Summaries

GISELINDE KUIPERS

Cyber life
Moral and digital entertainment

The Internet is a medium not only of information and communication, but also of entertainment. Much of this digital entertainment is transgressive – more so than in other media, owing to the complex regulation and the anonymity of the Internet. This transgressive entertainment has led to debate, worry, and sometimes to outright moral panics and attempts at legal intervention. This paper discusses reactions to two forms of 'dangerous' digital entertainment: ethnic humour and cybersex. It compares the way the dangers of these entertainments are construed in online discussions by Dutch and American Internet users. Ethnic humor is virtually absent on the Dutch part of the Internet, and is widely considered dangerous, whereas it circulates widely on the English-language part. Cybersex, on the other hand, is not considered very dangerous by Dutch Internet users; but it often construed as a moral danger by American Internet users.

JEROEN DE KLOET

Robin Hood in Cyberspace
Hacking, nationalism and digital politics

Cyberspace is very often interpreted a world without boundaries, in which the borders of the nation-state dissolve in the Esperanto of Bits and Bytes. It seems most logical that those who speak this language most fluently – the hackers – will care the least about old boundaries. This chapter shows how Chinese hackers are, contrary to these expectations, involved in fierce cyberwars with their American colleagues. It is argued that because of the imagined Western origin of new technology and hacker culture, Chinese hackers are at pains to hack with Chinese characteristics. In doing so, they make use of Chinese literary history. Coupled with this drive to localization is an identity politics that is anything but stable, a nationalist hacker easily slips into the identity of a dissident hacker or into a cracker. The politics of hacking, it is argued, are closely intertwined with the transgressive identity politics of hackers on the one hand, and the drive to localization on the other hand.

STEF AUPERS

'Like Angels in Cyberspace'
The religious imagination of the Internet in Silicon Valley

Since the emergence and widespread application of the Internet in the 1990s, cyberspace is often portrayed as a 'soul-space', a bodiless realm where people can have new, meaningful experiences or even live like spiritual beings. More arrestingly, these fantasies are often expressed by renowned technical specialists, who, according to a standard view in sociology, stand on the frontier of modern processes like secularization, rationalization and 'disenchantment'. An analysis of cyberpunk literature and in-depth interviews with 34 strategically selected ICT-specialists in Silicon Valley, shows that these otherworldly fantasies about cyberspace show a strong affinity with the ancient Gnostic tradition and its late modern heir: the New Age Movement. Paradoxically, technological progress does not necessarily lead to a disenchantment of the western world but also invokes new forms of (virtual) enchantment.

FRANK SCHAAP

Constructions and conventions of gender in virtual reality

This article discusses the discrepancies between the notion of cyberspace as a disembodied space and the everyday embodied experience of the people who play a character in a Role Playing MUD (Multi-User-Domain) a textual virtual world on the Internet. The author draws on material from his ethnographic fieldwork to illustrate how players construct and play their role-playing characters. Central to the analysis are the construction of a gendered identity for the characters and the role of gender in the online interaction, both between the characters and between the players. The co-construction of gender and the physical body in the everyday offline world largely obscure the socio-cultural processes that create masculinity and femininity in interaction. However, the absence of the physical body and the representation of the player by the virtual body of his or her character make those processes much more visible. Important findings of the paper are that online, contrary to the understanding of cyberspace as a disembodied space where 'you can be whoever you want to be', everyday gender conventions and the offline gender of the player determine the convincingness of and the socio-cultural meanings attached to the players' performance of their character.

CARLO P.M. HAGEMANN

Conspiracy, sarcasm and confirmation of one's own identity
An analysis of a usenet newsgroup about the assassination of Dutch politician
Pim Fortuyn

This article contains a content analysis of a Usenet newsgroup that started hours after the assassination in 2002 of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn and produced over 15,000 postings on this controversial politician. Political theories of public sphere and sociological theories about what motivations people have in participating in online political discussions underlie the analysis. An assessment is made of the degree to which the newsgroup supports deliberative democracy. In addition to that it assesses the roles that the most active participants play in this newsgroup.

Results indicate that the newsgroup gives a forum to an often-unheard group of citizens, people who are normally not engaged in politics. Second, the newsgroup can give room to issues that are not on any institutionalized agendas. The roles played in this newsgroup are manifold. Only a few participants are engaged in a discussion pro and contra Pim Fortuyn. Most of the participants just express their identity, without taking into account the arguments put forward by their opponents.

RICK VAN DER PLOEG & MEI LI VOS

ICT, policy and citizens

The information revolution is indeed a revolution, because of its pace and its all-encompassing and global character. The economy will undergo many structural changes. The separation between household and work will become blurred, as it was in the pre-industrial era. Although communication is becoming faster, cheaper and easier, governments seem to be losing touch with their citizens. Institutions are under pressure because of the emergence of new and constantly changing networks of people and organisations. The old laws, regulations and government policies no longer match a network society with empowered citizens whose identities are not as clear-cut as they were some decades ago. At the same time governmental and non-governmental organisations and one-issue networks of citizens are becoming more influential. Because time and distance are becoming less relevant, the importance of the nation state is decreasing. The powers of national government are also diminishing owing to the many European laws and regulations. Restoring the relations between government and citizens requires more than improving

service levels or consulting citizens via the Internet. Rather than continuing top-down governance, the government needs to encourage citizens in the information society to take responsibilities themselves.

WOUTER STOL

Social control and technology
The case of police and the Internet

In Orwell's *1984*, the Ministry of Love strictly supervised the community via so-called telescreens. Citizens were continuously observed by the Thought Police. In our society police computers have brought police officers rather than citizens under tighter control. The general rule seems to be this: it is people using a technology who are being subjected to greater discipline, instead of the ones the technology is aimed at. In this sense Internet and mobile telephone mark the beginning of a new era. Citizens use these technologies frequently. As a consequence, their comings and goings are being registered on a day-to-day basis. However, 1984 is not yet here. First the Internet provides citizens also with a considerable amount of freedom. Secondly, the police are confronted with numerous problems in policing the Internet. Hence, the police are not (yet) able to use the Internet for supervising the community.

ELS ROMMES, ELLEN VAN OOST & NELLY OUDSHOORN

Gender and the design-process of the first digital city in the Netherlands

In January 1993, the first digital city in the Netherlands was opened in Amsterdam. This city, 'De Digitale Stad' (DDS), was inspired by American 'FreeNet' systems and the push-button democracy of Al Gore. The original designers saw DDS as an instrument to invoke political discussion and to open up the Internet for a larger public. But although the main person behind DDS was a woman, although the organisations involved in the design included cultural and political organisation as well as people from the hackers-circuit and the government, although public terminals were installed throughout Amsterdam, and although DDS attracted a fairly high number of new users to the Internet, the number of women amongst the inhabitants of DDS was not higher than elsewhere on the Internet.

In an attempt to find out why DDS did not succeed in attracting a more diverse group of users to the Internet, the design process of DDS was studied, taking gender at structural, symbolic and identity-level as a key-entrance.

Madeleine Akrich's notion of 'script' is used as a theoretical basis. According to Akrich, during the design-process user-representations of the designers are consciously or unconsciously built into technological objects. A new technology may fail to become accepted by groups of users if the framework of action, the script of the technology, is not compatible with what the users want of the technology.

In the design-process of DDS, the designers made no conscious choices as to which users DDS was meant for. The user-representation-technique which the designers used is the 'I-methodology'. Partly because of a lack of time in the design-process, designers often used themselves as exemplar for 'the user'. The choices in the design-process were coloured by the personal preferences of the designers and policy makers of DDS. And although the designers of DDS were of both sexes, they all shared a fascination for new technology and its possibilities. They saw Internet as an adventurous new terrain and shared confidence in new technology as well as a 'trial and error' learning style. When looking at literature concerning masculine values, learning styles and technology, indications are found that these choices provide a better fit with masculine users.

In DDS, no user-groups were consciously excluded. On the contrary, attempts were made to draw in as many different users as possible. During the design-process, however, different choices were made regarding the kind of use which should be made of DDS by the users. In this often unconscious way, a script was constructed for users which may better fit masculine users than feminine users.

DON SLATER & JO TACCHI

Modernity in construction
A comparitive ethnography of the Internet

This paper presents an ethnographic perspective on modernity. It provides an analysis of a community radio and Internet project in rural Sri Lanka, and argues that new economies, information technologies and global networks are being constructed in this 'peripheral' site as well as in those that are considered to be the centres of such developments. We demonstrate how the very idea of new economic and organisational forms, widely associated with emergent technologies, are being constructed in relation to colonial and post-colonial experiences that generate different senses of the modern and the global. Technologies do not have inevitable and consistent effects on all places. Moreover, technologies and their properties are enlisted within specific biographical and social projects that in turn are reconfigured by these new objects. Here we investigate some of the ways in which technology, 'freedom'

and the 'new economy' were played out within the specific world of one community media centre, making the point that new technologies appear as both idiom and practical rallying point for establishing spheres of freedom and innovation in tension with established social structures.

M.I. FRANKLIN

'We are the Borg'
Microsoft and the struggle for controlling the Internet

In 1998, the antitrust trial between the American Department of Justice and the Microsoft Corporation finally began after years of preparation. Microsoft was charged with abusing its near-total monopoly of the global software-market by employing a number of strong-arm tactics in its business dealings. Former allies, longstanding opponents, and many consumer and 'open-source' software advocates lined up to file evidence, and other lawsuits, against Microsoft. However, by 2002, Microsoft's market dominance and share-price had been barely dented. This chapter critically analyses this trial with respect to how it illustrates an intense power struggle for control of the Internet; both within the corporate ICT sector and at the grassroots level of 'open-source' software advocates. It places the various vested interests at stake in the context of three key developments in ICT's; the deregulation, liberalization, and privatisation of telecommunications, the huge popularity of the Internet for ordinary users, and developments in user-friendly computer technologies from non-commercial as well as commercial initiatives. The political economic and socio-technological elements of this power struggle are drawn together by using a science fiction metaphor; the struggles between the crew of the Starship Enterprise and the Borg in the *Star Trek* television series. The Borg are an aggressive, efficient and merciless species with a highly sophisticated hi-tech society that seeks to take over and 'assimilate' all others. They are both feared and admired for they are very good at what they do.

SALLY WYATT, FLIS HENWOOD, ANGIE HART & JULIE SMITH

Re-examining the digital divide
The Internet, health information and everyday life

Survey data confirms that health information is very popular with Internet users yet very little qualitative social science research has been conducted about how people incorporate the Internet into their everyday information practices.

This article reports on an empirical study of the role of the Internet in people's efforts to inform themselves about menopause and hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in the case of women, and erectile dysfunction and Viagra in the case of men. These experiences are used to interrogate the notion of the 'digital divide'. We develop the concept of access to incorporate not only physical connection and information literacy but also gendered, age and generational social relations. We also develop the concept of 'warm expert' to draw attention to the ways in which people need help in making sense of generic medical information that is relevant to one's own circumstances.

PAUL WOUTERS

Cybersociology
A short cook book

This short cook book is an introduction for the beginning Internet researcher. Based on an extensive literature review, it discusses the ways the Internet can and cannot be used in social science research. The various stages of research create different opportunities to make use of the Internet. Each of them is discussed. The cook book warns against exaggerated claims relating to the Internet. Most of the data on the net are simply unfit for inclusion in social science data sets. A skeptical attitude is, paradoxically, probably the most productive one for methodological innovation in social science research. The cook book explains a number of do's and dont's and provides references to useful literature and Web sites. The topics discussed cover both qualitative and quantitative research methods, and range from the use of search engines for the creation of data sets to the fun of online interviewing. In fact, use of the Internet may help blurring the boundary between these styles of research. The cook book concludes with a number of meta-methodological considerations.