

# THE QUAD

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Autumn 2008

of Grove City College





## THE QUAD

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### Editor's Note:

This issue concludes the first volume of *The Quad*, and with a sense of satisfaction comes an impatience for the next volume. While we will build off of the first volume's foundation, the next volume will have a different feel, if only because the covers will change. We were fortunate to have Nate Mucha's Four Seasons as our covers for the first volume, which established the aesthetic tone of the magazine. For the next set of covers, the Student Government Association (SGA) sponsored a contest with a \$100 prize. Over a dozen people competed, and we can't wait to reveal the winner.

As always, our goal is to provide a platform for intellectual and creative debate in print form that promotes holistic living—to be a magazine that continues the college's Christian liberal arts education outside the classroom and after graduation. In that spirit, we would encourage you our reader to consider becoming a writer and engage in the conversation. As in issues past, we are pleased to present student, alumni, and faculty pieces.

While we do print some short fiction and poetry, as well as letters to the editor, our emphasis is on creative nonfiction, memoirs, essays, and book reviews. Our editors read and evaluate each submission blindly, so as to ensure their objectivity, and, as much as possible, they give feedback and constructive criticism on how to improve the piece, often working directly with the writer to prepare accepted works for print. These moments, in the discussions between editors and between editor and writer, represent a second aspect to the conversation engendered by *The Quad*.

Neither of these conversations would exist, however, were it not for the many people who make up and support our magazine. Specifically, we would like to thank Mr. Jeff Prokovich for his help in funding the magazine this year, President Jewell and the administration for their constant support, Dr. Vince DiStasi and the TLC staff for their help in printing the magazine, Mrs. Ann Stranahan and Student Life and Learning for their encouragement, SGA for their amicable partnership, Dr. Collin Messer and our Editorial Board for their guidance, our contributors for contributing, and our readers for, well, reading.

Thank you and enjoy,

Joel David Musser  
Senior Editor

Melissa Parry Short  
Junior Editor

Volume 1, Number 4, Autumn 2008. *The Quad* is published quarterly by students of Grove City College and funded by the college. The works in this magazine, however, do not necessarily represent the views of Grove City College, the editors, the advisor, or the editorial advisory board. The editors are responsible for the selection of articles; responsibility for opinions and accuracy of facts in articles published rests solely with the individual authors. *The Quad* grants permission for any original article to be photocopied for use in a local church or classroom, provided that no more than 1,000 copies are made, are distributed free, and the source is given as *The Quad*, including copyright information and date.

Anyone may submit to *The Quad*. Submissions must be sent to [quad.submissions@gmail.com](mailto:quad.submissions@gmail.com) by 26 January to be considered for the Winter 2009 issue. Include Campus Mailbox number (or address) with your name and use 12 pt Times New Roman font, double spaced; when citations are necessary, use footnotes. Any rejected submissions which are not returned will be destroyed. Accepted submissions may be withdrawn at any time. Anyone interested in writing a book review should contact Managing Editor Esther Harclerode ([HarclerodeEM@gcc.edu](mailto:HarclerodeEM@gcc.edu)) for review copies. Further guidelines for submissions are on our website, listed below.

The Quad is available online at [www2.gcc.edu/orgs/TheQuad](http://www2.gcc.edu/orgs/TheQuad)

# THE QUAD | AUTUMN 2008

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 4

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

4

## AN EDUCATION

Lesson #3: Forming a Question	5	<i>Justin Olson</i>
Catch of the Day	7	<i>Tiffany Shiebler</i>
Dear Harold Bloom	9	<i>Meagan Samuelson</i>

## FREE PROSE

Ladders	10	<i>Josh Mayo</i>
---------	----	------------------

## REVIEWS

Dwelling in Diegesis	16	<i>Joel David Musser</i>
Armageddon	18	<i>Esther Harclerode</i>
The Elephant in the Room	18	<i>James Brinkerhoff</i>
<i>Lost Mountain</i>	19	<i>Taylor Knight</i>
Blades for Bullets	20	<i>Tyler K. Short '07</i>

## ESSAY

Thoughts on Technology and Education	20	<i>Dr. T. David Gordon</i>
--------------------------------------	----	----------------------------

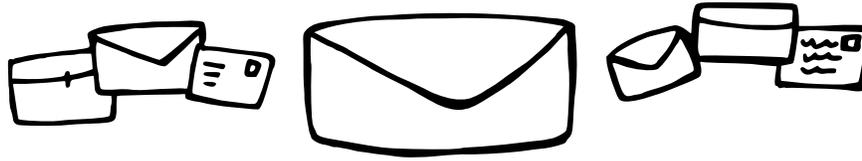
## POETRY

Fire	6	<i>Taylor Knight</i>
The Indian Night	9	<i>Brendan McCommas '07</i>
It So Happens I'm Tired of Being a Woman	8	<i>Morgan Mertz '08</i>
Angelus Novus	17	<i>Dr. Jennifer A. Scott '99</i>

## CONUNDRUMS

27





# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Respecting Wesley

Dear Editor,

I was glad to see the appreciation of hymns in Philip Gruber's article on "Amazing Grace" [Summer]. The simplicity of modern praise and worship songs, while useful in their own right as catchy tunes and personal expressions, seems to lack the encompassing message of hymns.

Although I agree that "Amazing Grace" is a quintessential hymn of the English language, the lesser sung hymns often have just as powerful a message. Charles Wesley is said to be the author of some 6000 hymns; surely among these there are many that deserve similar appreciation as "Amazing Grace." Perhaps instead of passively ignoring other hymns, we should find ways to familiarize ourselves and our congregations with them. The church I was raised in introduced "new" hymns between familiar songs and when we had a choir they often sang a verse independently allowing the congregation to get a feel for the hymn.

Considering the meaning these hymns have, I would recommend forethought not only in singing the powerful verses but also in adapting the lyrics. In John Wesley's preface to the *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists (1779)*, he requested that the lyrics remain unaltered:

I must beg of them one of these two favours: either to let them stand just as they are, to take them for better for worse; or to add the true reading in the margin, or at the bottom of the page; that we may no longer be accountable either for the nonsense or for the doggerel of other men.

I wonder, when we sing "You Are My King (Amazing Love)" in chapel, how many people know that the lyrics "Amazing love how can it be / that you my king would die for me" are paraphrased from "And Can It Be That I Should Gain?" by Charles Wesley?

You should praise God in whatever way makes you most comfortable, even if that isn't with a hymn. However,

please respect the hymn's lasting contribution to whatever worship experience you choose.

*Serena Sargent*

## Hermeneutically Challenged

Dear Editor,

I am stumped. Indeed, I am stupefied. Until a short time ago, I considered myself a reasonably rational creature, at the very least, one whose understanding of the English language was enough to comprehend, if not necessarily fully appreciate, poetry. These assumptions, however, were shattered as I read the enigmatic poem "ZION POEMS FOR THE RICHARDS FAMILY" by Adam Snyder. Don't misunderstand me, I did figure out pretty quickly that it was an acrostic. But that is as far as I could get. I might as well have been reading ancient hieroglyphics for all that the poem conveyed to me. The words were English, but the meaning, if there was one, was inscrutable. Please do not leave me and my fellow readers in such a position; reveal to us your mysteries.

In other words:

Here is another way of wording my question:

Adam's bewildering composition

Evoked forthwith great hermeneutical  
incomprehension.

Just kindly let me posco:

Quo reads such thoughtless, ununderstandable  
verses?

Willingly eXplain your zaniness!

A Thoroughly Confused,

*Gordon James*

Letters to the editor may be sent to [quad.submissions@gmail.com](mailto:quad.submissions@gmail.com) with "Letter to the Editor" in the subject line by 26 January. Letters to the editor are subject to copyediting, both mechanical and substantive, according to editorial guidelines. Other inquiries may be sent to Joel David Musser ([MusserJD1@gcc.edu](mailto:MusserJD1@gcc.edu)); by mail: The Quad, c/o Joel David Musser, Box 2405, 200 Campus Drive, Grove City, PA 16127.

# FORMING A QUESTION

JUSTIN OLSON

## Lesson Number 3: Forming a Question

I woke up yesterday morning trying to remember how to ask for help.

“What’s the word? Oh that’s right, *secours*,” I thought to myself. “No, that’s not what I want...*J’ai besoin d’aide*. There we go. *Le Seigneur, j’ai besoin d’aide ce matin*.”

It’s hard enough trying to pray in English. Trying to do it in French will make you realize you are helpless.

I tried to buy some cell phone minutes this afternoon, and thank goodness my host mom told me what the word for “bank account” was. Apparently, you can’t get a cell phone plan without one. I think the fact that I knew that one word was what kept the guy behind the counter from just telling me, *we don’t sell phones to foreigners*. He smiled at me as I left the boutique. I guess that’s a good thing?

During dinner, as I cut another piece of cheese, my host mom asked me what I thought of the election in the United States. Oh man, I don’t know enough words to talk about politics! I mean, how do you explain your country to your French family, when every news channel in France has already been explaining it to them for the past six months? I doubt I could make the American mindset reasonable to them in just three broken sentences. Maybe they just feel bad that I haven’t contributed anything to the dinner conversation for thirty minutes.

I started by saying that there are certain things in the United States that are different, that it’s possible to have good government without leaning to the left. For example, not everyone wants free education, free health care for everyone, or full pensions. (Actually I just said, *Je pense que notre mentalités sont différents*—I think we think differently.) But what do you say next? How do you explain that you care for the other people around you, but don’t think that getting rid of private hospitals is the best thing for them? And after you’ve told one of the sons of the family you are living with that you are a Christian, how do you explain

that you don’t want the State to take care of the working man’s needs, but that you still pray for his soul?

I found out the next day that you probably shouldn’t talk about guns in front of Europeans. I’m exaggerating, but just be prepared for some looks of grave concern the next time you say, *I know someone who packs heat, and he’s not a COP*. Two of the guys I go to church with came pretty close to convincing me that the government should disband the NRA. How do you explain to your brother in the Lord that you believe that *vengeance is the Lord’s*, just like he does, but that it’s okay to take someone’s life if they are trying to kill you?

You don’t want to know what my friend at the *Foyer Evangélique Universitaire* thought of the U.S. Congress when they first rejected the Paulson bailout plan. When you see the world markets collapsing this side of the Atlantic and then realize that your own country was the one that caused it, you feel like it’s your responsibility to save face. But how do you do that when, by all accounts, it looks like Joe Six-Pack and all the Hockey Moms don’t want to clean up after themselves? How do you explain that you want the world to recover, but runaway-capitalism just needs to take its course?

How do you ask for help again, in French? The sermon that week was on James 4.2: You do not have, because you do not ask God.

“How was your week?” my friend Clement asked me with a heavy French accent.

*Oui, ça va*. We have this thing going where he practices his English while I practice my French. I’ll translate: *Yeah, it was okay. The sermon basically described my life the past couple of weeks. I’m realizing that life’s a little more impossible than I’ve realized and this French thing is really getting me. I need to keep praying.*

“Yes, I agree.” Clement paused as he searched for the word in English. “I need to keep praying for my friends



who are lost. I need to keep praying for courage to speak with them. I cannot lose hope.”

That’s right, *Moi aussi*.

There’s no need to try to explain to your brother why you need to pray for help, no need to feel awkward because you are the American. I don’t need to experience his way of life and he doesn’t need to experience mine for us to understand each other’s faith. The gospel is the only cross-

cultural constant. No translator, no debate, no need to search for differences to celebrate. It was enough for us to say, *Le Seigneur, nous avons besoin d’aide*. Q

*Justin is a junior history and French major at Grove City College who is studying abroad in Grenoble, France this year. He enjoys experiencing the French culture and learning the language but has to admit that he’s currently addicted to cheese. His favorite is “Vacherin Mont d’Or.”*

## FIRE

TAYLOR KNIGHT

### I.

A flame, like a raging tiger  
constrained by his own desire,  
lunges out but cannot reach the old men  
who sit on the hearth warming their backs,  
crying, “Fire, fire warms the cold,  
but desire, desire makes us old.”



### II.

In the city the day wanes  
as stucco buildings settle in  
to the worn orange of late afternoon,  
and the men strut about the square  
and linger there, and linger there,  
while the women are waiting for the night again,  
and the hills are burning with an old desire;



### III.

and a boy in a country lane  
stops when the wind blows  
and brings to his tingling nose  
something of his life to come,  
the smell of orange blossoms  
soaked in a midnight rain.



*Taylor Knight is a senior English major. He hopes one day to be struck dumb by the simplicity of fire.*

# CATCH OF THE DAY

TIFFANY SHIEBLER

Whoever coined the phrase “Sweet Sixteen” probably wasn’t a New Hampshire fisherman. Sixteen marked the age when I couldn’t go fishing with my dad unless I sacrificed a large portion of my savings for a license. That’s how my state’s fish and game department wishes you a happy sixteenth birthday. So I put away my pole and tackle box, and Dad took evening canoe trips to Bailey Pond alone.

Four years later, in honor of my dad’s fiftieth birthday, I bought a license so we could fish together again. The entire summer stretched before us with the promise of father-daughter time in our favorite fishing spots. Dad helped me find my old pole in a dusty corner of our basement and offered to let me share his lures and tackle; my own had disappeared. As we packed the truck for a weekend trip to the mountains, I reveled in the anticipation of my first catch.

Dad and I rose early, leaving my mom and sister at the cabin. I had forgotten the irritation of waking up for a morning fishing trip while everyone else was still in bed. We wandered to the edge of the woods to dig up worms. Stifling a yawn, I watched Dad break the earth with the shovel. The dirt was cold and moist. It got caught under my long fingernails and in every crease of my palms. Breaking apart clods of soil, we chose our worms and put them in a rusty coffee can.

“That’s plenty,” Dad said, filling the hole and stamping the uneven ground with his big boots. I followed him through the brush that lined the banks of Baker River, and the branches scratched my face and got caught in my hair. Little bugs crawled up and down my sweatshirt, and I walked straight into a spider’s web more than once. I had forgotten how much I hated that feeling. Sauntering onto the carved rocks beside the water, I stopped short at the sound of Dad’s voice.

“Did you forget what I taught you about sneaking up on the fish?” Dad said. “Stay low and make your way over to that waterfall.” He pointed with his fishing pole. “I bet there’s a whole bunch of trout in the pool underneath it.”

My dad grew up fishing along this river, and I knew better than to ignore his advice. I crept back into the brush and continued upstream. Settling onto a flat rock above the churning base of the waterfall, I rearranged my tackle. Dad had offered to help me put a worm on my hook before I left, but I refused, confident that I remembered the skill. I was glad he couldn’t see me flinch as I tried to keep the struggling worm between my fingers. It was messier than I remembered.

I smiled as I cast out the fishing line for the first time in four years. The bait landed a yard from where I sat, but I only laughed. The reel felt comfortable in my hands as I brought the line in to cast again. When I saw Dad pulling out his first catch, I remembered that fishing in a river is different than in a still pond. I cheered up at the prospect of making my first catch when we moved to a quieter spot.

But we caught nothing at the dam farther up the road. That is, nothing living. My lure got stuck between two rocks under water. There was nothing left to do but cut the line or wade into the water to get it. I hesitated, thinking about the muck and water-creatures that might squish under my toes if I walked out there.

“It’s okay to leave it behind,” Dad said. He was right. We had plenty of lures. Still...

Biting my lip, I laid down my pole and gathered my resolve. When did I begin to worry about ticks in the grass, twisting my ankle as I ran through the woods, or a snake slithering across my path? I used to trek along the river without thinking of bug bites and bee stings.

Taking off my shoes and socks and rolling up my jeans, I waded into the cold water. The sand was soft and mushy



under my feet, but it didn't bother me. I untangled my lure and took my time wading back to shore. Sitting on the rocks to dry in the sun for ten minutes refreshed me more than a week's worth of vacation.

With our poles trailing behind us, Dad and I ambled through the long grass back to the truck. I climbed into the passenger's seat, content to leave without a catch. I could hold worms in my hands, get dirt under my fingernails, laugh when my fishing line tangled around a tree branch, let the wind sweep my hair, and still enjoy the moment.

When Dad and I drove back home that day, we trailed our hands outside the truck windows to let the breeze carry them up and down like birds in flight. I was grateful to the fish and game department for requiring sixteen-year-olds to buy licenses. Q

*Tiffany Shiebler is a junior English major at Grove City College. When she is not fishing, writing, or contemplating the beauty of God's creation, you might find her practicing archery, Irish step dancing, or dog sledding at home in New Hampshire.*

## IT SO HAPPENS I'M TIRED OF BEING A WOMAN

MORGAN MERTZ '08

It so happens I'm tired of being a woman,  
of picking flowers when I walk down the street,  
and noticing dew drops on the leaves. It happens  
when the crickets sing at night  
in the quiet heavy air, and I feel

as though I could pluck the heads off tiger lilies,  
and drop paint on the sidewalks  
while the fireflies and moonbeams watch me.  
It would not be destroying the earth  
if I were to laugh when lightning stikes the trees.

It would just be reactionary. In the street  
I'd like to see a revolution-old women  
selling knives from their sunflower stalls.  
Being a woman leaves me cold and it's the only way  
to fix it. Going to bed in satin won't do it anymore.

I need blood, not the sandman, who brings me  
drugged dreams of belonging. Poppies are no longer  
the opiate for me. I prefer shots of fire  
to the sweetness, sending me into the reality  
of oblivion.

*Morgan Mertz '08 soothes the (sometimes) burden of being a woman by drinking endless cups of tea, cooking deep pots of risotto, and knitting until her fingers hurt.*





## DEAR HAROLD BLOOM

MEAGAN SAMUELSON

Dear Harold Bloom,

Have you read every book that has ever been written? How do you do it? The sheer number of your opinions must exhaust you. Here's what I think: You have invented a machine that digests books and then regurgitates essays about them. All you have to do is match the correct essay to the correct book. Not too difficult a task. Perhaps you have hired a secretary.

Or (alternate vision), you are a balding, slightly round man with circular glasses and tails. I'm sorry, but you must wear tails at all times with a waistcoat and watch chain. You have a photographic memory, and a secretary who follows you about as you garden and play golf (all in waistcoat and tails) to write down every sentence that falls from your lips. There's that secretary again. Perhaps you are in love with her, and one day you will ask her to marry you. Then she will stay to record the brilliant words (before your marriage lost to posterity) that you speak outside the hours of nine to five.

Actually, I write all this nonsense because I am in awe of you. So much so that I think you might not exist. You are the massive dictatorial organization of all literary critics, the undergraduate's Big Brother. Your eyes are always with us. Must I look at all of literature through your eyes? Surely you have left a book for me to read through my own. One day I will find it.

Thank you, sir, I think.

Sincerely,

M.L.S.

*Meagan Samuelson is a senior English major with theater and communication minors. She plans to be an archive librarian, a job in which she will work with musty old books in editions that are not edited by Harold Bloom.*



## THE INDIAN NIGHT (OR IKE AND THE CHICKASAW CHIEF)

BRENDAN MCCOMMAS

No stately throne denies a cryptic sentiment,  
This black night, tempered by the river, glows  
Of old Promethean adventures, ripe as Eden.

Indian nights were lonely ones, I've lived too few, too few.  
Sweet mother's face was far from me, and close to heart  
Like cutting blade, and whiskey rum, mother never knew.

That driving rain and mud course my veins  
With hot coaled fire like Indian blood, the flame  
to smoke returns, a dragon's whispered breath.

Let me rise with the beasts and birds, sounds and groans  
Of the earth like music. Mete out the parts, woods and fields  
Tap the foot old man, keep time as I keep still with  
Damocles.

Spied across the swelling streams,  
The chieftain stares, blood as paint, eyes  
Sunglasses, I cannot divine the past.

Myself, the streams of blood are coursed, and blue  
Like ever winding ribbons, against the earth, cut deep  
In bringing my soul, heart, and mind to bear.

*Brendan McCommas '07 lives in Virginia and is pursuing graduate studies in literature at Georgetown University. This poem was partly inspired by William Faulkner's novel Go Down, Moses.*

# LADDERS

JOSH MAYO

Doe often complained to me about the “Chi problem” in the dining room.  
She said there were bad energies.

It was the way she understood the home,  
in religious terms.

Everything carried a current.

Everything was unified by some house-holding spirit.

She worshipped that enigmatic goddess and prophesied of its emanations.

She was its medium, and in the night, in fits of restless sleep, I heard her say its ancient name:

“Eye-Key-Ah . . . ”

She really just wanted a wall.

Not a whole wall,

but some kind of partition between the dining room and the kitchen.

She said there needed to be boundaries.

There needed to be space between the artist and her audience.

The fall is here now.

The other day I was supposed to clean the gutters,

but the ladder broke when I mounted the fifth rung.

I lay at the bottom, soaked, covered in rags, still clinging to the bucket.

Above me the sun shone ineffectively through the clear, cold blue.

It was mysterious and distant, bright and incomprehensible.

The maples fanned at the corners of my vision like heatless flames.

I decided to lie there until Doe noticed.

I had no clear rationale. I just wanted to see what she would do.

I wanted her to run out crying.

I think that everyone’s secret dream is to be discovered by someone, accidentally,  
and have them freak out over you.

I waited for a long time and eventually went inside.

That afternoon I was making grilled cheese sandwiches with our novelty press.

It’s the kind that burns little Virgin Marys on the bread.

Doe says it’s sacrilege.

My friends Az and Ben had the dining room in some disrepair.

Everywhere there were crayons and cardboard canvases,

pipe-cleaners, glue guns, shoeboxes and shoe strings.

They dropped glitter in the carpet. They slopped salsa on the table.

They drank pinot grigio and pretended to like it.

Doe tossed me bad looks like eggs,

the kind you have to cradle when you catch them.

-I can’t be in the kitchen when they’re here.

-I’m sorry. Did you shop prices for contractors?



-Are you kidding me? I already have the paint picked out.  
Why are your friends so awful?

-They're not awful. They're . . .

-Slobs?

-They're artistic. Crafty. Slobs don't do crafts.

-What are they making?

-I'm not sure . . . ask them. I think it's a new backdrop.

-A backdrop?

-For their cable show. Az got a block. 11 to 12 on channel 17.

-The Spanish Channel?

-It used to be. Now it's a local public operation.  
Az and Ben bought space when Olga Breeskin used to run.

Theirs was a less-than-ideal slot. They had few viewers  
and a lot of frustrated machismo.  
But it was less about the audience anyway.  
The show was mostly for them. When you're on TV  
you know for sure you exist.

I don't know how they met.  
Az was a librarian and Ben worked in dentistry.  
Az was from Turkey and Ben was from Pittsburgh.  
Az enjoyed film noir and Ben liked spaghetti westerns.  
Az studied the cavaliers and Ben read the beats.

I often wondered if they'd still be friends were it not for the media.  
People like that don't endure each other.  
It takes religion, or TV. Something bigger than life.

Doe left.  
I was still grilling the sandwiches. They were talking heatedly about entablatures.  
I decided to cut in.

-So what are you calling it?

Ben propped his glue gun and turned slowly like a crane.  
-The show? "The Yawp." It's talk stuff. We discuss a lot of peripheral topics.  
Every show we interview one interesting public figure and let them speak



about anything.

-Anything?

-Yes. Myclonia, Taoism, Reagan-ton . . .

-Reagan-ton?

-Yea. It's a small movement. Pretty groovy stuff.

Az put his marker down and entered the exchange.

-It's a chance to be heard, and in turn, to hear.

He wasn't yet 25, but he already sounded like an old, musty librarian.

-People don't realize that infinity is right outside their front door.

Everything is available to you.

Eternity is the permanence of present. We each speak unique virtue!

Wisdom is here! Love is here! Death is here and now!

The world is dialogue. Life is a florid conversation.

-Interesting. And everyone is worthy of being heard?

-Precisely. Think of it—what is the difference between the author and the reader? Nothing!

The author presents, the reader contextualizes. The author calls, the reader responds. Both are talking! Both are dancing! It's fantastic.

Ben poured more wine and gave it to me.

-What is the most beautiful thing you've ever seen?

-God! Well, one time I saw an white heron while I was canoeing near Pemaquid. It was perched on this mossy mound not twenty feet from me, I'm talking close! It didn't even flinch as I passed. What a sight. It was like a movie.

Az laughed.

-A movie! Film is the American sacrament.

Everybody imagines themselves as a central character. We all do it.

It's how we disguise the profane as something sacred.

That's the beauty of "The Yawp."

We don't mourn this human flaw, we embrace it! It's the new *felix culpa*.

We consecrate! We make the mystery!

It's revolutionary,

but I think you understand.

I felt small and stupid.

-You'll love it, Ben said.

I wasn't sure that I would—that I would even understand.



If life was a conversation I didn't know what to say back.  
I offered each of them a cheesy Mary.  
They declined.

Clearly, the world was more complex than I thought.  
I looked at the serene faces emblazoned on the Wonder Bread.  
Now they seemed silly.  
I threw them in the trash, grabbed my keys,  
and headed out to find a new ladder.

I abhor the hardware store. It's full of happy, perfect husbands.  
Men worship the idea of the handyman,  
the messiah that fixes the home, the savior that restores the microclimate.  
But I feel helpless in a place like this.  
I am supposed to create and repair.  
I am expected to assimilate, to comprehend end from the origin.  
The hardware store is empty of answers.  
It's filled with parts and nothing whole.  
It has no context. It's idealistic, full of terrible little mechanisms.

I walked under the front awning that sheltered the larger items of sale.  
There were lawnmowers and tool cabinets, trash barrels and big bags of mulch.  
Behind these stood the steel ladders, as tall and serious as stone.  
They held an old magnificence. They released an archaic aura.  
Those giant stairs drew my eyes all the way up to the canvas tenting,  
an empty heaven of flitting birds and dusty shafts of light.  
I bought one and bungeed it to the truck.

I was starving. On the way home I stopped to get cheeseburgers for dinner.  
I do this often when I don't want to cook.  
I love the thrill of unrestricted choice. I love the possibilities.

As I waited, I considered the drive-thru and its oracular mystery.  
I pondered the phantasmal voice, the window of sacrifice, the window of return.  
I'd like to believe that cheeseburgers are miraculously formed.  
If they are prepared, I don't want to see it.

I pulled up to the window and gave that obese priest a single.  
He handed me the baggy, but something was not right. It felt too light.  
I took out one of the sandwiches and unwrapped it.  
There was no meat. Nothing but a bun and ketchup.  
I took out another. Same thing.

The priest boiled like a Delphic spring . . . or fryalator.  
-Who did this?!

No response. It's possible that no one knew.

Daylight was dying.



The cold sun dwindled in the hill-hearth.

I had to work fast.

The ladder was too short after all.

It seemed taller at the store.

I rested the top against the wall of my house.

It barely cleared the second floor windows.

Conceivably, I could get to a height

where I could stretch and reach the gutters.

I started my climb.

Below, Az and Ben smoked fat, wet cigars and munched the bag of reconciliatory cheeseburgers.

-You alright up there?

-Yes. Well, no.

-Be careful, Ben said. We need your dining room.

-Right.

Ben turned to Az and ashed his smoke.

-What are some good ladder poems?

-Do you mean ladder poems or poems about ladders?

-The second.

-*No ladder needs the bird but skies, Ladder of St. Augustine . . .*

-I'm not familiar.

-“The heights by great men reached and kept  
     Were not attained by sudden flight,  
     But they, while their companions slept,  
     Were toiling upward in the night!”

They both stood smiling, looking up at me,  
 like I was a small child in an apartment window.

I grunted and scaled a final rung. I grappled for the gutter,  
     but something shifted beneath me.

I looked for any steady thing to hold, but there was nothing.

I heard them groan beneath me.

All gave way, and I plunged into blackness.

At first, I could only see two eyes.



They were soft, fixed and lovely. It was all difficult to make out.  
They belonged to a woman, a beautiful woman covered in gold.  
She seemed to have authority. She seemed otherworldly.  
She didn't move. She didn't flinch.

Before me I saw all of heaven.  
I saw a myriad of ladders that started and stopped at all places.  
Everyone was climbing, always climbing.  
    Everyone was singing!  
    The woman sang, the saints sang, the mothers and the daughters sang!  
    The politicians sang, the freaks sang, the preachers and the potheads!  
    From every voice came the same song—sacred, yet ordinary.  
    They all continued to climb and sing their curious hymn.  
    Up and up they climbed, up into the golden sun.

As the dream dried and died, I realized the true object  
of my transport on a blue willow dinner plate—it was a grilled cheese Mary.  
Doe had brought me one, a cup of coffee too. She was freaking out.

Where was I?  
I sat up in bed and felt my forehead scream.  
I remembered the ladder and inducted the obvious.  
Thanking her, I took the mug and sandwich.  
    With every bite I felt closer to health.

Az and Ben came in. They were wonderstruck.  
I didn't want to tell them about the vision. I knew they would tear it apart.

-It's good to have you back captain, Ben said.

-Thank you.

-A dead man talking, that's what you are!

I turned to Doe, she was shaking like a leaf. I knew that shaking meant love.  
-How are the energies? I asked.

-They're fine. Everything is fine!

Az was silent.  
For once there was nothing to converse about.

When they left I turned out the light.  
I was surprised at how bright the room remained.  
Outside the moon sailed through the sky like a lonely bird. Q

*Josh Mayo is a junior English major at Grove City College. He enjoys writing short fiction and is currently experimenting with this liberated form he calls "Free Prose".*

# DWELLING IN DIEGESIS

JOEL DAVID MUSSER

*The Death of Sigmund Freud:  
The Legacy of His Last Days*  
Mark Edmundson  
Bloomsbury USA, 2007. 288pp.  
\$25.95

Mark Edmundson, though a distinguished scholar and University Professor at the University of Virginia, is perhaps better known on this campus as the writer of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* cover story, “Dwelling in Possibilities” (March 21, 2008). In the essay, he criticizes the digital culture for a kind of *the grass is always greener* approach to life where no one enjoys the now, the present, but is always text messaging to find out who’s at the other party. Reading is like sitting down at a party and listening to someone tell you a story, and Edmundson is a good story-teller.

*The Death of Sigmund Freud* is the kind of book that could easily be too academic or too simplistic, but Edmundson’s conversant style allows him to discuss any topic, anecdotal or philosophical, with ease and cogency. His familiarity with Freud, like that of an old friend or relative, engenders in the reader a complex sympathy for the man. Freud’s love for his daughter Anna, his courage in the face of the Nazis, and his intellectual earnestness all compound with his misanthropy, his stubborn reluctance to emigrate, and his pitiable desire to appear scientific. He was, of course, a genius, and yet utterly human.

Much of Freud’s humanity, though, may result from Edmundson’s constant juxtaposition of him with Hitler. Edmundson realizes that Hitler’s rise to power coincides with Freud’s final days not just in time and space, but in

thought and life. They both incarnate a Zeitgeist that is strangely modern and primitive, atheistic and messianic, cultured and degenerate. Edmundson explains Hitler in terms of Freud’s theory, and elucidates Freud’s life with Hitler’s. Such insights often reveal ironic truths about them. Throughout the book, for instance, Edmundson demonstrates that Freud “wrote and lived to put an end to the kind of authority that he himself quite often embodied and exploited.” Likewise, though Hitler hated Freud’s “Jewish science,” he described his speeches as making love to the German masses. By alternating between the Freud and Hitler in brief, congenial segments, Edmundson exploits their differences and similarities, making the book readable and fascinating.

This oscillating action functions like a parallax view, allowing us to see aspects of Freud noticeable only when thinking in terms of Hitler, and likewise Hitler in Freudian terms. This see-saw effect, tied with Edmundson’s story-teller style, makes the book what it is—something worth dwelling upon. **Q**

*Joel David Musser is a senior English and philosophy major at Grove City College. He met Mark Edmundson last summer in a Starbucks where they railed against the modern world while sipping their tea. Actually, Edmundson sipped tea. Joel was late, which, of course, he blamed on the modern world.*

# ANGELUS NOVUS

JENNIFER A. SCOTT

In the first, two words, spliced together:  
Alpha/Omega.

In the second, two poles on a misshapen sphere:  
Arctic/Antarctic.

In the third, a clock ticks, then  
ticks faster.

Though they might not see you  
in the photographs, you are there

in the foreground, coming and going,  
talking of wings and Paul Klee.

You examine their faces  
as they stare at yours.

To escape your dim, reductive eye,  
they turn their faces away, your wings

part as if you are about to flutter, your lips  
part as if you are about to whisper

one word.

But it is not a question of knowing  
what to say to the camera, how to face it

or drawing contours,  
but of what escapes the contour,

what lies outside the composition –  
the secret movement, the Hegelian sweep

and the Adornean whisper of the line breaking,  
the unknown, the unexpected.

The photo cropped to cut  
the wing cannot prevent the abrupt

change, this razor-edge of demarcation.

There is a tear in the composition:

this is where bolts of gold and blue,  
shards of plastic torsos

plummet from inestimable heights.  
Last exposure.

*Jennifer A. Scott is an assistant professor of communication studies at Grove City College. Her poetry and criticism has appeared in The Penwood Review and Literature and Theology. She dedicates this poem to her Media Aesthetics class—both for allowing her to wax poetic about Walter Benjamin and to wax nostalgic about the days when people truly cared how to correctly pronounce the last names of German philosophers.*



## ARMAGEDDON

ESTHER HARCLERODE

*Armageddon in Retrospect*  
Kurt Vonnegut  
Putnam Adult, 2008. 240 pp.  
\$24.95

In April of 2007, America lost one of its keenest and most prolific writers. Kurt Vonnegut, in his lifetime, wrote over 20 novels that showcase his ability to speak earnestly about humanity, with an iconoclastic blend of trepidation and slapstick. This past year, his son, Mark Vonnegut, published a collection of his father's previously unpublished stories, articles, and addresses. While most of the stories relate in some way to Vonnegut's experience of the bombing of Dresden in the Second World War, every page of *Armageddon in Retrospect* unfolds Vonnegut's concerns for the peril of humanity and his revulsion over the waging of war.

"The Unicorn Trap" is reminiscent of medieval Europe, while "Armageddon in Retrospect" is set primarily within an institute devoted to the study of the occult. The title story centers around a professor determined to scientifically prove and subsequently destroy the existence of the devil. Far from the giggles and sunshine camp of most humanists, Vonnegut's outlook throughout the stories and lectures in this work grows from his understanding of the human capacity for evil. There is, however, a latent hope in Vonnegut that human beings can do good. In defining what humanists believe, Vonnegut states quite simply that "we serve as best we can the only abstraction with which we have any real familiarity, which is our community," and it is precisely this community that drives the insightful commentary of *Armageddon in Retrospect*. **Q**

*Esther Harclerode is a senior English and philosophy major at Grove City College who did not believe in unicorns until she read Armageddon in Retrospect.*

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

JAMES BRINKERHOFF

*The Last Lecture*  
Randy Pausch with Jeffrey Zaslow  
Hyperion, 2008. 206 pp.  
\$21.95

"My dad always taught me that when there's an elephant in the room, introduce it. If you look at my CT scans, there are approximately ten tumors in my liver, and the doctor told me I have three to six months of good health left." Thus Dr. Randy Pausch began his "Last Lecture" at Carnegie Mellon University, on September 18, 2007. In the ensuing months, Pausch's inspirational lecture gained widespread popularity, especially on the Internet, and even earned him a spot on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. When *The Last Lecture* hit the stands in April 2008, it quickly became a bestseller.

Pausch's lecture (and book) is an account of his personal success story and inspirational life lessons, flavored, like the opening lines, with endearing frankness and wit. He urges his audience to "follow their childhood dreams," live earnestly, work hard, and not waste their lives. It is not hard to see why the lecture has gained such popularity. If a man with so comfortable and happy a life can look death square in the face and still live with such vigor and optimism, surely his wisdom is worth its weight in gold?

As the book closes, however, one cannot help but feel the portentous presence of another elephant in the room, one Pausch did not introduce to us. In all two hundred and six pages of this book, written solely on the occasion of his impending demise, Pausch never addresses the fact of his own death itself. He explains his attitude toward life, in the face of death, but in regard to his own fate at death, he is curiously silent. In the end, his encouragements to "live out your childhood dreams" and "live life to the fullest" ring somewhat hollow without a hope or prayer for the world to come. **Q**

*James Brinkerhoff is a sophomore mechanical engineer at Grove City College.*



## LOST MOUNTAIN

TAYLOR KNIGHT

*Lost Mountain*  
Erik Reece  
Riverhead, 2006. 272 pp.  
\$24.95

**E**rik Reece insists that mountaintop removal, one of the many moral problems that have beset our fossil fuel based economy, is an issue all of America must fight against. Fast and cheap, it is the only form of coal mining in the West Virginia and eastern Kentucky Appalachians. Within months a few bulldozers and a good bit of dynamite invade a mountain as old as the hills, blast it away, and shove it into the valley below so that a seam of coal can be scooped up and hauled off. In *Lost Mountain*, Reece condemns not only the rather unfriendly practice of laying waste to ancient ecosystems but also the illegal actions of the coal companies that endanger the lives of America's poorest people who, a wise man once said, are the most important members of the aforementioned ecosystem. We are all responsible, Reece argues, for every time we switch on a light, we collude together with those coal hungry berserkers.

The book follows Reece's experience at one mining site over the span of a year and records his relationships with the locals—people whose homes were flooded, whose water was fouled, and who were terrorized by coal companies.

Reece does not worry that if we use coal too fast we will use it all up, but that we are using it so fast we are leaving only a pile of rubble in our tumultuous wake as we hurl aside anything which impedes us, mountains, locals and all.

The strength of his arguments lies in a relation and a theme: reverence and resurrection. Reece says that we as a culture lack reverence toward nature and toward people. We destroy the theme of resurrection in nature. In this way, his argument gets at some essentials of what to be human used to be and therefore goes a bit beyond sentimental or fear-driven environmentalism.

It is important to note that Reece would not wish us to leave *all* of nature alone. He is arguing specifically for the preservation of mountains—peculiar mountains in a peculiar place, behemoths of the impractical sublime. Mountaintop removal is a term that flows so well, one is prone to accept it, until, looking again, you say it slowly: "Mountaintop. Removal." Can two such words be wedded? Indeed it takes a great deal of faith to remove a mountain and to think no evil consequences will tread behind.

Though we live in a global economy, we cannot afford to treat problems like mountaintop removal as distant but must treat every problem in which we have a hand as a local problem and deal with it as you would an invasion of armadillos in your backyard. Yet at the same time, because we live in a global economy—in the whole world at the same time—it is impossible to care about everything we affect. Perhaps the only solution to such a problem is this: stop feeding Bulgarian armadillos. **Q**

# BLADES FOR BULLETS

TYLER K. SHORT

*The Afghan Campaign*  
Steven Pressfield  
Broadway, 2007. 368 pp.  
\$14.95

War never changes. Technology advances, as do tactics, but at its core, war never changes. Each war brings new stories of bloodshed and barbarism, but these stories have been told over and over. One has only to glance at Steven Pressfield's *The Afghan Campaign*, whose cover promises the tale of "an unbeaten army of the West [invading] the homeland of a fierce eastern tribal foe" to understand this story's modern application.

Steven Pressfield is a bestselling author known for writing well-researched historical fiction. His detailed description of the brutal training and tactics of the Spartans in *Gates of Fire* is required reading at West Point and is popular in the Marine Corps. In *The Afghan Campaign*, Pressfield follows the story of one Macedonian infantryman serving under Alexander the Great during his invasion of the Afghan kingdoms in 330 B.C. The novel is not written as a biography of Alexander. He does appear often in the book, but only from the grunt's distant perspective. The grunt's portrayal of Alexander as the driving force of the entire army highlights the general's charisma and magnetism.

*The Afghan Campaign* provides a perspective on war that leaves out little of the realities of war of that time: killing a man face to face, soldier's slang, torture and slaughter of innocents. Macedonian soldiers must choose between killing unarmed villagers or facing death by the hands of those

villagers when they join the enemy. Likewise, both sides use torture to gather life-saving intelligence. *The Afghan Campaign* provides an instructive look into how two very different civilizations, Western and pre-Islamic tribal, regard warfare and honor. The Macedonians deride the hit-and-run guerrilla warfare that defined this campaign for its lack of glory and honorable clashes in open battle. Conversely, the Afghans embraced indirect war: breaking pacts and treaties, and murdering their own women in the name of honor. Brutality escalates on both sides, with massacre repaying massacre as the conflict escalates over three years. In response to the escalating violence, Alexander ends the campaign in a surprising manner.

The differences between bullets and blades aside, the applications to modernity occur on the level of culture. The treatment of women, particularly honor killings, highlights the radically different conception of honor found among the Eastern tribes and the Western world. Little has changed in more than two millennia. Whether your interest is in Alexander himself, the clash of cultures, Greek warfare, or the ethics of torture and terrorism, *The Afghan Campaign* will not disappoint you in its intensity and relevance to our current conflict in the Middle East. **Q**

*Tyler K. Short '07 is a Second Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. Enough said.*

# THOUGHTS ON TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATION

T. DAVID GORDON

## Introduction and Definitions

I have ordinarily been on “the cutting edge” of the use of electronic technology in education. I was the second student at Union Seminary in Virginia to write a doctoral dissertation on a word processor in 1983 (CPM Version 2.02, on a computer that had 64KB of memory). I designed a program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) that effectively provided computers for the entire faculty within three years, at no cost to the institution. I used and tested beta versions of software designed to search the Greek New Testament. I was the first professor at GCTS to use a laptop in the classroom, and I serve on the technology committee here at Grove City College. So, I am neither a Luddite nor a technophobe. On the other hand, I am not a technophile, and I am as interested in how electronic technologies can impede certain educational goals as they can enhance them. That is, I am primarily an educator, and a user of tools insofar as they are a helpful means to educational ends.

Anything that a human makes is a technology (from the Greek *techne*, meaning “craft”). Thus, a given language is a technology, chalk is a technology, etc. Education is, therefore, entirely dependent on technologies. The question educators raise is: how do different technologies function; how do they shape us and the messages they contain? Especially today, we wish to discover the traits of the various electronic technologies. How do these technologies shape the knowledge and understanding we desire to convey, and how do they shape our students, as learners?

## Different Educational Theories Produce Different

### Analyses of Technology’s Role Therein

One theory of education is “positive.” For this theory, education consists of inquiry about God, creation, others, and self. We cannot fulfill our stewardship over the created order if we do not understand the properties of that created order; and we cannot work cooperatively with one another in that venture without understanding others and self. Education, for this model, consists of promoting knowledge and understanding of the created order (including the products and results of human creativity). This theory tends to perceive education as information delivery.

Another theory of education is “negative” or “critical.” For this theory, education consists largely in “unlearning,” in *questioning* the routine practices of a particular culture, to determine which of those many things that *appear* normal are *actually* normal. The great champion of this was Socrates, who stated that “the unexamined life is not worth living for a human” (*Apology of Socrates*, sec. 38). Solomon shared this critical approach to life, stating that “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death,” as do contemporary thinkers such as Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, whose *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* continues and advances the Socratic tradition. What is true of individuals is true of cultures: there are ways that “seem right,” which are actually destructive of aspects of human life. Only by questioning the dominant culture can we determine which of its aspects are helpful and which are harmful.

God is wise, social, linguistic, imaginative, rational, aesthetic, etc., and He has made one creature with similar



attributes, albeit on a creaturely scale. Only such creatures have any chance of caring well for His creation. However, to have any chance of doing it well, we must cultivate those aspects of His image that are not fully cultivated at birth. We have the *potential* for wisdom at birth, but are not yet wise. We have the *potential* to learn language at birth, but do not yet know any languages, for example. A theistic understanding of education, therefore, promotes both furthering an understanding of the created order and developing the *imago Dei*. Some aspects of education involve knowledge or understanding aspects of the created order; other legitimate aspects of education develop aspects of the image of God in the learner. Wisdom, rationality, language, creativity, and imagination, are cultivated the way an athlete cultivates the physical body (and education rightly includes such physical training).

For theists, then, all educational questions devolve back to these original considerations: What is the best way to cultivate God's image within and God's garden without? What are those attributes of God that are distinctively human,<sup>1</sup> and how do we cultivate those traits, or at least encourage their cultivation? How best do we discover and cultivate that which is life-sustaining or practical, on the one hand, and how best do we discover and cultivate that which is beautiful and lovely, on the other? Education, for us, is *both* objective *and* subjective; we learn about the created order, and we cultivate the *imago Dei* within us. Education is both informative and transformative (what

the Greeks called *paideia*), or, as we stated earlier, "positive" and "critical."

Educational technophiles tend to view education as the deliverance of information or knowledge; they tend to view education as objective (focused on the object studied). For those who view education as essentially about its content, education itself is largely an information-delivery system, and information technologies, for such a viewpoint, are perceived as an enormous advantage. Educational technophobes, on the other hand, tend to view education as the development of the individual student's latent capacities; they view education as subjective (focused around the subject who learns). For those who view education as the training of a lifelong learner, education is a matter of altering attitudes, cultivating the spirit of inquiry, and developing those human attributes essential to a life of inquiry. For such a view, electronic technologies do not help much. There are many individual exceptions to these tendencies; but the tendencies are real; one's view of education itself influences one's view of the role of electronic technologies therein.

The two, obviously, are not mutually exclusive. A first-year Greek student, for instance, learns information about Greek, such as that its nouns, adjectives, and pronouns are all inflected for case and usage. At the same time, in the process of memorizing the case endings for all three categories of Greek nouns (in two numbers, five cases, and three genders), the student's ability to memorize is cultivated, and by the end of the year, the student memorizes much more efficiently than at the beginning, whether Greek or telephone numbers. Nonetheless, there are differences of emphasis, reflected in the occasional observation "I can't remember anything I learned in my so-and-so class (or degree)." Such a comment views education as an information delivery system, and in this case laments that the delivery (or retention of the delivery) was a failure. Education, for this view, is not primarily about the learner, but about the content learned (or, in this case, perhaps not learned).

<sup>1</sup> I say "distinctively human" to avoid the unnecessary and unhelpful discussion of whether they are "uniquely human." Yes, some of the great apes can modify some of their vocalic utterances, and we may, if we wish, call this "language." On the other hand, they cannot yet use such utterance even for such a basic survival need of describing approaching predators; much less write sonnets, novels, or mathematical equations. For any practical purpose, or any Darwinian survival purposes, they do not have language as humans have it (nor do dolphins or other forms of non-human animate life). Yet, if students of simian neurology wish to call their utterances "language," I see no particular reason to object to this, provided that there is a candid recognition that whatever "language" means for these apes is altogether different from what it means for humans.



Another individual says something like, “I’m not the same person I was before I read Tolstoy. After reading him, I notice things, I think about things, I fear things, I perceive things, that I never did before.” Such a comment reflects a transformative understanding of education. Education is not (primarily) about the content learned; it is about the learner’s growing capacity to inquire, to perceive, to question, to learn. The goal of the one view is to become learned in some particular area; the goal of the other is to become a learner in all areas.

Since information (and possibly knowledge, though not understanding or wisdom) can be stored in electronic memory, and then displayed for the perusal of others, if the essence of education is information dissemination, electronic technologies are an unmitigated boon to education. But if education also consists in the development of one’s capacity to inquire and learn, then the matter must be perceived differently. Indeed, the packaging and delivery of electronic information may actually retard the development of certain neurological or attitudinal matters essential to cultivating the capacity for independent inquiry. Several considerations have led some educators to have second thoughts about the unmixed educational benefits of electronic technologies.

Until fairly recently, neurologists believed that the synapses of the brain were quite flexible or plastic when people were very young—but not beyond the early years. This view has changed, and neurologists now believe that the neurological functions remain flexible throughout life; new pathways are continually being constructed as individuals process new perceptions. Science writer Sharon Begley says:

The adult brain, in short, retains much of the plasticity of the developing brain, including the power to repair damaged regions, to grow new neurons, to rezone regions that performed one task and have them assume a new task.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain: How a New Science Reveals Our Extraordinary Potential to Transform Ourselves* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007, p. 8).

The brain “flexes” or “adjusts” (though imperfectly) to what it is exposed to, and this “flexing” makes subsequent acts of perception more efficient. Each new neurological process is analogous to hikers going off trail and making a new way through a forest. Each subsequent hiker beats the path down more, and makes the pathway more and more clear, and therefore more and more speedy.

The consequences of this newer understanding of neurology, while unquestionably good news for the medical field, is mixed news for the educational field, because we must now raise two questions of our information technologies: How do they present the information, and how do they shape the neurological development of our students? We can no longer merely be impressed with an interesting PowerPoint presentation, for instance. We must also ask: how does *viewing* PowerPoint presentations develop (or hinder the development of) human thinking ability? In the following areas, this is not an insignificant question. We will quickly survey two areas in which educators have expressed concern about electronic technologies: the mind (attention span and rationality) and language (reasoning and nuance).

### **The Mind: Attention Span**

The effects of current technologies, especially computers, on attention span are particularly important in considering their place in the classroom. Before colleges and universities were wireless, professors could permit laptops in their classrooms for those students who found it helpful to take notes in this manner, without the concern of distraction.<sup>3</sup> What we have found, however, is that young people who have been surrounded by electronic technologies from an early age have become accustomed to multi-tasking, to the point that they find extended concentration difficult. As Maggie Jackson has observed, “Nearly a third of fourteen to twenty-one-year-olds juggle five to eight media while doing

<sup>3</sup> Though even here, the tendency for such students is to become stenographers, rather than note-takers, as they attempt to take down the lecture verbatim, rather than to jot down the most salient points.



homework.”<sup>4</sup> Similar multitasking is pervasive when computers are taken into the classroom. However, deep reading and concentrated attention-span are clearly being attenuated by such multi-tasking. Studies of law schools show a high correlation between laptop use in the classroom and lower scores on standardized tests.<sup>5</sup> The integration of computer technology in the classroom not only provides easily accessible distractions, but over time may even hinder the students’ *capacity* for sustained concentration.

### The Mind: Rationality

Many observers of technological change have noted that the printing press, like the codex before it, had a profound influence on the development of rationality.<sup>6</sup> Walter Ong, in his study of the transition from oral culture to manuscript culture, wrote this:

To make yourself clear without gesture, without facial expression, without intonation, without a real hearer, you have to foresee circumspectly all possible meanings a statement may have for any possible reader in any possible situation, and you have to make your language work so as to come clear all by itself, with no existential context. The need for this exquisite circumspection makes writing the agonizing work it commonly is.<sup>7</sup>

Bullet points rarely make propositional claims that engage rational/critical thought. Nor is Ong’s point of view exceptional; it is the “industry standard” opinion among students of technology and its relation to education. As Neil Postman observed,

4 Jackson, Maggie, and Bill McKibben. *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*. Prometheus Books, 2008.

5 Kevin Yamamoto, “Banning Laptops in the Classroom: Is it Worth the Hassles?” *Journal of Legal Education*, Volume 57, no. 4 (December, 2007), pp. 1-44

6 The major difference being that the codex was a facet of manuscript culture, so that the rationality it cultivated was experienced only by the tiny fraction of a culture permitted to interact with such delicate and expensive treasures. The printing press, as it were, took rationality to the masses.

7 Walter J. Ong. *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*. Methuen & Co., 1982, p. 104.

From Erasmus in the sixteenth century to Elizabeth Eisenstein in the twentieth, almost every scholar who has grappled with the question of what reading does to one’s habits of mind has concluded that the process encourages rationality . . . . To engage the written word means to follow a line of thought, which requires considerable powers of classifying, inference-making and reasoning. It means to uncover lies, confusions, and overgeneralizations, to detect abuses of logic and common sense. It also means to weigh ideas, to compare and contrast assertions, to connect one generalization to another....It is no accident that the Age of Reason was coexistent with the growth of print culture, first in Europe and then in America.<sup>8</sup>

Books have contributed to the refinement of the powers of the human mind. Therefore, as the internet, television, and other technologies supplant books, in all likelihood, human rationality will suffer.

### Language: Argument and Reason

Image-based technologies present bullet points, instead of propositions, leading to impressionistic, non-propositional and non-nuanced “sound bites.” Such sound bites contain, at most, bits of information without intellectual or argumentative context. A sentence was once part of a paragraph, which was part of an extended argument. PowerPoint ordinarily makes no argument; its presentations are literally inarguable. But argument is the essence of reasoning, and without reasoning, there can be no understanding.

Impoverished lexical stock results from the use of limited vocabulary and the removal of vocabulary from the context of sequential reasoning. Before the attentive learner can even raise questions about the definitions of terms on a PowerPoint presentation, the next slide comes up, and attention is given to it. But one does not really know whether an argument is being made, or whether the argument is cogent, because a substantial part of a cogent argument depends upon the definitions of the words employed.

8 *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Television*. New York: Viking, 1985, p. 51.



Presentation technologies ordinarily resist the figurative use of language. Yet the figurative use of language often yields the greatest amount of understanding; poets, novelists, and religious leaders have often, perhaps even primarily, employed such figures as the best means of communicating profound truth. Plato's cave is a figure that explains the motivation of philosopher-kings (and many other matters), and Jesus' camel attempting to enter the eye of the needle challenges lovers of wealth. These rich metaphors contain substantial amounts of what cultures once called "wisdom," yet such figurative language ordinarily requires narrative context for their parabolic wisdom to be communicated.

#### **Language: Nuanced Expression**

Not only does content suffer, but sentence length diminishes, resulting in less-nuanced expression. (In representative public literature, average sentence length in 1936 was 22.8 words, and by 2001 had reached 13.1 words.) This tendency will likely continue, due to the influence of technologies (email, IM, text-messaging) that encourage, by their form, communication that is quick but not necessarily precise or qualified. Edward Tufte notes how Power Point, in particular, resists refinement or nuance:

At a minimum, a presentation format should do no harm. Yet the PowerPoint style routinely disrupts, dominates, and trivializes content. Thus PowerPoint presentations too often resemble a school play—very loud, very slow, and very simple.<sup>9</sup>

Some users of PowerPoint appreciate how it "simplifies" the presentation of information, but Tufte was concerned that not every human issue *can* be simplified without losing something important. The Civil War, for instance, can be summarized in a PowerPoint presentation, with plenty of colored maps, timelines, and bullet-pointed "key battles." But can this format go beyond the basic facts and address deeper aspects of the war—the debate over the Constitution

and states' rights, the cultural divide between the North and South, or the religious justifications for slavery?

#### **Language: Images in the classroom**

Ours is increasingly an image-based culture. In 1955, there was only one technology with a screen in the home: the television. Now the same home will have multiple TV screens, computer screens, cellphone screens, computer game screens, iPod screens, PDA screens, and more. In two decades, screens have gone from being rare to being nearly ubiquitous. It is not surprising, therefore, that Harold Bloom refers to our historical moment as "our new Dark Age of the Screens."<sup>10</sup> And while text can be put on these screens (I have a Greek New Testament on my PDA/cellphone), text is difficult to read in these media, especially extended amounts of it. So, the increase of screens really means the increase of images; and images make no propositional claims that engage rational or critical thought. Images leave impressions, and perhaps contribute to the cultivation of certain plausibility structures in that way; but images contain no propositions with which one can reason or argue. They simply do not make an intellectual claim.

Images, therefore, cannot cultivate rationality. In this sense, they are deficient, compared to language, as means of training this aspect of human intellect. Ordinarily, images do not require any more of human neurology than they do the neurology of a dog or cat. But language distinguishes us from the other animate species by demanding a fairly high level of reason, abstraction, and imagination to process it. Therefore, images should be used judiciously in the classroom. If we compare the classroom to the personal trainer, in most instances a student observing an image in a classroom is like an athlete who has stepped off the treadmill to take a break. Even when paired with text, pictures distract from rational engagement in the substance of the lecture. Students, of course, love images; but not because they help them learn. They love them because they are

<sup>9</sup> *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 2003, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> "Great Dane," *Wall Street Journal*, April 20, 2005.



accustomed to them (they are surrounded by them) and because they are easy.

### Means and Ends

Neil Postman and Jaques Ellul were both concerned about technology's tendency to grow unabated, to become an end in itself, rather than a means thereto.<sup>11</sup> Postman distinguished tool-making societies from technopolies precisely here. In the first, tools or technologies serve the culture's purposes; they are created for a specific purpose that the culture has determined to be valuable. In the latter, technologies take on a life of their own, and effectively dictate their own values (especially quantification and standardization) to the culture. The greater the role these technologies play, and the more money we pour into them, the more we tend to value them and what they do.

For instance, having access to numerous data bases does not, in itself, say anything about the methods (polling, statistical analysis, empirical studies, etc.) by which the data were compiled. Indeed, the more data we have access to, the more necessary it is to know how the data were arrived at. Further, whether data are pertinent to a given question is a matter of judgment, not merely a matter of data retrieval. Which data tell us what about what? But in a culture whose technologies aid us in accessing data, the unwary can easily conclude that data themselves are valuable.

### Conclusion

Hippocrates is probably still right: "Do no harm." Insofar as the technologies we employ in education injure the cognitive development of our students, or the attitudes necessary to the development of inquiry, it is our duty not to use them. I must say that while I ordinarily decry the litigious nature of our culture, there is one lawsuit I look forward to, even though I hope it will not be directed at our own

institution. I look forward to the day when a young person undergoes cognitive testing prior to and after four years in college, and discovers that his cognitive processes are worse than they were before, and he therefore brings suit against the educators who hindered his development while taking his money. I might even be tempted to produce an *amicus* brief in such a trial.

Our students may "like" our glitzy presentations—the way obese people like potato chips, but in each case, we may, and perhaps must, render a judgment about what is health-producing and what is not. If the presentation technologies we employ have the effect of reducing their attention span, of conditioning them to be averse to written language unaccompanied by images, of limiting their capacity for deep reading of substantial texts, or to expect learning to be entertaining or easy, then we have injured them as learners. We will no longer be able to refer to our closing ceremonies as "commencement" because they will not commence an adult life of inquiry, because we will have failed to shape them in such a way that such an inquiring life is likely to be their experience.

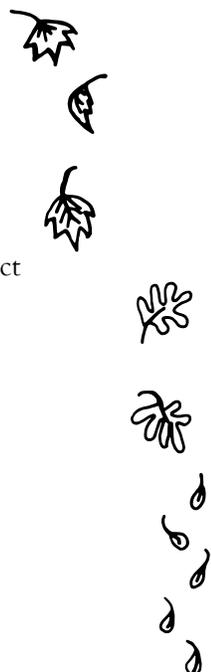
A decade ago, educational institutions were expected to be leaders in using (and encouraging the use of) every form of electronic technology. Today, their leadership should be devoted to the critical *analysis* of the uses of such (and earlier) technologies, recognizing where they are genuinely helpful and where they are actually counter-productive. Q

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<sup>11</sup> Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993; Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. Trans. John Wilkinson. New York: Knopf, 1964.



# CONUNDRUMS



## Math Palindromes

For the following sequences of numbers, insert the basic arithmetic operations (+, -, x, ÷) such that when the numbers are reversed but the operations remain in the same order, the new result is the opposite of the first result. You may use parentheses freely. There will be a \$15 prize for the first person to demonstrate the correct solution to Bill Robinson (robinsonwm1@gcc.edu).

Example:

The sequence of 1, 2, and 3 could be filled out as:

$$\begin{aligned} (1 + 2) / 3 &= 1 \\ 1 + (2 \times 3) &= 7 \\ (1 + 2) \times 3 &= 9 \\ 1 - 2 + 3 &= 2 \\ 1 - (2 + 3) &= -4 \end{aligned}$$

A solution for the case of 1 and 2 would be:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} 1 & 2 & => 1 - 2 = -1 \\ 2 & 1 & => 2 - 1 = 1 \end{array}$$

Remember: the operations remain in the same location, while the numbers are reversed, and the resulting sums should be opposite.

$$\begin{array}{cccc} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\ 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{cccccc} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 \\ 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{ccccccccc} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\ 8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{cccccccccc} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 \\ 10 & 9 & 8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \end{array}$$

## Last Issue's Flawed Sudoku Solution:

One way to make the Sudoku puzzle solvable is to remove the 6 from the bottom center box. Congratulations to Jim McNamara who was the first to solve this puzzle.

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