Sam Inkinen

INTERNET, "DATA HIGHWAYS" AND INFORMATION SOCIETY. A COMMENT ON THE RHETORIC OF THE ELECTRONIC SUBLIME

The sublime (Germ. das Erhabene) is an intriguing and ambivalent concept. In aesthetic discussions the sublime is usually regarded as opposite to the beautiful and harmonious. The concept has gained a central status in recent debates concerning the issue of [the] postmodern(ism).

The concept of the sublime is by no means unambiguous; it has inspired mutually different interpretations during centuries. One of the modern definitions was suggested by James Carey and John Quirk, the two communications scholars, who, in their discussion of the "electronic sublime", saw it as a thematic and chronological extension of the "mechanical sublime" of the 19th century. Conceptually both of these sublimes fall into the general category of the "technological sublime."

The present paper puts the visions, plans and utopias concerning the new media and information technology under critical inspection. Following Carey and Quirk, the electronic sublime is here seen as a futuristic and techno-optimistic contemporary mentality towards electronics and electronic systems (e.g. computer and information networks) and their ensuing effects of social change. The rhetoric of the electronic sublime, in turn, implies the utopian, enthusiastic language, often lacking substance.

Although there are many similarities in recent discussions of technology with techno-optimistic views of the 1980s, certain conspicuous thematic shifts of emphasis can be, however, discerned. While "computer" in the 1980s and "multi- and hypermedia" in the early 1990s were the rhetorical key concepts of the new information technology, the recent discourse has focused mainly on information networks and "data highways"/"Information Superhighways." Borrowed from the USA, this concept implies swift information networks capable of delivering multimedia information, whose objective is the unification of nations and continents into one extensive communications network, more efficient than ever.

In recent rhetoric, "data highways" have been connected to two other technological slogans: Internet (the global computer network originally constructed for universities and research institutes) and various futurological visions of the information society. These three concepts—Internet, "data highways" and information society—often appear in public confusingly and obscurely interconnected.

The present paper introduces visions and outlines of the future electronic society and culture by various governments (USA, Japan, the European Union, among others) and the most important visionaries of technology (e.g. Masuda, Attali, Toffler, Naisbitt). The basic orientation in the paper is a media and technology critical perspective (the Frankfurt School, Foucault, Forester, Roszak etc.) inside which the role of the new media technology as constitutive of contemporary culture and utopias is surveyed.

Seppo Kuivakari

SENSORIA. POSTMODERN MEDIA CONSCIOUSNESS

In the present article I take an introductory look at those dimensions of net culture which in my opinion form the basis of the future research in net. First of all, the focus of research will be on the links through which the new forms of knowledge and power are constructed and, on the other hand, on the mode of experience of the individual user. To follow Foucault, the relations between knowledge and power are not static but, rather, matrixes of change. Taking this metaphor as the starting point I survey such extraordinary and self-regulating media effects as prothetic synergy and responsive interaction in order to study the constitution of the subject in this "heterotopia" created by information nets.

As I see it, net culture seems to contain some possibilities to turn the electronic universe from a mere information channel to an active space of action. To me telematics is rather a technology of consciousness than of reproduction, more a didactic prosthesis than an architectural space. Information net is a navigation gadget operating on an associational and irrational basis, a route to self-sufficient and personal media consciousness.

In my conclusion I discuss the dimensions of this self-sufficient media consciousness, in Foucauldian terms, the genealogic dimensions of knowledge in information nets. The field of events does not consist of merely places to visit which we call events. An event is not just an "entity" but, rather, a meeting point of possible research routes, too. In media culture the analysis of thinking is closely intertwined with the analysis of events taking place at the meeting points of various, crisscrossing events in such fields as information nets. I finish my paper by returning to the classical sense of the concept of "theory": there theory included a very multi-dimensional, complex model of making active and pargnatic observations, a model which to me also forms the basis of research into media culture.

Kai Eriksson

INTERNET AND MODERN PUBLICITY

The paper approaches Internet as a part of the historical development of production conditions of modern publicity. Of all the key media of modern publicity Internet is here discussed by relating it mainly to the press, although the role of television in transforming the modern publicity system cannot otherwise be surpassed. This focus is due to the fact that I wish to study specifically the discursive construction of modern publicity, and, in this respect, Internet appears to form a totally new kind of discursive communication space beside the modern press.

At first I make a general survey on the origins of the conception of publicity in western societies. Next I proceed to discuss the press and its mechanisms in producing the modern discursive publicity. Finally, I conclude by discussing the position of Internet in relation to modern publicity space, thus conceived, and at the same time suggesting some elementary outlines of comprehending theoretically this global information network as a part of restructuring, besides publicity, also modern society.

Jouni Santara

SCHOLARS' OR HACKERS' INTERNET. WHO ARE THE USERS OF NET SERVICES?

The use of Internet can be studied by connecting a visitor's book to service applied in which the users unknowingly leave their traces. WWW (World Wide Web) and Netscape act as the operative technological basis and the target group can be defined through the contents of the service. This paper discusses the experience of offering an English-French minidictionary by the present writer into the net. Empirical statistics reveal the nature of the anonymous user masses of the two respective dominant populations in Internet. At the same time, the article evaluates the efficiency of the News system in target marketing.