

CYBERCULTURE AND INTERACTIVITY

Rsch. Assist. Dr. Erhan AKYAZI
Marmara University,
Faculty of Communications, Istanbul, Turkey
eakyazi@marmara.edu.tr

The Concepts of Culture and Cyberculture

Culture is a large and integral part of our everyday lives. It is our beliefs, values, behaviors, and material objects that create our way of life. It is human nature.¹

Culture can be defined as the collective programming of the mind, which builds on shared norms and values. However Culture is a mechanism of collective sense making; it binds individuals in groups and distinguishes one group of people from another.²

On the other hand, basically Cyberculture means the culture that emerges from the use of computers for communication and entertainment and business.³

The term of Cyberculture refers to cultural issues related to "cyber-topics", e.g. cybernetics; computerization, digital revolution etc. so generally it varies from source to source. Thus, cyberculture is an ambiguous, confusing, unclear term describing a set of issues. It can be used in a descriptive, analytical or ideological sense. It has a multiplicity of meanings and thus everyone willingly uses at least one of them.⁴

Too often, the term is used to describe contemporary cultures and/or cultural products that have some

relationship with technology. For example, cyberculture is a subculture of users of computer and network as members of virtual community that developed by means of computer networks in the 80's and 90's. However according to other opinions on cyberculture the concept of cyberculture concerned with Internet -in other words cyberspace- more than technology. This thought approve that spreading of Internet not only changed the management of information. In addition this, it changed the society. If the transformed society can be called new society or cyber society, describing the cyberculture as a collection of cultures and cultural products that exist on and/or are made possible by the Internet will be appropriate.⁵

Cyberspace (Internet) and Cybersociety

The Internet has made available a 'space' in which many people virtually work and play (in both cases, any-time / any-place). It has been described and interpreted in a vast number of ways, as people have perceived its import in different, sometimes curious, and in some cases downright misleading ways. It is often referred to as 'the net' (even though it is in principle just one of many possible nets); as 'the matrix' (which refers to the many paths one can follow in order to navigate around it); and as the 'information superhighway' (a desperately poor metaphor). The notion of 'cyberspace' is attractive to the media because it has an artistic ring to it, inviting each of our minds to draw on its blank canvas.⁶

The cyberspace term defined and described in *Neuromancer* in 1986 by William Gibson. After this, other works continued to fuel the popular imagination. In his work, Gibson described cyberspace as a space apart from the corporeal

¹ <http://www.usi.edu/libarts/socio/chapter/culture/what.htm>

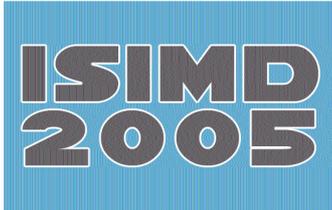
² Gregory E Kersten; Sabine T Koeszegi; Rudolf Vetschera, The effects of culture in computer-mediated negotiations, *JITTA: Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application*; 2003; 5, 2; ABI/INFORM Global, pg. 1

³ <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/cyberculture>

⁴ http://macek.czechian.net/defining_cyberculture.htm

⁵ http://iggi.unesco.or.kr/web/iggi_docs/06/952480150.pdf

⁶ <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/II/VicCCL.html>



3RD INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF INTERACTIVE MEDIA DESIGN

JANUARY 5 - 7, 2005

world-a hallucination. But the Internet is not growing apart from the world, but to the contrary is increasingly embedded in it.⁷

Cyberspace is a social space. Whether emailing a friend, surfing the Web, or posting to a listserv or newsgroup, users interact with one another. This communication -- often random and sporadic, often prolonged and regular -- fosters a sense of community and can help to generate virtual communities. Virtual communities are "social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on...public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace".⁸

People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. You can't kiss anybody and nobody can punch you in the nose, but a lot can happen within those boundaries. To the millions who have been drawn into it, the richness and vitality of computer-linked cultures is attractive, even addictive.⁹

What matters is the services that are available over it, the uses to which it is put, and the manner in which people interact with one another over it.¹⁰

Interactivity

The term "interactive" means capable of acting on or influencing each other.¹¹

Interactivity has been defined in many ways. For example, interactivity is the facility for persons and organizations to communicate directly with one another regardless of distance or time. In other definition interactivity has two primary features: the ability to address a person and to gather and remember the response of that person. Or it can be explain that interactivity is "the extent to which users can participate in modifying the format and content of a mediated environment in real time."

On closer examination, these different definitions can be classified by whether they focus on user-machine interaction, user-user interaction and machine-machine interaction.

1. User-machine interaction was the focus of early definitions of interactivity, in which the emphasis was on human interaction with computers. To be interactive, a computer system must be responsive to users' actions. However, though user-machine interaction is an important aspect of interactivity, it alone is not adequate to capture the concept of interactivity since the emergence of more advanced technology such as the Internet.

2. User-user interaction is most often discussed from an interpersonal communication perspective. The more that communication in a computer-mediated environment resembles interpersonal communication, the more interactive the communication is. However, one problem with looking at interactivity from the angle of interpersonal communication is that it ignores the ability of a medium such as the Internet to break the boundaries of traditional interpersonal communication. Not only do people no longer need to be at the same place, they do not even need to be communicating at the same time. With

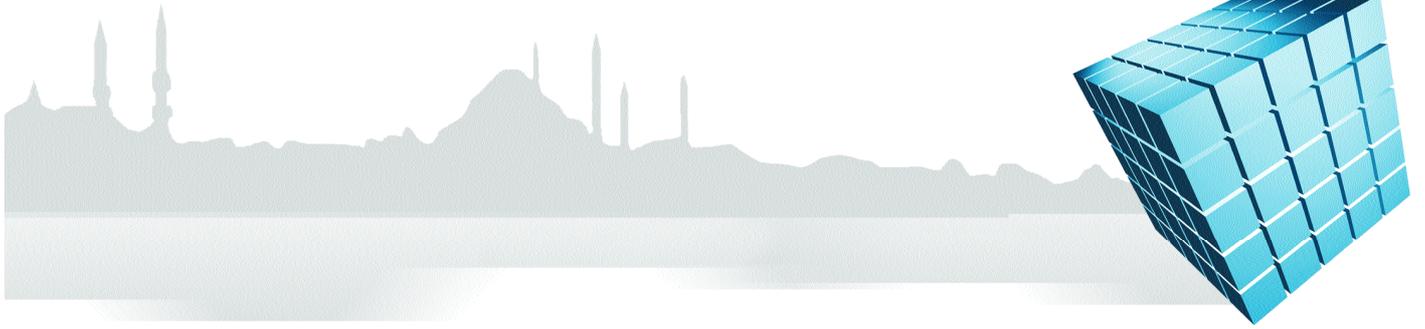
⁷ Samuel M Wilson; Leighton C Peterson, The anthropology of online communities, Annual Review of Anthropology; 2002; 31, Academic Research Library,pg. 449.

⁸ <http://otal.umd.edu/~rccs/biblio.html>

⁹ <http://www.well.com/user/hlr/texts/VCcivil.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/II/VicCCL.html>

¹¹ <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/interactive>

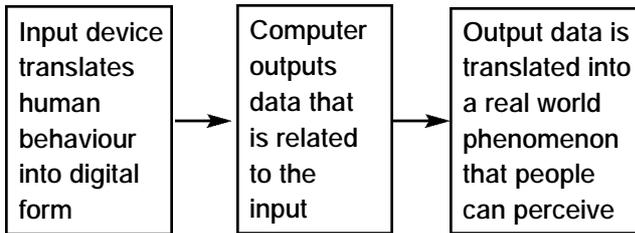


on-line translation service, people also do not need to understand each other's language to be able to communicate.

3. Machine-machine interaction: With the beginning of information networks to become widespread in addition to two type of interactivity described above, machine to machine interaction started to talk. In this way of interaction like other types talking of sides with each other and sending/receiving message occurs. Naturally the success and stability of this type of interaction depends on information network structure.

The evolution of computer systems and their applications has been tightly connected with significant improvements of the techniques through which users can interact with the system. The range of user-interface techniques available has expanded enormously over different generations of systems, reaching from non-interactive batch systems, through line-oriented command language interfaces, full-screen menus and forms, to graphical, direct-manipulation user interfaces. This development can be seen as a continuous broadening of the communication channel between the user and the system.

For something to be interactive the following events must occur:



The below figure (Fig.1) shows the relation of broadening of the communication channels between user and system with different generations of interactive systems with characteristic user interface features.

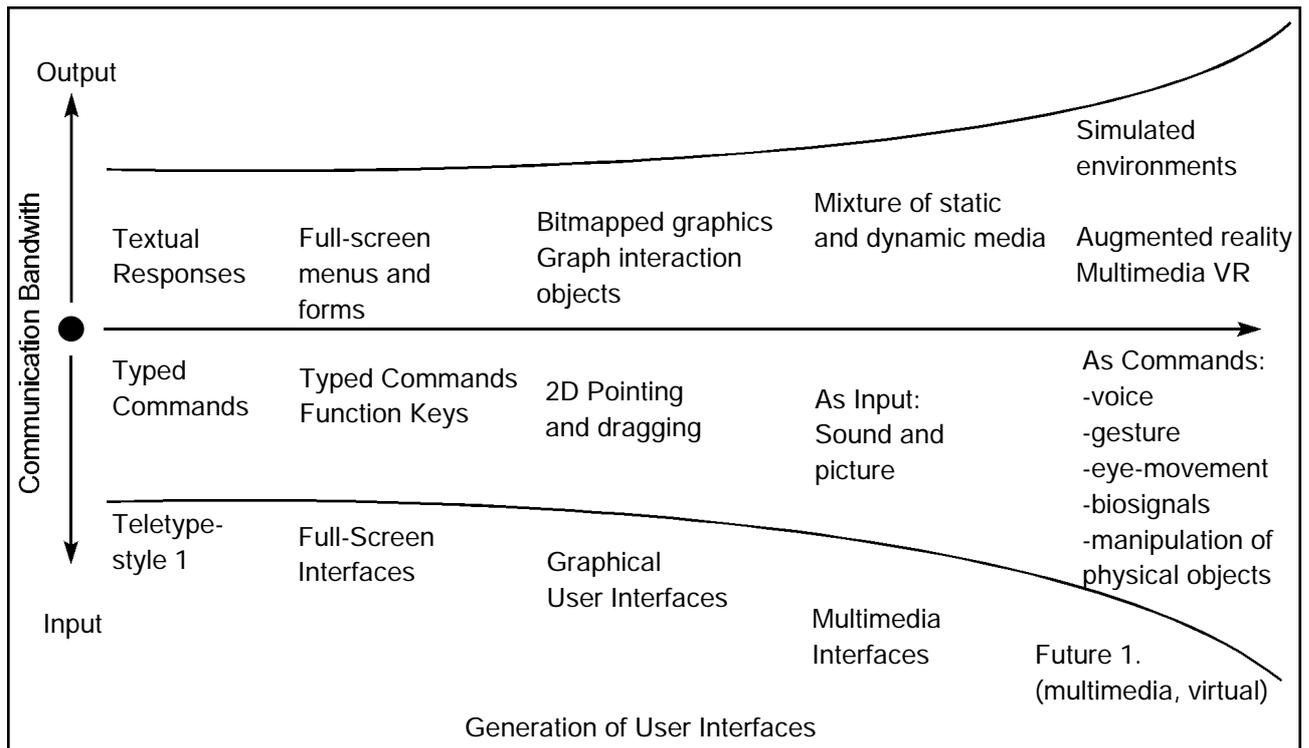
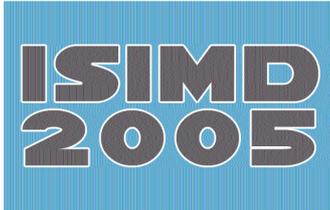


Fig.1



3RD INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF INTERACTIVE MEDIA DESIGN

JANUARY 5 - 7, 2005

Each interaction technique has its specific usability characteristics and may or may not be the optimal solution for all users and tasks. Thus, there have been various approaches to combining the advantages of different interaction styles in a single interface. This development is amplified in current user-interface research, which takes into account new input and output technologies. Multimodal interfaces are combining different input channels such as pointing, gesture, and voice in order to provide an integrated and flexible way of interacting with the system. On the output side, the integration of different media, including graphical simulations, is making considerable progress. In the future, we are likely to see more systems extending and integrating these capabilities, which will widen current human-computer interaction into a more natural, continuous, and implicit communication that will use all senses and modalities of expression available to us.¹²

Conclusion

In the meaning of cyberspace or Internet interactivity, it gives people non-linear accessing to information, sensing to be a member of a community, feeling to communicate face to face.

And interactivity increases as:¹³

1. the goal of communication is more to exchange information than to persuade participants have greater control of the communication environment
2. participants take an active role to fully benefit from the communication
3. participants act and react to messages via two-way communication
4. timing of communication is flexible and responsive to demands of participants
5. communication environment creates a sense of place

However, when realizing the interactivity, people overlook the wicked aspect of it, especially the hacking reality. In broad terms, hacking may be seen as a writing program code but it often refers to illegally gaining entrance to a computer system such as public web server or private communication network and then violating its databases or applications. Hackers can write codes but their hacks are produced to get around firewalls, download documents, replace files, overwrite data, and/or overload entire computer and communication system. Combining this sense of hacking with the interactivity as a sociotechnical performance, defining the interactivity as an interactivity will not be wrong.¹⁴

To open communication channels to cyberspace means approving hacking attacks to your system. On the contrary to be in cyberspace or to be a member of cybersociety requires venturing some risks. In such that dilemma what should be done?

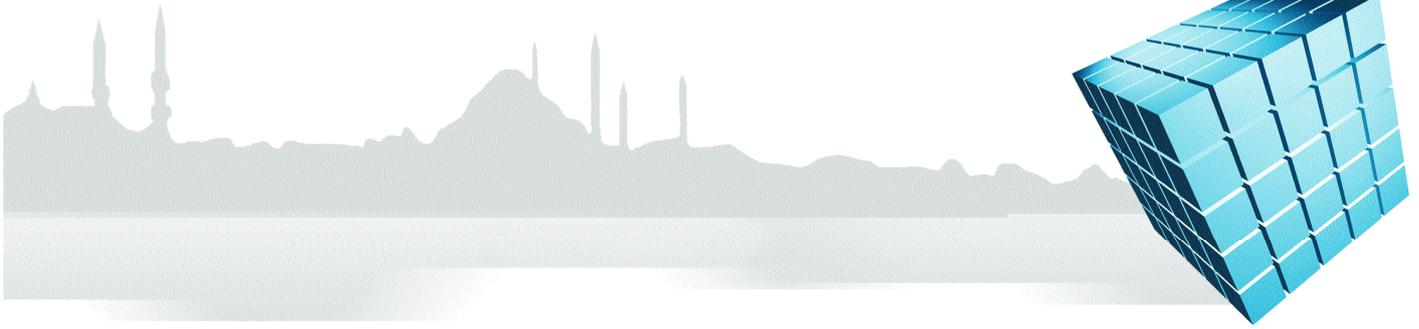
On the other hand, there are too many threats of cyberspace. The most visible and readily sensationalized concern is about the use of the net for pornography and racial vilification. Mediocre taste, in graphic designs and color-schemes, as well as in models' poses, abounds in virtual life, just as it does in real life. Another concern is that, as payment mechanisms follow documents into the virtual world, money laundering by 'serious crime' will become much simpler, and the web of surveillance that has been built in recent decades will fail in its task of delivering intelligence to law enforcement agencies.

Life in the virtual world is essentially pseudonymous. By that I mean that people have to use a name, and an electronic address, but there are no mechanisms to provably associate a person with an identity, to restrict a person to a single identity, or to restrict an identity to a single person. For people who wish to

¹² Ziegler, Jurgen, Interactive techniques, ACM Computing Surveys; Mar 1996; 28, 1; ABI/INFORM Global pg. 185.

¹³ http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue5_1/kenney/index.html

¹⁴ !nt3rh4ckt!v!ty, John McKenzie, Style; Summer 1999; 33, 2; Academic Research Library, pg. 283



actively smother the relationship between themselves and their 'digital persona', a number of mechanisms are available, including machines all over the world which willingly provide addresses (i.e. email-accounts and storage space), the freedom to obscure the machine and account from which a message was sent, and so-called 'anonymous remailers' for bouncing messages around the net and thereby denying access to their point of origin.

Criminal exploitation is clearly a problem, and there are other concerns too; for example, the norms of human interaction are less likely to be observed in such environments, and, even on seemingly non-contentious issues, relationships can quickly reach flashpoint. Electronic violence is in its infancy, but viruses, rumor-mongering, hate-mail and mailbox bombardment are all describable phenomena, and may graduate from art-forms to techniques. Because of the fear of retribution, all are more likely to be used pseudonymously or anonymously than by a readily identifiable person. A matter that concerns many people is the compulsiveness of some forms of IT. Interactive CDs and TV, particularly when coupled with 3D 'virtual reality' techniques, raise the same specter that TV originally did. There is ample evidence that some people are far more comfortable in the current, fairly primitive, largely text-based virtual world, than in conventional society.

There is a burning need to build on our understanding of culture more generally, and map culture onto the new medium. People in cars don't see people; they see other cars. We need to find ways to help people see other people when they use the net, analogous to enlarging windscreens and providing driver-to-driver voice-communications. We need to establish a theory or theories that will enable us to describe, explain and predict human behavior in Internet context.

Laws are likely to be inadequate to control human behavior on the net. But then that inadequacy already exists in physical communities; otherwise there would be no murders, extortion or defamation. We need to establish codes of behavior and guidelines, whose primary purpose is education

rather than retribution and sanction. These need to be implemented through Internet Services Providers (because they provide the means whereby people gain access to the net); but they need to be communicated, by behavior, by example, and by reminder, by net-users to one another.

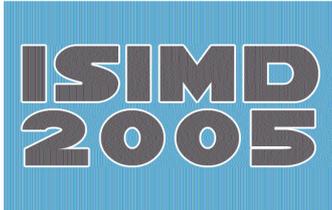
The inference was drawn from the case studies that all Internet products and services, and indeed the underlying protocols and architecture, contain loopholes that can be readily exploited by commercial interests, and by community-members interested in making nuisances of them. We need to identify the inadequacies, and work constructively towards enhancements and replacements.

Outgoing mail needs to be filtered, in order to detect and draw attention to potentially dysfunctional messages, such as those including multiple 'flame'-words, especially when addressed to multiple people or listservers; and lengthy messages or attachments being sent to multiple people or listservers. We need default email templates that contain 'Dear XXX' openings and 'Regards ... <my-name>' closings, and which are designed to replace the barrenness of computer interfaces with an atmosphere of human communication.

People who wish to subscribe to or unsubscribe from e-lists frequently send their messages to the list rather than the administrative address. Such messages (whether syntactically correct or not) need to be detected by the listserv, and deflected from the list to the list-management software and/or the list-manager.

Even within the World Wide Web, there are elements that are mechanistic rather than neighborly. We need to embody within browsers humanized metaphors such as 'enquiring' rather than mechanistic terms such as 'searching'; and 'visiting' rather than 'fetching'; and 'drawing attention to' rather than 'hot linking' or 'pointing to'.

The analysis of cyberculture is all we need.



3RD INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF INTERACTIVE MEDIA DESIGN

JANUARY 5 - 7, 2005

References

1. Int3rh4ckt!v!ty, John McKenzie, Style; Summer 1999; 33, 2; Academic Research Library, pg. 283
2. Gregory E Kersten; Sabine T Koeszegi; Rudolf Vetschera, The effects of culture in computer-mediated negotiations, JITTA : Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application; 2003; 5, 2; ABI/INFORM Global, pg. 1
3. http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue5_1/kenney/index.html
4. http://iggi.unesco.or.kr/web/iggi_docs/06/952480150.pdf
5. http://macek.czechian.net/defining_cyberculture.htm
6. <http://otal.umd.edu/~rccs/biblio.html>
7. <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/II/VicCCL.html>
8. <http://www.usi.edu/libarts/socio/chapter/culture/what.htm>
9. <http://www.well.com/user/hlr/texts/VCcivil.html>
10. <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/cyberculture>
11. <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/interactive>
12. Samuel M Wilson; Leighton C Peterson, The anthropology of online communities, Annual Review of Anthropology; 2002; 31, Academic Research Library,pg. 449.
13. Ziegler, Jurgen, Interactive techniques, ACM Computing Surveys; Mar 1996; 28, 1; ABI/INFORM Global.