ACCESS: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN EDUCATION
2001, VOL. 20, NO. 2, 83–93

From Cemeteries to Cyberspace: Cartographies of Identity in a Technologised Age

Elizabeth M. Grierson

ABSTRACT
From the starting point of death, this paper considers contradictory aspects of identity in a globally technologised age. It opens up a terrain of knowledge and ontology through engaging a politics of experience in questions of death and identity. Closure is inevitably disrupted when the imminence of death is confronted. The paper focuses on the cemetery and cyberspace, with attention to Heidegger's 'dwelling', Michel Foucault's heterotopia and a liberal version of utopia. A technologisation of knowledge is identified in the relations between the epistemological framing of these spaces and ontologies of 'the self'. A critical reading of this terrain makes visible the assumptions about progress, unity, and identity that normalised discourses of culture and technology presuppose. At the sites of cemetery and cyberspace the idea of imagined and imaginary frontiers beyond physical reality is the site at which identity faces the unimaginable. The project follows Foucault's procedure of the 'specific intellectual' in that it does not attempt to claim a masterful discourse of 'truth' in matters of technology and identity. The approach is rather one of strategised knowledge, a heuristic approach whereby the possibilities of theory open up the in the exigencies of *praxis.* Thus the paper declares itself through its own experiential starting point: a questioner stands at the borders of the question, facing the unimaginable *aporia* of death and the radical absence of a question.

To Hugh and Campbell

Dedication: A cartography of absence

I dedicate this paper to my sons, Hugh and Campbell. Hugh Maxwell Grierson, mathematician and mountaineer, software scientist and Olympic speed-skier, died at the age of 33 on 12 January 2001, at 10.30 am, his body then laid to rest in the stony ground of Wanaka Cemetery at the foot of the Southern Alps, Aotearoa New Zealand. We know the fact of physical cessation: we die. But an indeterminacy of time and space persists. We know not where and when. Precise knowledge of the context of that final act is beyond our grasp in a space without borders, a site without language.

In December 2000, I spoke with Hugh about his work in the abstract realm of mathematics and applied inventions of computer codes. One of his first assignments in the working world of software programming and information systems was to invent a virtual mapping of the horizontal and vertical placement of bodies in urban cemeteries with Geographic Information Systems (GIS). He organised that silent world in digital formation for easier information access, inventing structured grids, levels, locations for the naming and claiming of past identities - a stabilising cartography, bordering and mapping death-without-death, a systematising of a space whose function is beyond the limits of time's limitations. Networked, arranged, ordered, sections were designated, numbered, informationalised. From moment to moment of precision, Hugh worked with the practical rationality of *techne* towards a conscious and productive end of spatial arrangement and identification. Now it seems Hugh has materially joined the mapped inventions of his mind, leaving the social realm to face the radical cartography of absence.

Hugh was a mountaineer, a man who climbed the lofty heights and contemplated the abyss. In the space of contemplation, access to his brother Campbell might have been possible. Who knows? The cartography was theirs. His brother, Campbell Ian Grierson, mountaineer, outdoor adventurer, and secondary school physical education teacher, had faced that final moment in 1996, when, on the 25 January at about 7.30 a.m., he fell into a yawning crevasse high on the East Ridge of *Aoraki,* Mt Cook. A glorious morning: the throw-away camera in his back-pack gave evidence. No-one really knows for certain the moment of that final moment; only one was called to witness, and as she witnessed him, he witnessed her. Roped together, they lay for three days; motionless; carving a space of mutual impossibility; where an unrepresentable silence exceeds the condition of that which is knowable in language. Frozen in the abyss, she was 24, and he 27, and there would be no more naming .by numbers. Grey and bagged 'his body' (he?) was recovered on 27 January, to be identified on the tarmac of Mt Cook Village by his brother Hugh and handed over to be documented, measured and statistically immortalised.

The legacy of my sons' lives and deaths exist in a simple equation that Hugh had spoken once when cemeteries and cyberspace were on the agenda for talk, at a time when there was no knowing outcomes and eventualities; it was this, $x = y + 1.$ The answer to the question x is impossible, indeterminate as it is imminent. How does the human subject confront and negotiate the brevity of the question in the imminence of impossibility? The indivisible moment, which is absolutely known yet utterly unknowable, finite yet infinite, discloses only its undeniable indeterminacy, the certainty of the uncertainty in the imminence of death.

The merely correct is not yet the true (Heidegger, 1977: 6).

Narratives of dwelling

Where does truth of death dwell? Contemporary cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard (1998: 182) claims that death is a narrative that has become discredited, undesirable, eliminated in the social etiquette of our global landscape. In a technologised world of global communications, image-saturation, and instant information transmission, is there time between there and here, space between then and now? In the relations of being with time, where lies a legitimate reservoir for Heidegger's 'dwelling' in order to open our imminence of being in the world?

In spite of all the grand words, the weeping sentiments, the clarion calls for eternity, there is no time or space for death other than an anthropological interest in rituals, a scientific focus on causes, a medical curiosity for cures, a sociological saturation of data, an informational iteration of recording and reordering; the making of social cartographies through which we weave death's dwelling in ways that obfuscate its imminence. Is that the restriction of *techne* for life, in the death of *poiesis* as a process of revealing, of becoming present in time, as Heidegger would have it?

How does one think in a way that might 'bring-forth' knowledge of death into a presence that sees the question of absence without cluttering the space of that process? Is this the dilemma of a hyper-technologised world? Is it a 'new' dilemma in that sense? Or does new-ness have nothing to do with it? Is it simply about another way of '.being-there', of closing gaps between deeply embedded oppositions through which identities are constructed? Heidegger calls up *poiesis,* the 'bringing-forth' into presence enabling the 'disclosure into being' where 'dwelling' may not be cluttered. Is it possible 'to be', 'to have' identity in other than metaphysical terms, in the face of death's cartography of absence? To apply hyper-technologised calculative thinking to life and death is to over-occupy the space of indeterminacy, to bound it, border the border-less, and tal{e away from the social relationships we might have with death in life.

No over-occupation can legitimate the *aporia* of death; no technologisation of data can make visible the intricate and impossible claims to meaning when the moment of death is past and that moment is brought forth materiality into the immediate presence of corporeality; no digitalisation of information systems can illuminate the contradictory identifications of 'self' in the wake of death. All that is left is the question of the question of death, an impossible horizon of being.

In the game of knowledge, death has no equivalence, no correspondence in the productivity of life, in what knowledge orders for prosperity. Death is our dilemma, as Heidegger says, always "too early or too late to grasp our existence as a whole" (Ree, 1999: 37). Through death, technologisation of knowledge as a totalising force is put into doubt. Yet the technologised life-world might claim a different view. Technology 'discloses' life as it makes this or that happen; and in the happening there is a ready claim to progress as an effect of a cause. But technology, as technological activity, orders as it frees, consumes as it constructs. Reading through Heidegger (1977), the word 'technology' derives from the Greek word *techne* which contained the notion of *poiesis,* something poetic, that process of revealing or unconcealment within concealment. But in its contemporary spatialised mode and pace of disclosure, technology expands its unlimited and dominating capacity to fill economic and social spaces. What is constructed, what obliterated in the process?

Demands for input-output efficiencies roam the globe, unrestrained and insatiable. Death has no time, as there is no time for death. Concomitant with the revolution in globalised communications and digitalised information systems, social relations are increasingly hyper-technologised as the circulation of information becomes an end in itself. But, I suggest, this arrives not without a series of losses, micro-deaths offering a series of provocations.

What is death?

What is death? Where is death to be located when identity calls for attention? Jacques Derrida (1993: 25) explores the question of death and takes it further: '"What is death in general?' or 'What is the experience of death?' and the question of knowing *if* death 'is' - and *what* death 'is' - all remain radically absent *as questions".* He then reminds us that "these questions are assumed as answered by this anthropologico-historical knowledge as such, from the moment when it institutes itself and gives itself limits". In his way of speaking through the absent question, Derrida opens death to question in the social sphere of the 'to be'. That is the site of 'identity' to explore without assumptions, but the questions are already assumed, says Derrida (25): 'That assumption takes the form of an 'it is self-explanatory'; everybody knows what one is talking about when one names death".

When formations of identity are constructed in declarations of *everybody knows what one is talking about technologised* thought in technologised landscapes of social 'being', it seems the space for *poiesis* diminishes. The biological, cultural or informational take precedence as a necessity in the modes of capital production. And with that a technology of power operates to obliterate the potential for 'dwelling'. Relate this limitation to the *aporia* of death and the human subject is confounded. If the question of death is radically absent, and the question is answered before it is posed as "everybody knows what one is talking about", then the question of identity is already known as pre-assumed meaning over-occupies the void. Questions on the possibility of my own death might well be asked. In his *Aporias* (1993) Derrida exposes the problematic realisation that 'my death' can never be properly accounted for by me, as I will not be here to account for the experience of it. It will be forever foreign to me yet it will be properly mine. It is un-presentable even as it presents itself and frames 'my identity'.

I pose here a discourse through which we might invoke death as the radical reminder of "non-relational contingency" (Ree, 1999: 39) in matters of 'self' and the construction of knowledge in the social and philosophical conditions of life's being when the *a priori* condition of Being is already imposed. With the deaths of my sons, Hugh and Campbell, the Heideggerian imminence makes visible "the intricate contexts of meaning" in the "world", the *Dasein,* which "is present at the origin of the becoming-present of beings in time" (Krell, 1999a: 19-20). As Heidegger posits, death is what individualises us most absolutely (Ree, 1999: 38). Yet, that individualisation is immediately problematised at the borders of thought and experience when Being is privileged as 'having been before'. "What about borders with respect to death?" asks Derrida (1993: 3). Perhaps Derrida best supplies my procedure here when he answers: "We are going to wander about in the neighbourhood of this question" (3).

In the cartography of absence I have seen the over-occupation of presence. I have seen the paucity of knowledge when reason defies its own logic and when *poiesis,* the poetic coming-to-presence, is subjected to the technologisation of thought, of knowledge, of social expectation, of language. Then the over-occupation of the space of 'sense' dominates the potential for *poiesis* and obliterates the remembrance of *not-knowing* (that is, the remembered acceptance of the radical *absence* of knowing). Heidegger comments on "the radical failure of remembrance _ characteristic of these times in which we hardly know what to think", as Krell (19996: 366) puts it in his introduction to Heidegger's "What Calls for Thinking?".

Remembering "the question of being" becomes a demand for Heidegger; and recognising the question in the time of life's relations to death, is the demand of death. Such recognition may illuminate our path to moderate that righteous sense of rationalised knowing-ness that determines 'knowledge' as an unproblematic site when dominated by the over-use of technology (as technologised thought). By this I mean a technology of being, a technology of thinking, acting, ordering in the world; a technologised 'being' that comes forth at the site of death demanding the 'other' *to be* as *they* assume *they are,* ordering a correspondence, a return to the order of *the Same* - the *same* as them - that is, rational, knowing, in control of the faculties (a Kantian endeavour).

Through word or its omission, through touch or its withdrawal, is *theirs* an avoidance of *being* in the imminence of death? At the site of death, where lies life's relations to death in the much-revisited question, *"How are you?"* spoken as a demand for a 'knowable self', demanding a productive answer.

As mothers we might weep for the disclosures of death to be remembered. But as educators, weeping is out of order. Yet, as actors in a technologised global world of social-economic forces, inflected always with micro-moments of death, perhaps death might serve as a communal reminder to question those productionist demands, to take nothing at face value, and to open our landscapes for sight. Then we may site the loss of *poiesis* in our technologised knowledge formations upon which so much store of truth is put.

I exist in cyberspace as an article of faith - a credo (Baddeley, 1997: 79).

Articles of faith

In historical and present time, utopian dreams have found diverse cultural expressions in the presupposition that something must exist, other than technologised thinking, production and physicality. In time, space and language, the soul and infinity, have been articulated, given form, credo, truth, as articles of faith, which serve to locate corporeal identities in earthly and immaterial space. Here lies the promise of immortality presaging non-closure. Signs differ but signifiers of hope might translate into universally available manifestations of immateriality: angels, souls, spirits, karmic reincarnations, dream-time formulations, weightless beings uplifting the burdens and banalities of terrestrial life with its over-ordered being-ness. For centuries the human mind has scripted utopian possibilities of existence beyond the limitations of physicality. Driven by dreams of progressive fulfilment, such idealisms abound when the confines of corporeality are overcome, albeit through the willing suspension of disbelief.

Utopia, a *no-place,* a space of possibility, deriving from *ou,* not+ *topos,* place (Greek), a term first used by Sir Thomas More in 1516 as a Christianised concept in the book *Utopia,* anJ magined place, a state of things where perfection may be possible. Utopia signifies hope in belief beyond the confines of physical place, its opposite *dystopia,* an imagined society or place whose imperfection is perfect or ideal (see Jordon, 1999). Utopian idealisms suggest that through the passage of corporeality the human subject might attain a dimension beyond physical space in which a spiritual being could emanate. Through utopian principles subjective imaginings seek that hoped-for immortality, at the very least the promise of salvation, other life forms, or inter-dimensional incarnations, as a space of transcendent enlightenment for the post-corporeal soul.

Philosophically speaking, territoriality marks the intellect, the Cartesian thinking being, the objective measure of man, a mind-body dualism that Platonists have represented, Descarteans have rationalised, Kantians have universalised, Hegelians have synthesised, phenomenologists have experienced and poststructuralists deconstructed. In the nature of Platonic appearances, mortal lives may prefigure and reflect but a shadow of, or preparation for the immaterial where a continuum of existence may be assured through resurrection, incarnation, or other idealist possibilities.

High on the list of highly civilised values for the liberal Humanist notion of an utopian society, where 'man' is the measure of all things, has been the prioritisation of reason, the foundational belief in the correspondence truth of being, goodness and morality, and the guarantee of aesthetic harmony in productionist modes of representation. With the rise of the techno-sciences from Renaissance through Modernity, the prioritisation of progressive reason differentiates the material from immateriality, *praxis* from *gnosis,* providing space for the self-reflective individualised practices of the rational subject of ethics and aesthetics. Such differentiation has not vanished in the advent or aftermath of postmodernity. In fact, utopian notions of intellectual organisation and subjectivity have returned in full force with the rebirth of liberalism through global formations of the technologised 'knowledge society' whereupon, as Giroux (2000: 3) puts it, "utopian thinking has narrowed its focus and has become the driving force of neoliberalism". Or to look at it another way, in the globally technologised age, technology itself has become the utopian driving force of neo-liberal hope. A new informational spatiality structures and sytematises knowledge-transfer in a global domain. With space deterritorialised, new frontiers seem endless.

Margaret Wertheim, in her book *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace* (2000) posits that utopian beliefs are grounded in conceptual and material understandings of space, hence they change with cultural and time shifts. Through Western cultural formations of the Age of Enlightenment, the legacy of utopianism plays itself out in conceptualisations of spatiality and identity formations that are reflective of spatial architectures of heaven and earth, man and God, suns and planet. With 'the self' as an enduring entity of classical ontology, utopian articulations of souls and spirits can incarnate boundary-less space in a world beyond corporeality, a timeless space, colourless, formless, weightless and unchanging, therefore representing perfection in the Platonic sense. In a globally technologised age this may translate as a form of globalised transcendentalism. Imbued with the promise of hope rewarded, such conceptualisations are formalised through signifying systems of language and thus concretised in the world of being. Similar language spills from the pages of Negroponte on digital space. He speaks of "global movement of weightless bits at the speed of light" (1995: 12). He references digital bits having "no color, size, or weight ... the smallest atomic element in the DNA of information ... a state of being, on or off, true or false, up or down in or out, black or white ... " (14), and finally, as with the Christian Resurrection, the "ultimate triumph" (229). As digitisation is folded into the triumphal language of ultimate salvation, a heady utopianism abounds.

Wertheim considers the way scientific and social formulations of space impinge on our understandings and constructions of identity. With newly defined possibilities of reidentifying matter and meaning through cyberspace, the utopian possibility of what has been called "the cybernautic imagination" (Wertheim, 2000: 21) redraws the boundaries of identity formation and opens wide the potential for "cyber-religious dreaming" (22) as a sort of release from corporeal bonds. Wertheim examines the contemporary cyber-world of MUDs (multi user domains) and the utopian possibilities of cyber-dreaming.

The ponderings of non-corporeal, spatial dimensions may signify the eternal restlessness and questioning mind of the human subject. Or perhaps it is more reasonable to suppose that hyper-technologised subjectivities have little room for 'pondering' in the reinvention of *techne* as *Enframing,* obliteratating possibilities for *poiesis* in the heady call for technologised answers to technologised questions (see Heidegger, 1977).

When such instrumentialism dominates, perhaps the globalised information race of digitalised technology offers a field of entry to that dreamed-of utopia, the frontier-less space, through which identities might be composted however transgressive of physicality? There, in that zone of technologisation perhaps the endless construction and consumption of identity-on-line heralds 'over-occupation' as the ultimate triumph over the terror of empty space, unknowingness, the *aporia* of death.

What is interesting is always interconnection, not the primacy of this over that (Foucault cited in Brooker, 1999: v).

Heterotopia

Is there no escape from the imminence of *aporia,* the spectre of *not* knowing that is already 'shot through' with traces of knowing? Can we ever be a mind relieved of its reason? In the cemetery, as in cyberspace, the mirrored reflection of our subjective selves exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy, suggests Foucault (1986). The space that I occupy is both absolutely real, connected to all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal at the same time. "I find myself absent from the place where I am, in that I see myself in there" (Foucault, 1986: 24). Here Foucault speaks of the mirror as a *heterotopian* space where one's sense of space and place is in contention.

With global effects of new technologies, the spatialisation of the world and its beings takes precedence over chronological orderings of time. In his paper "Of Other Spaces" Foucault (1986) speaks of new emphases on spatial orders and technologies, new arrangements of information in globalised formations of digitalised elements. *As* Foucault puts it: ((we are in the age of the simultaneous, of juxtapositions, the near and the far, the side by side and the scattered" (1986: 22). He speaks of counter-sites, of places which exist outside all other places, locatable, real, structured as ((other" (24) - the *heterotopia,* from *hetero, other* (Greek). These sites "reflect and speak about" other places, other utopias. But in their relational proximity to ((other", their difference from other places is absolute. Like cyberspace, the cemetery exists as *an-other place* on the outskirts of town, beyond the space of embodied living. A «city of souls", the cemetery is characterised by an arrangement of carefully constructed containers where, in the act of forgetting, corporeality is inscribed linguistically in stone. In these heterotopic relations where does 'identity' find its dwelling place? In his delineation of the cemetery as a *heterotopia,* Foucault points to the interconnectedness of this space with the society or village, yet its absolute *difference* from other cultural spaces. There the dead are given attention; there lies "the only trace of our existence in the world and in language" (Foucault, 1986: 25); there in that "other city" in the suburbs (its location from the nineteenth century), "each family possesses its dark resting place" (25).

A Cartesian spatial paradigm divides this from that, finite from infinite, identity from death. Foucault directs his critical attention towards procedures of classification when he defines the present epoch as «above all the epoch of space", widening the definition to "the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by side, of the dispersed" (1986: 22). Relations, networks, connections in flexible time and space are suggested by this description. With the relations of proximity and distance, there is a horizontal movement away from chronological arrangements of historical time constructed by, and contained within monuments of meaning. Those acknowledge monuments', formulated in teleological progression on a two-dimensional plane, delineating point A to point B, iterate true correspondence of form and matter, the logical proposition of 'whatever is *is'.* Such iterations articulate material certitude, as they calculate truth, and establish certain values that could ,be incorporated and relied upon to deliver worthy goals for humanity's *progress;* but Foucault's discourses displace those articulations as they excavate modernity's inscriptions of historical time and counter-pose them for inspection.

In his paper, Foucault outlines a brief history of space in the Western world, through attention to hierarchic ensembles of places in the Middle Ages. These ensembles constitute sacred and profane places, celestial and terrestrial places, protected and open places, urban and rural places, all of which inscribe social and spatial practices in terms of human subjectivity and communal identity. Knowledge was thus articulated and categorised a certain way, which Foucault calls the way of "emplacement". Galileo's establishment that the earth revolved around the sun, "an infinitely open space", altered the concept of "thing" as a fixed entity in earth-space. This was opposed to a celestial sphere where «a thing's place was no longer anything but a point in its movement, just as the stability of a thing was only its movement indefinitely slowed down" (Foucault, 1986: 22). Emplacement was replaced by, what Foucault calls, "extension".

Today, "extension" has been replaced by "the site" (Foucault, 1986: 23). The site is a specific space where the question of arrangement takes precedence. Marked or coded elements of data now mark "the site" through which knowledge of this epoch is formulated. Once a mechanistic universe was articulated through Newtonian physics, wherein the law of gravity settled the attraction between forces of physical matter. Today's data organisation and storage mark the sets of relations which constitute subjective knowledge. The subject attempts to stabilise knowledge formulations and mal<e meaning out of technologised performativities, but the logic of relationality is put to the test. Foucault puts it this way: "We live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (1986: 23). The *heterotopia* has one abiding trait: it has "a function in relation to all the space that remains . . . a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged, as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (27). Foucault calls this a *heterotopia* of compensation, conceptualised beyond the Cartesian division of space and materiality. Like the sailing ship or boat-city of colonial times, "a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity..." (27). Such a place suggests cyberspace as much as it does the cemetery.

Terminal portals

Terminal: situated at an end, L terminus *end; Portal: entrance, gateway,* L porta *gate.*

The terminal portals of cemetery and cyberspace stand as sentinels to "the site" where the human subject is on the very brink of displacement. There the corporeal 'self ' teeters on the edge of deconstruction of the logic of identity, not quite here and not quite there. Where am I when I am in cyberspace or in the cemetery? I am here but not here, there but not there, confronting the inevitable *aporia* which calls for a radical reconstruction of the question of identity. Cemetery and cyberspace, two profane portals constitute material constructions through which society orders and organises its social order. At the brink of an-other space, not of this world yet sharply connected to it, a material cyberspatial moment is situated somewhere between 'inside' and 'outside', a hinged cultural space of ambiguity which is both temporal and spatial, either and neither. At the grave, as at the edge of infinite space, cyber and actual, the body as an embedded epistemological phenomenon disintegrates. I am, yet I am not. Each signifies a gateway to immaterial possibilities, yet each is networked inescapably to terrestrial or territorial space and to the logic of normativity. Does the normative rationality of 'the social' provide the excuse, reason or logic to grasp and stockpile the informational and technologised realm as a space-filling measure, albeit a simulacrum, filling the void to displace doubt? Is this where hope resides?

As the social templates of the past are altered and shaped into a new present, lived experience is now constructed and framed by informational technologies, and the identity of the technologised subject is displaced by the very technologies through which it is mediated and constructed. Codes, data networks, digital bits and bytes map the cyber-terrain as spatial formations outstrip the tests of reality and the question of *where am I when I am on-line?* cannot be answered fully in physical terms (Wertheim, 2000: 41). Perhaps, with the removal of physical restriction of spatial dialectics, the idea of utopian hope reinvents its discourse of progressive freedom. Yet, it is true that each site, cemetery and cyberspace, relies upon strongly individualised notions of selection and regulated knowledge formations for exit and entry, so utopian hope must be, as Giroux (2000) says, an educated one.

But how far will the educated subject go in the quest for spatial release from bonds of corporeal presence? All the way, according to William Gibson whose "cyberspace" (1984) was coined as a dimension of disembodied consciousness, a space or non-space of "unthinkable complexity" whereby "consensual hallucination [is] experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators" (Gibson, 1984: 67). Seeking release from the maintenance of classical order, Gibson's vision includes cranial implants to allow physical connection between computer and person to enable data transference and human movement through that data in the non-space entity of cyberspace. Such is the urge for freedom from corporeal restraints. To Gibson, as Jordan (1999: 26) points out, cyberspace has some key elements that include bodiless consciousness and the attainment of possible immortality. "Being in cyberspace is ... a continuous, never-ending grid on which different constructions emerge" with each construction signifying a data centre. Gibson even links one of the data centres to "a 'pirate's paradise' on the jumbled border of a low-security academic grid" (Gibson, 1984: 101, cited in Jordan, 1999: 27).

The "pirate's paradise" places Gibson in proximity to Foucault. At the end of his *heterotopia* paper, Foucault writes somewhat enigmatically: "In civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates" (1986: 27). Could it be that cyberspace offers a renewed "pirate's paradise" through the ultimate in technologised dreaming, a coded site of data beyond the bounded and mechanised universe? At the material portals of both cemetery and cyberspace, identity faces the terror, and hope, of unequivocal displacement - the imminence of disappearance as a potential for freedom from constraint. Yet at that very moment, the terrain is bounded, bordered, governed, ordered, and 'the self ' returned to its exact correspondence. Death is placed into deferral. Only those fulfilling certain preliminary requirements are permitted access to the ultimate displacement.

Identity in contingency

Identity, from L, idem, *the same; the relationship between an object and itself (logic).*

How can the subject's identity, the identity of the subject, 'be' a *being-in-time* without its *a priori* presence? Would it not then be a *being-in-deferral?* How could that *'be?*

Beyond the objective, unfalsifiable condition of truth, our minds may be grafted to the heady technological potential of cyberspace where we may attain that hoped-for freedom unavailable in the physical universe with its originating laws of correspondence. Cyberspace expands exponentially with in excess of 50,000 new customers a day signing up with an internet cell-phone in Japan. *k* well, internet users are multiplying by the million with each new estimate since the world's first long-distance computer network, the US Department of Defence's ARPANET in 1969 (see Hafner and Lyon, 1996: 151-155). Technological promise surges through the veins of global consumerism as our social practices are conditioned, as never before, by technologised and electronically mediated imprints for social identity and action. Can a critical reading of this terrain open the permutations of 'presence' to the imminent persistence of 'absence'? It seems that rejection of the idea of unoccupied space marks the lineaments of technological expansion. As cyber identities are counter-posed to 'the real', and the cyber-void is 'filling up' with data bits and bytes, does electronic transmission equate with the scramble for a return to subjective agency? Is this the new site where identity seeks confirmed security?

In cyberspace it is not only a search for the potency of agency that might grab the imagination of millions of cyber-users daily, but also a desire for communal agreement in the imaginative fulfilment of immaterial possibilities, or material impossibilities. Such discursive desires, performed in connective moments and spaces, act like a secular spirituality of gargantuan proportions offering utopian passages of networked hope in a virtual world of increasing performativity. Vast informational networks, which carry new cultural expressions involving the eclipse of territorial matter by telemetrical data (see Negroponte, 1995; Luke, 1998), suggest new forms of knowledge in the digital domain equating to new expressions of freedom in the social sphere.

Wendy Hesford (1999) posits that identities are formed in the contingency of experience, which is no more stable and fixed that any other social or cultural condition and provides the narrative encounters through which subjectivity is constituted. The subject-as-process can then tell its story, writing itself into being in its dynamic moments of language. It can be said that the logic of performativity may be similarly identifiable in the realm of digitisation through dynamic interplays, non-linear relations, unexpected junctions, complex chains, loose networks and contingent practices whereby technological processes mediate subjective encounters, and human subjectivity may avoid or deny the burdens of interface communication.

Foucault's networked sites may be delineated as maps, transportation systems, or clustered social spaces (see Foucault's description of trains, 1986). As sets of relations they mark places where people gather, through which they move, or in which they relax in private or public. But in the realm of cyberspace there is "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault, 1986: 24). In the simulated world of virtual relations, such inversions may seem to replicate (mirror) the properties of civic communities and social groupings, whereby shared practices or formal rights and moral obligations may be imagined in newly coded environments, but minus the trappings of social or civic responsibilities.

Cyberspace communities may redefine the nature of physical communities as they reinvent the dream of plenitude through virtually re-imagined frontiers. Seemingly like-minded souls may group together in virtual networks, or 'web-rings', linked affinity groups, countless thousands of them awaiting access and further networking. *k* John Naughton writes in *The Observer Review* (1998: 6): “Each site in a WebRing contains links to five other members of the ring. Some also offer a 'random' link that picks a site out of a virtual hat and takes you to it”. We may interface simultaneously with many different people in many different locales, providing endless global fulfilment. Moving to a logical conclusion, as Mark Slouka (1995: 19) suggests: "Physical presence would become optional; in time, an affectation. And having marginalised the physical self, we would marginalise community (in the old sense of the word) as well".

A mirrored site

As Foucault focuses attention to the spatial notion of utopia as "a site" with no real place, which maintains "a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society" (1986: 24), so cyberspace mirrors society, with all its alter-egos and hidden desires. Although a placeless place, it is a virtual site holding up a mirror to physical reality where subjective presence is delineated in its imaginary absence. Foucault speaks of the mirror where "I see myself where I am not, in an unreal virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not ... where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror" (24). Such is the utopia of cyberconnectivity where I can and cannot be present simultaneously, where at the exercise of my will I may or may not be gendered, aged or young, shaped in physicality, coloured to sight. In utopian terms the *hyper real* evolves a sense of 'perfect democracy' or 'true freedom' while I still occupy my corporeal state at a terminal, flexing my digital muscles, as the 'reality' of the moment displaces the void through newly invented, digitised, imagistic and linguistic codes. Such apparent freedom from the Aristotelian *horror vacui,* and departure from the measurable, mechanistic, relativistic or quantum laws of physics, places me thus in an idealised placeless space. This space hovers beyond the known equations, locatable only in the digits *zero* and *one,* global in potential, immaterial in quality, and interdimensional in the release of finite epistemological and corporeal bonds.

Such a state of freedom suggests the realisation of *utopia* in the liberal Humanist sense of the word. Such a utopia represents the type of thinking that has paved the golden path to enlightenment, as evidenced by institutional legacies and disciplinary discourses in the 'rise' of scientific technicity and truth- discourses founded in consensual desires for progress, autonomy and individual transcendence of the human spirit represented through a knowing, conscious, self-identity.

While institutions of society may speak of increased efficiencies and productivity through vast informational global networks of digitised knowledge and communications, it is the ubiquitous and imaginative release of territoriality that captivates so many cyberspace devotees, and, as Negroponte (1995: 4) observed: "The change from atoms to bits is irrevocable and unstoppable". The collective imagination expands exponentially in "the virtual imaginary" (Jordan, 1999: 179) of cyberspace, as immateriality opens its infinite frontiers to call heavenly cyberhosts into the global domain of telemetrical data. The desire for reframed epistemological and ontological transactions moves inexorably on as territoriality is dislocated by the telemetricality of cyberspace. There, in the potential of an instant, the space of atomless freedom displaces the *aporia* of death. Each site, cemetery and cyberspace tests the limits of being and knowing, and in the testing, exposes the limits of hope.

Where then does death dwell?

At the grave we weep. At this spatial frontier we confront the infinitely finite, the imminence of death. Here lies the ultimate displacement of being and knowing. There the historical shaping of epistemological and ontological foundations of Western thought, perception, rationality and belief are implicated as the immaterial mind is confronted by the enfleshings of the material body. Truth is rescripted. Once rid of the appendage, the utopian principles of faith in an immaterial hereafter might be exercised; but the appendage remains as the eternal reminder of the impossibility of the question in the imminence of death.

Derrida (1993: 25) had asked: "'What is the experience of death?' and the question of knowing *if* death 'is' - and *what* death 'is' ... "; and as he directs us to the radical absence of an answer, the impossible summons ripples across the surfaces of our being-in-the-world.

From cemeteries to cyberspace a conceptual key to the question of identity might disclose the pressing need *of* a question and insistence *on* an answer, be it territorial or telemetrical. But as Derrida reminds us, "the call of or for the question, and the request that echoes through it, takes us further than the response" (1995: 115). Where then does death dwell? Where lies *poiesis?* And the answer might lie in a questioning of the language of being in the moment of time, the time of death.

At Wanaka, in January, I walked away from the Foucauldian heterotopia, the networked city on the outskirts of town. The cemetery ground contained my son, yet it did not. Was the crisis in the death, or the question? Or was it in the impossibility of both? There, as in cyberspace, it seems the mythologies may grow as we bear witness to our inauthentic fictions. In that spaceless place lay my son, yet he did not. There lay the idea of imagined and imaginary frontiers as the site where identity faces the unimaginable.

And there in that space of indeterminacy lie the limits of my narrative.

References

Baddeley, S. (1997). Governmentality. In B. D. Loader (Ed.) *The Governance of Cyberspace.* London: Routledge.

Baudrillard, J. (1998). *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (I. H. Grant, Trans.). London: Sage Publications. [French 1976]

Brooker, P. (1999). *Cultural Theory: A glossary.* London: Arnold.

Derrida, J. (1993). *Aporias* (Thomas Dutoit, Trans.). California: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J. (1995). *The Gift of Death* (David Wills, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1986). Of Other Spaces. In *Diacritics: A review of contemporary criticism,* 16 (1), Spring, 22-26.

Gibson, W. (1984). *Neuromancer.* London: Grafton Books.

Giroux, H. A. (2000). Something's Missing: From Utopianism to a Politics of Educated Hope. Unpublished paper, 15 December.

Hafner, K. and Lyon, M. (1996). *Where Wizards Stay Up Late: The origins of the internet.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Heidegger, M. (1977). *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays.* (William Lovitt, Trans.). New York: Harper & Row.

Hesford, W. (1999). *Framing Identities: Autobiography and the politics of pedagogy.* Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

Jordon, T. (1999). *Cyberpower: The culture and politics of cyberspace and the internet.* London: Routledge.

Krell, D. F. (1999a). General Introduction: The question of being. In D. F. Krell (Ed.), *Martin Heidegger Baste Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)* (pp. 1-36). London: Routledge.

Krell, D. F. (1999b). Introduction to "What Calls for Thinking?" In D. F. Krell (Ed.), *Martin Heidegger Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964) {pp.* 366-367). London: Routledge.

Luke, T. W. (1998). *From Nationality to Nodality: How the politics of being digital transforms globalization.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 6-8 September. Retrieved 13 June, 2000, from the world wide web: http://www.cddc.vt.edu/tim/tim/tims/Tim609.PDF

Naughton, J. (1998). I started looking for Blackadder. I ended up in the Library of Babel: Internet. In *The Observer Review,* Arts, 22 November, 1998, 6.

Negroponte, N. (1995). *Being Digital.* Rydalmere, NSW: Hodder & Stoughton.

Ree, J. (1999). *Heidegger.* New York: Routledge.

Slouka, M. (1995). *War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the high-tech assault on reality.* New York: Basic Books.

Wertheim, M. (2000). *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A history of space from Dante to the internet.* Milsons Point, NSW: Doubleday.