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**PERSONAL EFFECTS: EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF  
PERSONAL-INDUSTRY TECHNOLOGY**

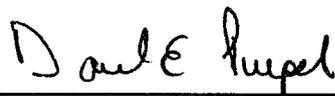
by

**Robert Alan King**

**A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Greensboro  
1996**

Approved by



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**Dr. David Purpel, Dissertation Advisor**

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**KING, ROBERT ALAN, Ph.D. Personal Effects: Education in the Age of Personal-Industry Technology. (1996) Directed by Dr. David Purpel. 227 pp.**

This work explains and models a “personal” way of doing education in the current era of personal-industry electronic technology represented by the computer. Seeing how powerful the now-fading mass-industry technological paradigm (represented by the factory) has been in terms of promulgating a one-size-fits-all, quasi-personal and quasi-social education, this work explicates and models a way of doing education which is instead highly-personal and highly-social, in accord with the potential of the new technological paradigm of personal-industry. The question of whether or not this new personal mode of education *will* promulgate itself as successfully as the former mass-industry model did is addressed, and resistances to the explicit and implicit changes the new paradigm represents are outlined and discussed.

The argument is made that technological paradigms signify through the instantiation and dissemination of different functional logics. The “message” in the mass-industrial model of technology is held to be “broadcast and obey,” in the sense that the overall system of mass-industry requires broadcast and obey in order to function. The “message” in the personal-industry model of technology is held to be “dialogue,” in the sense that the overall system of personal-industry requires dialogue in order to function. Technology is thus seen as having instantiated, functional-logic meaning -- based on physio-logic extensions and disseminated via metaphors in ordinary language -- rather than use-meaning (i.e., as a neutral tool) or propositional-meaning (i.e., as wholly-

explainably good or bad).

In addition to exploring and outlining the implications which this change in technological paradigms has for education, implications in the personal-industry paradigm are explored in the areas of ethics, epistemology, spirituality, and theory of self. The argument is made that the increased practice of dialogue (in particular, electronically mediated dialogue) required in conditions of personal-industry brings about deep changes in ethical, epistemological, spiritual, and self understandings. Some of these deep changes or “personal effects” are, again, modeled as well as argued for and explicated in this work, for example in the sense that most of the text in the work is in dialogical/collaborative form.

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## INTRODUCTION

### ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

*In this introduction I write a brief synopsis of the document and state the overall idea, intent, or thesis (Section One), I briefly situate the document in its institutional and discursive fields (Section Two), and I briefly write about the document's authors (Section Three).*

#### **Section One: Synopsis and Thesis**

The role of technology and technological paradigms is central in accounting for the development, shape, and direction of personal, cultural, and societal practices and ideologies. For example our society is currently in widespread transition from a *mass-industry* technological paradigm, represented by the factory, to a *personal-industry* technological paradigm, represented by the personal computer, and this move is creating wholesale changes in the experience and understanding of selves, cultures, and society.

In this document I try to do an adequate accounting of some of the changes implied in the move to *personal-industry* – particularly as these changes apply to teachers and learners as intersubjective, social individuals. In other words I focus on *personal effects*, changes in self understandings and interpersonal relations (including teacher-student, peer group, and self-to-larger-group relationships).

In Chapter One I map a “macro” perspective, arguing that the change in technological paradigm from mass-industry to personal-industry puts into effect changes in human communication patterns, from an emphasis on monologic forms to an emphasis on

dialogic forms, which in turn produce new experiencings and understandings of self, cultures, and society.

Chapter Two is a reflexive enactment of the theme outlined in Chapter One; it is a conversational/dialogic text produced via email on the topic of the personal/interpersonal communication dynamics involved in using electronic communication media.

Chapter Three is also an email conversation, this time on the topic of curriculum theory and pedagogy, mainly in the context of reflections on a research project involving electronic media and interdisciplinary teaching.

In the first part of Chapter Four I continue the institutional focus of Chapter Three, but return to a monological writing format to take a sustained look at the institutional politics of desire as they get played out differently in mass-industrial and personal-industrial forms of education. My argument is basically that personal-industry enables a very different -- and ultimately radically different -- politics of desire to emerge in educational praxis. In the second part of Chapter Four I begin an exploration of the deep-cultural politics of desire -- my argument being that the dynamics of personal-industry are gradually transforming discursive cultural subtexts which underwrite texts of praxis.

In Chapter Five I give the deep-cultural perspective on desire a further and harder spin, this time into the terrain of addiction and spirituality. My argument here is that the dynamics of personal-industry, in the form of "addiction to communication technologies" are in the process of transforming our understanding of God.

In Chapter Six I draw in the reins a bit to address ethical questions which tend to swirl around the rapid extension of the personal-industrial technological paradigm. This chapter is

once again in the form of an email conversation, and focuses mainly on the concepts of response-ability (literally defined as the ability to respond) and responsibility (the moral/ethical sort).

Chapter Seven is an email conversation which explores various theories of selfhood which emerge out of interaction in electronic media.

Chapter Eight functions as a dialogical mirror for reflecting back on the process of dissertation itself, and for reflecting forward as well, towards the “production of the unconscious” as an area of future involvement and study.

My attention to technology and technological paradigms in this document is not intended to be reductive or to be used reductively. Rather it is intended to allow for a more significant and balanced inclusion of technology and techno-theory into overall accountings of self, culture, and society in our current age. In other words I regard my focus on technology as somewhat corrective, holistic and hermeneutic rather than reductive in character, and my intention is to model an inclusive, interdisciplinary attention to technology which can be easily and meaningfully correlated with other topics and topic areas.

My thesis is that technology and technological paradigms are deeply and pervasively/interrelatedly involved in the production of self, cultural, and social understandings as well as in the production of widgets and gadgets -- and that we ignore *any* aspect of technology (i.e., material or ideological) literally at our own expense. This work therefore attempts to explain and model understandings of self, culture, and society in ways which *include* current technology deeply, pervasively, and interrelatedly.

## **Section Two: Institutional and Discursive Contexts**

This document is written as a dissertation in the interdisciplinary institutional field known as "the social and cultural foundations of education." What I hope to add to the ongoing conversation in the field of educational foundations is a heightened sense of the "technological foundation" of education.

The background discursive fields within which the document can be situated include constructivist philosophy, complexity theory, media theory, and feminist theory. This document is situated in these various background contexts and draws its sustenance from premises and patterns which these various discursive fields share.

The foreground discursive fields within which the document can be situated include what I refer to as techno-theory -- the most recent incarnation of which is commonly known as "cyborg theory" -- and theory of dialogue. I hope this document adds to the ongoing conversation in techno-theory by attaching an interpersonal, intersubjective dimension, grounded in desire and dialogue, to the cyborg figure. I hope this document enriches the ongoing "dialogue on dialogue" by heightening awareness of the unique personal and interpersonal effects which inhere in doing dialogue via electronic, written exchange.

## **Section Three: Authors**

I *guess* you could say that I am the primary author of this document, a Euro-American male with a background in philosophy (BA) and visual art (MFA). I am more than slightly

irreverent and skeptical of well-trodden paths, and I like to write in the spirit of aesthetic exploration. In Laurel Richardson's terms, "I like to write because I want to find something out. I like to write in order to learn something that I didn't know before I wrote it."

(Richardson, 517). What this means in my case is that for the most part I write with others, in dialogue, seeking to co-create insight and knowledge which can then be supplemented with textual sources when necessary and appropriate. There is more than just creative madness to this method, however. In part I write differently in order to effect changes in what Linda Brodkey calls "the culture of readers who write and writers who read" (Brodkey, 5), and I model a non-text based, dialogical approach to learning in part to challenge the hegemony of author-ity which I think is not-so-innocently enshrined in standard writing practices such as the monological essay.

I say "I *guess* you could say I am the primary author of this document" because, whereas it is obvious that I am the one now assembling the final version myself, in fact almost all of the writing of this document was done dialogically and intersubjectively via electronic media. My main writing partner for the work is Beth Baldwin, a doctoral candidate in English Rhetoric and Composition. Her background is in biology (BA) and creative writing (MFA). She describes herself as "a sardonic; a cynic with a sense of humor," and she also writes in the spirit of aesthetic exploration, augmented considerably in her case by being a poet as well as a scholar. We have been, in Plato's sense, "two going together, inventing a reason or excuse along the way." The primary author of this document is thus in many ways a dialogical, conversational relationship mediated by electronic technology.

In addition to challenging the author-ity of the monologic text, and wanting to avoid what I experience as the alienation of solitary writing, my point in going out of the way to produce a conversational, intersubjective text is to assert my feeling that each and every person has to make their own meaning, their own sense out of life, and I think that's both a highly social and highly individual process. Mostly I feel this process gets thwarted in mass-industry education, which I describe as quasi-social and quasi-individual. Books and teachers are structured in central positions which strongly imply that they somehow contain and transfer the meaning in life -- that it's somehow "out there" or "in them," in texts, in the library, in English teachers or Physics teachers depending on one's tastes and abilities, or now "on the World Wide Web." There seems to me to be too much slippage, too much "hit and miss" in this. It seems to me misdirected, ass-backwards and infused with a crazy sort of objectified and consumerist logic, and it's pretty much always felt that way to me, at least since high school.

In writing this dissertation I've added to this basic feeling the idea that there may actually be an explanation for what I take to be the sorry state of affairs in education -- an explanation which does not go to the likes of a conspiracy theory, does not have to posit a preponderance of mean-spirited or otherwise benighted fellow travelers at the helm, and which speaks to the ways in which well-meaning "student centered" education can sometimes be thwarted by structural features of education (e.g., hidden curriculum).

In other words by thinking through the "hidden" role of technology in self, cultures, and society, and by seeing how powerfully the effect of the mass-industry

technological paradigm has been in terms of promulgating the sort of “one size fits all” sort of education (quasi-social and quasi-personal rather than fully and richly personal and social), I’ve acquired a measure of compassion as well as a measure of concern that perhaps we should pay more or different sorts of attention to technology. I try to imagine and attend to this project of giving “different sorts of attention to technology” in this document.

In turn I’m somewhat hopeful about the power of the personal-industry paradigm to work its different ways, and I regard the fact of this document itself as a sometimes and understandably awkward but prime example of what I hope are things to come within the personal-industry paradigm -- education which is at one and the same time highly individual and highly social. In this sense I try to describe and enact personal-industry education in this document, but it is inevitably to some extent a “futuristic” enterprise since we are in my opinion situated at the inception of the personal-industry era.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### A MACRO PERSPECTIVE ON PERSONAL-INDUSTRY

*In this chapter I map a “macro” or large-pattern perspective, arguing that the change in technological paradigms from mass-industry to personal-industry puts into effect changes in human communication patterns, from an emphasis on monologic forms to an emphasis on dialogic forms, which in turn produce new experiencings and understandings of self, cultures, and society.*

*The weighted center of this chapter is the idea that understanding what technology means (i.e., in terms of effects on society, institution, or self), hinges on understanding how technology means. I write about this in Section Three. In Section One I offer a definition of technology. In Section Two I write about the transition from a technological paradigms of mass-industry to one of personal-industry. In Section Four I briefly outline various discursive traditions which can accommodate the shift to personal-industry meaning. In Section Five I briefly outline relatively new discursive traditions which provide very hopeful sites of “adaptation” to the circumstances of personal-industry.*

#### **Section One: A Definition of Technology**

I use the word ‘technology’ broadly and/or in several senses. I certainly think, for example, following Walter Ong and others, that writing constitutes technology, so in this sense I use the word broadly, to encompass any human activity which is mediated by an external tool. In this sense I draw a line at speech, but even here the line I draw is wavy; I don’t think speech is a technology, because there is no external tool involved, but the situation is complex because in some sense language is an externalization, and therefore ‘technological,’ and rhetoric and mnemonics for example are certainly ‘techniques.’ In any case my understanding of technology is that it is part of human nature -- something which human beings have literally never

been without, could not be without, and therefore aren't without in an ontological sense. My definition of technology is thus general but pointed at the same time.

In the general sense I find Foucault's taxonomy somewhat useful:

"As a context, we must understand that there are four major types of "technologies," each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality." (*Technologies of the Self*, 18)

I find this taxonomy only "somewhat useful" because the current wave of electronic technologies confound it; electronic communication technologies are, at one and the same time, technologies of production, signification, power, and self. Nonetheless, for purposes of definition/delineation, in this document I will be focusing on the "technology of the self" aspect of electronic communication technologies, for reasons which relate to the new technological paradigm being one of individual or personal-industry.

## **Section Two: Mass-industry to Personal-industry, Monologue to Dialogue**

My position is that the personal-industry technological paradigm is complex. By this I mean that it is still within the overall industrial paradigm (computers are, after all, industrially produced items) but the signifying logic and consequent effects on

understandings of self, cultures, and society are qualitatively different. In other words I think it is very misleading to think of the emerging current paradigm as “post-industrial,” yet also very misleading to think that the change is less than truly and complexly “significant” in its overall internal logic and in its myriad “special effects.”

It is also my position that one of the most important signifiers of the change from mass-industry (represented by the factory) to personal-industry (represented by the computer) is the overall shift in emphasis from monological forms of communication to dialogical forms. Monologue is not disappearing in the era of personal-industry, any more than dialogue disappeared in the era of mass-industry -- again the story is more complex than that. Instead monologue is gradually being replaced by dialogue at the center of things -- again, a matter of emphasis which is emphatic and complex enough to connote qualitative change in human communication patterns and hence in intra-personal and inter-personal understandings.

The dialogical “sign” of technological change is already increasingly prominent in many different social contexts. Writing from within academic culture, John Shotter puts it this way, “Our talk (and our writing) about talk is beginning to take a dialogical or conversational turn” (Shotter, 1) Research protocols, particularly narrative and/or qualitative research, reflect a turn towards dialogism, joint authorship is becoming more accepted, and a variety of theorists of dialogue, including Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin, seem to be attracting sustained interest. But it's not just in academic culture that this dialogic turn is occurring.

In corporate culture "groupware" (electronic conferencing software programs which facilitate dialogue and multilogue) and e-mail are now used extensively to organize many workplace functions. In media culture, talk radio and talk TV are proliferating wildly, and in the process dialogue is being powerfully modeled and "advertised" as an organizing principle. In government or state culture there is increasing use of "electronic town meetings" and other dialogically framed interactions. In scientific culture, science is now sometimes framed as "a conversation with nature." In popular culture millions of people are now routinely "talking" to one another via the Internet.

My proposal is that while many things must converge in order to bring about a change in a general organizing principle or "regime of truth," the single most important change, the one which has "tipped the balance" towards dialogue, is the change in technological paradigms from the "one to many" mass-industry model to the "one to one" or "many to many" personal-industry model.

When the common or standard technological logic and signifier are personal and individuating rather than impersonal and massifying, dialogue becomes of paramount importance. In a mass-industry model, where the basic logic is "broadcast and obey" and where the standard signifier is the factory, dialogue is not terribly important. Instead, what's needed is sufficient discipline and control to ensure that when broadcasts are issued they are taken in and acted on appropriately/obediently by large numbers of appropriately "grouped" people. In other words the need for

discipline, control, and grouping practices in the modern era of mass-industry era can be directly correlated with the “broadcast and obey” logic of the mass-industry technological paradigm and its central signifier, the factory. There need be nothing personal or dialogic about a mass system in order for the system to function. It may be *nicer* if people are “dialogued with” before orders are broadcast or actions taken, but the internal, structural logic of the mass-industry paradigm does not facilitate, require, or demand dialogue.

In a personal-industry model on the other hand, dialogue and communication become necessary. The common or standard signifier in the personal-industry model is again the personal computer, and in a condition where each person becomes an individuated center of activity at their computer, dialogue is required in order to bring about any sort of coordinated effort. Communication and connectivity come to be emphasized over discipline and control because the internal, structural logic of a personal-industrial organizational model facilitates, requires, and demands an emphasis on dialogue. Dialogue is part of the system -- built right in, so to speak, in the functional logic of connectivity which informs the computer itself.

In other words, monologue is (to use McLuhan’s term) an “extension” of the internal logic of mass-industry, and dialogue is an “extension” of the internal logic of personal-industry. As the personal-industry paradigm gradually re-replaces the mass-industry paradigm, as more and more people hook up to and identify with computers

rather than factories, we see a flourishing of dialogue because the logic of the new paradigm requires it.

### **Section Three: How Technologies Mean**

Internal logics are for me (from the above) the “content” of technologies – they are in effect the *way* technologies mean. “Mediums *are* messages” because they have identifiable internal logics. It is not the case that technologies are content-neutral, nor is it the case that technologies are content-rich (i.e., in propositional meanings or moral premises and conclusions). Instead technologies express as content the particular functional logic with which and according to which they were constructed, and in this sense technologies are “content-deep” – the content is literally built right in. In other words, the dilemma between technologies as neutral “tools” and technologies as highly charged “ideologies” is a false one in my reckoning. In relation to issues of content, technologies are neither tools nor ideologies, instead they are literalizations of different functional logics. These functional logics then generate metaphors which proliferate throughout society.

George Gilder asserts for example that the functional logic of the mass-industry paradigm is that of “one to many” or “broadcast.” Baudrillard might call it the logic of “production.” I might call it the logic of monologue, or the logic of the megaphone – a logic wherein the point is to amplify production of singular but undifferentiated items, whether the singular thing is a message, an object, or an “educated person.” Since it is

a functional logic, it is by the way and of course a logic which “works” – for example, the fact that there are “*more* college graduates than ever before” constitutes a success in the logic of mass-industry. And, also along the lines of “amplified production,” the mass-industry paradigm has tended to proliferate and circulate “muscular” metaphors as expressions of its functional logic/content – for example “industrial might” and “industrial strength.”

The personal-industry paradigm has a very different functional logic and hence a very different, but equally “deep,” content. For example, the functional logic of a computer, the reason for which it is made, is to make connections. A computer is literally a connection-making-machine, literally a collection of connections, synapses, switches. In other words the content of personal-industry is connectivity or, by extension, “intelligence” (the making of connections). The computer is a neural machine, not a muscle machine, and this is reflected in such metaphors as “powerful memory” and “artificial intelligence.”

Technological paradigms are thus “deep” because their content is literally built into their function. But they are deep in other senses as well. Because of their “functional” logic, technologies can all be related to autonomic, “deep” body function. I think this is why we don’t pay much attention to technologies unless or until they produce problems for us; the same goes for breathing, circulation of blood, and other autonomic functions. Even though autonomic function, like technology, is fundamental to our very existence, we tend to take it for granted and pay next to no attention to it,

and if/when we do pay attention we tend to do so in order to go back to ignoring it again. Again we routinely miss or mis-name the importance of technological paradigms in much the same way that we miss the importance of autonomic function -- we simply lack the cultural means to register awareness of their "deep" significance. I think it is for this same reason that we tend to regard technological development as "out of control" -- we have very little interest or experience in accessing or controlling autonomic function through conscious awareness, and by extension technological development seems "beyond our conscious control."

Whereas some cultures have meditative traditions which call attention to autonomic function (breathing, in particular), the West has pretty much rid itself of such traditions if it ever had them. Without access to or awareness of our autonomic function, we are -- again by extension -- literally without access to understanding the significance of technologies.

In a closely related sense it is also "deeply" ingrained in Western socio-cultural ideology to either ignore the body or attend to it only as a site of potential trouble, for example as a site of sin or a site of entropy/disease. Our societal obsessions with fitness, health and beauty, and to some extent disease, in effect only thinly mask or substitute for the fact that we are systematically ignorant of the deep, autonomic body. And this ignorance is of course "deeply" approved of and structured into persistent and thoroughly institutionalized socio-cultural ideologies, reflected for example in Christian immaterialism, Cartesian privileging of mind over body, education framed as an almost

entirely cognitive enterprise. It is very difficult for us to appreciate the significance of technological paradigms or other “deep body” issues because such issues and phenomena exist in our deeply approved, sanctified areas of ignorance.

However, one of the very interesting “inner loops” involved in the shift from mass-industry to personal-industry however is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the autonomic/deep body because the current wave of personal-industry is directly externalizing or extending our nervous system -- we are now externalizing or “autoamputating” (again McLuhan’s term) our intelligence apparatus, and this is making it very hard for us to remain “ignorant!” As long as we were seeing ourselves reflected in externalizations of musculature or skeletal systems, in metaphors such as “horsepower,” “structural steel,” or “industrial might” we were safely distanced, but now we are seeing ourselves reflected in “memory” and “intelligence,” which are much closer to what we have traditionally regarded to be unique about ourselves as humans. In other words in conditions of personal-industry the connections between “us” and “the technologies” are intra-systemic or direct rather than inter-systemic or inferential. It’s a leap to get from muscles to nerves, it’s only a buzz to get from autonomic to voluntary nerves.

I regard the first wave of electronic technologies as somewhat transitional in this regard. Televisions, telephones, radios all in different ways reflect ourselves -- again meaning here our specifically *human* proficiencies -- more powerfully than cars and steam engines do for example, but for various reasons they also enable us to

continue to distance ourselves at least somewhat from the reflections we see or hear in them. The people on the TV for example are like us, but also not like us. It is not so easy to make comfortable separations with second wave, personal-industry electronic technologies represented by the computer. What we routinely see or see/hear on the screen, at least in the interactive dimension of the Internet, are *our own personal* words, images, and voices, alone or in combination -- we much more literally see/hear ourselves.

In a way this section outlines three depth dimensions to the current electronic technologies -- one related to functional logics and two related to attitudes towards physicality -- and three dimensions seems about right! Clearly though, coming to terms with a three-dimensional technological paradigm is creating some newness and some discomfort, the alleviation of which I will turn to in the following two sections.

#### **Section Four: Sites of Accommodation to the New Circumstances of Personal-Industry**

There are pre-existing discursive and interpretive frames which offer some help in accommodating to the new circumstances of the personal-industry technological model. These sites/discourses have several things in common. First and foremost, they are discourses which arrange to have a place at the "table of signification" for materiality. Yet these are not simply discourses of materialism -- they are instead complex discourses where materiality has a role in complex processes of signification.

These discourses also share in non-binarism, and in positing interaction as the key to producing systemic coherence.

The reason I think these discourses “work” as sites of accommodation to personal-industry is because they mimic in a way the characteristics of the nervous system: they are all complexly inner/outer, material/immaterial like the nervous system is, consistently connective like the nervous system is, and consistently interactive, producing a “third term” via interactivity (which in the case of the nervous system, this third term is I suppose consciousness or awareness).

Several thought systems exemplify the new, complex order of personal-industry. In educational theory John Dewey’s system does this fairly clearly. His central concept of “experience” is complex and captures all of the features outlined above: inclusion of materiality into signification (i.e., one learns to do by doing), consistent disavowal of “either-or” thinking, and production of “third term” coherence (democracy) via interaction.

In the sciences, complexity theory displays the same basic features: the materiality of meaning is of course taken for granted in science (again, this is the kind of thing we routinely miss about science -- because for example we have no meditative tradition by which to connect to and understand autnomia -- so we tend to regard science as a runaway train, out of our control and beyond understanding). Complexity theory also evidences anti-binarism and dynamic coherence in its basic tenet that many of the phenomena we associate with life exist in a zone of complexity which is between

the either-or of chaos and order, and that within this zone of complexity a kind of "second order" emerges.

Switching contexts again "media theory" (Marshall McLuhan) also offers a map which is capable of accommodating the order of personal-industry. McLuhan's most central and famous formulation, "the medium is the message," embodies once again all of the salient features called out above. The medium itself -- in McLuhan's case meaning electronic broadcast media -- is accorded a central role in signification, the binary of medium vs. message is outrightly refused, and there is at least a clear allusion to a "mediated culture and selfhood" which spins out of the interactivity of humans and electronic media and (re)constitutes reality on new and different terms..

In some feminist theories there are, again, similar features. Adrienne Rich for example writes of defusing the either-or of "power over" vs. "passive eschewal of power." The third term she puts forth is that of "transformative power" and cites as one example or metaphor of an interactive, generative, material principle the art of pottery or vessel making -- an activity which asserts in its very doing (like experience, like dialogue, like electronic media) that "the vessel is anything but a "passive" receptacle: it is transformative -- active, powerful." (Rich, 98) And again, material practice is explicitly and inclusively tied to signification.

Finally in the general context of constructivism as a philosophical tradition, the dichotomy or either-or is between certain or positive knowledge on the one hand and relativism on the other is defused. The generative, interactive principle in this general

case is human intelligence. The world-description is that of a "constructed world," between and including relativism and positivism, a world in process -- again allied to a hyperreal world, a feminized world, a complex world, a democratized world, a world wherein materiality is part of signification.

All of these systems then, without exception but in different ways, establish parameters which match up quite well with the terms of personal-industry, a technological paradigm which intimately involves the materiality of technology as content-full and content-deep, and which features interaction as the means by which systemic coherence and "second order" are established and maintained.

#### **Section Five: Sites of Adaptation to the New Circumstances of Personal-industry**

In many ways both sides of my bifurcated focus on dialogue and technology can be seen as current "sites of adaptation" to personal-industry. On one side, theory of dialogue offers a fertile terrain to expand on in relation to establishing what amounts to a "new discipline" capable of adapting to the dynamic conditions of personal-industry as outlined above. In some ways, an expanded look at dialogue allows the possibility of "making good" on the promise of Dewey's work by correcting for the two major problems he runs directly into in academic culture, and by extension in the larger society. By focusing on dialogue -- in particular written dialogue -- rather than Dewey's more generic "experience" -- theory of dialogue is able to play into, rather than against, the identity strength of academic culture as the place where reading and

writing are king. In other words, in promoting written dialogue for example, one is dealing materially with the material conditions of academic culture, the culture of readers who write and writers who read. From this base, social change can then be promoted metonymically and corporeally.

On another side, by expanding on the theory of technology itself an adaptive site is also being developed which once again makes good on a Deweyan promise -- this one being the promise to bring good education to the masses. By incorporating personal-industrial technology into education via electronic conferencing and email, one can fairly directly and easily institute conversational interactivity into the very center of the learning process. In addition, techno-theory features theorists (including Donna Haraway, Bruce Mazlish, Scott Bukatman, and Sherry Turkle) whose starting points already embody the elements outlined above -- materially complexified signification, anti-binarism, and interactively generated coherence. This field again allows for development in many different directions.

In conclusion to this section, both of these sites of adaptation accord materiality, interactivity, and generative coherence a place at the table of ultimate signification, and this makes them likely sites to adapt to the somewhat strange conditions brought about by the personal-industry paradigm's three dimensionality.

In a way the *particular* confluence of dialogue and technology that I am interested in and involved in, the particular cyborg I am interested in describing and constructing -- electronically mediated written dialogue/multilogue -- captures the best

of both of these adaptive strategies and offers a very rich site for theorizing the personal-industrial. If humans make meaning primarily through conversational communication (that's the dialogue part), and toolmaking is inherently, internally- logically part of human nature (that's the technology part), then electronic communication/conversation tools would have to be regarded as extremely and deeply significant to human beings and human education in the current era.

Written conversation in effect expands a "liminal" zone between writing and speaking, while electronic communication technologies in effect expand a liminal zone between human and machine. In this sense electronically mediated written conversation, combining as it does the two above liminalities, is a complex compound which produces extraordinary spins and synergies, extraordinary "special effects" in selfhood, education, and society. It is these special effects that I turn to in the next chapter.

In closing this chapter, I hope that I have provided a definitional basis for understanding the move from mass-industry monologue to personal-industry dialogue, a model for understanding the way technologies "mean," and a mapping of several fields worth exploring for developing further and/or different understandings.

CHAPTER TWO  
SPECIAL EFFECTS -- ELECTRONIC CONVERSATION  
AND PERSONAL-INDUSTRY

*In many ways this chapter is an enactment or holographic representation of the theme and concepts layed out in Chapter One. One of the very special "personal effects" of the personal-industry paradigm is the enhanced ability to construct meaning interactively, intersubjectively or interpersonally, and directly via electronic media, and in this chapter Beth and I explore some of the ethical/philosophical dimensions of this new phenomenon from a position which is complexly, inside/outside. In other words the approach we model here both explains and embodies Chapter One: we both talk about and enact materiality of meaning, non-dichotomous framings, and interactively generated order. We both talk about and enact the personal-industry logic of connectivity via electronic conversation.*

*Scott Bukatman in Terminal Identity suggests that, in science fiction films, "special effects" are themselves the products of technological processes which the film narratives often attempt to explain. It is thus as a special effect or hologram that the conversational text for this chapter is offered -- it records a conversation across disciplines and genders, the subject of itself, the object that its self attempts to textually externalize and explain through its unfolding. The conversation, which originally took place during the months of May-June 1994, is taken from the record of electronic mail exchanges between Beth and myself. Beth's part of the text appear in normal character, my part appears in italic. This conversation was printed in EnText in the summer of 1995.*

*We are painters on a glass canvas, visible to our subject and our peers.  
- Thomas T. Barker*

Even though many of us in academia seem to talk ad infinitum about interdisciplinarity and "border crossings," why aren't we talking across hallways, departments, disciplines, across divisions of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, culture, and identity? My answer is succinct: because we can't. We can't, or don't, because we're

suffering from the postmodern condition. Post post-structuralism, our culture has moved increasingly towards one of two poles: either a nihilistic pole around which rally those who believe that values, ethics, and morals are matters of personal taste and opinion, that words can't really mean anything at all (so why both talking), or a fundamentalist, totalitarian pole around which dance those who deny the validity of any value orientation other than their own.<sup>1</sup>

I'm excited, though, by the potential of electronic communication to allow us to move beyond or between these poles and begin really talking again. It's not that I think people don't have ideas, or ethical/moral orientations, or opinions. I just don't think they express them. The lid's on the pressure cooker, screwed-down tightly over anything that might be a question of values. Perhaps the electronic medium will create a moral space in which free expression can take place. I think cyberspace is *the* ethical forum of our time. Granted, it's still a postmodern forum. After all, the *ethic* is merely an illusion.

Do you think we should talk more -- both about cyberspace as well as the question about talking / not talking across boundaries?

*Yes, let's talk. What began to drive me crazy as I approached the grand project of dissertation was the imperative to endure isolation and alienation. It seems as if we in the academy give great lip service to ideas about the social construction of reality and then insist that students engage asocially in their 'significant' work --which as we all know is writing and reading. Writing about the social construction of reality is okay, but*

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<sup>1</sup> According to Kyung Hi Kim, "these two extreme perspectives are dogmatically prohibitive to the development of democratic ways of life that require praxis of rational discourse and agreement based on mutual respect and recognition of multiplicity of our values" (14).

*just don't go on about actually constructing a socially meaningful network or society. I think it's a shame we don't do more towards fostering social networks, conversations, and working together.*

*But I have never had the impression that postmodernism is responsible for academic alienation, or that it's nihilistic. My take is that it leaves us at the doorstep of speculative, aesthetic, moral philosophy. I might even say that postmodernism (speaking here of a historical epoch more than doctrinal positions) opens the door to ethical deliberation, but we have to walk through it, enact it in our daily lives.*

*Whether or not electronic conversation will provide the means of enacting moral deliberation? I'm not sure, but it is such a (perhaps deceptively) non-threatening form of writing, I have marveled at the extent to which the fear of writing is somehow mitigated by the electronic medium. But I supposed, finally, it's not really writing any more than a conversation about personal topics over a cup of coffee (or over a clothesline) is really analysis.*

Again, we're talking about the role of illusion in electronic conversation. You say that it's not "really writing" and although I might disagree, let's at least say that there's the *illusion* that it's really writing. It's the same thing I was talking about when I said that the medium creates the "illusion" of ethics and ethical space. I recently read an essay that explained how the psychotherapy environment creates a "moral space" in which one cultivates ways of seeing, meeting, and respecting "the being of each unique other, in treating his or her subjectivity as of equal value with one's own." To me, this is the

environment, the illusion, of cyberspace. The machine creates for us (the illusion of) moral space where we offer to one another "free attention" or what this writer called the skill "of being able to be close to another with a kind of caring objectivity, in which those distortions of understanding, critical judgments, projections and distractions that so often get in the way of real meeting are minimized."<sup>2</sup> Cyberspace, in functioning in just this way, is the postmodern site for ethical meeting and democratic discourse.

*When I said that electronic conversation was not real writing, I think what I was trying to say was that it would not be real for academic establishmentarians (which I consider myself not to be). For me, talking over a cup of coffee or over a clothesline is exactly what I mean by the social construction of reality.<sup>3</sup> And this is exactly what our academic training would have us devalue in the persistent drive to produce singular texts. I take the 'construction' part of 'social construction' seriously too, being an avowed constructivist – what this means is that dichotomies are out; reality/illusion, inside/outside, etc. are all problematized in a constructivist orientation in the sense that there is recognition that we ourselves have constructed the dichotomies. Sort of like this:*

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2. These quotes are taken from Tom Kitwood's essay "Psychotherapy, Postmodernism, and Morality," in which he reiterates the relationship between postmodernism and the deterioration of moral praxis. Reacting to the contemporary inclination to an anything-goes philosophy, he asks whether or not there is "some position that recognizes the postmodern predicament, and yet which still holds firm in some way to that respect for persons which seems to be the bedrock of morality." The two key concepts he draws from the practice of psychotherapy are those of free attention and moral space, both of which foster open communication between engaged parties by creating an ethos of 1) "complete particularism," in which each person is recognized as a unique individual rather than a stereotypical representative of something else, 2) "aprescriptive[ness]" in which no individual is subjected to an imperative "ought" and, 3) "non-propositional[ity]" where the quality of experience is unique to the occasion (4-6). It is the illusion of a similar ethos, the illusion of free attention and moral space which I believe cyberspace creates so dramatically.

3. Mary Leach in her essay "(Re)searching Dewey for Feminist Imaginaries: Linguistic Continuity, Discourse and Gossip" states, "The settled practice of gossip can be analyzed as a form of relating, not merely one which involves participants relation to ideas but to each other." She also goes on to argue that the appeal of gossip is in some ways analogous to the appeal of reading published letters, qualitative research, and other academic delicacies.

*we humans invent writing, and then writing invents us, changes us and so forth.*

*Everything is interactive, co-creative, and somewhat reflexive; creating the world is not something we do by ourselves, nor is the world something we 'find' already created -- it is something that is constructed in between, in constant interactivity. So in a way constructivism implies indeterminism and also implies that everything is real (real meaning constructed).<sup>4</sup> My question might be under what conditions do constructions get named illusions, and why.*

I now recall how odd an experience it is to sit in a class with people from many different academic disciplines. We all use jargon that sounds alike, but it has different meanings depending upon our areas of scholarship. It may pose a problem for you and me since you're speaking School of Education jargon and I'm speaking English Rhetoric and Composition jargon. It's hard for me to understand, for example, how one can be a constructivist and an indeterminist at the same time. Normally, I think of the two as mutually exclusive. But, I see what you're saying; if we're being constructive in terms of mutually engaging in meaning-making, indeterminism might follow. Maybe then, I'm a constructivist-indeterminist, too. I just don't want to follow indeterminacy to an extreme, to the point where we *can't* engage in conversation, in meaning-making at all, the point that there is no point after all because nothing *can* mean anything. Why bother?

And about illusion -- don't get me wrong; I'm not glorifying illusion vs. reality.

Cyberspace is real, in the sense that it exists independently of anything we may think about

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4. For an anthology of essays on the history and tenets of the constructivist orientation see Paul Watzlawick (ed.) *The Invented Reality: Contributions to Constructivism*, 1984.

it. What I'm saying is that what happens in cyberspace is illusion. Just think about how easy it is to construct an ethos. And it's not just the absence of corporeality. Although I may be fat/skinny, black/white, male/female, old/young, abled/disabled and you wouldn't know it if I didn't tell you, ethos involves much more. I may choose to construct an ethos that leads you to believe that I'm a very reasonable, listening, caring, considerate, turn-taking person, when really I'm an over-bearing jerk (just for argument's sake, of course). Because the illusion of free attention is so high, you buy it; you want to buy it, so you do. We extend ourselves in willing openness to do democratic kinds of things, to carry on a conversation, but what we see when we read the text on the screen is really our own desire for a perfect interlocutor. We seduce ourselves, so to speak. Electronic conversation, especially e-mail, one-on-one, provides a mirror surface for us so that what we see is our own self/desire.<sup>5</sup>

Rhetorically speaking, you are seduced by the medium. You think we are having a conversation. This conversation feels really great because there's the illusion that I'm waiting right here on the other side of the screen, hanging on every word. I'm attentive. I

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5. Jean Baudrillard's work in both *Seduction* and *The Transparency of Evil* contributes to an understanding of rhetorical relationships in cyberspace. "Telecomputer man," he claims, "offers himself the spectacle of his own brain, his own intelligence, at work. Similarly through [electronic conversation], he can offer himself the spectacle of his own phantasies, of a strictly virtual pleasure. He exorcises both intelligence and pleasure at the interface with the machine. The Other, the interlocutor, is never really involved: the screen works much like a mirror, for the screen itself as locus of the interface is the prime concern. An interactive screen transforms the process of relating into a process of commutation between One and the Same. The secret of the interface is that the Other here is virtually the Same" (*Transparency* 94). Electronic conversation, in providing such a surface or interface, intensifies discursual intimacy because the distance between self and Other, rhetor and interlocutor, *seems* so close. It's not merely that the rhetor simulates or dissimulates her ethos, but that the interlocutor desires the ethos he creates from the text on the screen. "To seduce is to die as reality and reconstitute oneself as illusion," Baudrillard says. "It is to be taken in by one's own illusion and move in an enchanted world. . . . And it is potentially a source of fabulous strength. For if production can only produce objects or real signs, and thereby obtain some power; seduction, by producing only illusions, obtains all powers, including the power to return production and reality to the fundamental illusion" (*Seduction* 69-70).

don't interrupt you. Is this conversation to you because it's conversation in reality, or is it conversation because conversation is what you desire?

From the constructivist perspective, we'd have to be doing the conversation on a mutual basis. We'd have to be socially constructing meaning. But I wonder if we really are. Is it mutual? Perhaps we are each constructing in isolation. I am constructing you. You are constructing me. I, your ideal interlocutor, am your creation, so not Other. Illusion! This is an illusion of conversation. We are disembodied voices.

But great things can happen here, despite the illusion. It has potential for democratic praxis and consensual discourse. That's why I want to go on-line with my composition classes.

*We are disembodied only if we construct ourselves with dichotomies. Rather than illusion, let's talk about illusionists, the magic show kind. The key to illusionism is for the illusionist to get the audience to buy into a dichotomy; a situation is framed such that there are only two interpretative choices. Once this is done, all the illusionist has to do is make sure that whatever needs to be hidden (the interpretation which would reveal the actual circumstances) falls somewhere outside of the dichotomous frame because if it does it will automatically be invisible.*

*For the audience, the trick is not found in the sleight of hand, but rather in the dichotomous framing. By the time the sleight of hand comes around the trick has already been done in effect, going through the motions is all that remains. In this way Descartes can be seen as a great illusionist: he frames situations dichotomously, and then strange*

*things start to happen: bodies disappear; people begin to report feeling disembodied.<sup>6</sup> In other words, I would say you have been tricked. Seduced! There is no illusion here or anywhere else; there are only constructions, dichotomous or otherwise, that we either buy into or not. Once we buy in, the show begins and we take the ride, trick or treat, ready or not. I tend to think the postmodern is grounded in science, which is unfortunately usually left out of the discussion. Humanists and such, coming from time-worn constructs, tend to produce and reproduce Cartesian illusionistics, and hence we get these funny effects.*

I'd like to remind you that science is, after all, grounded in the humanities, historically speaking. Obviously, one has to keep grounding one's ground. Because I got my undergraduate degree in biology, I guess you could say that I'm personally grounded in science. Sure, science made its contributions to postmodernism, but it wasn't the sole contributor. I think of Saussure who did his part vis-à-vis linguistics.<sup>7</sup> Then the army of French theorists.<sup>8</sup>

Yes, I agree that I myself am seduced by the illusionist's trick. I participate willingly and actively. When I read a text like Baudrillard's it is in many ways a mirror game. But isn't that what reader-response theory is all about? Inserting ourselves into the

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6. Descartes' *Meditations* is in this way a setpiece magic show. He represents himself as seated comfortably before a fire, waxing philosophical. But, pretty much unbeknownst to the 'viewer' he frames this picture of himself dichotomously in a host of different ways – as a matter of doubt vs. certainty, existence vs. nonexistence, etc. – and in this frame, amidst this confusion it generates, the body disappears right before our eyes as it were. It's really a great trick. The extent to which Descartes' legacy is referred to as the mind/body problem is the extent to which the trick is still in effect. As long as we see it as a problem rather than a trick, we are under its spell.

7. By claiming that "the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary" (67), Saussure inserts uncertainty into language itself.

8. While the French theorists such as Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, and Lyotard have their differences, they can be, according to Vincent Colapietro, justifiably regarded as representing a monolithic position opposed "to the privileged status accorded the Cartesian cogito . . . and, in addition, in their debt to Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of language as a system of differences" (647).

gaps in the text that fall outside of the literal frame? And *post* structuralism, there are nothing but gaps.

*You're right about having to continually ground your grounding. Thinking about it again, I would say that I have found the language that science has recently generated to be more usefully descriptive of postmodernism, more helpful in terms of making a home in it, than the language generated by humanities theorists has been. Probably just a bias, but I seem to be able to do more with scientific concepts, maybe in part because its rhetorical posture seems less stilted to me.<sup>9</sup>*

*The other thing I would say is that science seems also to possess the mantle of truth, and that may also be why I associate it with grounding. Although the relationship between science and the humanities may be reciprocal or mutually implicating, this doesn't mean that the relationship is symmetrical or equally weighted. My sense is that science has more weight, is more grounded, simply because it gets down and into the intricacies of physical reality – literally into the earth/ground of physical processes. In my reckoning only feminisms such as ecofeminism have figured out that challenging the cultural dominance of science means challenging science's ownership of the physical "ground."*

*Anyway, notions such as "nothing but gaps," "endless deferral of meaning", etc., associated with humanities theorists, make me feel dizzy. In contrast, notions such as "pattern" and "self organization," associated with contemporary science, make me feel*

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9. In *Order Out of Chaos*, Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers for example frame science very unpretentiously as "a dialogue between man and nature." XXVII - XXXI

*somehow better about things. I guess I just need handles, particularly if a hand-hold is all that's available to me in my epistemological environment.*

*That brings me back to conversation again. Why do we spend so much time developing academic languages that hardly anyone can understand? It seems that the answer I usually get is "that's what academics do." Another answer suggests itself to me though – arcane languages are useful for things like job protection, making emperors' clothes, etc.<sup>10</sup>*

I just read an essay in Lester Faigley's new book in which a student talks about letter writing. I immediately made her comments analogous to electronic conversation, since electronic conversation is a peculiar blend of epistolary and conversational styles. Anyway, this student had been away from home for a while and communicated with family and friends a great deal through the exchange of letters. When she came back home again, she compared communicating by letter with communicating face to face. She notes "letters were unselfconscious and utterly honest, for the time and space lag between the letters made intimacy easier. . . . [Now that I can talk to friends and family face-to-face] the barriers are back up. We're careful again, wary of the reckless revelations we once shared. The physical distances between us are less now; cautiously, we distance ourselves in spirit."<sup>11</sup> Just like this student who has noticed that letter writing casts a distance in

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10. This same position is supported (though less cynically) by John Swales, who in *Genre Analysis* points out that the language, or specific lexis, of discourse communities such as those of the academic disciplines is centrifugal rather than centripetal – they tend to be exclusionary.

11. Quoted in Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*, 122-25.

time and space that paradoxically decreases spiritual distance, I have noticed that the electronic medium creates a similar chronotropic situation. Perhaps this enables us to overcome our postmodern spiritual distance<sup>12</sup> Although we are separated by space and time in reality, we have the illusion of closeness, spiritual intimacy. And interestingly, Faigley notes that, in the essay itself, the student writer creates the illusion of a unified and knowing self. Seems like there's illusion-casting on many levels. I'm thinking out loud. Am I making sense?

*Yes, you're making fantastic sense. It's just that word "illusion." Try this rewrite of the above sentence: instead of "in the essay the student writer creates the illusion of a unified and knowing self" try "in the essay the student creates a unified and knowing self." Deleting "the illusion of" solves a host of modernist problems. First, it does not specify the number of selves which might otherwise be created. Second, it acknowledges the power of language and writing practices; worlds, not illusionary worlds, are created by different writing practices. My quibble is that "the illusion of" as a locution is a machine for reinscribing modernism, as much as the solitary essay is also a machine for creating modernism's unified and knowing self.*

*For example, when I am the constructed self, or cyborg, Bob + automobile, I am a decidedly different construction. I tend to sing more, feel more powerful rushes of anger at small perturbances, etc. Seeing writing as a technology, when I am the cyborg*

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12. Jameson suggests that in postmodern society there has been a spatial disruption leading to "the disability of moving outside the ever-shifting subject position to achieve a positional stance from which to critique, as object, the culture in which we are immersed" (87).

*Bob + pen and paper I am again a different construction, and so on. So yes, I can now see that the cyborg now sitting here, Bob + computer screen, is a particular configuration, but not an illusory one. A particularly complex cyborg construction -- that much I admit -- but what happens here in electronic conversation is as 'real' as what happens anywhere else.*

*There may be good reasons for the apparent intimacy-through-distance and technological mediations. By "good," I mean evolutionary.<sup>13</sup> Devising such tools may be the only way our species might continue to proliferate under advanced industrial conditions if, for example, AIDS is an indicator of our future under conditions of corporeal, unmediated-by-technology intimacy. So anyway, I think we should dump all "illusion" language -- we have work to do, construction work, blue-collar stuff, no illusion. Constructing ourselves as cyborgs may be a possible future.*

I've begun to wonder whether or not we're trying to ex-terminate one another. I think we think the same things, but that we speak from different positions in language. Perhaps it will come down to only this: I have a very sardonic world view -- that is, I'm a cynic with a sense of humor. Perhaps you are much more a positivist than I am. Our basic world views are so deeply psychologically and experientially constructed that they cannot be undone. For me, the idea of illusion is quite comfortable. It can work well within my theoretical understanding of the world. And, to boot, when things go awry, I'm

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13. O.B. Hardison suggests in his book *Disappearing Through the Skylight: Culture and Technology in the Twentieth Century* that the merging of carbon based life with silicon based life may be a possible evolutionary path.

not as crushed as I might have been had I let myself believe in concrete creations. I'm working against seduction in a way.

How redemptive or evolutionary is this new technology? You brought up the issue of AIDS. Is the implication that we can now do away with corporeal sex and have cyborg (virtual) sex instead? Perhaps redemptive for the individual, but just how far will humanity evolve with disembodied reproduction?<sup>14</sup> Won't we suffer a fate similar to that of the Shakers? Our supply of converts to celibacy isn't inexhaustible.

*Positivism is in the grain of my (gendered) flesh. Your raising the issue of attitude, the process of arriving at personal meaning, is important -- not so much what is thought or said, but how. This must surely be argument's, reason's, shadow -- the idea that if we could just get our story straight, get it right, everything would be fine. Radical indeterminacy, it has been determined, is the correct answer! -- this is how spiraled and vortexed knowledge is. Caught in the language net, looking for a way out, does seem to ensure the net's closure. Answers and ex-terminations dovetail; if we frame knowledge as a problem, arguing about it and so forth, then I think we get positivist reinscription.*

*The rhetorical form or discursive practice we call argument is perhaps gendered male. Carol Gilligan cites studies of gendered game-playing in which male gaming features argument as much as the game itself, and in which female gaming is usually*

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14. An interesting cyborg mediation between sexual corporeality and virtuality is offered by Donna Haraway in "A Manifesto for Cyborgs." Biotechnology, the cyborg marriage of life and machine, she argues, not only produces a robotic labor force, but also genetic engineering and reproductive technologies that literally make reproduction without sex a reality.

*called "game over" if argument develops.<sup>15</sup> I do think it's more than coincidence that feminism(s) and postmodernism sort of go together; at least it seems to me that the postmodern era is tied to feminism. Is there a way to exchange words in some frame other than argument?*

*My desire to cleanse the language net of illusion talk is not something which I can cleanse myself of. What are my options? To speak with a measure of irony? Anyway illusion bashing is one thing; bashing illusion bashing is another. The kinds of change that might make conversation of a different sort possible are what? Dewey would say that nothing but doing will do, and I guess I agree with that. It is one of the many reasons I am heartened and excited by our work. There is the option of saying "how about instead of arguing, I tell you how it is for me, and you tell me how it is for you."*

*For example before I listened to you, I had a quite passive acceptance of the givenness of the screen I now sit before; I thought of it as a typewriter and had no other thoughts about typewriters. I have now entered into different terms, which I then re-translate into my own terms. So maybe it is possible to say in my framework that the unified self which is created is an illusion -- because there is no reason for insisting that we have limits on what we can create/construct. So illusion is a construction that we recognize; how do we know one when we see one? We have named a certain sort of thing illusion; how did we do that? 'Creation' is also a creation; how did we do that? Finally, we did it like the old Taoist masters said, "along the river" (or together in electronic*

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15. In her book *In a Different Voice* Gilligan argues that the way argument is perceived, and the role it plays in human development, is gender specific.

*conversation). Maybe the real mystery is that we seem to need to continue trying to figure things out.*

About argument -- game vs. game over, masculine vs. feminine playing styles -- I think Gilligan is concerned about just that: argument as style. Masculine style deliberation is argument; that includes being loud, shaking your fists, interrupting, name-calling, and a whole host of aggressive features to which the feminine style responds by saying "game over." Silence.

But argument, as deliberation in general, as rhetoric, I would say is feminine. After all, Rhetorica is a goddess, not a god. It's the use of language to the ends of seduction.<sup>16</sup> And rhetoric can either seduce by using truth or by using illusion, by simulating or by dissimulating, evil or good. In any case, it's feminine. So, as far as postmodernism relates to simulation and seduction, then I agree that it's related to the feminine. But remember, I said there were two poles to postmodernism; the totalitarian pole I regard as masculine; and in very strange ways feminine, seductive openness, can itself become a totalitarian position, always resisting closure.

I too am excited about the work we're doing, but I don't get the sense that we're arguing, at least not in the masculine sense. I think we're socially constructing meaning, which may or may not require narrative strategies. I have no objection to narrative. As I

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16. This is precisely the point that Plato's Socrates makes in *Gorgias*. Rhetoric, although neutral, can be used to simulate truth.

said, this is how it is for me: I'm the cynic with a sense of humor; you're the positivist (in the grain of your gendered flesh). If nothing else, we can balance one another.

The mystery and power of experience is always decentering and we humans just can't abide that. There are those who believe that there is no experience outside of language at all -- I've been through this issue in several seminar classes. I believe (and it can be no more than belief) that there is experience outside of language and that the purpose of language is to communicate the experience -- to circumscribe rather than to describe. Must this mean I'm a mystic?

*Mystical experiences, or at least experiences which fit my image of what such an experience would be, have landed somewhat outside of my range. Maybe they land when I'm sleeping. I don't know how to try mysticism, but I do have some angst about not having had these experiences of knowing, or what have you.*

*The closest thing I've had to an otherworldly or qualitatively different sort of thing was an experience I had once after reading a bit by Jung on mysticism in which he talked about it as if it was connected somehow to organic evolution; after reading it I remember getting this feeling of being intensely embodied, of the intense physicality of history and all such things. I experienced it as a kind of terror. I suppose that since disequilibrium is a relative thing, if we experience corporeality as disequilibrating it means that we are used to spending time incorporeally. Maybe the amplification of e-conversation only makes the general and pervasive muting of corporeality, particularly in academia, so obvious that it becomes shocking.*

*Other than that, I have always had two bones to pick with those who maintain an "it's all in the language" position. One is that it seems so entirely self-serving for such an idea to be so prized in academia where we do, after all, live lives in language. It kind of states the obvious to say that in academia there is no experience outside of language. It's as if the notion of sociology of knowledge, a notion generated in academia, has fallen into the blind spot, the aporia, of academia in order to preserve the higher truth of jobs and academic cultural identity. The other bone I have to pick is the one which has to do with figuring out what is happening exactly with children who are pre-language. I suppose they are doing body language; but once you grant that language is more than just words, you open onto a different world.*

"Oh Lord, show me things as they truly are." That is the mystic's plea. In a way it expresses the desire of my life. School, work, friends, play, religion . . . I look to all insofar as they will show me things as they truly are. While I do believe that there is experience outside of language (otherwise language serves no purpose), I will concede that there is no knowledge outside of language -- at least in terms of how we normally think of knowledge as something formal, inscribed, a kind of artifact that we can pass around to one another. The mystic's plea is one for seeing or feeling, an immersion in experience beyond language. I look to language to guide me to experience.

Perhaps this is a kind thrill-seeking behavior; I don't know. Baudrillard, for example, has observed that our culture is moving from a competitive/expressive orientation to one of vertiginous risk. The only passion we have anymore is a passion for

intensification, an escalation of the stakes, a passion for ecstasy.<sup>17</sup> Escalation, ecstasy, and vertigo are all elements that play powerful roles in electronic addiction. Especially for people like me who are suckers for mental risk and vertigo. I'm beginning to feel like I'm caught in the gravitational field of a black hole: on the one hand loathing postmodern nihilism, longing for reasoned romanticism (whatever that may be), and on the other, disappearing into the vertiginous ecstasy of the realer-than-real. I'm lost.

*The trajectory of our conversation seems to be moving towards the bottom -- "bottoming-out" in the language of addiction treatment, the point in an addict's trajectory when even s/he cannot deny that there is something wrong. The concept of "recovery" does carry with it associations with conformity, of making people who will henceforth be able to fit in, though (getting to things as they truly are) the choice to fit in rather than feel awful most of the time is a choice I gather an addicted person is willing to make at some point.*

*This is what sometimes concerns me about theorizing: as it truly is, vertigo is not fun. As it truly is, psychotic states are not fun; depression is not fun; being ex-terminated is not fun. So I would say that for people who are addicted to thought, recovery might just be "getting to things as they truly are."*

*Body talk is, I suppose, my version of mysticism. The problem with education, which aspires to get at things as they truly are, is that the body is constantly under*

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17. In *Fatal Strategies*, Baudrillard claims that "... our whole culture is in the process of shifting from games of competition and expression to games of risk and vertigo. Uncertainty, even about fundamentals, drives us to a vertiginous overmultiplication of formal qualities. Hence we move to the form of ecstasy" (187).

*assault and surveillance, ranging from the imperative to "sit still" to more sophisticated panoptic techniques. Recovery in higher education may mean turning the institution into a kind of health farm where people can learn to bask. Some people say that higher education at its best only undoes the damage done in lower education. If you're really a cynic though, you see that higher education really doesn't heal much of anything because it still insists on excluding the body, mystical or otherwise. The basking body can't be recognized in academic culture because that culture has been defined historically, and formed an identity in relation to, the denial of that body.*

In regards to addiction, or cyber-addiction, I don't think I'll be sleeping in the gutter anytime soon, or losing my job, or getting arrested for driving under the influence of cyberspace. Still, I may be addicted to thought. Yes, it could lead to depression and feeling awful; but it could also lead to ecstasy and feeling terrific. Vertigo may be experienced differently for positivists and sardonic romanticists, no? I like thinking/theorizing because it makes me feel intellectually alive; but I do need to have theory connect to practice.

*Perhaps my last message was more about the shadow side of my addiction because, like you, there are some parts of addiction I enjoy too. Maybe what happens in this medium is that a keyword, like "seduction," gets established and, in holographic fashion, a whole world is constructed in our conversation. Then another keyword or phrase, like "things as they truly are," is introduced and, once again, that 'bit' contains all the information necessary to construct another whole world. It strains my positivism*

*to make each world coherent with the next. In the world of "seduction," I would only ask what text you constructed from my text. In the world of "things as they truly are," I might try to construct meaning more viscerally.*

I suggest that we exit the world of seduction as well as the world of "things as they truly are." In either case, we could enter into a very postmodern exchange, interpreting each other's interpretations to infinity and never getting to anything more than vertigo. It seems like whatever we do, we have to deal with metaphysical questions. It would be great if foundationalism/antifoundationalism was pragmatically irrelevant, but it's not. At some point we have to consider whether or not people are innately good. Can we rely on goodness?

I think it's a worthy venture to reflect on the nature of desire, lack, seduction, and the state of our poorly evolved being in relationship to the big questions such as the nature of good and evil or the meaning of life. Why is there something instead of nothing? Language may be like the convict's spoon, and we are all convicts trying to dig mile long tunnels to freedom through solid rock. Our tools, our spoons, are woefully inadequate to the task. In many ways, ways related to pragmatism and democracy, our struggling separate selves must connect in collective consciousness and effort to pursue the ever elusive, shape-shifting answer. We must de-liberate.

I am suddenly reminded of Rainer Rilke's "A Tale of Death and a Strange Postscript Thereto" in which a grave-digger tells the following story to the narrator:

"You know . . . in olden times people prayed like this --" and I spread my arms out wide, involuntarily feeling my breast expand at the gesture. "In those days God would cast himself into all these human abysses, full of despair and darkness, and only reluctantly did he return into his heavens, which, unnoticed he drew down ever closer over the earth. But a new faith began. As it could not make men understand wherein its new God differed from their old one (for as soon as they began to praise him, men promptly recognized the one old God here too), the promulgator of the new commandment changed the manner of praying. He taught the folding of hands and declared: 'See, *thus* does our God wish to be implored, so he must be another God from the one whom heretofore you have thought to receive in your arms.' The people say this, and the gesture of open arms became a despicable and dreadful one, and later it was fastened to the cross that all might see in it a symbol of agony and death.

Now when God next looked down upon the earth, he was frightened. Besides the many folded hands, many Gothic cathedrals had been built, and so the hands and the roofs, alike steep and sharp, stretched pointing towards him like the weapons of an enemy. With God there is a different bravery. He turned back into his heavens, and when he saw that the steeples and the new prayers were growing in pursuit of him, he departed out of his domain at the other side and thus eluded the chase. He was himself astonished to find, out beyond his radiant home, a growing darkness that received him silently, and with a curious feeling he went on and on in this dusk that reminded him of the hearts of men. Then for the first time it occurred to him that the heads of men are lucid, but their hearts full of a

similar darkness; and a longing came over him to dwell in the hearts of men and no longer to move through the clear, cold wakefulness of their thinking. Well, God has continued on his way. Ever denser grows the darkness around him, and the night through which he presses on has something of the fragrant warmth of fecund clods of earth. And in a little while the roots will reach out towards him with the old beautiful gesture of wide prayer. There is nothing wiser than the circle. The God who has fled from us out of the heavens, out of the earth will he come to us again. And, who knows, perhaps you yourself will some day dig free the door. . . .<sup>18</sup>

*Rilke's wonderful story dovetails with the notion that the God-human cyborg may be the best model available to us. What it seems we have yet to realize is that God has indeed come around again, this time as an option on the postmodern menu. Where there is no ground, anything is possible, and the criteria for action (the unavoidable selecting-out) become profoundly moral/aesthetic. Truth's loss in status brings other concerns into greater prominence.*

*In terms of education, this means that if the truth question is over, or at least diminished, then we can stop trying to dig with inadequate tools. Those tools – intense cognitive apparati that nonetheless work about as well as a spoon – are part and parcel of what is questioned in the post-truth, postmodern era. If the project changes, so must the tools. If anything changes, everything changes.*

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18. From Rilke's *Stories of God*.

*So in school, we have learned, as your metaphor suggests, to be inmates. We are the proverbial spoon-fed who get so big in management training school (a.k.a. Ph.D. programs) that we grab the spoon and begin tunneling for all we're worth. Not only benighted, but impertinent, we unshackle ourselves and commence digging while the merely benighted (the "good," but not management caliber students) await our return. Eventually we do return, worn out, bearing lessons, never minding that we threw ourselves into the wrong metaphor and then went the wrong way.*

*This is exactly the reason that we need to repeat as our mantra "tell me something I don't already know" when contemplating what we do pedagogically. People, by the time we get them in our classes, know the spoon game. It is a fun and good game, but nobody learns anything about basking for example, and basking may be a much more important survival skill in the post-truth era than spooning. We can get to things like God's return, and the variety of proper greetings, etc. in the postmodern -- and I guess if the path of this conversation is any indicator (i.e., we do seem to have moved to address large-scale concerns), e-conversation may indeed go towards creating the kind of space in which moral deliberation can be enacted in the postmodern.*

There's one drawback to our musings about spoons -- if we don't have to do the spoon game anymore, if what we need is basking instead . . . you and I are unemployed! There's no longer a need for neo-pragmatism, democracy, postmodernism, modernism, romanticism, or anything else. We can all just open up our arms and receive the *Answer*, which is, of course, that we all need one another to be One, to be coherent.

*Wait a minute! -- certainly you have heard of contemplative literature. I'm talking about expanding the reading list and/or gradually substituting one kind of reading and writing for another. We can still sell ourselves with postmodernism, neo-pragmatism, modernism, romanticism, etc., then make a move on the inside to bring in the concept of basking. Maybe we have to imagine that at the other end of the historical tin can and string sits Galileo, similarly contemplating unemployment (or worse . . . but not really worse since unemployment in our society does equal death, just a slower kind of death) for making moves that would shake the dominant knowledge model as it was then known. It's a fluid medium. We live in Galileo's utopia, except that the reign of truth has recently been seen to have run its course.*

*I think a usable metaphor for getting out of the holes we get into is "coming out." There seems to be this sense that if you scratch the surface just a bit, you might find that many others are waiting for a sign that it's all right to come out too. Sighs of relief are heard.*

So, first we have to sell ourselves, make changes from the inside. I just hope that instead of staying in the hole, or coming out, we don't just spoon ourselves a bigger hole. To revise the metaphor just a bit -- we settle back in self-congratulation to lick the spoon that stirred the pot.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A PEDAGOGY OF PERSONAL-INDUSTRY

*This chapter involves using electronic dialogue, again somewhat reflexively, both to talk about and enact dialogic versions of curriculum theorizing and pedagogy under conditions of personal-industry.*

*In a way dialogue is both the significant and signifying work of personal-industry. In the Fall of 1994 Beth and I again demonstrated this "special effect of personal-industry" in enacting an electronically mediated "pedagogy of conversation" – in effect applying what we had learned from our own personal work and research on dialogical learning via electronic conversational writing to the classroom or "multilogical" setting. Among the learning we applied quite specifically was the idea that conversation could function holographically, as a "template" from which complete and meaningful discursive worlds could be constructed. Referring back to Chapter One, this holography had a distinctive Deweyan flavor – we were definitely "present" as teachers in that we commented and conversed freely in the electronic forum which we shared with participants in the course, but in many ways the conversational activity, the "experience" itself was the real teacher.*

*Our initial "plan" for the course was, in keeping with the above, to avoid overplanning, but we did need to figure some things out since we were after all combining or overlapping her course in English Rhetoric and Composition with my course in Educational Foundations. We arranged through the Office of Instructional and Research Computing at UNCG to set up a VAX-Notes electronic conferencing capability for the course so that the two sections could "talk" in writing with each other, and all of the enrollees in both sections were given usernames with which to access the "virtual discussion room." We agreed on three very general themes for the semester: authority, multiculturalism, and popular culture. We required thirty lines of text per week of participation in the electronic forum, and a more formal piece of writing to "close" each of the three topics. We each assigned some of the same readings, and in addition each of us also assigned some readings to our own sections which were not assigned in the other section. The sections met face to face only once, at around the halfway point of the semester, when Beth and I felt a strong need to "circle the wagons" and assess as a group the work we had all done up to that point.*

*This chapter consists of our retrospective conversation regarding this experience, and a brief "coda" section in which I record a few additional observations and musings*

*about the course. Because the learning environment we created was rich, multidimensional, and complex we wondered and talked about how we would be able to do justice to it representationally in writing about it. We finally agreed that the best way would be to literally “continue the conversation” – in the exact spirit of open-ended inquiry in which the course itself was run. Beth's text is once again in regular typeface, mine is in italic.*

*It seems to me that we maybe just need to talk about what we think is important about the “Inter-Course” we taught together, when we combined your section of English 102 with my section of ELC381. From my perspective, one of the important things was that the experience took us (you and me as well as our students) “out” to continue our learning – you found the work of Shotter and Clark on dialogue and brought that back to the class conversation; I found the work of Lather on validity and brought that back; we talked about Dewey even though we hadn’t planned to; our students introduced the work of Locke and Hobbes – and we’re still spinning those themes in our own conversation, long after the class has ended!*

*So for me I think it's important to note that the class produced tangential or supplementary effects, and that in Derridian fashion these supplements/tangents might come right to the center when I think about what was important. In a way, the fact that you and I still pursue some of the tangents from the course becomes an “exemplary answer” to the question we were asked at the Writing Across the Curriculum Conference in Charleston when we presented our research: “don't you need a different sort of time frame to talk about the effects you experienced?” In other words it seems to me that the “central tangents” of the course took us into areas of real concern, and when this*

*happens one of the effects is that the learning continues after class, and after the class itself is over.*

Yes, we need to have this conversation and where it leads. In relation to the question we were asked at the Writing Across the Curriculum conference regarding evaluative timeframes, "where the conversation leads" is actually the most important part of the conversational experience all of the time. It's important to not begin with a goal in mind and then to end when that pre-stated goal is reached. Although we pre-selected themes for our class and we directed them to consider certain issues such as "who should have evaluative authority in the classroom," their conversation bucked those pre-imposed constraints in many and various ways, all meaningful. It's important, I think, that we let those things happen, let the conversation lead.

One of the most evident tangents, the one that really shines, is the one in which evaluation came into question as an abstraction. In other words, each person had their own interpretive spin on "evaluation," the authority which claims evaluative power. But, in conversational turn-taking, everyone had an opportunity to get a feel for how complex the issue really is. The conversational exchange de-simplified things, and that's the only way liberalization can happen in my book. People always have their own ideas about what the abstract thing means, what value it carries; but, only through interaction can that idea be opened up to other possible meanings and values. What our classes found out is that the whole question of evaluative authority is very complex, not nearly so simple as they

thought in the first place. Then, in light of the revealed complexity, there was clear evidence in the conversation that they were taking each other into account in what they said, becoming more care-ful in their rhetorical dealings with each other.

In turn, an interesting tangent which developed from this was the focus on “teacher evaluations.” A lot of energy went into that. So much so that I ended up letting my students do a mid-semester evaluation of me with Professor Roskelly. I feel it was important that throughout the class conversation connected to some real effect. People constantly saw and felt that words do indeed have power to move others to actions, to move them to think and feel things which they hadn’t thought or felt before.

In any case, when the conversation refused the constraints imposed by the themes we originally selected, what was revealed through this “refusal” was whatever happened to be important to the conversants -- the ember of the real. To open up one’s pedagogical practice to that undirectable kind of change/exchange can be scary for a lot of teachers. I’d say it’s less scary for compositionists since rhetoric is still the central focus no matter what topic students take up. That’s less the case in a “content” course. But in any case I think it was important in our course that we let the exchange happen.

The life of the conversation, the ember of the real, is in the tangents because the goal of conversation is mainly to keep conversation going. This means to me that tangents are absolutely essential. It’s almost as if learning, growing, expanding the base of knowledge is a very positive “side-effect” of tangents in conversation. You don’t really start with learning/knowledge in mind as a goal; it just happens because it’s necessary in

order to keep the conversation alive. The kind of knowledge that is the “goal” of conversation, then, is understanding -- a richer kind of knowing, for example, than knowing the fine points of a theory and being able to compare that theory to other similar ones. When you come to see the complexity of issues in dialogue/multilogue with others, you “know” more than you did before, but it’s more on a model of understanding.

*This is interesting to me to think about the extent to which conversations “go where they will” and the extent to which they have “goals.” When two people talk, do you suppose there are always “goals” in play? I remember that when you and I first began our conversations in and about e-mail, which eventually led to our teaching collaboration, my “goal” was in a way to convince you that I was a worthy conversant, to convince you that I was worth talking to or listening to!*

*Still trying to prove myself (!), I’ll go on to say that maybe the bucking of constraints whenever we chose topics for our class was, in addition to other we’ve mentioned, bound up with the fact that our students, too, were more concerned with proving themselves worthy conversants in the eyes of their audience (their peers and you and I) than they were concerned with demonstrating that they knew the ins and outs of our assigned themes. Your comment about goals has made me think about the kinds of tangents different people took; invariably it seems to me they took tangents that would allow them to feel the nice feeling of having something meaningful and valuable to say, of having something to offer, almost as a gift. While I at times interpreted student*

*“tangents” in part as an inability to stay on topic, I am now thinking these tangents might be better thought of as excursions which all of us took and take in conversation – to areas with which they were familiar enough to be able to bring back “presents” to the group, or in order to “present themselves” as worthy to the group.*

*I remember that one of my fears as a teacher was that the topic was being swamped, that it was just disappearing! But the result was that this fear made me a better teacher. I had to honestly consider how to make the issue I wanted people to consider, whatever it was, if they weren’t considering it, interesting and gripping enough for them to want or need to respond to. In other words this made my own learning real in the situation; I had to honestly wrestle with how to get my points across in a compelling way, rather than just banking on a captive audience. I had to honestly consider if the whole organizational idea we were trying was, in fact, working – and that eventually led to my making a handout which spelled out in a coherent way the theoretical sources of our pedagogical ideas (complexity theory, organization theory, media theory, and so forth). In effect I “learned something” – I learned that constructing a coherent statement about our validity index might be important. In other words I think it was very important that in our course everyone was learning, and learning in public, in direct relation to each other. When it seemed that maybe some people were getting confused about the point of our pedagogy, even though they were enjoying it, we didn’t just “turn a blind eye and a deaf ear” to them – we responded to what I suppose amounted to the*

*needs of the discourse community. Another example, too, of meaningful words leading to meaningful actions.*

*In the sense of “responding to needs,” another of the things I remember most about that conversation on authority was the tangent about trust that spun out of it. When it got personal, it really heated up; some people really got incensed that their peers did not trust them to evaluate fairly. This was not an abstract thing; they were actually in the authority apparatus, having to come to terms with how much real distrust is packed in there. In other words, some people in our discourse community responded with real indignation at the level of distrust in their peers. We could have lectured all semester about “The Distrust Implicit in Evaluation” and not even touched the powerful learning that was played out in the debate over this issue of trust. We could have lectured all semester long about “Being Care-ful in Dealings with Evaluation and Authority” in a thousand different ways, with the most eloquent of textual representations and what not, and it wouldn’t have touched the effect that they got by seeing for themselves what is involved in negotiating the complexities of authority and evaluation which you write about in your last message.*

*And finally, yes, the goal of conversation is conversation, but this does still imply learning – on the model of understanding as you say. Realizing this saves me from falling into a hole I seem to love to dig for myself. When the question put to me “So, are you in favor of any sort of interaction, any sort of conversation?” I sometimes get stuck. Well, my position is that I too am interested in conversation that leads to “richer*

*knowledge” – it’s just that in addition I feel that pretty much any sort of conversation will do for starters! . Conversational interaction develops understanding along the way, and I think that’s what we saw and participated in throughout our course. I think we found content and process to be inseparable.*

Yes. I don't think we can too strongly stress the importance of the conversational goal of keeping us talking, keeping us in relationship with one another. Really, when you think about it, can you imagine what it would be like if we had the ultimate conversation and at the end of it we "solved" everything, we came up with a once-and-for-all consensual answer? There would be no more need to relate! Ideally, the goal of conversation is not just to solve a problem or instrumentally “learn something,” but to keep people in relationship with one another. In this sense we both “learn things” through conversation and also “learn to understand each other.” So in a way, knowledge and learning become nice by-products of the process of relating. So, your comment about trying to be a worthy conversant is apropos; it's an acceptance into the conversational fold that we're all looking for. We want not only to hear, but to be heard and to be taken seriously. We all need that "nice feeling of having something to say," to offer a gift that will be received and reciprocated. The natural place to turn for those "somethings" is personal experience, and this is what we saw evidence of over and over again in the course transcript. There was so much narrative. So much telling of stories.

*Yes, and there were also places where the conversation went to the very edges of verbal language. I remember the "Japura-against-the-liberals" exchange in which Japura held forth that homosexuality was just plain wrong while others marshaled more liberal arguments. All of the participants "de-simplified" the issue for one another via a full-blown conversational exchange, and then when they realized that there was not going to be agreement in point or doctrine, they "closed" with a metaphorical handshake. I remember Paraguay saying to Japura something to the effect "I don't agree with you but I really respect you for speaking your point of view." So maybe we are also looking via conversation to get to the edge of the ceaseless buzzing of language, and then into other terrain.*

*I also remember that this homosexuality discussion was another of those "central tangents" which developed on its own, without our prompting it -- but then we were able to follow it up with pointing out how they had in effect powerfully modeled behaving responsibly, with understanding, in the face of differences which aren't likely to dissolve or go away. In other words we pointed out that they had powerfully modeled a logic of "multiculturalism" involving real exchange and real understanding.*

Yes, that is interesting. These two sides reached a point where they saw self in other and other in self to some degree. They shared a non-verbal handshake which I suppose in this instance was a deep kind of relating beyond words. The area beyond the "ceaseless buzzing of language" is that space at the border between self and other, I think.

This same example also serve to illustrate how important it is for the political to be personal. Until people can insert themselves personally into an issue it can remain "simple" for them and thus "solvable if only everyone would straighten up and see things my way." Although one could get busy and try to "straighten up" those who see things differently, there's not enough heat to get "busy-ness" going. One can just sit back feeling comfortable, self-righteous, or disinterested altogether. In this case, Japura and his colleagues in dialogue each felt to some degree incensed to find their positions contested, but the contestation forced them to re-visit their positions interactively with those who disagreed, such that in the long run they were all "liberalized" -- they all came to see the issue as having more complexity, self-in-other, than they'd originally assumed.

It's no wonder to me that so many people, even those in college, are outside the loop of academic, scholarly writing. It's just too difficult to experience that kind of writing as involving a living relationship in which the personal and political blend. I think our class was important in this way too -- it provided an opportunity to realize just this blend.

*The connection you make here makes "the personal is the political" more than just a slogan we toss around in the academy. Reading your comments against my thinking about education as a cultural phenomenon, I could say that the simple insertion of the personal becomes, in a way, the "engine of complexity" in that through this fairly simple inclusion/insertion many other things, significant things, are made possible.*

*This is pretty much what Dewey had in mind; he felt that if schools were like*

*societies, complete unto themselves and without exclusions, then the education would more or less take care of itself without much worry. Adults/teachers were still necessary for guidance, as they are in any society, but need not be the central figures at all times. By removing the personal/social from school, a situation is set up wherein a lot of things have to be technologized. The personal has to be ventriloquized through texts. This reminds me of how I spent my undergraduate years figuring out how I could "produce myself" through reading novels, philosophy, psychology. If I had just been conversing with others, I think I would have gotten much further along, both in terms of growing up and in terms of learning about literature, philosophy, and psychology! By disallowing the insertion of the personal, a disallowance that is structured in almost all institutional practices, text practices, and so forth, we in effect consign school to being fairly simple, and thus promote "simple solutions." Again and again, I saw faces light up in our course when people realized that they, themselves, were in a very real way the subject matter of our course.*

*This is a long way of saying that I agree with you. I think the conversational pedagogy we used did allow the insertion of the personal, and in a way that's all we had to do other than HANG ON since it's a different kind of ride once the complexity cat is out of the bag!*

Maybe it's just me, but it's not been good enough for me to just nod my head when someone says "the personal is the political," understanding it only on an abstract kind of

level. In the conversation as we look back on it, you can see again how when the abstraction is concretely enacted, the ember of the real glows more brightly. The ventriloquation of self, the removal of the personal from the political and vice versa, that happens in traditional education does, as you suggest, require us to "throw our voices" into ossified forms (writing monologues, memorizing facts, mastering material, taking tests, giving the "correct" response) in order to create the illusion that the dummy talks while we remain dumb. There seems to be a great deal more effort going into the production of illusion in the academy than into authentic learning. I'm not saying that conversing alone will do. One still has to read, write, follow assignments, listen to lectures, etc., yet the conversation, if it is allowed to become a central focus, makes the reading, etc., become more necessary because the experiences one brings from the reading or from the lesson back to the conversation serves a real communicative purpose. Thus, I'd say that education and learning would be worlds easier and more enjoyable if we weren't institutionally ventriloquized.

But one of the problems with inviting students to really reinsert the personal into the political and vice versa is that it causes a lot of fear. I think that what is feared most is that our "simple solutions" and "private theories" will necessarily be dismissed. Genuine liberalization can be a scary process for educators as well because, in its truest sense, it means that they themselves have to be open to the changes the process may bring about in their own world views.

*Yes, in this kind of model, educators themselves have to be willing to be intoxicated by the process, willing to lose some control, willing to lose their/our ground in order to move to higher ground. And I suppose Dewey would say that this fear of transformation is completely understandable when you figure that education as the kind of cultural phenomenon was in many ways put into place precisely for transmitting the past as static, tried-and-true knowledge -- not for providing a venue for transformation to occur.*

*Part of my excitement about computers is that they can do what Dewey couldn't. No amount of Deweyan convincing could ever get people over those fears you speak of, but the computer can and does because it operates at the level of viscera, not argument. The computer has finally made Dewey hearable/bearable -- but he's now being "heard" at the level of sub-vocal speech. For example, the Internet in a way replaces a concern for content with a concern for connection, which old-school folks really hate (the complaint I hear most often is about the proliferation of "junk" on the e-wires), but which makes a great deal of sense in a de-academicized environment-- or an environment like we constructed where the point is to learn and to reach understanding at the same time. As we found, content and understanding emerge out of connection and then a feedback loop is established wherein each "feeds" the other -- content and connection, again, become inseparable.*

Yes, it's not that computers can do what Dewey couldn't; it's just that it enables the doing of what he advocated in a very immediate way. It's like the difference between us

doing our work on cuneiform tablets and our using a typewriter. And, argument *is* visceral. Always. It's just that the way we've been teaching argument and communication has so far objectified the experience that it's almost impossible to feel the visceral, connection to real others. So, I would caution against saying that what goes on here is entirely new. It is, however, entirely "faster," and thus gives us the capability of returning to fundamental levels of experience.

The Internet does provide both connection and content -- increasing the connection means increasing the content. It's a dynamic process.

*What are the limits to this approach to learning? To have this conversation we're now having, about the Inter-Course conversation, we in effect re-enter that space where everything is in motion. We are/were in it. It is/was reflexive. It is/was about learning. It is/was about communicating. It's the conversation itself that ends up keeping the journey smooth, the conversation which "regulates" the conversation.*

*Along these lines, part of what I think Dewey was contemplating was a major shift toward dynamic foundations, a move away from the time-honored thought-picture of knowledge as a fixed, anchored building with static foundations and towards imaging stability and knowledge more on a psychological/biological model where stability often involves flexibility, mobility, interaction, etc. In a way the shift is from anatomical/architectural metaphors to physiological/biological metaphors (i.e., stability*

*in biological systems is related to interactions, relationships, adaptive abilities, change and growth). Conversation energizes this shift.*

I think that almost all of the students in this class rose to the challenge of operating in a condition of dynamic foundations or moving pictures. There was a lot of complaining, especially in the beginning, and mostly about having to deal with computer technology, but everyone seemed willing to give it a try. In looking back, though, I wonder how much of this is simply another example of "doing what the teacher expects" in a relatively uncritical way. What's your take on that?

*I think the conversational model creates an inside/outside complexity. It think it's unavoidable that students will figure out what the game is and then play it. No matter what we do as teachers, we can't get outside of the fact that this is an institution which is in effect set up to encourage students to do what the teacher expects. But at the same time, the conversational approach puts the personal into the mix, and then something more is at stake -- people are then being public with their rhetoric and thoughts, and in the process becoming responsible members of a community. So no matter what might be done or not done, said or not said by students, they are still inside the process; their participation, or their lack of participation, or their cynical participation, is very revealing of who they are and what they really think.*

*What can, and for me did, get exciting was that we were able to feed some of this personal complexity back into the system/conversation, such that towards the end of the course there were times in class when students weren't allowing other students to hide, weren't allowing students to disavow their own rhetoric. My sense was that by the end of the course we were for the most part interacting as people, i.e., as people who also happened to be students or also happened to be teachers, but as people who were a whole lot more than either of those two roles. The conversational model not only mirrors real life, but is real life. It just so happens to be taking place in school (again, just a Dewey would have it). So again, it's inside/outside, and powerfully so..*

*The conversational model becomes more than a mere exercise not only because the people become available to one another through the evidence of the rhetorical expressions, but also because the organizational rules of the game become available to critique as part of the conversation. In traditional, monological-model education, content goals are placed in the center and parts of the conversation -- conversation about the organizational rules of the game and the way the rules may or not be at odds with the content goals -- are redlined, ruled out, placed out of bounds, backgrounded, in order to make sure the topics are covered and things "stay on track."*

*By foregrounding conversation, topics are covered (I think we experienced this approach as an effective and thorough means of addressing topics) and the organizational rules of the game are "uncovered" and made available to critique and amendment. Covered and uncovered, inside/outside. For example, we experienced*

*conversation about definitions of authority spilling out into a healthy questioning of institutional power arrangements -- the powerlessness of student evaluations, the politics of tenure, and so on, without having to prompt it. We did the definition part, the covering part, but we also did the rule-questioning and amending part, the uncovering and enacting parts.*

A couple of points here. First, Bob, I think that your pointing out that we created an inside/outside complexity is very apropos. Specifically, I felt that students had a hard time getting "inside" the issue (grading/authority) by having to do it instead of hear about it as in a traditional lecture class. They felt "outside" of the issue because it was not being presented to them in a familiar way. The complexity of the displaced, unique, learning space of "inside" made it seem not like learning, but like administrative activity instead. I recall some students complaining because they felt they were being asked to take care of "details" that you and I should have had worked out before the semester began as if "details" are not somehow the subject of a "from the outside," traditional class. In our class, they had to enact outside details from the inside.

Second, in regards to the conversational model, you say that something more is at stake when people are having to air their views in public. Now, let's look for how that airing was different in our class than it is in a good "discussion" class. There's plenty of airing views publicly in a lot of classes. The think I see as a difference was that our airing

was in text so that we could really look at what we said and what others said in a much more critical fashion. I called this the exercise of meta-rhetorical skills.

But we're so trapped into mere exercise educational models that we don't have good indices of validity for what happens in the conversational classroom. What's the long term value of all the foregrounding and making available of people and rhetorical expression? It was fun; but was it "worth it?" Would you say that more was learned because of the "uncovering" we did? A teacher in a single semester in a traditional class could not cover a topic with the same degree of complexity and comprehensiveness as we did in this conversational class. But, I still want to know whether or not the students saw it as learning by the end of the semester, or did it sink in later on (or not at all).

*What you say here speaks to me of the fact that all of education is driven by assessment. In part, my inclination is to say that the kinds of things we saw and participated in during our Inter-Course ought to be the measure by which other pedagogical models are judged. But it may be that as long as there is a strong imperative to assess or measure (which means in part to assess or measure individuals), we will have to deal with it. In one sense monological educational forms are perhaps necessary in a system that requires that individuals be assessed individually. One of the deep points in this hermeneutic is the cultural idea, much taken for granted, that salvation is an individual affair. Even for people in our culture who are only nominally religious, it seems to me the pull of monologism is strong enough to cause the move to*

*write dialogically to be felt as a sort of low vibration rattling the entire cultural edifice, based as that edifice is on a singular God, individual rather than group salvation, and salvation based upon received rather than socially constructed truth.*

I believe it's possible to assess dialogical writing and dialogical learning. But, one must be looking at the process more than at the product, relying somewhat on faith that when students engage authentically in process, in dialogue, the quality of the product will naturally follow along. One of the interesting things I did in my class the semester following Inter-Course was to not give grades along the way. I did, however, do extensive assessing. I read my students' dialogues and their monologues (essays) and I commented on them in depth. I just didn't give grades. Curiously, not one single student ever even asked about or fretted about grades. No one came forward to ask "what's my grade?" One reason for this, I think, is that they were so involved in the ongoing textual conversation, the process. And, in many ways, my assessment comments must surely have implied what grade I'd have given them if called to the task.

To make a short story long, I think it's possible to engage in dialogism and still assess students. It's just that what gets assessed is their commitment to the process. It would be a very interesting project to teach ENG101 using a pedagogy of conversation, displacing the essay as centerpiece of the course, then follow up those same students in a traditional ENG102 class to see if they were any more or any less "traditionally" competent than their traditionally taught peers. Now there's a grant to write!

I think that there are some genuine religio-philosophical underpinnings to the general issue of assessment/evaluation in our culture as well. Martin Buber speaks to this issue, too, when he delineates the "attitudes of men" as falling into a "We-Them" orientation. We, the right (teachers and students who earn the good grades) -- Them, the wrong (students who fail to make good grades). We, the saved -- Them, the condemned. The sheep and the goats. This We-Them orientation is precisely the orientation of monologic texts no matter how much lip-service we give to text-as-dialogue. It's not possible to grasp that as a metaphor if we don't let it live somehow in reality. What we as teachers in classes with traditional curricula end up doing is forcing students into the We-Them stance so that we can grade and evaluate their products -- tests, essays, etc. -- and then we let this sum up the learning experience.

*Maybe the fix on grades goes both ways: students and teachers both need to be unhooked from the emphasis on product. Postponing grading, if that works (as it does according to the mores and lore of the practitioner community), constitutes a good. Creating environments in which the focus on product seems to be subverted, if that works, is also good. I also think that you are right to think that your students in some sense did not need grading so much when they were guaranteed ample feedback, both from you and from their peers in conversation. Grading is in a way simply a degraded and often degrading form of conversation, so profuse conversation and feedback naturally steals some of the fire, and some of the burn, from grading.*

*Other than that, it makes some sense to me to assess students' commitment to the process because if it's evident that there is no commitment present, then there is an opening to meaningful, authentic conversation around the question "well, then, why are you here?" rather than around some pretense or some meaningless question about overall point totals or whether or not that student who is obviously not interested will be able to "pull a C." Because schools, even colleges, are coercive environments in the sense that students often feel that they have to be here, a focus on process at least allows the possibility that some students will conclude that they do not have to be here -- at least not now; they can always come back later.*

*I had one such "assessment" conversation with a student during the semester after InterCourse. I basically said to her that it seemed to me there was little evidence that she was involved in the process of the class. Instead of stringing the situation out, she told me that she preferred courses with more structure. This gave me the opportunity to say that it was most important that she got what ELC381 had to offer in a way that she could appreciate it and take in. So, she dropped, and I think for both of us, and for the class, this was a very positive outcome (product).*

*What I am getting at here is that maybe we create a false dilemma when we contrast process and product overmuch. Maybe it's better to talk about how the product(s) we are aiming at are different, and about how monologic processes are processes all the same, but not ones that allow us to produce the particular products we desire to produce. We're not saying that we don't have a concern with product; we are*

*saying that we don't think grading constitutes a good product -- defined as a product which fairly sums up learning. We are saying that dialogical methods produce good products -- defined as products which are open-ended, non-reductive, and encourage more authentic forms of learning and personal involvement.*

*My point about Dewey is related to the often-heard argument that there "just weren't (and aren't) enough Deweys" to carry out the kinds of ideas he promoted. This is one of the standard raps against doing conversational or interactive, "experiential" (to use Dewey's term) education. All I was saying is that it's here that the computer steps into the breach and cancels this argument. It may not be possible to produce all of the necessary Deweys, but it may be possible to produce all of the necessary computers. And to connect with your earlier point that process-centered education can be assessed, the textual conversation which electronic media now make easily available possible does enable a kind of recording and managing and/or evaluating of conversational interactivity. We have the capacity, via computers, to store, study, and evaluate conversation. That part is new, along with the added speed and immediacy that you mention.*

*Otherwise, I think many teachers beg off what we're advocating because 1) they fear their students won't pass the end of year test if they "do Dewey" (this is the K-12 cop out), or 2) they figure they can't afford the class time for Deweyan discussion and still "cover their content materials" (this is the higher ed. cop out). Well, the lowly computer doesn't allow either cop out because kids can learn to read, write, and all sorts of other*

*things (e.g., keyboard skills) as they learn to “converse” using computers. And older kids can now “converse” outside of class time in virtual discussion rooms such as we had, thereby preserving class time to be used just as it always has been used if the teacher so desires.*

*In other places, you have written about how much of academia is defined by “the essay.” In my interpretation, you argue that the imperative to write essays in effect drives much of what goes on in the academy, practically and politically. What I’m saying is that your focus of the essay might find a good counterpart here in a focus on the computer. There is a curious play here: the subjective essay becomes an object; the objective computer becomes (maybe as in “that dress becomes you”) a subject. You could argue that the computer is replacing the essay as the central “machine” of the academy. Again back to Dewey – what he perhaps couldn’t defeat, after all, was the technology of the essay (the academic counterpart of the factory, as a kind of signifying object). In other words, the essay may have been Dewey’s arch enemy, but he didn’t see it because he was too busy combating non-progressive “ways of thinking.” He was in this sense like one of those guys in “invisible man” movies who keep getting hit but can’t defend themselves because they are always looking the wrong way, at something which is immaterial. Anyway, it seems that people, standard academics, are about to be blindsided by the use of computers as much as Dewey was by the use of the essay. This again calls attention to the need for an adequate theory of technology in educational theorizing. We just tend to not want to accord serious, non-instrumental importance to*

*technology -- whether it is the technology of the essay the technology of the computer. We tend to see it as "just a tool," when in fact it is a tool packed with ideology and content. I think in part what we saw the "content" of the computer -- its logic/workings of connectivity -- expressed throughout our course, calling out or allowing to emerge the connective characteristics of human beings.*

## **Section Two: Coda**

First of all, let me say that the basis for my comments here, as throughout most of this document, is my own experience and perceptions. My comments are, in other words, offered as a piece of "practitioner lore," with all of the limitations and benefits implied in that phrase.

The simple availability and lateral, horizontal distribution of written discourse in our course was, in my opinion and observation, truly revolutionary. My belief is that writing literally functions like currency in academic culture. (Never mind "cultural capital" -- that's too abstract!). In other words I think it is very significant that teachers seldom write more than a few words to students, and also significant that students routinely do not write at all to each other. What this does, in my opinion, is construct writing as a "scarce commodity" which is for the most part utterly controlled by teachers. In making written texts available in the ways that Beth and I did, we redistributed currency -- always a revolutionary undertaking.

Among the “revolutionary effects” was that by making the discourse of peers available to each other, and having the discourse of multiple teachers also available, the course proliferated opportunities for various kinds of alliances to be made, since the currency-power was more evenly distributed. Some students in our courses argued quite well, and earned a respect from their peers which is normally the reserve (earned or not) of the teacher. Or, a student in my course could build more of an alliance with Beth on certain topics than with me. Again, all of this, facilitated by the electronic conferencing, profoundly re-ordered the experience of teaching and learning by simply re-ordering writing practices.

Another effect on the learning environment which I found compelling if not revolutionary was that the instructors came to have their own society -- what we began to refer to as “a society of two,” and students came fairly quickly to have their own society, and I think the two phenomena were connected. It was clear that Beth and I participated in the conversations differently, or at a different level of experience, than our students did, and in a fairly natural way -- since Beth and I would often converse in e-mail anyway (in fact we began the course by carrying on a conversation about authority ourselves on the VAX-Notes, and then in effect inviting our students into the conversation). This led to an interesting sort of “multicultural” awareness, but more importantly I found that the existence of our two societies mitigated the co-dependency that I think often exists between students and teacher. It was apparent to me that students got the idea that they did not need to meet their instructors’ needs for conversation and interaction, and this

freed them up considerably to go on about their own business, forging alliances where they might, or weighing points of view for themselves. As one of the instructors I can also say that the fact that students in my class could get ideas and attention from their peers and from Beth, and in fact seemed to enjoy and benefit from this, freed me as well from my part of the teacher-students co-dependency. I no longer felt the worry that I would have to have just the right thing to say to each and every student, either in broadcast or individual instruction mode. I tended to participate in the VAX conversation just as they did -- when, and in whatever ways I wanted to. I tended to lecture only when it seemed to me it was necessary. In sum you could say that the course modeled something more like an extended family than a nuclear family, and the effects for me were palpably different.

Another phenomenon I found interesting was that as the semester moved along the two forums (the in-class and the VAX-Notes) increasingly integrated and merged, to the extent in fact that several times in the last month of the semester I would come to class and a discussion would simply take off from the point of someone making a comment about what was happening in the electronic forum. And conversely, it also became much more common that discussion in the electronic forum would involve mention of things which took place in class (movies watched, issues raised, and so forth). This movement toward integration was also one of the high points of the class in my perception. It evidenced to me for example that the use of electronic conferencing could in fact facilitate the integration of personal narrative and abstract principle that I found to be sorely missing in monological formats, where conversation tends to be either severely limited to

"discussion on topic," or is relegated to taking place "outside of class." I also thought that this movement to integration of the two forums spoke of new synthesizing skills being learned by our students as a byproduct of "bifurcated" conversational format.

Along these lines my observation was that "new disciplines" began to emerge from the overall activity --- disciplines involving such skills as "large-pattern integration" and "reflexivity negotiation". This I found very exciting, partly because of the learning which was taking place, and partly because it seemed to me to provide a kind of direction towards which education in the information age might move. William Doll has written about this kind of development in relation to complexity theory, and in fact quotes Donald Schon's statement "Modern managers do not solve problems, they manage messes, and a whole new range of skills is needed for this." (Doll, "Curriculum Beyond Stability"). Peter Senge also writes about the advent of new disciplines in his book *The Fifth Discipline*. Beth has also written about this kind of "second order" discipline in terms of the development of what she calls "meta-rhetorical skills" of sensitivity to audience, authentic learning, and intersubjective tolerance and understanding.

In many ways it is possible for me to see the emergence of these "new disciplines" in our course -- and in addition this has enabled me to see how what has been decried about the "disciplinary mindset or consciousness" perhaps also grew out of simple practices. These practical beginnings of ideologies are one of Foucault's and his followers main points in "genealogically" tracing cultural ideologies to simple incarceration practices, policing practices, factory type sorting practices, and so forth. It is interesting

to me to see an instance of this phenomenon of "ideology growing out of practices" happen right before our very eyes via the growth of new kinds of learning through the institutionalization of dialogical educational practices. Simply by instituting new, (i.e., dialogical rather than monological) practices, new disciplines and ideologies emerged.

Perhaps in summary the best way for me to describe our course is with the word "integrity." As I mentioned at one point in the above conversation, my observation is that by working through issues together conversationally we were all increasingly able to see each other as people who also happened to be students and teachers, rather than as students and teachers who also happened to be people. Working in this way was sometimes frightening, sometimes intoxicating, never boring (at least not for us as teachers, and evidently not for students either, given that the course was evaluated by them as being very positive). It was not always an easy ride, not the simplest path to take, but -- somewhat like people say about having children -- it was very much worth any extra effort it might have taken to take the ride.

Again, Beth and I offer our research as a piece of "practitioner lore" and/or a piece of research/praxis (what Patti Lather refers to as "research as praxis"). Neither of us are particularly interested in offering anything other than narrative evidence for the validity of our research/praxis, because narrative evidence seems best suited to what we did. It is thus, in the spirit of personal and interpersonal discovery, responsible choice based on conversation and reflection, that we offer our research/praxis.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### *EDUCATION AND THE POLITICS OF DESIRE IN PERSONAL-INDUSTRY*

*I argued in Chapter One that a fairly simple shift from one kind of technological paradigm (mass-industry) to another kind of technological paradigm (personal industry) is transforming social, institutional, and personal patterns/understandings. Chapters Two and Three both exemplify or embody this transformation.*

*In Part One of this chapter I continue the institutional focus of Chapter Three, taking a sustained look at the institutional politics of desire as they get played out in mass-industrial and personal-industrial forms of education. My argument is basically that personal-industry enables a very different, and ultimately radically different, politics of desire to emerge in educational praxis. In Part Two of this chapter I begin a deep-cultural exploration of the politics of desire – my argument being that the dynamics of personal-industry are gradually transforming the discursive subtext which underwrites the politics of desire.*

*This chapter begins a sustained look at dialogue and technology which extends into the next chapter, but it starts with the simple ideas that people desire to converse, and that current technologies proliferate opportunities to converse. I argue that personal-industry technology, and dialogue as “the work of personal-industry,” move with rather than against desire – touching on deep-cultural nerves along the way, and providing a way to “do education with desire”.*

*In the first part of this chapter I use the word ‘desire’ very generally, to refer to activities or practices which humans engage in with enjoyment and without coercion, such that when I say “people desire to converse” I mean that people evidently enjoy conversation without having to be coerced or otherwise instructed to do so. In the second part of this chapter I focus more specifically on erotic desire, in order to explore the deeper discursive aspects of desire (since in the West the deep discourse of desire mainly refers to the erotic).*

#### **Section One: Learning and Desire**

Schools in our society are for the most part obviously compulsory environments, but less obviously they are also environments where desire is systematically squashed and

squelched through the valorization of activities which many students basically do not desire to engage in. For example, students for the most part evince little desire to read and write academic essays, yet reading and writing academic essays are activities which are very highly valorized. In this sort of environment, where what is desired is almost by definition excluded, it is transformational then simply to introduce something which students desire to do (i.e., converse with one another) into the learning process.

The “into the learning process” part of the above formulation is very important. It can certainly be noted that schools acknowledge and encourage desires to compete, excel, and set oneself apart, but it’s worth noting that all of these are either tangential or external to the learning process itself. My position is that the encouragement of desires to compete and so forth is often pitted against a kind of paean to cooperation-sans-desire, and that this dichotomy frames the elision of desire in the learning process. I think conversation introduces desire directly into the learning process in ways which can then accommodate the further development of healthy human desire to strive (“healthy” meaning to strive but not at the expense of others) and also accommodate the further development of cooperation based on an affirmed desire to cooperate rather than based on the dichotomously framed and somewhat negatively defined position of anti-competition, anti-personal desire.

By placing a desired activity such as conversation into the center of the learning process, re-placing for example the relatively undesired activity of producing monological essays, desire literally and materially becomes “significant” -- a part of the signifying

process itself rather than apart from it. In other words, rather than desire being a means to an end (i.e., the desire for good grades), it becomes part of the end and the means, part of the point itself, bound up in the meaning-making process as an integral part of learning. This is where the difference becomes qualitative.

Yet conversation, in particular written conversation, also reinforces academic culture's identity as "the culture of readers who write and writers who read." This ends up being important in a conceptual sense (alluding to a complex rather than simple or dichotomous model) and also important in a strategic sense; obviously there are other things which students desire which would transform education, but they would never fly in academic culture because they would threaten its identity contours.

There are clearly ways other than "pedagogies of written conversation" to introduce desire into education, but I don't think there are ways of importing desire which run less risk of being rejected out of hand as too threatening to the contours of academic cultural identity. Let's face it, academic culture is conservative and defensive about its mission to protect and serve reading and writing practices because it is through these practices that its cultural values are unconsciously projected. If educational reform does *not* include, involve, and/or interface reading and writing practices, such reform is more or less, sooner or later, doomed in academic culture. Defensive reaction will overwhelm reform which threatens to oust reading and writing practices from the center of academic culture without finesse.

For example, pedagogies of direct democracy, Deweyan or not, introduce desire and thereby “reform” education by placing the emphasis on empowered decision making based on individual and group desires related to governance. However, this intervention threatens academic culture because in an identity sense there is really no "school" if students are not spending most of their time reading and writing, there is really no "school" if students are only thinking, in a strict sense, about governance, and/or there is certainly no school if they "vote" to not have school at all! However, both desire and democracy can be nourished in education through conversational writing. In Beth Baldwin's words

*“What is democracy if not a community sharing discourse -- sometimes a large community, conceived of as a nation; sometimes smaller communities such as towns, neighborhoods, a school district, a club, or even two people talking with one another at the clothesline or over a cup of coffee. In any case, it's the act of sharing as coequals that opens the communicative experience fully to all participants. While we may ordinarily think of democracy strictly in public-political terms as a decision-making process that leads to some kind of policy or action, democracy is also at work in its most fundamental form whenever people come together to talk as equals and to share meanings.”*

So in this sense written conversation as a center of educational practice has a certain advantage of being capable of greater range, flexibility, and richness of variation in expressed desires -- and again, it is able to complexly express this greater range while at the same time honing reading and writing skills and thereby not threatening the identity contours of a basically defensive culture.

To some extent a "pedagogy of relationship" -- yet another way to get desire into education in order to "reform" it -- borders on our "pedagogy of written conversation." But again, similar to Deweyan or direct democratic education, it also tends to threaten rather than transform academic culture. For example, a philosophy teacher I once had put it this way, in relation to desire, education, and conversation: "If you want to learn how to write, fall in love with someone far away. If you want to learn how to talk, fall in love with someone nearby." This particular teacher was very enthused about the model of education evident in Plato's *Symposium* -- a model where Eros and erudition are "in bed with each other" so to speak.

But again this threatens academic culture's identity as we know it, and in any case reverses the order of priorities of conversation-based pedagogies -- it's not so much that students need to fall in love so they can learn, but rather more that students through conversation can "fall into understanding" -- a concept which is broad enough to encompass possibilities for relationship, democracy, and the development of real, felt desires to practice traditional academic skills of reading and writing in order to relate, and live, better lives after school is over. Beth and I for example found that intersubjective

tolerance -- one index of “falling into understanding”-- pretty much naturally emerged out of written conversational activity. We also found that conversational writing was understandably quite compatible with learning to read and write, think and reason! The merger of desire and learning, via written conversation, seemed to produce many beneficial effects in the center of the learning process, and nice side effects as well.

### **Section Two: Desire’s Depth Dimension**

In Section One I argued that desire can be introduced into the learning process via conversational writing. In this section I will consider the depth dimensions of desire, which is partly a matter of configuring traditional resistances to doing education with desire, whether via conversation or any other means. I do this “configuring” in order to cover all the bases, in the sense of acknowledging that repressive deep-cultural texts are already intervening in the world of electronic communication media, already hard at the work of repressing the Internet and its sometimes eroticized, adult speech, already working to limit the situations in which personal-industry forms of education will be recognized and accepted as valid.

In effect what I do in this section is construct an alternative to what I take to be the dominant Western discourse on desire. I construct a discourse which “bends” the discourse on desire rather than completely rejecting it. What I accept is the assertion of a deep relationship between erotic desire and any other kind of desire. This provides the

continuity. I then promote Eros's amplification rather than its repression. This provides the innovation. In other words I construct a discursive model which "mirrors" the model of conversational praxis outlined in Section One, a model which transforms without overly threatening identity contours. What emerges from my alternative construct is a depth-definition of desire which involves Eros but is not equated with it.

I construct my alternative in some sense "conversationally," in that I stage a conversation with text passages from other writers. My intent in doing this is to continue with my pattern of reflexively merging form and content, and to slightly interrupt the flow of signifiers with which the deep role of Eros in life and learning has traditionally been defined as something in need of control, something in need of death and resurrection, something in need of instruction, something to be feared, something at odds with ethics, morality, and spiritual life. My hope is that this interruption promotes reconsideration of this traditional picture by providing a coherent position in relation to which the traditional picture can be perceived as ideology rather than assumed as reality. Throughout this section I continue to relate my ideological/discursive exploration to pedagogy/practice, and in the end I relate this exploration to issues and models of communication.

8 8 8

*"The erotic underlines all levels of experience, openly and fearlessly, with intense joy. As we feel deeply the complex, many dimensions of ourselves, we begin to want the joy that*

*we know emerges through the erotic. We begin to examine our lives for the excellence and fulfillment we glimpse in erotic power. We are empowered to refuse the convenient, shoddy, conventional, and safe. The erotic compels us to be hungry for justice at our very depths because we are response-able."*

- Rita Nakashima Brock

To me this quote beautifully states the idea that desire is a pre-condition for response-ability and responsibility, and that therefore we need to be encouraging desire rather than discouraging it. Connections to desire need to be established, via conversation for example, in order to establish further connections to ethical relationship, connections through which we can for example become passionate and "hungry for justice at our very depths."

We tend I think to regard amplified desire with great dread, rather than imagining amplified desire spreading from the personal to the social to the moral. Again, we imagine amplified desire leading directly to things like pornography, when in fact it is suppressed desire which leads there. Brock's text indicates that if we establish less fearful relationships to desire, if we link Eros and ethics for example, we open the door to establishing a better, more ethical world.

The work which Beth and I have been doing foregrounds the notion that conversation is one way to establish a less fearful relationship to desire, and in many ways our conversational writing and teaching collaboration has in a relevant sense "produced

ethical relationship.” It has been our perception that in our own working/writing together, our desire "to keep the conversation going," has fairly clearly becomes its own pleasure principle as well as its own ethical principle; for us the work of conversation itself has involved learning what it means to be response-able (that's the pleasure part, much more fun than writing non-responsively), and to act responsibly in the face or fact of our different responses/opinions (that's the ethical part, having to deal with intersubjective difference, not just talk or write about it).

*“Carnavalesque structure is like the residue of a cosmogony that ignored substance, causality, or identity outside of its link to the whole, which exists only in or through relationship. This carnivalesque cosmogony has persisted in the form of an antitheological (but not antimystical) and deeply popular movement. It remains present as an often misunderstood and persecuted substratum of official Western culture throughout its entire history; it is most noticeable in folk games as well as in Medieval theater and prose (anecdotes, fables, and the Roman de Renart). As composed of distances, relationships, analogies, and nonexclusive oppositions, it is essentially dialogical. It is a spectacle, but without as stage; a game, but also a daily undertaking; a signifier, but also a signified.”*

- Julia Kristeva

I very much like this evocation of carnival in relation to dialogue and/or conversation. Very often it seems to me we don't worry enough about producing the response-able conditions in which people might actually *want* to live and let live, might actually *want* to save the planet, etc. In other words we don't worry enough about making life worth saving! For me, doing the work of conversational writing has been a continual joy -- even when it has been hard work it has been intrinsically meaningful work, and hence enjoyable, a way of realizing the deeper sense of interrelatedness which Kristeva speaks of in the fun, carnivalesque way that she speaks of. This kind of joy was also evident in the class which Beth and I co-taught. Students worked very hard at written conversation, but to a one answered "yes" when asked if it was worth the effort, and in many cases and instances reported that they were enjoying the process. Experiencing this kind of joy is part and parcel of wanting others to experience it, and wanting life to continue in such a way that future generations will be able to experience it.

I also really like that Kristeva evokes the submerged or suppressed traditions of carnival and mysticism in the West -- including the more ribald, chaotic theater traditions for example -- because I think we are entering an era when these traditions are re-surfacing through the avenue of electronic communication technologies. Her expression "spectacle without a stage" is to me a beautiful and accurate evocation and description of what happens when the run-of-the-mill brilliance of conversation is unleashed, unshackled, allowed to emerge and self-regulate. It is not the case that all hell breaks loose when conversation is allowed and encouraged. It is also not the case that the situation reverts

back to rigid order because things get so chaotic. Instead what happens, for example as it did in our “carnavalesque” teaching experience using electronic media, is an outbreak of self regulation (a.k.a. moral response-ability and moral responsibility freely and enjoyably arrived at through conversation and reflection). The comprehensiveness of the transformation brought on by simply allowing conversation to take its place in the center of things has been, in point of experience, amazing -- sometimes a bit frightening, sometimes intoxicating, never boring. Sort of like a good carnival; neither in control or out of control, but rather opening up the vast liminal place where the two walk hand in hand, spin and jump, catch one another.

*"Pluralism requires that conflicting notions of shared, social knowledge coexist, and that the conflicts themselves be publicly explored. Consequently, it necessitates the conversations that sustain a community proceed not toward agreements that would end the exchange but toward the exposure of disagreements. In essence, it means that the primary agreement that supports the process of conversation is the agreement to converse. From this perspective, the consensus upon which every conversation is built and toward which every conversation progresses is not so much an ideological agreement as it is an agreement to continue to discuss. . ."*

- Gregory Clark

For me this quote extends the sense of carnival which inheres in conversation. It is the play of differences, the commitment to the game, to the fun, which drives the construction of meaning. To short-circuit this desirous play is to short-circuit learning and ethical relationship. It's important to say that this play of differences in conversation often becomes "serious," "meaningful," play -- play which supplies the absolutely crucial dimension of response-ability required for ethical responsibility, and play which points towards the importance of "in-moving" desire in education rather than "in-stilling" motivation.

It's important to reiterate that this "serious play" can nonetheless be fun. Not only does play become serious in conversation centered education, but also serious thinking/worrying about issues can also be appreciated as enjoyable. On the model of Socrates, it became one of our goals that our students "gossip about ideas."

*"We read in Plato that Eros's mother was called Penia, meaning poverty or need. There is a static and an dynamic interpretation for this name: to feel deprived of something means to be spurred to search for it. In both life and love necessity drives us onward, but the search never ends, because whatever happens the result is always less than our expectations. Like Ulysses, humankind is forever embittered by experience, but dissatisfaction is the price we pay for growth. We know that personality only develops under the spur of what we are lacking." - Aldo Carotenuto*

For me this quote begins to get at the depth dimension of *why* we are willing to continue the conversation, why students are ready to say unequivocally that the effort required to stay in the conversation was worth it, why we are willing to "pay the price for growth" through entering into conversations and relationships. In other words to me this quote begins to speak to the complex blend of satisfaction/searching which characterizes human being, and highlights the important role which interaction, including conversational interaction, plays in both the satisfaction and the searching..

*"Erotic power is the power of our primal interrelatedness."*

-Rita Nakashima Brock

This quote again underscores the way in which desire underwrites interrelatedness, the satisfaction and the searching -- an "underwriting" which is of course literally realized in conversational writing, and which makes sense of conversation as 'verbal intercourse.' For intensely social creatures, let's face it, conversation is intensely enjoyable -- and it's nice to hear someone just flat-out claim that interrelatedness is "primal" -- constituted by the basic play of human desire. It certainly seems obvious to me that human beings are deeply social, deeply and passionately interrelated. The task becomes how to explain the disconnects, which the following quote begins to do.

*"Erotic power denied and crushed produces dominance and control."*

-Rita Nakashima Brock

Very often it is feared that unleashing response-ability will result in chaos and then the need to assert even more dominance and control. But here Brock asserts, accurately I think, that it is in fact the prior denial of Eros, the denial of response-ability, the denial of the opportunity for self-regulation to develop uniquely out of chaotic and ultimately mysterious patterns, which *produces* the need for dominance and control. In other words what I am calling self-regulation (a.k.a. moral response-ability and responsibility) only develops when an interactive process is allowed to develop the patterns of knowledge and trust which can only happen if the process is allowed to play out! If this pattern-making process is cut short by fear of what might could happen for example if interaction is allowed, the patterns of response-ability and responsibility are virtually guaranteed to not develop. Fear of desire thus becomes self-fulfilling prophecy. In education as in society, response-ability is rarely if ever it seems to me allowed to develop beyond initial fear -- and this anxious "fact of fear" has some fairly interesting theological dimensions, which the following two quotes explore.

*"Jews and Christians have adored God as the origin of all virtue, a wellspring of justice, wisdom, mercy, patience, strength, and love. But peripherally and implicitly, they have also grown accustomed and then attached, over the centuries, to what we may call God's anxiety. God is an amalgam of several personalities in one character. Tension among these personalities makes God difficult, but it also makes him compelling, even addictive.*

*While consciously emulating his virtues, the West has unconsciously assimilated the anxiety-inducing tension between his unity and his multiplicity. In the end, despite the longing Westerners sometimes feel for a simpler, less anxious, more "centered" human ideal, the only people whom we find satisfyingly real are people whose identity binds several incompatible subidentities together."*

- Jack Miles

*"He [God] is talking to himself. No human being has yet been created to hear him, and the other divine beings whom he will address infrequently and almost in passing seem barely within his field of attention -- bystanders at best, not collaborators."*

-Jack Miles

If 1) conversation and the implied and sometimes explicit erotic potential of conversation are very basic or primal to human beings, and 2) human beings in our culture model themselves on God in the way Miles suggests we do, and 3) God's character is complex but basically "intra" rather than "inter" personal, then clearly 4) we are at odds with ourselves because it is of our essence to be communicative, to be in conversation, but God models for us a form of solipsistic, private communication.

For me there is a fairly clear parallel here to the highly "quasi" forms of communication which are routinely used in academic exchanges -- for example the professorial writing in the margins, the test, the quiz, or even the essay. In particular the

practice of students communicating “privately” with their instructors via essays, office visits, and so on indicates to me that we have indeed perhaps created ourselves and our institutions in God's image in this sense.

Again however, if Miles is right in his argument, "being at odds with ourselves" talking to ourselves, or talking “vertically” (i.e., “up” to teachers, “down” to students) or in private are in form and effect devotional acts -- since God is also at odds with himself and models these sorts of private or vertical communicative forms himself. On this account, we would pretty much have to imagine traditional style monological academicians as at least quasi saints, modeling both vertical/authoritative speech as well as private consultation speech. Again though, teachers do not have to be particularly heinous or villainous to partake in these sorts of things; these are structural or “hidden” features of practice.

In any case the stakes involved in changing from a text-based to a conversation-based pedagogy -- even if we are talking about a pedagogy of written conversation -- would seem to be fairly high, and sunk fairly deep. If indeed we are so attached to or "addicted" to our view of God which Miles asserts, it would possibly require an even stronger addiction to move us off of that position. And for me, this is the point where I have to begin to talk about the nature of technology, and the nature of the current technological revolution -- for in this complex configuration is, I think, an addictive force which is clearly strong enough to unseat the monological imperative in education, and even strong enough to alter our understanding of God. In a way there is nothing new

about cyberspace. It is after all the place where we've always been and the place where we have sometimes explicitly gone when reading a good novel , watching a good movie, or praying. The difference is just that you can now meet others in cyberspace, you can talk with them there, and (because people desire to converse) desire is present. The implications in this are enormous, complex, deep, and at least potentially liberating both for education and society. In the next chapter I spin out some of them out.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## PRODUCING THE NARCOTIC REAL VIA PERSONAL-INDUSTRY

*In this chapter I give the deep-cultural perspective on desire a further and harder spin, this time into the terrain of addiction and spirituality. My argument is that the dynamics of personal-industry – in the form of an “addiction to communication technologies” – are in the process of transforming our understanding of God.*

*This chapter extends and adds to the previous chapter’s deep-hermeneutic ruminations about fear, desire, personal-industry, and conversation. I venture into the heart of the “fear of desire,” seeking dialogue with the king of fearsome desirous beasts – addiction – partly because it is with pictures such as that of “the addict” that we maintain ourselves in fear of desire.*

*I argue, following Jung and a more contemporary theorist of addiction, that there are important spiritual aspects to the phenomenon of addiction which are worth thinking about and saving, and which images of “the addict” tend to block from our view. And finally I argue that we are perhaps in the process of a kind of religious transformation as we gradually supplant our addiction to fear with an addiction to communication technologies – the result of which will be the production of an embodied God and an appreciation of the “narcotic real.”*

*The chapter is written in the form of what Beth and I have come to call a “ramble” – meaning an extended monologue which is nonetheless intended to eventually be responded to as, and hence brought into, dialogue. The final part of the ramble once again contains a sort of “staged conversation” with various quotes concerning addiction. Because a ramble embodies a kind of flow process, I have not divided this chapter into sections.*

On Monday, 3 July 1995 BOB KING wrote:

Hi Beth,

Wow! Another month, another chapter. I’m hoping to do the next one a little quicker. I have a favor to ask. It may be that I’ve become addicted to working conversationally, so I’m going to ask you if you’d be willing to read the following -- what will amount to one

of my longer “rambles” -- and let me know what you think.

I closed chapter two with the idea that we are perhaps addicted to a certain concept of God, and with my argument that “the cure” for this addiction would be another addiction (to the combination of technology and dialogue which communication technologies make possible and increasingly available). I realize this is a kind of problematic idea, this substitution of one addiction for another, so I figured it might be a good idea to dwell on it briefly in a separate chapter.

Supposing we are addicted to a fear of desire (in the form of a particular God concept)? Supposing we are addicted to a fear of addiction? If we are, then we are clearly dealing with having to unravel complex, reflexive convolutions. I have to digress here just a bit to make a couple of connections re: convolutions and short circuits. In an interesting book called *A History of God*, Karen Armstrong at several different points mentions that Christianity has features which are distinctly convoluted and vexing -- for example ‘creation out of nothing,’ which goes against all prior religious formulations of creation, and of course the Holy Trinity -- an idea which defies almost any sort of analysis.

After reading this I remembered a wonderful presentation I once heard about the artist Frank Stella -- the presenter talked only about the relationship of Stella’s work to his rhetoric about his work. It seems that Stella was, maybe still is, fond of issuing vexing utterances which defied all analysis. Mainly, at the same time as his canvases were becoming more and more sculptural, coming out from the wall further and further, he kept

saying to art reviewers that they were all about flatness and immateriality. Just plain bonkers on the face of it! The presenter pointed out that these statements created all kinds of discussion in print about his work -- discussion which would not have occurred if he had simply "talked straight," rather than convoluted.

Whether this was intentional or not is not a question I can take up. Mainly, in making this digression I am wanting to call attention to convolutions in discourses, how these convolutions attract attention, and how attracting attention is very important to the end goal of having one's discourse taken seriously. I guess I would also want to connect this to the point that Miles makes -- that the person of God is compelling precisely because he is so "fucked up" (to use "squid" terminology). What \*you\* might say is that the God discourse is extremely seductive.

Supposing from this I say that addiction is always a matter of convoluted short-circuit; for example if we are obsessed with working out God's convoluted personality we are short-circuited from actually having to think about whether or not our lives are meaningful. If we are endlessly discussing whether Stella's paintings are immaterial or not, we are short-circuited from thinking about the paintings themselves -- do we even like them? If we are preoccupied with getting our next fix, our next drink, this supplies us with something to do but short-circuits us from thinking about what we are doing. These are all in a way classic examples of addiction-as-short-circuit or addiction-as-shortcut. The point of dwelling on God's nature is intended to keep us in touch with the meaning of life, even as the taking of an addictive drug might be designed by the user to keep him in

touch with life in some way, but the effect is short circuited; the person who dwells on God misses the meaning of life because he is always thinking about God, the person who is addicted to a substance in effect progressively removes himself from life's wonders.

This is a pretty standard tirade in a way, against the evils of addiction. In fact it is really hard to resist the temptation to just "go with" the negative cast of this argument. But my purpose is to sing the praises of addiction -- precisely because it represents a fairly pure and unlimited form of desire. So for starters when we worry about "meaning in life" and being drawn away from it by addictions, we easily forget that in so worrying we are separating "meaning in life" from "desire" (another example of how we "institutionalize" fear of desire, this time in language constructs). Once we effect this separation, we have in effect bought into a particular way of looking at the world, and we take that ride, we take \*that\* particular short-circuit -- the one I am interested in, the one which has it that we are addicted to the fear of connecting desire and meaning. Education for example, would seem to be heavily invested in these two remaining disconnected. Education has a real "jones" as they say, a real "habit," when it comes to keeping desire and meaning separated.

But again, part of my argument is that we need short-circuits, for one reason or another, and so we might as well give up the pursuit of reaching a state where all addictions are quelled. Looping back to that quote from Aldo Carotenuto in chapter 3, my sense is that as desiring critters we are always in a state of satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Bill McLaurin gave me a book on addiction because we'd talked about it and he knew I

had more than a passing interest. In this book there is a story about Jung treating a person for alcohol addiction. Strangely enough, Jung suggests that the only thing that could cure this person would be a “genuine religious conversion.” I say “strangely enough” because what we have here is Jung suggesting that religion might be a cure for alcohol addiction, whereas I am suggesting that techno-communication might be a cure for a particular form of addiction to religion! The part I am interested in here is that Jung, as you might imagine, would not see this “treatment” as *negative* -- in the sense of religion being the source of enough proscriptions to put the addict in line -- but rather *positive* in the sense that the desire/fire in religion would be more than sufficient to outshine the fire of alcohol. That’s what I call an interesting argument. Jung is working on the side of desire here, and that is exactly what I am trying to do. I am trying to configure a sense of meaning in life, or education, which includes, encourages, or is “informed by” desire.

Sometimes desire may also need to be “informed.” I am reminded here of some people in education who worked, again positively, *with* the desires of students to join gangs in order to *inform* those desires (for affiliation, for support, etc.) with other ways to satisfaction other than high-risk gang involvement. But informing desire is very different from controlling desire, or squelching desire. Further, being addicted to fear as a way to control ourselves seems to me to be an addiction which is in need of additional “information.” Along these lines I like to think of the Sufi’s or dervishes, spinning in an individual sense out of control, but nonetheless controlled by the context. In other words I think we need to look at the ways in which we create educational and social contexts

which, rather than supporting the desirous, passionate spinner, serve to alienate him/her. All of our contexts are set up to say "I told you so" when someone really gets to spinning out of control. In contrast, the Sufi encourages the spin and supplies a meaningful context for the spinning. In this way the positive "addictive force" of religion or spirituality is used to very good effect. This must be what Jung had in mind -- it becomes possible to think of education and life as significantly informed *by* these processes, and then complexly informed in return by our collective and individual intelligence.

You know, it seems control is necessary but we seem totally addicted/immersed in an "uninformed" concept of self-control -- which I think connects very much to Miles' idea about how caught up we are in emulating a self-contained, self-controlled God. In other words we are "hailed" over and over again to see ourselves in pursuit of ultimate self control, and we behave as if that is the only way to go.

As you know, when you and I were talking about ventriloquy I got real interested in how the ventriloquist-dummy dyad in effect externalizes an inner dialogue -- and that in fact this is easily parlayed into something nightmarish for us, because keeping this inner dialogue to ourselves is quite much the measure of self control (which is again a measure of our Godliness). I've been interested for some time in the fact that people in our culture are more afraid of public speaking than anything else -- more afraid of it than afraid of dying. I've wondered if this might be because of the frightening possibility that the internal dialogue will break out or "slip" out in Freudian terms. My point though is to say that the conditions which maintain this inner dialogue *as inner*, the kind of conditions of

God's personality which Miles describes, are seldom revealed or thought about, so as a result these fears remain pretty primal. Saturday Night Live makes light of this kind of thing with its "Mr. Subliminal" spots -- wherein the narrator speaks his sub-vocal thoughts -- but for the most part these fears remain pretty much locked away, until a deadly fearful "opportunity" to public speak presents itself I guess!

So my argument here connects back to thoughts about technology and communication. What again becomes really radical about electronic communication technologies is that they in effect externalize inner dialogues without generating fear -- because, as you have made clear to me over the course of our conversations, there are considerable fail-safes or controls built into the system that make it easier for people to externalize or "speak" themselves, their own inner dialogues, fearlessly. Since the machinery implies and in fact institutes a great deal of contextual control (supplying in a way a Sufi-esque context), the imperative to self control is simply weakened -- and this produces greater spinning in part because here is a context that says (finally) "go ahead and spin, spin harder, I'll catch you" rather than saying "I told you so" when you spin out of control and hit the turf.

In effect the experience of talking electronically is what portends radical reconfiguration of the God concept, because it alters the terms/politics of inner dialogue (by making it external) without enjoining the fear that for the most part maintains that concept's self containment. It seems like people are "just talking" but, given the deep significance of keeping talk self-contained, "just talking" means that our understanding of

God and self is changing as we speak/write, and changing at very deep levels. There are things here which I want to get into further at some point -- for example the intimacy factor of writing which for us tends to make writing e-mail more radical in this way than talking on the telephone. In other words in some chapter I will probably want to look closely at different technologies and wonder about why the telephone has not radicalized the concept of God in the way that e-mail, written conversation is doing. Anyway, that's something for later.

For now, along the lines of the God concept, one of the more curious features of the current personal-industry model of technology is that it's central character -- "The Internet" -- looks a whole lot like a technologically realized Christian heaven, in that it is in effect a medium for disembodied communication between minds/souls. I mean the thing really is angelic in many ways -- all the way down to the glass fibers it is partly constructed of, like heart strings, visible/invisible. So the startling thing is that we pretty much get heaven on earth, at least as such a thing has been outlined to this point.

But then when we actualize this talking in real life on the Internet, we experience -- we read, see, and feel -- the desire that is present there. As with the Buddhist convolution of desiring to have no desires, we can see that that the Christian conception of heaven, although disembodied, carries with it a tremendous wish, *a tremendous desire*, for direct human contact/communication. The Internet can be seen in this way as functioning much like a photographic negative, embodying the conditions for producing the positive. In making obvious, real, and explicit this deep human desire to converse implicit in the idea

of heaven -- and also making explicit the erotic or desirous dimension present in communication -- the Internet literally becomes a source of revelation. Through the revelation, the revealing, of desire our concepts of God and self are transformed.

In addition the Internet is in a way the first real sign, for patriarchal religiosity anyway, that God has a body. With the Internet, God now has a nervous system. In a strange, paradoxical, back-door way, the Internet announces the advent of a more matriarchal, more embodied form of religiosity which can be appreciated and engaged in routinely/ritualistically by many, many people. Heaven as embodied on the Internet becomes conversationally very active, at times erotically charged, and aurally alive -- much more like the sounds of Greek gods and goddesses cavorting, much less like the sounds of silence, or the angry sound of thunder.

If then we model ourselves on our understanding of God, and our understanding of God is being transformed, what happens next? Maybe I am just wishful thinking here, but I think what might could happen is that "the real" -- for example the everyday, embodied exchange -- begins to be experienced as narcotic. Whereas we have become somewhat accustomed to people *experiencing* everyday life and *yearning* for heaven, it becomes thinkable at least that people through experiencing heaven will yearn for everyday life. If so, this would bode well for everyday life and its somewhat lonely champions (i.e., environmentalists, certain kinds of feminists).

In terms of concrete instances of the "narcotic real" I still wonder about those first couple of times when you and I ran into each other face to face after spending quite a bit

of time interacting on e-mail. I am inclined to say that the effect was narcotic, in that it was quite jarring for both of us; what should have seemed utterly normal seemed utterly exotic. Everything out there was the same, but we were different. Anyway, I think there is something in our own experience here to suggest that involvement in electronic mediums can create 'otherworldly' experiences of the everyday -- not always amplified in the direction of pleasant, but nonetheless narcotic and interesting.

One more example along these lines. I've been interested in AA type programs for some time now too. I've thought of them as really revolutionary, not so much for the ideology but rather for what is promoted structurally/experientially -- namely, conversation and sociality as a substitute for substance addictions. These programs of course like to emphasize the ideology part, but I like to emphasize the "practices" part. In a very direct way, these sorts of programs prove that the fire of conversation and social relationships outshines the fire of substance addictions. If regular weekly meetings at someone's house can cure alcohol addiction for so many people, we have this almost complete reversal, where the everyday, the absolutely ordinary, becomes wildly therapeutic -- the everyday becomes powerfully narcotic. So in general I find myself in the somewhat odd position of advocating addiction to communication technologies as a way to connect to the utterly simple, utterly ordinary wonders of language, talk, sharing, relationships! I actively promote communications technologies in order to get to the simple wonders sooner rather than later (since we may not have much time). Again I think we need to worry more about why there are not better contextual supports for

people to really get spinning, really get addicted in a positive sense. Not that I want to deny that addictions can be negative if they are not informed, but more that I want to explore the possibility that in throwing out addiction we also throw out desire -- and all that desire can do.

The story in my mind is this. I hope I haven't already told you this story because its one of my favorites. My ex worked as a salad chef in a small restaurant with a chef, Richard, and an assistant, Manfred. One day Manfred, who was kind of high strung, uptight, really "threw a hissy fit" (or whatever that phrase is) over something, and he started just \*throwing\* the vegetables into the soup pot with full force! Richard, who was a real interesting kind of character, decided to just start handing more things to Manfred, so there is this scene of Manfred yelling and throwing, Richard handing more and more things to Manfred, keeping the flow going . The story has stuck with me I think because it is such a graphic example of the possibility of encouraging desire, even irrational desire, as long as the person is not hurting themselves. Richard was a sweet guy, and liked Manfred -- if M. had been going at himself with a paring knife or something like that, R of course would have been just as insistent on stopping him. So maybe in part of this story allows me to say that all addictions are not equal, that we need to modulate our opinion about it in light of its relation to desire -- maybe we need to see and support the inner light of desire.

There's the possibility too though, that we will simply, unknowingly, and literally "talk ourselves into" a different world and cosmology without having to *do* much of anything! I love this quote from Shotter about this phenomenon:

*An important change occurs, not simply when one or another side in an institution wins an argument, but when such an opportunity is used to change the style of future argumentation -- that is, the permitted forms of talk within that institution. For instance, the move begun in the seventeenth century during the Enlightenment -- to talk less about our lives in religious and more in secular terms, less in terms of 'souls' and the 'human spirit' and more in terms of 'brains' and 'minds', less in terms of God's will and more in terms of natural mechanisms -- was, and still is, just as important for the new sways of talking and the new forms of social relationship (and new forms of contest) it introduced, as for any of the particular conclusions so far reached. . . . I want to argue that present in the conversational background to our lives are many other forms of talk, with their own peculiar properties, currently without a 'voice' in the contests within the sphere. If they were to gain a voice, it could change our lives.*

Well, I want to argue that new forms of talk -- to wit electronically mediated forms of talk -- *are* changing our lives, even as we speak/write. If we speak/write conversationally and inhabit the new inside/outside place of God's nervous system, we may be literally building God's kingdom literally as we speak.

For anything to become addictive it has to "become part of ourselves" -- which for me means "a part of our nervous systems." The whole point of a nervous system is to sense what is "out there" by bringing it "in here." In other words the whole point of having a nervous system is to problematize the inner/outer boundary, whereas with other physiologic systems the whole point is to remain closed and self-contained. The anatomical metaphors in earlier times (the most familiar to us knowledge workers being the 'tree' of knowledge), and then biological metaphors, for example based on the

circulatory system, reflect different kinds of thinking about things. The complexity of thinking in the postmodern is, in my opinion, directly related to how the personal or information model of technology extends, “autoamputates” (in McLuhan’s sense) or foregrounds the nervous system, rather than other systems (the industrial model for example foregrounded muscle -- i.e., “industrial might.”). Because the nervous system is in its very nature complexly inner/outer, the recent preponderance of nervous system metaphors has perhaps problematized/complexified the entire cultural field -- and, again, in the process we have in some sense literally brought God into our lives, becoming one with God via the Internet. It’s for this reason ultimately that I’ve decided to work in instructional technology. I mean, another way to look at all of this is that the information part of computers is already doing for us many kinds of human thinking, such that what remains for us to do ourselves with computers are things like mysticism and poesis, building God’s kingdom. It’s a wild and interesting time to be alive in this way.

Anyway, I apologize for the length of this ramble. Here are some quotes from the addiction book, interspersed with some of my comments:

*“As Jung sees it, in the case of his patient Roland H., “his craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, experienced in Medieval language, the union with God.” He then concludes his letter by observing that the Latin term for “alcohol” is spiritus. Thus, he writes, “you use the same word for*

*the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is spiritus contra spiritum [spirit against spirit].” (105)*

*“Throughout the Western tradition, the process of developing character has been formulated in a predominantly negative way, as a matter of the observance of prohibitions and restrictions. All the way back at least to Socrates among the ancient Greeks, character formation has been conceived primarily in terms of avoiding doing anything wrong, rather than in terms of actively doing anything right. Plato’s Apology, for example, contains a famous passage in which Socrates discusses the “divine voice” that he sometimes hears speak to him inwardly. It is revealing that Socrates’ voice speaks to him only when he is about to do something wrong, rather than calling upon him to perform positive acts. The [divine] voice almost always says “No,” never “Yes.” (140)*

This author says all of this, and yet in the end of the book he comes out in favor of “detachment” -- the Buddhist ideal -- as the attitude to strive for in relation to addictions. I have a problem with this because it seems to me a gussied up appeal to the same negativity that he is criticizing earlier. It seems to me that he proposes detachment as the “spiritual practice” but this in effect restores the old convolution, the old wishing that human beings could just control themselves!

Anyway, what I want to argue is that conversation is a much better spiritual practice than detachment -- because it works "on the side of" desire, and is more accessible to more people than Buddhist practices are. Anyway, interesting to me that this author gets through all kinds of junk about addiction/desire, and then in the end turns this one convoluted back on what he has said -- recouping God's way. Here are more of the earlier quotes, prior to the subtle turnaround he makes. . .

*"Addiction turns out to be a paradoxically liberating process of enslavement in which one comes to oneself through losing control utterly. In that sense, the meaning of addiction is freedom." (118)*

*"Addiction has about it something of the Holy. In Addiction and Grace, the psychiatrist Gerald May calls addiction "the sacred disease of our time." He is thinking of addiction similarly to the way Jung thought of alcoholism when he said it was an expression of the same longing that, in Medieval language, is called the longing for God -- a longing for "wholeness" Jung said." (110)*

*"As Gregory Bateson in effect also perceived, addiction is the living out of incommensurable need. For that very reason, as Bateson saw further, it is the process that progressively weans addicts away from any substitute for the absolute." (114)*

*“Those who have never been addicted only because they lack enough passion for it are not even in sainthood’s vicinity.” (112)*

*“The deluded idol worshipper, says Kierkegaard, is far closer to God than the correct-thinking citizen of Christendom. The very passion and wholeheartedness of the former’s worship brings him into the proximity of God.” (116)*

*“Nietzsche remarks that what we humans find intolerable is not pain as such. We can, in fact, tolerate a great deal of pain. What we find intolerable, he notes, is meaningless pain.” (106)*

*“Along with speech itself, addiction in the full sense is a distinctively human phenomenon. As Stanton Peele and others have observed, it is not at all easy to get rats or other animals to display signs of full addiction. In contrast to rats, getting humans to become addicted is remarkably easy. Whereas one really has to force rats to become addicted, about all one has to do to human beings is to give them a chance to become addicts. That, and take away any strong block against addiction, as both Jung and [William] Burroughs observed.” (105)*

*“Everything that is says yes.” —Nietzsche*

*“The opposing positive power is so great and so uncanny as to always to be able to turn even the worst machinations of Jung’s negative “evil principle” against its own intentions, and to bring the good rather than evil out of them.” (118)*

*“How can a need for anything at all, a deep-seated need, not be spiritual? How could it be separate?” -- Beth Baldwin*

Anyway, I’m sure you more than get the picture, particularly since this last quote is yours! I am basically saying that I think addiction can be encouraged/informed because “even the worst machinations” can be turned to great good wherever desire is clearly present. Without desire you get at best a ho-hum -- and that just ain’t doin it, in education or in life.

I hope there is something in this that you will want to respond to! This must be my longest ramble -- but maybe not; back in our arguing days I strung a few lines together then too :)

## CHAPTER SIX

### ETHICS AND PERSONAL-INDUSTRY

*In this chapter I draw in the reins a bit to address ethical questions which tend to swirl around the rapid extension of the personal-industrial technology paradigm into our lives. In other words in this chapter I take a sustained look at the condition of response-ability which inheres in the personal-industrial paradigm and I question whether this response-ability implies responsibility.*

*I am not so blissed out that I am unaware that many people feel that electronic technology bodes anything but well for everyday life, spiritual life, the environment, human relationships, and so forth. In particular I know that many people would feel uneasy with the notion that the world is soon going to be driven by desire and addiction rather than by the clear light of reason and benign, divine, Fatherly intervention!*

*Therefore In this chapter I subject my positions to critical scrutiny, I “attack my own convictions” to use Cornel West’s phrase. I do this in dialogue with Patricia Mutch, my marriage partner, on the topic of technology and responsibility. We write about environmental issues, since questions of technological responsibility often take shape in that context. We also write about language – in this case debating how to understand and frame the condition of personal-industry in “responsible” language. My text is in italic typeface, Patricia’s is in regular typeface.*

*As you no doubt know by now, I think the way the question of the environment and technology has been framed goes basically nowhere because it continually fights the idea that humans are part of the environment and fights the idea that technology is, in some relevant sense, a part of human nature.*

*So, I think the elided question concerns “mediatedness.” We seem to be struggling to get to a place where we recognize that we are “socially mediated creatures,” and the final argument for this position is that there never has been a time*

*when humans were not social, so it must be the case that humans \*are\* social in their very creatureness. The next step, as I see it, is to acknowledge that humans are technologically mediated, and the same final argument would apply: since there has never been a time when humans were not intensely involved in the technological, it must be the case that humans \*are\* technologically mediated in their very creatureness.*

*Environmentalists, up until this recent wave of new ones (who still it seems to me carry major features of the old into the new), have wanted to skip the “techno-mediation” point and go right to the next step – which is biological mediatedness. In other words, environmentalists would like people to feel their bio-mediatedness, their connectedness with the earth, but they fail to realize that we can’t just “skip over” this techno-connection.*

*Anyway, my sense is that social mediatedness is at least fairly well established, that techno-mediatedness is in process but is fighting many rearguard actions, and bio-mediatedness would constitute the last phase in what would amount to the transformation of how humans conceive of themselves, birth themselves, in language constructs.*

*Humans are in my view connected to the earth \*through\* technology – whether this is the technology of hunting and gathering, the technology of story telling, the technology of farming, or the technology of computer communication – so we just can’t skip that part because it is how we interact with the biosphere. It’s part of our nature.*

*Tim Callicutt said perhaps what’s happened is a kind of hubris effect; people cannot even be awed, as “the ancients” perhaps were, by the ‘technology of nature’ –*

*meaning people used to figure that nature could do things that humans could not do, and there was a measure of respect in that which could generate awe, even though (in support of my idea) that index of appreciation/awe was 'level of technological prowess' or some such thing. And there may be something to this, particularly given that we are now gene-splicing, "making organisms," and that sort of thing.*

*But then again, agriculture might have seemed like much the same sort of hubris to hunter-gatherers. Writing might have seemed like much the same hubris to oral cultures. There might have been a time when it was deemed hubris to go into some other territory to hunt and gather, since nature should provide whatever you need without your having to intervene in outlying areas. These are things we, or at least I, don't know.*

*What we \*do\* know is that we are, as creatures, intensely bound up with technology, one way or another, for better or worse. The sooner we realize that we are married to technology just as we are married to sociality -- the sooner we realize that we \*need\* technology just as much as we need social interaction -- the better. We need to face up to the fact that there just won't be any "coming out of denial" into a techno-free world. The denial we need to come out of is that we can even \*be\* apart from technology. And yes, given the complexity of evolution, that might mean that we won't be able to live without gene splicing and designer organisms, any more than I would be alive it weren't for medical and sanitation technologies.*

*So I tend to derive my sense of awe now from the overwhelming complexity of life, not necessarily from nature per se. As I've said to you before, I find resonance with*

*aspects of Indian (subcontinent) cosmology because it seems to suggest to me that the whole thing spins in/out of control, and we are privileged to take the ride for a short while. Keep your eyes open, fasten your seatbelt if that makes you feel better, but take the ride for just what it is at whatever time you happen to be on the great wheel. Do what you can, in other words, but don't let that spoil the trip.*

It seems to me that you are confusing two things: how an individual approaches life -- whether they fear it or embrace it -- and the effects of technology. It seems to me that your arguments concern mainly the first of these, namely, an individual's approach to life, and that your feeling is that we should not be fearful or avoidant of human capacities to create and technologize.

I basically agree with you that fear, including fear of technology, is not good. But I do not take the further step that not fearing implies that anything we do or can imagine doing is OK.

It seems to me you are saying that if people do whatever they desire, whatever feels good, then everything will turn out fine. This is a very inviting position because in taking it, a person is absolved of all responsibility except responsibility to his/herself.

I agree with you that humans are a part of the environment and that technology is a part of human nature. In saying further that all technology is OK, however, you reveal an additional belief that humans have no responsibility towards their environment. What does saying that we are a part of the environment mean? If the environment is a collection

of resources to be subject to human manipulation, then it's hard to see why anyone would have a sense of responsibility towards a bunch of stuff.

But if the environment, earth, cosmos, is a living being itself, then just doing whatever we want without a sense of responsibility for that which we are a part of takes on new meaning.

I am reminded of the conversation we had this morning about children and responsibility -- if we don't allow children to experience real responsibility, we infantilize them. Similarly, if adults don't take the real responsibility of being a part of a real, living world, then they become infantilized and absorbed in their own creativity \*to the exclusion of all else\*.

*I think you are right to say that there are two issues here. What I am trying to say is that the two issues are connected, in a kind of sequence. My sense is that as a culture we have to get through the fear issue in order to deal with the effects of technology issue. As long as we continue to fear technology, or react to it unknowingly, we will be unable to deal with the issue of its effects effectively.*

*I would never say that anything we do or can imagine doing is OK. What I would say is that telling adults "no, bad girl, bad boy" -- and I think you would have to admit that many environmentalists adopt this stance in relation to technology -- does the exact opposite of creating the kind of responsibility that you quite rightly argue is at the basis of a sound relationship towards the environment or anything else. Nay-saying to*

*adults is precisely the condition in which infantilization occurs. People require responsibility in order to be later responsible. So I am trying to get at what I would call the "preconditions" for developing responsibility. I think less fear is one precondition, and not talking down to or nay-saying people is another.*

*I would say that most environmentalists strike me as "lecturers" or "preachers," rather than conversants. They therefore suffer the same sorts of fates that monologue pedagogues of all stripes do -- they get to be right, and irrelevant (except in the next life for preachers, and in the never changing afterlife of publishing for lecturers). Preachers and lecturers prefer to be disembodied -- not dealing with the nitty gritty issues of technology -- but they are trying to promote an idea of embodied nature; the idea and the approach are therefore at odds. I'd like to see more environmentalists becoming scientists, or at very least conversationalists, but that is just my bias.*

*Strangely enough, for example, the new communication technologies might be helping to supply the very preconditions of fear-reduced response-ability which I think could be accentuated by environmental computer scientists. It's more fearless, because people seem to feel freer to talk freely via electrons. It creates response-ability in being a format in which everyone appears as equal (that is, as little blips of light on a screen in the shapes of letters). So in a way my bias is towards working from the inside out.*

*Again, I am not saying that I think everything will just work out fine, no matter what we think and do. I am saying that if people rather than being infantilized are instead afforded conditions of response-ability they will develop emergent order systems*

*of feedback which will exert powerful controls on what is actually done. In conditions of response-ability people make good decisions I think, because they are \*making\* decisions, not just reacting to pre-packaged issues framed by whatever expert is telling them to sit up and pay attention. In my classes I think I saw this at work: letting people talk as freely (response-ably) as they want to about race and other very charged issues creates a reflective personal sense of responsibility, and a social/group sense of responsibility. At no point did I proscribe any language, any words, and I also never needed to. Self-regulation \*does\* happen if it is allowed to, and so I am for anything which seems to afford opportunities for self-regulation to occur, because I think that's how you get responsibility.*

*In an age of mass-media technology, it may just be the case that environmentalists had to reach for the lectern and the pulpit and start to "broadcast," so I don't want to be castigating environmentalists for operating in a certain way given certain prevailing conditions. It's just that as of now there is this other 'environment' (Internet and so forth) and there may be other options. Critics say "oh, that's using technology to solve technology" -- and I'd again say nothing else has ever been done so we might as well get used to the idea! Again, hunter gatherers perhaps created a strain on the environment with the technology of hunter gathering, which perhaps forced them to develop the technology of nomadism -- moving camps so that a given area would not be totally scoured. A technological solution to a technologically-induced problem.*

*In the present world, communication is a real problem -- particularly since environmental problems are systemic and global -- and so I am in favor of communication technologies, the more the better, so that we can make our decisions as knowledgeably and responsibly as the hunter gatherers did. Yes, we're solving a technologically induced problem with technology, of course we are. Let's work towards doing this well. So again, my issue is communication more than environment -- you're right about that -- but I think the two are connected in our present world.*

*Communication and the production of responsibility are "environmental" issues.*

*I am also saying -- so you're right about this, too -- that in order to make sane decisions about what is good and what is not so good sometimes requires more prescience than we have available, so it comes down to a "fear" vs. "fearless" choice at times, which is for me a kind of spiritual matter. Mainly though, I am saying that if we are to be able to make good choices about technology there is significant groundwork which needs to be laid first, in terms of establishing preconditions of response-ability through adequate communication channels. If humans regard technology as "a part of themselves" and themselves as "a part of nature," a metonymic chain is set up through which humans are connected to nature. Communication and technology are both keys to sane environmentalism, as is a "spirited" rather than fearful attitude towards life because spiritedness makes life seem worth living, and worth saving -- which is also a motivating factor for responsible decisions/actions in regard to the environment.*

First of all, where did you get the idea that most environmentalists are not scientists? Take a look at any environmental science curriculum or subscribe to an environmental listserv. Science is the basis for environmentalists' responsibility and response-ability.

Second, you are not talking about technology in general. Your main focus is conversation that is direct and honest. So I think this conversation is about the environment and social humans. The extent of technology really being addressed here is e-mail and the Internet system, which is fine, but not to be confused with technology.

Why didn't you respond to the main point of my message?

*Okay, I stand corrected on that one about environmentalists not being scientists. In any case though, since you asked, I got the idea from "general circulation" -- environmentalists who get onto the mass media are pretty much not the scientists in my experience. In a way, the example you give of scientists getting "heard" on listservs on the Internet illustrates my point about the new understandings that are possible given this particular new technology. Tied to the mass media, I developed a certain impression about "environmentalists" which would not hold up if I got on a couple of environmental listservs, as you recommended I do.*

*You're also right that I'm talking mainly about electronic technologies, the ones which are proliferating in our current "environment." But if you recall I was speaking of hunter gathering as a form of technology, and I'd also say writing is a form of*

*technology, so I \*am\* talking about technology in a very general sense as well. It's just that right now the tip of the iceberg is electronic technology or computer technology, and yes again, most of my experience is drawn from using the communication potentials of this technology, not its number crunching potentials for example.*

*In regard to my not responding to the main point of your message, it seems to me as well a lot of the time that people don't respond to the main point of my messages! There is considerable slack in communication as you know. I thought I was responding to your main point!*

*So, tell me in your own words again, what was your main point? I tend to think that we rarely \*start\* with understanding of main points, but rather that we try to \*reach\* understanding of main points through conversation, correction, revision, and so on. If we just understood each other from the git-go, there would be little reason to talk!! Maybe you are thinking of new chip-implant technology that would eliminate the need for messy negotiations!! :)*

What I would like to discuss are the implications of promoting computer use without regard for *\*all\** repercussions of such use. Despite what you write, it does seem to me that you believe that conversation will automatically result in responsible action on the part of those involved in the conversation. That is what I meant when I wrote previously that you seem to feel everything will work out OK if each person follows their own desire.

If you don't think that everything will turn out OK, then I would like to hear what you do think will happen in terms of the larger environmental picture when everyone has their own computer and is really hooked on spending large amounts of time in front of the computer. (I guess I don't buy the idea that this will give people a greater appreciation for everyday life. I don't see any precedent for development of such appreciation out of a technological advance and I don't think that computers are so different from other technology that their effects on people will be radically different).

What I see (with more people involved with computers) is this: first of all we will have taken another step in the never-ending consumer spiral of yet one more item that every household needs (accompanied by massive resource depletion and pollution--what about communal computer use?). Second of all, this growth in the consumer world will occur in the context of increasing corporate control and centralization. What I do think is positive about what you are doing is making people aware of creative and personal modalities for using a medium (computers) which has the potential to be quite uncreative as well (packaged software, etc.). I talked before about not seeing a precedent for appreciation of daily life developing out of a technological advance; I also don't see any precedent for a radical anti-growth trend with a technology as popular and widespread as computers now are, so in many ways making the best of an inevitable technological development in the way that you're doing is a positive action. I would like to consider in addition to such action the further question of responsibility to the earth.

I agree with you that humans are a part of the environment and that technology is a part of human nature. But exactly how are humans a part of the environment? The consideration of the relationship of humans to the environment determines, I believe, the context for human use of and involvement with technology.

If the environment is regarded as a collection of resources, then I think we arrive at a position such as yours: that there is no need for explicit consideration of individual responsibility with regard to the environment.

But if the environment, or earth, is regarded as a living being itself, then acting without an explicit sense of responsibility for that which we are a part of is unthinkable. In terms of the metaphors you are using, addiction occurs in the context of responsibility. A person's addictions are always relevant to the effect that the addictive behavior has on people that are in relationship with the addicted individual. For example, when an alcoholic's behavior adversely affects the quality of his/her relationships with others, then that person has a responsibility to maintain an active awareness of his/her addictive behavior.

Analogously, I think that computer use needs to be practiced with an active awareness of responsibility to the earth with which the individual is in relationship with. To simply bliss out on the communicative potential of cyberspace without an awareness of how this behavior is affecting the natural world with which one is in relationship is irresponsible in the same way that it is irresponsible for an alcoholic parent or child to bliss out on alcohol while his/her family members are suffering the effects of neglect.

And it seems undeniable to me that the earth is indeed showing signs of neglect relative to its relationship with humans.

*Thanks for your thoughtful response. I'll respond in a kind of "global" sense, since our topic is the earth, might as well be global about it :)*

*I think you raise a very good point when you say that we need to try and account for \*all\* of the effects of promoting a technology like electronic communication, because as you say all sorts of things go along with the promotion: an already almost unlimited array of consumer products related to computers. An unlimited need to "upgrade" to better and better products. A computer in every house if not one for every person, and so on. Clearly this kind of manufacturing cannot be without environmental effects.*

*At the same time I am not in a position to characterize, let alone assess, these effects. I understand from "general circulation" that toxic waste in the form of solvents for example is a problematic effect of computer manufacturing. But I'm not sure how this stacks up against other things that computers might mean less of, like automobile travel, if and when more people can work where they live rather than physically commuting. I was just talking with a person over in IRC today about how she is homeschooling using computer resources. What is the overall effect of this technology then in terms of human choice and the "quality of life" that can be afforded by parents being able to exercise these sorts of options to a greater degree?*

*At times it seems to me that our generation is so used to the news about technology being bad that we have become almost reactionary to it. I mean it is hard to deny that in our lifetimes technology has tended to mean the atom bomb, the mechanized war, the toxic dump, the dirty air. I think maybe we need to look at a Wittgensteinian vocabulary of "use" to correctly assess technology. What are the uses to which computers are put, what kinds of things are enabled? I think the most widespread change that will come in these terms will be the ability to do more things without physical travel - work, school, etc. This doesn't make toxic waste a non-problem, it just means that we may have to look at this new technology as, well, \*new\*. In just the way that mass industrial technology could not be understood on the model of cottage industry, computer technology cannot be understood on the model of industrial technology. For example, a personal computer may \*function\* much more like a hoe than a bulldozer even though it is connected, as you point out, to very centralized industries. So what I'm saying is that this model has \*complex\*, contrary effects which need to be understood on their own terms, and I am suggesting that "use" may be a good index of evaluation if we really want to see what the global effects of computer technology will be.*

*Conceptually, "use" has this advantage: it is already a concept which implies a relationality between humans and environment, it's an interactive concept. It is very hard in a discussion of "environmentalism" to not fall into the trap of seeing "the environment" as separable from humans. Even seeing it as a "living being" has this problem. So I am saying we need to look at interfaces such as "use" to find the*

*conceptual tools to understand what is happening with this new technology in the kind of overall way that you are suggesting we must.*

*One of the paradoxes or "complex effects" of computer technology is that there \*is\* a lot of sharing of resources. Even though computer terminals are individualized and personal in that sense, WANS (wide area networks) basically share computing resources so that not every terminal needs to be fully souped up. The Internet itself models quite a bit of sharing. So again, the effects are complex. Yes, everyone needs to have a computer or access to one, but this in turn means that all sorts of other things do not need to be duplicated in every city and town (which, as you and I have talked about, may not bode well for centralized institutions like universities and schools; the new organizational structures will not need a university in every town nor a school in every neighborhood). So again, the industrial logic is thrown off and we are trying to invent a new logic for new circumstances. My sense is that is an important and urgent task, and that is partly why I am so keen on communication technology: conversation is inherently complex, and as such the "answers" that derive from conversation as a practice, even a spiritual practice, are well suited to the complexities of this new techno-sphere of computers. My sense is that we \*need\* computers not only because there are now so many of us that we need the added channels to sense ourselves, but also because we need a dialogistic (inherently complex) rather than monologicistic (inherently simple) daily praxis in order to properly understand what is going on.*

*You and I are exercising this daily praxis now; what I am writing is much more complex than it would have been had I just written a monologic treatise, and the effect on a reader is probably even more pronounced in that way. These are not simple problems and through this praxis we \*cannot\*, literally cannot, arrive at simple solutions. So in a way I agree with you that conversation does not guarantee the best outcome, but it does guarantee that the outcome will not be as simplistic as it might otherwise have been, and in the present circumstances I am willing to call that "good" since the problems we face in thinking about environment and responsibility are nothing if not complex.*

*I look to addiction in order to mine it for the desire that is present, in whatever twisted form it might take. In the same way I think educators need to look at \*anything\* which people desire to do and mine some clues for how to get some of that into schools (since we still have to worry about such things in the late phase of industrial technology that we are still in). I totally agree with you that addictions need to be managed for possible hurts to others. My only point about addiction to technology as regards the environment was to suggest that here too we need to mine the kind of attachment that technology is able to arouse in people and see how we can use that to foster connections to the biological world. Going back to the "hoe" metaphor, it seems to me that people really like for the most part to interact with the biological world, so having a personal computer may enable more personal gardening to be done -- and I still say that working a garden does more for environmental consciousness than reading Theodore Roszak does. As I've said before, my model of environmentalism is Bali -- where literally every*

*inch of the island is somehow touched and worked by humans. Nothing, or almost nothing, is unaltered. I think we need to see ourselves that way — with our hands already and always in the cookie jar.*

*My other response to your message is just to say in a global sense that I am much more interested in reflecting on how we look at ourselves instead of reflecting on how we look at the environment. I don't think it will ever work to just get people to "look at" the environment as a living being. Too abstract. It would be nice, but I would need you to talk more specifically about how we get from here to there. I am interested in your reaction to writers who assert that human beings are related to the environment in just this way; they are creatures, and further, they are creatures who are genetically bent on the short term solution as the key to success in a species sense. In other words, do you think that humans are capable of the kind of planning and organization that you might have in mind as necessary? I think we have to have some radical faith in ourselves as toolmakers and hope that in our toolmaking is something which provides bodily insights, again much like an addiction does. I think we overestimate our cognitive abilities when it comes to these global issues. As I understand it the genetic material that is truly different about human beings constitutes one one-hundredth of one percent of our overall inheritance. That's putting a lot of money on one narrow groove in the great wheel. I think we have to hope we will get through this and other crises by hook, crook, and cunning, like most other critters do, and by our strength — toolmaking — such as only we are capable of. I think we have to put our money there. I'm for the sumbitches who*

*spend their time figuring out how to build a non-polluting car and I am for tools (such as computers) that encourage the complexity of conversation and maybe work against the need for so much physical travel. I wish there were no untoward effects of these things, but in the overall scheme I'm still willing to bet that it's our best bet to stay with our strengths.*

A couple of things came to mind as I was reading your most recent message. First of all, conceiving of the earth as a living being is not for me a cognitive exercise, nor is it for at least some other people; this I understand from personal communication. As I think I've described before, I feel a physical pain when I see and feel damage to the earth, plants, waters, animals, pain such as I feel watching someone I love being harmed. I don't know exactly how to discuss this with someone who doesn't feel similarly: in some ways it seems like people can be from incommensurate camps in this regard. I would like to believe that everyone could feel the way I do, but from experience in this and other issues, it seems that people have different concerns, priorities, and personality tendencies. As we've discussed before, most people would have a very difficult time comprehending where you're coming from, and likewise for me most probably.

Whether conversation can do much to change this, I don't know for sure. My suspicion is that conversation is superlative for a lot of things, but for some things, like interaction with the earth, direct experience is better. Among the other people who feel

physical pain for the earth are at least some Native Americans, and I know that in many ways the traditional Native American world view is basically incommensurate with the western world view. Because basic foundations are so contrary, there is simply no possibility of compromise between native and western views. Native Americans have realized this from the very beginning of contact with Europeans, and have asked simply to be left alone to live as they desire, to no avail.

In writing, thinking, and talking about these issues it has occurred to me that there really is no satisfactory language of ecology. It seems to me an area that is so new for westerners that we really can't talk expressively about it. Native cultures have their own systems and languages but when we attempt to speak them it sounds like we are parroting others. This makes sense considering as I said before that the languages of the two world views are incommensurate: for a native speaker of western culture, native cultures, while one such as myself may feel it in their heart, sounds generally dopey because there is no fit with my cultured knowledge system.

I think you believe that you are working within the framework of western culture to address human needs and problems in a way that westerners can sincerely relate to, and this I admire. It is my personal belief that there is another approach and that is to develop a language of ecology more directly aware of the earth; maybe the people to do this are those such as myself who feel the connection to the earth most strongly.

Another thing that came to mind is that you are correct in saying that we really don't know what the pollution balance is with regard to new technology: are computers in

the balance more ecological because people will avail themselves of other polluting technologies such as transportation technologies, less? I think it is fair to say that we don't know and probably won't know, until it is too late. Many environmental scientists spend their lives assessing the impact of various pollutants on natural cycles and resources and the basic outcome is that because of the complexity of the problems at hand, no-one ever really knows. I think that to some extent the environmental movement gets its impetus from this dynamic: some people involved in the day-to-day scientific study of environmental processes realize that the complexity of the systems involved is such that we will never know for sure what's best. This leads them to approach the problem in a totally different way and that is to put less faith in the power of human cognition and more faith in the combined complexity of the human-earth system. The earth is not a living being apart from humans, rather it is a living being which includes us.

That is what I mean when I speak of responsibility and opening up the discussion from communication technologies to the human-earth system. I am suggesting that responsibility may be the start of a language of ecology, which as I mentioned earlier, I believe is non-existent.

I don't feel that your emphasis on conversation is overdone, but I do feel that it could be enhanced by consideration of issues such as responsibility as I have mentioned in previous messages. I see at least two problems, related to each other, with advocating a position of conversation, pure and simple. One is that not everyone will agree to

participate in conversation, and the other is that power relations exist such that some people have little to gain from conversation, and they know this.

Your position is close to what Jerry Mander identifies as the liberal response to all new technologies: It depends on how it's used. Mander writes about Walter Truett Anderson, a California writer and environmentalist who wrote a book titled "To Govern Evolution," "[Anderson] points out that we have been altering nature for thousands of years, at least since the beginning of agriculture, and that biotechnology is only the latest example. . . Anderson is interested in standards: 'We should be asking some very serious questions. . . about what we should and should not do. . . [biotech] is here; it won't go away; we have to learn how to cope with it. And we can't allow it to be guided entirely by the profit motive.'" Mander writes "What makes Anderson's view a liberal rather than a conservative one is that he speaks about the dangers of a police state, and the harmfulness of the profit motive as the guiding principle for development. But in all other ways Anderson's views are identical with conservative analyses of technology."

It seems to me that in encouraging conversation and nothing more, that you are not presenting yourself strongly enough, or not presenting yourself at all.

Conversation is, ultimately, the means by which change occurs; I agree with you on that. But there are the additional issues of who is talking and why, who should be talking and why, who talks from a position of power and why. In all these issues the "why" is important, and this is where I think a consideration of responsibility comes in. When I define terms of responsibility, or you do, or anyone else in the conversation does,

then the conversation becomes potentially critical of a conservative position. But without a commitment to issues such as responsibility, there will be no change in matters of participation and power in conversation.

With regard to issues of language, I generally agree with you on all points, especially that language can not develop outside of conversational use. What I was saying with regard to a language of ecology is that I think the terms of use, the parameters of conversation, of most environmentalists to this date have been mis-focused in that most environmental conversation is about measurements, calculations, resource depletion, and the nuts and bolts of the material world. I feel it would be more fruitful to include in the conversation, construct a language with the means to discuss, the human-nonhuman connection as well.

*In your last message I pick up two main themes. One is "incommensurability of world views" and the other is "lack of a language of ecology." You question my emphasis on conversation, but it seems to me that you pin your hopes as well on the creation of new language -- which I would say requires that people have venues in which to create. In fact I would say that the purpose of language is to bridge incommensurability, as far as this is possible, and that incommensurability is in many ways an ontological fact -- we are all strangers to each other in some ways, always unknown to each other in some ways. Conversation bridges or "heals" these divides -- at least it is our best hope for*

*such healing -- whether between individuals or between cultures. And it is surely through conversation that new language is created.*

*So I would agree with you that incommensurability is an issue when thinking about native American vs. western cosmologies, but I would only say that this is not at all unusual -- \*all\* conversation starts from the basic fact of incommensurability. The real question is where do we go \*from\* that point, how do we react to that fact. In specific terms of a language of ecology, I would disagree with you. Ecology is a term which has only been around for about 40 years and has made considerable inroads in our culture. I also think that the "language of complexity theory" is highly ecological in your terms -- in the sense that it encourages the idea that there are processes that are finally not amenable to apprehension by linear cognition alone. I think complexity theory does begin to position humans complexly inside/outside the biosphere, mediating and mediated, a part of rather than apart from. I figure Heisenberg started this by saying that even the white-coated lab experimenter is literally part of the experiment, changing that which is being observed. So I would say that the ideas and language you are looking for are already available there and are beginning to be implemented in many contexts. It's a transitional time though, and there is plenty of fear to go around when it comes to changing old patterns of thought. The benefits of working with scientific language is that, for better or worse, it smoothes some of these fears given that we have had now several hundred years in the West of trusting in it as a form of socially generated*

*knowledge. If we change the way science is talked or languaged, we are in effect changing the world in a big way.*

*That book I mentioned to you \_Conversational Realities\_ makes this point very well I think. The author points out that the scientific revolution did much more to alter the ways we \*talk\* about the world than it did to prove anything about the world. It introduced all kinds of new terminology to supplant talk of souls for example, but did not prove that souls do not exist. The world view becomes reified in the talking, but the assumptions that the world view banks on seem to go unaddressed. So what are we left with? -- exactly this: we are left with the assumption that how we talk about the world is inseparable from the nature of the world. In other words we are left with "constructivist" principles, which are radically different from what we have been used to. So constructivism may also be a language that we could promote towards your desire to have a language of ecology. What constructivism leads us too inevitably is that humans are, perhaps all creatures are, hopelessly (or hopefully, depending on how you look at it) mediated. We are mediated by language -- that's human nature. We are mediated by technology -- that's human nature. We are mediated by culture -- that's human nature. We are mediated by biology -- that's human nature. This makes for a \*very complex\*, moving picture, and I agree with you that the problem for our transitional time between static and moving pictures is how to construct language to describe what hasn't been lived yet. I think such language is being constructed, and there is much promotion to be done.*

*You might already be "there" so to speak -- able, like native Americans, to feel the pain of the earth. My criticism of native Americans, and as you know to some extent of you too, is that you and they are not committed enough to conversation. Their attitude is often that they have the grand scheme figured out and leave it for others to "come and see" the truth that they already possess. In a strange way this is a very non-interactive posture to take from within a cultural ideology which we like to imagine says "all things are related." We may get into problems talking about n.a. society as monolithic, but I would say there are some threads -- one that you point out (that n.a. society tends to see the world relationally) and one that I point out (that n.a. society is somewhat non-conversational). I say that non-conversationality is a good way to reify incommensurability, the only way in fact. So when I see incommensurability being put forth as an argument I want to do sociology of knowledge or psychology of knowledge and ask what the person or society putting forth this idea has to gain by putting it forth, and/or what they have to lose by not putting it forth.*

*Anyway, points of agreement between us seem to me to move along an edge of language as a concern and conversation as a concern. I foreground a concern for conversational venues or opportunities because I believe, and I think I have seen, that if given the opportunity to talk the language \*will\* be generated, partly because it is human nature to be mediated by language and society. But I also believe, and I think I have seen, that the reverse does not hold; that is, if the language is "out there" but there are only slight opportunities to work the language in conversation (this is a fairly apt*

*description of most education from students' point of view) then the desired transformations, the necessary creation of language in the users of the language, \*will not\* occur. So I guess, somewhat like McLuhan, I am more concerned about mediums than messages. I think mediums can defeat messages any old or new day. I think messages become hopelessly and inevitably irrelevant if they are not mediated, for example in conversation.*

*My argument is that conversation builds response-ability and this in turn builds responsibility. It's a two step process. Among other things it is not possible to build environmental responsibility by one-step shopping -- "taking everyone to visit a rainforest." If you think there are disparities in terms of who gets to talk, there are even greater disparities in terms of who gets to have wilderness experiences or whatever is that would build responsibility in your book. You continually switch my argument to the practical if I am arguing theoretically, or switch my argument to the theoretical if I am arguing practically. Maybe you should talk about how \*you\* would build the kind of responsibility you think is needed. I am saying that conversation is one of the key preconditions of responsibility -- so contrary to what you are saying I am \*continually\* aware of questions of responsibility when I promote the establishment of conversational venues and opportunities. Humans establish their relationship to the world through language and technology, so I figure being concerned about language and technology makes some sense in terms of responsibly thinking about the world. In other words, for*

*me conversation/responsibility/world are best framed, one way or another, together given the nature of human nature.*

*I agree with you that there are problems when people do not want to converse or when they feel that it's pointless due to power disparities. All the more reason to encourage people to want to converse by offering as many channels/options as possible, and to encourage modes of conversation (i.e., electronic modes) which have at least some "leveling" effects on hierarchies. For example as you pointed out earlier "real scientists" can converse with "regular people" on listservs and this did not happen before — hence a "leveling" or "horizontality" is put into effect. Perfect results? Of course not. Better than before? Of course. Qualitatively different? Possibly.*

*Also, my position is very different from anything Jerry Mander could come up with I would say. I think he is trapped in language constructs that have nothing to do with the non-linear potentials and complexities which characterize the era we are now in. I am \*not\* saying that we just need to be concerned with how technologies are applied or used. When I was talking about "use" as a metaphor, I was doing this to call attention to the ways in which "use" and "significance" are connected, to call attention to the ways in which "medium" is never neutral. What you seem to be claiming, via Mander, is that I am in the classical liberal posture, saying that technologies are neutral and the significance is only established through use. But I'm saying something quite different. I am saying that the kinds of technologies we are now in the middle of cannot be*

*understood on the basis of “neutrality made meaningful through use” or by appeals to binaries like “classical liberal vs. whatever.”*

*I would like to have you find me a passage where Mander comes out and talks about how \*he\* is framing his discourse -- not about how these folks over here, the "liberals," and those folks over there, the "conservatives," frame their discourses. Is Mander a constructivist? (I am) Does he think that technology can be understood on the basis of cognitive processes alone? (I think not) If not, how does he propose we understand it? What is his basic philosophical orientation? These would be a good places to start with him. He seems, in good environmentalist fashion, to talk too freely about "other people" without revealing enough of himself. Much of what I've read by him suggests to me all of the things that are still wrong with environmentalism -- such as its namecalling, negative approach and its lack of self-definition.*

*I agree with you that the language of measurement and so on is inappropriate and/or misdirected, whether this language is used by environmentalists or anyone else. But by the same token, so is any language which does not find a way to \*emphatically\* frame the human being and the environment in the same frame. Haraway emphatically frames humans as connected, via cyborg theory. Prigogine and Stengers do this with complexity theory. Show me Mander's frame! I'll bet it's hard to find.*

*It seems to me that environmentalists are intent on using 19th century language to criticize each other for being 19th century -- as if that somehow causes them to rise*

*above it. Donna Haraway is my idea of an environmentalist, precisely because she is working the terrain of language to find ways out of binary language traps.*

*To your credit, you have (unlike Mander) defined yourself. You wrote,*

*"Practically speaking, I would go about encouraging responsibility and that is to talk about what our responsibilities are, to make the issue of responsibility explicit."*

*Again it is interesting to me that when it comes right down to it you are advocating "talk" – to talk explicitly about our responsibilities are. This is good I think, but also begs several questions. First, what does this talk look like? Is it a lecture? Is it a sermon? Is it a conversation? Do lectures, sermons, and conversations carry the same meanings even if the topic is the same? It seems to me that each of these different mediums, each of these forms of talk, carries different messages.*

*What I have been trying to get at is the ways in which environmentalists have been lecturers and preachers and about how this has undermined the theme of interrelatedness that they are trying to promote. This is why conversation is important; conversation *\*is\** interrelationship enacted, in practice, and provides a real basis or model for acting in a conscionable, responsible, interrelated way. In my opinion you tend to skip over the issue of media and method, as if these were neutral, when you say*

*that "we should talk explicitly about environmental responsibility" without elaborating what you mean more precisely.*

*Second, I think it's utterly crucial that people talk explicitly about responsibilities -- I never said that these sorts of topics should be banned from conversation. What I am saying is that we've known the environmental message for some time now, and it seems not enough people have responded to it appropriately. Maybe that means we need to look at "media" or "method" issues to figure out why that is, since the "message" hasn't changed and yet it is still going nowhere. The environmental message seems very akin to "the war on drugs" in this respect -- lots of money and energy spent, no appreciable results. I'd say "more of the same" is not called for in these kinds of circumstances.. I am trying to suggest that maybe "direct action" -- squared away facing the responsibilities of the issue or whatever -- may be part of the problem, not part of the solution -- mainly because it tries to skip the step of instituting response-ability as a precondition of responsibility. The difference between my position and the classical liberal position is that I do not stop at establishing response-ability like classical liberals do. I advocate continuing on to step two, arriving at responsible positions.*

I am in total agreement with all that you wrote in your last message. To avoid confusion, I will go over each point in my own words. The form that I believe this talk

about responsibility should take is indeed conversation, not a lecture or sermon or any other form. Each of these media does carry different messages. It does seem to me that, for the most part, environmentalists have been lecturers and preachers and that this has undermined the interrelatedness they are trying to promote. Conversation is interrelationship enacted.

I do not believe that issues of medium and method are neutral; I believe that they carry a lot of weight. Indeed, this is why I am suggesting that talk of (conversation on the topic of) responsibility, and specifically the responsibilities of humans to the earth, be made explicit. Such talk should be made explicit because the medium of computer communication conveys more meaning than the meaning imparted by interactive conversation. The medium of computer communication, if unacknowledged as a medium, also conveys implicit acceptance of the spread of electronic technology. It also conveys the value of human-human interrelatedness (which I believe is one of the most important values to emphasize and develop) but does not implicitly, as a medium, convey the value of human-earth interrelatedness (which I believe is another important value to emphasize and develop).

In order to offset these implicit biases (biases such as any medium will have) of the medium of computer communication, I propose conversation to make these biases explicit--conversation not only through the computer medium but face-to-face and face-to-nature conversations as well. So I agree with you that it is crucial that people talk explicitly about responsibilities, specifically those responsibilities I have mentioned above.

I also agree that, in some respects, people have not responded appropriately to the environmental message thus far and that this does warrant a critical look at the media used to convey the environmental message. I advocate conversation as a good candidate for the environmental message-medium but not to the exclusion of other experiential media. I don't think that everything about the environmental message-medium thus far needs to be thrown out. Things I would not want to throw out: human contact with the earth and natural process, experiences illustrating the radical extent to which opportunities for this contact has recently diminished, real life experience of the destruction of natural process, real life experience of the power and wonder of natural process, some "listing" of facts on environmental status: I do believe people respond to these facts; it's just that their response is easily manipulated by the mass media (witness the popularity of recycling and the subsequent consumer emphasis on "green" products). More conversation would be a good way to help counteract such manipulation.

I will elaborate more on things I would not throw out and on the interaction of personal environmental response and mass media manipulation in my next message.

*Thanks for your last message. I'll again first quote you on what I take to be your main point, and then I'll go on from there. This one gets a little wordy again, but trust me it is only because the going is getting tougher here and I am just trying to use writing as a tool of discovery -- I'm not making an argument as such.*

*". . .the medium of computer communication conveys more meaning than the meaning imparted by interactive conversation. The medium of computer communication, if unacknowledged as a medium, also conveys implicit acceptance of the spread of electronic technology. It also conveys the value of human-human interrelatedness (which I believe is one of the most important values to emphasize and develop) but does not implicitly, as a medium, convey the value of human-earth interrelatedness (which I believe is another important value to emphasize and develop)."*

*First I like that we are now talking about computer technology in terms of its "inherent" or "implicit" aspects, rather than its applied aspects -- because, as we've already agreed upon, it is not likely that anyone at this point can know what the overall effects will be, for good or bad, etc.*

*I also like 'inherency' or 'implicit' as a focus is because I think it accurately reflects that the relationship between humans and technology is also one of inherency (technology "inheres" in human beings, as a capacity). So, moving the discussion to "media-content" -- AKA "the inherent tendencies or properties of different technologies to influence human thought and behavior in particular and very intimate ways" -- moves us into a terrain of complexity which fits or mirrors the complexity of the human-technology relationship in my opinion. The problem is, at this point we now need to talk seriously about "models" and "images" and "metaphors" with which to attempt to understand a phenomenon as complex as inherency.*

*The way to deal with simple heteronomous effects -- i.e., for example the situation where it is easy to see that technology is good for some things, for other things not so good -- is to make a tally sheet, count up the good against the bad, and make a decision based on the likely good vs. the likely bad. But it seems we are already beyond that. Inherency is not simple heteronomy. The relationships are much tighter, much more reflexive, much more complex. So how do we then approach something as complex as computer technology?*

*Some writers approach the complexity of the new technology by trying to metonymically "hook it up" to other projects. For example, Donna Haraway supports connectedness to technology in order to facilitate further connectedness to earth/life. She argues that techno-connectedness may be our best hope of \*establishing\* earth connectedness -- which she sees as being possible only if we can come to see the earth literally in us, just as cyborgs depict technology as literally in us. Haraway in other words banks on the power of images -- and in particular the pop culture images that you also refer to as having the capacity to alter perceptions/facts.*

*Whatever you may think of her argument, I would say that she at least has made this move that we too now have made into talking about, modeling, technology on some notion of complex inherency.*

*As you know I have put forth the possibility of understanding techno-inherency in terms of addiction, and advocated for the possibility that through the extreme connectedness to technology that humans seem capable of may be an avenue to connect*

*to the "real world" as a special effect or narcotic effect. Again, this is not a thoroughly noodled out theory, but it does have the benefit of modeling the understanding of technology on a relationship of inherency (in this case addiction).*

*Perhaps the best I can say what I have a feeling for at this point is that in tapping into humans' "inherent" needs to converse, to learn, and to use tools (the things we have absolutely needed to do in order to survive as creatures) computer technology mirrors, feeds back, and amplifies inherent "mediatedness" of humans in a way that we haven't seen before. Maybe we just plain don't have the conceptual tools yet to understand it. Maybe it fits the Western pattern that Tim spoke of -- the actuality of the situation always running well ahead of the conceptual grasp. All the more reason to catch up? Do you have any ideas about how to conceptually model the relationship of humans and environment which somehow accounts for the inherency/complexity of the relationship? Cyborgs, addiction, complexity theory -- these are about the only ones I can think of just now.*

In response to your last message I will focus on the concept of inherency which seems to me to be the foundation of your discussion in that message. I agree that we need to talk about models, images, and metaphors that could possibly be used in an attempt to understand a phenomenon as complex as inherency. Along with a model for understanding inherency goes, I think, some idea of what it is that we are considering to

be inherent: are we talking about inherent cognitive needs, inherent biological needs, or inherent qualities that encompass several types of needs. For example, the inherent human needs to converse, to learn, and to use tools that you mentioned in your message I would call cognitive needs, and the quality of inherent mediatedness of humans that you mentioned I would say encompasses several types of needs--which ones would be open to discussion.

My preference in talking about inherency is to name some of the inherent human needs and then go about trying to fashion a model that allows for all these needs to be included. I prefer this method to picking one quality, such as mediatedness, and then trying to argue that all significant needs are characterized by this quality because I feel the former method is a more open approach and (especially when more than one person is involved, as is the case here,) allows for more construction and cooperation (in choosing needs) and less combative argument (deciding whose abstract quality best fits the reality).

So, I agree with you that inherent human needs include needs to converse, to learn, and to use tools. I think other inherent needs are reflected in the evolutionary memory in each person's brain and include needs such as the need to be outdoors, a need for small communities and a low population density, a need for clean, fresh air, water, food, soil. I don't think we evolve out of needs such as these.

I also think we don't want to reinforce any dichotomies in types of needs such as "cognitive" versus "physical" or "biological." Biology gradually passes over into the physiology of the organism and thus

merges with its chemical and physical conditions which in turn merge with cognitive and social conditions.

So, it seems we are discussing models of inherency that encompass certain inherent needs, and the general nature of inherency in computer technology and in humans. In what follows I will talk about inherency in general terms that I believe accurately represent the inherent human needs I listed above, and also about what I perceive to be important differences in inherency in humans and in computer technology.

Starting with computer technology, I will use the model of complexity theory to explore what's inherent in computer technology (hereafter simply computers). Complexity theory derives from a basic 1/0, +/-, or on/off unit. The theory states, and demonstrates (through the use of computer computations, by the way,) that infinite combinations and sequences of these units result in surprisingly complex and intricate structures (arguably akin to complex organic structures). By setting the initial conditions of iterations of these units, the same structure can be repeatedly created (so these creation processes are replicable).

From these properties of complexity theory and computer operation, we can draw several properties inherent in computers which, I think, are deceptively similar to complex inherent properties of humans. I will elaborate on why I think they are deceptive after saying what these properties are. The intricacy and complexity of structures is a big one, combined with the existence of a creative process; in other words, it appears that computer iteration is paralleling the process by which, for example, a very simple

combination such as one organic molecule plus another (the parallel is the +/- unit for computers) can evolve into a complex living being (on a human time scale), or one simple algae can evolve into a complex organic system (on an evolutionary time scale). I think this parallel is the main reason why people are so drawn to computer technology and the potentials of computer calculation.

What gets people so excited, and rightly so I believe, is that complexity is produced out of simplicity and that the results are replicable, seemingly representing, for example, the replicable processes of human reproduction and human creation. But I think this is only half the picture and by focusing simply on the half we do have, it is too easy to neglect the other half. The other half, the half other than replicability, is variability. A model of psychological development comes to mind: a living being increasingly differentiates at the same time as it is increasingly integrating.

So, what is the process or the cause whereby complex organic structures are not only amazingly similar, time after time, but also amazingly different? (i.e. no two trees, two humans, two whatever, are exactly the same?) I'm not sure what the answer is, but I do believe that herein lies the reason why inherency in humans does not match inherency in computers. We need different models of inherency for the two and, in discussing the fit or lack of fit between inherent qualities of humans and computers, the fact that the models of inherency for the two are different indicates that there are important discrepancies between inherency in humans and computers. Which is not to deny that there is some constructive fit as well, it just indicates the limits to this fit.

To speculate for a minute on what the nature of the factor of variability or difference is, I would guess it has something to do with the passage of time, not simple irreversibility but real, lived time. Complexity theory and computer calculation are outside of real, lived time in that real time is not a factor in their outcomes. They can, organic factors aside, live on forever.

One thing in your last message I was not clear on: I do not understand why or how techno-connectedness establishes earth-connectedness (your representation of Haraway's argument) except in the simple (but still worthwhile) sense that embracing all material, including the technologically created, allows us to see that there is nothing that is not earth and not us. I think this is valuable but by no means the extent of the issue. I have tried to address above what the more subtle reverberations of embracing the technologically created as "us" are. An outcome of the my theory (variability AND replicability) that is outlined above, is that inherent human needs encompassing variability and needs encompassing the passage of time, needs we retain from our past, cannot be met by inherent qualities of computers.

*I appreciate your last message very much. I hope I can do it justice by responding to a few of the strands you develop.*

*First off, I like the work you do in developing the concept of inherency to take into account various kinds of inherency in humans, not just "cognitive inherency," and I like that you later then tie this general point back to the specifics of computers, in*

*arguing as you do that there may even be something inherent in computers which "speaks to" an appreciation of organic evolution.*

*I have to say that I think where you have gone with the concept of inherency actually adds something important to Donna Haraway's argument that. . .*

*"A cyborg world may be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints."*

*In my read of Haraway, she argues that in the images of cyborgs (machine/human hybrids) there is some hope in the fact that these figures are literally understood as partial and/or "existing "in relation to" rather than "existing unto themselves, alone." These cyborg figures, according to other writers such as Claudia Springer, literally exhibit a kind of "feminized" vulnerability in their obvious need for external supports, even though the cyborgs in popular cinema tend to be hyper-masculine in form and behavioral attribute (meaning they are mostly heavily armed and inclined to use violence to solve any and all problems).*

*What your argument adds to this is a vector which connects the fascination with electronic technology to the generation of organic complexity via infinite combinations of simple elements. In other words you, using inherency as a vehicle, travel into the*

*circuitry of the cyborg rather than staying on the gleaming armored surfaces and banking on the capacity of images of connectedness in one context (cyborgs) to translate or bridge to the kind of environmental consciousness you have in mind. Even though you point out that technological consciousness differs from environmental consciousness in the latter implies variability and real time, you nonetheless move cyborg theory along an interesting path.*

*As a kind of aside, there are writers who would say that variability is now being figured out on the borders of the AI (artificial intelligence) community, and then there are writers such as O.H. Hardison who argued that eventually silicon-based life *\*will\** evolve in real time. He argues that what we are approaching in the current wave of technology is a changeover from "carbon based life" to "silicon based life." For now, I am glad to be of and in carbon, but in any case it probably is important too note that there are people who can get excited about electronic and bio-tech eventually moving into the two areas -- variability and real time evolution -- which you mention as differentiating features.*

*This ties into your mention that the attributes of computers are all "cognitive." Prior to information technologies, technologies pretty much enabled humans to stop doing things that "animal power" could do better (using a horse and plow for example rather than a human and plow) or then letting a machine do the same "animal" job better than and animal (we refer for example too the "horsepower" of motors). But with information technology we enter an era where technologies can be better at some of the*

*things we pride ourselves in being uniquely suited as a species to do -- and these are for the most part the cognitive and tool-making skills. So this is a kind of intuitive way to get the idea that these new technologies are "under our skin" both literally and figuratively in ways that prior technologies were not.*

*Again what your argument does though is quite similar to what Piaget does in saying that advanced cognitive and tool making skills are in fact a biological adaptation -- in other words at one and the same time he is able to say that these things are special and also not so special. You do the same thing by pointing to the glaring similarity between "cognitive processes and technologies" and organic-evolutionary processes.*

*Returning to the notion of response-ability and responsibility in this newly configured cognitive and organic world then, where do we or how do we realize responsibility in such a boundary-blended scenario? My contention is that we now indeed have a responsibility to understand technology more than ever before -- not necessarily to change things but rather in order to understand ourselves (which is a necessary prerequisite to changing things). In other words I find myself arguing in favor of technical literacy, and in my own case I find myself very interested in finding work in software development. In still other words I find myself ready to explore a path which Baudrillard acknowledges McLuhan to have pointed to. . .*

*"One could still hope to manipulate the medium in its form, and to transform the real by utilizing the impact of the medium as form. With all content nullified, perhaps there is*

*still a revolutionary and subversive use-value of the medium as such." ( In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities \_, p.101)*

*Baudrillard spins away from this possibility with a kind of weak reference to hyperreality and all that, maybe because he would have to change jobs if he followed McLuhan's insight. Perhaps because I have less to lose than Baudrillard does, I \*am\* willing at this point to embrace a change of job scenarios. Anyway this would not be an old kind of "formalism" because the conditions and/or boundaries of the concern for form or technology are themselves altered. This is where Baudrillard often slides into Enlightenment thinking -- he forgets that one of the consequences of some of his most astute observations (for example his observations of hyperreal effects in information-age society) is that the new phenomena cannot be treated to old sorts of evaluative schemas. Formalism cannot be what it was under positivist, industrial-model technology. At the very least since Heisenberg, formalism is either something much more complex or needs to be called something else, because Heisenberg and others put "us" in the formal framing of the world. In other words, Baudrillard veers away from constructivist epistemology when it comes to issues of his job security perhaps, or when he would still like to be "the philosopher" in the old grand style.*

*That's kind of an aside but I hope it's relevant. Thanks again for your insightful work.*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## WHEN THINGS GO LIQUID -- FRAMING SELFHOOD IN PERSONAL-INDUSTRY

*In this chapter I return to a more personal index and explore different "framings" of selfhood under conditions of personal-industry and in conditions of electronic conversation. What emerges is a kind of hybrid of a mystical concept of selfhood and a techno-theory derived concept of selfhood. In a brief afterward to this chapter I also outline a mainstream psychological framing of "cyberselfhood" and relate this back to questions of fear and desire outlined in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.*

*One of the most exciting things about studying and participating in electronic, personal-industry worlds as they emerge has been getting to see how "the new" is framed or understood in language, and to participate in that framing to some extent. In this chapter, Beth and I explore several possible frames and maps of cyberselfhood -- moving squarely into the territory of "personal effects." The relevance for education is fairly direct: school age kids are often fairly sophisticated in negotiating electronic worlds and have in many cases developed self-understandings which incorporate technological metaphors. Being "conversant" with technologized understandings of self therefore seems fairly important if we are to understand the students in our classes and use our voices intelligently to shape the new worlds as they emerge.*

*In this once again conversational chapter Beth and I work within the circuitry or "nervous system" itself, complexly inside/outside -- seeking to understand changes in concepts of selfhood related to electronic media at the same time that we are actively participating in these changes, seeking to understand a transformative process as we are ourselves being transformed by it. The original title for this text was "Mirror Mirror: Theorizing Self and Other in Electronic Conversation" and is due to be printed in a book entitled "A Forest of Mirrors." This time Beth's text appears in italic typeface, mine appears in regular typeface.*

Even now, when the plot  
calls for me to turn to stone,  
the sun intervenes. Some mornings  
in summer I step outside  
and the sky opens  
and pours itself into me  
as if I were a saint  
about to die. But the plot

calls for me to live,  
be ordinary, say nothing  
to anyone. Inside the house  
the mirrors burn when I pass.

Lisel Mueller

### Section One: Responding and Transgressing

Beth, perhaps we should begin our conversation by explaining how we each got into the on-line mode. I'm still amazed by the serendipity of it all in my case -- meeting you again for what turned out to be the third time, reconnected by a third party, and then getting on-line to share conversation via electronic mail.<sup>19</sup> Retrospectively though, I would say that I was moving towards going on-line because I was searching for an interactive way to do scholarly work, a responsive way. As a teacher, I was already practicing democratic pedagogy in my classroom, which was a good beginning, but I was still searching for other ways to be interactive and responsive.

*You know, Bob, responsiveness was something I was looking for, too, but I never thought of it in those terms. I was in a big hurry to get my computer account and log on to "conversation." You see, it had been over a year since I finished all my academic work at the university. For a while, I kept myself occupied with studies for written and oral comprehensive exams, but those were now behind me as well and I found, in the aftermath,*

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<sup>19</sup>The authors had initially met one another in a seminar they both attended in the summer of 1991. Months later, they met again briefly to discuss issues in teaching. Finally, in May 1994, they were reintroduced to one another by a mutual friend in the department of English who knew of their mutual interest in cyberspace.

*that I really missed the multilogue of the scholarly seminar, the discussions and the social meaning-making process. So, I logged on for conversation, to keep my mind active, so to speak. Although my motives had intellectual merit, I have to be honest and admit that it was more the need for social interaction that sent me on-line than any quest for knowledge.*

The strange thing for me was that I wasn't getting what I would call responsiveness in scholarly seminars. It still seemed that the professor was transmitting or broadcasting rather than responding; it was stilted. The school experience came across like one more mass medium for the most part. It had its moments, when artful instructors made it work pretty well, but it still wasn't what I was looking for. When I read the Clarke and Holquist biography of Bakhtin, I imagined people sitting around, drinking strong tea, and talking about intellectual things in a natural way; that was what I was looking for and not finding in the classroom, even the seminar classroom.<sup>20</sup>

In his essay "Requiem for the Media," Baudrillard says

The mass media are anti-mediatory and intransitive. They fabricate non-communication -- this is what characterizes them, if one agrees to define communication as an exchange, as a reciprocal space of a speech and a response, and thus of a *responsibility* (not a psychological or moral responsibility, but a personal, mutual correlation in exchange). We must understand communication as something other than the simple transmission-reception of a message, whether or not the latter is considered reversible through feedback.

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<sup>20</sup> There are many differences between a "circle" such as Bakhtin's group and an academic seminar. Mainly, in this instance, what is referred to is the difference between having one's intellectual activity knit into life and having one's life knit into intellectual activity. It is the former connotation to which Bob alludes.

Now, the totality of the existing architecture of the media finds itself on this latter definition: they are what always prevents response, making all process of exchange impossible (except in the various forms of response simulation, themselves integrated in the transmission process, thus leaving the unilateral nature of the communication intact).<sup>21</sup>

If you plug school into this, I was finding plenty of response-simulations -- some good, some not so good, but none ultimately satisfying. I was also finding lots of talk about moral responsibility, for example, but an almost complete silence on the need to establish response-ability as a precondition. On-line conversation, however, is much closer to the tea room experience; response-ability does seem to exist here as a precondition.

*I find much I can agree with in the Baudrillard quote you offer about media and about response-simulation. And I looked to the conversations I had on-line as responsive conversation in which the conversation as well as the response could happen at times convenient for me. But, as time went on, I began to wonder whether or not the responsiveness was not just another simulation. In this case, the simulation being initiated by me. I began to wonder whether or not cyberspace was the ultimate illusion factory, so to speak.*

*Let's face it, electronic conversation, while it seems rich and multi-dimensional, is in fact one-dimensional. Electronic conversation is entirely*

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<sup>21</sup>169-170.

*rhetorical; electronic communities are rhetorical communities. While I might attend any number of "real life" seminars in which to share conversation with colleagues, those "real" seminars take place in specific locations at specific times; those engaged in seminar conversation are entirely embodied. Electronic conversation, however, takes place under circumstances of chronotopic variation, hence the appeal of being able to engage in exchanges only when it's convenient to do so. The discourse is also completely disembodied; one hasn't the advantages of body language and facial expression to interpret how successfully one is communicating. But, on the positive side, one hasn't the disadvantages of visual cues like gender, race, age, body size, and/or physical ability to overcome.*

*I found it quite comforting to be able to cast in a conversational text the ethos of my choosing. When I talk to colleagues on-line, they have no clues about my appearance, no clues about my "legitimate" authority to speak. They judge me solely on the quality of my rhetoric. This is a real advantage for a short, middle-aged white woman with an obvious feminine voice and southern accent.*

*Beyond that, I don't have to worry about being interrupted when I'm speaking in cyberspace. I compose my message in isolation (even though I strongly sense the presence of my audience, people hanging-on to my every word) and at my leisure. No one says a word in response until I finish what I'm saying and strike the "send" button. For a short, middle-aged female with a feminine voice, southern accent, and a*

*feminine style of argumentation, this is a great advantage – at least I get a fair hearing.*

*But the question is, of course, do I? I strongly suspect that what I get is the illusion of a fair hearing. I create an ethos for my interlocutor and that ethos is, at the very least, one of a fair and open-minded person. I strongly suspect that the reason I'm so fond of communicating on-line is that I can disembodify myself and create for myself an illusory world from what Baudrillard refers to as "the missing dimension."<sup>22</sup> Free of my body and my voice, I can be wherever I want, whenever I want, as whoever I want in cyberspace.*

I suspect that in concealing some things, other things are revealed. I would want to say that in electronic conversation you reveal, through your word choice and metaphor choice, for example, your desires. You reveal the contours of your worldview, the contours of the world you would like to see, in ways that might not be apparent in other mediums, including face to face.

Baudrillard's comments in "Requiem," although perhaps not specifically about electronic conversation, allude to another unique potential which I think electronic exchanges in fact have:

In effect, an immediate communication process is rediscovered, one not filtered through bureaucratic models – an original form of exchange, in fact, because there are *neither transmitters, nor receivers*, but only

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<sup>22</sup>Seduction, 67.

people responding to each other. The problem of spontaneity and organization is not overcome dialectically here: its terms are *transgressed*.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, I think you're on to the transgressive aspect of electronic conversation but you're describing it dialectically, in terms of illusion/reality, rather than describing it responsively, in terms of transgression. Graffiti, for Baudrillard, seems to provide something of a model of responsive, transgressive communication:

Graffiti is transgressive, not because it substitutes another content, another discourse, but simply because it responds, there, on the spot, and breaches the fundamental role of non-response enunciated by all the media. Does it oppose one code to another? I don't think so: it simply smashes the code. It doesn't lend itself to deciphering as a text rivaling commercial discourse; it presents itself as a transgression.<sup>24</sup>

So I would say, if there is a dichotomy, perhaps it's transgressive vs. non-transgressive rather than illusion vs. reality. What you feel subjectively in electronic exchange may be a heightened responsiveness to your own signals, but this sensation may ultimately not be recoupable as illusion. I am thinking that the subjective aspects of electronic conversation are better recouped as transgressive or hyperreal.

*I don't follow the allusions to graffiti relative to electronic exchange. For one thing, it's hard to see that particular medium, graffiti, as conversational in any except*

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<sup>23</sup>182.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid 183-84.

*the most remote of senses. But, I do think it's worth exploring electronic conversation from the perspective of hyperreality. Let's first agree on terms. Hyperreality, as I understand it, is the realer-than-real; it's reality without distance from that reality, therefore without perspective. An interesting example is Baudrillard's Teflon-coated pan in which one heats water to boiling. Although, as he points out, the pan transfers heat to the water, it does so without ever physically touching the water.<sup>25</sup> This is as close as one can actually come to the paradox of touching without having contact. There is, for me, this same kind of "lack of distance" between interlocutors in cyberspace -- quite an illusory lack since there may indeed be all the distance in the world. I may, for example, feel the direct contact heat of conversation with someone in Thailand while I, in actuality, am here at my terminal in Greensboro, NC.*

Referring to graffiti, I was thinking only that if electronic conversation is transgressive, like graffiti in *some* sense is, we would need to model it in a very novel way. If it falls outside of normal parameters, then it would be misleading to describe it in normal terms. My question, for example, concerns whether or not it is misleading to characterize the "contact heat" you might feel from an electronic message, from Thailand or anywhere else, as illusory.

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<sup>25</sup>In *America*, Baudrillard actually refers to this surface as the "interface." Because of the interface ("the code of separation" or pan surface), heat is transmitted "as a message" rather than as heat itself (32-33).

Electronic exchanges do seem to transgress our customary paradigms for understanding distance, and Teflon may be a helpful new metaphor for describing this transgression, but I am not so sure the old metaphor of illusion is helpful. An old metaphor which might work, though, is emotional distance; for example, we might compare the old-fashioned intimacies of letter writing to the new-found intimacies of electronic conversation. And what would be the overall connection? In a "real life" seminar, a lot of daydreaming goes on; people can be very much elsewhere and yet sit in the same physical space with others. Or, longtime partners who share the same house can remain strangers to one another in some ways. But, in electronic exchange, you could be next door "hearing" my keystrokes or you could be in Thailand; and in either case, we might be closer in some ways than if we were sitting together in the same seminar at the same time. Thus, conversation in cyberspace defies/transgresses normal categories, causing us to have to rethink our terms.

Along these lines, hyperreality is, to me, more like surreality than illusion -- hyperreality transgressing at one end of the reality-effect spectrum and surreality transgressing at the other. Electronic conversation can indeed transgress to being *too much*, although I'm not sure what it is *too much* of. Too much of self, maybe. Too much awareness that we construct our own reality, maybe. In any case, how can we describe this world from a perspective-less position, up close like perception must be to infants? What mileage do you get from describing this in terms of illusion?

*I agree that there's a too-muchness to electronic conversation, and I would be so bold as to claim that what it's too much of is indeed Self. What I construct when I construct you, my interlocutor, is whole-heartedly what I desire. You become the perfect Other, which is Self. So, you bringing up the difficulty inherent in describing cyberspace from a perspective-less position, up close like it must seem to infants, is very apropos. Self, Other, mirror phase – all are Lacanian concepts (or concepts that Lacan appropriates from Freud).*

*As I understand it, the Self is one with the universe prior to birth (what Freud refers to as oceanic consciousness); the Self exists in a state of unity. At the moment of birth, unity is destroyed, perhaps making birth the original sin metaphorized in Genesis. But, there can be no real return to the mother's body, no going back to the Garden. The original oceanic experience of unity translates for Lacan into Object A after which we are in perpetual quest, looking for "mother's body," the original Self, in Other.*

*So, after birth, we are only fragmented selves harboring unfulfillable desires for an Other to perfect us. Infants, of course, have no sense of their fragmentation, thus it is the mirror, by reflecting, that instructs us, that gives us perspective of sorts. We look into the mirror and see an ego-self.*

*In many ways, I "look at" the computer screen as I would look at a mirror, a surface upon which I see the reflection of my own ego and desires. I am thus seduced*

*not by an interlocutor, but by my own image, what I create. I idealize, for better or for worse. As Baudrillard says in Seduction*

*Seduction cannot possibly be represented, because in seduction the distance between the real and its double, and the distortion between the Same and the Other, is abolished. Bending over a pool of water, Narcissus quenches his thirst. His image is no longer "other;" it is a surface that absorbs and seduces him, which he can approach but never pass beyond. For there is no beyond, just as there is no reflexive distance between him and his image. The mirror of water is not a surface of reflection, but of absorption.<sup>26</sup>*

*The only mileage I get out of using the word "illusion" is that I feel it most closely circumscribes my meaning. I think that what happens between interlocutors in cyberspace is, indeed, illusion.*

"Illusion" circumscribes your meaning or circumscribes your desire? The difficulty I have with Freud and Lacan, and grand theory in general, is that so much can be annihilated with it. Doesn't this trouble you? As an alternative to Freud/Lacan, let's say that human nature is socially mediated and technologically mediated. Conversation is a clear example of social mediation. Computers are a clear example of technological mediation. Computer conversation in this sense doubles human nature -- and in the transaction a double is produced, by which I mean a novel subjectivity or persona. Let's furthermore say, then, that I have a desire to construct the subjective dynamics of

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<sup>26</sup>67.

electronic conversation with terms such as "transgression" and "doubling" and you have a desire to construct those same dynamics in terms such as "seduction" and "illusion." Since we are socially constructing this text, how will we mediate our conflicting desires? I now extend my question about the mileage of terminology: not, then, what mileage *you* get from using words like "illusion," but what mileage *we* get. My argument for not using such terms is that they provide a ground for dismissal of whatever work is done on electronic exchange as somehow less-than-real (i.e., illusory). What we get from talking in terms of transgression and doubling is a world wherein there is no position from which anyone could declaim on reality in order to dismiss illusory processes, or declaim on illusion in order to claim ownership of the real.

Baudrillard concludes "Requiem" by asserting that "what is strategic in this sense is only what radically checkmates the dominant form."<sup>27</sup> Having already identified the dominant media form to be simulated or quasi-responsive (e.g., the call-in radio show which, because it is controlled at one end only, simulates responsiveness), what would checkmate the dominant media form would be genuine responsiveness. Electronic conversation enacts genuine responsiveness insofar as the control is dispersed much more evenly between participants. What you are arguing -- that electronic conversation is illusory in this other personal sense of over-full projection of ego onto the screen -- seems not to be the case at least on the level of experience and

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<sup>27</sup>184.

politics; I mean it may be that ultimately we are deluded and in fact really do want nothing more than to return to unity in our mothers' bodies -- just as we are deluded into thinking we are really responding to one another in cyberspace -- but it doesn't feel that way to me. For example, when we put ourselves and our students on-line for discussions in the classes we taught last fall, people and power relationships were transformed; the usual power channels were transgressed.<sup>28</sup> Even if it could be demonstrated that this kind of thing is an attempt to return to the mother, suppose we just say that whatever allows a sense of return is good, rather than illusory. For me, terms like illusion have a way of degrading experience and it's not my desire to do that.

*In the remarks you cite from Baudrillard's "Requiem," you suggest that electronic conversation is an example of a reciprocal, truly responsive relationship, that there exists between interlocutors a kind of self/other relationship. Interestingly, I would say, then, that electronic responsiveness is more illusory while the call-in radio show responsiveness is more real. After all, there is a power disparity between the radio host and his caller and power disparities are real. The host, as owner of power, treats his caller, to whom he condescends to give air-time, as other. The further apart are self and other, the less reciprocal or responsive their exchange. Electronic*

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<sup>28</sup>In the Fall of 1994, the authors designed and collaboratively taught an interdisciplinary course in which students in education and students in English composition were linked together via a single VAX electronic conference. Conversation and discussion occurred only in electronic text, resulting in a leveling of the usual hierarchies of authority.

*conversation seems to close the gap between self and other as Baudrillard directly points out in "Xerox and Infinity":*

*Thanks to his computer or word processor, Telecomputer Man offers himself the spectacle of his own brain, his own intelligence, at work. Similarly, through his chat line or his Minitel [electronic conversation], he can offer himself the spectacle of his own phantasies, of a strictly virtual pleasure. He exorcises both intelligence and pleasure at the interface with the machine. The Other, the interlocutor, is never really involved: the screen works much like a mirror, for the screen itself as locus of the interface is the prime concern. An interactive screen transforms the process of relating into a process of commutation between One and the Same. The secret of the interface is that the Other is virtually the Same: otherness is surreptitiously conjured away by the machine.<sup>29</sup>*

*Now, I think we need to consider this carefully. I think we need to weigh this against what he has to say in his theories of seduction. It's quite easy for me to see the computer screen as a mirror surface, reflecting (doubling, if you prefer) my own desire, closing the gap between self and other.*

*This in no way negates the things that happened to us and to our students in the electronic exchanges; it in no way makes our experience unreal. But, I still think that it's the essential quality of the interface to function as a mirror, to seduce. In the long run, it's the seduction that facilitates communication, understanding, learning,*

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<sup>29</sup>The Transparency of Evil, 54.

*and a sense of human fulfillment that strikes us as union with another when it's really the self that we find.*

Okay then, in terms of my now proliferating explanations of electronic conversational phenomena I would want to add this: the boundary between self and other has been dissolving for some time now under the signs of "the social construction of reality" and "intersubjectivity," and what Baudrillard proposes in the passage you cite from "Xerox and Infinity" is precisely a merger of self and other (in the Same). So why should this be thought of as any big deal? If there never was a Self and there never was an Other, because both were already and always merged, then what happens in electronic conversation is routine, run-of-the-mill. Our brains, including the "spectacle of our brains" that we see on the computer screen are not our own anyway. When we "exorcise intelligence and pleasure" on the screen we find that we are composed of the so-called others anyway. This scares us, and so we run off and come up with complicated theories which reinstate the familiar boundaries. Even Baudrillard seems to get scared. He retreats all the way back to medieval terms -- exorcism no less-- to talk about electronic media. Rather than reinstating reality/illusion as you want to, he wants to reinstate self/other. Either way you slice it, it slices all the same. Again, I would say that this talk of terminology is important and pertains directly to making maps of the electronic conversational terrain.

*So you say that the dichotomy between self/other is a false one. Without bringing into the discussion any metaphysical or mystical considerations, create for me a narrative of day to day life in a world where this dichotomy does not, to some extent, exist. Let's reduce it to something really manageable, you Bob and I Beth meet on Monday morning at the local coffee shop to talk. There's no dichotomy between self and other . . .*

### ***Section Two: (Co)Responding***

Actually, I don't have to create much because, if you recall, we've already done something quite like non-dichotomy at the local coffee shop -- we "merged" there several weeks ago when we met our colleague to talk about an essay that we'd all just read. We didn't merge quite to the point of finishing each other's sentences, but nonetheless... Then later, we had a long string of e-mail exchanges about what had happened, finding ourselves to some degree co-responding univocally to a third party. So, I would only ask, what was it like for you? For me, it was scary and also exhilarating; boundaries were dropping; the world was beginning to look different.

Louis Althusser talks about how we are constantly "hailed as subjects" of a particular, individualistic sort.<sup>30</sup> Meetings at coffee houses, writing, reading, etc. are all stages on which we are called to see ourselves as me Bob and you Beth. We don't see

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<sup>30</sup>"Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 153.

that these are *particular* stagings of self until we experience some other kinds of stagings, and electronic conversation is one of these other kinds of stagings. It hails us as socially constructed selves but most of the world is still set up to hail us as individually constructed, *ex nihilo*, selves. It's irresistible to try to restage electronic exchange in terms of self/other because that's what we are used to. It totally perverts the meaning but makes it comfortable.

*About that day at the coffee shop, I agree that it approached a dissolution of self in other, a blurring of the boundaries, but it was still not you Bob and me Beth without the dichotomy of self and other. Let's imagine that we did progress to the point of finishing one another's sentences, or, even better, we began to speak in stereo, expressing thoughts in perfect unison. Let's even go so far as to say that we found a doctor who would agree to sew our tiny little heads together, to hook up our circulatory systems, etc., we would still only be approximating more closely a merger of self and other.*

*My point is that at all times, and in all places, there is to some extent a boundary between self and other. We cannot completely do away with boundaries that separate us, at least not until we shed our mantles of flesh, and at this point, one must speak only in metaphysical or mystical terms. Beyond the pale, we may very well be reunited, but that's merely speculation. Let's focus on to what degree the boundaries dissolve in electronic exchange. I will say that the interface as mirror*

*surface does traditional interpretations of Narcissus one better. You see, in psychologically reductive theory, Narcissus only saw his own reflection but never moved beyond seeing himself. But I don't think Narcissus was admiring himself so much as confusing himself with an other. In electronic conversation, after Narcissism, we may be able to see ourselves in others and others in ourselves, thereby weakening any convictions we might have held that Other actually exists. Because the discourse is disembodied, it's easy to let the mantle of flesh be shed in a way that's psychologically analogous to death.*

I agree that complete merger is impossible. That would be dichotomous anyway in relation to complete individuality of the ex nihilo type. So, we are in the middle, in the soup, and I'm comfortable there. There will always be a me Bob and a you Beth; my point was only that there are many encouragements to see *only* that, to exclude the complexity of identity as a social and technological mediation, and to reinscribe familiar terms and dichotomies in unfamiliar settings/stagings such as electronic conversation.

Prior to this meeting at the coffee shop, you and I had found some contact points with one another, but when we added the third party we discovered that we two responded to her with an unusual degree of mutuality. Maybe that's the key -- what had been agreement on points somehow, through our history of electronic exchange

and its concomitant dissolution of boundaries, became agreement in response; so we're looping back to the theme of responsiveness here, adding *mutuality* to responsiveness.

Touching again on Baudrillard's "Requiem," at the time he was writing this piece he evidently believed that something like genuine responsiveness or transgression is possible. He clearly sees this as non-dialectical or non-dichotomous (in particular as disrupting or stepping out of the sender-receiver terms of standard communication), and he cites graffiti production as an example. It remains unclear to me if he would include electronic conversation as transgressive, or whether he would say it's just an instance where the receiver and sender (self and other) are one and the same person -- and thus a non-transgressive internalization of the same-old standard terms of communication. In this latter sense, seduction is transgressive because it defies the standard approach to meaning and so on, more like an implosive transgression than an explosive, graffiti-like, one.

Does the implosive transgressivity of electronic exchange also connote an explosive transgressivity in the political sense because it allows for the possibility of non-bureaucratized exchanges between people? Baudrillard alludes in this text to going beyond bureaucratic models towards people responding to each other -- and this *is* the radical potential of electronic conversation as I see it. We saw this potential made kinetic in our electronic classroom; we watched our authority as teachers becoming much more responsive, less prescriptive, and so on. It seems to me there is this larger potential for political transgression of the usual categories such as

superior/subordinate, receiver/sender, etc. in electronic exchange. Anyway, I could see seduction as meta-political, as a strategy which defies political strategies as they are usually defined, but as having a politics all the same.

Has electronic conversation been a transgressive force in our lives (you Beth and me Bob)? Subjectively, I would clearly say yes: witness our experience of mutuality of response. Politically, I would also say yes: witness our collaborative writing, constructing a platform from which to speak in the public realm.

*There's some interesting digging to be done in regards to this phenomenon, and I hope the digging won't find itself reaching too quickly issues of word choice and definition. Okay, we had found those "contact points" to which you refer. Then, we met with a third party and found that not only do we share contact points, we also share the same notions about appropriate response. It was the responding that became mutual. So "response" was to our colleague, but to one another it was something else. There was no "re" to it – it was more of an ur communication, spondere rather than re-spondere. We no longer had to re-pond because, I think, the self/other boundaries had been dissolved through the process of electronic communication. We came to see not only our self in each other but each other in our self such that we, in metaphorical ways, had be-come each other. What about the electronic medium facilitates this? I wouldn't say that spondere doesn't happen outside the medium, but I suspect it happens much more rarely.*

*As for transgressing the standard terms of communication, the question is, what are the standard terms of communication. If I recall my theory correctly, communication happens when a message is sent and is received; there's not necessarily any feedback. And I know from reader-response theory that we all construct the meaning of a text, a communication, based upon our own contexts, experiences, what Frank Smith calls the "theory of the world in our heads."<sup>31</sup> I don't see graffiti as transgressive except in the most crude sense. I could, though, see seduction as transgressive based on communication theory. To effectively communicate, one (the sender) would not intentionally withhold the message in part or in whole. Seduction however requires a secret, a with-holding, a missing dimension. Thus, seduction transgresses communicative law.*

*Here it becomes quite complicated. I do see electronic conversation as seductive; it's just that locating the point of seduction is not so clear cut. Sometimes, the rhetor (the message sender) intentionally withholds information – for example gender, race, age, credentials, marital status, whatever. Complicating this further is that the withholding may be intentional or just a by-product of the fact that electronic exchange is disembodied. In other words, in normal face to face conversation, we're not accustomed to declaring our gender, age, race, credentials, etc. because these things are visible and the people with whom we speak often know us. So, on the level*

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<sup>31</sup>57-58.

*of the rhetor, the seduction may be conscious (which Baudrillard might see as evil), or unconscious.*

*Seduction also may occur on the part of the message receiver. I see this as primarily an unconscious self-seduction in which the reader creates from the text and its missing dimensions an idealized interlocutor. What the reader pours into the gaps is therefore himself, thus the screen functions as mirror. Only when he becomes conscious of this seduction, this self-seduction, can he begin to read himself in what he reads in others.*

*What I'd like to do is play with that notion of "people responding to each other" by rewriting it as "people re-ponding to each Other." Perhaps this transgresses the psychological Law of the Father that commands us to separate existences. Electronic conversation is transgressive so far as it encourages us to unity.*

*I think I follow, but would like some elaboration on what you call the meta-political aspects of seduction. Perhaps Baudrillard lends insight when he points out that*

*The strategy of seduction is one of deception. It lies in wait for all that tends to confuse itself with its reality. And it is potentially a source of fabulous strength. For if production can only produce objects or real signs, and thereby obtain some power; seduction, by producing only illusions, obtains all powers, including the power to return production and reality to the fundamental illusion.<sup>32</sup>*

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<sup>32</sup>70.

*Thus, seduction is political about the political, a source of power, transgressive, and therefore potentially dangerous to the existing order.*

*Reading the "Requiem" text, my general impression is of someone who dislikes the six o'clock news. Nonetheless, I take this from the text: "the dialectic itself . . . has reached the moment of deadlock."<sup>183</sup> This made me start thinking about the difference between the dialectical and the dialogical, made me think that what happened in our classroom and what happens in our electronic exchange can be more aptly described as dialogical or multilogical rather than as dialectical. The latter suggests argumentation, a logical exchange of arguments. Thus, it is to a degree inherently confrontational, with a view to winning. Dialogical, on the other hand, suggests a conversational exchange of ideas. The argumentation, as confrontation, is diffused; mutual understanding rather than winning is what counts. Electronic conversation as a dialogical form transgresses dialectic terms by breaking the deadlock with a view to exchange.*

*But what has been transgressed for you Bob and me Beth as examples of electronic interlocutors? Is it the Law of the Father?*

I would say so. Let's suppose electronic conversation allows for the construction or realization of the self as a perpetually half-full glass. If we work in the

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<sup>183</sup>182.

direction of construction, then we enter into the realm of the cyborg; electronic exchange literally enables a re-constructed human ontology, one that never existed before. If we work in the direction of realization, we enter into something like Sartre's formulation of the self as "being and nothingness," in perpetual suspension; electronic exchange enables us to realize the true nature of our selves. In either direction, we model something about human nature, and either way we transgress the Law of the Father because we connect to others and to ourselves. Otherwise, we could just say that what is modeled is fascination -- something like watching a spinning top, or getting caught up in a brain teaser which transforms ontological boredom into ontological trance.

Combining all these possibilities, it might be the proliferation of selves via electronic conversation which fascinates and transgresses; it might be that in creating and re-creating selves electronically, we perceive our usual selves differently as well. According to Karl Pribram, perception is the effect of "mismatch" between what we expect to find and what we in fact find. This explains, for example, how it is possible to notice that something is different about an otherwise familiar room or street *before* you in fact notice that someone has moved a painting, cut down a tree, or what have you. What you perceive first is the mismatch or difference, then you perceive the things which have been moved, removed, etc.<sup>34</sup> Electronic conversation, by adding cyberselves to our repertoire, perhaps similarly affords us opportunities to notice our

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<sup>34</sup>297-313.

usual selves through the initial generation of difference or mismatch. Having a child around is perhaps fascinating and insightful for parents in much the same way; the proliferative play of identity/difference, match/mismatch, provides "sweet confusions" of ontology which enable perceptions, including perceptions of our familiar selves, which would otherwise not be possible. In this way, parents learn things about themselves through their children.

Anyway, for me, this loops back to the cyborg again, and the particular features of the self that *are* in electronic exchange. We have to remind ourselves that this screen-thing hums because it too is embodied -- it is, after all, a piece of machinery. In this sense, there is a danger of sorts in referring to electronic conversation as disembodied. In fact, it's differently bodied; it transgressively constitutes and/or reconstitutes embodied selves.

As for Baudrillard's position on the potential of seduction to "[obtain] all powers, including the power to return production and reality to the fundamental illusion," it seems overdone in a way. More and more, it looks to me like graffiti-transgression speaks of 1968 and seduction-transgression speaks of 1979; what I am able to see is a move from explosive, explicit, oppositional politics to implosive, implicit, strategic politics -- a move from a first order use of language as expression to a second order use of language as rhetoric. I agree that this partly explains evil for Baudrillard. Plato saw this too, the potential for evil in those nasty rhetorician-sophists. It also somewhat explains our need to haggle over terminological nuances. In an

electronic world defined as rhetorical, what could be more important than the choice of descriptive and analytic terms?

*This particular connotation of "rhetoric" represents a return to the classical roots you yourself allude to by bringing Plato and the Greeks into our discussion. I am reminded, too, of Julia Kristeva's observations that a rhetorician is in this sense not one who invents language, but is rather one who is fascinated with language's symbolic function, someone who "seduces it in the Latin sense of the verb – he 'leads it astray.'"<sup>35</sup> But, I would like to emphasize that this kind of rhetorical seduction is not always to the ends of evil as Plato cautioned. In either case, for good or for evil, the cyber-rhetorician, like her traditional counterpart, attempts to "seduce the [law of] the father by rhetorical affectations," weaving from materials of the existing symbol system (language) a snare in which to hold fast Father and thus, transgressively, return incestuously to Mother.<sup>36</sup> Return to one and an-other.*

*Electronic communication between interlocutors is, of course, carried out in text, in the words one types on his interface and sends through cyberspace to another. On and between the interface, words pass through a cyber-territory wherein the proliferation of selves of which you speak seemingly occurs. This proliferation Kristeva calls heterogeneity and is that which she locates in the other of text, that*

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<sup>35</sup>"From Identity to An Other," *Desire in Language*, 138-39.

<sup>36</sup>ibid.

*which invites identification and denies it at one and the same time. Each self seems to be "me," but, as she points out, "it is not me, it is a non-me in me, beside me, outside of me, where the me becomes lost." The textual territory is peopled with selves/non-selves, the same and the different, at once fused as well as barred. The text, she says, "bounces back to me echoes of a territory that I have lost but that I am seeking within the blackness of dreams...lifting up the dismembered, sleeping body. Territory of the Mother."<sup>37</sup> Reconstituted cyborg-selves are just such echoes bounced back from the interface, a virtual territory from which the body can be re-membered. Perhaps I could more accurately say that the particular body that is disembodied in electronic exchange, is the one normally hailed in pedestrian social stagings while the body impossibly re-membered is a chorus of selves seldom hailed, elusive if not illusive. The dissolution of boundaries between the particular body and the chorus, while bodily experienced, yet remains elusive. I don't think this "new" human ontology is new at all; I think it's actually primary ontology – oceanic – but lost, cast irrevocably into the territory of the lost. As close as we can get is the interface where the variety of cyber-selves appear, illusively, as others.*

I think we are to a point where the words begin to look like exoskeletons, because it seems we're trying to get at the juice flowing around and through them. But all the same, we can't ignore the exoskeletons because they are part of the mix. I am

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid, "The Novel as Polylogue" 163.

thinking in part of McLuhan's idea that technologies represent amputations/externalizations. In *Understanding Media*, he argues that whenever stress on the central nervous system becomes too great, we protect ourselves by externalizing, "autoamputating," or otherwise delegating functions to machines. In the case of electronic communication, the situation is very complex; at one and the same time communication technologies may be protecting us from too much alienation (by supplying externalized, mechanical channels for mystical, fluid-driven functions) and also protecting us from too much connection (by supplying a great deal of mechanical control over the human communication process).<sup>38</sup> This concept of two-way protection may go towards explaining why even the tough-guy, heavily armored cyborgs of popular cinema are often, simultaneously, pathetic and extremely vulnerable; perhaps these figures, as symbolic equivalents of computers, also offer us a dual protection against too much alienation and too much connection.<sup>39</sup>

In McLuhan's terms perhaps the computer machine -- which composes part of the differently bodied experience which we effect in electronic conversation -- could be seen as the externalization or autoamputation of the bony-protective parts of the spinal

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<sup>38</sup>In McLuhan's view, though, the kind of complexity described here has accompanied the development of all communication technologies. In his words, "*The principle of self-amputation as an immediate relief of strain on the central nervous system applies very readily to the origin of the media of communication from speech to computer.*" (52). In effect, each new communication technology relieves strain on the central nervous system by externalizing/mechanizing a function, but each new technology in turn creates new strains that must then be relieved by the next invention, the next externalization, the next "autoamputation." For example the telephone may have relieved the stress of not being able to communicate with others at long distances except by traveling long distances or waiting a long time for mail to be delivered and returned. The telephone clearly reduced the stress of travel and/or waiting, but at the same time it created its own strains on the central nervous system (examples too numerous to mention) which answering machines and electronic communication by computer have in part relieved. Artificial intelligence is clearly one of the next steps in this series of autoamputations -- literally relieving, as it might, *the stress of having to think* in the information-overload conditions provided by computers.

<sup>39</sup>The Robocop figure, for example, elicits fear through his open display of amplified capacities for violence, and at the same time he elicits pathos through his open display of need for the assistance and compassion of his female cop-partner.

column. Thanks to this externalization, what we get as soon as we begin to operate in cyberspace is the electricity, the juice only. We get into it, even just a little bit, and the whole thing goes liquid. But at the same time -- like the armored cyborgs -- we also get in return a measure of externalized, mechanical control over the flow.

*Without a doubt, I agree that we get to the juice behind the words, the symbol system. You may wish to call this "differently bodied" rather than "disembodied" (which smacks at bit too much of political-correctness anxiety -- "differently" connoting some state not in the normal ways of thinking and looking), but I still prefer the latter as an accurate descriptor. In electronic exchange, I can get right to the juice because of the absence of the usual visual signals one gets from the body.*

*I wonder to what extent some would see what we're talking about as mystical soul or essential self . . . or, in Jungian terms, as a collective experience of human intelligence, being.<sup>40</sup>*

*And, in terms of the Self/Other boundary dissolution, when we get into cyberspace exchanges and the thing "goes liquid," whose juice are we getting into? Our own (as rhetor), the juice of the Other (as receiver), or the collective juice, the oceanic consciousness? Many people who get carried away with electronic*

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<sup>40</sup>Carl Jung, whose pioneering theory of collective unconsciousness was subjected to charges of mysticism, would perhaps feel a bit of *deja vu* in revisiting this mutual, although conflicting, focus on the use of the "mystical" as an adjective for cybermediation. As he himself tells his readers, "a normally functioning intelligence can discover in this idea just as much or just as little mysticism as in the theory of instincts" (44) whose existence and power are generally taken for granted. Mysticism, then, is in the mind of the beholder, mitigated perhaps by the extent to which one feels a sense of wonder and awe, a spiritual profundity not easily captured by language. Jung made every effort to empirically prove the existence of the collective and its archetypes; nevertheless, the spiritual, mystical dimension of its intricate, psychological architecture points to something well beyond normal human epistemology.

*conversation say things like "you get to know others from the inside, out." What this kind of claim reflects is a limited view of the juice – that the Other in his otherness is actually what one sees. It completely dismisses (or fails to consider) the possibility that a good deal of what one sees is actually Self, not Other. And, beyond that, that in seeing Self in Other and Other in Self, the juice becomes the collective. It's this last possibility, once we're conscious of it, that interests me.*

This question of "whose juice" is an interesting one to ask in relation to McLuhan as well. There is a curious ambiguity about the phrase he uses, "the central nervous system;" I mean *who* exactly is it that responds to stresses by producing new communications technologies? Is it me, you, the collective? Anyway, I'll grant your preference for "disembodied" as a descriptor of electronic conversation, but I still prefer "differently bodied" -- not because it's more politically correct, but because it reminds me of the merger I enact between human and machine ontology as I type at the keyboard with my eyes riveted on the blips of light being instantly produced in front of me. I don't know; maybe someone would read this as Jungian soul; someone else might read it as Freudian anal, kids playing with feces, fascinated by the product, what was inside is outside; someone else might read it as Kristevan re-membering, and so forth. In any case, I need to try and stay with *all* of the particularities which make electronic conversation possible -- including the technological ones. The ensemble *person at the terminal* is for me, in effect, the aestheticized, egghead cyborg. A merger

across the last great (false) divide, between humans and technology, is now in widespread process as, one-by-one, more and more people hook up to computer consoles to think and communicate.<sup>41</sup>

Describing electronic conversation as differently bodied allows me to cross that divide with my eyes open. I would say that the cyborg as a figure is much more suited to what is going on in electronic conversation than is Narcissus, although a merger of Narcissus and the T1000 liquid-metal cyborg from *Terminator 2* might more accurately capture it. Like us, the liquid-metal man violates the Law of the Father by "going liquid," but he is also perhaps emblematic of the mechanical control which inheres in our electronic communication -- that which you have referred to as its elusiveness/illusiveness. The liquid-metal man no longer sports his own armor; like us, he has externalized it to what amounts to an infrastructural microstructure. If the control or bodily features of electronic communication elude us, it is only because they have shifted-size -- much like the metal-man shifts shape; we don't see the bodily controls because at one and the same time they are both larger and smaller than what we have become accustomed to perceiving as "human scale."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>In *Terminal Identity*, Scott Bukatman attributes to Freud the idea that there have been three "ego smashing" events in human history, occasioned by the Copernican, Darwinian, and Freudian revolutions. Bukatman then attributes to Bruce Mazlish the idea that in our era we are undergoing a fourth ego-smashing event -- as humans we are no longer able to see ourselves as distinct from machines. Bukatman notes that the idea that humans and machines are continuous "...might represent the master narrative which underlies postmodern culture itself...*Terminal identity: an unmistakably doubled articulation in which we find both the end of the subject and a new subjectivity constructed at the computer station or television screen.*" (8-9).

<sup>42</sup>Claudia Springer writes, "...the T-1000 has the ability to transform himself into a stream of silvery liquid, and he can fashion himself into any shape...He is the embodiment of feminine fluidity and as such is a particularly frightening adversary..." (96). The read of the T-1000 presented here is slightly different than Springer's -- here the T-1000 is regarded as a hybrid of male musculature and female fluidity -- embodying the complex, dual protectedness referred to earlier in the text. In terms of scale-shifting, it is interesting that the T-1000 meets his demise in an industrial setting by being thrown into a vat of molten metal; in this single gesture the macro scale (the industrial setting) and micro scale (the properties of liquids) are fused, revealing that the control mechanism for the metal man is both larger and smaller than his human-scale body. This portrayal of

*One may very well abandon Narcissus; but, the person at the terminal must first see the Narcissism before abandoning it. I see this as a kind of progression that follows along these lines:*

*Log on*

*Engage in electronic conversation with an other*

*Believe that what you see on the interface is genuinely and only an other*

*Recognize that part of what you see is really your self*

*Recognize Self in Other and Other in Self – i.e., move beyond narcissism*

*Co(re)spond*

*In thinking about the cyborg, though, I'm troubled by the thought of it being human/machine in the way we normally think of cyborgs. I see it more as human/human, machine mediated. I think we're suggesting something beyond cyborg reality.*

I was thinking about his last night, this "Other in Self," in relation to now-past personal relationships of mine -- the sort of situations where I might say "he or she became part of me" and literally mean it. No doubt this is where exorcism gets its

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the non-human scale of human control mechanisms -- a portrayal which alludes, for example, to environmentally induced illness as a control on the macro scale, or viral illness as a control on the micro scale -- provides an angle for understanding Donna Haraway's exploration of the potential of cyborg figures to facilitate deeper understandings of what it is to be human in the postmodern era.

punch, same with voodoo I suppose. Our ontology is such that it does indeed seem to be collective to a much greater degree than we might like to think, and (looping back to Louis Althusser again) it gets scary to step outside of the separations, the Law of the Father, because in thousands of ways every day we are hailed or called into being as individual, separate beings. It may be the most audacious feat of human engineering to make this individuality feasible, like an intricate levee system, and electronic conversation may just be making fiber-optic sized holes, one by one, in the system of separations. There won't be a flood, but rather a saturation. Cosmic consciousness coming right up? Could be. But for me, it's got to have a body, too -- the Internet is a physical thing, requiring maintenance and all the rest. We wouldn't want to be part of a movement that would make cyber-communication into a disembodied, mystical thing.

*It's in many ways a frightening prospect to "spondere" because our culture simply doesn't support selves hailed into being in that relationship. For a very real example, Bob/Beth will most certainly not get a job. You Bob will get a job and me Beth will get a job, but not Bob/Beth.*

*And why wouldn't we want to be a part of a movement that would make this cyber-communication a disembodied mystical thing? You're assuming what? Let's assume that I see electronic conversational media as catalysts. Once the spondere relationship is catalyzed, could we continue without the media? I suspect we could. And if you'd agree, then we're obviously not talking about cyborgs in the usual sense*

*of the term. This is why I say the spondere is a human/human relationship, machine mediated. Insofar as humanity meets humanity to a great degree in cyberspace, there is about the experience something mystical and beyond any language we use to describe it. Considering our epigraph, Lisel Mueller's wonderful poem "There Are Mornings," she says that it's a plot that calls for her to turn to stone but the sun, intervening, fills her with life, the power to resist turning rock hard, desiccated. In much the same way, the Law of the Father, the plot, would have us turn to stone pillars; the "sun," the divine and the unnamable, however fills us like a mystical secret. Perhaps, in electronic conversation, the contact heat at the interface is similarly the mirror that burns, reflecting this secret, when we pass.*

The cyborg figure is indeed troublesome/frightening. But I think we need to embrace that troublesomeness to some extent, and we provide a way to do that. Human/machine/human is a cyborg that goes beyond cyborg reality as it is usually conceived. Perhaps even this model is disturbing to convention, because it disrupts our need to see ourselves as apart from technological, social, and biological/natural mediatedness. But it is important to remember that these anti-mediations belong to the Law of the Father, and a high and dry desert God. To refuse these separations is to be voluptuously mystical, to bring the Goddess, the Mother, like a splash of water into our otherwise arid cultural terrain, sizzling on our burning mirrors.

Could we continue our work without electronic conversation? Sure, and Ulysses could have walked on his journey rather than sailing; but, we would not have had *this* experience, right now for example, of writing this essay together. To regard the machinery part of our work as "just the vehicle" or a "catalyst" is the subtlest Law of the Father, the law which also says that women are merely vessels, separable from meaning. Do we want to reinscribe this? I argue for our expanded, mystical-model cyborg in part as a way of arguing that matter and meaning are together divine. Maybe we are, after all, only talking about how many cyborgs can dance on the head of an egghead, but I don't think so. What do you think?

### **Section Three: Coda**

Since we wrote this chapter, I've become interested to see how issues of electronic media are being framed in popular venues and also in academic research venues (primarily departments of psychology). What interested me was that whereas Beth and I had for example framed the effects of electronic conversation in terms of personal experience, mystical spirituality, cyborg theory, and psychological health, some sectors of popular-culture discourse and some sectors of the academic research establishment discourse have been busy framing human interaction with electronic media in terms of social and psychological danger -- what I began to refer to as "discourses of danger" or "discourses of fear."

In the popular press there have for example been a virtual flood of press given to the potential social dangers of pornography being distributed via the Internet and of the similar dangers involved in children accessing “adult language” via electronic media such as e-mail and listservs. What I noticed was that these particular venues mention nothing of the possible *positive* effects of people having access to talking with one another! -- not to mention that these discourses also routinely ignore the fact that children seem to have found their ways to adult language and pornographic materials long before the Internet!

The academic research community, in particular psychology research, was in my experience similarly negative, although they were “cautionary” rather than “alarmist.” An example, this from a researcher at McGill University, “In addition to affecting more fragile individuals, virtual reality may affect persons not considered at risk.” Again, electronic interaction was being framed primarily as a danger or risk, without reference to possible benefits, and without reference to other “risks” which also attend to life! ( life being is a risky process, after all. In my case for example, I would argue, and do at some length in the following chapter) that being extensively involved in the “technology of monological writing” has had clearly deleterious effects on me, but the articles which stress the dangers of the new “technologies of the self” (Foucault’s phrase) seem to imply that it is only the *new* technology which carries risks to personal psychological health and well-being! In other words it interested me that the overall rhetorical frame within which electronic interaction was being presented in the realm of psychology was, from the outset, implicitly negative. Even when the

two authors in the field of psychology granted something positive to electronic interaction it was *granted* as a kind of favorable dispensation, a gift to be treated with caution. This is not to say that I think there might not be risks associated with operating in electronic environments. It is rather to say that the topic of psychological risk is to me a much broader topic than it appears to be in the sorts of framings I found in evidence in the articles I mention above, and to say that these framings tended to almost completely elide any mention of possible positive effects.

Finally though I'm not too worried about these proclamations from central broadcast institutions, mainly because I think self-knowledge and mysticism are implied in the internal logic of the electronic paradigm (c.f., Chapter one, Chapter five), but in any case it has been interesting to see -- given in particular my interest in "addiction to fear" -- cautionary or otherwise "full-of fear" (c.f., Chapter four) discourses emerge from certain sectors of discourse-producing institutions.

I did find some exceptions though. Sherry Turkle for example is a researcher who takes a more dialogical tack in her work and arrives at complex treatments of the potentials *and* potential problems of involvement in electronic conversation/interaction. She has researched and reported on the kinds of metaphors by which people who use electronic technologies understand themselves, and about how new technologies are in effect thus generating new understandings of the self. In particular she cites the importance of metaphors drawn directly from the new technologies -- for example she enjoins a very insightful discussion of how the metaphor of "windows" has allowed people who work in the windows

electronic environment to understand and experience the multiplicity or multidimensionality of self in interesting and often positive ways. And yet she does this in an evenhanded way, also citing narratives of users who have derived some negative personal effects from this concept.

Interesting and worth noting here too that Sherry Turkle teaches at M.I.T. in the new discipline of techno-theory -- what I referred to earlier (Chapter one) as a site of adaptation to the circumstances of personal-industry -- and her written works appear in such popular culture venues as *Wired* magazine. She is not, in other words, in a department of psychology, nor are her works appearing in *Time* magazine! Turkle's formulations are quite similar in many ways to the ones Beth and I arrive at -- for example she refers to electronic technology as an "evocative object" where we refer to it as a "special effect" (Chapter two) and she also like us attempts to understand the complex merger of ideology of technology and self in personal-experiential terms -- the main difference being that she writes about others' experience, we write about our own..

In any case there are a variety of interpretive frames for understanding cyberselfness now in circulation/contestation, and it will indeed be interesting to participate in the complex negotiations which are certain to take place in regard to which frames get applied in which settings and for what reasons.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

*In preceding chapters we've been charting the "personal effects" of operating in a new technological paradigm, tracing the impact of electronic technologies across several registers from subjective/intersubjective effects to macro-social effects. In this concluding chapter Beth and I talk about, muse, and reflect on the process we've been and are involved in, and the implications and significance it might have for education.*

*In the process of our conversational work – our explanation and enactment of electronically mediated conversation as an example of the significant and signifying work of personal-industry – both of us feel that we have become "educated." Ironically though, we are now finding ourselves elsewhere, literally and figuratively alienated from the methods and aims of the academy. Doubly ironic though, this fact demonstrates the thesis of this work – that methods and/or technologies come with or produce their own aims. In other words by employing the technology of collaborative, conversational writing, "aimed" at continual personal process, we have arrived at what we aimed at but we have also literally written ourselves out of academic culture.*

*To an extent though, perhaps neither of us were completely "in" academic culture in the first place. Both Beth and I entered doctoral programs out of creative arts programs, she as a creative writer and myself as a painter/sculptor, and both of us have maintained a less-than-true-believer status throughout the doctoral process. Again though, no shortage of irony here, it's interesting that by some measure – perhaps by a pre-industrial measure – we have done \*exactly\* what the title "doctor of philosophy" implies; we've arrived at a philosophical understanding which to some extent pushes the envelope of knowledge, and we're telling others about it in writing. In this chapter we conclude that particular part of the process conversationally, with my text once again in italics, hers in regular, and I then add an afterword.*

*There are times in thinking about education when the old concept of "organized insanity" seems entirely apt – such that, for example, if you refuse to sit for nonsense then you better be ready and able to make your own chair because sitting for nonsense is a primary requirement for working in many organizations in the current conditions of*

*mass-industry, including organizations dedicated to "higher learning." This is also where for me it's important to remember that Thich Nhat Hanh for example did not sit by passively while the Vietnam war raged on. He made his own chair, but he did it wisely and intelligently. I've been thinking a lot about organized insanity and what to do with the reasonable amount of assertiveness I have which seems to put me at odds with current organizational imperatives -- thinking about what it takes to stop labeling that spirit in me that \*won't\* sit for nonsense a "problem."*

*In a way I feel like I am, in my relationship with higher ed. like a person in an abusive relationship -- I keep coming back because they keep \*saying\* these are places where intelligence, good sense and good ideas matter, and I am reluctant to "get it" that what they say and what they are can be quite at odds most of the time. Anyway, I think part of what you've done over the last couple of months is "get it" about higher ed. I think in my case I've looked to school as a source of sanity from early on, so it's a major kind of disillusionment process on several levels to be feeling it otherwise now. At the same time it's a very positive, affirmative feeling to be making a passage, so to speak.*

*Looking for pockets of sanity in higher ed seems to me a lot like swimming around underwater looking for overturned boats which might have a little air trapped up underneath them. In other words the odds look pretty bad that I will be able to "breathe" in this environment. I do still want a life of the mind, but I'm less and less willing to pay the academic price to have one.*

*Anyway, I'm obviously still working through this.*

Hi, I had to go by the bank and then by the movie theater to pick up Ace Ventura tickets for Aaron and his friend. I've decided not to accompany them but to use my time in more adult pursuits (which I have not yet decided on).

I was interested by what you said today about seeing that deciding \*not\* to sit for nonsense might be a good thing (new interpretation) rather than a bad thing (old interpretation). I've been into the notion of incorporating the shadow aspects of the self into the ego self and this is exactly the kind of thing that would indicate that process is taking place in yourself. It might be the same kind of thing happening to me when I say that "sour grapes" or "bitterness" are highly under-rated -- that sometimes it's really the appropriate thing to do to complain about the way you're being treated and to decide to walk away from it, shaking the dust off your feet as you go.

For me, much of my "shadow" was inappropriately formed by messages that told me that expressing anger was "bad" or that expressing negative feelings was "bad." I've actually vocalized that lately, my frustration when people try to tell me how I ought to or ought not to feel. For you, I wonder how much of the qualities normally considered masculine, such as not sitting for nonsense, have been shifted to your shadow self such that you feel you need to adjust to conditions as they are.

I got up so early this morning to cast into words the "poem" that just sort of insisted on coming to me that I got your address wrong (bleary eyes) and had to send it over via forward.

straight-jacket words/gut feeling/love-anger-fear-joy/

from spaces between/frozen borders/  
construct a rule-of-thumb called prohibition/  
knowing the infinite signified lies/  
(where's the terror?)/in solution/  
One-One-One-One

Reading the Jung dream book I mentioned to you, I found some of the most exciting "stuff" in the last chapter that deals with the role of dreams in overcoming neuroses. Be prepared for an early ramble consisting of some of the things from the book that really made a lot of sense to me in relation to institutional insanity and personal sanity:

--The most commonsense description of neurosis is this: the psyche working against itself, like a country at civil war, rather than as a unified whole.

--No true life task can be avoided, it can only be approached in an oblique or substitute way. The symptoms of neurosis are often substitutes for the more direct life experience that is shunned out of fear.

--(think of the collective neurosis of higher ed in general that you were talking about yesterday) A lack of normal assertiveness may result in neurotic symptoms of chronic anxiety, so that situations normally not fearful come to evoke fear -- as if the psyche

produces a superabundance of situations in which the needed development might take place.

--The neurotic is able to internalize conflict, setting up complex intrapsychic structures that insulate the ego from the original conflict but produce substitute conflicts which appear less meaningful until observed analytically.

--Fixation [at an earlier stage] may also occur because of a severe trauma in the past, the ego trying either to reproduce the traumatic situation so that it can be solved or to compensate in the present for the trauma of the past: in either case the present is sacrificed to a dynamic relationship to the past.

--Dreams that show the ego forced to deal with threatening situations are particularly indicative of neurotically delayed development.

--The movement out of neurosis also involves the relativization of a strong ego. The developed ego is asked to confront again the unconscious matrix from which it has freed itself in the first stages of the individuation process. Teleologically speaking, it is as if the whole purpose of the overall process of individuation were for the unconscious to become known and recognized as the source. . . . The natural inclination of the ego is to see itself as the center of the psyche, although it is only the center of the virtual conscious world, in

itself always a particular construction from the many archetypal possibilities. (See Don Juan DeMarco )

-- . . . if work with the unconscious is carried beyond the alleviation of neurotic suffering, it leads imperceptibly into the consideration of philosophical, religious and ethical issues on a level very different from their consideration on a simply collective conscious basis. (the spirit!)

-- the Self is the dream maker.

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It occurs to me that our textual relationship is in so many ways analogous to a dream -- that there is a "Self" which is inter-subjective (as the Self really is re: the collective of the psyche's figures and archetypes) and that is what creates our relational situations. For me, I am the dream-ego and you are a dream figure in the drama. For you, you are the dream-ego and I am a figure in the drama. Here, we work out our neuroses, sometimes falling back into familiar patterns and sometimes testing new alternatives of actions. In either case, the following up with a sort of "dream interpretation" in which we subject the dream to analysis. We have become a "safe place" to critique old ways of

looking at things and to try out new ways of looking at things. That's what makes this so unique.

That, believe it or not, is my ramble. I don't know if it's made any sense to you at all. It seems to make perfect sense to me, but I may not be articulating all that well between the early hour and my enthusiasm.

*Hi Beth, I'm finally getting around to reading more closely and responding to what you wrote re: Jung, dreams, institutional insanity and personal sanity. When you say "neurosis is this: the psyche working against itself, like a country at civil war, rather than as a unified whole" are you saying that both sides fighting for "union?" In other words is the disunity of the psyche the source of the conflict? Is the civil war the noise the psyche makes to draw attention to and protest the disunity, and to demand unity? If so, then conflict becomes the result of not giving the project of psychic unity the attention (Thich Nhat Hanh and Chopra) it needs and deserves. Conflict becomes a substitute for attention or a way of getting attention, calling for help – thinking of how I sometimes create conflict to get attention when I am fearing disunity.*

*In the West we tend to think that the self, particularly the adult self, should be maintenance free – only needing attention rarely, only needing a trip to the fix-it shop once in awhile if ever. The rest of the time we learn about other things – how to build rocketships or whatever. That's the mass-paradigm at work. What I'm trying to get at here is the educational philosophy that is implied in TNH and Chopra; it seems to me*

*they are saying that conscious attention to the self, attention to psychic unity, is a lifelong and daily kind of job, really, that people have to do as part of being human. So I guess I'm dragging the screens of TNH and Chopra across what you're writing about Jung, and wondering what it adds up to in terms of "personal-industry" pedagogy for example. It seems to me there is this worry that if we did "real" education, a la TNH and C, nothing would get done -- but this seems reversed to me. When I have psychic unity I seem to get more "practical" things done, as well as more thinking and so on.*

*In other words I'm wondering if psychic unity is a major "true life task" that gets pursued in the current configuration via the substitutes of degrees, jobs, accolades. If so, then there is a basis for a claim that we are constantly encouraged -- in school and out -- to be neurotic. I'm thinking of our work together and about how we have worked our way out of substitutes, into what I feel is true life, and lo and behold we are out of the loop in terms of society recognizing what we've done in a positive sense. To a significant extent, our knowledge is now personal-industrial, or what you have referred to as "local." We no longer have anything to say at conferences really. We no longer have anything to write as an essay for publication. We can't get a job because there are two of us. In other words, as we've moved further into sanity and true or individuated life we've moved off of almost all of the socially recognized and approved screens. If we moved back into neurosis we'd be rewarded -- but with substitutes.*

*I'll have to get back to this later. I have to fix some breakfast. . Unity demands it! :)*

Yes, "civil war" represents the dis-ease of all parties involved. The project of psychic unity Jung refers to as "individuation" and he sees it as the natural, "intelligent" (TNH, Chopra) way for all humans to proceed. Neurosis surfaces as part of the process it seems to me, especially if we've been raised or exposed to neurotic patterns of development. Yes, I think that the conflict does become the exact kind of attention-getting device you mention here. Progress towards individuation happens when we see it as the substitute, though, rather than the real thing -- when we become active in thinking about what we do and how we react. Of course I think TNH and Chopra are screens you can easily drag across Jung. I like these writers, I suppose, because of the way they connect to philosophies, ideas, and theories I deeply support (Jung).

You're right about the mainstream Western view of the adult, I think. Culture, en masse, is just like any other organization and promotes neurosis in individuals. Maintenance free adults are more useful than high maintenance adults. It's just that the idea of "maintenance" is so skewed. Kindness, reason, sympathy, sorrow, joy, companionship -- these should not be seen as needs related to "high maintenance." Actually, the neurotic is more high maintenance than the individuated person -- which relates to your ideas regarding "getting things done" better in conditions of psychic unity.

My take on what this means about educational institutions and pedagogy is the same as it is applied to the "cultural" organization. We make a mistake of the spirit to identify too closely with these things that are outside of ourselves. I don't think one will

find true happiness and true psychic health in a job, a school, a writing project, millions of dollars or anything else as long as the spirit is in disrepair.

I'd say that psychic unity is indeed a "true life task" and that degrees, jobs, and accolades are not really the ways to pursue it. Therefore, yes, there is a basis for a claim that we are often, if not constantly, encouraged to be neurotic. Our neurosis guarantees the well-being of the status quo. So, the lesson is that we better not look to any organization as an affirmation of our wholeness, the health of our being, our worthiness. I think there are places even now to look for these affirmations, however, but they are places that value our wholeness and the well-being of our spirit. For one thing, there's \*us\* and for another there's our families, and for another there are places like New Garden Meeting. There actually are some businesses and some schools that would affirm us, too. We just don't know about them.

I have to go now. Unity demands I see what's going on downstairs!

*I would say you've modeled very well in your last message the proverbial "tempest in a teapot" which in many ways characterizes "neurotic life" in the mass-industry academy. In the model you've outlined the courses themselves, the meetings, and everything else become "the superabundance of situations in which the needed development [of normal assertiveness] might take place." Lack of normal assertiveness produces these substitute forms which are of course ultimately dissatisfying, so another round of superabundance is always needed -- more courses, more meetings, etc. There*

*may be an explanation in here somewhere for edu-inflation, for a need for two PhD's rather than just one -- which seems "crazy" now but one day, in the era of super-super abundance, it might not seem crazy at all.*

*Continuing with another bit from what you wrote, when you talk about "internalization of conflict" it might be of interest that maybe for both of us, the movement out of "internal courses" (a movement already accomplished when we started writing together rather than in internal solitude) is now being paralleled by a movement out of academia, and in both cases perhaps out of certain kinds of insanity. If any of this is right, it shows that at some level academic institutions cannot yet abide sanity of the sort we've shown is now possible. It raises too many fears, practical and psychic. We must go -- it's "nothing personal," just get out! :)*

*Then finally, you pretty much describe this movement we've traced when you write "if work with the unconscious is carried beyond the alleviation of neurotic suffering, it leads imperceptibly into the consideration of philosophical, religious and ethical issues on a level very different from their consideration on a simply collective conscious basis. (the spirit!)" I mean this is pretty much exactly what has happened in our case.*

Wow, going to that collegial gathering Last night was as big of a mistake as I thought it would be! Sometimes I wish I would trust my intuition about what's best for me and not second guess according to someone else's interpretation. I felt very tense and

very sad. Not so much because everyone there besides me was still "in" (the academy), but that if you're no longer in (the academy) then you are out in almost every way. As in "non existent" or something. There was, for example, no conversation that had anything to do with the fact that there are actually other forms of life and life experience in the world. It worried me and made me feel really bad -- hard to keep on feeding myself all that positive thinking or at least hard, if not impossible, to swallow it. It turned out to be one of those "toxic" situations and I suspected that it would from the outset.

*Re: your collegial gathering. It seems at times like anything that feels good automatically comes under suspicion of neurosis don't it! And then the things we are rightly suspicious of (i.e., your academy get-together) get easily put in the category of "well, \*maybe\* I'm exaggerating, maybe it won't be all that bad!"*

*Anyway, I'm sorry you had your suspicions confirmed, but remember, like we've been talking about recently, there's consistency to the twistedness you experienced -- school as it is currently configured is the ultimate social "othering" machine. That's what it does best. It's just that we are now learning what some of those less polite and adept students learn at 16 or even younger -- the academic thing is nasty and vicious, but it's very clean and reasonable about it, as in eugenics. As we've discovered in our research and teaching, communication, "communing" in any sense, is a real novelty in these places. Communication? Nice, but no cigar. What you noticed when you were reading all of those student essays at Measurement Incorporated -- "all those writers and*

*nobody listening, just checking for competence, NEXT!" -- is one of those giant truths, and one which \*we\* are now caught in. Regardless of what we are saying, how good our ideas are and so forth, we are now being buried at sea, gone without a Derridian trace, and no one has to \*do\* anything -- we just slide off the decks when the next bit of weather turns up!*

Your Words are re-creating my sanity after last night's experience. My short-term life goal is to gain enough \*true\* poise to be able to sit through those experiences with grace, goodwill, and to "feel" the grace and goodwill rather than just put it forth as an "image" to fool everyone about my grace and goodwill. I want to go through it and come out of it psychologically and spiritually intact. I guess I must be talking about enlightenment.

I'm cooking (literally) and am trying to get some work done with significant side-tracks like perusing The Illustrated Children's Bible and getting caught in thought about the Words.

In looking back at the Christmas story to read Seth and Aaron, this from the first chapter of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. For the true light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

*I agree that what we're talking about is enlightenment -- not academic knowledge -- and I'm proud to be your friend. I wish I could have been at this gathering last night with you and to have brought a few other "other" people along!*

*This reminds me of a Thanksgiving dinner I went to one year in Santa Barbara. A kind of rag-tag group of people who sort of didn't make treks to family gatherings that year, and it just clicked. Artist types mostly, but not all, and including a guy who was obviously crazy and a couple of people who were \*very\* high -- and the overall effect was wonderful, Plato *Symposium* like. Nobody except a couple of people really knew anyone else very well, and it was in a way everything that your gathering last night was not. It was full of difference and human kindness. A gathering of "others" I guess in some respects, but no sense of these others as "losers" or any of that kind of crap. It was like a grownup thing, and it's so easy to forget how school does work to infantilize us. Anyway. . .as it is now done academia seems pretty incompatible with creativity, let alone the spiritual creativity implied in enlightenment.*

*Have fun cooking! I'm going to have some breakfast and then get on with working on the journal text.*

I think you made a great observation about groups like the one last night -- the main problem was the lack of "difference" (you know that thing which we tout so much the benefits of! IRONY). I remember when I was an undergraduate, our circle of friends was full of difference. Not even all of us were in college but had met through the source of this group and its periphery. Some friends were in psychology, some in art, some in biology, some in chemistry, Bob Niles drove a taxi and didn't go to school at all, etc. No one was the showboat -- or maybe it was that we each got to be the showboat in our turn *\*and\** we all enjoyed what each had to show & share. The important thing with that group of friends was the experience of enjoying our friendship, our closeness as primary.

In the academic gathering, the academic is primary somehow, even if it *\*seems\** like there's an experience of enjoying. I wondered what it would be like if someone made a rule for the evening that stipulated no academic or teaching stories at this gathering. Again, maybe I'm wrong. But, it's certainly a circle that you would refer to as hermetically sealed. There's no room for difference or for someone originally in the circle to *\*become\** different. They can stay the same, or they can become different (!) by advancing in the hierarchy of sameness, but they can't step outside.

In this way, I've found comfort in making new and *\*different\** friends. Good luck with the journal text and whatever you do today. I'm cleaning Aaron's room and finding an abundance of popcorn seeds in the most unlikely places.

*I like wherever you might be going with Word and Light. Going through these travails re: jobs and such has really heightened my sense of the importance of words, of discourse, to overall well-being -- whether as speaking publicly of questionable situations, or working to emend or heal sub-vocal verbal habits, or whatever.*

*I'm going to copy a good article I found in Wired for you. It's by Sherry Turkle and is about cyberselfness. She's researched kids' sense of self and reality re: their playing in MUDs ["multiple user domains" -- electronic environments]. Maybe nothing new to you, but I found it interesting, so I'll pass it along just in case. Sliding off the decks of a ship of fools maybe need not be so bad after all. Maybe we should think about writing something for a non-academic venue. Maybe we'll have a life of the mind and of the spirit.*

*On another tack, I'm still tealess this morning, and therefore even more fuzzy than usual around the edges -- but I had a dream which I remember little snippets of. I was somehow roped in to going to do volunteer work at a place that was like a converted big auto repair place, which served as a sort of halfway house or something like that. There were lots of people there and lots of different activities going on. The overall feeling was of people as molecules, coalescing into different formations and then re-individuating*

*into circulation. I was kind of perturbed that I had sort of been tricked into being there somehow -- it involved several hours and I kept reminding myself of all the other things I was needing to do.*

*One group of "molecules" coalesced into a fathers meeting of some sort. A group of maybe 60 guys sitting in neat rows on those horribly uncomfortable folding metal chairs, dressed more or less the same. At this time I was sort of puzzled by the molecular movements and the circus like aspects of the place, so I was kind of off to the side listening to what they were talking about. Something else changed and where I had been standing alone there was now a bed, which I was in with a woman. The fathers meeting was still going on. People would drift over and talk. This was sort of matter of fact, it was not like this was anything noteworthy even though there were kids in the place.*

*The feeling of this dream was that things would shift faster than I could comprehend, my mind couldn't keep up with changes that were occurring -- a little bit as if I were in a drug or dream state in the dream, just a little bit behind the comprehension curve in such a way that anything seemed surprising. So I guess fuzzy is the word here, too. I was never sure what was going on in this dream -- why was I there and what not. I think familiar people were there in the beginning but I'm not sure, I think I left the place alone but I'm not sure. I remember walking up a driveway ramp to the parking garage on the roof of the building, still thinking to myself, wondering, asking myself a question about why the car was on the roof or something like that.*

*This dream seems kind of transparent, as you'd say. This building seems like a metaphor for the way my life is in some ways now, along the lines we were talking yesterday in relation to your collegial gathering. This building was not filled with academics. It was filled with regular folks. And I was sort of baffled as to what to do. I was, and am, sort of like Dylan's Mr. Jones -- knowing something is happening but not knowing what it is -- and having mixed feelings about this new place, which is on the one hand too fast and fluid for me to understand but which on the other hand embodies the kind of liminal wisdom of a circus, in which the performers know always and already that \*of course\* life moves with greater speed than intellect.*

*The part with the fathers meeting, and me kind of off to the side listening but not being a part of, interests me because I think it speaks to my hanging back from things that smack of "traditional male stuff" -- but this resolved nicely. As I read/feel it, this resolution included my being "apart" in some ways but that this did not exclude my being "traditionally male" at the same time. Again transparently something I feel is dawning on me.*

Re: your dream. I'm envious to start off with. For one thing it seems like my sleep of late has been rather dreamless. I know that's not the case -- I'm just not remembering them. Still, I feel cheated, like I haven't had my evening entertainment or something. Second, those kinds of dreams spaces that are spaces like houses, warehouses, schools, circuses, carnivals, office buildings, etc. are dreams that represent your own unconscious -

- the space of the Self, so to speak. A great deal of time when I dream of these kind of spaces, I'm dreaming of either discovery or of seeking. The seeking dreams follow a pattern of me going from room to room or place to place inside the expansive space, usually observing the major hub-bub or looking for something vague. The discovery dreams I like better because they're like the one where I found the wonderful new space I could use -- one that had been there all the time. Or my all time favorites -- discovering a warehouse sized attic full of wonderful "things" like toys, furniture, jewelry, knickknacks, etc.

But, your dream was one of unity and that's what makes it really neat. Here you were in one of those big spaces, one you describe as circus-like (although you realized that all that activity was not merely chaos; you're dream-ego just had trouble keeping up with all at once), but your ultimate place in the dream was really wonderful.

The fact that this dream had as a central image one of you in bed with . . . let's say your anima . . . is really the best part. For one thing, as you said, you didn't feel that you were "seen" at something that wasn't okay, that this being in bed was just part of the accepted action. In other words, there was a strong sexual/sensual element to the dream.

According to Jungian interpretive schemes, sexualized dreams indicate that a transformative process is taking place. They claim that often the unconscious uses sexual imagery to symbolize non-physical processes of union and transformation and warn that interpreting these images literally is ultimately reductive.

Another thing that moves me along the lines of such an interpretation also has to do with the "fathers' group" that seemed a major element. The anima figure often appears in the company of or in a context along with a father figure which Jungians say can be taken as a hint that behind the feminine figure there lies a masculine spiritual figure and that the feminine more or less represents a being with access to hidden knowledge of this spiritual. It really interests me that your fathers were just that -- plural. There was for you a group of fathers rather than an individual figure. I wonder whether or not this stems from your loss of a central figure that helped you get in touch with the masculine or now whether or not the insistence that you come to terms or learn the hidden knowledge of the masculine spiritual is so strong that you get images of whole groups of men rather than a single man.

In any case, I would say that your dream is a positive sign that there's some process of coming to terms with and uniting with the "persons" of your unconscious mind. It's an exciting dream for sure because it certainly says something "big" I think.

*Thanks for your comments about that dream. I'm forwarding parts of what I wrote to my friend Paul re: spirituality. I've just begun to think about this stuff as we've gotten to this latest place in our conversation, and I know you have thought about it for some time, so please read this as a "draft!"*

*Re: spiritual life. I get this sense that each of us has these selves that we bring with us, and for the most part we don't like it. Even if it's an okay self, it's still a cage.*

*Other people strike us deeply sometimes as having keys, and as people for whom we have keys in return. In interacting with these people we are brought out into an "elsewhere" that is not either self, but more like a third party.*

*Lately it occurs to me that this elsewhere is what is meant by "spirit" -- it's that place where we are sanctioned to be someone other than the self that we bring. In Western spiritual traditions anyway, this space is not only sanctioned, it's sanctified as important enough to build houses to give it a physical presence, places where folks can get together and feel this potential to be someone that we didn't bring with us. I still think though, that we go to those buildings to remind us that such things are within our reach. The place the thing itself actually lives though, is in relationships.*

*It's not simple though because there is all that projection going on, all that screen-cleaning to do. But it's \*easier\*, maybe, if both people keep their eyes on the prize --which is this sanctified place to be elsewhere than the selves you bring. This is, I'm convinced, the grand prize of life, the secret reason for buildings, that which sanctuaries are sanctuaries for.*

*So, we're just who we are, and we're also capable of being "elsewhere."*

I would alter part of what you say just a bit, and say that our "not liking ourselves" is really a kind of innate dis-comfort about being incarnate. I think because we are spirits, greater than our incarnations, that we are ill at ease with our bodily limitations, especially

when we are poorly connected to others or at least to our sense of collectivity (vis-à-vis Jung).

I also agree that we key into others and form, as you say, "third parties." I attribute the "keying" in to synchronicity -- a meaningful synchronicity that arises because it is only natural since all things are genuinely connected. We're never \*just\* who we are. We are always elsewhere and elsewhere is always in us. Every day, every week, all our atoms change. We flow. We are, in fact, changing parts of the universe. Spirit endures.

Connecting this fluidity with Mind, Chopra in the book I'm reading says:

"... perception and experience are both created by the mind. . . . To create something "out there," all we have to do is first agree between ourselves that a certain reality exists out there, and then that agreement between us would construct that reality. . . . [Things] first manifest themselves as faint emotions, faint ideas, then stronger ideas and groups of beliefs, and finally a full-blown world."

If you believe Chopra like I do (and I think that being a social constructionist that you must), then you will agree with me when I say that we can also choose between us to construct some other kind of reality.

What would inform this construction or non-construction (depending upon which way we go), would be, for me, the "spirit." Chopra sees "spirit" as a universal organizing principle, the intelligence or force that made me "me" before I happened to fall through my

mother's body into this particular incarnation and the intelligence or force that will re-organize me into one with the soil, air, and elements when my body or physical incarnation dies.

Personally, I believe that we have the spirit to organize by force of mind (choice) a world that is satisfying, enlarging, and one that provides contentment. This doesn't mean that I want to sail off on the good ship Lolly-Pop as if worlds don't have chaos, misery, and turmoil. It just means that I think that worlds don't have to be destroyed by chaos, misery, and turmoil -- that we have the "spirit" to endure the storm and sail into calm seas.

*I want to connect what you've written here to your comment awhile back about our writing being like "writing in a diary and having it answer back." It seems to me we've "constructed" something fairly improbable via our conversations, sort of like an "Empire State Building" in its audacity, becoming as we've said before "a special effect, the subject of itself, the object that its self attempts to externalize and explain."*

*So anyway it seems to me like we are now adding a consciousness to what we do, and it's a consciousness of something which is quite complex and elusive, maybe consciousness itself or spirit -- like we're constructing an "Empire State Mirror" now, and holding it up to what we've already constructed, the point of which is to see awareness itself manifest, and thereby be able to incorporate it into our lives in such a way that any scene is just a manifestation of awareness. So to live in awareness is to live elsewhere/here in a way. This would be analogous to sensing what David Bohm would*

*call the implicate order, with the explicate order (the normal perceived world) existing as a sort of projection out of the implicate. At least I think that's how it goes.*

*I started thinking today about that class I get to teach in the summer. I got onto Bohm because I was thinking of possible useful metaphors/models for understanding what knowledge looks like in a dialogical, postmodern order (since this class is called "Electronic Community: Ethical and Epistemological Issues"). I was remembering the things we came up with and thought I might be able to go somewhere with holography in relation to conversation-generated knowledge. It's like everything is implied in conversation, as if conversation is a kind of holographic plate. This makes Plate-o a really apt name for a guy who thought that people already knew everything and that conversation was simply the way to pull that knowledge out, out of the implicate into the explicate -- sort of descriptive of what we've done since what seems like way back when, when we first agreed to talk about academic stuff on e-mail.*

*It's been a pretty nice day and I'm nicely tired now, thinking about sleeping wide and dreamy.*

The diary that answers back. Yes, indeed. In the journey of spirit and spirited words, I look forward to the "elsewhere," trusting that our journey will be informed by a positive spirit (the positive sub-vocal speech maybe). Chopra talks about how the spirit informs all "construction," even literal construction, i.e., the Empire State Building. Many people collectively had a thought informed by spirit; the spirit moved them to actions,

actions that led to a concrete structure. Our "elsewhere" is concrete, yet not concrete. It's constantly emerging. Exciting.

*Yes, and along these lines I found some interesting stuff in this Foucault essay Technologies of the Self. Here's a good quote in case you need one:*

*"I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning."*

*Here's another one that speaks pretty directly to the loss in the West of any sort of concept of education such as we're finding/constructing via TNH and C:*

*"There has been an inversion between the hierarchy of the two principles of antiquity, "Take care of yourself" and Know thyself." In Greco-Roman culture knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of taking care of yourself. In the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle."*

*This move he describes parallels another move which he, and we, also write about:*

*"From the time of Plato to the Hellenistic age, the relationship between care of the self and knowledge of the self changed. . .First, we see the disappearance of dialogue and the*

*increasing importance of a new pedagogical relationship -- a new pedagogical game where the master/teacher speaks and doesn't ask questions and the disciple doesn't answer but must listen and keep silent." (Foucault, "Technologies of the Self")*

*To wit, I'm adding that when people are "taking care of themselves" they are in dialogue, when they are "knowing themselves" they are in monologue. Monologue is therefore in some sense not allied with taking care of ourselves, hence allied with promoting what we were calling "institutional insanity." So the hallmark of higher ed is that "we DON'T take care of our own" -- everyone has to succeed or fail on their own, monologically, on the strength or weakness their knowledge. Wholeness, character (acting with care?) drop off the screen entirely. My fave philosophy teacher used to say that higher ed was for the most part full of professors who have found basically nothing exciting in life and are telling other people about it.*

*In both our cases we've recently "individuated ourselves from" the current working model of education-- ironically enough, or in support of Jung's concept of self, we've done this individuation precisely by bringing our individual selves to dialogue, not by becoming great monologists. In other words, it makes all the sense there is to make that in finding something exciting in life, in being explicitly concerned about acting with care, we have written tickets for ourselves out of the professorhood. Anyway, connections between dialogue, caring, sanity.*

*"In Plato the themes of contemplation of self and care of self are related dialectically through dialogue. Now in the imperial period we have the themes of, on one side, the obligation of listening to truth, on the other side, of looking and listening to the self for the truth within. The difference between the one era and the other is one of the great signs of the disappearance of the dialectical structure." (Foucault, "Technologies of the Self")*

*In what I'm doing I try to highlight the correspondence between the earlier dialogue conditions and the condition of "personal-industry" involved in maintaining the city-state, later monological conditions and the condition of "mass-industry" involved in maintaining an empire. In other words I try to correlate technological paradigms with rhetorical paradigms.*

*Interesting too that Foucault died before he wrote his book on the self. The essay is, I think, a lecture he gave when he was teaching at the U. of Vermont for a short while -- and at the time he was insisting that all this work be done collaboratively, so who knows what this book might have "looked like." He did say this though. . .*

*"I don't want to be a prophet and say, "Please sit down, what I have to say is very important." I have come to discuss our common work."*

## AFTERWORD

This work celebrates the return, rather than the “disappearance” of the dialectical structure which Foucault mentions in the above quote, and celebrates as well the return of the tradition of “caring for the self” and “looking and listening to the self for the truth within.” It celebrates the “common work” of conversation and the dialectical structure of intersubjectivity-in-subjectivity and subjectivity-in-intersubjectivity -- the sense in which we can, via electronic conversation in particular, meet ourselves as well as others and generate not only relationship but knowledge or truth in the meeting. In this sense it also celebrates a revised conception of education, an education which is both Platonic (it’s *written* conversation after all) and Socratic (it uses conversation rather than other written documents to construct knowledge).

For me this kind of education, this kind of knowledge, has something of the structure of a daydream. As a fertile screen of two-way projection, electronic conversation clearly invokes and involves the unconscious (inviting us as Beth mentioned early on to “fill in the missing dimensions” with ourselves), it does so right before our eyes, and it leaves a visible trace which can be reflected upon, re-inscribed, responded to. In effect electronic conversation allows us to *work* the unconscious (as much as this is possible, I suppose), to actively produce or reproduce it according to our desires, to merge

in this way conscious and unconscious. Again the form of a daydream, complexly and richly unconscious/conscious, finished/unfinished, in and out of control. It might seem strange at first that this conscious/unconscious unity could be produced by a change in technological paradigms, but it makes fairly good sense if one grants that technologies signify via their functional logics, grants that the functional logic of the personal-industry paradigm we are now entering is all about connections, and grants that this logic of connection-making inevitably pervades and “extends” to making connections between conscious and unconscious, autonomic and voluntary nervous systems, education and personal-industry, education and the work of the self. In other words the personal-industry paradigm makes connection-making into a form of “common work” for perhaps the first time in quite a while, and in turn for me at least this makes of common work a cause for celebration.

In a way it has been my ambition to write not only “in common” about this common work, but also to write as a common person, to write myself with the same sort of personal dignity and intelligent responsiveness which I accord students in my courses, to write with the same sort of personal dignity and intelligent responsiveness that is accorded interview subjects who are untrained and untutored. Of course I hope I’ve succeeded uncommonly in these ambitions!

It may again seem odd to go out of one’s way to write what is in many ways not an academic tract. Oh well! My intent, as I mentioned in the introduction, has been to avoid the alienation of solitary writing, and to challenge the author-ity of the monological

text and teacher. But most importantly my intent has been to assert my feeling that each and every person has to make their own meaning, their own sense out of life, and I think that's both a highly social and a highly individual process. In other words, as Beth and I talk about in the above conversation, it seems to me the aim of education in conditions of mass-industry gets put way off mark, and I have tried to envision and enact a different aim -- an aim which is in word and in fact highly social and highly individual rather than quasi-social and quasi-individual.

As I also mentioned in the introduction, I've learned something in this context in the process of dissertation, which is that we can look to the characteristics of technological paradigms to help us understand (and shape) educational forms. In other words by thinking through the role of technology in self, cultures, and society I've acquired a measure of compassion about what I have experienced as the abuses of mass-industry education as well as a measure of concern that perhaps we should pay more or different sorts of attention to technology. In turn I've also gotten somewhat hopeful about the power of the personal-industry paradigm to work in different ways. It's of course way to early to tell, but the battle is already pitched -- efforts to control and standardize electronic formats will surely be heightened, but whether or not they will ultimately be successful is in my opinion anyone's guess at this point.

In some ways it seems to me we are entering a kind of "spy vs. spy" era, when hackers will compete with controllers. Will the inherent properties of the personal-industry paradigm assert themselves as forcefully and unstopably as the inherent

properties of the mass-industry paradigm did? Will this give the hackers an edge? These are the kinds of questions that I end with on the general, cultural/social level.

On the personal level, I end with a considerable feeling of satisfaction and some questions, too. I've traveled to some interesting places and arrived at a new found interest in what I'm calling the "production of the unconscious" -- and because I've arrived there with some sort of integrity of approach (in my personal scheme of things) I am actually eager to read what's been said about the unconscious (starting with Jung and meditation). I'm also eager to continue my interest in the ways in which the unconscious is allied with the autonomic body, and with technology.

It may be strange again to put the acknowledgments at the end but here goes. Thanks Beth. Obviously. Thanks Hepsie for seeing that Beth and I might have some work in common to do. Thanks David for consistently having a big approach to intellectual work and life, such that a project such as this could be done. Thanks Svi for putting up with rants and raves and keeping an open mind and a willingness to keep talking. Thanks Penny for great suggestions and hallway conversations. Thanks Trish, once again obviously. Thanks William -- now that this writing is done I'll be able to write you those letters about your birth and first days with us!

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