

CLOSING REMARKS

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Computers and cybercultures are raising questions about human experiences of society. Primarily these questions are related to the individual's organisation of everyday life: speed, time and space, and a multitude of social experiences and socialities that represent his or her life-world. This might empower our image of the future, with new perspectives, related to the communication of roles and identities on the net, and the complexity of the "computer user" as an organising form of people and collective life.

A common cultural and sociological view is that modern society required shared experiences to be fully understood; this is the idea behind interactionism as a conceptual framing of a modern society. Since the early Fordist era, the spread of technology was concentrated in communicative networks that comprised the general features of an accelerating growth of transnational economy. The seminar's focus on the communication of shared experiences and practices of everyday life represents parallel and even counter-striving cultural forces, like Virilio's "gearboxes with different times". Advertising campaigns praising mobile phones with "Planet Earth has never been this small" give us a dramatic vision of immediacy.

Landscapes

Virtual spaces may be seen as human landscapes and from this point of view be explored as a form of inner landscapes. This means that places like "the street", physical in every sense, correspond to imaginary practices, which are embedded in rituals of places, representing the communication of Self and the Other. From here derives the notion that spaces are products of activities. The meaning of analysing the computer space might be conceived as being similar to events and cultural complexity in "real world".

Cyberspace might be understood as a new form of perspective. It would be conceived as relatively free of previous conceptions of the relation between technology and man. The essence of seeing and hearing at a distance is similar to a more traditional way of interpreting movement, but to reach at a distance gives us multidimensional notion of speed, transmissions, spaces in between and individual presence.

The user

From some points of view the seminar has shown that the concept of net user has a discursive meaning. I think that we understand the concept better when we place it among other clichés, like many other words of the “IT revolution”. So far it is a matter of duplication. It has something essential to say about two categories, the use of reality and the use of virtuality. Following that, the computer user might be positioned in a stereo-reality, and in this situation the study of the user’s activities on the net adds questions to the complex nature of social and cultural lives. What is the inner meaning of individuals when saying they found a home on the net or when they explain that they “are on the net”?

The specific negative aspect of information superhighways is a loss of orientation regarding alterity (the other); it is a disturbance in the relationship with the other and with the world. It is obvious that a loss of orientation, the prevailing conflict between experiencing realities and so-called “non-situations”, is going to affect the cultural fabrication of a person’s multiple identities, in a longer run society and, hence, democracy.

One of the effects of seminar is the necessity to analyse the use of digital power. It focuses on processes in a late modern Western civilisation and tendencies on the net, regarding the design of spatial sovereignty at different levels in society, from the user, nerd, and hacker to the big media and data corporations. ICT is obviously one of the most widespread tools for sorting out power relations, between Self and the Other, and between Self and World. The net has become the laboratory where individuals elaborate their identities, and seek to explore their minds, ambitions and lives, and a multitude of diverse interests of “being somebody”, and where they demonstrate their capacity to edit and communicate the endeavours of a cultural existence, apart from or within today’s world. For although IT may feed identity making, technology is steadily changing how we present and represent ourselves, how we think of others, and what it means to be a “user”. Tools have always done this, the national mail services, the telephones, the meetings in the streets, but in the last few decades we have been more aware of our tools. The status of the “user” is fading when nothing more has to be learnt from making new tools and no glory can be found from making new concepts or new measurements.

Globalisation

The focus of understanding globalism has grown in importance in recent years. This is a wide perspective in the cultural and social sciences which ranges from ideas about the nature of transcultural phenomena, such as the spread of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and the cultural effects of a mediated global community.

According to the general features of this seminar, globalisation may be viewed as a matter of virtualisation. What is being effectively globalised is time; everything now happens within the perspective of real time: users are supposed to live in a “one-time system”.

Thus we see on the one hand real time superseding real space. A phenomenon that is making both distances and surfaces irrelevant is the global spread of cultural identities and models of presenting, and re-presenting, an identity and a specific or unique Self. Some cultural scientists argue that replacing the term “global” with “glocal” might be useful. This emerges from the idea that the local, like a locally defined user or personal identity, has, by definition, become global, and the global, local.

User concepts will uncover the idea of a person’s multiple identities in a global community with economic interdependence creating almost similar social conditions in computer environments. Identities are going global, and there is an expanded flow of users, individuals and cultural crossroads that are influencing the perception of migration, travel and intensified global communication.

Counter-effects

There may be historical and national explanations of modern life in Europe, and in Sweden, that separate Europe from what is common in other parts of the world, especially when considering modern development in America, or Japan; but an accelerating expansion of media technology eliminates the great differences. The counter-effect is another phase of fragmentation, which must be focused on as fragmentary cultural interests, with an intense production of cultural zones and borders on the net.

The net, like world society, is a stateless polity. It has no central controlling body or authority. The same idea of a perceived development with little or no influence from central organisations, has contributed to the picture of cities in the 1990s and a media view on being “out of control”. It is the scene of modernisation, capable of being read, translated, codified, with reference to all cultures and individuals mixing together in small virtual areas. Among its actors one could say that culture served as a form of mind mapping, a creative reality, or ethos, where the individual proved his identity and found

himself stuck into representations of himself and others, in a landscape of meanings. His individual competence of navigation through the system of signs and symbols on the net was always escalating

Like speed in circuits

Living in towns is from some points of view a truly modern phenomenon, although history gives us many examples of media and mediating structures where human beings realised visions of freedom, translated into materialised objects and the consumption of goods. The spread of technology and economic opportunities comprised the general features of an accelerating growth of the transnational economy. News from the new economy is presented by the media in a dramatic, solid form which contributes to the perception of a one-dimensional, homogenised global world which is conflicting the nature of the real world. The net contains goods of homogenisation and heterogenisation working simultaneously and following the same pattern of boundary negotiations and cultural fragmentation that reminds us of the individual's understanding of citiness, like cities of circuits.

Models of socio-economic change, applied to cyber virtuality, made the use of computer laboratories for "modern" life. The Internet was designed as a planned reality, therefore in many senses a "scripted" phenomena, and comprised the modernistic view of development as journeys at high speed. The great outlines of progress and journeys are still there. User realities are materialised realities of signs and semiotics for progress. Economy, consumption and business are still creating new structures for the use in a perceived world of tomorrow, and there are still landscapes of power and repression to be launched over the net, many of them opposed to the Western idea of democracy.

The seminar will empower our focus on user research in an evolving socio-cultural context with multi-disciplinary understanding. The seminar was a great success that was wholly due to the brilliant papers. There is a strong demand for mutual exchange of research on the development of computer cultures that enables young scholars who will go on to take part in international discussions. We look forward to meeting you again.

It is necessary to provide an understanding of cultural change, from the emerging signs of new ways of handling political and business affairs on the net to the spread of information worldwide. The development of cultures on the net and the use of ITC play have been targeted as something important for the understanding of new social movements. There is also an important process going on at the individual level that is related to the ongoing production of meaning, identities, integration and exclusion.

Towards another Cultural Analysis

I think that we have found some convincing results; we are still heading for a cultural and sociological understanding of man's role in modern civilisation. Thus, a study of the user of ICT will unveil the specific pattern of many social phenomena. It traces a the story of the changing impact of mediating structures on cultural lives and the typical western concern about the subject's exploration of self and the critical understanding of de-centred identities.

The classical ideas of humanisation in industry are well known to most scholars in human and social sciences. The impact of Elton Mayo's *Human Relations* on welfare programmes has been of a great importance in many areas of technological development, such as car production, aviation and medicine. The traditional focus on industry and the classical interpretations of the subject's world of work in Western societies has moved to a much broader field of investigations. It is the experiences of virtual environments that confirm a dramatic shift in our notions of self, other, machine, and world. It is a change from the outlines drawn by generations of industrial psychologists to a multi-dimensional understanding of man's role in relation to the electronic media revolution and the use of high-tech computer devices affecting all parts of daily lives.

Global Monitoring

Papers that have been presented during the seminar reflect new perspectives on a foreseeable future when the relation between man and technology will be successively put in the front zone, and the impact of "human-centred technology" will be reloaded and charged with crucial interests. In that perspective, the impact of cultures and the orientation towards a mediated global community is of great interest for our seminar.

A striking thing is the number of dictionaries on the net; each of them pointing out the language preferred among users. GM makes its new environment-friendly website for kids, Indian officials put another piece to the global progress story when using the Internet as a communications hub during the Maha Kumbh Mela, a diverse celebration on the River Ganges that takes place every 12 years in an effort to provide some kind of order. An emerging global community of communication does not necessarily mean a worldwide understanding between people, nor does it lead to a homogenisation of cultures and languages, but we all know the Western interpretation of order. The breakthrough of such ideas on the computer market, like the concept of a culturally mainstream development as an outcome of the IT revolution, may be fateful. And it is not obvious that earlier intellectual pursuits seem like marginal disputes or that ICT will affect the lives of everybody on the planet.

It will gradually become more evident that ICT is a Western phenomena, reflecting post-colonial interpretations of the world. It is therefore important to unveil the impact of the individual, his or her culture and society, to explain the coming role of a “user”, i.e. the effect of man on technology and vice versa in a culturally diversified world. The individual’s sudden exposure to computers is filled with mythological experiences, without adequate means of understanding, of the imploded, instantaneous world of the new information order.

Literature

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