

The background features a white canvas with several large, organic, overlapping shapes in teal, orange, and black. Scattered throughout are numerous small black dots of varying sizes. The text is centered and rendered in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

The Enemy is us: on the sharp edges of Internet Governance Cultures

A Critical Anthropological Take

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Corinne Cath

Anthropologist studying Internet Governance Cultures

T: C__CS

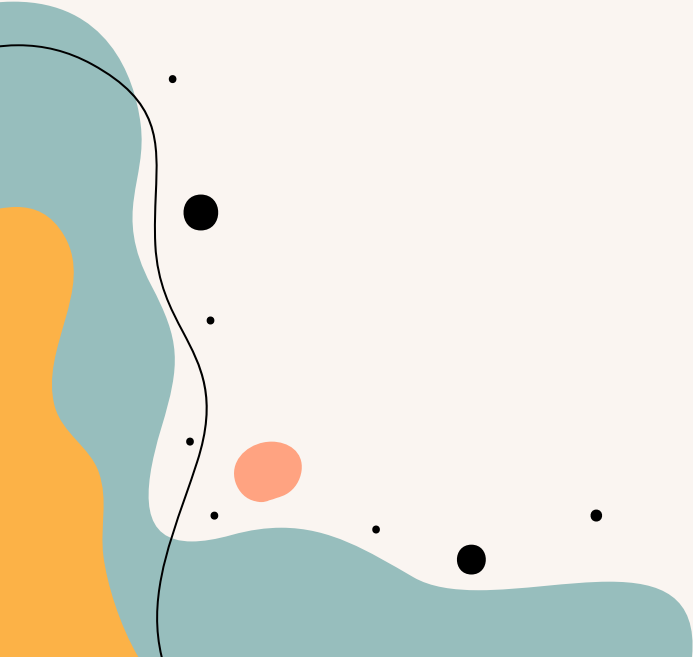
E: corinne.cath@oii.ox.ac.uk

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Dave Clark:

Us: We have met the enemy and he is..



Vision of the Future, IETF92 meeting

https://groups.csail.mit.edu/ana/People/DDC/future_ietf_92.pdf



Today's Talk

01

Who are we?

Who participates?

02

Findings: Are "We" Our Own Worst Enemy?

A case study of the IETF

03

Who is not here?

Internet governance: for whom
by whom?

04

Discussion

So What? Now What?

Back at RIPE

“Pushing All the Wrong Buttons”?

Toward human rights-preserving technological standards – Corinne Cath, Oxford Internet Institute

The presentation is available at:

<https://ripe70.ripe.net/presentations/145-Presentation-research-RIPE.pdf>

Corinne Cath gave a presentation on her work looking at the link between technical standards and human rights. She raised questions such as how would we measure a technical standard against human rights concerns? How would we incorporate this into the standards process(es)? How can those impacted by technologies gain a credible voice within the technical debate?

Iljitsch van Beijnum, BGPexpert.com, questioned whether there was actually little involvement in the IETF by civil society, and suggested that perhaps such stakeholders are participating in other ways or are not identifying as “civil society” (for instance, many involved from a technical standpoint are very interested in “civil society” issues like human rights).

Malcolm Hutty, LINX, followed up on Corinne's examination of tussle theory, which implies that while protocol design could indulge a systematic bias (e.g. pro- or anti-surveillance), it is better to make it as neutral as possible. Corinne agreed that according to this definition of tussle theory, many in the IETF seem to have rejected it, adopting a more solid opinion on surveillance capability.

Julf Helsingius, BaseN, noted that in general, while technologists understand the human rights part fairly well, the human rights people understand code not at all.

Some Numbers

- **STEM in NL**

27%

- **US Cybersec**

24%



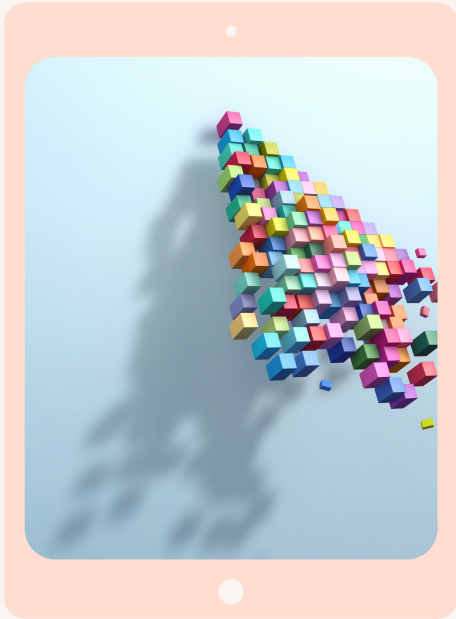
RIPE

Good question

IETF

About 10%

Diversity Matters



- Leads to more creative solutions
- Better technologies
- More inclusive cultures

industry worries too

A question-oriented approach leads to better products

To support Cloudflare's fast-paced roadmap, the Research team takes a question-first approach. Focusing on questions is the essence of research itself, but it's important to recognize what that means for an industry-leading company. We never stop asking big questions about the problems our products are already solving. Changes like the move from desktop to mobile computing or the transition from on-premise security solutions to the cloud happened within a decade, so it's important to ask questions like:

- How will social and geopolitical forces changes impact the products we're building today?
- What assumptions may be present in existing systems based on the homogenous experiences of their creators?
- What changes are happening in the industry that will affect the way the Internet works?

Organizational Cultures & RIPE



The Internet Engineering Task Force Up Close



2015 Survey of network operators on the IETF

3.2. Culture

Another common challenge we heard about while conducting this survey is one of culture. While the IETF is open to participation by anyone, some feel that they are not welcome or that they will be ignored or treated badly by other participants.

Grundemann & Zorz

Expires May 1, 2015

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Internet-Draft

Operators and the IETF

October 2014

We saw above that almost half (44%) of the respondents who do not currently participate in the IETF at all avoid it because they don't feel their operator input is welcomed.

This is echoed in some detail in many of the comments left by respondents:

- o IETF are just concern about the old members and don't think of how to get new members onboard

PhD Research



Changing Minds and Machines:

A Case Study of Human Rights Advocacy in the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)

Corinne J.N. Cath-Speth
Oxford Internet Institute and Alan Turing Institute, Exeter College

Supervisors: Victoria Nash and Gina Neff
Hillary 2021

<https://corinnecath.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CathCorinne-Thesis-DphilInformationCommunicationSocialSciences.pdf>



Anthropolgy

How to study Internet governance cultures?

What does anthropology do?

“Making the familiar strange” — Van Maanen 1995

“Listening carefully to what purveyors of a given technology say can tell you a lot about how a technology fits into, works with, or challenges the world around us” — Hoffmann 2014

Culture is “a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour” — Spencer-Oatey 2008



What do anthropologists do?



Selection of Literature on Tech Cultures


Research

“Anonymous” by Gabrielle Coleman

“Two Bits” by Chris Kelty

“Hacking Diversity” by Christina Dunbar-Hester

“Status Update”, “Uberland”, etc.

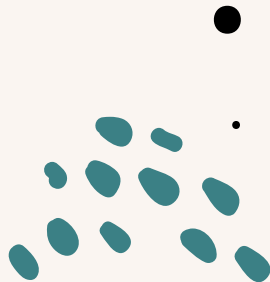


Community

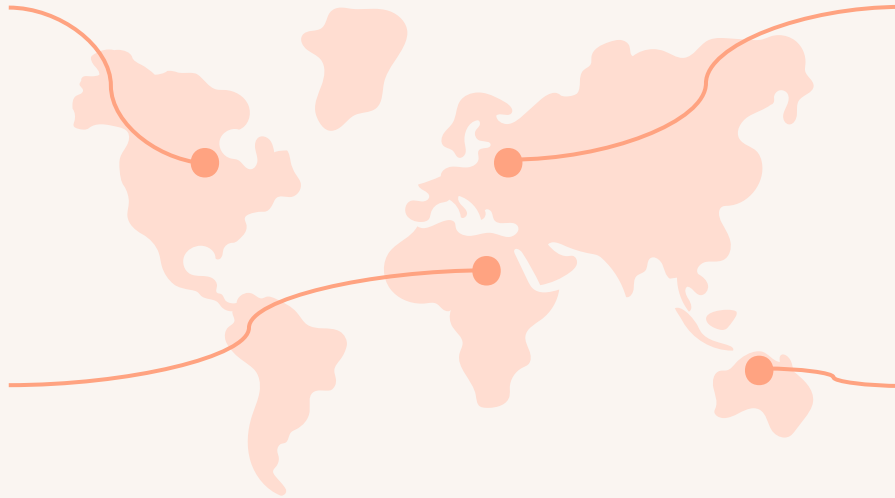
Hacking Cultures

FOSS Cultures

Big Tech Cultures



- **But we don't know much about cultures in key technical Internet communities**



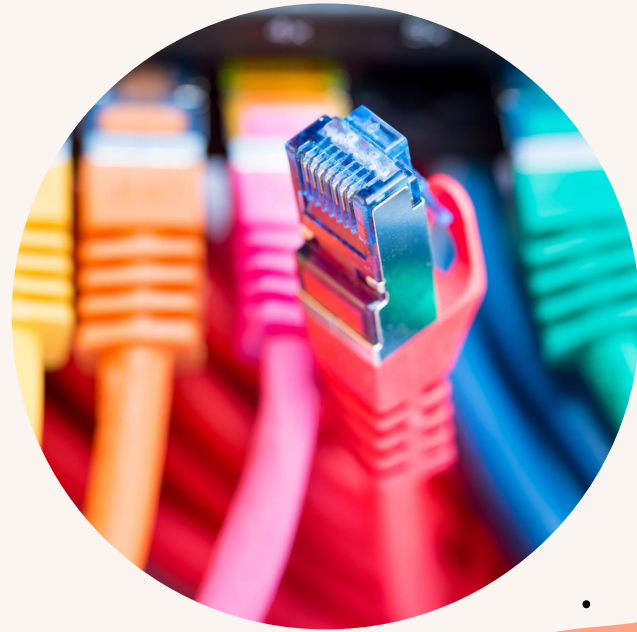
The IETF

Open or Obnoxious?



The IETF II

Transported to protocols



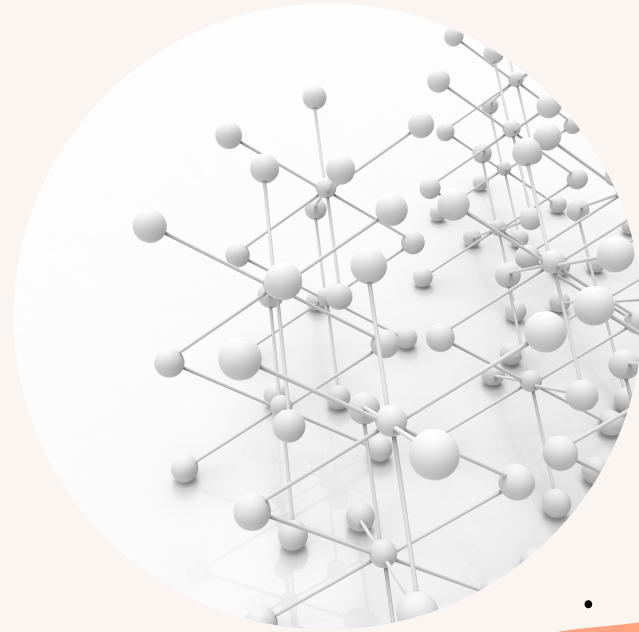


The IETF is often described as:

- “Inclusive and democratic” Abbate, 2006, 208
- “Bottom-up and by rough-consensus, with an emphasis on openness, fairness and inclusiveness” Bygrave and Bing 2009, 98
- “The IETF has a generally open and transparent approach eventhough many barriers to public participation exist” DeNardis 2013, 23

It is also

Homogenous
Insular
Conservative



Findings: IETF culture up close



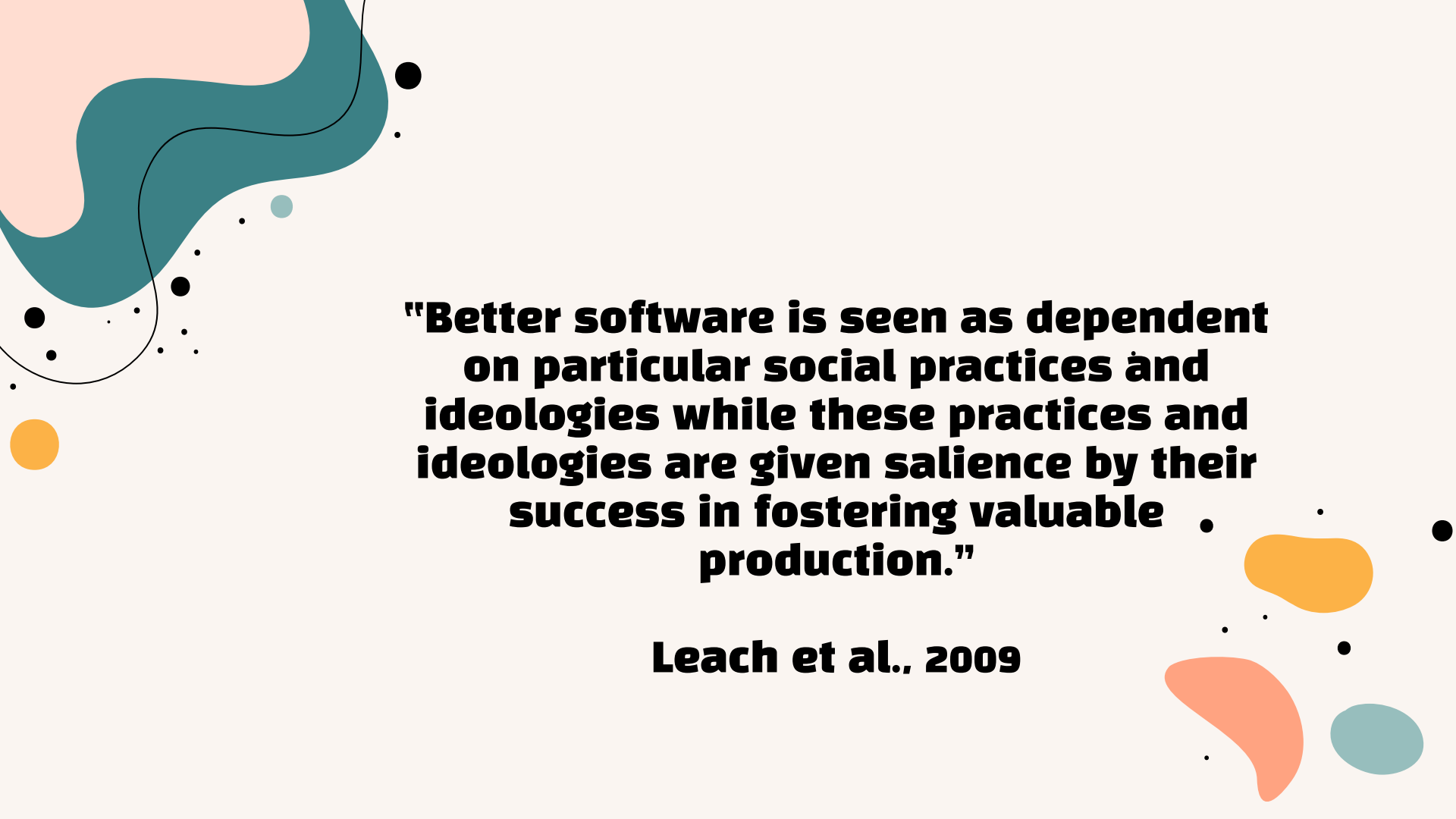
Working Practices

Confrontation & Loud Men




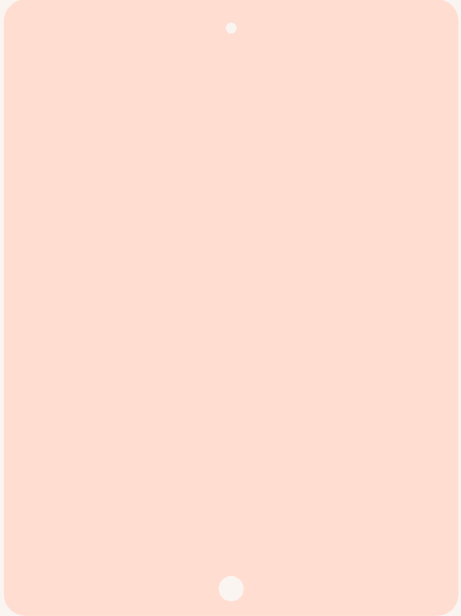

Organizational Narratives

Tech Optimism
Laissez-Faire
Individual Participation



“Better software is seen as dependent on particular social practices and ideologies while these practices and ideologies are given salience by their success in fostering valuable production.”

Leach et al., 2009



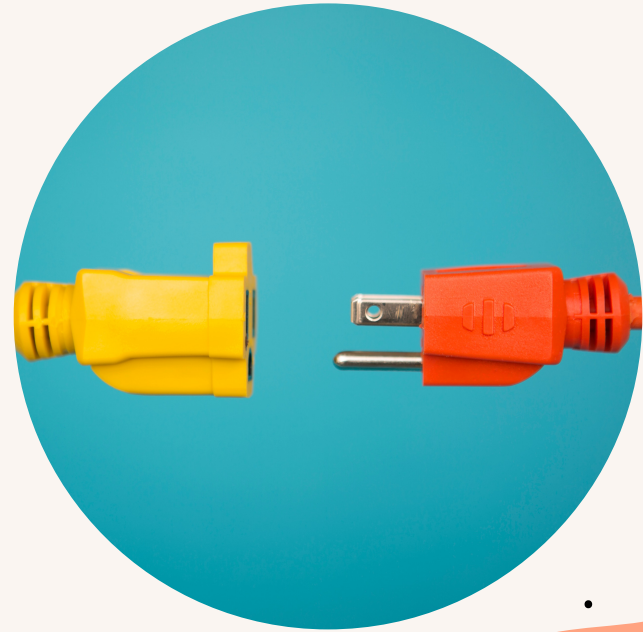
“There are only so many times I am willing to be mistaken for someone’s wife or shouted down when I try to raise a valid question, before I decide enough is enough.

Women get plenty of this in their personal lives. I don’t need this in my work environment too.”

--PhD Interviewee

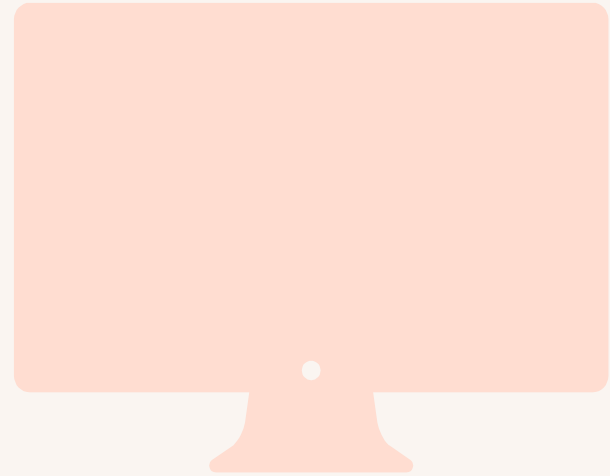
Why the disconnect?

Conflation of procedural openness
with cultural accessibility



SO?

Questions unanswered
Wrong Holy Grail
Beyond the Code of Conduct





Discussion

Us?

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THANKS!



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