Terminal Identity: A Reflection on one of my First Webinar Experience, January, 2016

There is a Gap between what has been for me the space of thinking/saying/teaching (the image of academia as place to pause and reflect, the place where the tradition of one's work—psychology—was preserved and transformed in service to the ancestors/in this ambience the virtues of patience and slowness matter), and the digital space of technology--the space for thinking, saying, teaching etc within which the mirror of technological distance (My technology book) has become the computer screen.

The mood sense of this gap is quite uncanny and what is uncanny here lingers as this mood of sorrow, the mood quality of not being quite at home in this Tech space (See Heidegger's work on technology), an atmosphere of sadness for what has been lost, left behind, been forgotten.

For a long time now the presence of the Gap when it shows itself as itself evokes Orpheus, the eponymous poet, the poet of the gap according to Baudelaire, and the only poet Plato allowed back into the Polis, to teach and sing and bridge the gap between the human and the divine and who calls to us to cultivate the human world beneath earth and sky and to dwell there poetically. In the uncanny mood of the Gap, Orpheus is near. The eponymous poet enters through loss.

So, after this webinar experience, I wait. I wait and try to listen to what the poet might be asking us to remember in this new polis of digital space.

Where is the sky in the digital world? Where is the earth, the flesh of nature? Where is the depth of this space? Its vertically has been usurped by the horizontality of an infinite expanse that eclipses or nearly so the human scale of time and space. And where is the other, the community of others when we meet at and through the terminal, where each and all of us now have a terminal identity, an image presence on a screen that has no haptic sense, a space then where we are quite specifically out of touch with each other, a disembodied image, which not weighted with flesh can float free and be anywhere in the digital world, a spectacle of a disembodied self? There are no kisses in this terminal world.

> (While you and I have lips and voices which
>
> are for kissing and to sing with
>
> who cares if some oneeyed son of a bitch

invents an instrument to measure Spring with...)

(ee.cummings)

We are as Gods in this space, creators of ourselves, makers of a new kind of being that makes a spectacle of itself, a being which-----

having sundered the erotic bonds of the sensuous flesh and the sensual world with all its appeals and seductions, its temptations to linger and to find in the moment the splendor of the simple, the miracle in the mundane,

and which, now floating free outside the envelope of time, an enveloping, a cradling of the present within a past that lingers, haunts, and casts its presence in the present, and a future that bewitches and beguiles the present moment and companions it forward----

might be tempted to imagine, to dream that we are immortal beings, eternal and beyond death

How do I think, say, teach in this new world where without the sheltering envelope of time each instant on the screen feels like a command to keep moving, to keep the illusion of self creation in place, a tyranny of immediacy in which the next moment is but what follows this moment, where any and every tomorrow is but what follows today, an endless loop of repetition. (Is this expression of repetition in digital space, a technological version of Freud's repetition compulsion, which he described as one of the organic rhythms of soul, a pulsing of soul in the face of trauma, a beat of soul trying to master its anxiety?).

And how do I teach, say and think in this new world where there is no flesh, where the erotic field of fleshy engagement between self and other, a fleshy entanglement with all its ambiguities and mess, with all its spoken and unspoken gestured desires and appeals, where all the follies and absurdities of trying to say what one means and to mean what one says is nakedly there impregnating the other, where the lies of a hidden mind betray themselves on the face? What are words spoken at the terminal when they are no longer inscribed within the gestures of the flesh? Words of mind unhinged from flesh are tricky, but the body never lies. (Did Descartes tell the first lie of this new world: 'I think therefore I am!')? What is truth in the digital world, when even the images on the screen can be photoshopped?

Sit with a patient in psychotherapy and you come to realize how much the body is a text and how necessary it is to read it. But at the terminal the image of the other is minimal, almost disappearing into that Singularity, a point where and a moment when Ray Kurzweil, the harbinger of the body's

disappearance, its magician, predicts the transcendence of biology as we are down loaded into the virtual cloud.

We are in new territory here, perhaps not unlike but certainly amplified as were those like Galileo who was drawn into the gap between the medieval world and its ways of thinking, saying and teaching and the modern world of science:

Galileo's Telescope

He pointed his telescope at the stars inviting the assembled schoolmen to look.

The moon, he said, had craters on it.

Too shocked by such blasphemy that corrupted its perfection,

they refused his invitation.

With their beliefs held firmly in place,

they retreated to their books and plotted their revenge

as their world crumbled into oblivion. (Leaning toward the Poet, p.116)

The new territory that we now inhabit comes toward us and announces itself as uncanny and in the mood of sorrow that colors the uncanny it is the capacity to remember for example those Aristotelian schoolmen who, retreating to their studies tumbled with their world into oblivion, and not just repeat it in order to master the anxiety in the face of a new, uncanny world. To re-member now what is passing away in order to imagine another possibility, a tomorrow that is not just the continuation of today, but the transformation of tomorrow through the re-collection of yesterday, a carrying forward of a living history.

To return then to the question: how do we think, say and teach in the digital world? Attending to the uncanny, being a witness for it, having the courage to stay with the mood of sorrow, we cross over the abyss and linger on the bridge that spans the gap between what was and what might be. We move forward by moving backward. We begin to think, say and teach by remembering not to forget. And we begin to think, say and teach out of the mood of sorrow by being in the mood for *what might be*, the subjunctive mood of thinking, saying and teaching that is contrary to facts regarded as fixed and inevitable and open to what is a wish, a hope, a

regret, a possibility and perhaps even a dream. A subjunctive mode of existence, which is a primary feature for me of a poetic sensibility!

In this mood then I try to begin to find my way into thinking, saying and teaching in the space of the webinar. I begin to **try on** thinking, saying and teaching **as if** I were a self in space-less space and timeless time, **as if** I were experiencing for a moment floating in digital space without the weight of flesh, an astronaut in this new landscape of weightless existence, **as if** I were immortal, a glimpse of what it might be like to be eternal, like a god.

And yet, and yet, perhaps to give the power of the illusion that this digital world holds its due, all of that above tempered by the regret that I am not such a being. But with that regret comes also the acknowledgement of what is lost and being lost is found again. Strange as it then might be, if one is in the mood for it then might the power of the illusion become an awakened Eros for what was lost and has been found.

> We shall not cease from exploration
>
> And the end of all our exploring
>
> Will be to arrive where we started

A   nd know the place for the first time.'

> (T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, Little Gidding, V, ll 239-242)

Four additional reflections:

> 1-The webinar experience has prompted these 'late night thoughts of a classical academic' and that prompting brings together the following:
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> > a-A poetic sensibility is the shadow side of the technological logos mind
> >
> > b-Actually engaging this technology—via the webinar—uncovers the connections for me among: a poetic sensibility, technology, Orpheus as the poet of the gap, and The Frankenstein Prophecies project: soul work in a technological world is marginal work, a working on the margins where the uncanny solicits us.

2-The gap is the core of the therapy relationship. This gap is an embodied complex gestural field. Patient and therapist are drawn into the gap between what is and what might be regarding the patient's suffering. When the field is not embodied—like it is not at the computer terminal—; when the field is structured by the therapist's intentions to be useful, meaningful, or helpful, he/she distances him/her self from the immediacy of the encounter between two embodied beings whose gestures carry a complex history, whose symptomatic incarnations are the locus of a loss, then the relation is one of power dynamics. But when those intentions are let go of then the relation becomes one of being with and in the presence of the other in a field of possibilities. Eros not Power! Eros with all its chaos, ambiguities and fluidity!

3-If the digital landscape is disembodied, and if, as above in the second reflection about the therapeutic field, it is the embodied gestural field that holds the affective dimension of human encounters, then where is a place for a mood of sorrow or for Eros in the digital world? Is the manic pace of the digital world where one can be on call 24/7 a defense against loss, a wall against sorrow? Moreover if the soul's way of finding something is by losing it, if loss is the alchemy that dissolves the ego's literal attachments to others/things and transforms them into their symbolic gold (See the Orpheus tale), then the digital world has a problem with soul.

Is a symptomatic expression of this problem to be seen in the fact that porn is one of the largest money-makers on the internet? In digital space does Eros become pornography?

4- Fascination, the glitter of the new and the expectations engendered by what is even on the way as newer, distracts us from the call of the uncanny. Technological civilization married to capitalist greed would fill the gap with appetites that remain unsatisfied, with a hunger that starves the capacities of memory and imagination.

In a recent conversation with my good friend and colleague Michael Sipiora, he posed this question:

' Why is the media full of stories about Bill Cosby's admittedly horrible exploits while Ebola spreads and ISIS beheads?

I suggested in reply that the echnological world feeds the hunger from the margins. B.C. becomes the latest 'monster'. The Technological world knows the value and necessity of margins and monsters and uses it to distract us from reflection about the

uncanny character of the technological world. As distraction it says to us, "The monster on the margins is not us." We are in the center (or depending on the issue could be. We could be one of the next rich ones for example). Distracted the center is strengthened.

Distracted we never begin to ask what the monster on the margins might say to us. We become deaf to the possibility that the voice from the margins might carry what is hidden in the uncanny.

This motif in fact lies at the heart of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Her story is an earlier primer at the early stages of the technological world for how to create a monster. Madison Ave has amplified that primer!