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**Work plan for the Graduation Project,
Media Design Department**

The machine of possibility

“Magic is the bastard sister of science”(James George Frazer)

While our relationship to technology becomes an, almost key factor in the relationship between ourselves and others, and mediated communication has undoubtedly become dominant, can we contrast the affirmative, forward looking productive side of technology with mechanisms that remind us of our human limitations? The starting point for this project is the analysis of information and communication technologies through the scope of magical thinking. Magical thinking will be understood as a part of human communication and the ambiguous relationship between man and "machine".

Magical thinking is a way for man to confront nature, an empowering strategy. It is connected to the physical world and to the imaginative world at the same time in a direct relation, and a way of organizing a social structure. I will base the definition of magical thinking through the ideas of several authors: Weber's definition of charismatic objects in animism, Frazer's homeopathic, and contagious magic (by Jacobson metaphor and metonymy), Malinowski's contribution to the power of language and possibility of words to directly affect* the world. Taking magical thinking as a practical means, I will try to locate its implications in the ways we communicate and use media and information technology. Magical thinking is in this sense applied as a social approach in the process of naturalizing technology, through language and conceptualization. We become the codes we punch (Katherine Hayles).

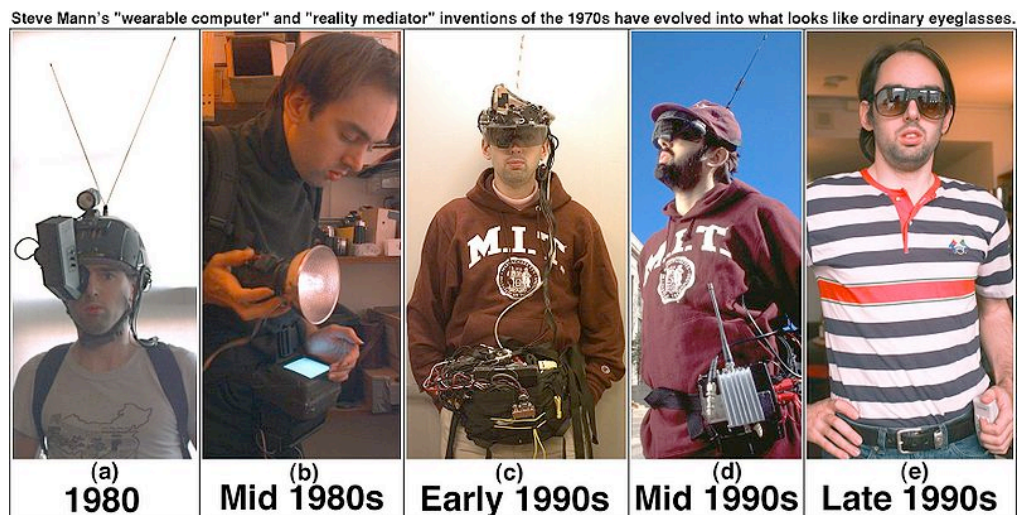
* Shouse, distinction between affect, feeling and emotion

With language as a basis, I will examine applications of metaphors and metonymies of magical thinking through different forms of language: performative human language (Malinowski), mediated language, and code- as executable language, encryption and physicality of our ICT (information communication technology) devices. Code will be thought through as a space for possibility, manipulation and control, both in commercial and artistic sense.

Code as nature- Devices as fetishes – immersive media – ambient intelligence

New technology comes as deus ex machina, as Kluitenberg nicely remarks. We can find possible applications of charismatic objects and the principle of contagious magic in the way we connect to interfaces that allow us to be always on, updated, metaphorically (the “cloud” in cloud computing) and physically. Furthermore, the people who work on new technology are specialized in encryption, therefore they are more “powerful, charismatic” than the ordinary user.

Devices and interfaces are a part of our naturalized surrounding, which greatly differ from the cyborg visions that were at the same time more utopian and dystopian than what we wear and communicate with today.



How do charismatic technological objects “talk” (in the case of GPS navigational devices, literally) to our affective parts and enforce the feeling of technological dependency, through the need to be connected, and through compensating for our natural limitations?



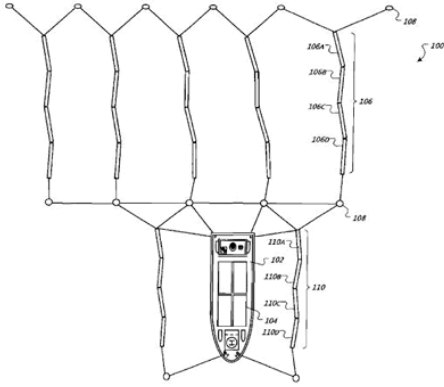
Seeing is still not believing.

The new Ipod touch, with a visual enhancing Retina display.

Download the What to Expect Pregnancy Tracker ▶



A different type of contagious contact is Cloud computing, which is a metaphor of ubiquity, an abstraction of computer networks. It is an extension of the idea of connectivity + personalized space, but it is at the same time a severe centralization of data on the Internet, and a very vaguely defined centralization for a very concrete, physical situation. Where is this cloud that is connected to everything, everywhere? Are server farms beyond geographical borders? Is this huge, physical amount of data literally floating (Google navy)? And if it is, who is the captain?



Google data navy, a solution Google is implementing to solve sustainability issues of server farms, by using water resources

Possible questions that rise: Immediacy vs. temporality, compensation, antropomorphization, technological determinism (also in the field of artistic practice), relation between production and desire, technology in service of economic growth, appropriation, creative industries

Connections to (previous) practice

How do we construct meaning is possibly the question that is the strongest driving force of my work. In the project "The us in virus" concerning issues of decentralized networks, online participatory media and paranoia surrounding viruses were analyzed through their symbiosis, drawing out implications of both networks being "walled gardens", and viruses as social networks. This relation between language, code, community and physicality was realized through literally tagging objects in public space considered as nodes of these networks, making an abstract set of issues physical, concrete.



Stickers tracing contagious physical networks in a pubic toilet and news stand (text: "H1N1 helps you share and connect with the people in your life")

Another former project was an identity correction of the Dutch Centre for visual art (CBK) and its approach to public art, dealing with problems of appropriation in artistic institutionalization and muzealization of cities. Besides forming a gallery interpretation of buildings as temporal public sculptures, I developed an audio guide to walk through the “collection”, creating a museum-like experience. The audio walk opened up questions of possibilities of navigating through physical space inscribed with meaning. Continuing in this line, thinking through physicality of information systems, technological dependencies, navigating through dense (information) spaces, could be one of the elements in the practical part of my research.

Through the practical research, I wish to challenge my traditional way of work and apply programming and computing power to, on one hand do something I otherwise wouldn't be able to do manually, and on the other hand to show the underlying structure of code, the physicality of communication and information systems. I will research Siegfried Zielinski's approach to archaeology of media (“Machines are prostheses for dealing satisfactorily with the impossible”), and different approaches to interfaces, history of technological metaphors (technological determinism vs. rejection of technology), strategies of mystification and concepts of magical thinking.

I want to focus on the ideas of and approaches to interfaces, how are they designed and conceptualized, creating a tool that doesn't necessarily have to be functional, but will underlie the physicality and hierarchies of abstraction. The output can possibly be an alternative way of using a browser, a navigational device, with different “modes” of navigating, or an interface experiment, applying the theoretical research in a physical way. The practical outcome can result in a creation of a myth and its deconstruction, or by taking the process of naturalization/rejection of technology to their extreme.

What I would like to research through this subject is the idea that technology can be strongly tied to myth and magical thinking, that with the rise of technology rise also the strategies of enhancing, immersing, control, through the process of naturalization and through the levels of abstraction (be it metaphoric language or abstraction through the applications of interfaces and code).

Work and approaches that deal with some of the issues or methods mentioned above:

The Yes men <http://theyesmen.org/>

PS world, by Julian Oliver <http://selectparks.net/~julian/psworld/>

Endo-Verena Friedrich <http://www.heavythinking.org/content/view/30/37/>

Embodying useless computational activity in a literal black box

ELIZA--A Computer Program For the Study of Natural Language Communication Between Man and Machine- Joseph Weizenbaum
<http://i5.nyu.edu/~mm64/x52.9265/january1966.html>

Crucifix NG, tech-enchanted faith, Eliot Malkin
http://www.neural.it/nnews/crucifix_ng_e.htm

Images:

Steve Man-wearable computer:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wearcompevolution.jpg>

Pregnancy tracker:

<http://itunes.apple.com/app/pregnancy-tracker-from-whattoexpect/id289560144?mt=8>



<http://www.apple.com/ipodtouch/features/retina-display.html>

Google navy: <http://www.technovelgy.com/ct/Science-Fiction-News.asp?NewsNum=1860>

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<http://nictoglobe.com/new/query2.html?d=articles&f=glitch>
- Collaborative futures* (2010), *Transmediale & FLOSS Manuals*
<http://www.transmediale.de/collaborative-futures>