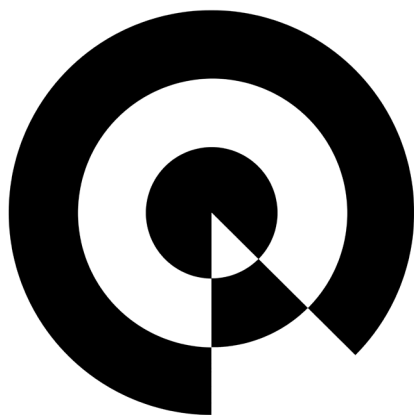


FORUM ON QUAERO

A PUBLIC THINK TANK ON THE POLITICS OF THE SEARCH ENGINE

29 – 30 / 09 / 2007

JAN VAN EYCK ACADEMIE MAASTRICHT



QUAERO: isn't that the search engine that former French president Jacques CHIRAC declared to be the EUROPEAN challenge to Google? A public alternative to Silicon Valley-born commercial search engines, funded by the French state, in service of the PUBLIC GOOD, in the true tradition of the GRAND PROJET? An INFORMATION MACHINE capable of reclaiming European LANGUAGE and intellectual HERITAGE in the age of GLOBALIZATION?

NO. Quaero is the name of a CONSORTIUM of technology firms and RESEARCH LABS working together on multimedia and WEB SEARCH PROJECTS. It is a STATE-SPONSORED effort to stimulate PRIVATE French technological competitiveness.

According to François BOURDONCLE, one of its participating developers, *'Quaero is definitely not a project to build a web search engine, it is a project to make significant advances on the handling and indexing of multimedia content. It is completely out of the question to build a new, state-owned, state-operated, or even state-funded search engine. Only the R&D around these cutting-edge multimedia indexing technologies are in the scope of the project.'*

But still, the issues that the idea of Quaero has raised – since its public launch by the former French president – constitute a formidable challenge. Internet search engines are political projects proper if only because they give and take power; they represent science, technology, (trans)national politics, private enterprise, culture, territoriality and language in ever different combinations. They are also social spaces. Internet search, the indispensable public tool that allows one to survey the ever increasing web, is currently in the hands of only a few global players, to whose private interests its setup corresponds.

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On 29 and 30 September 2007, the Jan van Eyck Academie, in collaboration with the Maison Descartes, Institut Français des Pays-Bas, organizes the FORUM ON QUAERO, taking the concept of the search engine as a public project as a starting point. Search engines' indexation methods inevitably

Florian CRAMER
Jodi DEAN
Frédéric MARTEL
Ingmar WEBER
Isabelle STENGERS
BUREAU D'ÉTUDES
METAHAVEN
Tsilá HASSINE
OPEN SEARCH
Michael ZIMMER
Richard ROGERS
Florian SCHNEIDER
&
Maurits DE BRUIJN
Sabine NIEDERER
André NUSSOLDER

2 DAYS OF DISCUSSION
STARTING
SAT 29 / 09 11 AM,
BOOK NOW

ADMISSION € 25 for 2 days, including lunch, dinner, drinks and the *Forum on Quaero* publication.

REGISTRATION e-mail to Anne VANGRONVELD, anne.vangronsveld@janvaneyck.nl

PAYMENTS to be made to

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Please put FORUMONQUAERO on the payment.

To be sure of a seat, we kindly ask you to submit your payment before 27 / 09 / 07.

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INQUIRIES & PRESS e-mail Metahaven Design Research at office@metahaven.net

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

in Media Design, until graduating in June 2006 with Google randomizer Smoogle. Hassine is a researcher at the Jan Van Eyck Academie. •

Frédéric MARTEL (speaker) is a writer, journalist and a researcher/professor at Sciences Po-Paris. He is author of 5 books, including *The Pink and the Black*, *Homosexuals in France since 1968* and *De la culture en Amérique* (an overview on the American culture and art policy system in the U.S.). From 2001 to 2005, he was the head of the French cultural and academic services in the French Embassy in the U.S. He is now the editor of nonfiction.fr, a new website dedicated to books and ideas. •

METAHAVEN (speaker, initiator) is a design research collective based in Amsterdam and Brussels. It consists of Daniel VAN DER VELDEN, Vinca KRUK and Gon ZIFRONI. Their work focuses on visual identity and the political, assigning key importance to the role of conflict in relation to the design of institutions in the era of globalization. •

Sabine NIEDERER (respondent) is managing director of the Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam. She recently co-founded the Digital Methods Initiative, a group of researchers, programmers and designers dedicated to researching and visualizing 'natively digital' objects of study, such as the tag, the thread and the link. • André NUSSOLDER (respondent) is a philosopher. Last year he finished his PhD thesis at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, in which he investigated the role of fantasy in the virtual worlds created by new media technologies: Interface-Fantasy. Weary of academic commentary and conformism, he is now trying to develop different ways to write on philosophical issues. •

OPEN SEARCH (speaker), by Erik BORRA and Koen MARTENS, is a peer-to-peer project whereby people mutually form a search engine without the intervention of central servers or a central actor. The motivation for this project is the censorship and manipulation by major multinational corporations (Google, Yahoo, Microsoft). Koen Martens is a programmer, hacker, organiser, and the treasurer of GroenLinks The Hague section. Erik Borra graduated in artificial intelligence and is now involved in the Digital Methods Initiative. The Open Search project is scheduled to be launched in 2008. •

Richard ROGERS (speaker) is Head of New Media at the University of Amsterdam, and director of the Govcom.org Foundation, a group that develops info-political devices for the web. Previously, Rogers worked as Senior Advisor to Infodrome, the Dutch Governmental Information Society initiative. He has also worked as Research Fellow in Design and Media at the Jan van Eyck Academie, and as a Researcher in Technology Assessment at the Science Center Berlin (WZB) and in Strategic Computing in the Public Sector at Harvard University (JFK School). •

Florian SCHNEIDER (speaker, moderator) is a filmmaker based in Munich. He has been involved in a wide range of projects dealing with the implications of post-modern border regimes on a theoretical as well as a practical

lead to moments of inclusion and exclusion (sometimes by hands-on censorship). Search engines closely monitor their users' behaviour and offer additional services, retrieving and storing increasing amounts of private information from them. The majority of web search is carried out through only a few, very large corporate search engines which communicate ideas about their role in the world via their brand identities. These may lead to distorted impressions of what the commercial search engine as a institution really entails. This conference aims to bridge the gap between politics, policies and practices in the field of web search. Some questions:

- What are the politics of the structure and image of search engines and their technologies?
- To what extent have search engines like Google, which started from the ideal of access to information, become the modus operandi of political bias? Can we envisage scenarios for the search engine as a public domain institution?
- What kind of hierarchy (if any) should be implemented when deciding what should go into a search engine's database, and what is left out?
- Can contemporary web practices tackle the conventional static models used to archive and present (institutional) concepts of cultural heritage and democracy?
- Collaborative and participatory methods are increasingly placing the *Demos* as the force that structures information. Can we work towards a 'politics of code & categorization' that allows plural interpretations of data to coexist and enrich each other?
- How can concepts of digital and networked European cultural heritage reflect the political and social issues related to Europe's changing borders?

The Forum encourages and facilitates audience participation; it is meant as a public think tank, a live sketchbook around new questions for the search engine.

IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Maurits DE BRUIJN (respondent) is a graphic designer working on a variety of web concepts, which combine distinct visual identities with an experimental scripting and engineering architecture. De Bruijn criticizes the consequences that major search engines and their indexing mechanisms force on the scripting architecture of web sites. De Bruijn teaches information design and interface design at ArtEZ Institute of the Arts in Arnhem. •

BUREAU D'ÉTUDES (speaker) is a Paris-based media collective founded in 1998, comprising the artist duo Léonore BONACCINI and Xavier FORT. Using complex graphic tables conceived for the internet, they map various hidden global structures of finance and world governance, formalising patterns and connections through scientific and informational exactitude. •

Florian CRAMER (speaker, moderator) is Media Design course director of the Piet Zwart Institute. He was junior lecturer in Comparative Literature at Freie Universität Berlin. Cramer has published papers in the fields of code poetry, comparative studies in the literature and the arts, modernism, text theory, literature and computing; he collaborated on the www.runme.org Software Art repository and edited the *Unstable Digest* of code poetry. His German PhD thesis is called *Exe.cut[up]able Statements*. •

Jodi DEAN (speaker) is Professor of Political Science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. She has authored or edited 8 books, including *Publicity's Secret: How technoculture capitalizes on democracy* (2002) and *Zizek's Politics* (2006). •

Tsila HASSINE (speaker) is a media artist and web programmer. She completed BScs in Mathematics and Computer Science and spent 2003 at the New Media department of the HGK Zürich. In 2004 she joined the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam, where she pursued an MA

level. He is one of the initiators of the campaign *kein mensch ist illegal* at Documenta X in 1997 and subsequent projects such as the 'no border network' and the online-platform kein.org. He is a member of the PhD programme in research architecture at Goldsmiths College, London, and teaches theory at the art academy in Trondheim. •

Isabelle STENGERS (respondent) teaches philosophy at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. Her interests centre around the constructive adventure of modern sciences and the crucial challenge of what she calls an 'ecology of practices', as a condition for embedding our many diverging scientific practices in a democratic and demanding environment. She has written numerous books, among which, translated in English, *Order out of Chaos*, with Ilya Prigogine and *Power and Invention. Situating Science, and The Invention of Modern Science*. •

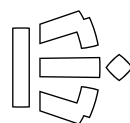
Ingmar WEBER (speaker) is a postdoc in information retrieval at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne in Switzerland. His PhD thesis at the Max-Planck Institute for Computer Science in Germany deals with efficient data structures for and applications of a more interactive search engine called CompleteSearch. Ingmar is generally interested in alternative search engines and runs an informal seminar on 'Cool stuff on the web'. •

Michael ZIMMER (speaker) is the Microsoft Fellow at the Information Society Project at Yale Law School for 2007-2008. His PhD *The Quest for the Perfect Search Engine: Values, Technical Design, and the Flow of Personal Information in Spheres of Mobility*, investigates how the quest for the 'perfect search engine' empowers the widespread capture of personal information flows across the Internet, threatening the ability to engage in online social, cultural and intellectual activities free from oversight, thereby bearing on the values of privacy, autonomy, and liberty. •

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