

Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

This is a signal issue as it bears the “Tribute to Rob Kling” section in memory of my predecessor. I got to know Rob in his later years when he was cultivating a field—Social Informatics—whose seeds he had sown many years ago. In the course of working with him on TIS, I got to like him as a person, and he colored my mind in a profound way. At the time of his sudden passing, I was well acquainted with his multifaceted and probing mind. However, when his friends and acquaintances started sharing their memories of him via postings and articles on Web sites, listservs, and journals, especially Roberta Lamb’s “The Social Construction of Rob Kling” in TIS 19(3), I was jolted into the realization that my interactions with him had been limited to only one slice of his life, mellower days of Rob. The pieces by Rob’s long-standing friends and colleagues in the “Tribute to Rob Kling” section trace notable parts of his intellectual journey that opened up new territories for us to explore.

James Watt takes us back to 1970 when the bombing of the Army Mathematics Research Center brought the National Guardsmen with M-16s onto the campus of the University of Wisconsin. With his vivid descriptions of the student unrest of the Vietnam War era, he recreates the context within which Rob first taught his “Computers and Society” course as a newly hired assistant professor. As he tells us, Rob moved the class to his house where over coffee and snacks the discussion moved from Ellul to Firesign Theater’s “I Think We’re All Bozos On This Bus” and “Marx reared up and collided with IBM.” True to his style, Rob did not “hide behind his academic detachment mask” and fueled debate until 13 students sprawled on his living room floor had “one roaring good intellectual time.” With Ken Kraemer’s piece we move to the University of California, Irvine, where Rob joined the faculty in 1973 and stayed till 1996, 23 productive years when he did the great bulk of his groundbreaking work. Ken captures for us the dynamics of his first collaborative project with Rob—Urban Information Systems (URBIS) project on computerization of city governments. The section “Multiple Perspectives on Rob,” play on Rob’s constant call for multiple theoretical perspectives, provides telling anecdotes about what it was like to work with him. He was a skeptic who prodded his interviewees to the point of “badgering the witness” to get beyond off the cuff reactions, a fun-lover who sought reimbursement for renting a sailboat during the weekend on the grounds that it was cheaper than the

hotel, and a quibbler who grumbled when due credit did not come his way. Above all he was a “great generator of ideas” who stretched everybody’s mind.

While James Watt and Ken Kraemer look back on a class and a research project at the outset of Rob’s career, Barry Wellman and Starr Roxanne Hiltz and John Leslie King provide panoramic views of his career. Barry and Roxanne talk about the multiple facets of the “Sociological Rob” they encountered over the years. They go back to the beginnings of the centralization versus decentralization of computing debate, when mainframes reigned supreme, and highlight Rob’s early contributions where he used institutional analysis to lay bare the systemic pressures towards centralization. Yet, when the arrival of personal computers brought about a paradigm shift, they note that he presciently observed: “the centralizing-decentralizing war would never have an ultimate winner or even reach a stable balance.” In this very engaging piece Barry and Roxanne interweave intellectual history with personal reminiscences in a delightful way, leaving behind many memorable sentences. John’s piece, a cerebral take on Rob’s intellectual contributions, highlights his role in the formation of the Irvine School. After providing a broad overview of the major projects at Irvine, he focuses on some of Rob’s projects that served as defining moments in the evolution of the Irvine School. The “Riverville,” fictitious name for Chattanooga, project in 1974 is especially noteworthy. After studying the much-celebrated example of integrated delivery of social services in Chattanooga, he found that while the system was perfectly rational in design, the personnel of the involved agencies rarely used it. This discrepancy propelled Rob to dig further and he discovered that the system was designed on very naïve assumptions about human behavior. Even though the system worked well in a mechanistic sense, the agencies ignored it because it threatened their autonomy. This crucial insight opened up a vein of research that led to a number of landmark papers, including the one that predicted that Department of Defense’s project which eventually resulted in the creation of Ada, a high-order programming language, would not succeed. John concludes by saying, “Rob’s legacy cannot be captured only in his papers, his students, or his programmatic efforts at UCI or IU. These all play a part in a larger legacy, the creation of a vital *point of view* about information technology in the world that gave rise to the Irvine School.”

In addition to the above-mentioned pieces by Rob's long time friends and colleagues, this issue has three regular research articles by Eschenfelder and Desai, Lewis and Madon, and Hudson and Bruckman and a forum piece by Gardner.

Kristin Eschenfelder and Anuj Desai gage the impact of the *Universal City Studios v. Corley* decision in their paper entitled "Software as Protest: The Unexpected Resiliency of U.S.-Based DeCSS Posting and Linking." They report findings of a study that tracked over a 26-month period the posting and linking of DeCSS, software that "opens" up encrypted DVDs, which was made illegal by the Corley decision. Eschenfelder and Desai collected data on Web sites posting or linking to DeCSS and those posting non-executable forms of the software. They also noted the political speech on these Web sites and the geographical location of their authors. Their research showed an unexpected resilience of DeCSS posting and linking. The willingness of the owners of these Web sites to defy the law is remarkable because the DeCSS software is now obsolete. Eschenfelder and Desai themselves found about 30 different "rippers" that could be downloaded for free. In fact, as they note, one Web site "characterized DeCSS as 'old' and warned that it might not rip newer titles." Their explanation for the resilience of DeCSS postings and links in spite of its obsolescence is that it has become a symbol of protest. The fact that these Web sites also have political speech on matters related to copyright, fair use, reverse engineering, and software code as an expression akin to speech lend credence to their explanation. The suggested motivation needs to be empirically verified, as they plan to do in a subsequent study, via interviews of the authors of the Web sites they tracked in this study.

David Lewis and Shirin Madon in their article entitled "Information Systems and Nongovernmental Development Organizations: Advocacy, Organizational Learning, and Accountability" draw on information systems and NGO literatures and a case study of the Association for Credit and Empowerment (ACE), a large NGO in Bangladesh, to understand how information systems can enhance the effectiveness of NGOs. On the theoretical level, they contend that information systems researchers have much to learn from the NGO researchers and vice versa. Accordingly, they start by providing an overview of information systems and NGO research and highlight contributions and issues that pertain to NGO effectiveness. In the case of information systems research, they point out the importance of informal systems and the context within which the technology is embedded. In the case of NGO research, they explain that the literature has tended to focus on what NGOs do within their local context. The internal workings of NGOs and also their relationship with the larger global context have only now started to be studied. On the ground, the NGOs are increasingly being pres-

sured to be accountable, not just in financial terms but also in achieving their stated goals, and this pressure has got them to explore how information systems can enhance their performance. ACE, the focus of the case study, provides a good site to explore these issues because elements within it are trying to redirect "personal relations" advocacy by a well connected Dhaka-based leadership to a more grassroots oriented effort involving its 100,000+ local groups all across the country. Also, there is a move towards increasing bottom-up information flows for developing an effective monitoring and evaluation system that would not only enhance performance but also facilitate organizational learning. ICT enabled information systems are important for both these goals.

Hudson and Bruckman explore the ethical issues related to chatroom research in their paper entitled "'Go Away': Participant Objections to Being Studied and the Ethics of Chatroom Research." They observe that it is difficult to carry over conventional frameworks to behavior research on Internet forums because of the blurring of traditional distinctions such as public and private spaces, identified and anonymous subjects, and published and unpublished information. They urge us to revisit the fundamental questions of risks and benefits of research and rights of subjects that led to the development of today's well-established practices. Furthermore, they argue that these questions "cannot be answered in the abstract, but must be addressed in the context of a particular set of research questions and methods." In the case of chatroom research, one of the fundamental questions is "How much do users object to being studied when they are aware of the study?" To address this question empirically they designed a study wherein they entered chatrooms, declared that they were there to study language use, and recorded the response of the participants. On entering a chatroom they did one of the four things: posted a Recording Message (informing participants that they are recording chatroom activity), Opt In Message (giving participants an option to voluntarily participate in the study), Opt Out Message (giving participants an option to opt out of the study), or posted no message (only used "Chat.Study" as name). In the first three conditions, where the participants were explicitly informed of the researcher's presence, they were kicked out of 63% of the chatrooms. The corresponding figure for the fourth condition was 29%. This leads them to conclude that the only way one can study chatroom behavior is by not seeking prior consent. After considering the risks and benefits of chatroom research, they argue that human subjects committees should grant prior consent waivers except in those cases where the risk is high.

William Gardner's forum piece—"Compelled Disclosure of Scientific Research Data"—provides a thoughtful critique of the legislation that requires researchers to make data from federally funded research available to

individuals and organizations filing a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. His main concern is that parties with financial and ideological reasons are likely to use this mechanism to obstruct research. He cites instances of pharmaceutical companies litigating to prevent publication of research that could undermine their products. Often pharmaceutical companies take researchers to court even when their cases lack merit in order to deter research on topics that are damaging to their interests. The researchers lacking the money and time necessary to engage in lengthy legal battles are likely to shy away from controversial topics. He mentions the case of Dr. Paul Fischer who abandoned his research when RJR, the manufacturers of Camel cigarettes, followed up the subpoena demanding complete data for his JAMA article on “Old Joe” advertising campaign, which was squashed, with a request under Georgia Open Records Act, a law akin to FOIA. He argues that instituting requirements in all federal funding grants to make data electronically available is a better way of making information accessible to the public. While some federal agencies are already moving in this direction, they

have not clearly articulated the principles that would determine what constitutes complete data (as opposed to exhaustive data). The issue is tricky because what data sharing means varies from discipline to discipline, ranging from reagents and organisms in biomedical sciences to archived digital records in clinical research. He suggests that federal agencies should use criteria similar to that used by courts to determine when to shield people and documents in the discovery process. In effect, the data made public as required by a federal grant should suffice for an FOIA request except in cases where the requesting party provides evidence that suggests fraud or inaccuracy.

In addition to the pieces mentioned above, this issue of TIS has four reviews of books on information, global media, human-technology interface, and IT assisted learning. The tribute pieces provide insights about the former editor who gave the journal its present shape and accompanying pieces give a sampling of what is currently cooking at TIS.

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