

Networks and Places

110, Spring 2005

Week 13

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Cyberspace vs. Real Space

- Issue discussed briefly earlier
 - Cyberspace is an artificial place
 - In which real transactions and interactions happen
 - What law covers on-line transactions
 - Law governing user?
 - Law governing corporation offering service?
 - Law governing physical location of server?
 - Some new "cyberspace" law?
 - Major variations in international law, e.g.
 - Copyright
 - Obscenity
 - Gambling

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Laws: Domestic US

- Internet taxation is one issue
 - Taxing of Internet services
 - Congress has prohibited
 - Taxation of e-commerce purchases
 - States cannot force collection
- Variation in many other areas
 - Sale of wine and liquor
 - Gambling, etc.

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Laws: International

- Huge variation
- In some areas, Internet can do little but match buyer and seller. Risks remain from customs.
 - Arms deals
 - Cuban cigars
 - Canadian prescription medication
- In other areas, entire transaction can be online
 - Sex shows (Amsterdam)
 - Circulation of banned or pirated material
 - Gambling

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Online Gambling

- Very well suited to Internet
 - Games can be played in web browser
 - Credit cards ensure payment
- Online games popular
 - Casino type games of chance
 - Poker
- Also unregulated betting on sports events
 - Off track betting limited in the US

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Berlind Reading

- Profiles US expats operating sports betting in Costa Rica
 - Where gambling is legal and business welcome
 - Good infrastructure, English speaking workers
- Extension of existing bookmaker practice
 - Odds set by knowledge, and supply/demand
 - Long term odds favor the bookmaker
 - College and pro US sports
- Are laws being broken?
 - Not in Costa Rica
 - Federal Government uses "wire" laws
 - Operators face prison terms on return to US

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Foreign Governments

- Many governments impose strict limitations on press and political coverage
 - Saudi Arabia
 - China
- Increasingly using Internet
 - But in censored form
 - Filters on all traffic routed into country
 - Block access to non-approved website
 - Monitor traffic
 - Proving quite effective

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Great Firewall of China

- Net is widely used in China
 - Seen as key to economic development
- But huge effort to limit available content
 - Limit access to Google and AltaVista
 - Block political websites (19,000 as of Feb 2003)
 - Amnesty International
 - Anything to do with criticism of China
 - Firms with Chinese presence agree to self censor
 - E.g. Yahoo's Chinese subsidiary
 - Cisco and Nortel offer products and consulting to improve it
- Efforts to fight
 - Mirror sites for blocked websites
 - Proxy servers to relay material
 - Peer to peer redistribution of material

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Sealand

- See Garfinkel reading
- Legal status unclear
 - Outside British territorial waters at time independence was claimed (1967)
- Very few inhabitants
 - Strong on symbols
 - Passports
 - Marriage Certificates
 - Coins and stamps



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Data Havens

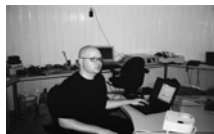
- Server located beyond reach of international law
 - Happy to host criminal or illegal activities
 - Swiss Bank of the computing world
 - No disclosure of data to any legal or government authority
- Concept actually comes from science fiction
 - Particularly Bruce Sterling, Islands in the Net (1988)
- In 2000 HavenCo tries to make a reality
 - Sealand as first location
 - Peak of the Internet boom
 - In conjunction with "21 year-old MIT dropout"

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Fate of Sealand

- HavenCo website still claims to be "fully operational"
 - Open to anything but spam and child porn
 - Services from own server to file backup space
- Ryan Lackey has left
 - He says company doomed
 - Problems with net connection
 - Handful of customers
 - Complaints of tampering from "royal family"



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Longer Term Questions

- Can governments successfully regulate cyberspace
 - Trends suggest they can
 - Effective tools to filter content entering countries
 - US gov't can target citizens involved with services
 - Users
 - Providers (if have interests in US)
 - Payment mechanisms (Visa, PayPal, etc)
 - There are technological alternatives
 - Not clear whether will ever be widely used
 - Countries may block or discourage adoption

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