

Maintaining a Leisure Fugue: An Ecofeminist Voice About Leisure and Technology

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Introduction

Schole — the title of this journal and the Greek word for leisure — exemplifies leisure as virtue, learning, ethical citizenship, and goodness. Historically, leisure provided a means to improve society, to better the lives of individuals, and to enhance moral development. Recently, leisure has been advocated as a basic, human right. Leisure, a complex phenomena, is both a personal choice of freedom and socially determined and constructed. Leisure encompasses dialectical potentials: improving the quality of life and engaging in destructive activities; providing avenues for resistance and reproducing hegemonic practices and structures. Leisure is a moral concept and practice and, as such, demands ethical discourse about content and medium.

Almost thirty years ago, McLuhan (1965) argued that it is important to understand the personal and social consequences of any technology and how it, through merging content and medium, shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. McLuhan was one of the first to address the invisible but powerful effects of technology on daily life. Technology sends ripples of changes throughout the world and over generational time periods. Therefore, it must be understood within its social, cultural and political contexts. The history of industry and technology suggests that the lives of a few people are enhanced over the degradation of the majority of people. Technological progress has been a tool for justifying the free market, for colonial domination and exploitation of non-Western primitive societies, and for the manipulation and exploitation of our natural biological environments (Wimsatt & Schank, 1988). In 1995, more than 800 million human beings were unemployed or underemployed in the world. Currently, re-structuring and downsizing are permanently eliminating whole job categories. A growing number of destitute and desperate human beings are creating a vast new criminal subculture at the edge of the industrial and high-tech global village (Rifkin, 1995).

All governments assume that progress is the natural desirable state and that it is measured in terms of economic growth even as there is growing evidence that the Earth's biosystem is finite. The latest computer revolution is an example of the recurring fantasy that technological change itself will create the good society. Without serious argument or reflection, computer enthusiasts have heralded the advent of the personal computer as the

tool that will bring about freedom, greater equality, and a genuinely participatory democracy. However, occasions for community reflection, debate and public choices are now being relegated to polls, surveys, sound bites and invisible private forces inspired by narrowly focused economic motives. Society and the world are ill served by reducing complicated social, environmental, moral and political questions to questions of risk that need to be assessed technically.

Although I concede that technology is here to stay and brings certain advantages, I want to focus on the potential of technology, in general, and within educational processes in particular, to separate leisure practitioners from the basic, life-sustaining values of leisure. Leisure is driven increasingly by consumerism that directly exploits, degrades and detracts from natural environments and builds upon the misery of unskilled workers, especially women and children. If technology is chosen, it is chosen only when it supports and enhances relationships and life-giving interactions and with a consciousness and awareness that protects the diversity of the world. Leisure scholars and practitioners must sustain a moral language and engagement if leisure practice is to be consistent with the values of *scholē*, respectful of natural areas, and resilient through economic and political upheavals.

Ethical Perspectives

Drawing upon insights from the margins, such as ecofeminist, feminist, and African-American theorists (Collins, 1990; Donovan, 1992; Fine, 1995; Warren, 1994; Willett, 1995), ethics is re-constructed as a social activity that is central to our form of life. Ethics becomes an artistic or creative process where people intermingle shareable interpretations of responsibility and opportunities for caring and generous giving. Ethics encompasses discursive rationality (e.g., logos and language) and non-discursive elements (e.g. music, dance or emotive aspects). Ethics emerge from the messiness of ordinary life and are often articulated in traditional stories of embodied, flesh and blood people with reciprocal relationships.

The concept of self is inclusive of subjectivity, relational involvements, and embodiments of interactions and discourse. Hekmans (1995) reinterpretation of the work of Gilligan (1982) proposes that individuals develop moral voices as a function of the emergence of selfhood in relationships and that the definition of the moral realm is necessarily structured by the concept of self that informs it. Willett (1995) suggests that the original ethical relationship is between the mother and child and involves non-discursive elements of touch and play. These rhythms of social attunement are an elementary music and dance with the Other. Therefore, the ethical self begins in the diffuse intentionalities of this dance between mother and child and the fundamental terms of social exchange lie in music and dance not in logos or language. The ethical bond is nurtured and sustained with dynamic face-to-face encounters of triumphant jubilation and playful discovery. This ethical bond assumes there must be an Other and it is impossible to change places; the proximity of the Other is an attunement across differences and style. Proximity with otherness intones togetherness in differences and allows multiple voices to be heard independently and interdependently. Sociality emerges from the reciprocity of play, embraces other beings over time, and later comes to discourse or logic.

How does such an ethic inform our practice and pedagogy of leisure? First, it focuses our attention on the network or web that surrounds an individual. Second, it defines ethical practice as patterns that include both discursive and non-discursive themes. Third, it requires educational content and process that is respectful and that nourishes embodied personal experience. Finally, it highlights the necessity of creating narratives for individuals and communities of leisure with ethical themes.

Self and Community

Continuing the themes of embodiment of self, ethics and language, Gilligan (1982) proposes that, "We know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others, and that we experience relationships only insofar as we differentiate other from self" (p. 63). I am reminded of a story told in the 1960s by a professor who influenced my life profoundly. He was just beginning his career as a psychologist; late one afternoon, he was preparing to leave the mental hospital. A young woman runs toward him with outstretched arms. She was admitted earlier in a state of deep depression and virtually out of touch with reality. She stopped a short distance away from him with arms extended, almost touching his coat. Weeping, this young woman stammered out a strange question: "Please, may I touch you so I can know what I am?" Obviously, she was a very disturbed woman; however, she dramatized a great truth for us all. Each of us needs opportunities to physically and experientially touch other human beings and the natural world in order to define the self.

Touching is necessary for individuals to grow, develop and thrive. Active touch uses all of the senses at once and touch is our primary and deepest experiential mode of relating to the world. Self-recognition happens in response to touch and that is why the self is vulnerable to the deprivations and abuses of touch. When individuals harden themselves to the power of touch or find their sense of touch deadened, they become numb to the resources of touch that results in the undoing of self. We touch others and are touched by them. The most significant lifelong task for each of us is to know ourselves; to know how to relate to others; to know what to do with our lives and how to fit into the world; to know how to leisure and have fun; to know how to recognize the unique and novel of the natural world. All of these tasks can only be resolved, again and again, as we reach out and touch others, and as others reach out to us.

Individuals who touch each other become communities, cultures and societies with ethical requirements. The Japanese concept of human nature is *ningen* and the two kanji characters express a double structure of selfhood as being both individual and social. Accordingly, various social and natural environments intersect the embodied spatiality of human existence. The self is embedded in space, social interactions, and natural forces. The personal narrative becomes communal as it reflects the daily behavioural patterns, non-discursive and discursive elements, emotive forces, and political, cultural, and economic structures. Ethical practice becomes located, not with the individual, but in community, in the natural world, and selves in relationship. The Greek word *ethos* that gave rise to ethics was always a practice or a way of being. Good *ethos* was a man, at that time, who was

practicing freedom or the ability to give oneself the rules of law, the techniques of management. Ethos, or the practice of self, would allow games of power to be played with a minimum of domination. Ethics is a discourse and a practice (Heckman, 1995). Traditionally, culture supplied individuals with an ethical language but the current failure to provide such an ethical language game is a result of the disenchantment and disengagement of the modern world that has left a new generation to choose ethics without social guidance.

Ethics may be pluralistic in nature but they are not necessarily inflexible or arbitrary. Ethics are grounded in communal narratives and furnish clear standards and concrete values. They provide a definition of who the members are and how they can act as moral agents. Pluralism provides the opportunity to examine and critique various positions and make visible hegemonic forces, systems of oppression, environmental exploitation, and forms of resistance. Communities play and struggle to tell ethical narratives that reinforce wisdom, compassion, thoughtfulness, and respect for all our relations. The ethical narratives are nourished and revised by individuals who are embedded in the social and natural communities, materially interacting with others who present alternative interpretations, present in the flesh and blood, and actively touching and being touched.

Leisure education, therefore, is the interpenetration of practices, social history, moral discourse, natural forces, mutual critique, and personal narratives. Teaching and learning are complementary processes that require openness, play, courage, risk, challenge, dedication, experience, and enjoyment. Teaching and learning flourish when there is time and space for human beings to touch and be touched, for listening and playing face-to-face, for sensing and observing natural forces, and for quiet solitude. Skills of lifelong learning, contemplation, self-awareness and reflective dialogue as well as challenging and multiple interpretations of content are essential for a leisure education that supports spontaneous curiosity, active citizenship, and responsible environmental choices.

Epistemological Concerns

Within the feminist and post-modern traditions, knowledge is constructed, impartial, and situated (Donavan, 1992; Fine, 1995). The concept of self and community becomes intimately related to what is known, the process of knowing, and how epistemology structures moral decisions. The epistemological goal becomes creating shareable interpretations about the world around us, juggling competing and contradictory interpretations, re-affirming that all knowledge is partial and situated, and making visible value and ethical questions. Such processes are essential for mutual critique and identifying the harm in good intentions, hegemonic forces and oppressive practices as well as movements of resistance, creative and novel resolutions, and collaborative play.

The current dominant discourse is primarily created by and for men (and specifically those of European, North American heritage). The favored knowledge is factual, technical, objective, abstract, disengaged, universal and essential. Knowledge gained from distancing the observer or researcher, relying on technical steps and expertise, and applicable to many

subjects is deemed more valuable and true. Technology, itself, is a byproduct of this discourse and mirrors the values of the dominant structures and discourse. Furthermore, since the ability to develop, produce and use this technology is often in the hands of a few, very similar bits of information are produced and there is a similarity to what we see and hear. For example, news reports across several channels often repeat the very same facts and context. Further compounding this situation is the fact that African-Americans (not to mention other marginalized groups in the United States) are still struggling for a substantial and non-token presence in television. Technology commodifies rather than embodies. Recent technological mediums (television, interactive computer programs, virtual reality) are more complex than previous technological mediums (print, radio, or photographs), but they are less complicated and messy than real life. As such, the medium often portrays the information, concepts or people as distinct from the contexts, as the information or interpretation of a complex actuality, and easily bought, sold or traded:

Humans are embedded and embodied in space, history, relationships, and nature yet technology has made reality ambiguous. In fact, hyperreality is the new term that describes the difficulty of distinguishing reality from unreality (virtual reality). Virtual reality presents information in novel and entertaining ways and affects the brain similar to real experiences, while reducing the embodied interaction and messiness of life into fewer levels of experiential interactions. The end result is concentration of a few senses or talents and a general disengagement that makes invisible the other senses and talents necessary for the embodied experience. Technology transforms a thing which is symbolic and encompassing of a totality of sensory levels and affective engagement into a technically functional item that connects with fewer levels of engagement. For instance, Strong (1994) states:

the world of the hearth, its ties to the natural and cultural world, and our engagement with that many-dimensional world on bodily, cerebral, and cultural levels, is taken over by the machinery of the device—that is, the central heating plant hidden away in the basement. With this change, the warmth, the only aspect of the hearth left remaining, no longer serves as a focus for the household....The overall result of such availability with devices is disengagement. (p. 100).

Students prefer to analyze video or film clips rather than their own group work putting themselves and the real issues at distance. Cognitive abilities are emphasized over other spheres, people are desensitized to violence and its consequences, and the level of passivity of the individual is increased.

Technological hubris connects the mounds of facts, data and information to a belief that solutions and power are unlimited. However, such equations often neglect human issues such as time to interact or share stories or moral issues related to quality of life and equality of voices. Recent economic analysis indicates that the transition to an information age may leave the majority of people without meaningful jobs. Technology is silent on resolving discord among values, relationships or contexts or contributing to an increasing gulf between

the people who know and create knowledge and the people who are not a part of this particular knowledge generating process. Technology supports a disembodied knower and knowledge, isolates individual selves, and often contradicts the values of leisure related to social interaction, virtue, freedom, and access for all. Humans are now able to act and make decisions without reacting, without involvement.

Traditional African culture favors the centrality of emotion and provides an alternative context for the use of technology. "In African society, technical activities are always linked with cultural and religious activities, with art and magic...It is complete consciousness, because the subject moved and the moving object are united in an indissoluble synthesis, or as I have put it, in a dance of love" (Senghor quoted in Willett 1995, p. 210). Leisure education needs to create contexts and processes where individuals can actively construct knowledge, participate in mutual critique, and learn through an embodied attunement rather than simply accumulate information and manipulation entertainment mediums. Leisure education needs to make visible how technology for education affects some people negatively, removes more and more opportunities for them to participate in meaningful leisure, and increases the distance between people who are well-off and people who are starving. Leisure needs to privilege processes that enhance community, ritual, social interaction, ethical decisions, and spontaneous play. Multiple stories must be consistently sung as counterpoints to the universal and sameness of technology.

Relationships with the Natural World

The rise in consumerism began in the 1930s and has resulted in the proliferation of consumer items well beyond what is needed for a comfortable life. Certainly the current models of technology are adding to the same cycle as they replace models yearly, build systems that have optional items as necessities, and consume natural resources. Technology saves one resource at the cost of another. Millions of poorly paid and underemployed people in non-Western countries are degrading resources for the technology that will inhibit their entrance into a world of affluence (Rifkin, 1995).

Technology has distanced and transformed the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Humans know and connect with natural environments through stripping away the layers of societal time structures and technological devices. Individuals need to feel, hear, taste and sense the natural world; for nature is not simply a collection of natural objects but a set of processes that progressively transforms. Technology creates expectations that animals will appear like they do on television or can capture the essence from a motorized vehicle with a home video camera. Advocates propose that technology can fix natural processes maximize them to fulfill human satisfaction, or repair damaged ecosystems. These technological fixes merely produce artifacts, reduce living organisms to functional solutions, decrease the diversity and adaptability of natural systems, or eliminates the possibility of transformation in the presence of a wild, unpredictable Other.

Preserving unique features of the environment is unquestionably important but the effort will succeed only if we cultivate the ability to experience such features as meaningful

in our culture. This task will become increasingly difficult as more and more lives are being lived predominantly centered around the built environment and technology. Many more people are being alienated from the natural environment and thus are unable to reconceptualize themselves relationally with the natural world. Recognizing unique features, assuming obligations toward future generations, and protecting nature is based upon embodied relationships and through the context of traditional stories.

For human beings to know the natural world, its wildness, its unpredictability, its novelty and mystery, they must engage the natural world at all levels. This process requires the absence of not only advanced technological intermediaries but even of words. Wordlessness, silence, listening and transcending language are essential to attunement with the earth. Leisure is one of the major arenas that generates opportunities for people to play in the natural world. Leisure education must empower people to live lightly and simply with the land, adapt a deliberate practice of shedding verbal addictions, and respond to a holistic understanding of the process of life. Leisure moves individuals outside the din of human-created information so they can hear the voices of other beings, of their inner selves, which only sometimes speak in words. Leisure and pedagogical strategies must illuminate times, space and strategies for reconnecting with the natural world.

Honoring Diversity

Technology tends to homogenize and routinize experience, people, and cultures. Although a viewer can passively travel around the world in an hour video, the event will lack the particulars related to a full embodied participation. Diversity, novelty, risk, and adventure are vital for human beings and the natural world. Protecting, enhancing and sustaining these requires constant attention and consciousness to the invisible and non-linear effects of technology.

A host of ethical issues exist related to the development, production, and sales of technology. Less than one-third of the households in the United States have computers and these households represent the higher socio-economic classes. The economic ramifications of technological development has lowered the quality of living for women, changed family structures, and created unemployed and underemployed millions. In addition, technology has increased the distance between technological and traditional societies, made it more difficult for non-technological societies to access information and power related to decisions about them and their resources/environment, and created ever-increasing demands on resources. This privileging of technology and technical information has relegated the non-technological to a lower status and has further increased the disembodiment of human beings and ethical discourse.

Technology may be fascinating only to specific sexes, ages, cultures and classes. For instance, it has been far more attractive, on the average, to men than women and may reflect a gender difference related to value assessments of resources, accumulation of facts, and control of the environment. In addition, the use of technology requires an ever increasing

level of formal education and privileges the rational and logical over cultures of music, dance, and touch.

Ethical practice would suggest a daily pattern committed to sustaining natural resources, improving the welfare of all peoples, and nourishing human relationships. It would be essential that we carefully consider the ethical issues around the use of each piece of technology, make these issues visible, and clearly articulate our rationale for choosing the very tools we use in the classroom. Similar ethical issues and choices surround leisure practices that promote consumerism and consumption of natural resources over those that are grounded in simplicity and face-to-face interactions. Large shopping malls, motorized vehicle recreation, video arcades, and recreation equipment all supply employment for recreation professionals at a cost to the natural environment and people in non-Western countries. Exclusion from these pursuits has contributed to aspects of crime, destructive leisure practices, and loss of leisure for various portions of the worlds population.

Technology has increased the potential for manipulation and often distanced the people from substantial meaningful embodied discourse. For leisure to be relevant to movements of resistance and cultures navigating the tides of economic, political and social changes, processes of coalition building, ethical interactions, building trust and hope, and creating appropriate identities must be an essential ingredient of the experience. Often, these arenas are messy involving multiple agendas, differing human needs, numerous value positions, and confounding factors. Engaging in the messiness of life, tolerating and thriving in ambiguity, and developing structure in the midst of chaos will be essential for the leisure professionals of future generations. In spite of our technological increases, large number of humans are not benefiting from these advances. Similar to high priced medical technology, the leisure of today requires technological items beyond the financial wealth of most of the people in the world. If the field of leisure is to address these injustices, skills and predispositions applicable to embodied, face-to-face interactions must be developed.

Conclusion

As we approach the 21st century, the world is continuing to undergo change that is both rapid and complex. Technology has been a mixed blessing for many and a curse for most of the worlds population. My concerns go to the heart of our ethical commitments to concepts of leisure, self in human and natural communities. I would ask for a re-visiting and re-construction of the values of *scholē* as applied to todays world. Although technology has improved the quality of life in some quarters, we must be mindful that it has also degraded, destroyed and isolated. Leisure, too, has been a part of creating hegemonic systems that are oppressive, fueling consumer drives that degrade natural resources, excluding individuals who are not part of a dominant set, and turning away portions of the population who must resort to destructive leisure activities. The ability to survive and thrive in periods of change and chaos, generate structure and meaning in the midst of change and adversity, and sustain social networks is vital for leisure practice if we are to be consistent with our values and cognizant of our ability to oppress and create negative aspects of leisure. This requires

rigorous reflection, self-awareness, and commitment to change which comes with an education that increasing linguistic competencies, sensitivity to lives of other individuals, and embodied awareness of others.

Ethical leisure practice is a social activity that invites leisure practitioners to orchestrate embodied play that engenders social change, celebration of differences, and development of potentials. Following the theme of ethics as music and dance, Aaron Copland in his little book *Music and Imagination* states, "When Beethoven's music exhorts us to be noble, be compassionate, be strong, he awakens moral ideas that are already within us. His music cannot persuade; it makes evident. It does not shape conduct; it is itself the exemplification of a particular way of looking at life. A concert is not a sermon. It is a performance — a reincarnation of a series of ideas implicit in the work of art" (p. 26). Leisure education should exhort us to be noble; create practices that are compassionate; self-aware, diverse, and environmentally respectful. The leisure theme interweaves personal and communal narratives that awaken the ethical self within. Leisure exemplifies a particular ethical practice through an embodied play.

The process of composing this piece has caused me to think of more than music and art; it brought to memory those teachers who touched my life, who awakened my imagination, who enabled me to hear the multiple voices, and who inspired me to celebrate multiple realities. Like a fugue, leisure education needs to be a polyphonic composition based upon multiple themes that are enunciated by several voices in turn, subjected to contrapuntal treatment, and gradually built up into a complex form having somewhat distinct divisions. A leisure fugue focuses our teaching and learning on developing our selves in relation to other human beings and the natural world. It requires time and space to tell stories, touch and be touched, and listen to the natural world. Creating ethical leisure is about being present and embodied in the world.

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