Humans as cameras

Touchy is an artwork designed by Eric Siu in 2012. It has won several awards such as the Best Picture at the Robot Film Festival, New York, in 2012, First Prize at the 15th International Media Art Biennale, Poland, in 2013 and the Silver Award, Interactive Design, Best Digital Entertainment Award at The Hong Kong ICT Awards in 2014. This year it was also selected as Best-of Ars Electronica Festival. It was also covered in various media such as WIRED UK, Neural, Discovery News, Huffington Post, Washington Post.

Touchy is an interactive device that enables a human to transform into a functioning camera. The working principle is that while wearing the helmet-like camera, the wearer is completely blind until he or she is touched by another person. When this interaction occurs, the eye-holes functioning as shutters of the camera open and the wearer is able to see through the holes. If this physical contact is held for 10 seconds, the camera takes a picture that is displayed immediately on the LCD screen at the back of the device.

Touchy and society

According to Eric Siu, this project is ‘a phenomenological social interaction experiment aiming at healing social anxiety’ which is nowadays produced by the different social networking sites. The ubiquity of social media networks like Facebook and Twitter can be criticized that by forming virtual social spaces, they are neglecting the physical social interactions and are “dehumanizing physical communication”. Touchy is trying to be the opposite of social medial platforms as Facebook, by focusing only on human physical interaction. Touchy is also inverting the process of ‘selfies’, as the human camera is able to make pictures of other people but not of himself or herself. Siu also posed the question: “Isn’t it a lyrical irony that gazing into another’s eyes for 10 seconds gives life to your self-portrait?”. Photographs have always had a central role both in a social media network as in a physical space. According to Siu, the camera was improving our social lives because it enabled people to share memories, valuable moments or emotions.

With this kind of interaction, Touchy is trying to heal the society that is becoming increasingly isolated because of technology: “Touchy is a result of rethinking our relationship with technology, and the joy that can come via offline communication.” Siu also stated that: “The project does not aim at making photography more social, but human. That is to say, employing the social capability of a camera to a human being”
It is interesting how a device that transforms a human being into a machine might heal a society that is overtaken by technology. The core of this device is the human touch, which is showing how important senses can be for human relationships. This device allows embodiment instead of disembodiment.

**Touchy and cybernetics**

The importance of the human senses in a digitized society brings me back to the early beginnings of cybernetics. When I say cybernetics my mind goes straight to the image of a human wearing a helmet, walking on the street and being completely disconnected from the physical space.

With a personalized *virtuality* displayed by the helmet, a human could live as isolated as possible, but still being in contact with everything and everybody. These kind of thoughts can be found in the early stages of cybernetics and to an extent they can apply for our everyday society. It is very common to us to see people constantly interacting on their smart-phones. They are not wearing a helmet, but a telephone can also make someone’s view of the physical space quite narrow.

When trying to make cybernetics an universal science and language, prominent cyberneticians where arguing that: “with this new language they were breaking down the false dichotomies between mind and matter, human and non-human – dichotomies that the new information-based language would show never to have been true”(Bowker, p. 117). It can be interesting to analyse to what extent the humans will further merge with technology and also to what extent humans can become disembodied from the real, physical space. Could a device as Touchy become a new way of socializing for future ‘Facebook addicts’? Or would Facebook become the norm for socializing and the disembodiment-embodiment dichotomy will disappear?

**References:**
A little over a week ago on September 6th Kei Nishikori very surprisingly beat Novak Djokovic in four sets at the US Open semi-finals. Meanwhile an algorithm developed by IBM turned this match into music (Titlow). In order to create this song James Murphy, the man behind the dance-punk band LCD Soundsystem joined forces with IBM. A vast array of data containing player movement, number of shots, winners, unforced errors etc. is collected during the match. This data is then algorithmically being transformed into musical tones. In fact, all the matches that were played at the US Open have been turned into a combined 400 hours of music. All songs were available live and can be played back on a subdomain of the US Open website called US Open Sessions. The matches are presented not only through sound but trough visuals as well. The created songs were later remixed by Murphy into a more approachable form (“Hear James Murphy’s US Open Remixes”). What is interesting about this process is the replacement of the creator in the making of music and the influence of algorithms on our lives. Who or what is really making the music?

A definition of music that is used very often is French composer Edgard Varèse’s description of his own music as nothing more but ‘organized sound’ (Varese and Wen-chung, 18). Furthermore, musicologist Jean-Jaques Nattiez proposed that ‘The border between music and noise is always culturally defined’ (Nattiez, 4). Despite a wide range of definitions of music, it has always been considered an art involving the expression of human emotions. The Oxford Dictionary defines music as: ‘Vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion’. Throughout our history, different innovations have changed and shaped the definition of music. The perception of music has been changed by the invention of technological mediums to carry music such as a vinyl record or a cd. A musician no longer needed to perform the music in order for a listener to hear it. Another stretching of the perception of what music is or is supposed to be occurred with the creation of synthesizers (such as the Minimoog displayed on the right). Sound as expression of electronic currents instead of the vibration of natural objects. In all these developments one thing has remained the same. Music is a cultural phenomenon that has a creator who expresses. This creator invents melodies, rythms and arranges different noises and sounds in order to create a piece of music.
In this video, describing the process of making the US Open Sessions' music, James Murphy very aptly says:

‘The primary music generator is the algorithm, it’s not me. I’m not writing music, I’m generating probabilities for music.’ (Making Music with Tennis Data)

This project gives rise to the question of the creator. The creative mind behind the music is effectively replaced by an algorithm. Perhaps Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart would have written a piece on the semi-finals that captured the intense emotion of a David and Goliath-esque story. The algorithm captures the same event, but has no emotion. In the case of the ‘music’ created based on the US Open tennis matches, there is no direct link between the musician and the sounds that are arranged. The algorithm is based on choices that a musician makes translated by a programmer into the actual code so the vague remains of a human element still exist in the final piece. The key difference is that the sounds we listen to are no longer arranged or composed by a human being, but rather generated with predetermined mathematical precision. Where playback mediums took away the magic of a live performance, algorithms take away the liveliness of the creative process that is making music.

Again from the video describing the making of the US Open Sessions:

‘… in between there is this layer that has to translate between the tennis data and the music data and that’s really what the algorithm is doing’ (Making Music with Tennis Data).

More generally speaking algorithms form a layer between us and the world and control our lives in an ever increasing fashion. Seen for example by Gilles Deleuze as a society of control, one that is operated by computers (Deleuze) and thus their algorithms. Or as posed by Lawrence Lessig, who claimed that ‘Code is Law’, describing code as a form of social control (Lessig). Whether they are Google search algorithms, Amazon’s algorithms to suggest new products or the algorithms used by the stock brokers to predict the rise and fall of certain stocks, they form a larger part of our world than we may perceive. Kevin Slavin described this tendency in his talk at a TED conference in 2011. He recognises how algorithms shape our world, not just by mediation, but by actually determining what that world looks like. One of the most striking examples is an algorithm that recognises patterns in stories in order to write more successful scripts for movies. Successful in this case means ‘the most profitable’.
The US Open Sessions shows the power of algorithms in a new and creative way. Simultaneously it gives us a peek in what may be a world of culture produced by algorithms. James Murphy might not lose his edge to the new kids on the block, but to the mathematical algorithms that know us best.

Citations


This Saturday, the North Korean news agency KCNA rejected a recent South Korean proposal for official high-level talks as a result of anti-DPRK leaflet scattering known as the “balloon operation.”

South Korean activists have employed helium balloons to send messages over the North Korean border since at least 2003. The balloons tend to carry U.S. dollars, photographs from outside of North Korea, thumb drives with information, and anti-DPRK pamphlets. It was a recent launch delivering Choco Pies, however, that garnered major attention from international media outlets and DPRK officials alike.

Choco Pies first entered North Korea as bonuses given out by South Korean employers at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a demilitarized business zone near the countries’ border that has operated since 2003. The confections quickly gained popularity amongst the North Korean populous, eventually to the extent that they were sold on the black market at inflated rates. Considered a symbol of capitalism and rebellion, Choco Pies were ultimately banned by Kim Jung Un this past July. The retaliatory balloon launch was ultimately met by KCNA’s public dismissal of South Korean state diplomatic efforts.

In utilizing the helium balloon, South Korean activists subverted modes of control that rely on digital technologies and physical infrastructure. The North Korean government employs a variety of blockades on imports, information, communication, and currency. While the helium balloon is neither as efficient nor precise as the technologies it replaces, the balloon nonetheless provides an impactful alternative for controlled mediums like phone, internet, and postal service. As shown by the Choco Pie launch, helium balloons are even capable of successfully delivering food and cultural influence to what is otherwise a largely isolated society.

This scenario poses a number of challenges to the current discussion of media utilization in grassroots diplomacy. Scholars have explored the role of grassroots diplomacy as utilized by governments and corporations, as well as the effect that the internet and social media has had on breaking down conventional diplomacy. Each line of thinking proposes a structure, either bureaucratic or technological, which enables efficacy in grassroots diplomacy. The balloon operation relied on neither of these systems. Rather, the lack of such structures is a crucial aspect of the operation’s design.

Working outside of conventional models, the balloon operation was successful on a number of fronts. It warranted a response from the governments of both North Korea and South Korea. Food was successfully delivered to eager recipients. Perhaps most importantly, the Choco Pie launch is illustrative of the humanistic role in grassroots diplomacy as described by J. Gregory Payne:

> A fundamental theme of these narratives is the role of credibility and open communication in engaging people from around the world to enter/avoid relationships necessary for the creation and nurturing of trust and further communication. The overall goal is to further understanding—appreciation for what we share in common and respect and tolerance for our differences.

Balloons deliver substance in a way digital communications cannot. In sending Choco Pies, activists are sending tangible signs of peace that can be eaten and enjoyed. The pies are a physical representation of South Korean people and their production. Sharing this food is an active display of
solidarity in which South Korean citizens communicate a mutual understanding for their counterparts in the North. This marks a distinct change from previous balloon drops, where the contents tended to focus on the differences between the two nations in terms of economics, culture, and politics. The Choco Pie, on the other hand, exemplifies the existing similarities.

The balloon operation highlights that new media innovation does not require new technology. Rather, innovation requires a consideration of the technology at hand for the parties involved. There is nothing new about balloons, chocolate pie, or grassroots diplomacy. There is newness, however, in the evolving contexts in which they may be utilized.

References


One of the most emblematic and authentic motifs from the American sci-fi television series *Star Trek* involves the medical officer Leonard McCoy using a *tricorder* in order to scan and analyse living beings and environments. He records data with a small sensor probe and reads it on a separate, handheld device.

**SCiO** – a “pocket molecular sensor” – works in a similar way. It is “a tiny *spectrometer* and allows you to get instant relevant information about the chemical make-up of just about anything around you, sent directly to your smartphone.” The light sent from the device reflects back into the inbuilt *near-IR* sensor, which contains information necessary for determining the chemical structure of the chosen material. It then sends the data to user’s smartphone application via *Bluetooth 4.0*, and consequently to the cloud, where it is processed and analysed with algorithms. Finally, the analysis is sent back to the smartphone and displayed in real time. In addition to the product itself, the company will release an Application Development Kit, which enables developers to build their own third party applications to use with SCiO for their own purposes.

With just the basic SCiO kit, the users will be able to examine the molecular contents of various different things. For instance, they could scan an apple and get detailed information about its nutritional facts. Or, as *CNN* reports: “SCiO could be a protective tool for clubbers keen to check if their drink has been spiked, or patients to see if their pills are as advertised.” Its applications are virtually unlimited. Indeed, the creators hope to create a first “*database of matter*”, a collection of digital genetic fingerprints of physical objects that can be accessed and updated by anyone. Although, theoretically, one could also use SCiO to measure one’s own blood sugar level, or even the chemical composition of one’s skin,
the creators warn that it should not substitute a professional medical opinion. In the interview with CNN, the creators also mentioned that people with allergies should not rely too much on it either, as: “it can identify elements between ‘0.1% to 1%’ of the overall chemical makeup, and that it would need to be more robust to be an effective guide for allergy sufferers.”

There has been a lot of emphasis put on the importance of managing one’s health in the media recently (Rose 1996), particularly in the western society, where health gurus have risen to the status of superstars. Some examples include Dr. Oz in the United States, or even the first lady Michelle Obama with her anti-obesity initiative Let’s Move. Existing digital media, and especially Google, are already used by many to find a diagnosis for illnesses. However, it is often criticised as being an unreliable and sometimes even dangerous method of acquiring medical information. Tania Lewis from the Monash University, Australia, analysed a group of young people who used the internet as a way to find information about their medical problems. Lewis concluded that, generally, the popular media and the medical literature tend to use an: “either/or rhetoric; lay people are either empowered consumers with control over their lifestyle choices or potentially the victims of cyberchondria” (536). The author is fairly in favour of using online sources, as it usually indicates a concern of the individual with their own well-being and healthy lifestyle. Tang and Hwee Kwoon Ng (2006) analysed instead how helpful Google can be for doctors to arrive to the correct diagnosis. Their conclusions indicate that, “in difficult diagnostic cases, it is often useful to ‘google for a diagnosis.’” (1144)

It would be reasonable, therefore, to assume that SCiO will help the customers make even more accurate medical predictions. It can enable them to track the intake of calories and other properties of the food or pills they are consuming. The new technology devices, such as SCiO, could give people more possibilities to monitor and prevent diseases on their own without going to see a doctor. Admittedly, there is a danger of cyberchondria, however these sort of consequences (hypochondria) existed prior to the introduction of the more advanced technology, and are not directly caused by the use of technology. SCiO also provides the user with facts specific to the analysed matter, and has consequently less chance of misinforming the users with misleading guesses.

References


In the past decades, videogame developers have been adding realism and immersion (as well as blood spattered details) to their games. With the advent of powerful graphical processors and high-definition screens, the images have become sharper and the line between reality and realism has become blurred.

Much of this development has to do with realistic use of (human) motion. Using motion capture techniques, body movements (walking, running etc.) have become far more convincing, but even facial expressions are now captured by sticking small dots on actors’ faces and have their expressions analysed and converted to facial expressions of their virtual alter ego.
Another way of immersing the gamer into a virtual world has been to design appealing, hyperrealistic surroundings: green pastures where you can almost smell the grass, grisly mountains, cosy villages and impressive cloud formations, all too beautiful to be true. One would almost be tempted to grab a camera and take pictures of the scenery, just to post them to Facebook or Instagram. A number of games have included the option to pause the game and take screenshots, to be shared with online friends. Numerous blogs are filled with – at times breathtaking – pictures of non-existing worlds. This option has been taken a step further by developers of the PlayStation 4 version of the game ‘The Last of Us – Remastered’, where a dedicated ‘Photo Mode’ was added. Not only does this mode allow the gamer to pause and take a screenshot; it offers the possibility to create ‘actual’ photographs of the scenery using a virtual camera, not unlike Instagram or VSCO cam, so including the option to change the virtual lens’s aperture – adding depth of field –, adding filters and effects. As Kovalovs, one of the developers, mentions:

> Graphical fidelity and social integration on game consoles have converged at a time when it’s never been easier or more popular to share photography online. (The Verge, 2014)

According to the creators of the Photo Mode, the technology that enables this mode is not necessarily new, but the online ecosystem has changed dramatically in the past few years. The willingness or even eagerness to share experiences and especially pictures and video has reached new levels: Twitter and Facebook, as well as blogs and other platforms are heavily used to share gamer’s achievements. In fact, Twitch – a website that offers nothing but streaming video of other people’s gameplay – was recently acquired by Amazon for nearly a billion dollars (wired.com 2014) in an attempt to dominate the television screen, where most of the videogame action takes place (with most other screens dominated by Apple and Google). In July 2014, Twitch had 55 million unique visitors watching 15 billion minutes of gameplay (businesswire.com 2014).

Why are gamers so keen on sharing? If games are designed to be immersive (for a wealth of reasons), and to have the gamers identify or even unify with the game’s protagonist, one could consider the shared pictures ‘first person selfies’. Selfies as a form of ‘personal photography’ has been extensively researched. Four social reasons for sharing personal photos are: personal and group memory, relationship creating and maintenance, self-representation and self-expression (Van House et al. 2005). The emphasis of videogame photo sharing seems to lie with the last three of these reasons, and memory is a fading aspect of more and more ephemeral and intangible personal photography. As Van House concludes:

> Personal photographs may be becoming more public and transitory, less private and durable, more effective as objects of communication than of memory.

If ‘gameplay selfies’ are effective objects of communications, what exactly do they communicate? In the case of ‘The Last of Us’, the pictures contain severe violence and very graphic images. The award winning war photographer Ashley Gilbertson, who spent months as an embedded photojournalist in Iraq and other war zones, was asked by Time Magazine to ‘embed’ himself in ‘The Last of Us’ and shoot a series of pictures using the Photo Mode. Gilbertson, who witnessed enough violence to develop Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, found the game to be too violent and gruesome:

> I initially played the game at home. But after a short time playing it, I noticed I was having very strong reactions in regards to my role as the protagonist: I hated it. When I covered real war, I did so with a camera, not a gun. At home, I’d play for 30 minutes before noticing I had knots in my stomach, that my vision blurred, and then eventually, that I had simply crashed out. (Time.com, 2014)

If an experienced war photographer crashes out playing the game, and millions of gamers around the world can’t wait to cheerfully share their ‘zombie selfies’, what does this say about self-representation?
Last week I received an e-mail from Twitter with the heading ‘We’ve updated our Privacy Policy and terms of Service.’ That’s always interesting news. What was even more interesting was the easily announced new feature Twitter is testing: a “Buy” button that allows users to purchase a product.

The Buy Button

The button let users shop from select merchants and artists directly from the social network. For a small percentage of U.S. users, some Tweets from Twitter test partners will feature a “Buy” button, letting you buy directly from the Tweet (Twitter Blog). Mashable wrote immediately about the new feature of Twitter. Reporter Seth Fiegerman states that the button represents Twitter’s biggest step into ecommerce to date and is the result of many months of development and tests.

How the “Buy” button exactly works? In Twitter’s test, a purchase can be completed in just a few taps. After tapping the “Buy” button, you will get additional product details and be prompted to enter your shipping and payment information. Once that’s entered and confirmed, your order information is sent to the merchant for delivery (Twitter Blog). Twitter explicitly mentions the security and safety of the information of you purchases: “Your payment and shipping information is encrypted and safely stored after your first transaction, so you can easily buy on Twitter in the future without having to re-enter all of your information.” They’re also mentioning that you can always and at any time remove your entire payment information if you want to.
Nathan Hubbard, the former Ticketmaster CEO who joined Twitter a year ago as its first head of commerce, told Mashable something interesting in an interview. “In some capacity, we’ve been working on it since day one that I’ve been here. I think you’ve seen us do a lot very quietly over the past year that informs where we are today.” That means that Twitter is interested in inventing and improving their ways of making money for already a long time. That isn’t good or bad of course, but it somehow questions the idea behind the “social” service Twitter offers.

Social network turns into shopping network?

The question now arises if the social medium Twitter, an online platform to meet and share with others, will be still the same if commerce enters the arena. Shouldn’t social media, as the word describes, have something to do with being “social” and not with commerce and buying things like in a webshop?

In her study Gina Masullo Chen says that Twitter gratifies users need to connect with others (757). If this is the reason why users are sharing their information and experiences with others on Twitter, what will happen if the whole platform transforms into something slightly different? Suddenly this platform has the extra aim to sell things to users instead of only being a platform where the user decide what it wants to share, do and see.

Verdegem and van der Graaf are confirming a transition in social media from a logic of sociability to one of commerce (1). They explicitly give data a key role in this transition, since the data of users becomes valuable for all kind of third parties, but the buy button is in my opinion pointing to the same transition. As they state: “Implicit in this transition are the issues of surveillance and transparency, as what started out as collective, user-centred social media platforms have become profit-driven organizations required to create commercial returns for investors” (1).

In an other article for Mashable, Fiegerman writes that the bigger goal for the social networks sites Facebook and Twitter, according to analysts he spoke with, may simply be to use commerce as a way to boost engagement among users by giving them more reason to stay on site as well as provide an additional selling point to advertisers.

The fact that Twitter is now experimenting with the development of this “Buy” button shows how this social media platform is commercializing its service. This is also what Nick Summers in an article for The Next Web writes: “It’s a huge move for Twitter and one that emphasizes its drive to effectively monetize its service.” However, Seth Fiegerman undermines this a bit by stating that Facebook and Twitter won’t become a shopping network like for example Amazon, because users won’t necessarily have a “mindset to make an impulse buy.”

Therefore, the question overtime will be: is the “Buy” button just a nice addition to the social network platform or will it change the whole nature of tweeting?

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Just five days ago, on September 9th, Apple held another one of their famous Keynote presentations. On this particular ‘Special Event’, Apple introduced, among other new software and hardware releases, their new and already highly hyped wearable: the Apple Watch. And personally, I think it’s a most peculiar release by the Apple team.

**Feature mess**

Apple’s iconic ex-CEO Steve Jobs was a perfectionist. In the official biography, *Steve Jobs*, Walter Isaacson points multiple times towards Jobs’ purist approach of Apple’s products, highlighting quotes such as “we make progress by eliminating things, by removing the superfluous” (445) and “nature loves simplicity and unity” (561). With the Apple Watch however, Apple broke with their minimalist approach and stacked the device so full of software that its reported battery life is only one day. In a recent article on WIRED, Kyle VanHemert made a somewhat similar point on the excessive amount of features on the new Watch:

> The Apple Watch is so many things that Tim Cook didn’t even have time to list them all, though he did blurt out a few more as he was heading off stage: It’s a viewfinder for your iPhone camera. A remote for your Apple TV. A walkie-talkie.

Aesthetically, the Apple Watch fits neatly into Apple’s design range: Sir Jonathan “Jony” Ive has once again shown he’s worthy of his knighthood for services to the design industry. Apple’s line is functionally speaking also highly balanced: the MacBook line for mobility, the Mac Pro line for home and office work, the iPod line for music, the iPad line (which App store allows users to use the device however they like) and, of course, the iPhone.

So a brand, Apple is somewhat restricted: their line is small and balanced, and a new product will often (sometimes over time) replace the older product altogether. The Apple Watch is admittedly physically a new product, but its function seems to me like a mashup of the other Apple products’ greatest hits. It combines so many features and options that it seems to distance itself from Apple’s product line. The Watch includes text messaging, phone, email, passbook (also for credit card payments), maps, calendar, music, and much, much more. In order to offer much, much more, Apple also launched:

> A brand-new platform for developers.

> With its powerful technologies and placement on the wrist, Apple Watch opens up exciting opportunities for apps. Using a new set of tools called WatchKit, developers will be able to easily create experiences designed specifically for Apple Watch.

**Platform mess**
The features on the Apple Watch are highly social; Apple highlights the "more immediate, intimate ways to connect" the Watch presents to its users. Its perhaps logical to assume that designing 'experiences' through a platform for a social-driven product requires intimate knowledge of how the device is used. As Apple sees its product as a platform, the focus for these developers should lie on a platform's main commodity: attention. Taina Bucher approaches the capacity of attention both as "as a mode of participation" (1) and "a mechanism to both predict and inhibit the future" (15). To understand attention in and around the Apple Watch, the platform must be thoroughly scrutinised and understood. For instance: is the Watch enough of a platform to allow for certain medium specifics? How would the Watch distinguish itself from the iPhone? Are the Digital Touch features on Apple Watch (such as Sketch, Tap, and Heartbeat) user and platform specific enough to direct attention toward? Research into these platforms means that platform data has to be constructed into a more qualitative data, taking it beyond its 'meaning' and putting it into the 'bigger picture' of a specific discourse (Langlois and Elmer 10, Rogers 202). As the platform is very physically located and thus isolated, this practice of research could be problematic.

Admittedly, such questions also arose with the iPhone, but as more and more features are available for the device, it could very well ultimately lose its destined purpose: to be a watch. So please Apple, watch out…

Works cited


This year has been exceptionally fruitful for the fans of wearable technology. Last week, we were introduced to a new child of the wearable technology era: the Apple Watch.

On September 9, Apple revealed its own long-anticipated smartwatch – the Apple watch. The smartwatch will be available in two sizes of 38mm and 42mm, and come in three main designs: the classic Apple Watch with stainless steel straps, Apple Watch Sport (for fitness fans), and Apple Watch Edition (for high-end orientated customers). The watch will be available in early 2015, with the pricing starting at $349. Apple Watch can only be used in pair with an iPhone, and it runs Apple’s own Watch OS.

So what does it do? Except for the ability to tell time (in the variety of watch faces), Apple Watch can serve as the extension of the iPhone. Many apps are available in a simplified mode, such as messages, phone calls, calendar and app notifications. It offers the ability to make Apple Payments, play music over Bluetooth, and serve as a remote shutter for the iPhone camera. Apple Watch naturally offers some features for the lovers of fitness gamification – the smartwatch has a heartbeat sensor, a pedometer and a handful of apps for tracking your activity. Apple Watch also offers somewhat new ways of communication, called “Digital Touch”. Users can send each other simple sketches, a voice message, a tap (which the receiver will feel on their Apple Watch) and even share heartbeats. Apple Watch is making use of a so-called “Taptic sensor”, which provides haptic feedback: different vibration signals for different notifications. Apple Watch can be managed through the touchscreen, and a "Digital Crown", which allows for zooming, scrolling, and selecting items without the necessity to touch the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktuusc4ZUtO

Wearable technology is often associated with cyborg culture. However, can we think of Apple Watch as of product that brings a person closer to being a cyborg? The term “cyborg” has many definitions. In the original sense, a cybernetic organism is a mix of an organism and a machine. Oxford dictionary defines cyborg as "A fictional or hypothetical person whose physical abilities are extended beyond normal human limitations by mechanical elements built into the body." We are not the cyborgs in a classical sense of the fusion between the man and the machine, as Apple Watch does not serve as an implant, and merely replaces and accessory familiar to us from the beginning of time.

I think that we can see wearable technology in terms of Marshall McLuhan: wearable technology serve as the extensions of men. Here, it takes
quite literally position: smartwatches serve as modification of our wrists, and Google glass as extension of our eyes. So no, Apple Watch does not make us cyborgs in a classical sci-fi sense. Here, I think more in terms of Donna Haraway. She offers the following definition of a cyborg: “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (291). Haraway claims that in our time we are all cyborgs, hybrids of an organism and machines. From her point of view, any devices make person a cyborg.

Although smartwatch can be seen as an extension of ourselves, it is questionable, whether Apple Watch adds anything new in terms of experience. Many people think it’s a redundant technology, which merely does the same things as an iPhone. The only original features I can name are the haptic sensor, the activity tracking possibilities and the “digital touch” communication feature.

Apple Watch is primarily social-media and fitness oriented. It makes sure that we don't miss the latest notification, that we always stay in touch. There is however, something new about smartwatch, something that distinguishes it from a smartphone. What smartwatches do replace is indeed the regular watch. I think that this is very significant. It is no coincidence that we wear a watch on one of the most accessible places – a wrist. The practice of timekeeping is essential to our society. Apple Watch notifies us of new messages, emails and Facebook updates without having to reach for the phone. That way social media is always in front of our eyes. It firmly embeds media in our daily lives. My question here is whether “mediaking” has become as important as the practice of timekeeping?

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Google, a company that is renowned for its top of the line high-tech gadgets is said to release its highly anticipated Google Glass in the near future. Google Glass is a new generation of wearable computing, which giving the user the ability to use apps and record video footage while on the go. With this new revelation of wearable computers the question of privacy has been raised. With this technology everyone could potential be under constant surveillance without even knowing.

The product

A revolutionary set of digital glasses with a built in microcomputer. They feature a small 640 x 360 display in the right eye that mimics a 25” screen. Additionally it has a built in 5MP (720p video) camera with audio capturing capability. The device is mainly voice activated, however also features a small touch control on the right side.

Do we really lose privacy?
Privacy is something that all of us have a right to. However with technology growing and changing on a daily basis the laws on privacy start to become blurred, in the sense that it is hard to distinguish if a certain technology could be considered as a privacy infringement or not. “There is a widely understood sense that we live in an age in which an individual’s privacy has become a commodity” (Kieran 119) we no longer have the same privacy that we had 20 years ago. Google Glass is just another example of a technology that is pushing the boundary of what is expectable. Google argues that a smart phone has the same capability to infringe people’s privacy as do Google Glass. Google take a legal stand point and admits that it is illegal to “photograph or film a person against his will when he is on a premise not accessible to the public” (Robertson 54) however in a public space it is not an infringement if you involuntarily capture someone on camera. The problem with this is that Google has developed an app that can conduct facial recognition through the small camera, with additional software that would allow users to recognize celebrities. This would then clearly be considered a breach of privacy.

News Report on the subject matter of privacy and Google Glass

The Good side

Google argues that this facial recognition software also has its positive advantages on society. Working together with the company FacialNetwork, they have developed an app that lets the users scan people’s faces against the National Sex Offender Registry which has more than 450,000 entries. This intern would make the online dating and offline social interaction much safer and give people a better understand of who is actually around them.

Banned

Places Have Banned Google Glass

With the UK release date approaching citizens in the UK are having mixed feelings about the product. Since the current privacy laws have not been adjusted to facilitate a product of this sort, several places have taken matters into their own hands and imposed bans on Google Glasses in their establishments. These bans have been imposed in establishments in which people could be found in compromising situations. For example most of Las Vegas Gentlemen’s Clubs have a complete ban on the use of Google Glass in the premises, to prevent exposure of the identity of their customers.

Where do we stand?

As with most newly introduced technologies there is always this uncertainty about what it will be used for. It is clear that Google Glass lies in a disputed grey area of privacy laws and could result in a complete loss in privacy. With this being said it is not right to blame the technology, it depends on the user. If he or she chooses to use it ethically and not infringe the privacy of other people then this new gadget has the potential to become an incredibly useful and powerful tool in our everyday lives.
Is this the Future?

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„We all pass away sooner or later”, states the opener of the webpage of eterni.me. Only to continue with a much surprising statement: “But what if you could be remembered forever?” – With the data of your old online-communication, eterni.me’s algorithms promise to create a version of you, that lets the non-deceased communicate with this fresh-but-old-rip-off-entity. Is eterni.me selling zombies?

Eterni.me’s USP: the simple task of becoming immortal

Talking to the dead is not a phenomenon of the internet. Be it shamanistic journeys or the conjuring of ghosts – each time has its practices of trying to communicate with the deceased. Eterni.me tries to tackle the fact of life’s certain end with the industrious collection and recombination of traces left behind:

“Eterni.me collects almost everything that you create during your lifetime, and processes this huge amount of information using complex Artificial Intelligence algorithms.

Then it generates a virtual YOU, an avatar that emulates your personality and can interact with, and offer information and advice to your family and friends, even after you pass away.”
This proposal of ghost-communication tries to monetize a narcissistic fear: ‘it will be a dread when I’m gone. Dreadful for those, whom I leave behind, those, who will then forget me’. Looked at from the point of view of those left behind, eterni.me has a unique selling proposition to fill a (perhaps sudden) gap of yawning absence, leaving but the need to have it removed.

This exact phenomenon was addressed in the 2013 British TV-series Black Mirror. The second season’s first episode revolves around the sudden death of Ash and the process of coming to terms with it of his wife Martha. At Ash’s funeral, the film takes on the view of a rationalist non-believer (just as it can be seen in the protagonist of Woody Allen’s latest Magic in the Moonlight), when Martha’s friend Sarah begins to make an offer:

The film shows what Sarah negates with saying “it’s not some crazy spiritual thing”: it appears to be hocus pocus to speak with the dead. When indeed it is nifty technology, which has to work like a charm to make ‘magic’ happen. This was already the case in 1789, where people were tried to be convinced of the presence of a ghost (Gaderer, pp.25) with the use of electricity, smoke and a magic lantern. The workings of the process had to be hidden, in order not to disturb the immersion of the respective ghost-conjuring attendees. In eterni.me’s case, it is new media technology aka algorithms which try to replicate a person with this technique of excessive mimetic approximation in order to create presence. In trying to reverse certain aspects of death, that is to reverse parts of the absence of a person, it strives for the creation of the immediate, and, in so striving, remains irremovably tied to the mediate which it can never leave behind. The result is bound to be paradox: the fabrication of presence of that which is utterly absent does not only fabricate presence, but at the same time co-evoke the absolute absence of that which is made present (and of course is this Derrida, speaking).

A certain kind of the Uncanny Valley

In an essay about the ‘Corpse inside of the wax figure’ (free translation by me, this article was published in German), media-historian Bernhard Siegert argues that, in a wax figure, it is the uncertain status between alive and dead of the significant which is causing its uncanniness. In its ever changing status, death itself is co-referred to by the oscillating significant. And just like the excessive mimesis of the wax figure causes the real to show through (cf. Siegert, pp. 118), eterni.me’s mimetic subjects are doomed to cause an automatic deconstruction of its significant by never being able to shake off the death of its signifier that is constantly showing through.

It is thus to differentiate between immortality as advertised by eterni.me and an automatized, reactive and recombinative index of a former online presence (which is ultimately created). On the same page, it really could create the realistic experience of communicating with the dead. The algorithmic entity would have to pass the turing-test and meet the willingness of the respective user (where Christiane Voss’ theory of the lending body (again, sadly only in German) could be subject to discussion), but Eterni.me, as well as the work-alike lives.on (“If your heart stops beating – you’ll keep tweeting”) could then have created a money-generating zombie who comes from the dead and feeds on the living. Or as Sarah from the Black Mirror clip puts it: “I know he’s dead, but it wouldn’t work if he wasn’t.”

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(1) The Homepage of Eterni.me
The Toosheh application can be uploaded from the Google Play store.

Branded as a little blue bundle, the new android application developed by the Information Sciences Institute at the University of Southern California is a slight play on words. Toosheh which in Persian means baggage, endeavours to connect Iranian’s through what has popularly become known as mesh networks to content and communication with other users without an Internet connection. The double entendre in the name of course comes from the french word touché, which in fencing terms is the acknowledgement of a hit of one’s opponent. Indeed Toosheh is meant to be a hit by Iranian users against the government of Iran’s information controls, as users are able to both bypass the nation’s filtering system, and the government’s control over Internet speeds. This is a natural progression from the developers previous, and still existing Persian language project Balatarin, which was a crucial tool during the 2009 Green Movement in sharing content about the opposition movement.

Before we get into the work of Toosheh, it’s good to reference John Gilmore’s statement,"the Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it."(2) Within the past four years many incidences have emerged to significantly put this ethos under threat, starting in 2009 with the Iranian government’s response to the 2009 protests against the fraudulent Presidential elections, slowing down Internet traffic in fear communications technologies could help mobilize protesters against the state. In 2011, when the Egyptian government cut off Internet access to an entire nation after a few phone calls to the nation’s Internet service providers, an alarm bell really started to ring about the dependence of people on state controlled Internet routes. (3) This was further exasperated by other instances of information controls during the Tunisian revolution, and the long established practice of China’s “great firewall”, now coupled with the power Western democracies hold over Internet service providers, wherein corporate entities such as Comcast maintain growing control over Internet traffic (also known as the Net Neutrality debate). (4)

In an age of top-down control over the Internet, it is a surprise that mesh networks have not become ubiquitous. Regular Internet connections rely on ISPs to control the nodes of information, but in a mesh network, the user is the data relay, not the machines owned by the ISP, and as such users becomes their own Internet service providers. When used anywhere in the world, no central authority could censor, or contain the speeds within mesh networks. Academics of the Berkman Centre were amongst those who first started to argue these networks were essential tools, especially in times of crisis (the Boston Marathon bombings of 2013 were a good example of their deployment). (5) Within the past year, FireChat has emerged as a key player in the field, especially within Iraq’s region’s of Internet blackouts. A report by the Citizen Lab has indicated that the application operates unencrypted, and is thus susceptible to surveillance, as well as infiltration from various kinds of users, as accounts and names are used and created by anyone. (6) It is clear that from 2012 (Berkman) to the present (Citizen Lab), the sentiments of mesh networks from liberation technologies to potential surveillance danger have changed the discourse.
Toosheh users can upload content from regular Internet connections, or through their computer, then share with other users via bluetooth pairing. Photo taken by author.

How Toosheh enters the fray is yet to be known. Testing on the encryption have not been done, so matters of privacy cannot be addressed within this blogpost. Toosheh is at its infancy, and developers are still fine tuning its structure before it is officially launched. Currently, Toosheh’s focus is not on the personal communication of chats, but rather content. The goal is to allow digital content, which is censored by the Iranian government, to reach the users of the app through a bluetooth network. The application thus requires one user to connect to the Internet to download the content, after which the user can connect to other users through bluetooth, and share. The most utility will be found in the ability to stream video content once it has been shared over bluetooth, taking away user reliance from government controlled ISPs that purposefully offer slow Internet speeds.

What this app lacks, and what the developers have explained will be part of the next development phase, are the abilities to exchange user generated content. In the event that the Internet is throttled again in Iran, what will be crucial will be the ability for users to upload, transfer, and communicate information with one another without dependence on the state. Currently Toosheh does only one of these things.

Promotional brochure explaining the application’s features, and future development. Image used with permission from the developers.


(2) Elmer-Dewitt, Philip, “First Nation in Cyberspace: Twenty million strong and adding a million new users a month, the Internet is suddenly the
Last Thursday, Datacoup officially opened its personal data marketplace for every internet user. While it was in beta for two years, it is now possible for you to sell the records of your online activities to the New York based start up. In short, you can sign up on the website, connect the online services you are using and define what information you want to share. Datacoup supports all the major social media platforms and even credit card companies. Depending on how much you reveal about yourself, you can sit back and earn up to $10 a month via PayPal. While many companies, of which Facebook is a prime example, give you a free web service for submitting your personal details, Datacoup seems to be the first one to offer real money in exchange for information. As it states:

It’s about time you earned more than a ‘free service’ for your data. Datacoup is the only company that helps you sell your anonymous data for real, cold hard cash. It’s simple. If you connect data, you’ll earn.

You could ask yourself whether it is sensible to sell your personal information, but it also raises the question of how Datacoup can make revenue from the information it already seems to be owned by ‘free services’.

After signing up on the Datacoup website, an overview of services you can connect to your profile shows up. These include social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare, Google+, Instagram, Tumblr, Last.fm and Meetup, but also credit card companies. The website explains that “every data attribute has a high, medium or low value given to it”. This value is determined by the current demand in the data marketplace for that attribute. The price for your data is the sum of all your active attributes. While Datacoup states that it has not found its marketplace yet, it assures that the potential purchasers of your data can not trace it back to you:

Purchasers of data have access to a large pool of aggregated, de-identified, anonymous Datacoup user data. For example, when you start selling your data, we combine it with all the other Datacoup users’ data, take out anything personally identifiable, and then analyze the large pool, looking for patterns across different demographics and other data characteristics. None of this aggregated data can be traced back to a particular individual user.

The biggest aggregator of online data at the moment, Acxiom, shows a comparable transparency about its activities as it has set up the website About the Data to tell you what happens to your personal data. However, Acxiom does not pay you for your data. As About the Data says, it “aggregates it from surveys, registrations, purchases, postings, etc”. Moreover, the company explicitly states your data is used for “organizations to make relevant offers to you, they need data to identify products and services you might be interested in”. In short, Acxiom takes your data for free and uses it for individual targeted advertisement, while Datacoup pays you money for sharing information and guarantees privacy. This is a curious difference that raises the question whether Datacoup’s early stage business model is feasible, as it is unclear what is unique about its database. It is hard to sell what information is already pulled out of your personal data as Acxiom’s description is quite vague, just as Datacoup’s disclaimer can not tell you exactly what you reveal about yourself.

In 1968 Alan Westin did a significant writing on consumer data in which he defines privacy as “the claim of individuals, groups or institutions to determine for themselves, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others” (Westin 166). In the age of online platforms however, it is hard to talk about privacy, as the very use of social networks already seems to give much of it away. It is easy to understand that social networks offer free services in exchange for data, as former Wired editor-in-chief Chris Anderson states: “Free offerings build audiences with distinct interests and expressed needs that advertisers will pay to reach” (Anderson). The fact that already much personal data is no longer private makes is questionable if Datacoup can regain its cashed out fees with a supposedly untraceable data pool. Whether the start up will go...
Social networks have a huge impact on how their users perceive their lives and what happens to them. Different networks influence different aspects of our lives, both social and cultural. Instagram, one of the most popular networks today, meant not only a revolution in photography but also in people's perception of memories as they remember experiencing them in the moment they were happening.

A Nobel Prize laureate and one of the most influential psychologist alive, Daniel Kahneman, was working with the concept of so called “experiencing-self” and “remembering-self”, an approach that can be applied to the usage of Instagram and its latest feature: Instagram Hyperlapse.

To summarize what Instagram (a combination of words “instant camera” and”telegram”) is: A platform for sharing photographs and short videos (up to 15 seconds) was first introduced in March 2010. This easy-to-use social media and photo editor in one allowed its users to do three things: snapping pictures with their phones, quickly editing them by using pre-set filters (enhancing colors, contrast, saturation, light, and providing the photography with a vintage look), and sharing the results with friends and public by using several other social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Flickr or Foursquare. It is also possible to tag people, or add the photo to a photo map by using Facebook Places.

On August 26, 2014 Instagram launched its new feature called Hyperlapse. It is not embedded in Instagram but works as an independent application, so far only available for iOS. One of the advantages is that Hyperlapse users do not need to be subscribed to Instagram or Facebook to use it. What Hyperlapse does is it enables the user to take a video (up to 45 minutes) and consequently accelerate the speed of the motion up to 12-times. The application also uses an algorithm to stabilize the image, which creates a cinematic effect. The optical stabilization is especially useful when shooting the video on-the-walk. A downside of Hyperlapse is that it does not record sound and it is not possible to blend two videos together.

Even thought the function of speeding up the motion as such is not exactly revolutionary, Instagram found a way to deliver it to its users without having to use any complicated software. You can see the comparison between an “old fashion hyperlapse” and “Instagram Hyperlapse” in the video below. Instagram Hyperlapse is simple ans user-friendly option to enhance one’s video. Although it does not support filters, the final result of any video taken with the application will seem extraordinary in comparison with the original.

Lot of criticism has been directed at Instagram for its alleged distortional influence on art (Willim). Let’s examine a different aspect of Instagram (and in the near future probably also Hyperlapse).

Kahneman explained in a TED talk about “Experience vs. Memory” the difference between experiencing and remembering while perceiving happiness. He said that the endings of stories are crucial to how we remember them. Moments pass us and they are lost forever – unless we
capture them. We have the power and the tools (smartphones + Instagram) to capture them all in a way we want to remember them (using filters that best associate with our current feelings). Kahneman classifies the “experiencing-self” as the one who lives in the present and “remembering-self” as the one who maintains the story of our lives. When we think about our experiences and contemplate (choose) whether it was a positive or negative one, this is what Kahneman says about the choice:

“The experiencing self has no voice in this choice. We actually don’t choose between experiences, we choose between memories of experiences. And even when we think about the future, we don’t think of our future normally as experiences. We think of our future as anticipated memories.” – Daniel Kahneman

The notion of the correlation between this theory and Instagram was already picked up by a “Performance Philosopher” Jason Silva in his channel Shots of Awe and he created a short clip describing his viewpoint about the “Instagram Generation”.

Enhancing photos and videos capturing our lives also enhances our memory of them, which leads to a happier life.

“This is not about how happily a person lives. It is about how satisfied or pleased the person is when that person thinks about her life. Very different notion.” – Daniel Kahneman

If you pardon the low quality caused by poor lighting, you can watch my own demonstration of what a Hyperlapse can look like – writing this blog-post using an iPad:

http://youtu.be/42uXIpWEMwM

References


The concept of universities and teaching mechanisms hasn’t changed dramatically over the last 800 years: a particular person with knowledge of certain issues stands in front of people who know less about the issue; by speech they receive information about the issue; and with this they learn. Thomas Aquinas did it in the 13th century, whilst students currently are exposed to this manner of teaching in various degrees at various institutions. Recently several developments increased the accessibility of knowledge, through projects such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), where platforms like the Khan Academy and Coursera offer online courses about various issues to whomever are interested.
The newest development is the Minerva Project, which is a real accredited college with real students and an own campus who offer another technique for learning through digital means. Based in San Francisco, the Minerva Project tries to redefine a century-long culture of academic life and principle. With the introduction of internet, social media, big data and the commercial interest related to it, one could argue that the Minerva Project is just another Silicon Valley-minded approach to innovate an institutionalized concept.

The Minerva Project is a part of the Keck Graduate Institute, a Claremont-based college part of the Claremont Colleges consortium. Though all other colleges of this consortium are based in the Los Angeles Area, the Minerva Project is the only one based in San Francisco. The idea is different. The students – in the first year thirty students from fourteen countries enroll – are supposed to transfer to Minerva locations in Berlin, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, Mumbai, London and New York in their second, third and last year. But this isn't the innovation Minerva want to become.

At the center of the Minerva Project is the software called the Active Learning Forum. Students log into the software at places they would like to sit. The courses are given with the help a webcam. A maximum of nineteen students log in along a professor who gives the course. The result is some sort of a massive Skype-conversation wherein the professor is the moderator, allowed to give tests, to let people debate, to follow real life statistics about the students and involve other digital techniques in the course. Different than being in a lecture hall typing notes on the computer, being able to be distracted by friends and Facebook, Minerva offers short intensive courses where students need to be at their top game to participate; to not able to be distracted because at any time a quiz can be given. This way the students are engaged with the lecture instead of them being presented with information relating to the topic.

Last year, Minerva received a 25 million investment from Benchmark, the the venture-capital firm that also financed eBay and Twitter. Take this together with Minerva’s CEO, Ben Nelson, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, leading the online photo service Snapfish for a couple of years, and one could notice a Californian Ideology in the project. This concept, introduced by Barbrook and Cameron (1995), describes an major believe in technological determinism. Take a look at recent popular startups as Airbnb and Uber and compare it with Minerva, and one will see that all three correspond with each other: with the help of technological advancement – such as the internet, platforms, big data, etc – an old concept is turned into a commercially minded new concept. At the same time, an individualistic-but-collaborative spirit is created, wherein people and small entrepreneurs take over from settled institutions. Uber did it with taxi’s, Airbnb with hotels and other rooming whilst Minerva is planning to change the academic world.

Whether they succeed is one big guess. For example: what will happen when they scale up to more students? Who will they hire? What will happen if the pretty untested pedagogical approach won’t work or only appeals to students with a serious autodidactic streak? For now, traditional colleges and universities won’t disappear, but Minerva is a project to keep an eye on. Maybe they will change everything; maybe they will become one of the many Silicon Valley startups who fail. Another 25 million lost. Who cares in Silicon Valley.
The future of the web: HTML5 & CSS3, the place where dreams come true
The future of the web: HTML5 & CSS3, the place where dreams come true
I've built my first public website back in 1999. I was just getting to know my way around the internet and this was my first attempt in building a website. The first version of HTML – the code which…
By Alex Maat on 10/19/12 0

[Interview] Juul Spee of Zesbaans: Digital Media Designer
[Interview] Juul Spee of Zesbaans: Digital Media Designer
Zesbaans is a digital media and design collective that experiments with media and interactivity. Zesbaans (Dutch for a six-laned highway) has been based in Utrecht, the Netherlands, since its founding in 2007 where it has been involved with projects…
By Joe Mier on 10/17/12 0

Augmented Reality and Extending the virtual
Augmented Reality and Extending the virtual
The idea that the world is confined with boarders and barriers is slowly evolving to an open space during this globalizing age, without for example passport controls on the ground in the EU. The utopian idea of the world…
By Anne-Claire Verheul on 09/14/12 2

Mobile Tweeting – recognising usage frequency, tendencies and social interaction differences
Mobile Tweeting – recognising usage frequency, tendencies and social interaction differences
The Question Academic research on Twitter has been rife since it hit off in 2006, with significant focus on two topics in particular- that of privacy and identity. Much that has been written by scholars of Twitter has generally…
By Christopher Mead on 10/05/11 0

Book Review: The Cultural Logic of Computation, by David Golumbia
Book Review: The Cultural Logic of Computation, by David Golumbia
How does new media influence the cultural development of the society and which influence do they have on the identity of a society? Which possibilities of knowledge to they open up and which risks are involved? The Cultural Logic…
By Jesse Oyegbesan on 09/20/11 0

Book review: ‘Designing Culture: the technological imagination at work’ by Anne Balsamo
Book review: ‘Designing Culture: the technological imagination at work’ by Anne Balsamo
In this book, ‘Designing culture: the technological imagination at work’, Anne Balsamo, Professor of interactive media at the University of Southern
California, calls for a new approach to technological innovation arguing that culture must be taken into account when...

Book Review on Sherry Turkle: Alone Together

By Philip Breek on 09/19/11

Book Review on Sherry Turkle: Alone Together

Book Review on Sherry Turkle: Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other Sherry Turkle is a MIT technology and society specialist who is interested in the influence of technology at human life and...

By Anne Laurine Stadermann on 09/18/11

Book Review: What Technology Wants by Kevin Kelly

By Anne Laurine Stadermann on 09/18/11

‘Headdesking’ and Beyond: The British Uprisings

‘Headdesking’ and Beyond: The British Uprisings

Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not...

By Jamie Franklin on 09/12/11

Is the internet ruining our brains?

Is the internet ruining our brains?

We shouldn’t be talking about the rise of the social media and new media any more. It’s here, in everyone’s lives on a daily basis. And it’s doing things to us. It’s changing the way we communicate, learn, socialise...

By Ave Tampere on 09/09/11

TOP: Climategate IPCC and the legitimacy of public concerns

TOP: Climategate IPCC and the legitimacy of public concerns

In this session we focus on the contemporary connections between science, technology, and politics. The connections between these three domains are often neglected or unjust presented as complete seperated area’s. Bruno Latour speaks of matters that matter, by which...

By Elias van Hees on 03/20/11

The Future of Hacking

The Future of Hacking

Data theft, child pornography, spying on governments and spreading destructive computer viruses. When thinking of the term ‘hacking’, we usually think of internet crime, computer breakdowns and some geeks sitting in front of their laptop looking for a fresh...

By Caroline Goralczyk on 10/15/10

Book review: Repair – Ready to pull the lifeline

Book review: Repair – Ready to pull the lifeline

Repair is an art and technology festival organized by ARS Electronica, an Austrian platform for digital art and media culture based in Linz. The festival was held this year from September 2 until September 11. The message of Repair...

By Cendy Calis on 09/20/10

Augmented Reality through the appearance of a little green man

Augmented Reality through the appearance of a little green man

Meet Proto. This little green man appeared on my hand today when I was about to write this blog post. Off course he didn’t ‘just’ appear to me like the virgin Mary. His arrival was caused by an almost...

By Lotte Woerde on 09/12/10

Can African reporters equipped with smart phones help improve accountability and transparency in development aid?

Tomorrow Africa Interactive and the International Resource Center for Water and Sanitation will compete for the WeMedia GameChangers award.

Here is an outline of my presentation. All comments, thoughts and ideas are welcome ! Africa Interactive is working to...

By Ben White on 02/25/09

Eternal life?

Eternal life is a fairytale. It is not possible to live forever. Or at least, this is the case these days. But what if it really becomes possible to live forever? According to three scientists, Anders Sandberg, Aubrey de…

By Laura van der Vlies on 10/19/07

iOS Application developers seem to learn fast from each other these days; in a short amount of time, many applications for pairing wine with a main dish have been developed and its content has been extended. For example, on the application market were vivion, drync, hellovino and delectable, all designed to help the customer choose a wine that can be recommended with a specific main dish.
But again a new wine app is launched, called Whatwine, and according to its developers, Cedric Maloux and Matthew Gerner, the improvement is that it can scan the wine card of a restaurant. This makes it possible to decide your wine before you order a bottle, instead of scanning the brand after you ordered and (and many times paid) the bottle of wine, which was the case with the other apps.

To explain the working of the app briefly: they all make use of a digital database, for example Snoothmedia, specialized in detailed information about drinks and food. When you order a glass or bottle of wine, you can use one of the applications to research the brand: by typing the name or using OCR technology, you can easily get information of the specific wine and the recommended kinds of food with it (fish, wild, vegetarian etc.).

As Steve O’Hear explains in his article about Whatwine on Techcrunch, the new challenge for Maloux and Gertner was to make an App that could scan a wine list. As developer Maloux explains, the problem was to overcome ‘technical obstacles involved with scanning and interpreting any wine list regardless of font, layout, background colour etc.’ Together with Salsita Software they managed to finish the App, and the result can be found on whatwineapp.com.

The goal of Maloux and Gertner was to make food and wine pairing as easy and comfortable as possible; the only thing a customer has to do is to scan the wine card and use the app. Sounds like I can have the perfect combination of wine and dish next time, and have a comfortable dinner. But what I want to do now is to imagine going out for dinner using WhatWine, just to see how it practically works.

Me and my partner make a reservation, and when we enter the restaurant we are brought to our table. Imagine that my partner is really interested in wines. She does not need the advice of the waiter, she can use the Whatwine app on her smartphone, containing ‘Foursquare’s API’ to select the location that we are right now: when other Whatwine users have already been at this restaurant, the wine card is already in the App. If we are the first Whatwine users in the place, the OCR technology on her smartphone can be used to scan the wine card that is on the table or that the waiter will soon bring to us.

After scanning, the following menu will appear:

We will take a look at the dinner card we just received from the waiter, and I will take the beef burger. I use the app to select Beef, and as shown
above, I will probably choose the Cabernet Sauvignon or the Pinot Noir. My partner takes a vegetarian dish, but this category does not exist in the database. The solution for this is to ask the waiter what kind of wine is recommended with that dish.

Based on this thought experiment, it can be argued that the way people will make use of information technologies during daily routines as going out for dinner will change in the coming years. As Applications contain more information, the way we gather information about our drinks and food is already changing. Instead of asking the sommelier, people can choose to figure out information of pairing wine and food themselves.

Interesting about this is that it might have consequences for the job market. On an academic level, authors like Karim Sabbagh argue that ‘Digitization creates jobs, with a 10 point increase in the digitization score leading to a 1.02 percent drop in the unemployment rate’. (Sabbagh, 36). When we apply the term ‘digitization’ to the example of information databases about wine, it could be argued that more jobs are indeed created with the need to gather and select all information about wines that is available at the moment, and also, more jobs in the iOS Application development are becoming available, because there is more demand for Applications. But on the other hand, it can also be argued that waiters will become unnecessary in the future, because more and more information about the wine and food card can be individually gathered right at the moment of having dinner at a certain location.

The job market of this sector will certainly change in the future. And different databases gathering information about wines will have to compete or work together with each other in the future. Will we have a totally digitized & waiterless dinner in the near future?

References


Privacy, surveillance, technology and design: in the workshop ‘Warzone Wearables’ clothes and accessories are being adapted in order to escape the all-seeing eye of your physical and social surroundings. (more…)

Amidst these times of social media revolution with new apps being developed constantly, there has been a clear counter movement. A drive towards local (local brews vs imports), towards meeting people (LinkedIn vs Seats2Meet) and a longing for experiences.

Traces, launched in the beginning of August in the UK, is an app that strives to link social media with experiences through augmented reality. Users can send a message to a friend who has to ‘pick it up’ in a specific geographic location before the message expires. Check out this video to see how it works (there is no sound).
Traces was developed by a neuroscientist, Beau Lotto, who strives to make human communication more meaningful by adding context to the conversation. A lot of his research has to do with illusions and how we see the world. After watching his Ted Talk (a fun watch) it is clear that he believes that context is everything in how we understand the world around us. Even though we’re in a digital world, we’re still humans who have evolved along specific ways to communicate. Messaging should reflect that.

Context in Conversation

In the Ted talk about optical illusions and how we see “Context is everything…” using examples of how we perceive the world through our sense of vision. Lotto continues to show us how the context influences how we receive a message:

“What you see is grounded in your history: your brain takes information which is meaningless and it makes it meaningful. The way it makes it meaningful is by literally engaging with the world, with the physical world around you and associating what you see now with what you saw in the past. A lot of messaging, like Google Glass etc, is about information but the brain’s indifferent to that, it doesn’t know what to do with it. What it really wants is something meaningful. History, location, people you care about – those are the things that make it meaningful for the brain.”

Humans are animals (who seem to forget that every now and again). Everything we know about anything is told to us through our senses. Since we know that we should cater to it. Messaging with added meaning, like location, should make the communication between two people more meaningful than a message received in a ‘passive’ way (being read off a screen).

Possibilities

There are so many creative ways to use this app:
Scavenger hunt around town to teach history
Use instead of or in addition to tourist information signs
Show renderings/plans at construction sites
Botanical information along a trail
Share experiences instead of pictures “Check out this view”

Future of Traces

I see this app could go several ways. First, as a fun way to send a special message. I imagine that the first Traces proposal will surface any day now. I don’t think that Traces will replace all messaging, simply because we won’t take the time to go travel to the message. Unless the sender knows your basic daily schedule and puts a Trace in your way, this type of messaging will be time consuming, and our time is precious. So although any messages sent and received using Traces will be reprieved as such, convince will go above the context.

Secondly, I that the marketing world will hijack this idea and change the app from a fun, scavenger-hunt like way of messaging to the next way to get ads. I see “Sponsored traces” hovering in the screen while searching for the Trace sent by a friend.

Finally, that the app becomes a sort of novelty.

Are we really such non-communicative screen zombies as Lotto makes us out to be?

Maybe, but isn’t it important that someone is creating new ways to communicate with neuroscience in mind (pun intended)?

Get it

For now the app is only available in the UK for iOS devices and you can add your email to receive a notification once the app rolls out worldwide and for Android.

While this week’s tech-press has devoted much space to the launch of yet another better, bigger and more amazing set of consumer electronics, it
was a seemingly unexciting object with the looks of a humble notebook-charger passing by the name of “Cyborg Unplug” that caught my attention.

Cyborg Unplug is a 100-dollar “anti wireless-surveillance system” developed by Berlin based artist and Critical Engineer Julian Oliver that is able to effectively prevent potentially privacy-invading devices such as Google Glass [1] to connect to (closeby) Wi-Fi networks. It functions by first scanning the surrounding networks for ‘blacklisted’ wireless devices and once such device has been discovered to invoke a “disconnect-command”. In case you are wondering who would need such device here is a practical application:

You own a café or nightclub were customers are unlikely to appreciate being watched by “Google Explorers” that are potentially able to live stream imagery over the Internet. So as a precautionary measure you could use Cyborg Unplug to effectively prevent Google Glass wearers to connect to the Internet. But what about offline recording? – you might ask – and here you hit the nail on the head. In fact, Google Glass wearers would still be able to record video footage on their devices making Cyborg Unplug only a half-hearted anti surveillance solution.

However my interest in Cyber Unplug goes beyond its practical application: drawing on the notion that our material culture is loaded with cultural meaning (Pearce) I am interested in the questions it poses concerning our current and future socio-technical development. Let me start with the name – Cyborg Unplug. This begs the question of first how we define a cyborg, a term which was coined by Manfred Clynes in the 1960s (Clynes and Kline), and second whether Google Glass wearers can be conceptualized as such.

The Oxford English dictionary defines a cyborg as a person whose physical abilities are extended through mechanical elements built into the body. In contrast Andy Clark, argued that we are cyborgs not just in the physical sense but also in the “more profound” sense of being “reasoning systems whose minds and selves are spread across biological brain and non biological circuitry” (Clark 3). Donna Haraway goes even so far to argue that in fact we are all cyborgs (In: Bell et al. 44). For the purpose of this blog-post I would postulate that technologies such as Google Glass which both in its physical appearance and usage scenario forge a closer bond between humans and technology, are sustaining a process of “cyborgization” (Wittes and Chong). This in turn poses a series of challenges in terms of access to technology, discrimination and privacy of which the latter two bring us to Cyborg Unplug’s purpose: that of “unplugging”.
Much debate concerning Google Glass has revolved around the issue of privacy. Considering the technical abilities of such devices as well as the vulnerabilities that can be exploited by hackers, such concerns are certainly justified. While Cyborg Unplug puts these important debates in the spotlight the solution it proposes is rather backward thinking: what the “unplugging approach” essentially does is to discriminate against the use of technology that is deemed as privacy invading. As long as it affects a relatively small number of Google Glass beta-testers’ ability to “explore” casinos or night clubs it is a rather mundane issue. However if such technologies are to become as ubiquitous as the smartphone, and as such integral parts of ourselves, then more forward-thinking approaches will be needed.

Perhaps a starting point would be a reconceptualization of the rather vague concept of privacy (Solove) that goes beyond a private/public dichotomy to a more context-aware definition (Nissenbaum) as well as more context-aware and privacy-ensuring technological implementations that will build on such conceptualizations. For instance such implementations would be able to control the privacy settings and sensor capabilities of a device based on the situation/pace the user is in (Templeman, Kapadia, et al.).

Julian Oliver predicts that Cyborg Unplug is only the beginning of a future market of surveillance counter measures. However I hope that such devices will, rather then becoming more popular, spark more critical discussions on issues relating to to Google Glass and alike. With a possible increasing “cyborgization” of society, which will make us both “agents of and subject to surveillance” (Wittes and Chong 18) such issues should be addressed at the root of the cause through revisited concepts of privacy, technical implementations that will follow a privacy by design approach (Cavoukian) and appropriate regulatory frameworks.

Footnotes:

[1] Other devices include popular wearable ‘spy’ cameras, microphones, Dropcams as well as small drones and copters.


References:


Images of wearable computers range from 1940s detective Dick Tracy through to Michael Knight’s 80s wrist watch. The cartoon detective’s watch, in particular, has reached iconic status in the electronics community. As perhaps one of the strips most recognizable icons, it is seen as marking an important stage in miniaturization which may have informed later smartwatches. On September 9, Apple’s CEO Tim Cook announced the Apple Watch. With its various new features and input technologies – such as digital touch communication – as well as the array of customizable designs, the Apple Watch marks yet another stage in wearable technology.
It’s Sleek and Tells Time

Although smartwatches are nothing new, the interior as well as its exterior are constantly changing. The Apple Watch opens up new ways to communicate, it potentially makes you healthier by tracking your steps and pulse rate, you can pay with it and, not unimportant, it tells the time. At least, if you already have an iPhone for it is not a standalone device. However, the Watch is also meant to look pretty. It is a matter of taste whether or not you like the design(s). Apple’s Watch offers three collections that each feature two sizes (38mm and 42mm) which ultimately results in 34 individual models. It is sleeker and less bulky than its competitors. Over the years, there have been many concerns if anyone would actually want a smartwatch. A major problem for wearable devices is that the majority of people do not want to look like Michael Knight:

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The problem that faces those searching for commercial applications for wearable computers is where technology crosses the bounds of social acceptability and fashion. People will wear Bluetooth headsets, but they seem more prevalent in Munich and Stockholm than they do in London. (Edwards, IEE Review, 24)
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Wearable technology has become an extension of the human body, but this extension should not make us look odd. Steve Mann observed that people found the combination of human and machine bizarre. On the right, we see Mann in 1996 with his wearable multimedia computer that, like the Apple Watch, senses his heart rate and includes a miniature screen and Internet connection. In the course of these 18 years since Mann’s 1996 experiment, wearable technology has become significantly smaller and lighter to the point that it becomes related to fashion, rather than computer science. Wearables have to be in line with social aesthetic norms in order to overcome the challenge of integrating technology and beauty (which is, of course, in the eye of the beholder). This integration is important in answering consumer wants and needs.

Intangible Data to Tangible Interaction

Moreover, the Apple Watch has the potential to provide a very intimate form of interaction with the wearer as it allows digital touch. The touch aspect combines technology and tactility which is essential because contemporary use of computers and screens makes people crave a sense of touch, according to trend forecaster Li Edelkoort at Dezeen Live. “The more screens we have the more our fingers are afraid we’re going to disappear,” Edelkoort said in 2012. “I feel it already in my fingers that they want me to touch lots of things so I don’t lose contact with touch” (Dezeen Magazine). Her prediction on the increasing importance of touch could not be more apt.
Apple has developed a new way of connecting instantly and intimately with others. As well as sensing touch, the Watch also senses force. Wearer are able to tap each other, share a quick sketch or their heartbeat. These subtle ways of communicating allow data to become tangible which is something technology often inhibits rather than enables. Converting intangible digital data to tangible – users actually feel the taps on their wrists – provides a new kind of communication. While digital touch encourages communication without words, sharing something as personal as your own heartbeat or gently tapping your SO who’s at the other end of the world is perhaps even more intimate.

The Apple Watch will be released early next year.

References

Etherington, Rose. “‘Super Technology is Going to Ask for Super Tactility’ – Li Edelkoort at Dezeen Live.” *Dezeen Magazine*, 28 December 2012. Web. 15 September 2014.


2013. But with Apple being in the race, it nearly always means it’s becoming serious.

Functionality

To start with, the smartwatch is essentially an extension of the smartphone. It connects to a smartphone via Bluetooth or NFC, which enables it to perform certain actions that are actually happening on the smartphone, like showing messages or the weather forecast. The other way around, smartwatches can also be used to let a smartphone perform certain actions, like making calls and shooting pictures. In this sense, the smartwatch can also be seen as a remote control for the smartphone. Smartwatches also bring with them some new features. For example, they can be equipped with different sensors, like heart rate monitors, thermometers and GPS.

Humans and the smartwatch

As human beings, we keep interacting with technology more and more. The smartphone definitely revolutionary changed the way we organize our lives. But the smartwatch is now about to take this change a step further. The technology literally becomes part of our body. Not only is it attached to our body, it is actually connected to it by, for example, measuring our heart rate. And, because the smartwatch will be always online, it connects our physical self to the online world more than ever.

Are we a step closer to Haraway’s Cyborg?

One of the terms that, at least to me, almost immediately popped up when reading up on the features of Apple’s new watch, is Donna Haraway’s ‘cyborg’. In her essay “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” (1991), Haraway proposes a new way to look at the human race. She wants to dismiss the Oedipal theory that creates a strong distinction between the two different genders, stating that all humans are cyborgs, humans that are inextricably connected to technology. While Haraway’s cyborg is rather abstract and symbolic, the smartwatch brings the idea terrifyingly close. Until now, the cyborg theory was applicable to the fact that we engage with technology in a sense that we are working with it every day, by sitting behind a pc or by having a smartphone in our pocket. But the smartwatch really makes us one with technology, and in a way blurs the line between us as human beings, and technology. Are we really that much involved with technology that we have lost (a part of) our humanity?

In the most recent cover story of Time Magazine, called “Never Offline”, Lev Grossman and Matt Vela argue that the smartwatch — and for them, the Apple Watch in particular — is indeed a step closer towards technology being really one with our body:

> It’s intoxicating and also a bit disconcerting to have this much functionality perching on your wrist, like one of Cinderella’s helpful bluebirds. Wearables get inside your personal bubble. We’re used to technology being safely Other, but the Apple Watch wants to snuggle up and become part of your Self. This is technology, after being repeatedly repulsed, finally establishing a new beachhead. To wear a device as powerful as the Apple Watch makes you ever so slightly posthuman.

To me, it’s that last term that might even be more terrifying than that of the cyborg: post-human. While this is a difficult term to interpret, and it certainly doesn’t have one, unequivocal meaning, the simple parsing of the word is what expresses it’s powerful message. We are in an era where we go beyond ourselves, beyond being humans.

So, to answer the title question: Yes, I think smartwatches take us one step further towards the cyborg that Haraway proposed as a new view on the human race and society. Maybe even more than the smartphone did, because the fact that the smartwatch is really attached and connected to our bodies makes the term ‘cyborg’ more real than ever.

References


Haraway, Donna. “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”.. Simians, Cyborgs and
In the scope of the ancient desire of human to predict the future, DOR TAL designed ‘Predictables’ as a refreshing interpretation of this mankind’s historic quest. The app searches for “patterns, frameworks and links in the torrent of information that one generates through one’s everyday interaction with the surrounding digital world” (Dor Tal Stuff Design) in order to predict your individual needs in the very near future. ‘Predictables’ consist of a smart watch and a projector, which are both connected to an app. The app collects user data and crawls social networks for data generated about the user. The pico-projector unfolds a timeline of floating bubbles anywhere you want. It represents the appropriate actions to take. The bubbles are color coded to indicate how soon the actions should be taken. Via a smartwatch the timeline can be projected on your hand (Dezeen Magazine).

Although Tal has only made a concept version of Predictables, the future with such apps seems pretty close. GOOGLE NOW already made the first steps in doing so. By collecting and analyzing much data such as your e-mail and texting traffic, your agendas, locations and things you bought online, Google Now provides you information that you need for your plausible next step. The big difference is that Predictables also incorporates data of other people and organisation that potentially might affect them. It suggests appropriate things to do based on what is extracted from other’s data in terms of what they ‘need’. An algorithm detects patterns of behavior that could be a prophecy ahead of time. The more personal information and profiles the more intelligent the device becomes (Dezeen Magazine).

From a broader perspective Predictables seems to heavily draw on what is been called contemporary ‘risk averse society’. Predictables is focusing on making the most appropriate ‘best’ choices, stating what you ‘need’, minimising the change that you do something ‘wrong’. A good thing, you would say. But I also want to make you aware of the things we need to give in, which I will further elaborate on in terms of ‘interpassivity’.

‘Interpassivity’ is a term by SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK and ROBERT PFAFFER. Žižek describes this term by the famous example of the VCR, which do more than just recording; they watch TV and accordingly enjoys on our behalf. It redeems us from the need to watch ourselves. We don’t need to watch as long we are in the comforting knowledge that something else is watching for us. According to Žižek we outsource passivity; while the VCR watches for you, you can stay active ‘doing’ both things at the same time. But: ‘you think you are active, while your true position, as it is embodied is passive’ (Žižek 7). Žižek also speaks of interpassivity in the sense of substitution: emotions can be moved from subject to object, which he explain through ‘CANNED LAUGHTER’ in American sitcoms where the television laughs for us. One experiences indirectly the emotion of laughing through the television (Žižek 4).

Pfaffer adds an element of ‘detachment’ (van Oenen n.p.). According to Pfaffer we also outsource ‘engagement’ because we have a limitless belief in the potential of the system (van Oenen n.p.) we outsource interactions to. This is not because we don’t believe in direct interactions anymore, but simply because we can not handle all the interactions we have to have at the same time. Gijs van Oenen combines these two elaborations in his notion of a ‘interpassive society’ as an explanatory framework for social phenomena, wherein we more and more outsource our wishes, emotions and responsibilities to (digital) devices, institutions and more in general to media (van Oenen n.p.).

When applying the idea of ‘interpassivity’ we could say that we ‘figure out’ through Predictables; we indirectly engage with the things we should do, while being detached from the process towards it that is needed for self-satisfaction and fulfilment. We outsource our search in doing the right thing. We still do it, but our input becomes redundant (van Oenen n.p.). So, at first sight Predictables, as a new digital medium, seems a gift from heaven for people in a more accelerating contemporary society. The clip shows a ‘perfect’ world where you will never forget your sport gear and you will always be right on time buying flowers because “Anna might be sad”. Yes, you will be the perfect son in law. Yes, it will help you manage your life, especially when you have to be a whole bunch of different perfect people at the same time. But it may also be the end of the serendipity, of make-up sex, learning from your mistakes and what I like to call, ‘the end of the experimental human’.
Cyborg Unplug works by sending de-authentication signals to unwanted monitoring or spying devices. Then, depending which version is being used, Cyborg either displays an alert or automatically disconnects the device from the network.[1]

The idea for Cyborg emerged of glassholes.sh, a script written by Julian Oliver to detect and disconnect Google Glasses from any local Wi-Fi network. The free piece of software became so popular amongst Google Glass critics that Oliver decided to develop a device based on the same premises. Cyborg is established with the spirit of the Stop the Cyborg Campaign. The aim of the movement is to protect the personal privacy and to stop a future where “the iron cage of surveillance, calculation and control pervades every aspect of life”[2]

“Wireless defence shield” in a World of Mass-Surveillance

“Basically it’s a wireless defence shield for your home or place of work,” Oliver says. “The intent is to counter a growing and tangibly troubling emergence of wirelessly capable devices that are used and abused for surveillance and voyeurism,” Wired.com reported him as saying.

Cyborg also offers an ‘All-Out-Mode’, which will disconnect any surveillance devices within its surrounding area. It is legal to block surveillance devices trying to enter one’s own network, however booting devices from a network that is not administered by oneself is illegal. Oliver advises against using the mode[3], still, the possibility is offered and likely to be abused.

However, cutting the Wi-Fi might not necessarily be the right approach to protect one’s personal privacy. In fact, Cyborg does not detect surveillance devices unless they are trying to hack into a Wi-Fi, which temporarily hinders them from streaming. Videos and photos can still be stored locally and shared afterwards. Also, there is still the ultimate alternative: the smartphone. Yet, the term ‘surveillance device’ should be considered critically since surveillance is an action with intent, that is, eventually, user driven.

Who is responsible?

In the post-Snowden environment, society has become very crucial about sustaining personal privacy. Even businesses, at least on the surface, have started to take a more ‘pro-privacy’ stance. Thus, the question to be asked is – whose responsibility is it to assure personal privacy? Should device makers be urged to create more privacy-friendly recording functions? Should the government develop stricter privacy policies? Or should users increase their privacy awareness combined with a more privacy-conform use of their so-called surveillance devices?

“I consider Cyborg Unplug to be a positive, tactical response to a growing and widely felt social issue, one born from the technologically-enabled abuse of mutual, human respect.” Oliver claims.[4] Still, he has to face a lot of criticism from the ranks of the tech elite:

Google has long realized that its Google Glass is not well received by many. Glass wearers have already been banned from bars and attacked in the street.[5] Google tries to raise awareness about the acceptable use of the Glass. Following its principal ‘Don’t be evil’, they released a list of
Do's and Don't's for Google Glass Explorers. However, when it comes to the question of how to assure privacy, Google remains rather vague and abstract.[6]

The rapidly increasing number of supporters of Oliver’s idea regarding privacy protection can be traced back to the growing demand for his device. Thus, many people feel uncomfortable with the thought of being constantly recorded in whatever ways. The fact that devices, such as the Google Glass, are pushing at the very edges of what is considered acceptable as a society, is both problematic and fascinating.

There are two issues emerging from recent developments: The resentment of the tech elite and the discomfort with the technology itself. History has shown that the adaptation to new technologies is a long-term social process. However, the pace of how new technology is rolled out is maybe not consistent with this very adaptation process, which makes it even harder for society to actively participate in shaping its environment. Time will tell, whether the use of technology to fix technology can be a long-term solution for a social issue.

References


Bomb Gaza

Is a game for Android that was uploaded to the Google Play store on 29 July, 2014 and has already been downloaded between 500 and 1000 times. allowing players attack Gaza while it’s still being bombarded in real life.

Game Description

In Bomb Gaza, the Israeli Palestinian conflict is imitated as follows:

“You play as the Israeli Air Force, tapping a touch screen to pour red-nosed bombs into a 2D multilevel landscape filled with cartoonist people wearing white robes and clutching children — meant to signify civilians — as well as others draped in black, clutching rifles, touting greenish headbands and grinning maniacally. The goal is to hit those black-garbed militants — presumably members of Palestinian militant group Hamas — while avoiding the white-clad civilians”.

No specific instructions on how to play the game. However it is almost impracticable to play without accidentally killing civilians.

Negative Reviews and Outrage
Timing was very crucial to release such game while in real life hundreds of civilians mostly children and women were killed and injured in Gaza. Consequently rage comments and tweets were posted on several social media platforms condemning the release of such game.

One Google user said: “To think that you can turn genocide, murder and ethnic cleansing into a game is absolutely disgusting, a second user added: My beloved brothers and sisters are dying in Gaza and some stupid ignoramus decides to make a game like this”.

While another one tweeted on his account saying: “This is just disgusting and vile. How are Google allowing this to stay on for almost a week!!”

Accordingly Google removed the controversial Bomb Gaza game from its Play Store after the negative reviews.

“Google spokesperson commented: we remove apps from Google Play that violate our policies as Play’s policies prohibit depictions of gratuitous violence and content advocating against groups of people based on their race or ethnic origin, religion”.

The developer of the Game commented about his motivation for making it by saying it was the truth. Within the above mentioned Google policy, is not quite understandable why to upload such game with such violent content at that specific time in the first place, wasn’t it checked or reviewed before uploaded?

What impact such video games leave on their audience/gamers in general?

Video games in general are developed for fun and relief, and supposedly to keep the players away from stress and boredom, but is this the case here? Most scholarly literature discusses the violent video games from a negative impact.

Meta-analysis reveals that:

“Exposure to violent video games is significantly linked to increases in aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, and cardiovascular arousal, and to decreases in helping behavior. Experimental studies reveal this linkage to be causal. Co-relational studies reveal a linkage to serious, real-world types of aggression”. (Anderson 2003, 113).

Another study claimed that besides the game content the blood presence makes a difference.

“The presence of blood is one factor that may activate more aggressive nodes in the associative network, thus increasing aggression found those who played a violent video game with the blood present had higher levels of physical aggression intentions than those who played the same video game without the blood” (Barlett et al. 2007, 540).

Such studies add more responsibility and warning for games developers when they do their designs. However another scholarly work asserts

“On the short-term impact of violent video games but not the on the long-term “Although previous experiments have shown that violent video games can cause a short-term, immediate increase in aggression, until now no experimental study has tested the long-term cumulative causal effects of violent video games on aggression”. (Hasan et al. 2012, 224).

Conclusion

Conflict and war are the feeding material for contemporary gaming. When real wars are partly covered with virtual ones, users may lose the ability to distinguish between both, resulting in desensitization towards violence where blood becomes nothing to mean, and people’s lives or death are with no difference. Perhaps that is the cause of increased crimes like school shooting, homicide, domestic violence, and snipers shootings.

References:


But all of this is at risk when the safety, health and protection of a nation are in the hands of anonymous individuals who are not accountable. Russian private investigators say every day there are more and more people who turn to hackers to solve their issues. We are all being constantly told that having our private lives monitored and surveilled is for our own good, and our guardians are these expert hackers that have access to anyone’s emails and phones. With such access, they claim they can anticipate terrorist attacks and protect us all. Privacy is a right of every person in this planet and hackers are stealing that right from us, with the help of the governments or without it, with the approval of citizens or without it. It is illegal, and wrong. Our privacy is always at risk. If you ever go online, your privacy is already at risk. The FBI demanding a hack to unlock any phone it finds is above what they should expect. I have a hard time believing that this one phone can not be opened.