

Chapter 8

iCyborg: Shifting Out of Neutral and the Pedagogical Road Ahead

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ABSTRACT

Teachers may no longer envision their educational technologies as powerful yet essentially neutral tools plied to accomplish their own pedagogical ends. Rather, these technologies are more accurately theorized as vocative objects that prereflectively engage and invite us into their world, and mimetic interventions that scaffold, transform, and sustain new teaching and learning practices and ways of thinking regardless of teacherly intentions. This chapter explores some of the significances and implications of a ubiquitous technologizing of educational lifeworlds in light of this understanding.

Digital technologies are transforming how we learn, what we know, and how we understand the world around us. New media, Virtual Learning Environments, electronic whiteboards and new software tools are significantly changing the processes of teaching and learning in primary, secondary and postsecondary education settings. Few are surprised that in virtually every classroom in schools, training institutions and universities, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are commonplace. Students supplement textbooks by accessing their assignments and readings online, they word-process their course papers, download

PowerPoint presentations and class notes, keep in touch via online social networks, discussion boards and texting on their smart phones. Yet, we have barely begun to grasp the profoundly co-constitutive relationships we share with our digital technologies, relationships that simultaneously open new worlds of possibilities while silently closing down others (Introna, 2007).

This chapter explores some of the pedagogical significances and implications of this ubiquitous technologizing of the lifeworld, and suggests that as educators we may no longer view the digital technologies we adopt in our classrooms as neutral tools. I aim to show how these new technologies are more accurately comprehended as *evocative*

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objects (Turkle, 2004) and *mimetic vehicles* (Benjamin, 1978) that invite, scaffold, and sustain new practices and patterns of thinking, and thus carry significant *effective* as well as *affective* implications for students and teachers alike. This recommendation to theorize digital technologies anew precipitates from a hermeneutic phenomenological study I conducted exploring students' and teachers' lived experiences of PowerPoint in the classroom (Adams, 2006, 2008, in press). This research investigated how students and teachers are not only aided and "enhanced" by the particular digital media technology in use, they are also enmeshed, constrained by and relinquished to the language, imagery, framing, at-handedness, and sensuality of their materiality and design.

At the hand of teachers' everyday experience of PowerPoint in their classrooms, I will demonstrate how "our existence changes with the appropriation of a fresh instrument" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002, p. 143). From this simple example, familiar to every teacher and student who has experienced the world of digital-technology-enhanced education, I then wonder what transformations of perception occur, what translations of action manifest any time we take up a "fresh instrument" of digital technology, be it PowerPoint or Smartphone, Second Life or Web 2.0, wiki or Wii, in the lived space of the classroom. Mark Hansen suggests that new media technologies are "poised on the cusp between phenomenology and materiality" and as such have introduced "a theoretical oscillation that promises to displace the empirical-transcendental divide" (Hansen, 2006, p. 297) that has long structured western thinking. This chapter is situated in the midst of this difficult theoretical divide, and attempts to make visible some of the tight intimacies, primordial interminglings, and, at times, acute dependencies teachers find themselves living with their educational technologies everyday.

VOCATIVE OBJECTS

The totality of the immediate environment that we inhabit, our lifeworld, is best described as "*a milieu*—a field of intensive forces, vibrant according to their own inner codes" (Lingis, 2004, p. 278). Ivan Illich (1997) coins the phrase *le milieu technique* to refer to the irresistible embrace of the high technology lifeworlds we find ourselves dwelling in today. The technological milieu is shaping substantially—insinuating itself, habituating us and simultaneously reinterpreting—how we act in and perceive the world. To gain access to the unique tenor and structure of this new milieu, Illich suggests we look beyond what technological objects *do*, and attend more carefully to what they *say* to us, to what they *invite* us to do. Within the situated, relational, embodied context of lived space, each object or place presents a unique evocation or "pathic" appeal to us: "cool water invites us to drink, the sandy beach invites the child to play, an easy chair invites our tired body to sink in it" (van Manen, 1997, p. 21). Of course, beaches and easy chairs do not "speak" to us in the same way as people do:

Pathic knowing inheres in the sense and sensuality of our practical actions, in encounters with others and in the ways that our bodies are responsive to the things of our world and to the situations and relations in which we find ourselves. (van Manen, 2007, p. 12)

Orienting to pathic or lived sensibilities, we are positioned to catch glimpse of the nature and quality of the intimate rapport enacted between human beings and their technologies every day.

The pathic or invitational quality of a thing is always "heard" in light of our *intentionality* or indissoluble connection and orientation to the world as child, parent, teacher, etc. The sandy beach commands the child differently than the watchful parent, or the teenage sibling in the company of friends. Intentionality expresses the

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