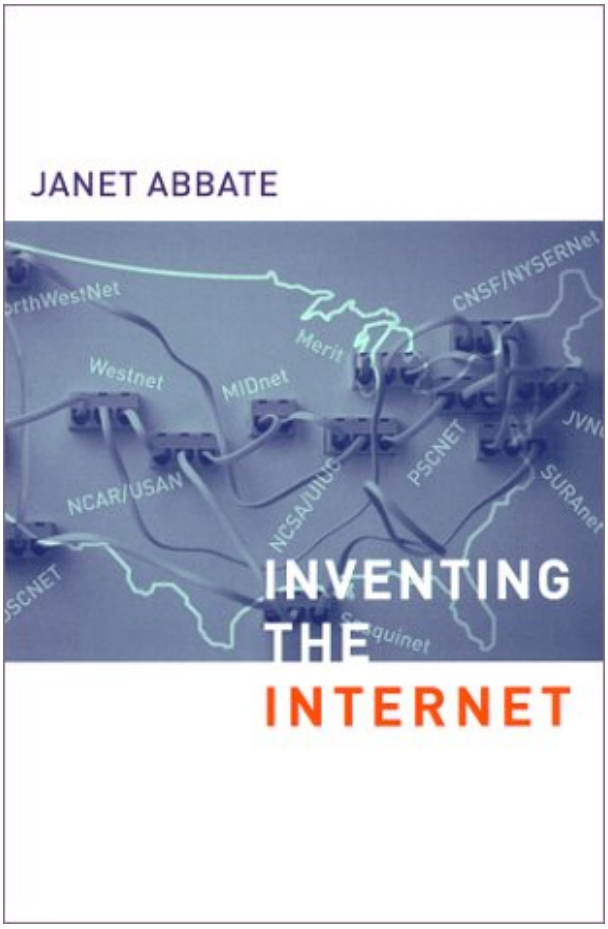
INVENTING THE INTERNET (INSIDE TECHNOLOGY) BY JANET ABBATE



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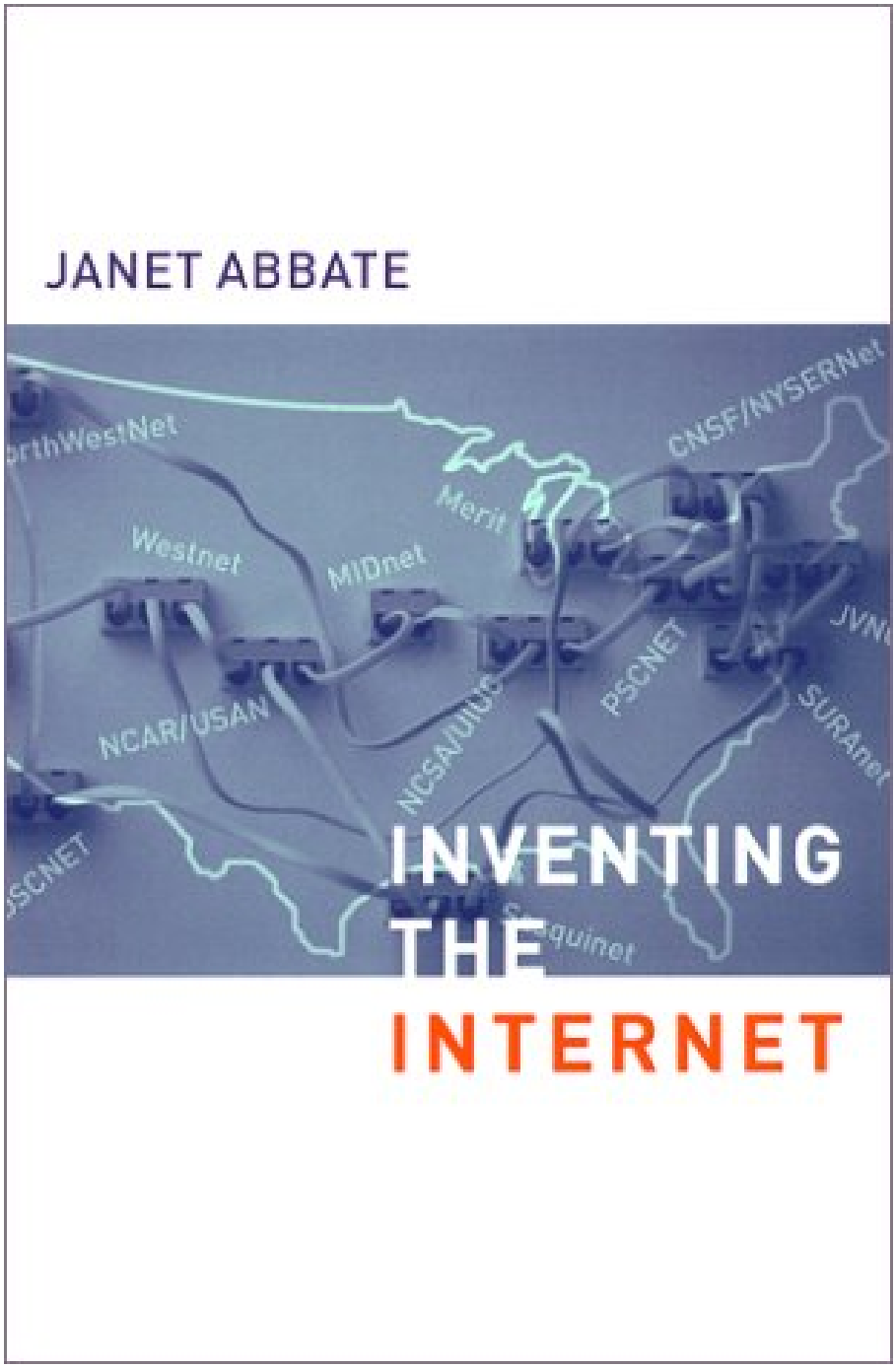

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Since the late 1960s the Internet has grown from a single experimental network serving a dozen sites in the United States to a network of networks linking millions of computers worldwide. In Inventing the Internet, Janet Abbate recounts the key players and technologies that allowed the Internet to develop; but her main focus is always on the social and cultural factors that influenced the Internets design and use. The story she unfolds is an often twisting tale of collaboration and conflict among a remarkable variety of players, including government and military agencies, computer scientists in academia and industry, graduate students, telecommunications companies, standards organizations, and network users.

The story starts with the early networking breakthroughs formulated in Cold War think tanks and realized in the Defense Department's creation of the ARPANET. It ends with the emergence of the Internet and its rapid and seemingly chaotic growth. Abbate looks at how academic and military influences and attitudes shaped both networks; how the usual lines between producer and user of a technology were crossed with interesting and unique results; and how later users invented their own very successful applications, such as electronic mail and the World Wide Web. She concludes that such applications continue the trend of decentralized, user-driven development that has characterized the Internet's entire history and that the key to the Internet's success has been a commitment to flexibility and diversity, both in technical design and in organizational culture.

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.
Hard to read for a non techie.
By S. Salvadore
Very technical and hard to follow.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.
How the Military Freed University R&D From the Short Term Market Imperatives
By Jean-Guy Rens
Janet Abbate's analysis of the birth of the Internet establishes systematic links between the technological development and its organizational, social, and cultural environment. There are many histories of the Internet

- in print and, of course, online. Most of them are full of well-documented information on technology and history. Some even refer to the underlying concepts of communication, information, and knowledge. But Abbate's work is the first that goes beyond mere facts or scholarly exercise, and her findings are most revealing.

The beginning of the Internet is well known: it was a U.S. Defense research program called Arpanet. What is less well known is the internal structure of the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) that incubated the network development during its first 10-12 years. Inventing the Internet clarifies how the small agency was created in 1958 to respond to the Soviets' successful launch of the world's first artificial satellite (Sputnik). ARPA never owned a single laboratory. Its role was to create centres of excellence in universities through the financing of research projects in defence-related domains.

ARPA had several project offices that were created and disbanded according to the ever-evolving priorities of the Department of Defense. These offices were managed by directors from the academic world - not from the military. In theory, the offices' budgets were approved by the Congress. In practice, ARPA's management used the pretext of the "national interest" umbrella - and we all know how broad the concept of national interest in the United States is - to remain out of reach of political interference. The result was a purely scientific culture benefiting from the entirely free environment that came with the universities and the plentiful money that came from the military budgets. When ARPA decided in 1969 to connect the supercomputers scattered among university campuses, it had no political or financial difficulty attracting the best computer scientists from all over the United States.

The originality of Arpanet is this intrinsic freedom, in contrast to market laws and official control. Inventing the Internet emphasizes the exceptional character of ARPA, which seems in radical contravention to both the "laissez-faire" dogma and the state-intervention ideology. Arpanet was born in an atmosphere of total confidence within a community whose wholehearted purpose was to connect the computer equipment from as many universities as possible, while imposing the least restricting standards and interfaces. Packet-switching technology was the tool that seemed to impose the fewest constraints : Arpanet was thus based on packet-switching instead of the circuit-switching technology that characterized all other telecommunications networks in the world.

Without detailing all the analyses contained in Abbate's work, I shall give the example of the tensions between the scientists united around Arpanet and the telecommunications carriers backed by their respective governments. Indeed, carriers were being pressed by their business customers to provide them with data transmission. Contrary to a widespread idea, the carriers quickly understood the advantages of packet-switching over circuit-switching. As far back as 1975, the carriers had created the packet-switching X.25 protocol, which centralized the management of the new networks inside the core. The goals of this centralized architecture were to relieve the end user of conducting complex interconnection procedures, to transmit information reliably and, of course, to boost the carriers' profit. On the other hand, computer scientists wanted to move intelligence (and control) out of the network and establish it in the host computers, because they were themselves end users and they did not mind making an extra effort to get the services they wanted, at reduced costs. Moreover, the TCP/IP protocol had been created to make up for an unreliable network in a war environment.

Abbate rightly notes that the TCP/IP and X.25 protocols were not technologically but architecturally incompatible. In the duel between X.25 and TCP/IP, Canada played a leading role: it led an anti-Internet crusade with the help of Great Britain, France, and Japan. What motivated this opposition? IBM was proposing to use its SNA standard to connect its computers, while Canada and its allies wanted to protect their home markets against IBM's monopolistic practices. Canada feared the creation of a computer

communications monopoly more than any other country because of the rapid growth of its trans-border data traffic with the United States. It saw in this a threat to its very existence. When the computer scientists proposed TCP/IP instead of IBM's protocol (SNA), the suspicion turned into panic, since this protocol depended directly on the U.S. Department of Defense. This is how the Canadian government and its principal carrier, Bell Canada, ended up being the principal architects of the X.25 protocol and the main adversaries of TCP/IP. This hidden conflict gave birth to the Datapac network in 1976, which was presented to the public as a world first and became the data-transmission protocol in Canada.

Each chapter of Inventing the Internet sheds new light even on facts that we already knew, as it reveals the real stakes of the Internet's formative years - and it does so without taking sides between the conflicting players. Abbate exposes the organizational structures of the involved forces and leaves it to the reader to judge. An example of her absence of bias: she is one of the few authors to call the transfer of the Internet's backbone management to private operators at the beginning of the 1990s "privatization": " The final step toward opening the network to all users and activities would be privatization ". (1) She is correct: the transfer of a publicly owned infrastructure to a series of private corporations, even if there is no formal sale, is called "privatization" everywhere in the world. So should it be in the United States.

There is, however, one major error, all the more egregious since the book is otherwise so well documented. Throughout Inventing the Internet, Abbate refers to the "Canadian PTT." She seems to be confusing the Trans-Canada Telephone System (TCTS) with the European PTT. (2) The TCTS was the grouping of the main Canadian carriers, most of which were private operators (as in the case of Bell Canada) and not state-owned corporations. Although this is a gross error, it should not prevent us from reading this fundamental analysis.

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(1)Cf. page 195.

(2) The error can be found at pp. 153, 163, and 168.

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Great Stocking Stuffer for the Techies on Your List
By Gayle Simpson, PhD
For how long have you been aware of the web? Five years? Six? Didn't it seem as though we woke up one morning and there it was? Not so, as you will find out when you read this fascinating account of the way in which Internet technology took on a life of its own and morphed into the gigantic marketplace/library/chatroom that we think of today.
For example, did you know that the techniques used in the Internet were born out of Cold War paranoia? Or that email was an afterthought to the original system that unexpectedly became the most popular application of the network? Or that in the early 1980s, the military agency running the Internet was so afraid of hackers breaking into the system ("unauthorized penetrations," as one army major put it) that they split the network in two, one for the military and one for the civilians? Read the book for the details on these and other intriguing techno-tidbits.

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