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Congress Close to Internet Censorship

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It may have seemed that the danger of Internet censorship in the U.S. had passed when Speaker Gingrich, Vice President Gore, and President Clinton spoke against the Senate's Communications Decency Act (CDA) of 1995, and the U.S. House refused to approve that bill. However, the House approved several bills, some better and some worse than the Senate's CDA. These are all in a conference committee of House and Senate members. That committee is expected to report back very soon, perhaps this week (early December 1995), and it appears to be favoring a CDA, and one worse than the Senate's. Do something now, if you can (see below for what). After the conference committee reports back, there will still be a brief period to ask the House and Senate not to approve what it reports, and even if they do a brief period to ask President Clinton to veto it, but stopping it earlier will be easier.

Knowingly Indecent?

If you are against pornography, please read the bill before you conclude that it would either prevent that or that it would do so without much broader effects. Should we ban asphalt because roads can be used to reach stores that sell pornography? Should we close all libraries because they might contain books that children might see and that someone might consider indecent? Well, this bill would have similar effects on the Internet. If it becomes law, anyone who "knowingly" permits a minor to see anything considered "indecent" would be liable for it, and if convicted would be subject to a fine of up to $100,000 and up to two (or perhaps five) years in prison.

The term "knowingly" is not defined: a news story in the press might qualify as "knowledge" that "indecent" material existed on a system. The term "indecent" is not defined: a copy of *Huckleberry Finn* or the *Canterbury Tales* would very likely qualify.

These charges and penalties are applicable to each person involved: each and every person working for an Internet provider (or a school or a library with an Internet connection) could be charged.

The traditional defenses of claiming to be an enhanced service provider or a common carrier are explicitly prohibited.

This bill is specifically aimed at the Internet; traditional broadcast radio and television and cable television are explicitly excepted. The restrictions the bill would place on the Internet are much stricter than those currently in place on those traditional media. Radios and televisions are not required to have child-safe locks; ISPs would be.

The charges and penalties aren't restricted to providers or businesses, either; individuals would be equally liable for anything they posted to USENET, put in a web page, or sent in electronic mail. Actively sending something is not required, it merely has to be "made available" to be actionable. Limited distribution is not a defense, and no right of privacy of personal communications between adults is even mentioned; if someone steals

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Matrix News is a newsletter about cross-network issues. Networks frequently mentioned include USENET, UUCP, FidoNet, BITNET, the Internet, and conferencing systems such as the WELL and CompuServe. *Matrix News* is not about any single one of them. It is about the Matrix, which is all computer networks worldwide that exchange electronic mail.

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Constitutional Tango

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Never let it be said there is no place in society for higher learning.

Around the beginning of November, four freshmen at Cornell University — Rikus Linschoten, Brian Waldman, Evan Camps and Patrick Sicher — produced one of the "lists" that generally elicit chuckles or groans, usually attempting to be as outrageous as possible. Titled "Top 75 reasons why women (bitches) should not have freedom of speech," the list, for many, evoked the intended response.

Usually, these sorts of lists are passed around the office, or are sent from friend to friend in private e-mail, given to those who are most likely to get a good laugh out of the material.

In a bright burst of stupidity, however, these blossoms of our future generation decided to post the message to several e-mail addresses, some of which included feminists and those for women's rights; somewhere along the line (it gets pretty fuzzy who actually did the posting), the list was posted to several mailing lists and newsgroups, among them bit.listserv.gaynet and bit.listserv.politics.

Bad move.

Dr Nancy Goldstein of Harvard University, one of many who got a copy of the list, fired off a quick letter to John Ford, Dean of Students at Cornell, and David Lambert, Vice President for Information Technologies, berating not only the four students for their questionable taste, but also condemning the university for not upholding the "policies governing the uses to which undergraduates might put their Internet priveleges and if this particular usage was in keeping with [the] university's principles." Dr. Goldstein demanded that the Dean and Vice President deal with the students "with the utmost seriousness."

And deal with them the university did.

Not only were the four students' Internet accounts summarily dropped, they were "J-A-ed" — a nickname for Judicial Administrator, which is basically a college court — and face sexual harrassment charges and misuse of computer resources at the University. Letters have poured into Cornell and an incredible amount of posting traffic was instigated by the list, much of which can be found by the appropriate searches in DejaNews <URL:http://www.dejanews.com>., a World-Wide Web search engine that searches the Usenet newsgroups for a specific topic.

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Cyberspace Theater

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It's often been said that cyberspace is only virtual reality, that the Internet and the Matrix contain no community, no culture, no tradition.

Well, there's some truth to that, in much the same way as you won't find much American culture if you look for culinary traditions like the French or blossom-viewing traditions like the Japanese. If, however, you accept culture as something that grows from the local people and their reaction to their history, then there's popular music, Elvis, and even Elvis sightings. This may seem crude culture compared to ancient Greek songs of Orpheus and Eurydice, but, hey, give it a few hundred or thousand years!

I'd say the Internet and the Matrix (much culture has to do with inter-human communication, and thus extends beyond the interactive Internet into the store-and-forward mail and news parts of the Matrix) probably currently date around 500 BC culturally. That's when the Greeks really took to writing down oral history, and what else are FAQ files, after all? FAQs are probably the most widespread artifacts of cyberspace culture; sort of the cuneiform tablets of the early online age.

But let's look at an even bigger and ever-popular piece of cyberspace culture. This one has developed to about the level of early medieval morality plays. A bunch of players pull into the next village with their cart and props, and proceed to overact a melodrama with stock characters and moralistic overtones. The audience may join in by cheering, throwing vegetables, or even chasing the players out of town; very participatory. In cyberspace the cart is a mailing list or newsgroup, the village is global, and the players are the list members, and the audience is cyberspace itself, but the idea is similar. Cyberspace Theatre!

And what's one of the most popular plays on the playlist? One that plays pretty much the same in English or French (or probably Aztec), on multiple continents at the same time, and never fails to contain most of the same characters and motifs, even down to a characteristic speech in each of three acts?

Why, it's:

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your steamy love letters and makes them available where minors might conceivably see them, you could be liable.

The Bill

Don't believe me. Read the bill.

The actual text of the bill changed in conference committee. Later in this article, I list World Wide Web addresses that contain the full text of the bill that passed through conference committtee.

The Constitution

For comparison, here is a much shorter bill, part of the Bill of Rights, and as the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution part of the most basic law of the United States:

Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The proposed CDA and the Constitution are in conflict. If CDA becomes law, it will certainly be challenged in the courts on that basis, if not others. Fear of this kind of heavy-handed government interference with free speech is exactly why the First Amendment was needed in the first place.

The Effects

Meanwhile, CDA as law will have a strong deadening effect on the Internet. Who will want to be in the business of providing Internet services with such vague and arbitrary penalties hanging always over the head? Some of those who stick it out will end up being test cases, to the tune of massive legal bills. Those children CDA supposedly is to protect will be denied much of the benefit of one of the greatest boons they might have had: the Internet. Those adults who use it will have to fear for their every word, sound, and image, that it might be considered by some prosecutor somewhere to be "indecent".

As we have previously noted (MN 506, *"Decency Filters"*), technical solutions and commercial products are already available to those parents who wish to limit Internet access. Government interference with the Internet is unnecessary, and is a waste of taxpayer's money when the government has so many more pressing matters to deal with, such as getting its own budgeting process in order.

Should we ban asphalt because roads can be used to reach stores that sell pornography?

If government feels it must get involved, a much more reasonable approach has been proposed by Cox, White, and Wyden (HR1978), which basically involves studying the problem to see where it might actually exist, and recommending types of technical and social solutions.

What can you do?

Call or write:

- Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, 202-225-4501, fax 202-225-4656
- Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, 202-224-6521, fax 202-224-8952

Tell them what you think in your own words. For example, tell them you are opposed to censorship of the Internet but you are in favor of parental control, as reflected in the the Cox/White/Wyden approach.

Calling them or faxing them a message will be more influential than sending electronic mail, which in this particular controversy can be discounted too easily.

Both Gingrich and Dole are Republicans, but please don't mistake the Internet censorship movement as a Republican initiative: the principal sponsor of the original CDA is a Democrat, and many Democrats are involved in this movement. After all, what politician is going to risk being tarred as being in favor of pornography? Perhaps those whose constituents make it clear that they are in favor of freedom of speech and of parental responsibility, rather than unneeded governmental interference.

For More Information

For contact information for the conference committee members and other Congress members and government leaders, as well as other information, you can use the Internet itself:

- <URL:http://www.vtw.org/exon/>
- <URL:http://epic.org/>
- <URL:http://www.cdt.org/cda.html>

The bill we quoted isn't even the only Internet censorship bill before the conference committee. For information on the others, see the URLs above, or <URL:http://www.zilker.net/senate/index.html>.

These addresses come from the Voters' Telecommunications Watch (VTW), which has been one of the most active organizations monitoring the progress of Congressional attempts to censor the Internet. VTW posts weekly updates on the situation as well as occasional alerts. To get those messages, or similar but less frequent information from the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT), send mail to one of the following addresses:

- vtw@vtw.org
  (put "send alert" in the subject line for the latest alert, or "send cdafaq" for the CDA FAQ)
- cda-info@cdt.org
  (General CDA information)
  cda-stat@cdt.org (Current status of the CDA)

Apathy is easy, but the political action needed to preserve the Internet isn't all that difficult if enough of us do it.

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The Unruly List Member and the Dictatorial List Owner

Act I: Fogging up the Window

During a slack time on the list, a member starts posting daily stream-of-consciousness notes, or incredibly technical detailed notes, or weekly newsletters, or frequent updates on that member's favorite organization. For a while, nobody minds, and a big advantage of cyberspace is that unwanted messages can be deleted. But after a while the verbosity becomes irritating, and somebody complains to the list owner (or moderator, if there is one). After a little discussion, the unwanted posts cease for the moment, but the verbose person has gotten attention; this is otherwise known as positive feedback, and it encourages more verbosity.

Or somebody starts posting responses to almost every message sent to the list. Perhaps brief at first, these responses gradually become more verbose and more contentious. This isn't a problem in itself; discussion is what lists and newsgroups are for, and lots of people feed on contention; this may just be a lively period for the list.

The plot may thicken. Maybe so much off-topic material gets posted to the list that it's really become a problem, but the poster won't stop.

Or the verbose poster doesn't like the style of something someone else posted, and starts insisting that nobody should post such a thing, or even that nobody should act like that at all. Sometimes this happens about substantive matters or concrete actions, but to be most effective the insistence should be about subjective matters of style, which are hard to prove wrong, but can waste a lot of effort in the attempt.

To get things really stirred up, throw in a little misinterpretation. You'll often hear later "I could only go by the words in the message!" Not. Consider something as simple as "It was annoying that that person wanted me to call on the telephone." Does this mean the telephone is the problem, and anybody who expects it to be used is annoying? Or is the annoying part that the person didn't call instead? Which is more important, the noun or the verb? Context may indicate which. If not, electronic mail works both ways, and anybody who can't tell could ask. But for most dramatic effect, be sure to assume either one or the other and post a long diatribe.

There may even be specific taboo subjects for the given list, but those vary widely and we can't discuss them here. The most common type of clearly inappropriate message is the direct personal attack.

Sooner or later, the namecalling starts. "Ass!" "Rude!" "Jerk!" Whatever. Sometimes it's more virulent, and sometimes it's in an apparently milder form, such as "your tone just really isn't up to your former standards". The common motif is that it's personally directed at a specific list member, it's clearly pejorative, it's basically subjective, and the namecaller is quite insistent. This is the characteristic soliloquy of Act I. It may be repeated as needed for dramatic effect.

Sometimes even at this stage the situation can be defused. Humor would be good, but cyberspace hasn't evolved that far. Humor is likely to get digital stones heaved at you; accusations of heavy-handedness, irony, or, *gasp!* sarcasm!

Other threads of conversation might get people off the contentious subject. Unfortunately, many people won't post at all when anything contentious is going on, even if explicitly asked to do so. There's also the danger that new subjects can quickly be made contentious by the same kinds of postings that were already a problem. It's worth a try, though.

List members often recommend just ignoring the personal attacks. This may produce a breathing space, but it also gives the impression that personal attacks are OK. Thus they will re-occur later, and louder. Repeat Act I from the beginning, until the person attacked or the list owner (who is also the easiest target) decide enough is enough.

For dramatic effect, pepper the thickening stew with haste. All players can assist with this seasoning.

Eventually we end up with the list owner or moderator having to assert authority (oh, what an ugly word to networked ears!) one way or another. The best way is to simply appeal to all to calm down and get back to more productive discussions. This seldom works, but if it does, it's the least contentious solution. Unfortunately, its eventual result may be the same as ignoring the problem, which is to say the problem may just reoccur again later and louder, but this tactic is still worth a try.

Another way, though more risky, is to assert that diversity is the essence of online discussions and that nobody has to agree with anyone else. An appeal to reason, or higher principles, or collegiality. Sometimes this works, if the participants aren't too angry already, and if they aren't of too dissimilar personality types.

Still more risky is to assert that the rules of the forum preclude personal attacks. The poster(s) performing such attacks are very likely to deny any such intent, no matter how inflamatory, personal, subjective, or derogatory their language. And in their minds, they may even not have had such intent (see below on personality types). There are also, of course, people who see nothing wrong with personal attacks and will insist on continuing them, knowing full well what they're doing.

So, eventually the situation reaches a point where more drastic measures seem called for. A list moderator can try rejecting objectionable messages, and that may work. However, the person receiving the rejection notices is likely to get even hotter under the collar, and eventually the same point may be reached as if there's not a moderator. The moderator or list owner may be faced with having to remove someone from the list.

If various mild warnings don't work ("you have the option of unsubscribing if you don't like what others on the list are posting"; "the list is not for personal attacks"; etc.), it's worth getting someone else to ask the problem member to desist. Here's where having two list owners or moderators can be useful: one can be the publicly-visible light-

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So, what was it about this list that got these kids booted from the net? Well, space deprives us of the ability to share the text with our readers, but suffice to say the list was sexist, explicit, offensive, and, in certain places, bad enough to elicit a gasp or an incredulous shake of the head. The list was probably written in an attempt to obtain just such reactions.

Given this, the reader still puzzles over what reasons those who obtained the list had to publish it where they did. In this age of hypersensitivity, one need not practice rocket science to understand that those in bit.listserv.gaynet might not take the list in as humor-filled a fashion as, say, those on alt.tasteless.

As a matter of fact, those who most strenuously objected to the content of the list gave this as their principle objection. Dr. Goldstein mentioned that the Cornell students were "welcome to use the Internet to do whatever and say whatever they like *except* when they post a message on a *public* board or *send* it to *specific people* that has no purpose other than to offend, intimidate, and enrage women on their campus."

The students who started this hullabaloo have been, understandably, unable to defend themselves or their actions, since they have had their accounts yanked. They have not, however, been without their defenders on the public boards that the list was posted to. In almost all cases, the defense comes down to a very simple, and very powerful, axiom: In America, people are generally free to say what they like, where they like, in whatever manner they like, no matter how offensive, unless intended to provoke people into causing violence to another.

Of course, as laudable as this defense is, it is also moot. There have been constraints on free speech since this country's inception. In public venues, obscene language is generally disallowed. Both newspapers and other media are constrained by libel and slander laws.

To add more room for contention, the Internet provides even more room to muddy the waters. For starters, the Internet is a commercial system; people pay to use it. The service provider, in this case Cornell, has no obligation to either defend the students' position or to maintain their ability to use the Internet through their facilities. With the general setup of the Internet, much better places to post the material exist, and the specific places the students posted to leave little defense in the form of claiming, "it was just a joke!"

On the other hand, did the students *deserve* a pulling of Internet priveleges? Did the punishment fit the crime? Did these students deserve the protection of the First Amendment?

Perhaps other punishments would have better fit the offense. Dr. Goldstein even suggested some of them herself: "would it have been better to get the boys' home addresses and send copies of their list to their parents? Should those who objected at Cornell simply have blown up pictures of these guys and plastered them on the walls outside of the students union with particularly choice selections from the list written below their pictures?" The official Cornell University response mentions that the four students had "written a public apology to all concerned, and that apology has been published in our student newspaper, the Cornell Daily Sun."

The removal of the students' internet accounts may have punished the students much too harshly. Students at major universities, now more than ever, rely on the research capabilities and correspondence abilites of the Internet. Banishing them for their action in this matter could cause a great deal of hardship for the students *placed on top* of the humiliation and derision they have already encountered. Considering the amount of furor that this incident generated, the students may have been punished enough by the Internet community itself, with no need for the University to continue to punish. Why the University *would* continue to punish the students may be a cause for alarm.

Add to this that the students had not originally posted the messages to public boards — no, the list entered the world of Usenet through outraged "victims" of the "verbal violence" posting the message where they could to attempt to inflame the country as much as they were inflamed.

The last question contains, perhaps, the most dangerous rationalizing. The First Amendment has no litmus test of taste for viability. As a bill of rights, its whole point was, and ostensibly is, to protect material and media that could be considered offensive to its audience. And, in reference to the Internet, those that did not wish to view the material could, at any point, have moved to the next article. The First Amendment does not qualify itself by stating that one can only state what one believes in places where people are sure to agree with the speaker.

What a quandry. These students, with their vacuous and raucous material, present bright red targets for proponents of the Exon bill looking for an example for an excuse to implement controlling measures on the Internet. In perhaps the worst complication in the situation, people who should have known better (but didn't) should have used restraint (and didn't) in posting material where dangerous people could make dangerous policy decisions based on their actions. Perhaps a case for only allowing mature people to use the Internet *is* valid; after all, a measure of freedom exists on the Internet not usually found in any country on the planet.

Perhaps the real issue, one that has no quick answer, questions who acted most outrageously in this scandal.

WebWatch

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Bringing the War to the Web

The Pentagon is maintaining an Internet site for the public to monitor U.S. participation in the unfolding Bosnia peace mission.

The site, called BosniaLINK on the World Wide Web, contains operation maps, fact sheets, news releases, photos, biographies of key commanders and leaders, briefing transcripts, as well as speeches and congressional testimony. BosniaLINK is provided by the Office of The Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), and the Defense Technical Information Center. The BosniaLINK address is: <URL:http://www.dtic.dla.mil/bosnia/>

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ning rod while the other speaks softly behind the scenese. By now the problem person is probably only listening to those who send messages of agreement, but it's worth a try. Starting a new thread of conversation may still be an option, even at this late date. If these things don't work, the problem remains, and Act I has a cliffhanger ending.

Act II: The Defenestration

The play is in full thrash when the list owner has to directly warn the problem member that further offenses will result in removal from the list. It helps if the guidelines for the list explicitly say this is a possibility, but you can be sure that the problem person won't like it one bit anyway. Just because someone saw such a clause when they signed up doesn't mean they ever thought it might apply to them!

A common reaction is hints of how some other forum would be a good idea; after all, how dare anyone be so dictatorial as to threaten (threaten! why, the very idea!) to remove such a harmless member of list society! Such a productive member! One who never posted anything offensive to anyone! Clearly the list owner is the real problem! A long soliloquy often ensues on this subject, and this is the characteristic speech of this act.

The play becomes most dramatic if the two people involved in this central duet are of different personality types. For example, consider two oversimplified types: social (or people-oriented) and logical (or task-oriented).

Now if a social type sends a message, it's likely to be long enough to encode the subtext that contains the real meaning, which is that the sender is a fine sort of person who appreciates the addressee and wants to be recognized in kind, so both will feel warm and fuzzy. A logical type is likely to respond only to the literal points of the message and in a matter-of-fact manner, since the words in the text are the text and getting the job done is the only real source of satisfaction, not irrelevant pleasantries. The social type will then become offended at finding no subtext of respect and high valuation, not even any small talk, just a short, brusque, no, rude!, even angry!, message. The social type will likely then respond by sending an even longer emotion-laden message in an attempt to smooth things over, without necessarily addressing any specific previous points, which were of course irrelevant to the essential meaning. The logical person will then see the social person as unresponsive, slippery, pompous, manipulative, and time-wasting. These twain are unlikely to meet. Each may be sending messages in what they think is good faith, but neither is going to see it that way. If one starts trying to insist the other should switch personalities, nothing but trouble will result.

A popular proposal is that lists should only be run by social people, since after all communication is a social act, isn't it? This actually doesn't work any better in practice unless all the list *members* are of the same personality type as the list owner; otherwise you get just as many problems, not matter which personality type it is.

Often the problem person will find the possibility of actually being removed so distasteful that they will unsubscribe first. A good twist on this development is to post private correspondence with the list owner as a parting shot. Misposting the actual unsubscribe message to the list instead of to the -request list is another good touch. Doubtless no one would ever do that just to stir up controversy, without any real intention to unsubscribe. Whatever the intention, a prudent list owner will take such a request at face value and unsubscribe the person.

Or the former behavior will continue, and the list owner will have to remove the member. It doesn't really matter whether the person jumped out the window, muttering words of wounded denial, or was thrown out; the ensuing reaction will be the same. Act II thus comes to its conclusion with the defenestration.

Act III: Closing the Window

Now come the defenses of the defenestree. Usually the first ones are of the nature of "Let's be reasonable." These may even come from people who were asked to help before, for example by starting new threads of conversation, but who declined to do so at the time. After all, surely no one meant any personal offense, and now such people feel compelled to post and say so (no matter how specific and personal the messages may have been). "This list has seen racism, sexism, anti-semitism, etc., and somebody gets kicked off for an insult?" Nevermind that those things were discussed, not aimed at specific list members.

The main thing that won't get posted is support of the list owner. After all, what is this list *owner* term! Isn't cyberspace common property? Aren't we all equal? Shouldn't all decisions be democratic? Or by consensus?

Actually, the political system of cyberspace is anarchy, but most people only know that term as a curse word, since in the unnetworked world more organized political systems have usually won out and produced the histories. The Matrix is the biggest anarchic system ever, and in an anarchy things happen because somebody takes the initiative to make them happen. This involves committing time and other resources, such as disk space, CPU cycles, and messages to interested people. Such commitment comes with responsibility to keep the initiative working, and that is the basic role of the list owner. The list members also have responsibility to help keep the list going, for example by staying within the charter of the list. But the roles and responsibilities of the list members and the list owner are not the same.

Pretty soon someone will work up to a fine pitch of rhetoric, and post the "Dictator!" speech. The exact key term varies with the mundane world culture of the poster. Africans are likely to say dictator or even colonialist. Latin Americans might refer to Pinochet. Nazis and Hitler are popular worldwide for use as insulting epithets. I've seen even nastier comparisons for the list owner, even (oh the shame of it!) *publisher*! A good dictator speech should also include many uses of the word "power" as a synonym for "evil". One such speech is good enough, but more can only be better, since more egalitarian, and thus excellent for setting up the

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basic conflict between the poor, aggrieved, defenestree and the nasty, inegalitarian list owner.

This speech lends itself to adornment, much like a Christmas tree. Ancient imagined slights can be hung all over it. Opinion presented as universally known fact makes sparkling baubles. Malice on the part of the list owner may be invented and hung in ropes around the tree. Hearsay should be set on top. But too much decoration can hide the tree, or sometimes make it look more like a troll, and thus less likely to be taken seriously by anybody. Sticking to the basic subject is actually better for setting up the dramatic conflict.

People posting both kinds of message in favor of the defenestree usually copy the defenestree, nevermind that said person is already off the list, either voluntarily or not. Usually around this time either the defenestree or supporters thereof start making more explicit demands for a different forum.

The Matrix is large, and can easily contain more pieces of cyberspace. Anybody who wants another forum can certainly start one. Somebody will probably contest even this relatively obvious fact, however, arguing that there's only one true list; it's just been perverted by the list owner and must now be rehabilitated by changing the rules or wrenching it away from the list owner. In such internecine struggles are movements and revolutions (or conversation, for that matter) drowned. It sure would be a lot easier for those who want a different list to just start one, announce it on the original list or elsewhere, and see who joins. Let a thousand fractals bloom. Natural selection will decide which ones work.

The play from here may have different endings. Those supporting the defenestree may pick up their marbles and go elsewhere, which may or may not split the original group or eventually do away with the original list. Or they may stick around and wrangle about how things should be run, which is very likely to drive the list into the ground. Or they may accept the decision of the list owner and get on with the discussions the list was started for.

There's also the possibility that the defenestree may decide to abide by the ground rules of the list after all, and may then be welcomed back in. This is unlikely to be a lasting solution since the original problem probably arose from conflicts of personality, which means the same person is unlikely to recognize similar future occurrences as a problem.

Part of the problem is that people use inappropriate analogies. A voluntary mailing list isn't a government project and membership is not an entitlement program. It isn't really a play, either, it's more like a meeting in the list owner's living room. A guest who starts calling others names will likely be talked to relatively quietly at first, but will eventually be asked to leave, and not invited back. This isn't a matter of freedom of speech or of the press; it's a matter of hospitality and common courtesy.

But, of course, not everyone will agree on that analogy, either. Life's like that, especially in cyberspace: often there are no neat endings.

The Moral

What is the moral of this modern morality play? Well, that's hard to say; the culture of cyberspace is only beginning to be invented, and it's not clear what the seven deadly sins or virtues might be. Possibilities for at least venial sins, however, might be verbosity, literalmindedness, and haste. Possibilities for virtues might be initiative, responsibility, and tolerance, or merely civil conversation.

Gallic Packets

Copyright © 1995, Christian Huitema

Et Dieu crea l'INTERNET.
Paris: Eyrolles, 1995.
ISBN 2-212-08855-8.
Pp. 201. US $34.95.

Reviewed by Peter H. Salus
peter@uunet.uu.net

Christian Huitema was the first "foreigner" to serve on the IAB. He was the first "foreign" chair as well. He has produced a personal, informal, light-hearted quasi-history of the Internet which should be read by anyone whose French is up to the task (which is not an arduous one, Huitema writes fluidly, not in the manner of many French (and American) academics). I enjoyed his version of history a great deal, even though I can pick nits about the early history.

For example, Huitema dismisses as a myth the notion that ARPA sponsored the Internet out of fear of attack on its communications network. This is only true in one sense: it was the ARPANET that originated in this way (ARPA commissioned the first studies of "distributed adaptive message-block switching" by Paul Baran in 1962, following a terrorist attack on three microwave towers in Utah on May 28, 1961; it was Don Davies of the NPL who coined "packet switching"). Elsewhere, Huitema states that the principal demonstration of the ARPANET took place in 1971, it was October 24-26, 1972.

Note that these are nits. They do not genuinely impact Huitema's excellent narrative flow. In fact, it may only matter to historians like me whether it was 1971 or 1972. I do think that Huitema over values Pouzin's contribution to the work in the 1970s and the influence of CYCLADES, but as these were French contributions, little blame accrues.

Two exceptionally fine chapters concern "electronic democracy" and progress "towards a billion nodes." I trust that this fine book will get the circulation it deserves.

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The Internet in Central and Eastern Europe

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Here is some data from Matrix Maps Quarterly Volume 2 Number 4 (MMQ 204) about Internet hosts in central and eastern Europe. The table shows raw host data from the July 1994 and July 1995 Network Wizards Internet Domain Surveys. It also shows the percent change in that period of a year, and the number hosts in July 1995 per thousand people per country. The host populations come from the CIA World Factbook 1994.

Switzerland and Austria are included for comparison. They are among the most densely network countries in the world, but they're also in central Europe.

Of those countries from what in Romania they call the former society, Slovenia is the most densely networked, followed by Czechia, Hungary, and Poland. Poland has the most absolute number of hosts, followed by Czechia, Russia, and Hungary.

Romania is not the least densely networked among these countries, but it's far from the most. However, in Romania there is extensive use of UUCP to connect IP LANs, and hosts on those isolated IP LANs of course don't show up in this data.

For maps of hosts per country, hosts per capita per country, host growth, and detailed per-city maps, see MMQ 204. For more about Romanian networks, stay tuned.

Country Region	hosts Hosts-94	Hosts-95	%change	hosts/ 1,000 pop
Central Europe				
ch Switzerland	47,867	70,327	46.92	9.99
at Austria	21,043	42,454	101.75	5.34
si Slovenia	587	3,504	496.93	1.78
li Liechtenstein	26	22	-15.38	0.727
hr Croatia	875	2,102	140.23	0.448
mk Macedonia	0	5	new	0.00226
ba Bosnia and Herzegowina	0	0	0.00	0
yu Yugoslavia	0	0	0.00	0
6 total	2	missing		
Eastern Europe				
ee Estonia	721	2,574	257.00	1.59
cz Czech Republic	7,417	15,226	105.29	1.46
hu Hungary	5,529	10,899	97.12	1.06
pl Poland	7,545	16,298	116.01	0.422
sk Slovakia	1,249	2,082	66.69	0.385
lv Latvia	186	994	434.41	0.362
bg Bulgaria	82	664	709.76	0.0755
lt Lithuania	62	277	346.77	0.072
ro Romania	463	924	99.57	0.0399
al Albania	0	0	0.00	0
9 total	1	missing		
European CIS				
ru Russia	3,923	12,245	212.13	0.0819
ua Ukraine	343	1,577	359.77	0.0304
am Armenia	2	59	2850.00	0.0168
md Moldova	2	9	350.00	0.00201
by Belarus	0	5	new	0.00048
az Azerbaijan	0	1	new	0.00013
ge Georgia	0	0	0.00	0
6 total	1	missing		

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Dumbing Down the Net

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stargoat@mids.org

Much of the material in this article was taken from CyberWire Dispatch *for the days of December 6-December 12.*

On December 6, 1995, the House Conference committee voted to accept the harsh regulation language in the Hyde Amendment to the closely-watched telecommunications reform bill currently rushing to a vote on the House floor, thus bowing to the Religious Right.

In a half-hour long meeting, the committee voted 17-16 to retain all the wording of the White proposal *except* for the "harmful to minors" standard, replacing it with the "indecency" language.

This bill runs parallel to the much publicised Exon bill proposed in the Senate.

The amendment, in its current form, could make illegal the public dissemination of anything from the "7 dirty words" to classic works of art in literature and painting, sculpting to music and other forms of art, from Picasso to James Joyce to Michaelangelo. In accepting the highly general "indecency" wording in the Hyde amendment rather than the constitutionally accepted "harmful to minors" provision given by Representative White, these bills will run all over the Constitution, but most of the congresspeople will probably vote for it because of the unpopular move of appearing to support pornography.

Perhaps the most chilling aspect of the bill coming up for a vote is the incredible power it puts in the hands of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC); the FCC, in order to execute the bill, could be able to monitor e-mail, could have agents watching in every public list or board, and could generally sit and wait for something that could be offensive to the ever-elusive Somebody to roll across their screen, and then issue a *warrant for arrest*.

Among many other items, the proposal recommended by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL) and Rep. Rick White(R-WA) implements the following punishments:

1. Creates $100,000 fines and two-year jail terms for anyone who makes available any indecent material to a minor (Sec 402 (d)).

2. Grant the FCC broad authority over on-line speech and over on-line technology (Sec (e)(1))

3. Criminalize the transmission or display of indecent material to anyone under 18 years of age (Amendment to 18 USC 1465),

4. Not pre-empt state from passing even more restrictive, or even inconsistent, regulations.

Think it sounds outrageous? It is.

The text of the Hyde proposal, and many of the other bills that are on their way through Congress, can be found at <URL:http://www.cdt.org/cda.html>. Pay especial attention to the portions under "House Conferees Approve New Unconstitutional Online Indecency Provisions".

Despite much vocal opposition, the Congress seems to wish to continue on its track of a major crackdown on speech on the Internet — so much so that major efforts for protest have been organised. An urgent sense of the need to do *something* has pervaded most parts of the Internet at this point, and emotions on the Internet seem to range from near hysteria to resignation.

Much of the resignation is due to the idea in many people's heads that there is just nothing they can do about the situation, that it's over their heads, that once again there is no way to let the government know what *they* really think about it.

You can, and should, do something about it.

The Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT), where we obtained most of the information in this article, also provides the following information:

What You Can Do Now

1. All of the proposals available to the conference committee will fundamentally restrict your speech on the Internet and other public networks. Look at the list below and call the Senators in your state and ask them to oppose them. If none of the members are in your state, call Sen. Dole.

If we cannot convince the conference committee to make the right choices at this juncture, we will have positioned the Internet community as vulnerable to widespread arrests throughout the next few years.

If you're at a loss for words, try one of the following:

"Please oppose the unconstitutional Internet indecency restrictions, such as those passed by teh House conference committee Telecomm bill and those proposed by by Sen. J.J. Exon. They will criminalize many forms of expression, including much art, music, and literature which should be protected by the First Amendment." or "As a religious person and a parent, I oppose all the unconstitutional indecency restrictions currently proposed in the Telecomm bill. I, the parent, am the best person to monitor my child's access to the Internet." or "Although there is information on the Internet that I wouldn't allow my children to see, I don't agree with all the proposals in the Telecomm bill that would censor indecent material on the Internet. I have parental control tools that are far more effective at controlling my children's access to the Internet than the legislation being proposed."

You may call any of those listed on the table.

Congress is expected to vote on the bill on Tuesday, December 12th, but even if you choose to call after this date, please do so to register your discontent.

Congress must know that freedom, once tasted, will not be easily given up.

see CONFEREES, page 10

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CONFEREES, from page 9

Senate members of the Conference Committee

P	ST	Name and Address	Phone	Fax
R	MT	Burns, Conrad R.	1-202-224-2644	1-202-224-8594
D	HI	Inouye, Daniel K.	1-202-224-3934	1-202-224-6747
D	SC	Hollings, Ernest F.	1-202-224-6121	1-202-224-4293
D	WV	Rockefeller, John D.	1-202-224-6472	n.a.
D	NE	Exon, J.J.	1-202-224-4224	1-202-224-5213
R	AZ	McCain, John	1-202-224-2235	1-202-952-8702
R	SD	Pressler, Larry	1-202-224-5842	1-202-224-1259
R	WA	Gorton, Slade	1-202-224-3441	1-202-224-9393
R	AK	Stephens, Ted	1-202-224-3004	1-202-224-1044
R	MS	Lott, Trent	1-202-224-6253	1-202-224-2262
D	KY	Ford, Wendell H.	1-202-224-4343	1-202-224-0046
R	KS	Dole, Robert	1-202-224-6521	1-202-228-1245

Cryptanalysis Could Show Security Breach

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A potential security breach has been found with regards to several systems that use security crypting programs like Diffie-Hellman, RSA, and DSS. The full paper can be found at the following locations:

- <URL:ftp://ftp.cryptography.com/pub/kocher_timing_attack.ps>

- <URL:ftp://ftp.cryptography.com/pub/kocher_timing_attack.ps.gz>

- <URL:http://www.cryptography.com/timingattack.html>.

The abatract, done by Paul C. Kocher, an independent Crypography Consultant from Stanford, Connecticut, states that many cryping algoritms can take "slightly different amounts of time to process different messages." Many hacking-based programs can cryptographic tokens, network-based cryptosystems, and the like, breachers can determine the amount of time used to complete operations on a particular algorithm.

The abstract shows that timing channels may regularly leak key material.

The attacks often only require known cyphertext, can work even if the actual measurements of time are off by a bit, are not difficult to work with, and are significantly difficult to detect, according to the abstract.

The abstract "outlines attacks that can find secret exponents in Diffie-Hellman key exchange, factor RSA keys, and find DSS secret parameters." The abstract mentions that several other algorithms are also at risk.

A complete description of the attack will be presented in the full paper.

The main alarm first raised in the abstract could be that many algorithms considered at least reasonably secure can now be accessed with a relative amount of ease and breached without a fear of detection — a problem those very algorithms were intended to solve.

As the hackers become more and more experienced with regards to breaking these algorithms, a need for more and more complicated algorithms tends to cause an upward spiral.

There doesn't appear to be much of a glass ceiling on the situation, either. Even as one algorithm is made, a security breach has been made to it. What lies in the future for crypography algorithms should be quite interesting.

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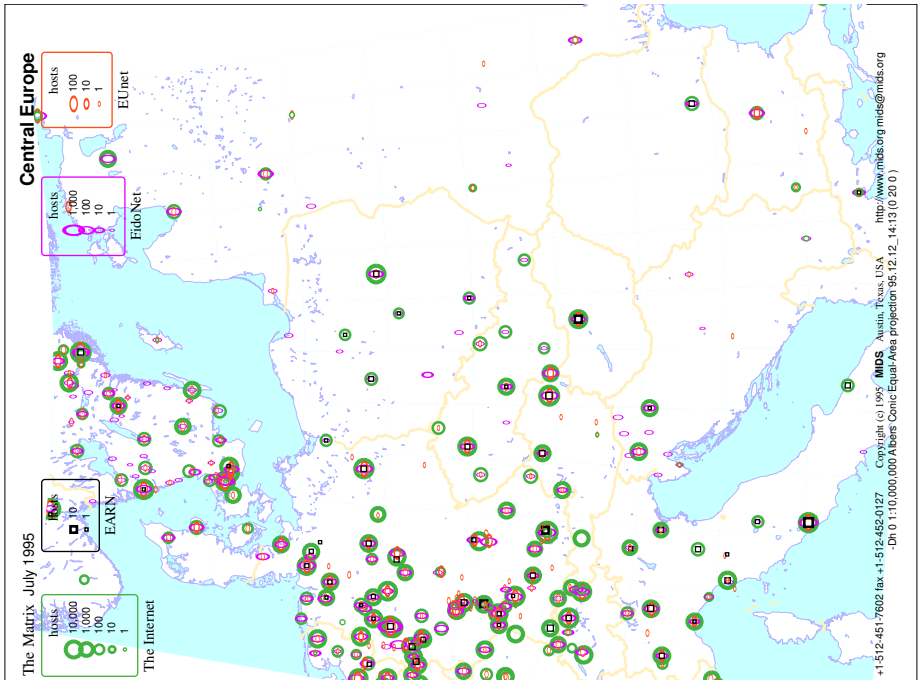

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