ABSTRACT

Questioning gender in E-learning

Cecile K. M. Crutzen

Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference
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In the nineties, in the computer discipline a focus shift took place. „Information“ is was not the main theme anymore but „Interaction“.

„Interaction“ can be seen as an exchange of representations between actors. Speaking, writing, making, designing are doings in which an actor presents herself to other actors: human and not human. All acting of an actor is a representation of herself in a world of other actors and at the same time an interpretation of that world. In such worlds of interaction the potential of all meaning constructing processes that may emerge, depends on the participating actors and the exchanged and ready-made representations. This potential will determine the learning possibilities of the individual actors.

Through learning in interaction worlds actors develop habits and routines. Acquiring habits out of experiences is the power to develop dispositions, to cope with difficulties of a later situation to represent an acquaintance with the world of actors, materials and equipment to which action is applied.

Interaction concepts used in the design of ICT-products such as e-mail, groupware, workflow systems and Internet services, are based on formal and planned interaction. Using these products humans will change their interaction options and thus the character and content of interaction itself will change. The rich potential and variety of human interaction, which should be included in learning processes, are problematic because the ready made electronic interactions are mostly habituated in the interaction potentials of technical objects and syntactical data processing. Habits tend to transform into frozen routines.

„Questioning gender“ is an instrument for analysing the influences of the disciplines that are dominant in the creation of E-learning. „Questioning gender in E-learning“ will also be presented as a strategy to disrupt closed learning environments in which the learning process is reduced to a procedure of formal and planned acting of learners. Learners are seen in such environment types as objects with predictable behaviour.

„Questioning gender“ is also a source of inspiration to create E-learning environments as open critical transformative rooms. The interaction potential of E-learning environments should be as diverse as possible and should not determine the acting of the learners and their tutors.

In the presentation will be given examples of learning environments. Further there will be given recommendations for and reflections on the design and development of team oriented, competence based online learning: An educational setting which could be adequate for acquiring professional expertise because it opens up negotiation possibilities on learning and working tasks which are comparable with the complexity and dynamics of authentic
work settings. Competence based online learning articulates the underlying constructivist instructional design principles of participation and cooperation.

Dr. C.K.M. Crutzen
School of Informatics
Open University of the Netherlands
P.O. Box 2960, 6401 DL Heerlen, The Netherlands
Tel: +31 45 576 2572
Fax: +31 45 576 2115
E-mail: cecile.crutzen@ou.nl
ABSTRACT

ICTS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING WOMEN’S STUDIES – PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES IN EUROPE, A REPORT FROM ATHENA WORKING GROUP

Sara Goodman, University of Lund, Sweden, Laurence Claeys, University of Antwerp, Belgium

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This is a presentation of the book, ICTS in Teaching and Learning Women’s Studies. Editors: Sara Goodman, University of Lund, Sweden, Gill Kirkup, The Open University, UK and Magda Michielsens, University of Antwerp, Belgium

Context for the book
This book has come out of the work of the European ‘ATHENA’ Network, which is a network of higher education institutions involved in feminist research and in delivering Women’s Studies and Gender Studies programmes.

Women’s Studies have developed a particular pedagogic focus that values both recognition of the ‘personal’ and critical reflective thinking in learning communities. Feminist epistemology holds a sophisticated critical perspective on the relationship between technology and gender. These two factors combined with the pragmatic constraints of being a poorly resourced academic discipline have made Women’s/Gender Studies at times circumspect about taking up opportunities for using ICTs in teaching. The contributors to this book believe that there are productive opportunities for ICTs and that ICTs can, if used well, expand our students’ learning opportunities, as well as provide University teachers with opportunities to develop our feminist pedagogic praxis. If used badly they can restrict learning, and be a source of frustration and exploitation for staff.

This book is therefore a timely intervention in the developing pool of expertise in this particular academic teaching area. It warns of ‘elephant traps’ and ‘potholes’, as well way-marking the route around at least some obstacles for those who come after. It provides signposts and encouragement for those who want to journey further.

Contributors:
Fatima Aranz, Complutensian University of Madrid, Spain
Rosi Braidotti, Utrecht University, Netherlands
Laurence Claeys, University of Ghent, Belgium
Mischa Peters, Utrecht University, Netherlands
Babette Pouwels, University of Antwerp, Belgium
Erna Kotkamp, Utrecht University, Netherlands
Mara Kuhl, Humboldt-University, Germany
Sonja Spee, University of Antwerp, Belgium
Myriam Trevisan, University of Rome ‘La Sepienza’, Italy
Annamaria Tagliavini, Bologna University, Italy
Esther Vonk, Utrecht University, Netherlands
Abstract

Interpretive Communities and Female Chinese American Diary Writing on the Web

Lena Karlsson, Centre for Gender Studies, Lund University

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This paper deals with autobiographical acts on the Web in the form of online diaries. More specifically, it focuses on a cluster of female Chinese American diarists who present large-scale autobiographical narratives. In part, this cluster is defined by membership to Rice Bowl Journals, a large U.S. based Webring where the membership requirement involves having an active online journal/Weblog, and being Asian or of Asian descent. The diarists I deal with are 1.5 and second-generation Chinese American women, in their late twenties and early thirties. This community within a community (the “attitude chick clique”, as one of the online diarists puts it) is premised on the sharing of experiential life stories. Here, the production and consumption of autobiographical tales are intimately connected.

In the paper I address both the effects of remediation (the transportation of some characteristics of an old genre into a new medium), and the gendered articulations of “Chineseness” one finds within this cluster. Because of its capacity to bring together people based on shared interest without regard for physical proximity, Web technology has been hailed as the supreme tool in the imagining of diasporic communities. Yet, in looking at the situated performances of ethnicity within the cluster, I argue for the usefulness of a version of the concept interpretive communities, rather than the related concept imagined communities. Here and there does not blur in this specific case study; the autobiographical imagination is a situated one.
In the focus of my presentation is the experience-based relationship between young men and IT as it appears in the “computer-biographies” written by young male IT students at North Karelian Polytechnic (NCP). I consider the idea of (information) technologies as an essential part of hegemonic masculinities in relation to the writings of the young men. I ponder how (hegemonic) masculinities and IT are intertwined in cultural and social processes? How these intertwinings relate to experiences of the “real” men? The stories of the IT students partly confirm the understandings of hegemonic masculinities, but there are also some interesting breaches present.

I spread the invitation to participate in the writing of computer-biographies in North Karelia during the years 1998 and 1999. Computer-biographies are freely written texts based on given themes, considering the meanings and effects that IT have on the different areas of life. On the whole I got 129 texts about people’s experiences and opinions about IT. Out of those seventy were written by young men studying IT at NCP. In my presentation I also use children’s drawings that picture their opinions and experiences of information society and computers as an additional material. The drawings are the result of an art competition for comprehensive schools held at North Karelia in the year 1997. Through these materials I look what does information technology mean to the young men? What kind of connection there is between (young) men and machines?
ABSTRACT

NEGOTIATED STORIES OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY
Sari Tuuva, University of Joensuu, Finland

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Finland has been developed towards the information society since the end of the 1990s by official authorities, at national as well as at local levels. Hundreds of information society development projects have been carried out during the past five years. Now most of the projects have ended. How women who have participated these projects interpret information technology?

In my ethnographic study I explore the interpretations of information technology in the context of the information society. I approach the interpretations as negotiated stories: the meanings of information technology are negotiated in the contexts of everyday life, local situations, information society development and also with me in the interview situation and my research projects. Negotiated stories create and construct the interpretations of the information society.

I have interviewed participants of information society development projects in North Karelia and followed the process from 1998. My informants are mainly women who have participated in the information society: women who construct their relationship to information technology and information society. In this paper I concentrate on story of Oili.
"Web fiction is great!" I tell my students but, despite their increasing websavvyness, they often come to the MA in Women’s Studies at the University of York wary of the perceived ‘artiness’ of the medium. This paper investigates the process of teaching and learning web literacy within this environment. While the web is usually associated with information and communication, I focus on a third aspect: the creative potential of the medium, and I ask specifically how literature is being changed and challenged by new technologies. I argue that mature web literacy – the ability to critically read as well as write web pages – is a vital part of contemporary scholarship and reflect on my attempts to incorporate web-based methodologies into feminist cultural and literary studies. Much of this paper is based on the Wired Women’s Studies project – details on http://www.york.ac.uk/teaching/cws/wws/ - and on my own and students’ responses to our explorations of web writing. I offer some thoughts about the excitement such media generates in students (and teachers!) once they have gained a degree of understanding, and hope to share ideas about methods, skills, and critique with others who teach and learn web studies, in whatever field.
ABSTRACT

ANALYZING WEBSITES FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE: ACCESSIBILITY AND MANAGEABILITY

Laurence Claeys, Policy Research Centre on Equal Opportunities, University of Antwerp

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The nature of the internet as information provider creates the opportunity to take the diversity of their public or users into account. The variety can be implemented in the technology as well as in the content. Starting from the concept 'script' used by Madeleine Akrich (1992) and refined by Margo Brouns (1998) and Els Rommes (2002) in 'genderscript' I analyzed the user (and more detailed the gender) representation- and materialization in texts and internet tools.

The central questions in these paper are:
§ how can I analyse websites from a gender perspective without being essentialistic?
§ Do web developers catch the opportunities to diverse the internet and hypertext?
§ Have their view on the audience(s) changed? Not only from 'passive public' to 'active provider/user', but also from 'single user' to 'diversity of users'? How is the reader 'hailed' by the text?

The used methodology in this research is website analysis and analysis of interviews with the editor of the websites. The possibility to distinguish web content and –usage was examined in view of a research on four Flemish women e-zines (Annet, Femistyle, Divazine and Flair). The main 'sensitizing' concepts as used in the analysis were accessibility, personification, managebility and gender representations.
ABSTRACT

GRRIZINES - STYLES AND STRATEGIES IN YOUNG FEMINISM

Martina Ladendorf, Roskilde University

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In my dissertation (forthcoming, autumn 2003), with the same name as the title of this abstract, I analyze a group of grrl webzines (magazines on the Internet) from both a third wave feminist perspective (especially the Riot grrrl movement) and from the perspective of the cultural studies of women’s magazines in the 1980:s and early 90:s. What happens to a genre that is often accused of encouraging girls’ and women’s senses of inadequacy, when in a new medium and made with a do it yourself-ethics? How can this be linked to the recent popularity of feminism in Sweden? And what does it have to do with identities, especially gendered and sexual? Can one talk about resistance and empowerment in texts that, even if progressive and DIY (Do It Yourself), still live under the laws of commercialism?