

THE OLD PUPPET MASTERS: CONTENT MODERATION ON COMPUTER BULLETIN BOARD SYSTEMS

KEVIN ACKERMANN

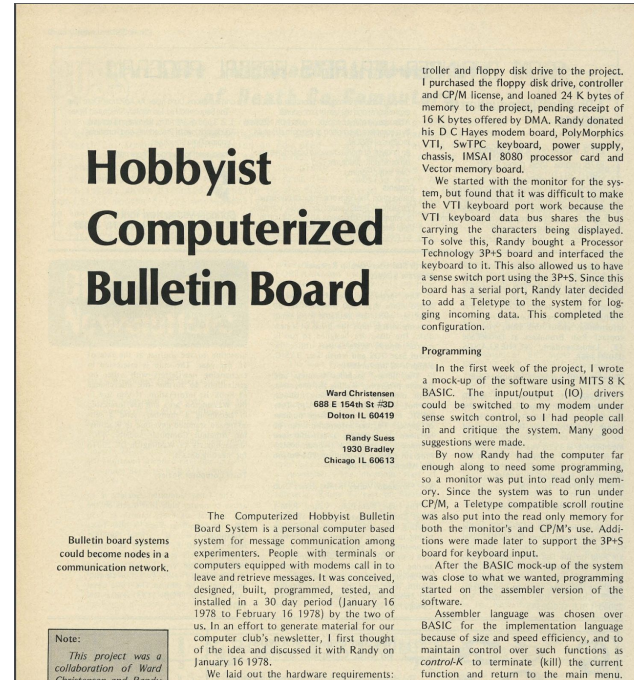
About this work

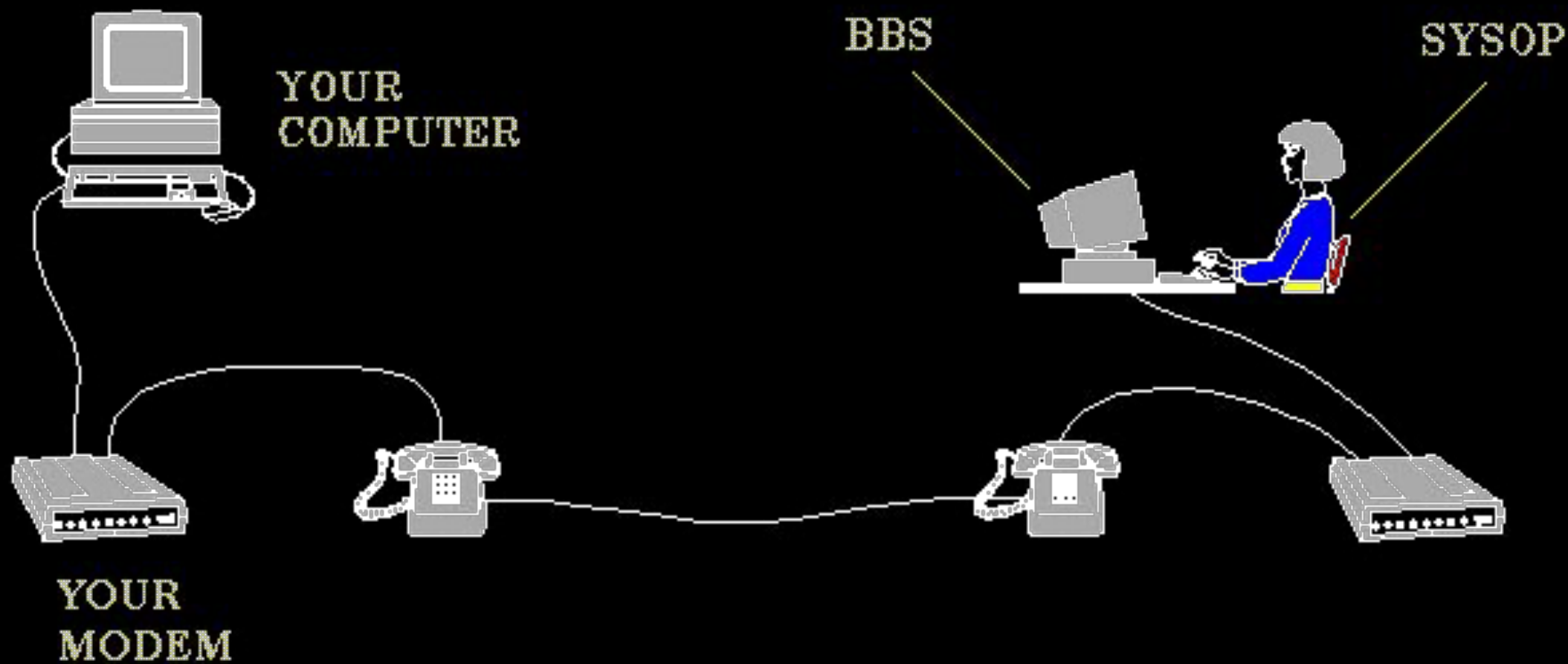
- Archival Methods + Oral Histories between 2019-2021
- Extraordinary team of advisors: Meg Leta Jones, danah boyd, Dan Bouk, and Leslie Harris

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1. What were BBSs?
 2. Why were they important?
 3. How was content moderated on BBSs?

WHAT ARE COMPUTER BULLETIN BOARD SYSTEMS?

- Social Media (sort of...) was born in a snowstorm in Chicago!
- Ward Christensen and Randy Suess created the first BBS in 1978 to talk with their computer club





HOW YOU CONNECT TO A BULLETIN BOARD

File Area [1-31], [L]ist, [H]elp, [Q]uit, [ENTER = ALL]: [1]

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|
| 1. | New Uploads | 2. | Special Downloads |
| 3. | Communications | 4. | Internet Utilities |
| 5. | TriBBS Utilities | 6. | BBS Software |
| 7. | BBS Utilities | 8. | Anti-Virus |
| 9. | File Compression | 10. | Text Files |
| 11. | Word Processors/Editors | 12. | Windows 95/NT Utilities |
| 13. | DOS Utilities | 14. | Windows 3.1 Utilities |
| 15. | Sound/Audio/Music Utilities | 16. | Graphics/Image Utilities |
| 17. | Games [Windows] | 18. | Games [DOS] |
| 19. | Game Levels [WADs etc..] | 20. | Online BBS Doors/Games |
| 21. | LORD/LORD II Utilities | 22. | Programming Tools |
| 23. | Business Utilities | 24. | Home/Finance |
| 25. | Self-Improvement | 26. | Educational/Childrens Programs |
| 27. | Miscellaneous Other | 28. | Wildcat 5 Utilities/Games |
| 29. | USR PalmPilot Utilities | 30. | Christian Interest |
| 31. | File Uploading Area | | |

- End of File Area List -

[1-31], [L]ist, [A]ll, [S]ort, [F]ind, [H]elp, [Q]uit, [ENTER = NEXT]: []



BIG WHEELS... KEEP
ON TURNING?

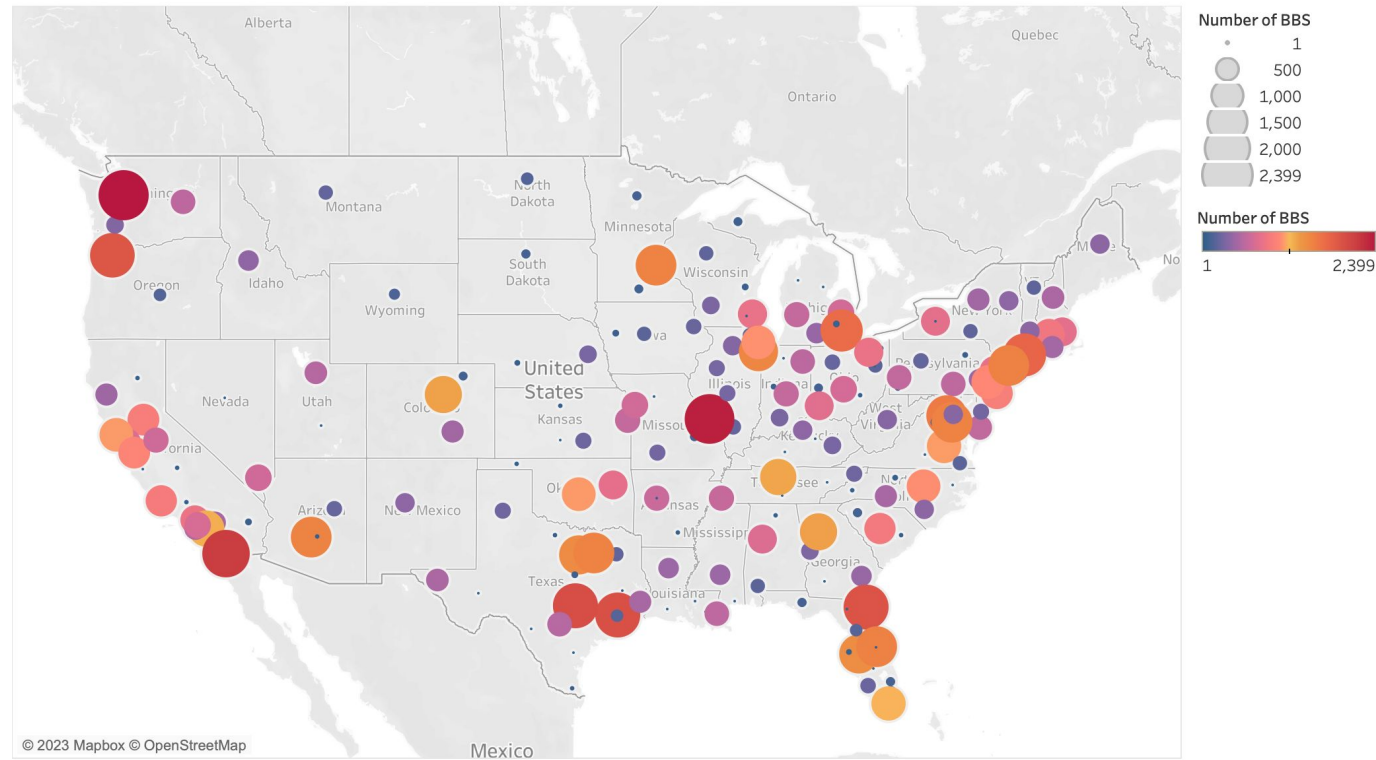


CURRENT INTERNET HISTORIOGRAPHY

- Focus on one type of network protocol – TCP/IP – that would eventually consume All Networks
- Linear Narrative of Gov / Corporate growth



Bulletin Board Systems by Area Code



Map based on Longitude (generated) and Latitude (generated). Color shows sum of Number of BBS. Size shows sum of Number of BBS. Details are shown for Area Code.

BBSs 1978 - PRESENT

LOCALLY OWNED AND
OPERATED!

FARM TO TABLE INTERNET!

STORY TIME



- Created the Federal Whistleblower BBS for Rep. Bob Wise (D-W.Va.) on the House Government Operations Committee
- Reminds us that BBS technology is a background, not a solution





SALVATRIX

- Small networks because dialing in was expensive
- Geographic proximity = making friends IRL -> learning more BBSs to dial -> making friends IRL

Oh, yeah. He got really PO'd; he had dozen online games, including Legion of

THE KEEP Info Services

THE Electronic Renaissance - Eugene's Premier information Service

World-Link, Inter-Link nationwide chat networks.
Internet, World-Link, Major-Net, E-Mail & Forums.
Action Chat Teleconference with many channel themes:
Daily Electronic Newspaper, Daily Sports Scores, Stock Reports,
Weather, Music/Video Rating and more! Multi-User Online Games
including Tele-Arena Multi-User dungeon exploration game!

Call today with your Computer and Modem-

8 bits, No Parity
FREE 5 hour demo with your sign-up!
(503) 343-5015 - 2400 baud access number
344-4457 Voice

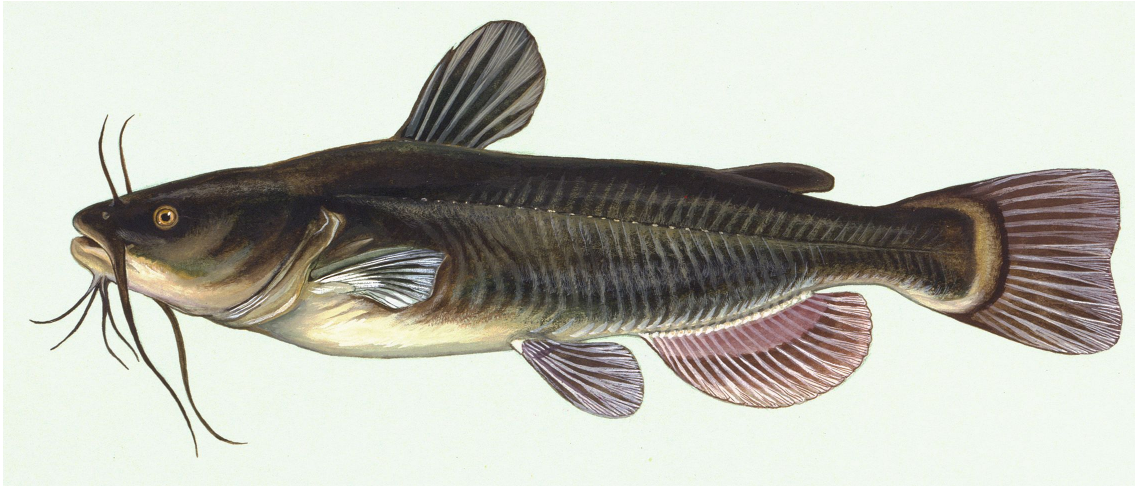
(503) 343-6010 - 14.4k baud
342-6010 Fax

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SYSOP VETTING

- Content moderation was seen not as something to balance free speech / expression, but as community management
- Literally who do you know here...

NELL MINNOW



- “Oh, I’ll tell you one thing that was interesting back in those days was that I that women would sometimes not know if they were talking to another woman. And kind of the secret code for proving that you were female to other women, was there were two questions: **One was what size panty hose do you wear?** Because men don’t know what sizes panty hose come in. And they would say, like seven or something, which is not even a thing. And now, we don’t even have pantyhose anymore, but okay. And **what’s the French manicure?**”

-OCT-16

12:40:12

members have more fun! Subscribe today!

CONCLUSION

Alternative Pasts ->
Alternative Futures

The KEEP BBS ==- M
1) Electronic Mail
2) Forums/Message
3) Library of File
4) Online Games
5) Matchmaker
6) User Registry
7) Calendar
8) Internet Service
9) Chat Rooms.
U) Account Setting
/RATES) Membership
/RULES) System Rule
=?) help with glob
.?) help with acti
+) Quicksan forum
*) Check for new m
G) Goodbye/Logoff

enter your choice here [=>

Want to know more about BBSs?

- Play around with the archives on textfiles.com
- Read “The Old Puppet Masters: Content Moderation on Computer Bulletin Board Systems” by Me

