

**Digital Dreams Conference,
Newcastle upon Tyne, 1994
*Peter Dunn, The Art of Change***

Introduction:

These notes are not a true record of what I actually said because, I spoke about the work using slides and discussed the broader implications, for the most part, without referring directly to notes - it was spoken, not read. So what you see here is in some cases a summary, and where I did refer to notes or previously published writings these have been included.

I began by outlining some of the essential differences between the practices and context that Loraine Leeson and I had been involved with in *The Docklands Community Poster Project* (1980- 90) and those we are currently engaged in at *The Art of Change* (1990-present). Docklands was about direct campaigning, using 18ft x 12ft billboards, posters, leaflets, major river events like the 'People's Armada to Parliament' which involved over two thousand people taking to boats as a cultural event and political act. We were part of a campaign network with representatives of the tenants and action groups in Docklands forming the majority membership of our Co-op structure. There was a direct and relatively uncomplicated fusion between our visual practice and our politics. It was however a product of the conditions of the time; the coherence of the Docklands communities in opposition to a naked attack by government upon their living conditions and future potential; the fact that we had a long standing relationship with both the political and cultural networks in the area; and last but not least, the political and financial support of Greater London Council until its abolition. Post abolition and faced with a third term Thatcher government, the situation changed markedly. The Docklands campaign itself faded, funding was drastically reduced. We were faced with the choice of simply winding up or radically transforming our practice in order to generate sufficient income to continue. This gave rise to quite a fundamental question: can one earn money - in our case more than fifty percent of our running costs - and continue to maintain and develop a critical practice. We had also learned concretely (although we had recognised it before intellectually) how conditions in places like Docklands are the result, not only of National and International forces, but how increasingly they are affected by their nexus in 'time zones' and the 'Digital Highways' that criss-cross the globe.

What follows are some moments on the journey to develop that new practice - a change which coincided with 'going digital' - and the issues raised.

The Slides

1. Digital Highways, Local Narratives

"Digital Highways are the Corporate lines of communication that criss-cross the globe, spanning time zones, national boundaries and cultures. They link the financial centres of the world, dealing in electronic money transfer, carrying the information and value systems of multinational culture. Along these nodes of power come the technological hardware, the "Fordist" business practices and the steel and concrete infrastructures that support them. In short, they have a profound impact upon the communities and work places that immediately surround their nexus points and have a ripple effect in terms of the development or underdevelopment upon whole regions of the globe.

The perspectives of the Digital Highway are those of a minority, but a very powerful and increasingly internationalised one. They are undemocratic in their operations yet exert a major influence upon the democratic institutions and "free markets" of many nations. There is no place for the needs and concerns of local identities, disenfranchised minorities (or majorities for that matter), for non-western thinking, for difference of any kind. Its whole ethos is that of Western Modernism. And far from being "dead" as some Post-Modernists claim, it is currently engaged in major projects of Regeneration in cities around the world. To paraphrase Habermas, Modernism may be dead but, behind the facades of post-modernist architecture and techno-hype, it is certainly dominant."
Peter Dunn 1990

The Digital Highways Installation: a collaboration between Peter Dunn & Loraine Leeson and Canadian artists Karl Beveridge & Carole Conde, shown at the Agnes Etherington Gallery, Kingston, Ontario, Canada in April/May 1991.

The installation ran the whole length of a 60ft x 40ft gallery, using the two end walls to represent 'terminals' in London and Toronto (previous works by Beveridge, Conde, Dunn & Leeson were shown along the side walls). The 'terminals' were joined by a laser beam flanked by live TV monitors showing current stock market information and a pixel moving message board spelling out "EXCHANGE". Counter pointing this on the floor, like the SLOW signs on a road, where the words "USE" and reversed out of white dashes across the floor where, alternately, "resist" "transform", "transform" "resist".

This slide shows **Digital Highway - London Terminal; 'The confusion of Tongues'** Montages produced by means digital imaging software on computer, enlarged photographically to 9ft x 12ft, hand coloured with acrylic glazes.

This work borrows its metaphor from Bruegel's "Tower of Babel" , and as Bruegel placed his tower within his own contemporary setting, so our tower is placed on the site of Canary Wharf. Today, the 'confusion of tongues' are the meta-languages of information technology, the social and economic stratification which means that different social groups have totally different terms of reference - they don't 'speak the same language' . Added to that is the continuous erasure of one partially grasped impression by another as the media rolls on to another 'current affair'. The thrust of the work is not anti-technological, on the contrary - in keeping with the theme, the major part of this installation utilises computer technology and represents an experiment in new Digital Photography techniques - rather it raises questions about its use. The Gulf War began when we were in the process of producing this work. As the differing practices of imperialism - the early 20th century model of military annexation, and the late 20th Century one of economic domination - faced each other in the desert, we were reminded that the original Tower of Babel

was sited on the banks of the Euphrates, yet its 'story' is communicated to us through the 'Western tradition'. And when some Tory politicians described the BBC as the Baghdad Broadcasting Corporation because they believed we, the British public, were getting too much information about what was happening in Iraq, then this obviously became an important element of the work.

The representational tradition of the Tower of Babel sites the tower itself in the background, emphasising its scale against a dwarfed landscape with its uppermost reaches rising above the clouds. Its winding structure usually contains narratives of work. In the foreground you see the rulers and task-masters, and the 'confusion of tongues' is dramatised here by a rhetoric of gestures among those surrounding them. In our interpretation, we split foreground and background into two sections. The backdrop contains the tower, foregrounded by a column of microwave dishes beaming their messages in all directions. In front of this stands a free-standing console of monitors and computers showing a selection of images from news broadcasts during the second week in February - the Gulf, Palestinians, Advertisements for London's Docklands, the Birmingham Six, the bombing of London rail stations, the UN, and an array of prominent leaders currently on the 'world stage'. Reclining under the tables of these 'consoles' are images of homeless people from Cardboard City, from work by Phil Wolmuth and David Hoffman who work with homeless people (we wouldn't presume to take such pictures ourselves without being engaged). The sound that goes with this involved the weaving in and out of four simultaneous tracks, a 'babble', taken from these news broadcasts with the music of 'Mars: bringer of war' from Holst's Planet Suite starting off quietly and eventually drowning everything else out. At this point the sound and lighting goes off and slides are projected over it ~ events and demonstrations organised by local tenants' and action groups in Docklands, notably the "People's Armada to Parliament". This lasts for six minutes and then the cycle begins again.

2: *West Meets East*, Textile/photographic montage displayed as a 16ft x 12ft Photo-mural 1992. *West Meets East* was produced in collaboration with pupils and teachers from Central Foundation School for Girls, Bow, East London. Working with a class of Bengali girls, the project explored the theme of their experience of living in two cultures. The central part of the image shows hands, decorated as for a marriage, joining material from the two cultures through a sewing machine. The sewing machine however is a problematised symbol, since it is often the means of oppression for Bengali women, working in the sweat-shops locally. The border, constructed in textiles by the pupils, contains a combination of Western and Eastern imagery and words in Bengali and English. The Photo-mural toured The Art of Change bill-board sites. A touring exhibition in two languages was produced to document the project.

3 The following two images were a straight commission, and in some senses using a very traditional format - that of the 'history painting' - however, they were produced digitally, using a combination of historical photographs, drawings, and 'hand colouring' using a digital pen. They were then scanachromed at a large scale onto canvas.

3a. History Panel 1, Jack Dash House, digital wall hanging 1993. Size 14ft 6ins x 9ft. This is the first in a series of wall hangings for the Council Chamber of Jack Dash House, the Neighbourhood Centre for the Isle of Dogs in London's Docklands. The hangings take the form of 'windows' through which we glimpse something of the history of the docks and dock workers, featuring Jack Dash the famous dockers' leader and others who have helped shape our past and present. This image features moments from the early part of the century: the campaigns of *The East London Federation of Suffragettes*, *George Lansbury* and the 'Dockers' Tanner' strike with Ben Tillet speaking.

3b History Panel 2, Jack Dash House, , digital wall hanging 1993. Size 14ft 6ins x 9ft. This is the second in a series of wall hangings for the Council Chamber of Jack Dash House, the Neighbourhood Centre for the Isle of Dogs in London's Docklands. This image features Jack at different moments in his life, working on the docks, becoming a union leader, and retired - but ever active, as a painter, writer and poet, as well as continuing to campaign on many issues. He lived as he urged us all to in his poem *Time : Time is now, use it!*

4 :*Celebrating the Difference*. Digital montage displayed as a 16ft x 12ft photomural 1994.

This was produced in collaboration with pupils and art teacher, Richard Crawford, at George Greens School on the Isle of Dogs. Working with a class of year 11 pupils, the project dealt with issues of culture and identity, commonality and difference in an inner city area fraught with racial tension during the period of the BMP's attempts to secure an electoral victory, which they subsequently lost. The Photomural was launched on The Art of Change bill-board site on the Isle of Dogs and toured other sites throughout 1994. It is now housed in the school.

5. Tricks of the Trade

This is an Interactive CD ROM project comprising both still and moving images, music, poetry, stories and verbal and textual information. It concerns the roles of 'trickster' figures that have emerged as symbols of resistance in the folklore of Afro-Caribbean peoples in the Diaspora of the slave trade and colonialism. The central figure is Anansi the spider who - whilst being one of the smallest and weakest creatures in the forest - uses wit and guile to achieve its ends against even the most powerful. Anansi takes many forms, sometimes half human, and has connections with the 'Rude Boy' of contemporary Caribbean popular culture and oral/musical story-telling forms such as 'toasting' and Rap. The tactics of Anansi mark a sharp contrast to Spiderman, the western hero of Marvel Comics who achieves his ends through superior force and technological supremacy.

The 'Front end' image itself is designed to be a "tricky" image (a rebus), having an immediate visual impact but using various layers of representation and 'strings of narratives' that can be unpicked along the web of the Diaspora (both historically and geographically). It needs to be seductive on the surface but its meanings elusive, designed to incite curiosity and raise questions - a key and teaching pack is provided both to "deconstruct" the existing image and to create new work around related themes. This project is currently being piloted in a school in East London. Certain projects encourage students to contribute to a growing structure of "narrative webs" around the image/poster in the classroom, radiating out along walls, across ceiling or floor (i.e. the images/materials produced can be "pegged" to lines; 'strings of narratives' can radiate outwards or run around radially). There is also an advanced study guide planned for use in Higher Education contexts.

ToT1 The visual elements were originated using conventional photography (medium format) and collected from photo-archives, scanned in and electronically manipulated and montaged in Photoshop, on an Apple Macintosh Computer. The final version was run out as a 10" x 8" transparency (and as 35mm slide as seen here) then enlarged to an A0 poster. This medium is not only relevant to our own development, having used photomontage for a number of years now, it is also appropriate to the content of the image - the montaging of cultural forms within the Diaspora, culminating (in this instance) with the high-tech rap gig, incorporating giant video screens and world wide simultaneous satellite transmission (as in events such as Band Aid and Live Aid). But perhaps more importantly, it allows further translation onto CD-ROM, so that the "strings of narratives" mentioned above can be accessed in an interactive process. What this means is that the image itself becomes the front end access to a large data base of other materials - other images, moving and static; text and sound - that are activated by "touching" parts of the image. This may be used not only to explain, expand and deconstruct the references that we have placed within the image but also to suggest projects and invite users to contribute their own ideas and even images (if there was a scanner or light pen connected). The details below are the 'hot-spots' which activate the narrative strings and indicate the issues explored there.

Detail ToT 2 This is Anansi RapAttack - utilising the spider motif in the dance - Anansi taken into the Western Urban context is streetwise, a tricky "public enemy". The issue of "positive images" is raised - why is it that positive images of black people are predominantly in the area of entertainment or sport; is it because these are spheres where one can be a "public enemy" and part of the system at the same time? The history of Rap can be traced back, through toasting, sounding, signifying, to the Ashante rite of passage where one was allowed to insult the elders, but in a ritualised rhythmic form.

Detail ToT 3 This is the TradeAid Trickster - who is he? Who benefits from aid? In his right hand are the crops which dominate post-imperial economies: Sugar, Tea/coffee, tobacco. The figure turns and hold out a hand, changing its face - in doing so it steps out of the video and onto the stage (the "spectre at the feast") - and in its had is a bandaid.

Detail ToT 4 Shows the whole "Mega Video Screen" from the stage set. In the centre are the effects of tourism/cultural imperialism (the Golden Stool Hotel - the Golden Stool of Ashente contained

the soul of the nation). To the right is a logging truck, taking away the hardwoods; deforestation - the results of economic imperialism. It drives in front of a sugar plantation - another example of western needs (and post slavery) dominating third world economies.

Detail ToT 5 Tricksters "hiding" in the rain forest. Top left is Durer's "St. George as a wildman" - relates to myths of the "Green Man" - embedded in the Tree trunk is Esu Elegba - The Yoruba monkey trickster god - and to his right Tarzan/Greystoke - the "noble savage" /ape-man of western popular culture. Bottom left and bottom right are, respectively, Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit from the famous plantation stories - in the original, more hard hitting stories, the Rabbit represents the slave and the Fox the master.

Detail ToT 6 In the foreground are slavers being taken from their village. Behind them is the Empire Windrush, the famous ship that brought immigrant "guest workers" from the West Indies to Britain in the 50's. Across the water along the Western skyline is situated Tate & Lyle Sugar Co., and next to it the Tate Gallery (to situate the relationship of our major cultural institutions to their 'roots') Above this looms Spider Man - the (spider) spirit of the West.

Detail ToT 7 The shadow of the West; entwined in the web is Turner's "Slavers, throwing overboard the dead and the dying". Turner painted this about a real incident when slaves were thrown overboard to claim insurance for "damaged cargo". He exhibited it to great controversy to coincide with the International Convention on Slavery held in London. Ruskin later owned the painting but it "haunted him" (according to his journals) after he had defended a friend who had put down a slave rebellion in Maudant Bay - he later sold the painting. His public writing about the painting makes few references to the subject matter even though he was privately obsessed with it. Behind this image would be other works which refer to slavery or slaves (e.g. Manet's Olympia) both historically and contemporary works dealing with the heritage of slavery, racism or post-colonialism.

6. Between Family Lines is a collaborative project between *The Art of Change* and *Cultural Partnerships* with the support of *Women Against Fundamentalism*.

" It focuses on the essential flaw within the idea that the family is the paradigm of virtue. This "family", with its family life and family values is spoken of as if it is a neutral, self-evident concept, and everything that deviates from it is implicitly negative. We believe this thesis needs to be refuted and we wished to explore "other" family structures and see how values stem from them. The result is a lively, combative and celebratory multi -media installation using constructed imagery, photography, poems, songs and conversation. In this way we wish to support women in making links across culture, through difference and between family lines. The work depicts aspects of women's daily lives, their stories, their beliefs, their aspirations and concerns. We show the obstacles they face alongside expressions of their cultures . We see many faces and hear many voices. The whole installation illustrates numerous facets of the idea of family and shows how rich its manifestations can be. The work is across cultures and provides an opportunity to celebrate diversity and, as such, confronts the rise of fundamentalism, fascism and racism. The form of the work is a series of interweaving portraits- representations of women's lives through documentation of the 'objects' that hold meaning for them and which bear a special relationship to that turning point in their personal development each has experienced - snapshots, clothing, home or familiar environments, souvenirs, books, writings, memorable songs, poetry and music - backed up by interviews and live recordings. It is an evocative rather than 'documentary' exploration of the 'watershed' each woman has experienced in her life. From the perspective of the present and using the material of the past, the imagery incorporates the information that each woman would choose to pass on into the future for the next generation".

They worked with **Kiranjit Aluwalia** - an Indian Hindu, **Dena Attar** - a Sephardi Jew, **Kulwinder Buller** - an Indian Sikh, **Ann Rossiter** - an Irish woman and **Sara Tabrizi** - an Iranian. They all chose or were forced to leave their domestic situation and have since gone on to create a new family structure for themselves.

The main component of the installation is a four-projector tape/slide show, accompanied by a series of exhibition panels based on sequences from the audio-visual work, using electronic imaging processes. A video version of the tape/slide production will soon be available for distribution.

The slides are from an exhibition accompanying the installation.

BFL 1. Sara Sara has been in exile for many years, she is an outspoken critic of the regime in Iran and campaigns for women's rights. She is also angry that her Iranian culture has almost disappeared under the weight of the Islamic Republic.

BFL 2. Dena Dena was made an outcast because she complained - her brothers were given all the choices she wasn't, she couldn't have her own friends, she was not allowed to have choices. She would not and could not conform to her father's rigid view of how she must lead his way of life.

BFL 3 Kiranjit Kiranjit was subjected to 10 years of the most vicious domestic violence and then had 3 years of imprisonment for eventually killing her husband. The pressures placed upon her in her marriage and the issues she was silent over throughout her experiences all have their roots in her cultural framework.

BFL 4. Ann Ann decided rebellion was the only way open to her at an early age at school where she fought against the nuns. She has been a political activist ever since, concentrating on fighting for abortion rights for all women.

BFL 5. Kulwinder Kulwinder saw herself as an artistic person at the age of 5. Her family married her to a stranger as a very young girl and sent her overseas - alone. Her strong creative spirit was only ever seen as a problem by her family and then by her domineering

7. Challenging Public Art: a public art strategy for the Bethnal Green City

Challenge area.

This work was a two month consultancy for Bethnal Green City Challenge to provide them with a public arts strategy for the area. The sites we chose to visualise, represent a Phase One Prioritisation from over sixty sites discussed in the report, together with an overall strategy for consultation processes, financing and infrastructural networks. The slides are an example of how digital imagery can be used to simulate how an environment might be transformed by proposals, as means of consultation and debate.

The text here is edited highlights from section 2 of the report *Sites & Sights*.

CPA 2.1: Gateway Bishopsgate/Brushfield St.

We envisage the corner feature itself to be a free standing work, dealing with the corner space, the form perhaps indicating an embracing gesture towards Broadgate then pointing or leading into Brushfield St. It could even have a lesser follow on element sited further into Brushfield St. We believe an abstract or schematic approach might be suitable for the overall form of the piece but with indications of local cultural references included in the detail. Such an approach might make an interesting reference to the large monumental and predominantly abstract works in Broadgate whilst embodying the more intimate and culturally specific iconography within the City Challenge area (perhaps referencing some of the motifs used at the junction with Brick Lane - see 2.3). Such a piece could also contain in its centre an embellished profile map, with the embracing gesture reaching overhead to provide some shelter from the rain; thus uniting the functional with the symbolic.

This feature should also be surrounded by and incorporated into a broader environmental scheme both at the corner and into Brushfield St., encompassing the car park which is currently faced with ugly hoardings. We would recommend lots of greenery here, replacing the hoardings with trees or hedges, perhaps with tubs or tree planting onto the broad paved area at the corner as additional backdrop or shelter to the corner feature.

CPA 2.2 Brushfield-Fournier St Corridor.

2.2b Poor lighting has been identified as a problem along this route, as well as the need for some repeated signing elements to identify the route. Both these issues could be addressed we believe by commissioning light works for this route.

2.2d Another approach would be to utilise the traditional floor feature of skylights for basements or cellars; one could replicate their structure but use back-lighting to highlight stained-glass, image motifs. This would be especially appropriate for Fournier St were any wall lighting or non-traditional standard lighting would be out of keeping with the listed buildings. The theme we think appropriate for this journey through Brushfield and Fournier Streets would be one of migrants/migration, utilising the iconography of the different immigrant groups who have inhabited this area, possibly incorporating short pieces of text; prose or poetry in different

languages. Joint funding for this might also come from the lighting dept of the Borough if the need for improved lighting is accepted by them. It might be possible to get sponsorship of materials from glass manufactures. There is also a lighting/sign firm on the corner of Brushfield St who might be approached.

CPA 2.3 Junction of Fournier St and Brick lane.

Our recommendation for this key site is a major public artwork involving the two gable ends and front fencing, conceived as a continuous piece running out from the walls and culminating at the gates. This work should read as a visual Welcome to Brick Lane , not in words (though we would not exclude the use of such words) but as a visual landmark. This would involve the building of specially designed fencing as part of the artwork. Anu Patel is an artist who has done such work on fencing based on the Bengali tradition of paper cutting in which animal or floral motifs are chiselled through several sheets simultaneously, giving the final product a serial frieze-like effect. In this context such cut-outs could be produced in sheet metal on the fencing and as large profile-cut wooden structures on the gable ends. These could be painted or monochrome. There are two other traditions which could be drawn upon here; the practice of tying objects onto temple fences and the kind of arches and ephemeral structures used for Bangladeshi weddings - practitioners of this activity could be teamed up with an artist in the design stage. The flow from gable ends to fence could produce interesting effects of scale and rhythm, resulting in a spectacular introduction to the Brick Lane corridor. It should be lit at night.

CPA 2.6 Subway at Aldgate East and station.

2.6a The primary intention here should make the experience of the subway exciting, rather than boring or oppressive as it is now. It could take the theme of arrival , with reference both to the many waves of immigrants but also links with the Docks through trade in textiles, spices, and out to the world's seaways. Since the subway is physically situated underground, one could feature this as a kind of Aladdin's cave depicting caverns and tunnels containing tableaux from important events, an archaeology of different layers of history. One could also use the space playfully, picturing holes in the ceiling to show the traffic going overhead and gaps with glimpses of things happening on the streets. Such images could be produced digitally and aerosonically sprayed, laminated into a resilient Formica-like material and fitted to the walls in panels. Sound could also be used here (from oral history archives) voices of arrival , together with various kinds of music. Lighting should also be improved.

CPA 2.7 The Brick Lane, Gateway and Corridor.

CPA 2.7b ' Flag-stones'.

We have recently discovered an old East London custom - grotto day - that has a parallel on the Indian sub-continent (in Tamil it is called Kolam, in Hindi it is Rangoli, and the Bengali form is Alpona - mainly practised by women). In the East London version children used stones and shells and other items to create patterns and motifs on the floor and, in a similar vein to penny for the guy , collected money for their efforts. In the Indian sub-continent floor decorations using coloured sand and range of objects are used for both sacred purposes and, more popularly, to welcome people into a space. Both forms are intended as temporary and are cleared away afterwards. We believe a fusion of these traditions could be enabled in conjunction with local schools, and organisations like Oxford House, Chisenhale, the Whitechapel Art Gallery and Atlantis Gallery, to produce more permanent floor decorations. As part of schools projects and educational outreach projects, the elements could be composed within pre-determined templates, the size and thickness of a flagstone, and fixed in colour-stained concrete or some other suitable base, then sealed in resin and topped with a transparent polycarbonate. Each finished piece could then replace flagstones at appropriate intervals. The advantage of such an approach is that it would not impede movement, which is a problem with any other kind of street furniture on Brick Lane. Such a project has enormous educational potential, as well as providing something unique in public art terms.

CPA 2.7c Repeated Elements; Wall pieces.

Along Brick Lane and its surrounding areas can be seen many crumbling and almost obliterated motifs on the walls immediately above the ground floor, often just above the shop signs. They are frequently the faint traces of occupation by preceding immigrant groups. We can see here the

potential for another enabling/educational project, perhaps co-ordinated by the artist in residence at the Heritage Centre, involving taking castings and rubbings from such traces and culminating in the production of new or reconstructed wall pieces to create a visual and visible archaeology of cultures who have inhabited the area. These final products could either be those produced directly by the participants or they could be later refined and edited by the co-ordinating artist/s.

CPA 2.14. Bethnal Green Station and adjoining arch.

Currently this is a rather grim place, especially after dark. Most women we have spoken to in the area avoid using this station after dark if they can. The arch is in a rather dilapidated condition, its underside is deep and poorly lit. It could however, be a very interesting site for public art transformation, relating the three elements - the entrance threshold, the crossing over (bridge), with embarkation (platform). One might approach British Rail for match funding. Because of its strategic position, it would be good pilot for the kind of arch treatments we are recommending elsewhere.

Having discussed how our work operates in a specific practice I would like now to address some of the broader issues raised by the conference, particularly that of the power relations of 'the digital dream'.

The Digital Dream meets the Colonial Time/Space Continuum

The 'Western Tradition' of art and culture has inscribed within it, on both a representational and philosophical level, a notion of correct distance.

On the representational level this is manifested most clearly in the development of perspective during the Renaissance, through to issues of focal length and depth of field in lens based media used today. On a philosophical level this concerns ideas about 'objectivity' in observation and the inscribing of disciplinary boundaries - the 'purity of the field' - elaborated during the Enlightenment. In our own times this concept has also come to embrace the negotiation of distance between the fledgling ego and its image, between infant and mother, during the "mirror stage" in psychological discourse and, in anthropological study, between the 'home culture' and the "culture of study".

In other words "correct distance" is a concept applied to the space between our feelings, drives etc and our "self-representation" in the development of consciousness, and the distance between us - of the cultural West - and them - the cultural other of 'primitive' or non Western cultures in the development of Civilization.

In this view, the further one travels from the centre (of empire/ or ego consciousness) the more 'backward' or 'primitive' are the technologies and peoples or, in psychological terms, the drives and impulses. This is even more marked in Freud with the division between Ego and Id. Whilst some these metaphors may be largely discredited within their fields today, they have become part of our culture.

Space - distance from the centre - is equated with time - evolutionary development. Thus, by travelling to the main US cities, New York or L.A. we travel into the future (Britain no longer being the centre of Empire) and by travelling to the third world we travel into the past.

It is no accident therefore that this Colonial Time-Space Continuum and the conflation of technological with psychological "intelligence" is the basis of much racism, both conscious and unconscious.

And again It is no accident that these two, the psychological inner and cultural outer, are conflated so that fear of the unknown, the dark regions of the unconscious, have been projected upon far flung regions of the globe - 'Darkest Africa' for example. Or that the "threat" to the home culture by the "invasion" or "contamination" of these cultural others is so irrationally and passionately represented by fascists and their supporters. Indeed, it may be argued that Fascism is simply an extreme manifestation of the culturally ingrained anxieties that we, in the West, feel to varying degrees when confronted with the cultural other; an unconscious racism.

The question of "correct distance" also confronts those peoples who are emerging from a colonial past, but in reverse. In the emergence of a new culture how does one negotiate a distance, not only from the ex-colonial power, but also from a perceived 'nativist' past; how does one renew a culture that is neither neo-colonial nor nostalgically 'ethno-primitivist'. The result is frequently a fusion; hybrid.

The old colonialism's maintained their control through communications networks; first roads and seaways then, following the industrial revolution, through railways, air-routes, telegraph and telephone. As these changes took place so did the representations of peoples 'on the edges of the known world'. Ancient cartographers depicted strange monsters and 'savages'; modern depiction's acknowledge humanity but as degraded victims of famine or 'underdevelopment'.

Now that we have moved into the era of Digital Highways, ¹ and virtually instantaneous communications networks, does this affect the old colonial time-space continuum?

In one sense it must, but it takes time for mass cultural consciousness to assimilate such major changes and we are only on the threshold, with a small minority directly experiencing these changes. Which raises the very old and crucial question - that of access. And it is here that the old colonial structures still apply; not only is it a matter of

¹. For further information on the concept of "Digital Highways" see *Digital Highways, Local Narratives*, Peter Dunn (AND magazine No 27 1992 London). It also represents the title of an installation produced by Peter Dunn & Loraine Leeson in collaboration with Carole Conde and Karl Beverage in Kingston Ont. Canada, in May '91: see Ten 8 Vol 2 No 2 Digital Dialogues.

economic power, it is also a question of geography and 'time zones'. The new technologies rely upon the old infrastructures to support them. So while the Digital Highways may criss-cross the globe - albeit with 'relay stations' in far-flung areas of the world - it is still the old colonial power structures which determine where these will be and who has access.

It is this infrastructure which is the hardware, and the ideology of the Colonial Time Space Continuum is the operating system.

So when we are discussing different approaches in the use of digital technology for social change, we frequently end up talking about the differences between applications - I'm talking metaphorically here - In other words we don't give sufficient attention to either the hardware or the suppositions of the operating system - ie the Colonial Space/Time Continuum.

(And we have to remind ourselves that the 'freedom of the Internet' is only temporary - like the freedom of the airwaves at the birth of radio - it is contested ground were the multinationals are itching to take control. What we have now is only a window and we should use it wisely.)

I believe it is crucial therefore that we stay alert to the larger picture, to the interactivity beyond the screen - social interactivity - because if we don't, the windows of opportunity for making changes will gradually be greyed out, leaving us stranded in a virtual wasteland of illusory choices and false promises.

Local Narratives

Here I want to talk about the importance of "local narratives". "Local narratives", as opposed to the "Grand narrative" claims of International Modernism in art, Multinational Economics and its Corporate Culture.

"Local narratives" - not just defined by geography but as the specificity of what it is like to be working class in this society, to be a woman, to be black, a person of colour, to be gay, to be differently abled.

"Local Narratives", in other words, as the voices of all those suppressed and marginalised - defined as 'other' - by the arrogant claims and practices of the greatest and most pernicious cultural imperialism the world has ever seen.

And it's not just The West which is responsible for this - though it has a lot to answer for - we are now witnessing the results of decades of suppressed "Local Narratives" in the Soviet Union, and in many other parts of the world. Whether or not we are comfortable with what they have to say, we ignore them at our peril.

Unless this Grand Narrative arrogance is at the very least blunted, then it will not just be the many rich and diverse cultural narratives that will become extinct but the countless biological narratives that sustain life on our planet.

In short, opposition to this regimen is not simply about the ideological differences or the opposing aesthetics of elite art movements, it could well turn out to be the crucial factor in a life and death struggle for the future of our planet.

These technologies also create.....

A New Visibility

Baudrillard has talked about a consciousness wrapped in a 'screen' of images from television, film, advertising billboards, magazines, computer games etc - our memory and imagination is coloured by these countless images that dangle on our association chains - when we look at something, or think of something we see it through this memory screen, coloured - some would say polluted - by these 'borrowed images'. We are witnessing an invasion of the memory snatchers - a shift from the corporeal to the corporate.

Virilio has described the 'viral images' that survey us in supermarkets, on the streets gated YUPPIE ghettos on the gentrified waterfronts that have mushroomed at the centre of our ravaged inner-cities. And these are just by-products of the even more sophisticated military and police surveillance systems. We are rapidly developing countless mini "Strategic Defence Initiatives" in all of our commercial, social and domestic spaces.

This omnipresent gaze, doesn't communicate anything to us, except to tell us we are being watched. It is a one way relationship. Like a spot-light it illuminates us as form - the one dimensional shadow of potential threat - but in content it refuses to illuminate. It does not communicate, it contaminates.

He describes this as "blind gaze" or "gazeless vision" as viral images, as a logical extension of the Western Gaze, or the "Vivisection Gaze" Michael Foucault analysed so well in the Birth of the Clinic - "the medical gaze is in reality the scientific gaze of the West. And it can only lead to the vision machine. A closed circuit".

And where do we fit into this closed circuit? Computers do these systematised tasks much quicker, and they are getting faster all the time. We get replaced and we are replaceable. That has always been the object of Fordism - as the maximisation of productive profit with the minimisation of labour costs - but now we are, as human beings, enclosed in a regime of temporality that is rapidly being superseded.

However, it is important to remember that this is only - for the time being at least - within certain systematised tasks that this is the case. Neither do I agree with the "saturation despair" of Baudrillard; we still have room for manoeuvre.

There are ways that we can turn some of these developments to our advantage. Suffice it to say - putting aside for the moment the prospect of major ecological disaster or the collapse of Capitalism - that Digital Imaging will have at least as profound an impact upon our culture in the coming century as optical imaging has had in this.

And if we are to remain visible within this 'New Visibility' then, like it or not, that is a future we have to engage.

Beyond Deconstruction

A lot of artists and other cultural theorists and practitioners in the 70s and early 80s talked about the necessity to 'deconstruct' these mass-media images and indeed there was a whole genre or work around it. And it's still important to continue to deconstruct, critically, in order to see how those signifying systems change and adapt. But 'deconstruction' on its own is not enough, it so often leads to another academic pursuit which - although it may be grounded in popular culture - nevertheless ends up as just another genre within elite art circles. We need to move beyond that.

We exist and operate in a variety of communities. In our daily lives we engage with interconnected and overlapping spheres of discourse; a web of different communication forms and channels. It is within this web that the issues of power and privilege, oppression and dispossession are played out.

This is not just a 'microcosm' of the larger forces at work elsewhere, it is the point of impact - the cutting edge - where the abstractions of the "Digital Highways" and "Grand Narratives" are realised in their material and subjective effects upon our daily lives. I think it was Brecht who said 'The great universal dramas of human existence are all enacted upon local stages'

Raymond Williams said : "Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community". If we believe that then culture is the site where the struggle to create a kind of society we want will be won or lost; Digital Dreams or Digital Nightmares.

Dreams don't come true simply by wishing. They come true by building networks of power. And like Foucault I believe that power is not just based on social consent guaranteed by class or state ideology but by social regimens; technical control that 'disciplines' our behaviour (indeed our bodies) directly and materially.

Let's learn the lessons of that last great dreaming - in the 60s when people thought that the 'immersable representations' of sex and drugs and rock festivals would bring about the revolution. They awoke to find that the world had moved on, leaving revolution on the record shelves.

Immersable technologies and the Internet do offer extra-ordinary promises - but they are also capable of creating the greatest opiate the world has ever seen.