Editorial: On IRIE Vol. 3

The third edition of the 'IRIE – International Review of Information Ethics' (06/2005) and the first under its new title after having been renamed from IJIE (due to a name similarity with another infoethics journal) is dedicated to the focal subject "Search Engines". Much attention has been paid to this subject during the past few years; most of all the necessity of (self)regulation of Search Engines and their suppliers has been discussed. In his essay "Funktionen, Probleme und Regulierung von Such-maschinen im Internet (Function, Problems, and Regulation of Search Engines in the Internet – an extended abstract in English is enclosed)", Christoph Neuberger reports on this debate in Germany as well as on the most recent results of the communi-cation sciences. The author contributed to the research project "Transparency in the Net" (2003/4) which was carried out on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung (Bertelsmann Foundation). In the context of this project all the details of suppliers, offers, and users of Search Engines in the German language were empirically analyzed for the first time. Fur-thermore, we publish an English translation of the "Code of Conduct" which also was developed in the context of the already mentioned research project. I like to take the opportunity of expressing my deep-est thanks to Marcell Machill for allowing both translation and publishing.

The great importance which is attached to the subject is perhaps expressed at the best by the title of a recently published book. Under the headline "Die Google-Gesellschaft (The Google Society)"[1] it claims to target not only Search Engines in specific but the change of the cultural handling of knowl-edge on the whole. According to the authors it is perfectly legitimate to subsume the complex subject under the brand of the most common internet search engine insofar as "a crucial tool like the Google Search Engine is employed as a synonym of our fundamentally different way of creating, chang-ing, and distributing knowledge in the 21st century" (p. 18). In this context the authors even go as far as exaggerating Search Engines to be a new "universal interface of man and information" (p. 20). Surely it is possible to challenge such a view, but there remains the question once opened by the develop-ments in the past ten years, what information ethics is able to say on the internet at all if it remains silent on the offers currently most used in the net, particu-larly as by the help of them billions of US $ are made every month.

In so far I am happy of being able to present four essays covering this subject. Certainly they do not deliver a complete practical philosophy of search engines but they perfectly highlight some very important aspects like "Ethical and Political Issues in Search Engines" (Hinman), the necessity of the "Symmetry in Confidence" in search engines (Rieder), search engines and their relation to the "Ethical subject" (Blanke) and finally the "Problem of Privacy in Public" (Tavani).

An area not covered in this issue is the important economic aspect of search engines. The recently published report "Das Google-Yahoo Ökosystem (The Google-Yahoo Ecosystem)"[2] e.g. points out to the fact that by search engines a new "ecosystem" of smaller suppliers is coming into existence chal-lenging the incumbents. In so far, the subject of this special issue will definitely be on the IRIE´s future agenda especially when a more economic subject will be chosen as a theme of an issue yet to come.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to the authors for their essays and to the reviewers for their reviews. Special thanks go out to Karsten Weber, who stood in for me during my holidays, as well as to Mirko Wittwar who despite of being com-pletely booked out did the necessary translations on time.

Have an exciting reading!

Michael Nagenborg, Guest Editor.

This is issue is supplemented by two articles that do not fall under the focus of 'search engines' but complement it in one or the other way. Thomas Hoeren argues in 'Laws, Ethics and Electronic Com-merce' that the Internet is leading to a demateri-alization, deterritorialization, extemporalisation and depersonalisation of law and thereby the legal system loses its traditional (Roman law) roots (per-son, space, time). Besides selfregulatory ambitions and technological perfection of the tools for it (like

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[1] Kai Lehmann, Michael Schetsche, hg.: Die Google-Gesellschaft. Vom digitalen Wandel des Wissens. Bielefeld: Transcipt 2005.

[2] http://www.berlecon.de/research/spotlights.php?we_objectID=227

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we can perfectly assess in the area of search engines) according to Hoeren further legal clarification is needed. Secondly, the 'Attitudes of UK Librarians and Librarianship Students to Ethical Issues' have been empirically examined by Kevin Ball and Charles Oppenheim. The Students are found to be in no case more liberal than the practitioners – unlike one would expect – but are even more rigorous especially in the case of Internet filtering e.g.. Do they emulate a stance of responsibility pressed by the difficulties of the job market? In the end the authors observe that the substantial efforts of teaching ethics within the curriculum lead only into a mediocre level of awareness and sensitivity for the underlying ethical issues of the information sciences and professions.

Finally the reviews provided in this issue for the first time and from now on regularly shall introduce and/or discuss important and interesting publications in the field of information ethics. You are all invited for suggestions and/or volunteering for writing a review on request.

We hope you once again can enjoy this issue. It may inspire your thinking, scientific working and your personal and professional practice.

Yours,

Rafael Capurro, Thomas Hausmanninger, Karsten Weber and Felix Weil, the Editors.