

Alex Soojung-Kim PANG

***The End of Cyberspace
and the Emerging Telecommunications Convergence***

In the 1980s and 1990s, cyberspace became real. The personal computer, graphical user interface, and Internet became a technological foundation for a new virtual world, a Platonic dimension of information separate from and superior to the real world. Cyberspace became a "metaphor we live by", to use George Lakoff's phrase. With the growth of mobile communications and computing, wireless connectivity, and RFID and geocoding systems, however, the experience of being online, and of interacting with digital information, is shifting decisively.

In this talk, I will outline some of the consequences of the end of cyberspace. I will show how cyberspace obscured certain important features of information. Cyberspace promised a world free of the limits of the material world, the constraints of geography, and the prejudices of social interactions; but in reality, information has a material life, and is interpreted in – and affected by – social and geographical context.

A new generation of information technologies, however, offers the possibility of creating devices that work with the materiality, geography, and sociability of information, rather than resisting it. This, in turn, has deep implications for our thinking about the future of convergence: how it will unfold, what it will mean for users, and how it will be experienced.

Alex Soojung-Kim PANG is an historian of science turned futurist. Research Director at the Institute for the Future, a Silicon Valley think-tank. He has conducted research on emerging technologies and their social and cultural consequences, and on the future of science. Alex is author of a number of scholarly and popular works, and *Empire and the Sun: Victorian Solar Eclipse Expeditions* (Stanford University Press, 2002). He is completing a book on the rise and fall of cyberspace. E-mail: askpang@gmail.com.

