Computer science and technology:
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abstract
Wired early issues, 1994-95.
Coverage of computer science and technology in Africa is so rare that any article or larger work that does stands out: Jeff Greenwald’s “Wiring Africa” is about Dakar, Senegal and the plan to revive the Pan African News Agency (PANA) through UNESCO impetus.

This is part of a series covering networking in various parts of the world (as part of the ‘electrosphere’ section).

Another issue of 1994, 02, contained a contribution about “Wiring Japan” and the conflicts between Japanese and American firms operating there.

“At precisely 8:00 on the evening of Friday, September 17, 1993, Japan’s first commercial Internet packets flashed out of Tokyo and down Trans-Pacific Cable No. 4, bound for San Jose, California. A new era in Japanese networking had begun. As befits the birth of a new business, cheers went up and toasts were made. But not everybody was rejoicing in Tokyo that night - for Japan’s first commercial Internet packets were sent by American engineers working for Japanese subsidiaries of the US corporations InterCon Systems and AT&T.
InterCon’s first customer was TWICS, Japan’s first public access Internet provider, a small for-profit firm most of whose 400-odd subscribers are foreigners based in Japan. Across town, a group of Japanese internet pioneers were grinding their teeth in frustration. The company they had set up to provide commercial Internet services had been denied a license to operate by Japan’s Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. Holding up the locals while waving on the foreigners is not the way business is usually done in Japan.”

The portrait of Canon emphasized it as “lone wolf” in a country that, supposedly, seeks uniformity: the headline read,

“Most Japanese firms run with the pack. Not Canon. It’s not a member of a cartel-like keiretsu. And it emphasizes individual effort over teamwork.”

‘In the Kingdom of Mao Bell’ is Neal Stephenson’s attempt, in 1994, to do a Gibson-like piece on Asia, (cf. 1993’s ‘Disneyland with the Death Penalty’), except Shenzhen instead of Singapore. And Stephenson instead of Gibson. And falls flat like the pathetic imitation that is is (the usual anti-communist twist included - no thanks!).

"In the inevitable rotating lounge atop the Shangri-La Hotel in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, a burly local businessman, wearing a synthetic polo shirt stretched so thin as to be semitransparent, takes in the view, some drinks, and selections from the dinner buffet. He is accompanied by a lissome consort in a nice flowered print dress. Like any face-conscious Chinese businessman he carries a large boxy cellular phone.”

Mmmh, no, stop! You’re not Gibson, and this isn’t Neuromancer, and you’re not on the docks underneath an RGB sky... You’re just another American or British guy in Asia : the, hopefully soon vanished, detestable ‘expatriate’ figure (i.e. the neo colonial traveler reports on the customs of the far East...)

Wired’s Mosaic article written by Gary Wolf, (author of the epic Xanadu piece), has “everything [one] ever wanted to know about Mosaic” and in any case presents the state of the browser around or up to the publication date of October 1994 including an interview of Clark and rumors of Microsoft wanting to license it to include it in Windows. Titled presciently and accurately “The (Second Phase of the) Revolution Has Begun” since the graphical browser is now often considered the next biggest invention after the Web.

“Rumors have circulated that Microsoft was secretly licensing Mosaic to incorporate it into Windows. (Microsoft says only that it is "considering" a Mosaic license.)” [p. 116]
Microsoft, being the sly foxes that they are, instead pursued a tactic of 'giving away' their browser to crush these upstarts (who sold a commercial version of their own browser to businesses)... That being said Clark pursued a similarly shrewd if not worse strategy with regard to the University of Illinois to begin with:

“In April 1994, Jim Clark, founder of Silicon Graphics Inc., ... created the Mosaic Communications Corporation and hired a half dozen of the most experienced Mosaic developers away from the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA)”

The plundering of universities is often behind a lot of the "innovation" - so called - of Tech, and in a society other than the dominant capitalist one is a practice that would be outlawed. (The Internet would have also not been made commercial in the way it was, instead it would have been a common good and a special zone for commerce would have been created in a separate network for example.)

The November 1994 issue had a stand out contribution in the 'electrosphere' section about gay teens on the ‘net, and the changes that the Internet and Web have brought to life as a young gay person.

“the "Queer Global Village." Just 10 years ago, most queer teens hid behind a self-imposed don’t-ask-don’t-tell policy until they shipped out to Oberlin or San Francisco, but the Net has given even closeted kids a place to conspire.”
‘Prophet of Privacy’ is Levy’s portrait of Diffie: “He took cryptography out of the hands of the spooks”... It also includes a parallel coverage of PGP.

In ‘Push-Button Democracy’, alternatively titled ‘Direct Democracy’, the idea of electronic voting is explored:

“The notion of a nationwide network for participatory politics goes back to the 1940s, when scientist Buckminster Fuller first proposed voting on the issues of the day via telephone. Psychologist Erich Fromm, in his 1955 book The Sane Society, wrote of “a true House of Commons,” where citizens would vote on the issues “with the help of the technical devices we have today.” In 1982, futurist Alvin Toffler wrote that such a system “would strike a devastating blow at the special interest groups and lobbies who infest most parliaments.” Perot, in fact, has been advocating the electronic town hall for twenty years.”

The fundamental issue is whether this would lead to in fact direct democracy or an experience closer to the shopping channel adapted to politics hence ”the Democracy Channel”:

“Mixing television, politics, and interactive electronics could be a formula for either new public enlightenment or a country run by push-button impulse. It all depends on how the concept is executed.”

One version of how this could unfold is imagined at the beginning of that article:

Good evening, citizens. The electronic town meeting is about to begin. Everyone take your seats and make sure your voter ID number is handy and your touch-tone phone or remote control device is by your side. Those of you tuning in via computer please click on the "start" icon on the top of your screen.

Today’s topic is gun control. We assume everyone has read the issue brochure sent to all of your electronic mailboxes one month ago. Our first speaker will be Robert Corbin, executive director of the National Rifle Association, followed by Sarah Brady, president of Handgun Control Incorporated. We will follow that up with a discussion among a panel of twelve randomly selected citizens and an impartial moderator.

At the end of the meeting, we will ask you to vote on the proposed legislation.
‘RoboCourt’ had for headline “Moving Justice from Expert Witnesses to Expert Systems” and reports on a new kind of court in New York, described:

“The nation’s first entirely computerized courthouse will handle 15,000 misdemeanor cases annually, feeding millions of details about offenders into a master database.”