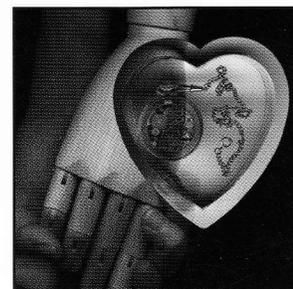
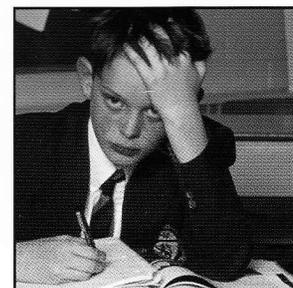


# TECHNOS

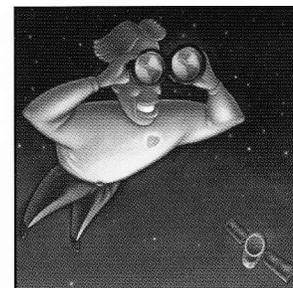
QUARTERLY FOR EDUCATION & TECHNOLOGY ► FALL 2001 VOL. 10 NO. 3



*A.I., YOU & I*



*ED TECH: BOOM OR BUST?*



*THE PROBLEM WITH OUR GODS*



## AGENCY FOR INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

The Agency for Instructional Technology is a nonprofit U.S.–Canadian education organization, founded in 1962, whose mission is to foster learning for pre–K through adult students. AIT develops, acquires, and distributes quality technology-based instructional resources and services; and it provides leadership to the educational technology policy community. AIT is the headquarters of TECHNOS Press, which publishes TECHNOS: *Quarterly for Education & Technology*.

AIT products include video programming, interactive videodiscs, computer software, CD-ROMs, and supporting print. AIT materials, which comprise 40 percent of all broadcast video classroom programming in the United States and Canada, are used on six continents, reaching nearly 34 million students in North American classrooms each year. AIT also offers product support workshops and online forums for educators and readers of TECHNOS *Quarterly*.

Since 1970, AIT has cooperatively produced more than 39 curriculum products through the consortium process it pioneered. Major project funding comes from state, provincial, and local departments of education, federal and private institutions, corporate sponsors, and other partners.

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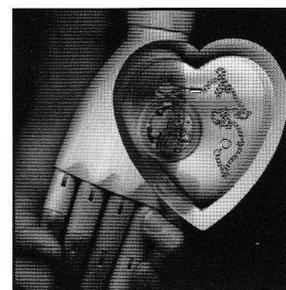
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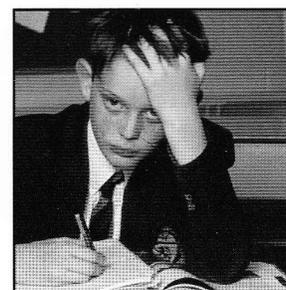
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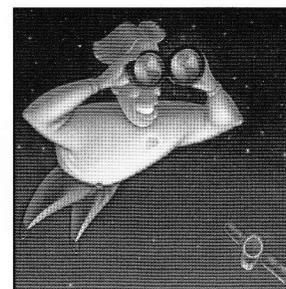


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Jere Smith; Jason Ohler, Animator

# The Problem with Our Gods

By Jason Ohler

*Whatever you believe, that's who you are.*

**This is a work of fiction, excerpted from Chapter 13 of the author's cybernovel, *Then What? A Funquiry into the Nature of Technology, Human Transformation, and Marshall McLuhan*. Visit the Web site at [www.thenwhatonline.com](http://www.thenwhatonline.com)**

“Who has a big-picture networking story to tell?” the Reverend Willamina “Billy” Pulpit suddenly announced, upbeat and resilient. The congregation opened its eyes, looked up, and started to murmur with subdued excitement.

“I do,” said a man near the front. The voice-activated microphone homed in on his position and broadcast his voice throughout the cathedral. I looked around and spotted dozens of speakers hidden within the folds of the stone archways. “I made friends with three Muslims this week in a virtual clothing store,” the man said. “They particularly liked the blue jeans. I introduced them to two Christians, and we all ended up in a private chat room together being real friendly. We might even meet up next summer in Europe together! Praise networking, for it makes the world one.”

“Praise networking,” chanted the congregation.

“Praise networking indeed!” bellowed Billy Pulpit. “Who else saw the big picture this week?”

“I did, Reverend Pulpit!” a young woman announced.

“Tell us about it, sister!” Billy Pulpit said.

## Expanding the Classroom

“I am a school teacher, and I just finished a unit with my fourth graders called ‘What’s Unique, What’s Universal.’ I use email and video mail to connect my

students with students all over the world so they can discuss all sorts of things, like clothes, gender roles, diet, music. The object of the project—”

“The object of the project!” Billy repeated. “Give that woman two points for rhyming!”

“Two points!” everyone hollered gleefully.

“Thank you, Rev’rend. Anyways, the object is to figure out which customs they feel are universal and which are unique to their culture. On the one hand, they are always so surprised to learn that not everyone dresses the way they do, or eats what they do, or thinks the way they do. But on the other hand, they are also always surprised to find out that blue jeans and McDonald’s are very popular just about everywhere. It is a blow to ethnocentrism and helps them see the world as one planet capable of sustaining social diversity while embracing commonality.”

“You got them living in the bosom of irony!” Billy howled. “You got them seeing we are all one, all different, and alllllright! Praise networking!”

“Praise networking!” hollered the congregation.

“How can I get my children involved in this?” a parishioner asked excitedly.

“I would ask that anyone involved with this project wait around in the back after the service to talk to folks who would like to know more about it,” Billy said.



"I will do that," the teacher said. "And praise networking and what it can do!"

"Praise networking!" the congregation said.

### **Citizens of Cyberia**

A young woman, professionally dressed and fitted with large round glasses, stood up and announced that she had a story that segued nicely with the last one.

"Do tell," said the congregation.

"Indeed," said Billy, smiling broadly. "Media people love a good segue."

"Well," the woman began, "I am an online teacher for a consortium of universities in the United States. Last year I was asked to teach a course to a group of educators using the World Wide Web, and even though I knew I was going to be traveling, I agreed to do it because I knew I could get access to the Web wherever I went."

"You mean you actually got in an airplane and moved your body from one place to another?" a congregation member asked incredulously. Laughter instantly filled the room.

"Yes, I did," she assured them. "And so much for the myth that online communication will make us travel less. I struck up a relationship with some faculty at a few universities in Germany and, à la Nicolas Negroponte, after sending my data bits there for more than a year, I decided to send my atoms there too.

"Well," she continued, "the last month of my travels took me to Canada, where I used a local Internet provider to reach my students. While I was at a party explaining what I did for a living, a young man politely announced that he was an immigration officer and found what I did very interesting.

"Well, I didn't think anything about it until the next day when I received a call from someone at Immigration who accused me of working illegally in Canada! I told him I was teaching U.S. students and was being paid by a university in the United States. He said he didn't care, that I was working in Canada, that any job held in Canada had to be offered to Canadians first, and that my situation had to be reviewed

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### **"Praise networking!"**

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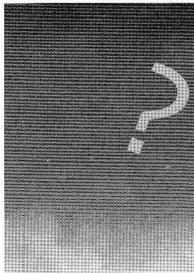
for possibly displacing Canadian workers in violation of Canadian immigration law. I told him that I couldn't possibly be displacing Canadians because it was a U.S. job, was only available to U.S. citizens, and wouldn't be offered to anyone outside the country, unless, of course, it was an international course, which it wasn't.

"Well, then he told me that I was at least in violation of federal tax law for not paying taxes on my income. But it was not a Canadian job, I kept arguing; it was a U.S. job and I paid U.S. income taxes, and so the issue of Canadian taxes was irrelevant. Well, actually, I told him I paid my taxes to Uncle Sam rather



Jerre Smith; Jason Ohler, Animator

than Queen Elizabeth, a statement he found quite offensive. He told me in quite a huff that I was working in Canada every day and like everyone else in that situation I owed my fair share to government. I told him that while my butt might be in Canada, my mind was in the United States, that's how cyberspace worked, and that he needed a crash course in the mechanics of the global market as well as proper manners. He told me he would get back to me with a date for my hearing. I told him I couldn't wait, but I never heard from him again.



"Well, the whole experience made me wonder," the woman continued. "When I can project my mind one place while sitting in another, which government should I answer to? It made me take a good look at all the governments that controlled my life that were based on where I live. The best of the lot is my neighborhood association: we deal with real issues, like garbage overflow, noisy tourists, and curbing our dogs. We deal with real people and someone usually brings a coffeecake to the monthly meeting.

"But the larger the government entity, the less responsive it is; the city government's so-so, the state government's nearly intolerable, and the national government is what it is—a reasonable attempt to do the impossible: to satisfy over a quarter of a billion rabid individualists. Maybe someday we will look at governments as monopolies which no longer serve our best interests and which will have to compete for our citizenship. Maybe someday we will all consider ourselves citizens of cyberia first and will choose our governments second. Maybe we will choose them the way we choose any professional organization to belong to. Maybe we will commit to them for a certain period of time and then, depending on their track record, either renew our citizenship or go elsewhere."

"Maybe!" said the congregation.

"Excellent questions, sister. And at least part of the answer is obvious: we are all connected, and

something's gotta' give! It all boils down to where's your mind versus where's your behind!"

"Amen!" the congregation shouted.

Billy started to stamp out a beat with one foot that cycled through the congregation, who immediately began to clap their hands in unison. In her deepest baritone she began to rap:

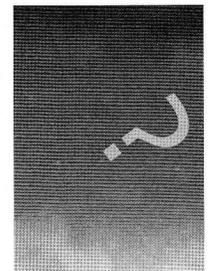
There's your mind!  
And then there's your behind!  
And sometimes the two just don't align!

"And sometimes the two just don't align!" the congregation joined in as they stood up. Billy began to rap another cycle while everyone moved and swayed, clapping their hands with a snap and a funk that was so infectious no one could resist standing and joining in.

On it went, funking down through ultra cycles until Billy put up one hand to stop it, a wide smile on her face. "Amen, brother and sister networkers," she said, pulling a blue-and-gold handkerchief from her pocket and wiping away the sweat that was streaming down her forehead. "Amen. Please be seated."

"AAAAMMEEENNN!" returned the congregation, shuffling back into their pews. Almost immediately the congregation was quiet and waiting.

"Another story of the power of networking, I beg you, brothers and sisters," Billy implored.



### **A Peaceful DisSolution**

An old man near the rear of the cathedral stood up. "I have a story I would like to share!"

"Tell us!" encouraged the congregation.

"Fellow networkers, I used to be a divorce lawyer. So I went to a meeting of the local bar association a few weeks ago and pitched networking as a way to get people who don't like each other to com-

municate and work out their difficulties. I asked these lawyers if any of them had one of those cases where two people are trying to get a divorce but they hate each other so much they can't even talk on the phone without swearing up a storm? Just about everyone said 'yes,' so I made the case for networking as a way for people in that situation to be able to communicate. I suggested that people could come as avatars, or holograms of their favorite movie stars, or just use email, in order to talk to each other. The idea was to put enough distance between them so they wouldn't power up and get all upset before they even had a chance to say, 'Hello, I hate you.' There was a lot of interest but quite a few lawyers were afraid that if it actually worked, no one would need them in the middle and they wouldn't make any money.

"Then, fellow networkers, an amazing thing happened. Two honest lawyers—"

The entire congregation burst into hysterics, and screeched in unison, "Say what?"

"That's what I said, fellow networkers—two honest lawyers—agreed to try using electronic mail between two people who were trying to get a divorce but who hated each other so much they couldn't even agree how to split up. And guess what? It worked! We turned off voice and video and made them use just text, and, fellow networkers, an amazing thing happened: it took them so long to type in a swear word that after the first few attempts they just didn't bother. The bottom line is that they worked out a shared child custody arrangement and a property settlement in a half-dozen email messages that they had not been able to work out through their lawyers for months."

"Praise networking!" the congregation said.

"Praise networking indeed," Billy Pulpit thundered, "for it holds the promise of making the world a more peaceful place."

## The Dark Side Emerges

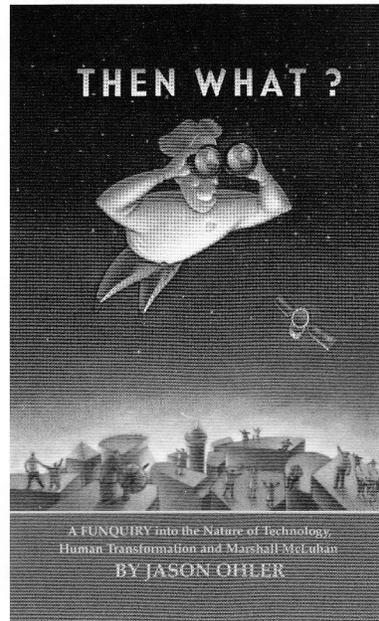
"Reverend Pulpit," a distraught young woman called out in a voice that shook with rage. The people seated next to her put their arms around her.

"Yes, sister," Billy said quietly.

"Bad people do bad things to good people with good networks. I know for a fact that the KKK, militia groups, and God knows who else, use networks to help them do mean, vicious things to honest, decent people. My friend—my best friend—died, committed suicide, because the forces of evil—you know, the credit agencies who know all about you and don't hesitate to make a buck by selling what they know to whoever wants it—the forces of evil managed to destroy his good name and his credit so utterly that he felt he had no choice but take his own life. And it was all a lie, a big lie! He had wonderful credit. But he was a doctor who supported abortions, and his enemies were bound and determined to bring him down. So they sabotaged his information. It's a new kind of warfare, brothers and sisters.

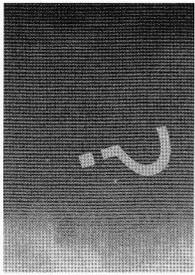
"His enemies borrowed his credit information and began to send information to his house about national cross-dressing conferences. Well, of course, his wife got hold of it and wanted to know what else he wasn't telling her about his private life. Then the forces of evil managed to massage his credit card purchase information so that his wife began to suspect that he was using her Victoria's Secret account to buy lingerie. And they did it so artfully, so subtly, that when his wife wasn't believing he was buying it for himself, she began to suspect he was buying it for another woman or worse: a fellow cross-dresser!

"And if that weren't enough, they tapped out his credit line with things like lifesize, anatomically correct Barbie dolls, padded bras, and silk sheets, and



anything else that would make the lie more complete. He saw his wife and family dying of shame, so he killed himself. His enemies bought information about him, *legally*, and then they used it to fabricate a lie that destroyed him. But it was all a big lie! He was a wonderful friend and father! And he had wonderful credit, do you hear me? Wonderful!”

The young woman was sobbing uncontrollably. No one moved. No one uttered a sound. The vast echoing chamber of the cathedral was deadly silent as everyone waited for her to continue.



“I know technology is an amplifier,” she finally said in a voice barely above a whisper. “And I know it amplifies good and evil. But surely there is justice in the next world. What happens to these people, Reverend Pulpit? I need to know what happens to evil networkers when they die.”

“What happens to their souls when they die?” Reverend Willamina Pulpit asked.

“Yaaass,” intoned the congregation.

“You want to know what happens to the souls of evil networkers when they die?” Billy said a little louder.

“YAAAAS,” the congregation crooned.

“They go to hell!” she bellowed.

“Amen!” everyone screamed.

“And do you know what hell is?” she asked with fire.

“Tell us, Reverend Pulpit!” the congregation commanded.

“It is whatever you create out of the dark side of your soul. It is the worst of the worst that you have ever known. For a networker, it is a network with only one computer to be shared among an infinite number of people. It is an email server that crashes continually without backup. It is a local area network connected

to the Internet with a slow, unstable connection that works best on the weekends when no one needs it. It is a group of users who move their computers without telling anyone and yank the cords out of the wall just before lunch so the entire network goes down. It is a phone company whose satellite link is eternally plagued by sunspots. It is a boss who wants every bell and whistle imaginable but doesn’t want to pay for them and won’t take the time to learn how to use them. Hell! I say, hell!”

“AMEN!” everyone yelled as they waved their arms and writhed in their seats. “AMEN!”

“You need not worry about them, sister,” Billy Pulpit assured the young woman. “They will get their due.”

“AMEN!”

### The Suits Take a Lesson

The congregation buzzed wildly for a moment before the excitement subsided. When calm returned to the cathedral, Billy Pulpit smiled. “Well, let’s end on a positive note. Who else saw the big picture this week?”

... “I’m not exactly sure this counts,” I began apologetically. “It’s more of a confession.”

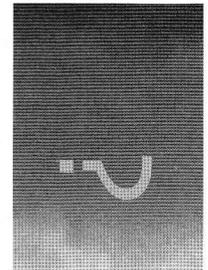
“Well, son, you’re in the right place then,” Billy assured me.

“Thank you, sir, uhm, ma’am,” I stammered.

“‘Reverend’ will do,” Billy said with a smile.

“Yes, ma’am, Reverend. But I actually used the network this week to get the suits to understand how to treat their employees like human beings. See, the suits—you know, management—they’re the people who, well, run the place where I work. Actually I need to stop calling them ‘suits.’ It’s part of my training. They are people too, just a bit misguided.”

“No need for an explanation, son,” Billy broke in with a smile. “We all know who the suits are, don’t we?”



“Amen!” hollered the congregation.

“But,” said Billy, “you are quite right. They are people. And your compassion will serve you well as you try to understand the world. We are here to help, not here to condemn. Please continue, brother networker.”

“Well,” I said, “then you all know that they don’t understand the networking thing but they act like they do even though they never come to training sessions and insist that when they make a mistake it is all someone else’s fault.”

“Amen!” the congregation hollered again.

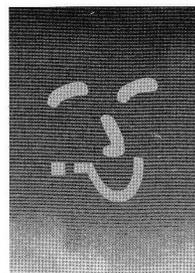
“And,” I continued, “they make people working for far less than they make do senseless, ridiculous things because of their ignorance. While people care about being paid so much less, it’s actually the insult that really hurts. Anyway, so today I got them to actually see what they were doing to people by involving them in a text-only computer conference in which they thought they were talking just to other suits but in fact they were talking to me who was acting like a suit. And because they thought I was one of them, they listened to me. Was that too dishonest to count?”

“Not at all!” thundered Billy Pulpit. “Sounds like an excellent use of technology to me!”

“Praise networking!” the congregation said.

“Praise it indeed!” Billy Pulpit echoed. “And how did you teach these unteachables the basic lessons of humanity?”

“Umm,” I began, looking at my friend the teacher, Ms. Edwina Tech, “I chose a metaphor they could relate to, the annual stockholders convention. I got them to focus on the opening image of everyone in the audience with the company logo up on the screen. I explained in big-picture terms how the convention was more than just a meeting, it was a convocation, a



coming together of all the parts of the company that formed one unit that needed to operate like a single entity. I explained that while the convention may consist of many individuals, it was one group with a

“Praise networking,”  
Billy Pulpit said.  
“And praise teachers!”

common purpose. I got them to understand that the company was no different, that the company was also a single entity and every time all the pieces were in synch, working like a single entity, everyone was happy and the suits made more money! Then I explained how everyone’s job at the convention, from the keynote speakers to the napkin folders, were important parts of the whole, and that if you weren’t nice to the napkin folders, well, you got crumpled napkins, and who likes that?”

“Hear, hear,” a number of the faithful mumbled as they nodded their heads in approval.

“And I told them how the company had keynote speakers and people who folded napkins too, though they had different names, like ‘managers’ and ‘data entry clerks,’ but there was really no difference. When everyone is treated like an integral part of the whole, they act like an integral part of the whole, and everyone is happy and the suits make more money!”

“Bravo!” said Ms. Tech, a tear hanging in the corner of one eye. “Well done, William. Well done!”

“Praise networking,” Billy Pulpit said. “And praise teachers!”

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