

Goldsmiths Media Research Centre, Centre of Cultural Studies: 'Force of Metadata'

Abstracts

9.45 – 11.15 Keynote 1

Chair: Jennifer Bajorek

Bernard Stiegler: The alternative of metadata:

Automated voluntary servitude or economy of contribution

The concept of metadata was put forward in 1994 by Tim Berners-Lee, when he launched the W3C group, with a view to devising formal languages for describing data generated on the web. It was a question, at that point, of specifying the rules of what was called the *semantic web*. (At the same time, Leonardo Chiariglione organized another group for standardization in the domain of images, MPEG, which also generated formats for metadata, even if the concept was not used. The question was reached through image compression technologies and the methods of automatic indexing pertaining to them.) The concept of a semantic web was countered ten years later by the proposition of a *social web*, where metadata would be generated by the entirety of actors in the network, and not only by specialists or by automatic systems operating with ontologies. At that point, people spoke of *web 2.0* and of *folksonomies*. It was in this context that Clay Shirky championed the idea that the time of ontologies was over, and that it would have to make way for that of tags, that is to say, that of a generalized annotation, in a logic that was no longer *top down* but rather *bottom up*.

In this lecture, I will argue that the technologies of collaborative indexing based on metadata generated by all of the actors in the network actually constitute a radical rupture with the organization of indexing that was centralized for a very long time (the first metadata date from the Mesopotamians), and that we must understand this development by inscribing it in the history of a process of grammatization, in which the relationships between senders and receivers are ceaselessly evolving, and in which the digital environment of the web constitutes a major rupture because it makes the formation of an *associated* (in Simondon's sense) technological and industrial environment possible.

If industrialization and technologization had effectively led to a centralized standardization of modes of life as well as of modes of production, which had resulted in turn in the generalization of a *dissociated* environment, in which consumers no longer participated in any way in the development of their own life environment, the digital

environment, on the contrary, brought about a multidirectional relationship between actors rather than a unidirectional relationship between producers and consumers. The question of metadata would thus be at the heart of a possible change in the industrial model: a model founded on contribution rather than consumption. And in this context, the cultural and cognitive technologies that make up the collaborative apparatus would be a resurrection, in the cultural domain, of the figure of the amateur and the overcoming of cultural consumerism, which ruins the life of the spirit.

I will nevertheless also try to show why the opposition between *top down* and *bottom up* logics represents an overly simple apprehension of something that comes under a process of transindividuation (that is to say, the metastabilization of multiple categories being developed by the play of co-individuation). Metadata are categorizations engendered in conformity with ascending and self-organized logics as well as in conformity with descending logics, broadcast from centers to peripheries. What matters is the composition of what must be understood as tendencies. The relational digital technologies that give rise to metadata must be understood as technologies of transindividuation, in the sense that, within a process of transindividuation, there are two tendencies that come together and work in concert: a tendency stemming from what Saussure described as a diachronic pole and another tendency that he described as a synchronic pole—with Simondon's theory allowing us to understand why synchrony is a metastabilization, that is to say, an equilibrium that is always at the limit of disequilibrium.

Such questions have extremely far-reaching consequences, and they are at the heart of tomorrow's political economy. The conception of collaborative technologies from which metadata have resulted is a pharmacological question in the sense in which Plato spoke of writing as a *pharmakon*, and this is why the development of relational digital technologies can open onto two opposite *scenarios*:

1. Either it intensifies control in the sense explained by Deleuze, and by developing an automatic voluntary servitude;
2. Or these technologies become the *hypomnematon* whereby industrial capitalism passes from a consumerist economy to an economy of contribution.

Translated from French original by Jennifer Bajorek

11.30 – 13.00, Panel 1

Chair: Robert Zimmer

Götz Bachmann: The Power of Metadata Time

Power in Television is placed in programming, and programming is based on schedule and flow. But how about Internet based video communities? What kind of power

emerges here? This presentation will use an ethnographic case study on the Japanese video community Nico Nico Douga to elaborate on three strands of new media power: The power of tags, which create, at least on Nico Nico Douga, a new form of evolutionary narrative and narrativised evolution. Secondly, I will look at the power of rankings, which organizes this emergence as well as temporal usage patterns. Algorithms and interface design of rankings are thus the topic of heavy debates between the users and programmers of Nico Nico Douga. Thirdly, I will look at the power of comments, which have created on Nico Nico Douga a new collective speech situation. This speech situation might indeed be a possibility to move beyond the Nietzschean antinomy of slave and master morality.

Yuk Hui: Metadata, Being, Power

The economy of the web has been termed "user generated content", nevertheless it is misleading. Now metadata is taking over content and changes both the products and mode of production of the web. Taking the approach of Gilbert Simondon, this paper tries to analyse the web economy from the point of view of machines, especially the current development in information retrieval and the vision of Semantic Web, in two aspects: the production of networks and the networks of production. It tries to identify "relation" as the basic unit in these productions, and suggests a new way of understanding the current and future web economy by exploring David Hume's theory of relations on the growth of complexity and recursion in algorithmic thinking.

Kuan-Neng Foo: Innovation, Metadata and Firm Growth

Innovation is at the core of firm growth. Incremental innovation sustains survival in existing markets, while radical innovation can result in paradigm shifts leading to the development of new markets and new economic growth cycles. The strategic management of metadata within social network applications has the potential to drive user generated innovation. What decisions over metadata in these systems can sustain the high level of creativity required for innovation? How can a firm grow by accessing subsequent user generated innovations on its products while, at the same time, maintaining an equilibrium between a strong intellectual property regime and desirable consumer perception of the firm? What are the governance conditions between firm and user that lead to optimum firm growth and user innovation? These issues will be evaluated within the context of a video based social network application, Nico Nico Douga, with particular attention to the case of the Xbox game, iDOLM@STER, by Namco Bandai.

14.30 – 16.30, Panel 2

Chair: Olga Goriunowa

Harry Halpin: Metadata and the Dialectics of Post-humanism

With dizzying speed, metadata - "data about data" - increasingly dominates everyday life. Many of us so rely on the lists of Google and we would be lost without it. Efforts to evolve the Web - such as the Semantic Web of Berners-Lee - are crucially architectures of meta-data. In order to distinguish metadata from other forms of data, an analytic definition of metadata must be formulated. Leaning on the work of Brian Cantwell Smith, metadata is the data that can be used for control of access to other data. Yet control for what purpose? In order to uncover the function of this control, we will trace a brief archeology of metadata, a dialectical path that starts from the logical positivism of Carnap to the more recent cybernetic post-humanism of Hayles and Clark, moving from control over the world to control over the formation of the subject. However, despite the hype about "post-humanism" - a term as misguided as "postmodernism" - this archeology leads straight into the anti-humanism of Althusser, a reconsideration of the human that has become more self-evident in the age of the Web.

Stanza: The Emergent City

Stanza will present works from the The Emergent City. A series of projects that use real time data to visualise the city, using sensors and CCTV. Stanza will also present selected previous projects using and manipulating data such as: Genomixer.com - a series of audio visual generative artworks based on the artists sequenced dna; Soundcities.com is an online database of sounds from around the world all controllable online; and Sountoys.net a database of interactive artworks..

Artistic Statement about current research and practice:

I am researching data within cities and how this can be represented, visualized and interpreted. Data from security tracking, traffic, and environmental monitoring can all be interpreted as a medium to make artworks. I investigate new ways of comparing, conceptualizing and then visualizing complex concepts related to the relationship of emergent data and real space in the built environment. Through practice based research I have made a series of modular experimental artworks that express the possibilities for our data-mediated future.

There are three strands of my working process; these involve collecting the data, visualizing the data, and then displaying the data. The outputs from the online interfaces and online visualizations can be realized as real time dynamic artworks as diverse as installations, and real objects, made out of new display materials back in physical space. In all my work I try to exploit the changing dynamics of city life as a source for

creativity and create meaningful artistic metaphors. I utilize new technologies and integrate new media artworks into the public domain as part of this ongoing research into the visualization of city space. In essence I am researching data as a medium for creativity and how meaningful experiences of our cities may result.

By investigating these data structures I aim to create new metaphors relevant to the experience of the city. The patterns we make, the visual and imaginative interpretations we give to real world events, are already being networked into retrievable data structures that can be re-imagined and source for information. These patterns disclose new ways of seeing the world. The value of gathering and re-presenting this data in artistic form, and then analyzing its impact and influence, lies in making meaning accessible to a wider audience.

Lev Manovich: Information Wants to be ASCII

Why did metadata (defined as ³the data about data²) become so important in the present decade? In the older information regimes, contexts where information was to appear very fixed. Everything was already prearranged in its place, and you could not easily separate pieces of information from their packages, move them around, remix them, search for them, etc. So metadata was not that important.

In the new Web 2.0 regime, information has become more atomized. It can be easily moved around between contexts, media, people, devices; it can be also easily remixed with other information ³atoms². This separation between objects and their contexts makes metadata crucial. Metadata came to functions as objects¹ "IDs" – identifying them in a new world without predefined contexts and allowing them to enter in relationships with other objects.

17.00 – 18.00 pm, Keynote 2

Chair: Matt Fuller

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: Antimonuments and Subsculptures

Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer will present his recent interactive art installations, including "Wavefunction" a kinetic sculpture premiered at the Venice Biennale 2007, "Voz Alta" a memorial for the Tlatelolco student Massacre in Mexico City and "Pulse Park" a lighting sculpture for Madison Square Park in New York. His main interest is in creating platforms for public participation, by perverting technologies such as robotics, computerized surveillance or telematic networks. Inspired by phantasmagoria, carnival and animatronics, his light and shadow works are "antimonuments for alien agency".

