preface, this "piece" is "not the production of a private writer, but the unanimous *act* of a large American city lately printed in New-England" (my emphasis).[24] Most obviously, it is an "act" because the motion to accept the pamphlet receives a unanimous favorable vote within the town meeting, so *The Votes and Proceedings* becomes an official document of the town of Boston. It also achieves this status because, as the product of a committee, it submerges the opinion of private writers into corporate authorship which is also highly public: all twenty-one members of the committee are listed in the text, as well as the newspaper notices that describe the town meetings leading up to its formal adoption. Finally, the boldness of its statement of opinion gives it the edgy notoriety of an act that might in fact be seditious. In the previous years, a number of anonymous pamphlet and newspaper writers had courted the charge of sedition by vying to see who could develop the most fiery denunciation of the British Administration. But the Boston committee eschewed the veil of anonymity and instead stepped boldly forward to offer a public statement of their sentiments. In this way they modeled the frank exchange of sentiments that they hoped to extend.[25]

In order to gain access to this new species of emotional liberty, the other towns need to adopt the committee technology and cast their sentiments into a public communication with the Boston committee. To overcome any reticence about responding, the letter of the towns gives a particularly tendentious meaning to the silence of British Americans: "Great Pains has been taken to persuade the British Administration to think, that the good people of this province in general are quiet and undisturbed at the late measures; and that any uneasiness that appears, arises only from a few factious designing and disaffected men. This renders it the more necessary, that a sense of the people should be explicitly declared." (33) These two sentences inscribe the Boston letter to the towns into an ongoing communications war to define the "the sense" or sentiments of the people. Since the Governor and Ministry attribute any "uneasiness" or anxiety about late measures to a few "designing and disaffected men," the Boston Whigs developed a communications interface that allowed the people of the towns of Massachusetts "explicitly" to declare their sentiments.

How did the Boston committee arouse the other towns to action, and more specifically, how did they draw them into the sort of disciplined committee communication that they have modeled? First it is important how the Boston committee "speaks." Boston's invitation to respond is issued with these carefully chosen words:

> ---A free Communication of your Sentiments, to this Town, of our common Danger, is earnestly solicited and will be gratefully received.

Every word in the phrase, "a free communication of your sentiments," is suggestive: these communications are *free*, because, as I have noted above, they are not constrained by the protocols of the traditional petition, or by mediation through the town's elected

delegate to the provincial assembly. Following eighteenth century usage, "sentiments" here implies a mix of idea and feeling; they are important because they are *yours.* Finally, by circulating them freely among the towns of Massachusetts they are a *communication* that has the potential to become *communally* shared, thereby binding the disparate towns of Massachusetts into a larger common unity. But the open protocols of the Boston pamphlet are not sufficient to incite reciprocal communication. The ideological content of the pamphlet also proves importantly motivating. Ideas fuel the expenditures of energy necessary for communications among speakers and listeners, writers and readers. By articulating ideas with certain emotions—for example, tyranny is associated with anxiety, rage, and a community at risk; liberty is associated with calmness, happiness, and a community secure—the Boston pamphlet offers a starkly polarized account of emotional life in crisis. The Boston committee's promise that they will "gratefully" receive the "free communications" they have so "earnestly solicited" is not extended because *any* response will confirm the formal functioning of their new communications system. That pledge of gratitude is dependent upon a town's recognition of "*our* common danger," a shared anxiety for a shared object of love: liberty.

So the Boston committee's request for "a free communication of your sentiments" gets its full rhetorical force by the way it is mingled with the spectacle of liberty in distress. The dialectical movement of the passage, which follows the request that I have just analyzed, is designed to take the reader and auditor through an emotional roller coaster.

> ---A free Communication of your Sentiments, to this Town, of our common Danger, is earnestly solicited and will be gratefully received.

If you concur with us in Opinion, that our Rights are properly stated, and that the several Acts of Parliament, and Measures of Administration, pointed out by us, are subversive of these Rights, you will doubtless think it of the utmost Importance that we stand firm as one Man, to recover and support them; and to take such Measures, by directing our Representatives, or otherwise, as your Wisdom and Fortitude shall dictate, to rescue from impending Ruin our happy and glorious Constitution. [1]

But if it should be the general Voice of this Province, that the Rights, as we have stated them, do not belong to us; or, that the several Measures of Administration in the British Court, are no Violations of these Rights; or, that if they are thus violated or infringed, they are not worth contending for, or resolutely maintaining;---should this be the general Voice of the Province, we must be resigned to our wretched Fate; but shall forever lament the Extinction of that generous Ardor for Civil and Religious Liberty, which in the Face of every Danger, and even Death itself, induced our Fathers, to forsake the Bosom of their Native Country, and begin a Settlement on bare Creation. [2]

----But we trust this cannot be the Case: We are sure your Wisdom, your Regard for yourselves and the rising Generation, cannot suffer you to doze, or set supinely indifferent, on the brink of Destruction, while the Iron Hand of Oppression is daily tearing the choicest Fruit from the fair Tree of Liberty, planted by our worthy Predecessors, at the Expense of their Treasure, and

abundantly water'd with their Blood. [3]

Votes and Proceedings, 33-34. (The numbering is mine.)

This passage was printed as an excerpt in the Boston Gazette (November 23, 1772) and reprinted in many of the newspapers throughout the colony in the following weeks.[26] It tenders the central claim of the *Votes and Proceedings* which might be rendered this way: if "a free communication of your sentiments" allows us to achieve public consensus, then together we can become a powerful new agency for opposing British administration. To support this claim for the transformative effect of a publicly shared consensus, this elaborate rhetorical period goes through three movements, each corresponding to one sentence: the initial proposition, its reversal, and then a reversal of that reversal.

1: proposition: "If you concur with us in our opinion" (about rights, administration and the rest), then you will "doubtless" think it of the "utmost importance" that "we stand firm as one man."

2: reversal: "But if [you do not concur] …we must be resigned to our wretched fate;…" (i.e. enslaved to British power);

3: reversal reversed: "But we trust this cannot be the case: We are sure [you will agree]…[to defend] the fair tree of liberty."

At first glance the passage may offer a fairly simple proposition for the towns it addresses. Join us in "standing firm as one man" and together we will defend the "fair tree of liberty" from the "iron hand of oppression." However, if one reads the passage within the specific context of the Boston Whigs' address to the towns, where consensus must be consistent with the freedom of all the towns, if one attends to the rhetorical machinery that propels the passage forward, and if one takes account of the technical

infrastructure the Boston committee is trying to build, the passage appears more interestingly complex. To begin with, even the "we" that speaks for the Boston Whigs is open to question. Since the "we" of the pamphlet is generated by the writing which also presupposes it, a certain wishful fictionality clings to this "we." This passage of *The Votes* postulates, in a proleptic fashion, the moment *after* the *Votes* are read/heard by the towns, and *after* the towns have responded to Boston confirming their shared recognition of "our common danger." The passage's vacillation, between a securing of and the loss of a collective "we" (that would include both Boston and the other towns), may reflect the suspense the Boston Whigs felt as to how or whether the other towns of Massachusetts would respond to their communication.

What are we to make of this passage's three part movement from "standing firm as one man" to the disunion of a failed consensus to a postulated gathering under the "fair tree of liberty?" "To stand firm" in defense of liberty was broadly associated by British and American Whigs with Cato's brave defense of republican liberties against Caesar's ultimately successful imperial ambitions.[27] However, the Boston Whigs had no interest in serving as Cato-like solitary martyrs to lost liberty. Instead, through this act of communication, they propose to the other towns that we "stand firm as one man." These words use the trope of personification, "the representation of a thing or abstraction as a person (OED)," to make plausible that the diverse 260 towns may, by sharing ideas and feelings, become "one man." While such a union may be usefully threatening to their political adversaries, it would also compromise the liberties to which they lay claim. So this personification is also embedded in a simile: the towns are not to become one man, but to "stand firm *as* one man." Only through a loose, incomplete, or provisional union

could the freeholders and inhabitants of the many towns of Massachusetts be able to engage in the "free communication" to which this passage calls them. However a failure to achieve a concurrence of opinion, and the partial union that would entail, would leave their liberty vulnerable to the "measures of administration." So in the second movement of this period, the cowardly retreat of the castrated sons, who fail to live up to the heroic deeds of "our Fathers," is expressed through their vacillating opinions (opinions that, it is worth noting, are at variance with the central arguments of the Boston committee): "if…the Rights …do not belong to us; or…[there has been] no violations of these rights; or, … they are not worth contending for…" But, the reminder of a common debt to "*our* Fathers," who bravely faced "Danger" and "Death itself" in beginning a "Settlement on bare Creation," prepares for the counter-movement, which brings the rhetorical period to a culmination in one loaded, pathetic image. What is finally at stake in this struggle is "the fair Tree of Liberty, planted by our worthy Predecessors, at the Expense of their Treasure, and abundantly water'd with their Blood." The threat to Liberty, here figured as a tree, is rendered as a rape—a theft and a ravishment—by the "Iron Hand of Oppression" which is "daily tearing the choicest fruit from the fair tree." This "hand of oppression" figures the British ministry as "iron", that is "firm , inflexible; stubborn, obstinate, unyielding" (OED), in their/its determination to engage in a machine-like imperial system that would be destructive of American liberty. Here arboreal liberty is put at risk by imperial machinations. Why does "the tree of liberty" (instead of that firm "one man") become the figure favored to secure a consensus as to the threat to American liberty?

The idea of a tree of liberty developed in this passage builds upon a familiar

analogy of colonial settlement to horticultural planting. The "plantation" of European colonies translates European humans, animals and horticulture so they both enrich and benefit from the new world into which they are planted. Because New England liberty needed to be defended from encroaching enemies—especially French Catholics and Native Americans—it not only required treasure (money, labor, and love), but it must also must be "watered" with blood. This mythos of New England settlement is gradually elaborated in Samuel Adams' private letters and anonymous public writings between the years 1765-1769. Adams' argument for the special flourishing of liberty in New England develops along this line: because they carried the ancient rights and liberties of Englishmen with them, because the earliest New England settlers were not sent or sponsored by the British state, because they received no direct or indirect subsidy from others (and this was very different from both the failed and successful Virginia settlements), because they had no grand proprietor-investors behind them (the way Pennsylvania and Maryland did), because they emigrated to preserve their religious freedom from encroachment, because of the bitter privation upon their arrival (arriving in December, they only survived by eating clams from the sea), for all these over-determined and rather differently grounded reasons, *the first English settlers of New England knew freedom as their original and natural condition.* (Cushing, I: 7-297)

This mythos of the organic growth of liberty in New England is condensed in the passage's climactic invocation of the "fair tree of liberty." This figurative tree offers an oblique reference to one very literal tree. If the British associated the survival of the Stuart monarch with the mighty Royal Oak that saved Charles II from capture of the battle of Worcester in 1651, the Whigs of Boston honored their liberty under one

particular huge and ancient elm. It was planted in 1646 soon after the founding of Boston near the intersection of Essex and Orange streets. Located in the front yard of Deacon Jacob Elliott, it was made available by its Whig owner to the Whigs for public use as a site protected for oppositional political speech. Paradoxically, its status as private property helped to protect it from the legal manipulation of public agencies (like the Governor or His Majesty's Army) to which it might have been vulnerable if it were located on Boston common.[28] This elm became the focal point of Boston's agitation against the stamp act on August 14, 1765, when Andrew Oliver, one of the officials assigned to sell stamps, was hung in effigy from one of its branches. In the seven years that followed, "The Liberty Tree" (as it was formally named on a plaque in September 11, 1765) became the place where the Boston Whigs assembled in public meetings, devised a mock court, punished Tories accused to collaborating with British ministry, and started their marches.[29]

The concept of freedom figured in the "liberty tree" contrasts with modern liberal and neo-liberal concepts of freedom by the way it reconciles communal freedom with individual liberty. Adams's writings, *The Votes and Proceedings*, and the New England culture of which both are an expression used the words liberty and freedom to express distinct but related set of values. This distinction has been developed by David Hackett Fischer in *Liberty and Freedom*. While "liberty" is derived from the Latin word that "meant unbounded, unrestricted, and released from restraint," and becomes associated with the rights of individuals, towns, and colonies, the English words "free" and "freedom" are derived from the Indo-European words "dear" or "beloved," and have the same root as "friend." A "free" man meant, in David Hackett Fischer's formulation,

"someone who was joined to a tribe of free people by ties of kinship and rights of belonging" (Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom*, 5). Only if we grasp this double valance of liberty and freedom—the first brings autonomy through rights and the second involves one in a binding attachment to and responsibility for the community—can we understand how liberty and freedom came to be interpreted as what motivated the settlement of New England, bound the early colonists into a single community, and (during the approach to revolution) justified collective action in its defense. This expansive concept of liberty helps to explain why the specter of liberty's loss induces such intense anxiety.[30]

If we link this figural tree (in the *Votes*) and the literal elm (in Boston), a cluster of related ideas are subsumed under "the fair tree of liberty." The fact that the Liberty Tree is old, tough and ancient suggests the antiquity of English rights; its vast size connotes the greatness of liberty; and its longevity suggests that liberty may (or *should*) survive from the dim past into the distant future. Yet, because the tree is alive, it is vulnerable to disease, fire, and cutting, just as liberty itself is vulnerable to sudden destruction or gradual decay. The thought of the loss of this ancient and precious living endowment—once it is destroyed, it is lost forever—produces the sentimental solicitude, anxiety, and dread that suffuse this climactic passage from the *Votes*.

In 1772, the recent uses of the "Liberty Tree" by Boston Whigs gave it particular salience in forming committees of correspondence throughout Massachusetts. Because Boston's Liberty Tree was a place of voluntary assembly, political speech, and symbolic protest, the tree also becomes a metonym for the voluntary association of the Boston Whigs' throughout the last eight years of protest (1765-1772). To destroy the tree would be to disable the liberty practiced in Whig gathering, speaking, protesting, but also

associated by this passage with the crucial first free act, the settlement of New England. The defense of the freedom to protest and to be heard is thereby condensed into the protective embrace of the figural tree of liberty. In a similar way, the figural "fair tree of liberty" becomes the public possession of all who claim its protection. The figure of the "fair tree of liberty" not only naturalizes the human desire for liberty. By publishing *The Votes and Proceedings,* the Boston Whigs have recourse to the media prosthesis of print so as to invite all the towns of Massachusetts to assume a place beneath the(ir) "fair tree of liberty." In this way all the towns of Massachusetts can achieve a new unity by joining their "brethren," in a freely communicated consensus, under Boston's Liberty Tree. The sheer numbers gathered around this figural tree, and the intensity of their shared sentiments, for example in their solicitude for the "fair tree of liberty," will then enable each of them, through a free communication of sentiments, to "stand firm as one man" against that firm, or "Iron[,] Hand of Oppression." By associating their own technology of uniting with the organic-natural-arboreal 'tree of liberty,' and opposing it to the oppressive iron machines of British power, the Boston committee conceals by sublimating what is machine-like, repetitive, protocol-controlled about their own technology—the committee of correspondence and the communication network it initiates.

The "public machine" and the emergence of a new techno-human revolutionary subject

The Votes and Proceedings succeeded beyond the dreams of the Boston Whigs. In the months between December 1772 and September 1773, over 110 towns held meetings

to discuss the pamphlet and frame their own supportive resolutions. By December 1773, the time of the destruction of the Tea, 140 towns had responded. Approximately half of the responding towns established their own committee of correspondence. The letters and resolutions of the other towns were sent to the Boston committee, which wrote individualized replies to each, but also published the letters and resolutions of selected towns in *The Boston Gazette* and other papers of Boston and New England. This two-way network infrastructure was then available for conferring upon and inflecting the political crisis of 1774.[31] In closing this essay, it is worth noting what is new and what is not new in the techniques and technologies developed by the Boston committee. The Boston Committee obviously did not invent town self-government, the committee, the voluntary association, the royal post or the newspaper. However, it did develop a second order communications technology to connect pre-existent elements in a new way. The Boston Whigs developed a technology (the standing political committee of correspondence) which became an *interface* for communications among the towns of Massachusetts, used certain communication *protocols* (of represent-ability, equality, and collectivity {"we-ness"}), sponsored writing in a *new genre* (the public declaration, that incorporates and overwrites the traditional petition), modeled a performance of Whig political ideology (virtue, courage, and firmness in the passionate defense of liberty), which was transmitted through a *network* (composed of the postal system, of voluntary associations, and of the Anglophone newspapers of the British Empire). By the way they gave new form to the old political ideas, the Boston Whigs practiced an enlightenment version of what the ancient Greeks called *technē*. Of course, none of this artful communications technology would be remembered, or be of much historical consequence, if the communications of

the Boston Whigs had not been "counter-signed" by other groups throughout Massachusetts and the colonies of British America. By answering in the affirmative to Boston's emotionally fraught political interpellation, by choosing to embed themselves in the new communication technology of the committee, by embracing and communicating the shared sentiments of a new community of technohumans, the Whigs of Massachusetts precipitated the emergence of a new species of technohuman subject, one ready for revolutionary action and self-government. What emerged was a new "public machine" (Joseph Reed)—literally, a res-publica, "the thing of the people"—that could then convincingly speak the collective "we" so crucial to the performatives that would institute American self-government in 1776 and 1789.

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[1] *Massachusettensis: or A Series of Letters. (Boston; London reprinted for J. Mathews, No. 18, in the Strand, 1776*), 34. Leonard's suspicion that "party agents" lay behind the foul birth of the committee of correspondence follows Hutchinson's erroneous suspicion that Benjamin Franklin hatched the Boston Whig plan to establish a committee of correspondence.

[2] New York Historical Society, 1885; also Ryerson.

[3] Latin: *homo faber* means "Man the Smith" (or "Man the Maker", "Man the Toolmaker", "Man the Fabricator", "Man the Worker"). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo_faber The idea of the long and crucially shaping relationship between humans and their tools is given memorable dramatic expression in the Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey* when the bone weapon of the earliest man-ape, thrown aloft in triumph, "becomes", through a witty film edit, a space vehicle gliding through space.

[4] (in Greek technē + logy, a "discourse on art or craft.") "The Name of What We Do," http://www.kk.org/thetechnium/archives/2004/11/the_name_of_wha.php. Kelly's definition of technē seems to be an echo and gloss on Heidegger's affirmative image of technology as "a way of revealing" not unrelated to another culturally elevated form of revealing and making, poetry (in Greek, "poesis").(Heidegger, 12)

[5] Here is a characteristic passage from the front page of Netscape first annual report, from spring of 1996. Note how the announcement of a transformational change is paradoxically linked to a reassuring instrumentalism: "The World Wide Web …describes a world where old notions of how people communicate collapse under the weight of considerable changes that are occurring in our society today. But there's nothing to fear. Technology, after all, is just a tool. A better hammer to drive the nail home. A way for people to become closer,…"

[6] For the general understanding of the relationship between the human and technology developed in this paragraph, and elsewhere in this essay, I bear a special debt to my collaborator and friend, Professor Clifford Siskin.

[7] While Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood have emphasized the republican ideological origins of the American Revolution, and the way republican ideas were used to contest the sovereignty over the colonies of the King in Parliament, Julie Ellison (1999), Elizabeth Dillon (2005), Lynn Festa (2006) and others have suggested the centrality of an emotional or sentimental economy to the American Revolution. Lynn Festa notes the 18th century shift in the understanding of emotions as a uniformly negative disturbance from the outside to being something valuable that emerges from within the self. (*Sentimental Figures*, 23); she also discusses the way emotions, sometimes valued as originating in the unique self, can overflow bounded selves and course through the group (*Sentimental Figures*, 7).

[8] Of course, even while founder biographies take up long term spots on the bestsellers list, generations of historians have challenged what has been called "founder hagiography": they locate causes for the American Revolution in ideology, economic transformations, the enterprise of printers, bottom up social history, and so on. But most of these approaches to the invention of America neglect the innovative communication technologies I'm focusing on in this essay.

[9] It is useful to specify what I am *not* arguing here. Within the deconstructive methodology of Jacques Derrida, it is sometimes claimed that the "deconstruction of Western metaphysics" requires a reversal of instituted hierarchies in order to understand the chain of oppositions that organizes Western thought. In such an itinerary, these three oppositions--idea/emotion; individual/collective; human/technology—could be aligned with others like spirit/body ; man/woman; identity/ repetition. Feminist technology studies, indebted to Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto,* have made good use of such an analytical strategy, revealing for example, the remarkable ways in which technology is often aligned, in its embodied, secondary, and instrumental position, with "woman." While I don't disagree with this analysis, it is not what I am doing here. I am marshalling a more local and historical argument for modifying our understanding of these three particular oppositions.

[10] I will have occasion to quote John Adams, Mercy Otis Warren and Daniel Leonard on the committees; Govern Thomas Hutchinson argues the dangerous effects of the committees in his speech before the General Court, in his published debates with the House and the Council and in his private correspondence with the American Secretary Lord Dartmouth in Whitehall. While the first speech is circumspect about the occasion for his address, in a later second speech, Hutchinson is explicit about why he felt "bound" to give the speech that opened the session on January 6, 1773. "The proceedings of such of the inhabitants of the Town of Boston as assembled together and passed and published their resolves or votes as the act of the town as a legal town meeting, denying in the most express terms the supremacy of parliament, and inviting every other town and district in the province to adopt the same principles and to establish committees of correspondence to consult upon proper measures to maintain it, and the proceedings of divers other towns, in consequence of this invitation, appeared to me to be so unwarrantable and such a dangerous nature and tendency, that I thought myself bound to call upon you in my

speech at opening the session, to join with me in discountenancing and bearing a proper testimony against such irregularities and innovations." (*The Boston Gazette*, Feb, 22, 1773, Governor's rejoinder to the Council and House's reply to the Governor's first speech) For Hutchinson, what the Boston committee has set loose has a "dangerous nature and tendency," wording, which by using the canonical terminology of Blackstone's commentaries, invokes the legal specter of sedition. In his later written History of Massachusetts-Bay, Hutchinson deplores the acts of the Boston committee but acknowledges its effectiveness in broadening the political debate and drawing other towns and the General Court into controversy. History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay, ed. Lawrence Shaw Mayo, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1936. 261-266) Oliver's comments on the committees may be found in Peter Oliver's Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion: a Tory View. Ed. Douglass Adair & John A Schutz. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1961. 74, 104. Charles Thomson's description of the central importance of the committees of correspondence to political organization during the summer of 1774 in Pennsylvania appears in a letter to Doctor David Ramsay (November 4, 1786), who at that time was composing his history of the American Revolution. (Thomson, 218-219).

[11] See Wills, Inventing America, chapter 7.

[12] Richard Henry Lee uses the phase "a shock of electricity" to describe the effect that news of the Boston Port Bill had in mobilizing Whig sentiment in Virginia (Arthur Lee, June 26, 1774, 114). When the Continental Congress met, it was understood by some as a congress or gathering of the committees of the various colonies (Samuel Adams, [[letter.]]

[13] In Adela Pinch's commentary on Hume's *Treatise on Moral Sentiments* offers a vivid way to formulate the priority of shared to individual emotions: she argues that Hume's *Treatise* "contends that feelings are transsubjective entities that pass between persons; that our feelings are always really someone else's; that it is passion that allows us to be persons, rather than the other way around. (*Strange Fits of Passion*, 19) I am indebted to Laura Mandell for pointing me to this suggestive passage.

[14] More violent ways of staging public opposition to British measures were evident in the more or less organized riots of 1765, 1768, and 1770: the sacking of the houses of Andrew Oliver and Thomas Hutchinson (on August 14 & 26, 1765), the riot around the British taking of John Hancock's ship *Liberty* (June 10, 1768), and the Boston "Massacre" (March 5, 1770). The circular letter to the other colonial assemblies was used in agitating against the Townshend Bill; the Boston Whigs organized the 'convention of the towns' of Massachusetts in September 1768.

[15] In her *History of the Rise and Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*, Mercy Otis Warren asserts that "perhaps no single step contributed so much to cement the union of the colonies, and the final acquisition of independence, as the establishment of committees of correspondence." She goes on to credit her own husband, James Warren, for proposing "the institution" of committees to Samuel Adams, who then carried the idea to Boston. (I, 61-62).

[16] While a full elaboration of the relationship of the committees of correspondence to the concept of the public sphere lies outside of the scope of this essay, a few words are in order. Habermas was the first to demonstrate how the emergence during the eighteenth

century of new practices (discussion of public matters by private citizens in coffee houses, saloons, and learned societies) and new forms of communication (letter writing, diaries, newspapers, journals) provided the general conditions for the emergence of a discursive space—the "public sphere"—for opposition to public authorities (i.e. the state). My study of the Boston committee confirms Habermas's emphasis upon the effective influence of public opinion. However, by focusing upon a particular episode in mobilizing public opinion in Boston, in Massachusetts, and in the colonies in British America in the months before the American Revolution, and by exploring the activities of a committee that began its life as an official organ of town government, I end offering an account of public sphere discourse that is less global, rational and disinterested, and more passionately and tendentiously motivated, than the one offered by Habermas. Thus, although the committees claim the disinterested concern for the public that is part of the appeal of debating societies, salons, coffee shop talk, or the society for learning and improvement, by the way they grow out of town government, and adopt the procedures of the committee, the committees show how opinion can be tethered to action—by reading and writing in a highly disciplined, conventionalized, and fashion, and sharing those activities with the public.

[17] For a general argument in favor of the strategic pertinence of studying old media (like print) in the light of new media (like the networked computer), and studying old media within the frame of new media, see the conference description written with Clifford Siskin for the Fall 2005 conference "Digital Retroaction" at http://dc-mrg.english.ucsb.edu/conference/D_Retro/conf_description.html. Here are few examples of this general trend in recent scholarship: from literary studies of the early period, the collection edited by Neil Rhodes, *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print*; from literary studies of new media and science fiction, Katherine Hayles' influential *How We Became Posthuman*; from a political economy of books and copyright, William St. Claire's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*; from media history, Paul Star, *The Creation of the Media: the Political Origins of Modern Communications*; from film and new media studies, Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*; from political science, Bruce Bimber, *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power*; from legal studies, Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of the Internet* and *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the law toLock down Culture and Control Creativity*; and from early American history, the collection edited by Alfred D. Chandler Jr. and James W. Cortada, *A Nation Transformed by Information: How Information has Shaped the United States from Colonial Times to the Present*. In taking up the question of media and communication technology these studies seem to be shaped by four key ideas. First, the transformative effects of developments like the Internet and personal computing have produced a retroactive reinterpretation of our history. Thus, after surveying the many kinds of technologies embraced since the earliest days of American settlement, Chandler and Cortada insist "In short, Americans have been preparing for the Information Age for more than 300 years. It did not start with the introduction of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s." (v) Secondly, for scholars of contemporary media policy, the introduction of a historical perspective allows policy makers to invoke time-honored American values and practices (public libraries, limited copyright, the public domain) to negotiate the

thicket of issues opened up by new the networked computer for copyright, privacy, surveillance, and access.(Lessig; Star; St. Claire) Thirdly, this historical perspective on media technology has led to revival of interest in the media studies of Marshall McLuhan, the first thinker to develop a systematic approach to a comparative, and historically informed, study of media technology. Finally, the critical power for technology studies of putting into question the categorical distinction between human and non-human was a strong theme in the work of Donna Haraway (e.g. "A Cyborg Manifesto", 1983) and Bruno Latour (e.g. *We Have Never Been Modern*, 1991). Since then, this conceptual step—at work in my use of the term "technohuman," has become an implicit part of the new scholarship on communication technology.

[18] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, chapter 5, "The Interface."

[19] For other examples of this sort of comparative media analysis, see *The Essential McLuhan,* 270-297.

[20] For this broader application of the concept of the interface, see Stephen Johnson, *Interface Culture.* For the concept of a "cultural interface" I am indebted to Lev Manovich's discussion in Chapter 5, "The Interface" in *The Language of New Media.* For examples of the utopian longings stirred by interface design, one can contrast Samuel Adams' letters touting the power of the committee of correspondence to other Whigs (Arthur Lee; RH Lee and Charles Thomson) with David Sarnoff's promotion of radio broadcasting in the early decades of the 20th century and the "sell" for the networked computer found in Bill Gates' *The Road Ahead* (1995), or the Netscape first annual report (1996).

[21] The instrumental concept of technology is frequently used in contemporary advertising to allay anxiety that the human will be engulfed or controlled by new technologies. Within the context of the technological 'sell,' the promise, for example, that 'the computer is just a tool' should be understood as evidence that technology is more than a tool, but it is in fact always something that puts the separateness of the autonomous human subject in question. For a broad discussion of this topic see Hayles (1999).

[22] While he is imprisoned in New York, Ethan Allen describes one of his fellow prisoners this way (Allen, 1779).

[23] Alex Galloway offers this suggested interpretation of protocols: "Protocol is a technique for achieving voluntary regulation within a contingent environment." (7) Galloway's study suggests the many different ways in which voluntary as well as strict or embedded protocols influence the form and content of communication.

[24] Franklin, 20: 84-85, written February 1773, published in London, June 1773.

[25] A rhetorical excess haunts texts like the *Votes and Proceedings*. Robert Ferguson notes, in his discussion of other revolutionary texts, that an "earnest insistence on presentation" of consistent legal and historical ideas is paired with "a spirit of invective and outraged condemnation." (433-34) Ferguson offers the strongest reading of the contradictory tendencies of the official documents of the American Revolution. See *American Enlightenment*.

[26] For example, here are some of the newspapers and publication dates for reprinting this passage following the Boston Gazette publication on November 23, 1772. This list suggests the speed and efficiency of this distribution network.

New Hampshire Gazette, November 27, 1772;
New London Gazette, November 27, 1772;
Providence Gazette: November 28, 1772;
Pennsylvania Gazette: December 2, 1772;
Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon): December 17, 1772.

[27] For the various ways Cato inspires imitation, within many different British, American, and French political contexts, see Ellison and Dillon.

[28] Because it is a public symbol planted on private ground, the Liberty Tree offers a nice example of the constitutive mutual imprecation of the private and public spheres elaborated by Elizabeth Dillon in *The Gender of Liberty.*

[29] For example, in June, 1768, when John Hancock's ship *Liberty* was taken for customs violations, a British boat involved in its taking was burned beneath the Liberty tree. By June 13, 1768 a huge crowd of 4,000 gathered in protest around the Liberty Tree. David Hackett Fischer notes that this is equal to the total male population of Boston. "The scale of these events added another meaning to the Liberty Tree. It became a symbol of the town and its collective rights, in the old New England way" (Fischer, 27. See the classic article by Schlesinger).

[30] Fischer develops these two distinct concepts in the introductory chapter of Liberty and Freedom. Fischer points out that "A person who was born to freedom in an ancient tribe had a sacred obligation to serve and support the folk, and to keep the customs of a free people, and to respect the rights of others on pain of banishment." (8) Fischer's expansive history of "freedom" may help clarify how the New England congregationalism of leaders like Samuel Adams provide a basis for his republicanism.

[31] For example, between April, 1773 and September, 1774, the Boston committee prints and distributes at least 7 broadsides to all the towns and districts of Massachusetts.