



# GLOBAL CURRENTS

MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY NOW

EDITED BY  
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RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS  
*New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London*

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Global currents : media and technology now / edited by Tasha G. Oren and Patrice Petro.  
p. cm. — (New directions in international studies)  
ISBN 0-8135-3479-8 (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-8135-3480-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)  
I. Mass media and technology. 2. Communication, International. 3. Globalization.  
I. Oren, Tasha G. II. Petro, Patrice, 1957— III. Series.

P96.T42G58 2004  
302.23—dc21

2004000299

A British Cataloging-in-Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

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(December 2002), [http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue7\\_12/braman/index.html](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_12/braman/index.html).

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# @HENRYPARKESMOTEL.COM



STEVE JONES

## *Firewall*

Henry Parkes Motel. Google turns up 434 matches to those words. At the top of the list, <http://www.ennew.com.au/henryparkes.htm>, the Web site of Ennew Allsopp, “not just Property Valuers but Property Experts.” The company’s origins go “as far back as 1979.” In “Internet years” one might say that is a lifetime, but in regard to the real estate industry one must wonder whether that is at all a long time. One of the company’s founders, Owen Allsopp, its director, “has specialised almost exclusively in Compulsory Land Acquisition work.” What has happened to this hotel that Ennew Allsopp is touting it?

The Web site provides a photograph of the hotel. There, among the “Residential Valuations,” “Commercial, Retail and Industrial Valuations,” “Rural Valuations,” is the category “Hotels and Motels and RSL’s,” and beneath it a photograph of Henry Parkes Motel—Tenterfield. Click on the photograph and go to <http://www.ennew.com.au/henryparkes.htm>.

Meaghan Morris’s eminent essay “At Henry Parkes Motel” uses the image of Henry Parkes Motel, of being a visitor, a traveler, and of tourism generally, to critique the conventional dualism of home/travel, ordinary/extraordinary. In the essay, Morris is able to weave notions of mobility, place, time, and text to critique patriarchal notions of tourism and travel as an escape from the home and the everyday. In her essay the motel serves both as a home (away from home) and as a space of confinement, but not as a fixed space. It is, rather, a space of temporariness and temporality, one that serves as a metaphor for explaining travel as an everyday occurrence rather than as a practice disconnected from everyday realities and that connects to other spaces through which one passes, in which one lives.

Morris notes that the experience of “[t]he motel can be used to frame and displace,” and in the case of the Ennew Allsopp Web advertisement it is used to exemplify a type of property, along with the Alstonville Hotel, Bay Royal Apartments Byron Bay, Max Hotel Moree, and Ballina RSL.<sup>1</sup> Of the several properties in the category, Henry Parkes Motel is the only one not modern, indeed the one least modern, and the only one without an image of an automobile in the photo. Yet it appears first in the category, its pink stucco structure drawing one’s gaze toward it irresistibly, while on the rest of the page of look-alike concrete and glass buildings there is little on which the eye might linger.

As with the rest of the properties pictured, there is no text beyond a property name. There is no written history, no marker, no inscription, no “Legend of Parkes” like the one Morris found. Unlike Morris’s journey, here the virtual trip to Henry Parkes Motel begins not “with a view on the run from the road,” but rather with a site/sight given by a search engine.<sup>2</sup> As Morris’s “populist” approach” to theorizing tourism is meant to re-view Henry Parkes Motel and renew theoretical approaches, another popular practice can be retheorized and placed alongside the activity that “motels work to foster,” namely the practice of Web surfing for/as tourism.

The opposition between home and travel that Morris insightfully theorizes in her essay must now be joined with theorizing about the Internet. As do other technologies of transportation and communication, the Internet has had consequences for travel and for the home. The parallels and intersections between home, travel, tourism and the Internet are rich and deep and cannot be adequately addressed in a single essay. Nevertheless this will be an attempt to draw some of their broad strokes, to interrogate notions of territory and ownership, and metaphors of space, that now intersect with on-line and off-line mobilities.

### *Home Pages*

In Internet parlance, home is the home page, about which there is nothing particularly or necessarily domestic. Indeed the term is misleading, for “home” as it refers to domestic space denotes a private space (albeit one on which public space has been encroaching via the media, and via announcement of the “TIPS” program that may make informants of service employees in the U.S., government and private, who enter the home). But in Web terms a home page is public—in fact the notion of a private home page is somewhat

of an oxymoron. The practice of going to one's own home page on a regular basis for any reason other than assessing changes one has made, or wishes to make, is probably somewhat narcissistic—home pages are made for others.

Put another way, there is nothing domestic about a home page. The term originated from computer jargon, from the notion of a “home” or “root” directory in which one stores files and finds paths to other files. The shift to a home page came when Tim Berners-Lee and others developed HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) to publish documents, “pages,” on the Internet. They used the term “home page” unproblematically and without definition as early as 1992 in the seminal paper “World-Wide Web: The Information Universe.” The notion of a home page as the root directory of a hypertext document seemed natural to those steeped in computer programming, as is clear from this passage in the paper in which the connection to a directory is explicit: “A menu becomes a page of hypertext, with each element linked to a different destination. The same is true of a directory, whether part of a hierarchical or cross-linked system.”<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the notion of a “cover page” that Berners-Lee and his colleagues coined, a page that provides indexing information for a home page or Web site, never caught on. Perhaps the metaphors of ownership, security, and domesticity that “home” engages ultimately captured the popular imagination.

In its original Web usage, the home page was considered a place to which one comes back, and to which one comes back from travel with, one might say, mementos. Note in the following description by Berners-Lee and his colleagues the “comfort” of the browser and home page (“the consistent user interface”), the invocation of space and distance (“a further index”), and, most important, the placement of “a new link” after search of “a further index,” like the placing of a souvenir in a curio cabinet in the home:

Enthusiastic users of the browsing software particularly appreciated the consistent user interface for all types of data. Reading news articles as hypertext was a good example: the same user interface is provided, and references between articles, and between articles and the news groups in which they are published, are all consistently represented as links.

It became evident that both hypertext links and text search are important parts of the model. A typical information hunt will start from a default hypertext page by following links to an index. A search of that index may return the required data, or some more links may be followed. Sometimes a further index may be found, and that searched, and so on. When the user of a hypertext editor has found what he wants (no

matter how remote), he can make a new link to it from his home page so that he can find it again later almost instantly. This is generally preferable to making a copy which may soon be out of date.<sup>4</sup>

The home page in this formulation is a place that you come back to repeatedly, that you design and decorate, that you go out from and return to, but, crucially, it is not a place in which you spend very much time. It is more akin to a tourist information center you operate for yourself than it is to a home. But this is not the formulation that has come to dominate the Web. Rather than a place for one's souvenirs, a jumping-off point for further travel, the home page has become a billboard.

### ***Banner/Ad***

Using Lawrence Grossberg's insightful analysis of billboards, Morris notes that "billboards are dominated (unlike the motel) by the operability of space and the modality of the tour, by 'going' rather than 'seeing,' they enable in turn the making of maps, the citing and sighting of places." Home pages are more akin to billboards in this regard (as well as in others, when it comes to banner ads and e-commerce). No one "surfs" billboards, and home pages, like billboards, "are neither authentic nor inauthentic; their function cannot be predefined, nor are they distributed according to some logic of the 'proper' organization of space or the 'proper' use of place."<sup>5</sup>

Home pages—indeed the Web, by the nature of its hyperlinked structure—are akin to billboards, acting as markers, literally. Some are scanned, some glanced at, while others command more attention and engagement (Burma Shave as mobile-hypertext). Unlike billboards home pages are not a boundary, they do not "take up space," nor do they "block out the landscape," and they do not denote any space other than that of the Web. As Berners-Lee and his colleagues suggest, the construction of a home page is in a sense the construction of a hypertextual map.

The nature of this map, however, ought to be questioned. It is clearly not a linear map, one that can be printed in two dimensions and read like a conventional road map. Nevertheless, most of the time it is conceived of as a literal map—one follows hyperlinks from page to page in search of information. But the home page itself can be considered a "mattering map," particularly insofar as home pages can be analyzed as texts:

These mattering maps are like investment portfolios: there are not only different and changing investments, but different forms, as well as dif-

ferent intensities or degrees of investment. There are not only different places marked out (practices, pleasures, meanings, fantasies, desires, relations, and so on) but different purposes which these investments can play, and different moods in which they can operate. Mattering maps define different forms, quantities and places of energy. They tell us how to use and how to generate energy, how to navigate our way into and through various moods, and how to live within emotional and ideological histories.<sup>6</sup>

On the Internet, some maps are made deliberately by users, as is the case of home pages or even of lists of “bookmarks” or “favorites.” But others are made inadvertently, or one might even say maliciously, as is the case with “cookies” and cache files that track a browser’s movement through the Web. Consider the myriad issues concerning privacy and surveillance of Internet use—then consider the manner in which mattering maps are constructed “for” Internet users based on Internet maps drawn from cookie or cache data. In the case of the hapless employee whose cookie file shows visits to pornographic Web sites he did not visit but that are the result of “pop-up” advertisements, those maps may matter most of all. What counts in such a case is not where do you want to go today, but where your browser was taken for a ride.

### *Surf/Browser*

Morris writes that “motels in fact demolish sense-regimes of place, locale, and history.”<sup>7</sup> The Web demolishes these, too, then attempts to piece them back together via the hyperlink, although the piecing together is “hyper”—the assemblage is subject to the rearticulation of linking pieces almost haphazardly. It is as if Humpty Dumpty were, in fact, put back together again, but each of the king’s horses and each of the king’s men, if they were at all successful, put him back together differently—and never quite in the shape of an egg.

On the Web the “piecing back together” is typically called “surfing,” and it involves moving from Web site to Web site in an ongoing process of interpretation that has, underlying it, the sense that there must be something more, some more information, somewhere on-line. Perhaps the most meaningful word with which to describe the Web is “meanwhile”: In the time during which a page or image loads, or during which one looks at a Web site, there is ever the sense that something else is happening but a mouse click away.

It is interesting that we have continued to use the term “surfing” to denote what a person who uses the Web does. The term’s origin owes more to its prior use in the practice of “channel surfing” while watching television than to any unique attribute of Internet use. In both television and Web parlance, surfing (or the equally applied and inaccurate “Web browsing”—“hopping” would be a more accurate term) denotes the experience of riding a wave, a practice on the one hand requiring a great deal of control and quick reflexes on the part of the surfer, but on the other hand a practice to a great degree out of the surfer’s control. The best one can do is choose a wave to ride, and then ride it. This is not an inaccurate description of using the Web. Moving from link to link does have parallels to moving from one wave to another, although it is more accurate to say that what is being invoked by the surfing metaphor is not the temporal thrill, inevitability, or the challenge of choosing a wave and riding it through to its end. Instead the surfing metaphor is being invoked to connote what appears to be the speed, zig-zag motion, smoothness of surfing on water (and, perhaps, the notion of “thinking on one’s feet” that is nowhere better illustrated than on a surfboard). The surfing metaphor when employed in the context of the Web fails to transfer its meaning as a practice that puts the body at risk. There is no “impact zone” (the area where a breaking wave lands and exerts downward force) in Web surfing.

The surfing metaphor, furthermore, disconnects use of the Web (and television) from travel metaphors that are otherwise commonplace (e.g., “going on-line” or “going on the Internet”).

### *Click*

The Web surfer most closely resembles the “nomadic subject” about whom Lawrence Grossberg writes:

The nomadic subject exists within its nomadic wandering through the ever-changing places and spaces, vectors and apparatuses of everyday life (including, but not limited to, those of signification and ideology). Coherent subjectivity is always possible, even necessary, and always effective, even if it is also always fleeting. This subject’s shape and effectivity are never guaranteed; its agency depends in part on where it is located, how it occupies its places within specific apparatuses, and how it moves within and between them. . . . Nomadic subjects are like “commuters” moving between different sites of daily life, who are always



mobile but for whom the particular mobilities and stabilities are never entirely directed nor guaranteed. Like commuters, they are constantly shaped by their travels, by the roads they traverse; but as they struggle to adjust their shape they also reorganize their vehicles, they construct new billboards, they open up new roads. And, like commuters, they take many different kinds of trips, beginning from different starting points, punctuated by different interruptions and detours, and arriving at different stopping points.<sup>8</sup>

Though he did not intend to specify or narrow the description to Web browsing, the preceding passage from Grossberg provides many connections to it (not the least of which is, of course, the lately forgotten metaphor of the “information superhighway”). The nomadic experience of browsing the Web is akin to finding “that the strange is always and already familiar” and remakes us as cultural critics who “construct a record, always partly imaginary, that re-marks the densities and distances within which our travels are constituted.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, one can claim that travel and Web surfing are critical practices, at least insofar as they involve observation, interpretation, and decision. But these acts, while present in the practice of Web surfing, come with less immediacy to the Web surfer than to the traveler. That is not to say that there is an “authenticity” to travel that is lacking on the Internet. Rather, the *consequences* of decisions during travel are generally greater than those of decisions made on-line. While a tourist, there is rarely the opportunity to press the “Back” button and return to one’s previous location. (One wonders why the “Esc,” or “Escape,” key is not automatically mapped to the “Back” function in most browsers.)

### ***Port Scan***

Seeking travel information on-line is a moderately popular Internet activity in the United States, judging from results generated by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. About 7 percent of Internet users look for travel information on the Internet. Among broadband Internet users, however, a much higher number, 23 percent, reported that they use the Internet for travel information. And while only about 2 percent of all users buy travel on-line, 14 percent of broadband users report buying travel on-line.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps these findings at least somewhat support Morris’s refutation of van den Abbeele’s claim that “a tourist does research for his trip not merely to avoid discomfort in strange places, but to prepare himself, like an

assiduous art student, . . . for *grasping* the eventual authentic ‘sight.’”<sup>11</sup> The disparity between broadband and dial-up users may be evidence of broadband’s utility for travel research and evidence of its utility as an “always-on” information medium. But their disparity also parallels disparities of travel—speed, money, richness of experience, are factors that influence travel and Internet use, even though these media are entirely different. To dial up itself requires preparation, and waiting. In some cases, such as those where there is only one telephone line in the home, or when all dial-in access lines are busy, the on-line journey may need to be put off for a time. Broadband access promises an on-line journey, and a rapid one at that, all the time, but at greater cost than dial-up’s coach-class travel.

Movement is not all that is needed for travel. At some point a traveler needs shelter and respite. James Clifford noted the textual use of the hotel as a place that signifies a shelter for travelers and a marker of history and culture.<sup>12</sup> Morris noted the strategic placement of hotels in relation to space and transportation:

The installation of any one motel can easily be seen as strategic. There is not only rhetorical competition with neighbors (“address” projected in space), but a conative effort at stopping the traffic over days as well as moments, to slow transients into tourists and divert energy to places (the motel and its vicinity). The aim of a specialist motel like the *Henry Parkes* is an elaboration on this—an attempt from a small-town highway spot to alter urban maps of significance.<sup>13</sup>

But in cyberspace, on the Web journey, there are no hotels or motels in that first sense—there are only Web pages that serve as markers and demand movement elsewhere. One may linger at a page, even bookmark the page, but every instance of its viewing at another time is a return and again requires travel. The closest one comes to, say, a Grand Hotel on-line is what is referred to as a “portal,” a site that aggregates (and in some cases personalizes) information. But a portal is less like a hotel and more like the signpost with dozens of road signs pointing in different directions (“Chicago, 280 miles; Tokyo, 2800 miles; Budapest, 1765 miles”).

### *Where Do You Go to Want Today?*

What makes the Web’s notion of a home page interesting in light of Morris’s essay is her critique of patriarchal assumptions about travel (as an escape

from home, *domus*) and the home's configuration as a place of feminized captivity. The Web home page can be thought of, at least insofar as computer use and Web-page creation continue to be dominated by men, as a place that *excludes* the feminine.

One result of "the relative dearth of women in cyberspace" is "a great deal of 'computer cross-dressing,'" according to Lisa Nakamura. As a place of "identity tourism," of people who take on personas on a moment's notice (gender, race, ethnicity, even species can be changed, communicated, negotiated), the Web is clearly a place where colonial narrative is reproduced along with its tourism offshoots. What makes cybertourism different from its off-line counterpart is that it "allow[s] identity tourists to simultaneously claim two positions, that of the tourist and that of the native; they can be both inside and outside."<sup>14</sup>

What is unclear is what they are inside and outside of, and who is inside and who is outside, the tourist or the native. With what may one judge either position? There is a distinct need for landmarks, but on the Web there are no landmarks, only bookmarks. The importance of landmarks for assessing one's own and others' positions is pointed out by Massumi:

The way landmarks function in the actual course of orientation is very different from reading a map. They are what you habitually head for or away from. . . . Landmarks are like magnetic poles that vectorize the space of orientation. A landmark is a minimal visual cue functioning to polarize movement's relation to itself in a way that allows us habitually to flow with preferential heading. The vectorial structuring effected by landmarks gives the space of orientation a *qualitative* dimension, in tropistic preference.<sup>15</sup>

I routinely shift-click on links so that a new browser window opens with a new link, leaving the window that had the link in the first place to reside behind the new window. It is my landmark, the point of departure and, if need be, of instant return. Even when not on-line I have many such landmarks now, though few are made of real estate as such: Global Positioning System (GPS) devices, which have now shrunk to a size that allows them to be incorporated into mobile phones and PDAs, tell me with remarkable precision my location. I know where my spaces are, too—multiple webcams at home and at work show me where I have been and where I will be, at home, at work. The Weather Channel, local news, webcams, a plethora of media, show me what it is like outside, be it a few yards or continents away.

My mother travels in Europe—I watch webcams of places she is visiting. When she e-mails that the weather is nice, I already know that it is.

### *Ping (There)*

To travel to the Henry Parkes Motel on the spur of the moment in any way but via the Web is, at least for those outside Australia, impracticable. And the Web does little to convey one there. The motel itself does not have a home page. And the pictures and words that one finds pale by comparison to the motel's description by Morris.

But even if the motel had a home page, would the pictures, text, audio, and video get one "there"? As Jerzy Kosinski pointed out in his archly titled "Being There," at least in the realm of attention, one who watches television is "there" rather than "here." One might make the same claim for the viewing of a Web page, perhaps for Internet use generally (after all, to access the Internet requires a screen, as does television).

The Web is particularly a medium of "there" and not "here," as hyper-linking (hyper, indeed) entices us to move from every here to another there. What is there to absorb one's interest beyond the opportunity to click on a link? Television is a dynamic visual medium, while the Web acquires movement only through a user's actions. While parts of a Web page may move, as is the case with animation, or may play video or audio files, the page itself is an additional screen within the screen, a reinscription of the inscribed space of the Internet and computer. Yet on the Web I can "ping" another computer, send it an electronic sonar signal so to speak, to verify its existence. On television I can only assume television sets and broadcasters are out there.<sup>16</sup> (I'd like to teach the world to ping.)

### **404 Not Found**

Past the first couple of Google results and on to the third, but it proves a disappointment—<http://www.countryhaven.com.au/npm.html>. North Parkes Motel is near Henry Parkes Museum but there is no mention of Henry Parkes Motel. The North Parkes Motel is a "home away from home" and "Parkes newest motel." The image of it at <http://www.northparkes.com> is little more than a thumbnail, and it is a building virtually indistinguishable from any other brick building.

Click on the "back" button to return to Google. Next result: <http://www.wilmap.com.au/parkes.html> and a history of Parkes. I learn that Parkes "was

originally called 'Currajong,' but was renamed after an early Governor of the state, Sir Henry Parkes, who visited the gold diggings in 1873. Sir Henry Parkes was born in 1815 near Coventry, England, Parkes' Sister City. . . . The main street name was later changed to Clarinda St. in honour of his wife." There is a Hamilton's Henry Parkes Motor Inn listed on the page, but without a hyper-link. What of Tenterfield's Henry Parkes Motel? Is Hamilton's another Henry Parkes Motel? How has Henry Parkes, as symbol, traveled, and why has his name been affixed to two motels?

There must be more pictures of Henry Parkes Motel on the World Wide Web than the one at Ennew Allsopp's Web site, but traveling through Google results link by link is akin to stopping every few miles while driving, asking for directions, and being given different ones each time.

Rather than cast a wide net I attempt the opposite. I type [www.henry-parkesmotel.com](http://www.henry-parkesmotel.com) into the browser's URL window. The browser responds "www.henryparkesmotel.com does not exist. Please check the name and try again." In hope of the motel's holding an Australian top-level domain I try [www.henryparkesmotel.com.au](http://www.henryparkesmotel.com.au) but the browser again tells me the domain name does not exist. Had there been a domain name I might have attempted a port scan, a common means of detecting what Internet services a computer provides, and a common means by which hackers learn what connections might be exploited on a computer.

Instead I refine the Google search, hoping to narrow my choices. This time I try "Henry Parkes Motel," the quotation marks designating to the search engine that I want results returned only where those three words appear one next to the other in succession. There are forty-four results. Surely this is a manageable number.

Manageable perhaps, but the first two are again links to Ennew Allsopp. The third link's synopsis reads:

SpacePlaceandLandscape . . .

Nov. 20: Tourism, Pilgrimage, Migration, Exile, Diaspora. Dean McCannell, from The Tourist Meaghan Morris, "At Henry Parkes Motel," John Durham Peters, "Exile . . . [home.uchicago.edu/~wjtm/SpacePlace-andLandscape.html-9k](http://home.uchicago.edu/~wjtm/SpacePlace-andLandscape.html-9k)

It is an irresistible summary and even if it were not the next logical link I cannot help but be curious about what it might say in regard to "The Tourist Meaghan Morris." The site is a course syllabus at the University of Chicago, the summary itself created by Google.

Why not simply register henryparkesmotel.com myself? Why not, indeed? Moments later, I am @henryparkesmotel.com.

## NOTES

- 1 Meaghan Morris, *Too Soon Too Late: History in Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998), 32.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 3 T. Berners-Lee, R. Cailliau, J. Groff, and B. Pollermann, "World-Wide Web: The Information Universe," 1992, 3, [http://www.w3.org/History/1992/ENRAP/Article\\_9202](http://www.w3.org/History/1992/ENRAP/Article_9202).
- 4 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 5 Morris, *Too Soon*, 313. And see Lawrence Grossberg, *Bringing It All Back Home* (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1997).
- 6 Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?" in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 50–61.
- 7 Morris, *Too Soon*, 33.
- 8 Grossberg, *Bringing*, 314.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 312, 315.
- 10 Lee Rainie, *Tracking Online Life* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2000), <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=11>
- 11 Morris, *Too Soon*, 41.
- 12 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997).
- 13 Morris, *Too Soon*, 37.
- 14 Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes* (London: Routledge, 2002), 43, 57.
- 15 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 2002), 180–181.
- 16 From "The Jargon File" (<http://www.dpmms.cam.ac.uk/~gjm11/jargon/jargP.html>):

*ping* [from the submariners' term for a sonar pulse] 1. n. Slang term for a small network message (ICMP ECHO) sent by a computer to check for the presence and alertness of another. The UNIX command 'ping(8)' can be used to do this manually (note that 'ping(8)'s author denies the widespread folk etymology that the name was ever intended as acronym 'Packet INternet Groper'). Occasionally used as a phone greeting. See ACK, also ENQ. 2. vt. To verify the presence of. 3. vt. To get the attention of. 4. vt. To send a message to all members of a mailing list requesting an ACK (in order to verify that everybody's addresses are reachable). "We haven't heard much of anything from Geoff, but he did respond with an ACK both times I pinged jargon-friends." 5. n. A quantum packet of happiness. People who are very happy tend to exude pings; furthermore, one can intentionally create pings and aim them at a needy party (e.g., a depressed person). This sense of ping may appear as an exclamation; "Ping!" (I'm happy; I am emitting a quantum of happiness; I have been struck by a quantum of happiness). The form "pingfulness", which is used to describe people who exude pings, also occurs. (In the standard abuse of language, "pingfulness" can also be used as an exclamation, in which case it's a much stronger exclamation than just "ping!") Oppose blargh.