Steven G. Jones (ed.) (1995)
CyberSociety; Computer-mediated
Communication and Community.
London: Sage.
ISBN: 0-8039-5677-0 (pbk.) 241 pp.

Rob Shields (ed.) (1996)
Cultures of Internet. Virtual
Spaces, Real Histories, Living
Bodies. London: Sage.
ISBN: 0-8039-7519-8 (pbk.) 196 pp.

The Internet has not only been 'discovered' and embraced by the general public, commercial and private, but also by social science researchers. The recent theme issue of the *Journal of Communication* devoted to the Internet, co-produced and published by the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, is a formal declaration of this academic awareness.[1] The central message of these two theme issues is a plea for more concerted scientific investigation of Internet activity. Other journals – *Media, Culture and Society*, and *Javnost/The Public* – have also devoted considerable space recently to the relation and impact of the Internet on democratic practices.[2]

Book-length scholarly treatments are less numerous, but there is every reason to expect a flood of titles before the year is out. Sage Publications has already released two edited volumes concerned with the Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC), and they are the subjects of this review.

CyberSociety; Computer-mediated Communication and Community was something of a best-seller even before its release in early 1995. All of the copies reserved for the London office of the publisher had been sold before the book left the printing plant. Sales figures are seldom reliable indicators of quality, but those readers who gambled by reserving copies of *CyberSociety*, sight unseen, have reaped multiple dividends. This edited volume is rich in both theoretical discussion and empirical labor, and the questions its editor and authors pose will help guide many scholars currently exploring the Internet and related CMC phenomena.

Editor Steven Jones sets the stage for the collection with an essay in which he discusses and problematizes the possibility of community based on forms of computer-mediated communication. He correctly critiques the often unquestioned position taken by community sociologists, like those associated with the Chicago School at the beginning of the century, who automatically associate community with locality, with geographic place. Jones, like Bender (1978) and others before him, contends such identification robs the concept community of its essence, and mistakenly places priority on organizational ease.

One of the measures of genuine community, Jones states, "ought to be its relationship to action (political or otherwise)" (p. 25). But, he continues, "Does participation in online communities increase or decrease individuals' feelings of power?" (p. 25). Although Jones further suggests that it may be difficult to determine what constitutes online political