

**“Global Digital Divide”**

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Let me start by seeking some precision, at the risk of sounding sort of dumb,  
Just what is this “digital division” that we all should want to overcome?  
Rather, which of several formulations, should we make the heart of our discussions,  
So in conference panel conversations, we assess the major repercussions?

Differences in ICT adoption, just might be too easy to misread;  
Is their application just an option, or a fundamental human need?  
Is this just another way of gauging underlying differences in wealth?  
Or a deeper battle we are waging, with losing very hazardous to health?  
Let’s distinguish three discrete dimensions, (knowing all good concepts come in threes),  
That should aid our common comprehensions, given our wide range of expertise.

On *one* hand, there are ICTs as tools, *enablers* using networks and computers,  
Applications taught by firms and schools, systems built of terminals and routers.  
Ways of organizing information, ways of making business plans consistent;  
Ways to maximize collaboration, even when distributed and distant.  
Wider ways of doing education, cheaper ways of tending peoples’ health,  
And ways of governmental operation: services that make for common wealth.

Countries and economies that use them tend to have advantage in performance,  
Types of interactions that suffuse them, leading to societal transformance.  
Not just more efficient but more dense, information-rich and more transparent;  
Even though they also seem more tense—with cell phones all too readily apparent.  
Notwithstanding debt and bursting bubbles, productivity has been impressive;  
Leave aside the scandals and the troubles, most of what we’ve seen here is progressive.

Surely we need more discrimination, judgments of what ICTs do best,  
Coupled with more local adaptation, sensitive to where we should invest.  
Still, in poorer places, rates of take-up lag behind and magnify the gap,  
Will they have the money and the make-up to remove this major handicap?  
This *applications* digital division, sets up those who will from those who won’t;  
A kind of restless, “fidgit-al” division, between the ones who do and those who don’t.

The *second* gap is ICT as sector, the industry to grow a country’s wealth;  
ICTs as GDP affecter, creating jobs and economic health.  
Most of this is sited in the North, drawing in investment, brains and sales.  
How are we to make it sally forth, close the gap and start to right the scales?  
How can we assist the poorer nations, lagging in industrial production,  
To compete in telecommunications, software, chips, and World-wide Web construction?

How are they to generate the sources, incubate the businesses and grow them?  
Who will help suggest potential courses? Which of us is smart enough to know them?  
Corridors and Cyber-ports and such--innovation sought through aggregation--  
Still will not accomplish very much, if no one wants to join their congregation.  
This second sort of digital division separates the late from early bloomers;  
We might call this the “widgit-al” division, between the widgit-makers & consumers.

Both these gaps, development addresses, through organized, strategic choice of options;  
When natural birth of industry regresses, countries can seek infants through adoptions.  
Using ICTs to fix and fidget, and making public service more effective;  
And learning how to build a better widget, with policies corrective not protective.  
None of us deny the height of hurdles standing in the way of such gestation,  
Still, we need to act like hares, not turtles, seeking forms of close collaboration.  
Partnerships of public institutions joining with enlightened private firms,  
May not overnight create solutions, but they ought to work up better terms.

Yet--well above these national endeavors--looms another gap of larger scope,  
Pitting those who hope to pull these levers, with those who have a different sort of hope.  
Those who see the trend of global movements as on balance worthwhile and benign,  
Facing those who don't see these improvements, & challenge their pervasive bottom line.

We face a basic difference in awareness, between the global boosters and refusers;  
It has to do with differences in fairness, felt by those who feel they are the losers.  
Perceptions that the game is stacked against them; resentments we must recognize as real.  
That richer states control them or have fenced them, tearing up their culture in the deal.

ICTs themselves can be a factor, striking at a culture's solar plexus,  
Oftentimes a negative impacter, mowing olive orchards with a Lexus.  
If we don't address these culture chasms, making global politics inclusive,  
We will face repeated hostile spasms, and the hate to which they are conducive.  
This *third* sort of digital divide, needs to be resisted by each nation;  
And not be a “draw-bridge-ital” divide, used to justify our separation.

Here, as well, technology has strengths, giving scope and reach for wide decisions;  
But we'll have to go to extra lengths, making bold political revisions.  
Working towards a world perceived as fairer, working on conditions that divide us,  
Heading off the tendency to terror, a world where someday networks unified us.  
A world less torn and much less hierarchal, spreading out the ICT solutions,  
And to which my colleagues up at Markle try to make some useful contributions.

All of this may sound a bit naïve, for ICTs are not a panacea;  
Still, we dare not lose our *joi de vive* (along with rhyme and onomatopoeia).  
Sorry if I sound a bit like Bono, minus the dark glasses and the sweater;  
I recall when John and Yoko Ono, asked us to imagine something better.