

Conceptualizing users and use

I214

January 24, 2012

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1980s – 1990s

THE EARLY DAYS OF USER RESEARCH

From Human Factors to Human Actors

Bannon, 1992

Users are

- ...not stupid
- ...active adopters
- ...not only individuals
- ...not newbies forever

Research should take place

- ...where the action is
- ...**before** development
- ...with users' participation
- ...in iterative prototyping

What, if
anything, has
changed since
1992?



1990s – 2000s

(RE)CONFIGURING THE USERS

User-Technology Relationships: Some Recent Developments

Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2007

Innovation studies

Sociology of technology

Feminist studies of technology

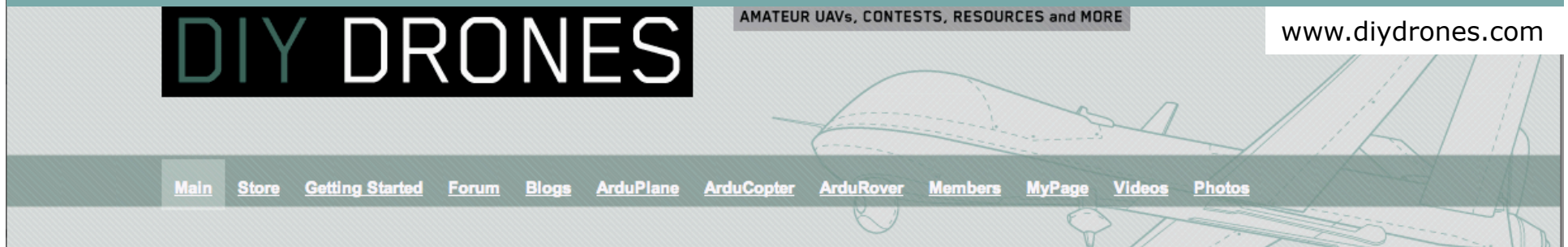
Semiotic approaches

Media and cultural studies



User-Technology Relationships: Some Recent Developments

Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2007



Innovation studies

‘Lead users’ (Von Hippel) as adaptor-extender-inventors

Co-construction of product and its market

- See: hardware projects on Kickstarter or DIY Drones

User-Technology Relationships: Some Recent Developments

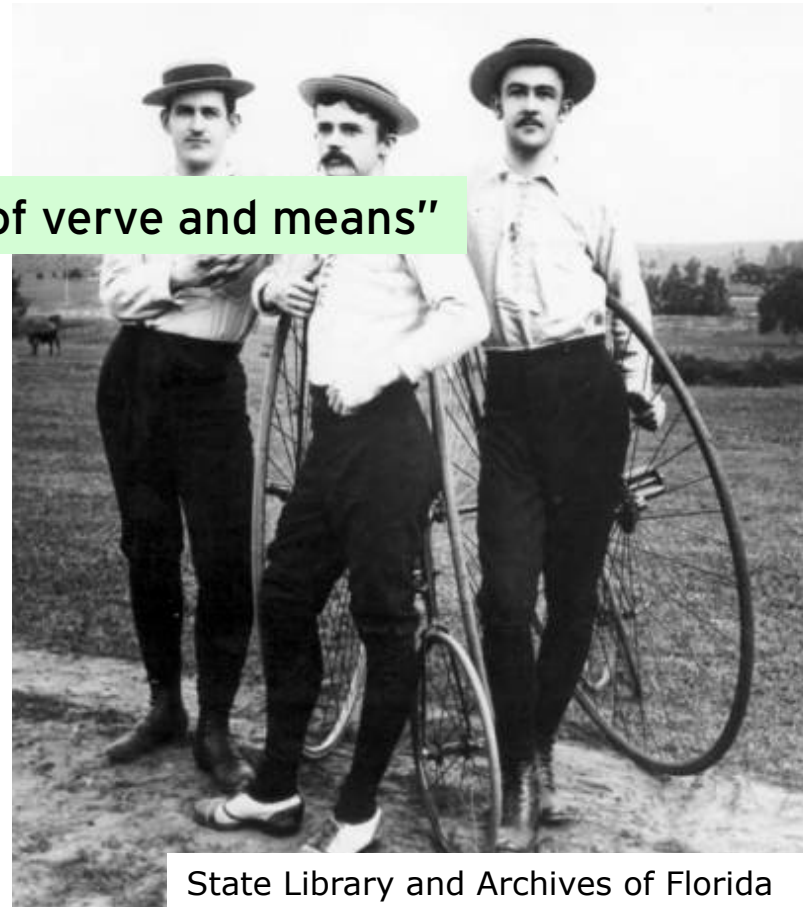
Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2007

Social construction of technology

Relevant social groups **"Young men of verve and means"**
(Pinch and Bijker, 1984)

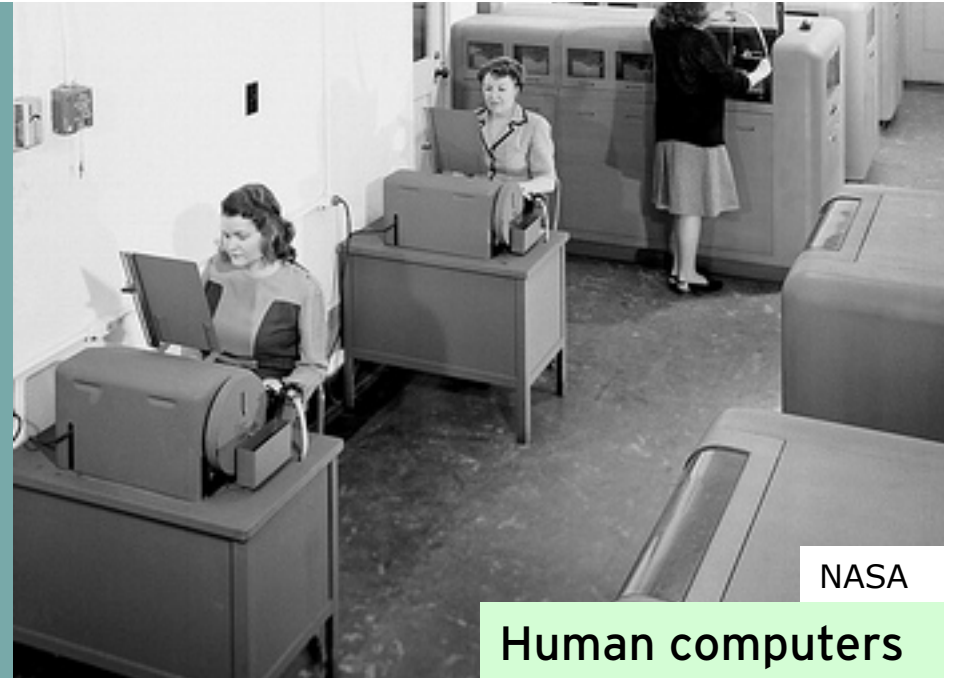
Co-construction of users and
technologies

Users as "agents of
technological change"



User-Technology Relationships: Some Recent Developments

Oudshoorn and Pinch,
2007



Feminist studies of technology

The “consumption junction” (Cowan)

Diversity of affiliation, role, and influence

End-users, lay end users, implicated actors (Clarke)

Cyborg bodies (Haraway)

Power, politics, and exclusion

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Semiotic approaches

Configuring

The user (Woolgar)

- Defining identity
- Setting constraints on likely future actions

The designer (Mackay)

Who does the configuring?

Scripting (Akrich, Latour)

Delegating responsibilities

Subscription

De-inscription/resistance



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Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2007

Media and cultural studies

Consumption: making
identity and culture

Domestication of unfamiliar
technologies (Silverstone)

“Unboxing”



Flickr photo by DeclanTM

Today

RECLAIMING THE USER?

Turing Complete User

Lialina, 2012

“The denial of the word “user” in favor of “people” becomes dangerous. Being a User is the last reminder that there is, whether visible or not, a computer, a programmed system you use.”



Turing Complete User

Lialina, 2012

“But whatever name I chose, what I mean are users who have the ability to achieve their goals regardless of the primary purpose of an application or device. Such users will find a way to their aspiration without an app or utility programmed specifically for it.”



Why does this matter?



Why does this matter?

Psychologists depersonalize the people they study by calling them ‘subjects.’ We depersonalize the people we study by calling them ‘users.’ Both terms are derogatory. They take us away from our primary mission: to help people. Power to the people, I say, to repurpose an old phrase. People. Human Beings. That’s what our discipline is really about.

— Don Norman, “Words Matter,” 2006

Why does this matter?

Product opportunities...and failures

Professional responsibilities and ethics



**COMPUTING HAS ALWAYS
BEEN PERSONAL**

By this I mean that if you weren't intensely involved in it, sometimes with every fiber in your mind atwitsch, you weren't doing computers, you were just a user.

So, what word
should we use for
what we're doing?



To sum up: key themes

Co-construction of users, markets, technologies

Pinch, Woolgar, Lialina

Users as active agents of change

Von Hippel, Pinch, Cowan, Akrich/Latour, Silverstone, Lialina

Seeking out alternative orientations to “use”

Pinch, Clarke, Akrich



To sum up: conceptual tools

Relevant social groups

End, implicated, and lay users

Cyborgs and non-humans

Delegation of action

