

Thinking Beyond Electronic Borders: Global Ideas, Global Values

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Section 1: Paper 2

Thinking Beyond Electronic Borders: Global Ideas, Global Values

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The theme and indeed title of this Conference is “Thinking beyond Borders: Global Ideas, Global Values.” It is a theme in keeping with numerous developments both within and between countries, nationalities, ethnicities and groups of people in general, that militates against old fashioned and traditional notions of nation state and geopolitical, social, cultural and linguistic boundaries founded on some of the basic ingredients of nationhood, nation-making, and nationalism. To think beyond borders is therefore to give voice to global ideas and global values of the sort that transcend national, regional, municipal borders and thereby embrace truly international, world-wide, and universal beliefs and mores. But not everything is as simple or straightforward as this may suggest.

For one, it is based on a facile and, quite frankly, rather optimistic view of internationalism and globalism that underestimates the liabilities and weaknesses of our current post-cold war era while simplifying complex trends and developments of the more recent and distant past. For another, it is illusory, often based in part on rhetoric, appearance, and style, as opposed to substance, structure, and political and economic realities. Finally, it is grounded in conventional notions of globalism, globalization, and internationalism that denigrate the role of smaller and more local units of power while

denying the powerful effects of cataclysmic change associated with seminal technological and economic developments.¹

It appears today, for example, as if we live in an age of increasing borderless transportation and communication wherein national boundaries and physical barriers matter less than they ever did before. Witness the cataclysmic changes associated with the end of the Cold War and its aftermath, including the collapse of the Wall and disintegration of the Eastern Bloc and the U.S.S.R. taking place at the same time that national boundaries in eastern and western Europe, for example, recede into apparent insignificance, as customs and passport controls disappear while free trade and a common currency (the Euro) prevail. With the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, the disappearance of the Iron Curtain, and the waning of the Cold War, it augured well for a new world order to be based on less ideological rancor and polarity and greater political harmony and economic and political reintegration that finally put an end to the tensions and rivalry of a world order polarized and splintered by the Cold War. As the historic truncation of East and West Germany was converted first into political and then into an economic reintegration of a country that symbolized and epitomized so much of the Cold War, so hopes rang high that Germany, and indeed most of eastern and western Europe, would enter a new stage of international reconciliation not experienced in more than half a century. Yet appearances deceive, for as certain political, ideological, and geographical borders may be no more, others are reinforced.

The centrifugal forces of frustrated nationalism and religious fundamentalism, combined with the disproportionate growth of free trade and an ever expanding corporate capitalism that knows no borders or limits, have violated older, more collectively crafted

notions of the public interest and the public good while riding roughshod over any meaningful concept of individual rights and civil liberties. Thus it is that, after almost twenty years of apparent political and economic reintegration in pursuit of a so-called unified country,² supposedly under freer and more harmonious conditions than during the half century preceding reunification, Germany, among other countries, suffers from an underlying destabilization and dislocation. These factors have exacerbated economic hardships, nativist sentiments, and disillusionment among Germans in the east while west Germans experience a gradually deteriorating quality of life with the exponential growth of privatization and commercialization taking place as the public sector shrinks and government retrenches.³

On the surface, then, countries like Germany were becoming freer politically and economically, and increasingly “borderless” from within and without, but while appearances and rhetoric mesmerize and are reflective of western political and economic institutions and mores, the wholesale transformation from one political and economic system to another and the cataclysmic political and economic changes contributed to deleterious consequences. They manifested themselves in terms of dislocation, restructuring and unemployment, but they also had a more attractive deceptive façade to them.⁴

One of the most telling and powerful series of examples instrumental in creating both a skein of prosperity and progress and a deeper reality of wrenching change and profound alienation in countries like Germany is the very technology that has shaped our modern life style while contributing to the image of a borderless utopia. Once again,

however, as mentioned before, appearances deceive, for as certain political/geographical borders/barriers may be no more, others are reinforced.⁵

Electronic communication and a potpourri of technological devices, especially the computer, the Internet, and the cell phone, purport to transcend traditional borders and barriers, creating a world community of instantaneous communications and contact with large numbers of people in constant touch with each other. From an apparently borderless world of weaker national entities, free trade and ever increasing consumption driven by the imperatives of corporate capitalism to a technologically driven world economy, the insatiable need to be in touch with others via an abundance of technological gadgets reinforces a synthetic image of progress, convenience, and the necessity of urgent, ubiquitous, and unceasing communications from which there can be no escape. On the surface, these inventions and machines appear to have made our lives more satisfying, convenient, and ameliorating in general, given not just the uses to which they are put but also the magnetic appeal they have for us. Convinced that these devices have improved and enhanced our lives in myriad ways, we have also contributed directly to the mythology of our prosperity and our sense of progress—the stuff of which dreams and our culture are made. Yet if it is true that they have facilitated some human activities while making our lives more convenient and less prone to physical drudgery, this has come at a terrible cost to us, involving the introduction and imposition of harsher, more rigorous imperatives and pressures that create new, dysfunctional, and restrictive burdens and borders.⁶

Take, for example, the computer, a product of the post-World War II military-industrial complex in the U.S., which has become such an entrenched and pervasive part

of our technological, economic, social, political, and communications infrastructure. There can be no doubt about the fact that computers, mythologized as instruments of progress, the stuff of which dreams are made, have revolutionized communication, calculation, the processing and organization of information, and our life styles in ways that reflect modern man's fascination/obsession with speed, efficiency, leisure, convenience, and an aura of omniscience and omnipotence--part and parcel of the notion of technological determinism. In conjunction with the Internet and our continuously expanding and refining information highway, computers are the ultimate purveyors of information and data, epitomizing automation at its best and at its worst both in society in general and in institutions like hospitals and universities.⁷ The speed and logistical soundness with which calculations can be made and information gathered and conveyed and the ever expansive networking communications potential of the computer make it difficult not to consider computer technology a means of transcending our political, geographical, and ideological borders in pursuit of a borderless, integrated, and more functional and harmonious world. Yet in many respects, the computer has reinforced those borders and barriers that cut to the very core of what life is all about and what human beings consider essential.

It has made us much less human and contributed to an impersonal society. When our communication takes place primarily through e-mail, chat lines, chat rooms, text messaging and cell phones, the human/personal interaction of yesterday is being replaced by the inhuman, impersonal characteristics of machine technology today. Not only does this make our society less personal and less human, detracting from the very global values and global ideas that are so indispensable to our planet, but it imposes restrictive

borders on how our communications take shape. To the extent that the software and hardware determine the format and particular characteristics of our e-mail and other forms of electronic communications, we humans have no input into the mechanistic and automatic significance of our words. The relative lack of tonal, human, or emotional expression that is part and parcel of the electronic world is another intrinsic quality of this computer technology that makes for a less human format over which the consumer has virtually no say. At home, this has resulted in families becoming more unfocused and indeed fragmented, detracting from the traditionally structured family and giving way to the more selfish, egocentric, narcissistic behaviour of individual family members. Similarly, at the workplace, computers have made for a more callous, impersonal, and sometimes regimented environment within which employees are even more at the mercy of their supervisors and bosses than they were before computers became so widespread. Indeed, today, employers are wont to use the computer as a weapon with which to monitor, assess, control, and discipline the employee while possibly even violating his/her privacy/confidentiality.

This significant incursion into the rights and freedom of the employee represents a further extension of the principle and practices of scientific management, founded and implemented by Frederick W. Taylor who, in the early twentieth century, tried to maximize the efficiency of all movements and activities connected to work, so that management could establish the foundation for the culture and hierarchy of compliance, corporate productivity, and efficiency.⁸ In this way, control of the workers and of the jobs could be achieved not just through the supposed application of scientific principles, but also primarily through deskilling--a progressive degradation of work carried to its

logical extreme by the very machine technology that was supposed to make our work more efficient and satisfying and our lives more rewarding and convenient.⁹

Taking shape immediately after World War II, this third industrial revolution--the most systemic, insidious, and dysfunctional of all of them, has transcended our more traditionally structured approaches to time, work, thought, human interaction, identify, and community, thus transforming the very fabric and meaning of our lives. The years since 2000, in particular, have witnessed a sea change not just in the way we communicate ideas, knowledge, messages, and language to each other but in the sheer magnitude and volume of information and data available and in the far-reaching implications thereof for individuals, families, and society in general.

In effect, the information technology that we credit with speed, efficiency, convenience has continued unabatedly the trend toward meaningless work with a preponderance of the labor force in most industrial countries engaging in work requiring no more than simple, repetitive tasks while also contributing to intractably high structural unemployment between the 1940's and the 1990's. The very technology that has been used and developed to deskill, impose discipline on and displace human labor has intensified the dislocation and marginalization of a large percentage of the world's population, resulting in a proliferation of temporary and part-time workers, increasing the ranks of the perpetually impoverished, and contributing to both the growing gap between rich and poor and to a greater concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the world's elites. Those who have jobs are now working longer days, under deteriorating conditions, with less pay, fewer benefits, little, if any job security, fewer skills and greater stress.¹⁰

In this ever so disorienting, deceptive, and dysfunctional process, kept hidden from the view of numerous people who believe in technology's omniscience and omnipotence in quest of an ever-expanding borderless planet, we can find ominous barriers and borders that take shape as we speak and that militate against the kind of international ideas and values that are human, interpersonal, sustainable, and therefore truly global. For, as we cross over the traditional borders of our various professions/jobs, we enter the surreal, camouflaged, and at times meretricious world of cyberspace--borderless, shapeless, chaotic, and enervating--defined by no time limits, 24/7, and ever growing quantities of work that impose onerous burdens on the average employee while changing the very nature of the workplace and of work itself. How common it is to hear and to read about an ever-growing number of employees taking their work home with them because of the overwhelming number of e-mails which they can't handle at work or increasingly ignoring what is on the computer screen, in general, because of the exponential growth in workload due to information overload and the unpredictable nature of technology in its impact upon work and people.

No less common is it to hear, read about, and indeed observe and experience the growing silence, dehumanization, and spiritual and intellectual torpor, frustration, anxiety, and stress of the workplace, as employees and management become more and more dependent on computers, cell phones, Blackberries and the like, relegating the myriad human qualities and practices and the personal interaction that used to epitomize the essence of our behaviour to the margins of our existence.¹¹ In such an oppressive climate of monolithic stupor and uniformity of mind set, the pressures to conform and to be part of a larger consensus abound, especially given the ubiquity and entrenchment of

computer technology and computer culture in the workplace, with all the advantages and additional power that such an infrastructure and software provide employers. It is in this context that our current, unfettered quest for speed, automation, convenience, and efficiency in an increasingly commercialized, commodified, and corporate environment has planted the seeds of our own undoing. Indeed, it has provided a stark contrast with the apparently borderless world of greater freedom, fewer parochial economic and political barriers, and fluid political and economic integration that many of us currently fetishize in this post-Cold War era.

The new world of apparent, borderless work unfolding in an environment of instant and constant electronic communication therefore takes on a harsh, austere, and indeed almost surreal reality of pronounced, unnegotiated, unregulated, and daunting borders and barriers, the likes of which no previous generation has had to endure. The restructuring and financial constraints, facilitated and reinforced by technology and, in particular, computer technology, have taken their toll especially harshly on hospitals, universities, and colleges, where it is sometimes difficult to recognize the original connection between health care, on the one hand, and hospitals, on the other, between education and intellectual integrity, on the one hand, and universities, on the other.

In the hospitals of today, despite the impressive medical breakthroughs and improvements to which technology has contributed, the computer technology and culture of the workplace have also redefined the roles and the work of nurses and doctors in ways that detract from best practices, good patient care, and the Hippocratic Oath. The cutbacks which successive governments imposed on hospitals, the restructuring, amalgamation, and closure of hospitals, and the indispensable role which computers and

automatic telephone devices such as voicemail, have played in the process led to the loss of thousands of jobs and to irreparable cuts to valuable services. In particular, the unprecedented and catastrophic losses suffered by nurses during the Rae and Harris years (approximately 10,000, *in toto*) were instrumental in causing the chronic nursing shortage in Ontario from which we still suffer today and in creating a hobbled system. But it was also during these years that technology and the computer, in particular, were implemented with a vengeance, contributing not just to a loss of jobs, but also to a very different workplace and to a very different job.¹²

It was during these years that nursing underwent one of its most profound transformations, changing from what was essentially a more bedside, patient-friendly profession to one involving more office work and large amounts of time spent on the computer and away from the patient. In effect, nurses became less accessible, less personal and less patient-oriented as their working conditions deteriorated for reasons related not just to the exponential growth in patient load (what with the rationalization of resources and services and the decimation of the ranks of nurses), but also because hospitals became increasingly computerized and the job of being a nurse changed so dramatically.¹³ At the same time, the doctors' responsibilities and workload grew exponentially as did the extent to which doctors depended on the very computer and information technology that made their workplace less personal, less human, and ironically enough, less accessible to their patients.

It is in this context that the increased use of voicemail, computers, cell phones, Blackberries, podcasts, etc. assumes a special irony and significance, as the need for greater human resources becomes more acute in the health care environment at precisely

the same time that the increased use of machine technology challenges our human priorities and our indispensable human interactions for which computers, voicemail, and other technological devices are simply no substitute. Thus it is that the patient who waits interminably for emergency treatment in the E.R. or is delayed in any other department or clinic of a hospital, who is put on a waiting list and therefore delayed by months or even years for a critically important procedure or operation, or who finds it impossible to gain access to a family doctor, experiences a tenuous, if not drastically weakened, connection between the health care so highly touted and the reality of the increasingly virtual, supposedly borderless, technologically-oriented system of today.

During these same years extending to today, universities too have undergone cataclysmic changes and restructuring that challenge the very essence of our post-secondary institutions. At the same time, they are imposing borders and dysfunctional constraints upon our very ability to communicate effectively, interact personally, teach and engage in research with integrity, and think logically, critically and independently. In the end, many people wonder what connection there is between education and the intellectual pursuits so highly touted and promoted, on the one hand, and the universities and colleges that are supposed to be so instrumental in achieving these results.

Our universities were not always like this. Not too many years ago, universities were respected for being centers of intellectual vitality and excellence, inspiring debate, diversity of opinion and methodology, controversy, dissent, and creativity. Today they are but pale reflections of what they once used to be and especially what they were meant to be. Where once there was a sense of respect for the place, function, and status of the university in society, now there is confusion, skepticism, cynicism, and at times bitterness

about the mission, practices, and effectiveness of our post-secondary institutions. This is so not just because the world we live in has changed so fundamentally and radically, with consumerism, the marketplace, the corporate sector, free trade, globalization, technology, and the exponential growth of commercial, military, and security/disaster-related expenditures reinforcing the primacy of the private sector and relegating the public sector to a secondary, if not negligible, position of authority, but also because the nature of the university and its borders have changed so fundamentally. At the same time as our world order appears to become increasingly borderless and reintegrated in ways that have been hailed and decried at one and the same time, our universities reflect the confusion, conflation, and tensions of the old and the new. Boundaries or borders that were once categorical between public and private sectors and between the university and society are also becoming fuzzy and virtually non-existent. And as the university becomes more interconnected to the very society, economy, and business interests and values of which it once stood in more critical judgment, so it loses its critical perspective and indeed part of its *raison d'être* that reside so preciously and precariously in the liberal and arts and the role of the intellectual.¹⁴

The commercialization of universities and the commodification of knowledge have only exacerbated these conditions. Nothing remains sacred or sacrosanct in the university anymore, for almost everything is saleable or dispensable. Indeed, the corporate presence of the private sector is exemplified by the deals universities are willing to make with a host of companies, partly to make up for lost revenue due to cutbacks and dwindling government support, but also because of the increasingly pragmatic, technocratic, and commercial orientation of universities. In the process,

universities reinforce the consumer values and the private interests and corporate logic underlying big and small business while students learn the rudiments of corporate culture and the supposed attendant rewards.¹⁵ Some campuses, at least in part, being to resemble shopping malls, allowing students to confuse and conflate the academic world with that of the daily shopper, thus blurring even more any potential distinction between the university and its environment. As the activities of the university begin to resemble those of institutions in which production and outcome become all important and in which the commodification of knowledge and commercialization together with financial constraints reinforce the perceived need for redesigning work, teaching, and how it is delivered, so technology in the university becomes all important and all pervasive.

This has been especially the case since 1980 when increasing opportunities to supply education in new contractual and entrepreneurial ways have intensified the links between universities and business, radically changing the nature and purpose of the university while leading to less independence and openness, greater secrecy, censorship, and intimidation, more vulnerability on the part of faculty to corporate pressures (as the Nancy Olivieri case, for example, clearly confirms), skewed research results, and greater prospects for conflicts of interest. At the same time, these developments promoted the research function of the university at the expense of its educational and pedagogical activities while favoring the sciences, medicine, and applied, technologically-oriented research at the expense of the pedagogy of the small liberal arts classroom. As universities began a new era of commercial entrepreneurship, so research and knowledge became an important source of profit and an important catalyst for further change, often affecting universities adversely.¹⁶

This confluence of factors witnessed the transformation of the university in such a way as to implement efficiencies in the way research is done and the way teaching is delivered. In the sciences, medicine, and a variety of applied fields, computer technology was and is more functional than in other disciplines but even here, there were social and cognitive liabilities that were difficult to erase. In the liberal arts, however, computer technology and the internet proved problematic at best. Beginning in the early 1980's, computers became an entrenched part of the technological infrastructure and postsecondary landscape of the university by the late 1990's, creating a difficult environment for teaching, learning, and intellectual growth and detracting from intellectual rigor in both schools and universities. Most fundamentally, how can one develop, refine, or sharpen one's mind under the auspices of the same institution that is encouraging us to depend more and more on computers or even robots which ultimately threaten to replace the human mind with their own artificial intelligence and which, in the process, rob us of our own critical faculties and intellectual ability? To ask the question is, in effect, to answer it, leading us to some rather critical, somber, and disturbing observations and conclusions about the conditions which prevail at our increasingly borderless, fluid, and virtual institutions of so-called "higher learning".¹⁷

With the implementation of "technologically enhanced" learning and teaching that supposedly saves the university money while facilitating the teaching process, technology is used not just as a means to economize, rationalize, and simplify, but also as an end in itself, encouraging instructors and students to promote visual learning and crass/diagrammatic bullet point learning at the expense of comprehensive, complex, teaching and learning of a more critical nature.¹⁸ As millions of dollars are spent on the

latest state of the art technology in classrooms and lecture halls with professors dutifully and deferentially obliging, rewarded with stipends and/or course credits for embarking upon new, technologically-enhanced pedagogies, so students receive mixed messages about the educational/entertainment value of these devices. In the process, the traditional liberal arts classroom, once the domain of the professor at the helm and the student, ready to be challenged by knowledge, critical thinking, and analysis, is now becoming obsolete as audio-visual accessories take over the classroom and as visual and graphic learning replaces what has long been a tradition of structured, formal, oral, and cognitive pedagogy.

Indeed, the traditional form of communication, teaching, and learning that used to prevail at most academic institutions and its resultant culture have been profoundly transformed by the computer and the ever expansive internet through e-mails, chat lines, chat rooms, Facebook, MySpace, U-tube and the sheer proliferation of, and instantaneous access to, information and a plethora of data bases. In effect, the virtual reality of cyberspace, while adding an important dimension of convenience and accessibility to academia and projecting an image of borderless and constant contact and communication and timeless customer satisfaction, also undermines the personal, the interpersonal, and the indispensable components of humanity, intellectual rigor, knowledge, a critical imagination, and academic freedom, so much a part of the traditional classroom but increasingly elusive in this new environment.¹⁹

In addition to these dehumanizing and impersonal effects, the extensive use of computer technology has resulted in trivializing, routinizing, and making more casual both the content and the delivery of curriculum, knowledge, and ideas. As our students

become more attuned to the colourful world of advertisement and corporate logos, SPAM, and all the distractions and side-effects of the Internet, they become less capable of thinking and reasoning on their own. This is especially true, as our thinking machines do more and more of our thinking, calculating, and researching for us and as our cerebral health and intellect are no longer challenged and stimulated the way they once were before computers became household and office items.²⁰

Reinforcing this weakness, the information that is gleaned from our computers or test-messaging machines generally lacks the depth, the analytical, the interpretive or the abstract dimensions that go hand in hand with the personal and experiential, delivered as bytes of information or data rather than as knowledge or ideas. Researching a topic through the Internet, while useful, expeditious, and complementary, cannot compare with library research or the kind of archival research in which scholars have engaged for hundreds of years. Not only can the former lead to a superficial and simplistic examination and understanding of a topic, but it can be incomplete and inaccurate as the research is often based on wikipedias and/or blogs which lack the most rudimentary criteria of accuracy and reliability. In this most abbreviated and sometimes unprofessional process, the knowledge transmitted through the computer is further diluted and distorted by our casual, idiomatic, and sometimes sloppy and ungrammatical use of language, as exemplified once again by e-mails, chat lines, and chat room conversations in which sound, lucid, crystal-clear expression of ideas is sacrificed for speed, convenience, and “technological correctness.” To the extent that language becomes a serious casualty of this type of communication, one can argue convincingly

not just that the transmission and cultivation of knowledge suffers grievous losses, but also that the very basis of our communication--our language—has begun to decline.²¹

Concomitant with these developments are the myriad ways in which students and professors have plugged into the new technologies of teaching and learning, only to realize, and rather belatedly at that, that they are not as impressive as they have originally been led to believe. For one thing, there is little choice in the matter. In an overwhelming number of cases, it is simply considered mandatory, as was first the case with military academies. By the late 1990's and well into the third millennium, universities and colleges increasingly made sure that computers and the Internet were part and parcel of a student's education, with some universities requiring computers as a ticket of admission and many courses stipulating that students bring lap-tops to class. Indeed, today, universities and colleges of applied arts and technology make computer technology and electronic communication the new norm for all to follow.²²

In part for this reason, but also because the teaching, research, and increasingly splintered and truncated work and communication that goes on at the university resemble the activities and tasks of an impersonal and large, bureaucratic workplace and worksite, the technologies prevalent in the university have become increasingly “prescriptive”. As Ursula Franklin so insightfully observes, they are designs for compliance within which “we are ever more conditioned to accept orthodoxy as normal, and to accept that there is only one way of doing it.”²³ It is thus that our universities have become very different institutions from what they used to be, with greater regimentation, less transparency and openness, less academic freedom and more pressures to comply and conform, in pursuit of greater profits and in quest of a corporate consensus, incompatible with the essence of

academia and with the intellectual soul of the university.²⁴ In this context, students, faculty, and staff realize, with ever-growing concern, the liabilities of this new, ever so modern, technologically-oriented university without borders or limitations of time, work, space, and control.

Research gleaned from the classroom and evidence amassed from other observers, scholars, and journalists confirm the profoundly questionable and dysfunctional consequences of computers and the Internet for students, professors, and a university environment that is now in a state of flux, if not progressive deterioration. Distance education, online instruction, and courses taught with computers and the Internet have grown exponentially, while growing disenchantment with the virtual classroom and the virtual professor has taken its toll in the form of higher dropout rates, loss of interest, and dwindling attention spans.²⁵ Increasing numbers of students express frustration and impatience with these courses, voicing deep disillusionment with the impersonal and dysfunctional format of instruction. They commonly complain about the lack of human contact, the absence of direction and of a pedagogical rationale, and the lack of accountability in courses whose content is delivered on the computer but whose pedagogy makes it impossible for them to experience personal instruction and interaction in a structured classroom. Many struggle in vain to contact their instructors and to get meaningful feedback from them. The hours spent alone in front of the screen and questions that go unanswered, the human isolation from both instructors and other students are enough to alienate many students profoundly and to detract from any semblance of learning. By losing the personal instruction and interaction, students today,

according to another authority, are missing out on the larger intellectual challenges.

Heather Menzies expressed it well when she said:

Instead of co-producing knowledge through challenging discussions with faculty members and fellow students, enhancing and practicing the democratic idea that society does best when there is a continuous open dialogue about the issues of the day, they [students] are downloading modules of ready-made knowledge.²⁶

Another witness to those developments, a student herself, cut to the heart of the matter when she underscored the shortcomings of her undergraduate education. Finding only one professor in her four year education with whom she communicated on the phone and in person, she remarked: “Sometimes you need a voice, not a typed letter, some compassion through a voice. You can’t get that on e-mail... What’s happening now is we’re losing a sense of human touch. We’re losing our choice as students at universities to get to speak to professors.”²⁷

Not surprisingly, many professors are pulling the short end of the stick as well. Indeed, they complain about their dwindling ability to stay focused and about short-term memory problems that are linked to the digital revolution. Just as noteworthy is the fact that a large proportion of faculty members admit they scan for useful bits of information rather than reading deeply, reflectively, and broadly.²⁸ Reinforcing this trend, the overwhelming use of e-mail, they find, is affecting the very nature of their interaction with their colleagues and students, making communication more superficial and less personal. Another professor, acknowledging the deleterious changes affecting academia through technology, observed critically:

We are becoming loners...we are creating in our offices because we have more access to information and we have tools to do things faster, but we are not sharing with other people. The big questions are not being asked anymore...I feel that we are giving students the wrong idea about what learning is.²⁹

With mounting evidence that our excessive use of information technology is dumbing us down, encouraging superficial and uncritical thinking, interfering with learning, and that constant interruption of people's concentration by e-mails and phone calls lowers considerably a person's aptitude for learning, according to a University of London study, small wonder that the malaise of our modern culture and civilization revolves largely around a technology with grandiose intentions for improvements under the supervision of technocrats and entrepreneurs, but with little, if any, ability to create an environment of logical, independent, critical thinking, fostered by human and collective values.³⁰

For all these reasons it is absolutely essential for us to think well beyond electronic borders, since only by so doing do we stand a chance of embracing and implementing those ideas and values that reinforce human, interpersonal, sustainable beliefs and practices while also creating a world in which human beings matter most, both collectively and individually, and in which intellectual curiosity, vitality and integrity make the biggest difference.

ENDNOTES

1. The limitations of such an approach are especially pronounced when technology is used as a conduit or even solution to transcend the borders that we consider problematic. In the process, however, the self-defeating nature of technology becomes clear once we place all of our eggs in technology's basket, as the rest of the paper demonstrates.
2. By the time this article appears in print, the historic reunification of Germany will have taken place almost thirty years ago.
3. The current "improvement" in the German economy should not disguise or even hide the long-term pain and dislocation, experienced by East Germany in its cataclysmic conversion from one system to another, and the government retrenchment which, under the leadership of Merkel and Westerwelle, has hit the lower and middle classes throughout Germany especially hard.
4. Obviously, much of the dislocation, restructuring and unemployment that took place in the aftermath of the political and economic reintegration of East Germany into the Federal Republic transpired in East Germany, but the financial sacrifices undertaken by Germany and the political and economic "adjustments" the country endured took a heavy toll on both East and West Germany. The attractive façade showed up in the form of a recrudescence of consumerism and materialism made possible in part by privatization and technology. Their downside, however, was reflected in the lifestyle changes taking place as social benefits were pruned or cut and "western" values and practices superimposed and adopted.
5. My observations of and conversations with Germans both in the West and the East and my reading of German newspapers and journals, especially *Der Spiegel*, since the time that the Wall came down, suggest numerous pressures and polarizing forces that originate largely with an untimely, coercive and rushed political and economic reintegration of the former East Germany into the Federal Republic of Germany.
6. There is a growing body of critical literature on the use or abuse of technology as a panacea for all problems and on the dysfunctional aspects of technology. This literature includes, among others, such scholars as Lewis Mumford, Herbert Marcuse, Jacques Ellul, Neil Postman, David Noble, Kirkpatrick Sale, Langdon Winner, Ursula Franklin, Harry Braverman, Ellen Rose, and Jeremy Rifkin.
7. See David F. Noble, *Forces of Production* (Oxford, New York, Toronto Oxford University Press, 1984), 42-56; see also Wade Rowland, *Spirit of the Web* (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1999), 236-302.

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8. Harry Braverman, *Labor & Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1974, new edition, 1998), 59-83.
 9. See Braverman, *Labor & Monopoly Capital*, 59-83 and Noble, *Forces of Production*, 33-34.
 10. See Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labourforce and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (Putnam Publishing Group, 1995).
 11. These observations and phenomena are clearly becoming more pervasive as we become more addicted to computer technology and our digital culture.
 12. See Heather Menzies, *Whose Brave New World* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1996), 65-72.
 13. Ibid.
 14. For obvious reasons, the liberal arts, reflective of the core of the university, is more vulnerable to the cuts and increasingly pragmatic orientation of the university than any other segment, resulting in painful choices and change.
 15. There is a growing body of literature on this subject, including, among other works, Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Heather Menzies, *No Time: Stress and the Crisis of Modern Life* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005); David Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Learning* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2002); Neil Postman, *The End of Education* (Vintage, 1996); Heather-Jane Robertson, *No More Teachers, No More Books: The Commercialization of Canada's Schools* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Inc., 1998); Ellen Rose, *User Error: Resisting Computer Error* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2003); Neil Tudiver, *Universities for Sale* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co. Ltd., 1999), and James Turk, *The Corporate Campus* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co. Ltd., 2000).
 16. See Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills*.
 17. Some of the most rudimentary questions and issues of both a philosophical and an educational nature have been ignored in our rush to embrace and become immersed in digital technology.
 18. This is all part and parcel of the challenge of “technologically enhanced learning”. Our audio-visual and computer accessories have taken over in a big way, squeezing out important pedagogical traditions of the liberal arts classroom. For an informative and incisive account of the style and effects of PowerPoint, see Edward Tufte, *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* (Cheshire, Conn.: Graphics Press UC, 2003)
 19. There is a growing amount of empirical and indeed documentary evidence pointing to declining standards, productivity, and quality of work due in part to the distracting and disruptive influence of cyberspatial factors. See, among other sources, “The Ivory Tower in Cyberspace” in *Academic Matters*, Winter 2006.
 20. See Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labour Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*.
 21. There is much evidence at the university and in the school system in general to indicate how the Internet, Wikipedia and electronic communications detract from our cognitive and critical faculties, while diluting the content of the curriculum

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- and complicating our faculty with language. See, for example, Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture* (Doubleday, 2007).
22. Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, was the first university in Canada to require a laptop computer of every new entrant. As well, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) in Oshawa is an example of a high tech institution where almost everything is taught and communicated online.
 23. See Ursula Franklin, *The Real World of Technology* (Toronto; House of Anansi Press, 1999), 17.
 24. There is a growing body of evidence and of critical literature attesting to these developments. They include Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace*, David Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills*; David Noble, *Forces of Production*, Neil Tudiver, *Universities For Sale*, James Turk, *The Corporate Campus*, and Heather Menzies, *No Time: Stress and the Crisis of Modern Life*.
 25. My close observations of the teaching landscape at York University and my frequent discussions with students have demonstrated how disenchanted many students are with this new-fangled pedagogy and how alienated they are by the impersonal and corporate environment.
 26. Heather Menzies, "Dumbed down on campus bit by bit", *Toronto Star*, May 1, 2005, D10.
 27. Quoted in York University's *Y-File*, September 21, 2006 and in the *National Post*, September 20, 2006.
 28. See Heather Menzies, "Dumbed down on Campus bit by bit", *Toronto Star*, May 1, 2005 and also "No Time to Think?" *Academic Matters*, Winter 2006, 13 and 15.
 29. "No Time to Think", *Academic Matters*, Winter 2006, 15.
 30. See "Dumbed down on campus bit by bit", *Toronto Star*, May 1, 2005, D1: see also, "No time to think", *Academic Matters*, Winter 2006, 13 and 15, and Heather Menzies, *No Time, Stress and the Crisis of Modern Life*.