

reinventing the wheel, as it were, on the other. This is not to suggest that Mr. Kennard's report is not useful. Quite the contrary: it is a very useful reference document for regulators in all jurisdictions on almost all regulatory issues connected with this sector. It will provide insights for regulators on major regulatory issues confronting them today, but will need adaptations in implementing the basic underlying principles.

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Society on the line; information politics in the digital age

William H. Dutton; Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, 390 pages, ISBN 0-19-877461-3 0-19-877460-5 (Pbk).

This book is one of the many products of the UK Programme on Information and Communication Technologies (PICT) supported by the Economic and Social Research Council between 1985 and 1995. This was a pioneering research programme exploring the long-term social and economic implications of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Research was conducted by more than 60 researchers in six research centres at the Universities of Brunel, Edinburgh, Newcastle and Sussex, at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, and at what was then the Polytechnic of Central London (now the University of Westminster). Dutton was the Director of PICT during its final years, from 1993. This book represents his own, very particular synthesis of the results of PICT research. He has also edited a companion volume (Dutton, 1996) in which a wider variety of perspectives on the socio-economic issues surrounding ICTs is presented.

One of the original objectives of PICT — unusual for its time, but now commonplace — was to engage with users, broadly defined to include policy-makers, industrialists, public and voluntary sector actors. This book attempts to engage with an oft-forgotten group of users of academic research, namely undergraduate students. The language is straightforward; the text is frequently broken up with boxes which explain concepts or provide examples. Very brief essays of just one or two pages by PICT researchers are included at the end of each chapter; for example Donald MacKenzie on the 'certainty trough', Nicholas Garnham on 'power' and Rod Coombs on 'management control'. I was moved to return to longer versions by these authors and one can only hope that students will be similarly moved. Some might be critical of this approach, arguing that it is a 'dumbed down' version of some complex and original work. This is reminiscent of early PICT discussions about engagement with users, when some researchers resisted contamination with the so-called 'real world'. I will not rehearse here the familiar arguments about, inter alia, accountability, academic integrity, relevance, source of ideas and material and co-option into capitalism.

In Part I, Dutton outlines his two organising concepts: 'tele-access' and the 'ecology of games'. Tele-access is a very broad concept which 'covers the multifaceted interactions available through

ICTs and how they shape access to information, people, services, and technology' (p. 5). He uses this in preference to more widespread concepts such as 'information society' because of the latter's focus on information as a new economic and social resource. Dutton acknowledges some similarity with Castells' (1996) concept of 'network society', however, unlike Castells he does not analyse changes in global patterns of trade, industrial structure and employment in such detail. Of course, there is nothing new about the importance of information, what is new is how people gain access to information and it is this concern with changes in the means for processing and distributing information that Dutton wants to capture with tele-access. As a result of this focus on access, the book is very much oriented towards the concerns of users. Other parts of the book focus on household, organisational and political use. There are sections concerned with the shaping of the technology, but the focus is very much on access and use. This is a perfectly legitimate concern but much PICT research focused on production and design; and the possibilities for and conditions of access are very much shaped by producers and designers.

The concept of the 'ecology of games', familiar to readers of Dutton's earlier work, could be used to analyse the roles and actions of both users and producers of ICTs. 'A game is an arena of competition and cooperation structured by a set of rules and assumptions about how to act to achieve a particular set of objectives. An ecology of games is a larger system of action composed of two or more separate but interdependent games' (p. 15). This is in contrast with the Wittgensteinian notion of completely independent (language) games; and it does not appear to allow for the possibility that some games are only competitive or only cooperative. In the rest of the book, however, the focus is very much on 'tele-access'. There are only six entries under 'ecology of games' in the index (versus 27 under 'tele-access'). Unfortunately, the ecology of games concept is not being asked to do much work here.

The book covers an enormous amount of material, and incorporates some theoretical and technical developments which have occurred since the end of PICT. It will be useful for students of science, technology and society studies (STS), politics, sociology and business studies. However, scholars interested in more theoretically robust analyses of the social relations of ICTs should read the original PICT results.

References

- Castells, M. (1996). *The Rise of the Network Society*, Oxford: Blackwell.
Dutton, W. H. (Ed.). (1996). *Information and Communication Technologies, Visions and Realities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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¹Sally Wyatt worked with Professor William Melody, the First Director of PICT between 1986 and 1988, when centres were still being selected and the research was just beginning.

