

## **Technology Tutors and the development of a Technology Resource Center in Collaboration with the Writing Center**

A Note from Jeremy J. Shapiro on Readings for the Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> Workshop

I make the following assumptions about the relationship between liberal arts education and information technology:

An important role of liberal arts education is the mediating or hermeneutic role of helping students learn to interpret, understand, and situate their personal, cultural, and historical experience in terms of cultural tradition and history and at the same time to incorporate, understand, and reflect on cultural tradition and history from their own perspective in the present in order to become more richly human.

All of us today -- faculty, students, administrators, citizens -- are living through a kind of "permanent revolution" in our personal and social lives on account of the continual change of and expansion of information technologies. We are a living laboratory of history, especially because these technologies have such direct impact on our essential human activities of communicating, talking, writing, thinking, visualizing, knowing, and interacting. The expansion of information technology use in higher education is not just an engineering change, it is part of a cultural change in human cognition and expression.

As such a cultural change, our new uses of information technology provide a direct link to the core of the liberal arts curriculum by giving us opportunities to engage in our mediating and hermeneutic role. For they offer new perspectives on the thinking and writing and art and culture of the past, including the ways in which these were shaped by past technologies. Inversely our cultural tradition and history enable us to get outside of and gain some reflective distance from the current cultural context and assumptions in which information technologies and their uses are embedded and come to understand them in a cultural, historically, and philosophically informed way. In this way, these technologies can contribute to the liberal arts curriculum at two levels: as "technique" or tools for facilitating teaching and learning (the "audiovisual aids" model), and as intellectual content and substance, because of their role in our lifeworld and its transformation. And, to the extent that we and our students learn new techniques in such a context, we will also be learning them in a liberal way, that is as cultured and autonomous individuals, rather than in a menial or "banal" way.

I have chosen this small group of readings as examples of literature that can be used to make the cultural and historical connections. Many other candidates suggest themselves. Many will be familiar, perhaps some will be unfamiliar. Since they are almost all selections from books, I have added a few notes to help put them in their setting.

## Readings

“Defining Technologies in Western Culture,” from Bolter, J. David. *Turing's Man: Western Culture in the Computer Age*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

The book as a whole, whose outlines are summarized in this chapter, looks at the way the major technology of each period of Western history has shaped its culture, including notions of reality, mind, space, and time. Connection

“The Recipe, The Prescription, and the Experiment,” from Goody, Jack. *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

A chapter of a larger book by an anthropological expert on the evolution of literacy that focuses on the impact of writing on cognition and conceptual organization and sees writing and its impact as the defining difference between “primitive” and “civilized” thought.

“Beginnings,” from Mitchell, William J. *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.

Introduction to a detailed investigation of digital image-making and how it alters the notion of truth, reality, and the correspondence between representation and reality.

Mowshowitz, Abbe. "Virtual Feudalism." In *Beyond Calculation: The Next Fifty Years of Computing*, edited by Peter J. Denning and Robert M. Metcalfe, 213-32. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1997.

A chapter from an edited volume on the future of computing and its impact. Mowshowitz has just published a book version of this article -- Mowshowitz, Abbe. *Virtual Organization: Toward a Theory of Societal Transformation Stimulated by Information Technology*. Westport: Quorum Books, 2002 -- that looks at the new historical formation brought about by virtuality as a principle of social organization and, as in the article, makes interesting and substantive comparisons with feudalism.

Rescher, Nicholas. "Technological Progress and Human Happiness." In *Unpopular Essays on Technological Progress*, edited by Nicholas Rescher.

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980.

A noted philosopher explores where there is any relationship between technological progress and happiness.

“Lessons from the Luddites,” from Sale, Kirkpatrick. *Rebels against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution -- Lessons for the Computer Age*. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1995.

Sale's book attempts to rehabilitate the Luddites and show the reasonableness of their protest against industrialization.

“The Compartment,” from Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 18th Century*. revised edition ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Schivelbusch's lovely study – a book that could have been written by Walter Benjamin – looks at the manifold transformations in experience, life, and society initiated by the railroad.

Shields, Rob. "Hypertext Links: The Ethic of the Index and Its Space-Time Effects." In *The World Wide Web and Contemporary Cultural Theory*, edited by Andrew Herman and Thomas Swiss, 145-60. New York/London: Routledge, 2000.

Shields's cultural and theoretical interpretation and deconstruction of a Web page as a model of the world is suggestive of how a current information-technology artifact can be used for cultural and historical analysis.

“Computer Liberation,” from Simons, Geoff. *Are Computers Alive? Evolution and New Life Forms*. Boston: Birkhaeuser, 1983.

Simons's energetically and provocatively affirmative response to the question, “Are Computers Alive?” and corresponding assertion that computers have rights is an excellent jumping off point for the entire interlocking set of questions and controversies about the similarities and differences between humans and computers.