Prospects for a Materialist Informatics: An Interview with Donna Haraway

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Lisa Nakamura questions Donna Haraway about race, speed, and the cyborg.

L In a collection of essays entitled Race and Cyberspace, that's the one co-edited with Beth Kolko and Gil Rodman, your work actually inspired us a great deal to even do this collection; inspired me in particular to focus on issues of race and cyberspace. We noted that there's a real lack of critical discourse on the cyborg as raced. Which we saw as an omission because the Cyborg Manifesto is quite clear. That's one of the dimensions of identity that you are really interested in.

D And also national issues that aren't entirely caught by the word "race." For example, the location of information workers in southeast Asia is a question not maybe always best approached through that North American category, but some sets of issues around class and position in international trade systems, and race/gender configurations that are not at all the same as in the North American context, so that the word "race" is one of many dimensions. But I agree with you that the Cyborg Manifesto tried very hard to put the cyborg in a situated context and not a universalist context.

L Right.

D You asked why the cyborg has not been discussed in terms of its specificity of relation to women of color, specific class and national circumstances and so on...

L Yes.

D I thought about that for a long time in different ways and your questions provoked it again. I think that there are many things to say about that. For example, technology, and especially so-called "high technology," is theorized in the history of philosophy, in the history of technology, in national and international politics, in terms of the relationships between two universalist categories - human and machine - as if these categories are history and cultural neutral. For example, I read a New York Times article in the "Science Times" last week, where robotics researchers at MIT were being interviewed about their latest generation of robots that can learn. These robots are discussed in terms of these universalist categories - human and machine - and neither machine nor human get the kind of situated material-

semiotic analysis that asks: What kind of relationality is going on here and for whom? What sort of humanity is being made here in this relationship with artifacts, with each other, with animals, with institutions? How do you move out of the universalist category to the situatedness of the actors, both the human and nonhuman actors? So neither human nor machine should be theorized in these universalist ways; but rather, which kinds of humanness and machineness are produced out of those sorts of material-semiotic relationships. In thinking about information worlds, or cyborg worlds, insofar as the cyborg world is a figure for information worlds, I want to know what are the specific material circumstances for the designers, the makers, the users, the marketers, the dreamers, the performers, the musicians, the public culture, the occupational health people. Who is where in these worlds, and where are the human and nonhuman actors, and what does their relationship say about world-building? So that at no point in the system are we using these pseudo-universalist categories like man and machine, or human and machine. If we do it that way questions of race and justice within an intersectional analysis of racial positioning, which also takes account of age, marital status, national location, class location - i.e., how all of that figures in interaction with both other human beings and machines - would be taken for granted from the start. You would never have to get to race from somewhere else.

L Right.

D So you're always inside complex material semiotic worlds and not inside these universal categories.

L It almost sounds like the omission of race from the cyborg discourse is symptomatic of what you're talking of in a way, which is this totalizing impulse to look at sets of categories in these exclusive ways.

D And they all rely on adjectives - you know, like race, or gender, or class, or something like that - as opposed to thinking cyborgs from the get-go in terms of their real conditions of existence, which have nothing to do with those pseudo-universal categories of human and machine. Does that make sense?

L Yes, it does. It does. It's interesting to me, given that there are so many different kinds of entities in play here that I think are being deconstructed by the cyborg, some have been taken on so enthusiastically, especially the gendered ones, and others have sort of not been.

D Yeah. Well, some communities have taken up some of the gendered stuff, but even there it seems to me that it still ends up, gender still ends up meaning women as opposed to understanding the systems of sexualized meanings and practices that run through these worlds. And that also it seems - this is kind of an aside, but I think it helps us think about the same set of questions - there is a way of thinking about any technology that has the same baleful effects as these universal categories of human and machine, and that is thinking in terms of costs and benefits. And if you can make up an economic accounting sheet, an audit, you can audit a technology for cost over here, benefits over there, who gets which costs,

who gets which benefits, and so forth. You handle it like an accounting problem. And I think that's a terrible mistake, or rather that's a tiny little bit of work that ought to come after we ask questions like "What kind of world is this?" Literally, ontological questions: What sorts of entities exist here, and with what kind of relationality? What are the practices here? We might find much more interesting things, including things that bear on who lives and who dies, that aren't well gotten at by thinking as an accountant or cost-benefit analyst. A cost-benefit analysis basically takes a given technology and then tries to assess the costs and benefits; it doesn't question the conditions of existence of the life world itself. And the life world is not the technology in some narrow sense - it's a whole set of material-semiotic practices that make lives this way rather than some other.

L Correct, yes, it makes life signify one way rather than another way.

D Consider ways of living which aren't caught by a cost-benefit analysis. I think oftentimes the critics end up trying to do a cost-benefit analysis that resets the, you know, who comes out ahead and who comes behind. These "resettings" have the same kind of epistemological approach, instead of a materialist cultural approach.

L Exactly. I think the metaphor of the digital divide, which is what we hear now to explain some of the inequities in access to cyberculture, whatever that means, looks at it very much in that way, that once everybody is online, so to speak, then everything will be O.K. For a couple of reasons, one is that I think cyberspace is seen as an unmediated good, and the other reason is that once an audience of any particular group, whether it be Blacks, Native Americans, etc. have been penetrated fully by the new medium or the new technology, that is seen as a benefit.

D Well, exactly, and it's because what folks lose in that way of thinking - the digital divide way of thinking, as you've outlined it - what folks lose track of is that there are other ways of doing life. Access to a supposedly universal good is not necessarily an improvement, and there are ways of doing life that aren't about getting access to someone else's privilege. Let me back up in order to bring in an idea that Leigh Star developed. She wrote a paper on basically what happened when you think about the world from the point of view of people who have to live in relationship to standards that they don't and can't fit. So they don't have the option of simply being elsewhere - you can't forget that those standards exist because, you must be living in relation to those standards in one way or another. I think infomatics is like this, on a global basis. Virtually no one on the planet is untouched by the dominance of these techno-economic systems. It means that lives have to be lived in relationship to standards that aren't one's own, but that you also can't just ignore. What happens if you begin thinking about techno-science from that point of view - that's the standpoint - from the point of view of the folks who don't fit but can't just walk away?

L Right.

D You don't know in advance what shape and feeling that non-fitting has. Sometimes it's super exploitation; sometimes that's not it at all, but it's another kind of non-fitting that might have to do with different sorts of idea about what constitutes a satisfying kind of family or what constitutes a proper relationship with the land and with agriculture. Exploitation is only one kind of not fitting. I think that those of us who are - for the lack of a better metaphor - on the left somewhere fall into impoverished ways of thinking about what it's like to live in these emergent worlds. We too get either/or categories: you're either exploited or you're in power, you're either white or you're of color, you're either privileged or you're unprivileged. We get these binary ways of thinking going, and then the thickness of the world gets lost. We miss many kinds of exploitations we aren't paying attention to, but we also miss many kinds of possibilities that ought to be nurtured. Does that make sense?

L Yes, it does. It seems to me listening to you more and thinking about your work that you've been writing about the digital divide for a long time, I think even before the term became sort of a policy-like way of talking about the Internet.

D Maybe I would say less a digital divide than a kind of like a digital California, a digital earthquake system.

L & D Laughing.

D Do you see what I mean? Lots of people come to California because they want to live here, and in a sense, I think, the earthquake system of California, or these high seismic activity zones, are better metaphors than the simple idea of the digital divide.

L Right.

D Because there are all sorts of dangers and possibilities that are differently distributed, and if we think in a binary way - benefit/cost, digital divide, and on/off - we're going to miss both the trouble and the possibilities.

L Now theoretically, the Web offers a different way - the Web claims to be non-binary, it claims to give choice to users - and...

D And there's some truth in that.

L And I think there's a little bit of truth in that. One dichotomy I wanted to address comes from personal experience: I grew up in Cupertino and you write very eloquently about the culture of Silicon Valley, in particular the culture that generally doesn't get written about, generally in the New York Times, it's not dot.com culture, in that stereotyped way, but rather its the lives of the people who work in chip factories.

D Or service providers, such as janitors.

L Uh huh, people who empty the garbage cans, people who...

D The whole array of people who make that system possible.

L Right. And it seems that these people are just as much the cyborg in the way you posit - just as much the cyborg as somebody who programs or surfs the Web or engages in more sort of visibly or seemingly digital activities.

D Exactly. I wanted to use the notion of the cyborg as that world - that emergent array of ways of life - that incorporates people in all sorts of positions, not just designers and users, but makers, refusers, cleaner-uppers, the whole array of lives that exists inside this techno-social system.

L Yeah.

D The cyborg in the "Manifesto" was not supposed to be the fembot in Wired magazine.

L Right. Exactly. Nor was it supposed to be Ripley in the Alien films with her mechanical arms. I'd say that's a vision of the feminist cyborg which has been celebrated far too much.

D It would be funny if it wasn't so depressing. Although I must admit I kind of liked Ripley.

L Oh, I adored those movies, yes.

D But that's a different issue.

L It's really hard to ask somebody who is a theorist like you to speculate as to why their work has been received as it has been, and I'm not even sure if you follow the way your work is received over time; it's been almost ten years since Simians, Cyborgs and Women.

D No, fifteen years. 1985 is when it came out in the Socialist Review.

L That's right. And people often forget that it came out in the Socialist Review.

D Not Wired magazine!

L Right.

D It came out in response to a question of what is socialist feminism going to look like in the '80s, in the context of the Reagan years.

L Right.

D And my cyborg was not a celebratory, blissed-out wired bunny.

L Exactly.

D Well, I think my work is a Rorschach. Some of that is because my writing really is layered and evocative and figurative and regularly full of sometimes deliberate and sometimes gratuitous contradictions. It really doesn't have a dominant sense of straightforward argument. Partly because what I'm trying to do is write complexity, and that's a deliberate choice. The writing complexity means that people can take it in different directions. On the other hand, I think there's a kind of motivated refusal to acknowledge the racial analysis, to acknowledge the analysis of systems of inequality and systems of exploitation that runs through my work all the time. There are some people, whom I regard as overwhelmingly allies within the anti-racist and feminist left, who also regard my work as part of the enemy, as part of having sold out to technoculture. I think they are deaf to the critique because of what they see as the pleasure. And the pleasure is real. Then on the other side, there are folks who read my work for a kind of cyber-feminism that is very different from what I think I'm doing, who don't want to hear anything about the systematic suffering built into these ways of life, and who want to hear only the emergence, a kind of emergent transcendence, or something like that. I think both readings are highly motivated misreadings.

L Right. And I think that your pointing out the sort of, to me, literary - as I'm a literary person your work is very literary to me, very multi-layered - shows that misreading is in a sense unavoidable, but there are motivated kinds of misreadings.

D Exactly. There are some misreadings that I love because they show the things that weren't necessarily in when I wrote them, but certainly are in the way people read. There are others kinds of misreadings that seem like flattening with a bulldozer.

L Right. I think you could have an interesting essay about teaching Donna Haraway's essay, because I think that students often are baffled by that essay, and tend to have, as you say, a Rorschach response to it as well, and expect it to be a celebration of the cyborg because it's a term you put into play. No one can understand why you'd invent a term and then not sort of parade it down the street with a red ribbon, so to speak.

D You know, I appropriated the "cyborg" from space-race language, basically, and tried to reinhabit it, to do more interesting kinds of work without denying for a minute the way cyborg worlds are part of permanently militarized national science, part of systems of late capital, part of both new and old forms of deep inequality. Without for a minute forgetting all of that. But I also refuse to write a kind of a pious, "I see nothing but evil in the world." The "Manifesto" is an attempt to inhabit cyborgs in more complexity, but as an anti-racist and left feminist. And a person of a particular generation, out of a post-World War II generation, and a person whose own access to education is directly because of Sputnik - which paid money to Irish Catholic girls to get an education. You know, that kind of trying to be conscious of where in history one is. We don't look at these things from all the time everywhere, but from very particular kinds of history. I also happen to write sometimes with a kind of ecstatic quality. I think language is a physical phenomenon, and I enjoy it. Pleasure in writing is

sometimes taken as a mark of non-seriousness. Sometimes the problem is humor, but it's more than that - if the writing itself is acknowledging and in some sense reveling in its own physicality, that's taken as evidence of a non-serious analyst. Does that make sense?

L Yes, it does, and it seems to me to explain why your work has been taken up particularly by critical studies of technoscience, people who are working in English, or rhetoric, or cultural studies.

D Or performance art.

L Performance art, exactly.

D Yeah, I get taken up much more by artists in the broad sense, who often get what I'm doing both critically and in terms of more life-affirming stuff, not that criticism isn't life-affirming, but that it isn't the whole story. I get much more taken up by artists in that double way than I tend to be taken up by critical theorists, or folks who write with a very different kind of rhetoric.

L Again, that may be part of the Rorschach test you're talking about, I think, to not take advantage of this kind of work that you're doing seems to me a sort of motivated refusal as well. I wanted to talk a little bit about the pictures that accompany your work: I know that you've written working closely with Lynn Randolph, and it seems to me that you've always done multimedia work, as least as long as I've been reading your stuff.

D Yes, it's been twenty years, I guess.

L Right, which of course predates the use of the word "multimedia" in a lot of ways. It's not common for a critic to do that, or for a theorist to do that. I think it's more common for literary authors to, and I was wondering...

D I was an English major in college. It was English, zoology, and philosophy, it was a kind of equal...

L There'd be very situated knowledge for each of those. And the image on the cover of Simians, Cyborgs and Women - you noted in the introduction that race in cyberspace is something that isn't talked about it at all, even though it's such a particularly hybrid kind of image racially speaking.

D Well, actually the model for that painting is a very particular woman from the People's Republic who happened to be in Boston, Cambridge during the Tiannemen Square event. She was from Beijing, not far from where some of the most powerful demonstrations and the army tank movements were going on. She was at the Radcliffe Institute. It's not just a woman of color in some universalist sense; it's a person in a very particular historical place, that lives, who was a colleague of Lynn Randolph that year at the Radcliffe Institute. The image on Simians, Cyborgs and Women is a "woman of color," in a sense, but not an American

woman of color. In other words, the specificity matters; "women of color" can become a misleading universalist category just as quickly as the category "man" or "woman" can because it can make you think that one set of racial discourse is going to apply globally.

L Right. Especially now during the presidential election I think that these terms may go around as voting blocks.

D And that is interesting. But that there's no question that Lynn Randolph and I were very deliberately taking up a painting, a visual figuration, that made it difficult, one would hope, to think in some kind of universalist white way. There are also animals, humans, machines, racial categories; that is, there are all sorts of categories in that painting that are put into question. I used that image quite deliberately for those reasons. And I think of it more as a painting that puts categories into question rather than hybridizes them.

L Right.

D It's like a Derridean move; it's like categories have a slash through them. They're in question as opposed to resolved into a hybrid. That is the critical move on race that makes sense to me. But one doesn't necessarily give up crucial categories - like let's say the category Black or African-American, or the African-American voting block issue in Florida, or the elderly Jewish retiree voting block issue. You don't necessarily give up categories like Jewish or African-American because they have powerful lived meaning. But the categories have a slash through them; they are in question because they don't travel everywhere. They get taken apart when they move, when they are taken up in other moments. Begin with the category Black or African-American in relation to contemporary medicine, and especially genetic medicine, and, let's say, transplant medicine and genome-databanking issues around the globe. There are various ways that clumping populations into quasi-racial categories by shared genes is something that certain populations, certain progressives, blacks, health activists, are demanding in some contexts. At the same time these same activists would be resisting genetic racial categories in another context. To take another example, people who want to keep certain racial categories in the census will, on the other hand, loosen up on categories when they look at, let's say, residence patterns in county planning. Political actors have got to be savvy about how these categories aren't "on" or "off." It's not either/or; it's that categories have to be in question in savvy materialist ways.

L It seems to me that that image which you chose to use takes race and a bunch of other categories as you were saying, it puts them sur rature...

D Which is different from hybrid.

L Right, exactly. I think it is a bit off as hybrid.

D Well, I think I've read worlds as hybrid sometimes, too.

L Well, hybrid is a comforting category in many ways because it seems that everyone can get in on it on a sort of equal basis. To put something sur rature I think is a much more radical move, it sort of destabilizes it in a permanent way which is not comfortable for people.

D Plus, it's that 'the being uncomfortable' is not the same thing as saying that you can walk away from something. Hybridization tends to be used as a resolution of contradiction, a means of walking away from the contradiction. And I think that if anything characterizes what I believe over this whole period of time it's that you can't walk away from a contradiction. We need somehow to be accountable to all of them even though we know we can't.

L Right, and it seems that in particular now with the Web being so popular and cyberspace as this panacea for social ills it seems that cyberspace offers users the opportunity to walk away, that that's the lure in it, that there are no bodies...

D At least at the level of ideology. You know, the level of practice is always more interesting.

L Oh, of course.

D And what's going on on the Web, I defy anybody to give a one-line generalization in terms of the complexity of really positive things and really, really scary stuff. The Internet is a powerful, very recent, if not absolutely new, material semiotic bond among people that you can't just walk away from. Celebrating it or condemning it seem to me equally paralyzing gestures.

L Right.

D You asked me earlier whether I see resistance practices at work in the academy. If we think of the Internet in relation to resistance practices - there is a tremendous amount of creative appropriation of the Internet for ways of life that I want to see affirmed, whether they're environmentalist, or indigenous sovereignty issues, or ways of questioning conditions of trade, and so on and so forth. None of this is utopian, but it is also very real and has all kinds of potential for folks. It would be crazy to celebrate the Internet as some kind of blissed-out answer to the dominations of contemporary capitalism. It would also be crazy to walk away from it.

L Yeah, I entirely agree, I think that the movement, around 1995, from non-graphical to graphical cyberspace, that is from pre-Web to post-Web Internet, was a movement away from lists, which is what the Internet was, it was bulletin boards and hierarchical arrangements of information which were difficult to navigate for most people to something a little more mosaic-like, which was the original term for the first Web browser, Mosaic, and that in itself is encouraging.

D Yeah, that's true. I also was thinking about all the different modalities of creative resistance, you know, creative/resistance work, both, because not all the stuff I see going on on the Internet necessarily is readily labeled resistance. There are also creative productive work going on by our folks, if you will, that isn't always best named resistance. Resistance always sounds like it's resistance against the forces that are supposedly in control and leaves the notion of the generation of creative possibility somewhere else. Does that make sense?

L Yes.

D The word resistance is too narrow. But anyway, just think of all the genres - there's straightforward critique, there's circulation and analysis of the latest outrage, there's performance and performance art of all kinds, there's creation of public cultures on the Web, there's a creation of both novel and interesting forms of access, there's people involved in design dimensions of infomatics. Look at the University of California system's various efforts to take seriously the mandate to be more available to all the populations of California by making use of the Internet. On the one hand, that's been commercialized, as the university is ever more commercialized; on the other hand, there's rural outreach to populations that would never be in the UC system otherwise through various distance learning mechanisms. This is an area where it really makes sense to be one of the actors - the question of the relationship of the Internet to the University of California, say - or who's going to have what kind of role to play in distance learning in the UC system. Is it just going to be a way to make money, or is it going to be a very interesting kind of democratization of education? That struggle matters, and I don't think it's captured by talking about either acquiescence or resistance. It's more complicated than that.

L Right, I agree. It seems that distance learning is something that academics are allergic to as a concept.

D Well, partly because we're so used to the copyright arrangements of the published word, and we're not very used to the struggles over property and pedagogy that are going on over distance learning. What kind of relationship is a good pedagogical relationship? We often have very conservative models of liberal education with no idea what kind of privilege goes into that. By the way, I'm not about to give up face-to-face learning; on the other hand, I took a course from the Cornell University veterinary school last summer on dog genetics that was a distance-learning course. I thought the quality of social interaction between faculty and students and among the students was superior to many courses that I've taught at UC, and it made me rethink my rather scolding dismissiveness about distance learning. It doesn't make me a booster, but it makes me much more thoughtful about the creative things that can and are being done under distance learning arrangements. And my colleagues in the humanities often are uninformed about the quality of moral and intellectual engagement, about the possibilities for creativity, about whom they might reach as students. Does that make sense?

L Yes, it does. As I'm listening to you talk, I'm thinking about a conference I was at last weekend at Brown University entitled "The Archaeology of Multimedia" and hearing conversations about how encouraging or sort of mandating faculty to use the Web more, say, in their instruction, is like a form of speedup, a sort of language for mechanical...

D Yes.

L And I wanted to bring us back to the idea of cyborg as worker, as worker on the ground. It seems to me that when you look at power you look at people's bodies and see where power is inscribed on people's bodies. Be it in terms of carpal tunnel, or in terms of lower back issues, or in terms of just not getting enough to eat, you know these are basic body issues. I'm wondering to what extent you think academics' apprehension about distance learning is partly that fear of the body again being put into play too much, so that people talk about their fatigue a lot. I think that academics are very keyed into the idea of stress and fatigue being part of their bodily symptom of life in the information age, or however we wish to put that.

D This is a deeply felt dimension of our lives. I look at our graduate students, and probably more than 50 percent have some fairly serious repetitive stress injury symptoms. You know how widespread it is, and it isn't just office workers, it's the whole array of labor practices. But before I talk more to what you asked directly, let me describe a museum in Vienna I visited at the end of September, a pathology museum, that collected lung samples, lung tissue, late 19th to early 20th century material, and also skin material preserved in formaldehyde and also wax models of various pathological conditions. Overwhelmingly, the pathologies had to do with the conditions of labor of that period: asbestosis, tuberculosis, diseases of malnutrition, vitamin deficiency diseases, all sorts of lung diseases, just an extraordinary array, linked to poverty and to labor practices. These diseases of course, have not disappeared, particularly outside the so-called first world. Many physicians will come to this museum to study material that they don't see, even in long hospital residencies, in western countries or in Japan, but will see if they're practicing in very poor areas mainly outside the "developed" world, but also in areas of the "developed" world. So that the question of the relationship of the diseases of the body to ways of life is a deep and old one. In relation to infomatics, the forms are different, and the distribution of well-being and ill health is different.

L Right. And that's something I like about your work. Despite so many tendencies around me to dematerialize technology, and to see it as abstract, and not about bodies or about identities in particular, but really about transcending those whole kinds of notions, I think in your work you have strived so hard not to do that.

D Well, I try.

L It's frankly depressing to me that I really don't see that effort so much elsewhere, and I really wish I did. I think of it as a sort of sad and telling kind of omission.

D You were asking about the laboring bodies in informatics, and I think that a deep commitment to understanding what the materiality of linked bodies is in the infomatics world means knowing something in depth about how the physical, including the biopolitical, body. This knowledge is more than medical. It is about how well-being and ill health are experienced in all sorts of designing, using, marketing, making, in the whole array of practices that produce these ways of life. We started this little part by thinking about the stress injuries that academics are worried about in the face of speedup, having to spend so much time on the computer as part of academic life now. Computer work such as email has become simply obligatory, for many hours a day for most of us, to the point where we feel absolutely cannibalized. And we're the privileged workers, relatively speaking; even the privileged workers are experiencing tremendous amounts of speedup and ill health and destruction of peace of mind, in relation to these technologies. But that's not all we're experiencing. We're also experiencing the emergence of new kinds of audiences, the opportunities for building a kind of analytical work and performance art into our academic practices. We're experiencing certain kinds of power to design that we didn't know we had, these same workers, the faculty who I'm talking about. How do we take both parts of these experiences and get better control over the conditions of our own labor and ally ourselves with other laboring people? For example, with the secretaries at the UC right now, who face outrageous overwork and underpay. They face speedup worse than we do, on and on; how do we do this in alliance with other working people? How do we see what we're doing as work in alliance with other kinds of working people? This is about rebuilding a labor movement across the categories of contemporary labor.

L Exactly. And I think also our students are experiencing the speedup as well. At the California State University they have to take fifteen units a semester, which is five classes, to maintain full-time status, which for many means their scholarships. I mean, they have to do that.

D They have to do it, and you know both the UC and CSU systems now also push students out because there aren't enough places to accommodate the population that has a right to a university education. They are not allowed to take as much time as they might want and take as many courses as they might want. There's speedup of all kinds. Most of them are carrying fairly big debt burdens; many of them have family support obligations. Many, many of them have to work all the way through.

L What we're preparing them for in a lot of cases is the ultimate speedup which is the start-up company.

D I know. And you have to change your career twenty times a decade to survive, but that way of living is just not acceptable. And I think that one of the crucial political questions of our historical moment is what kind of organization is going to get back control - not just of the conditions of work but the conditions of life. You know, what sort of political movement-building is going to take on these issues in some kind of a serious way? Because they're not just labor issues; they're whole life issues.

L Some of the websites I've seen recently have tried to build solidarity among contract workers, free agents they like to call themselves, because in our group which is simultaneously privileged and also had its jambs knocked out from under it in terms of organization, they don't have the face-to-face contact in community that would allow them to even examine some of the practices that they have to undergo, and in that sense, perhaps, they are a little bit like academics who tend to be atomized.

D Kind of "free agents" but on the other hand it's a whole system of labor.

L Exactly. I wanted to go back to a comment you made earlier about the Web and how it would be foolish to lose the opportunity to be in on this discourse. In other words, to simply shun it in fear and stay away from it is a terrible mistake.

D Well, we really don't have the chance. It would be stupid even if we did have the choice.

L Yes, so on two levels it would be a dumb kind of decision to make. Yet the price you are describing for being in the discourse is high on many levels. In what ways do you think - and I don't mean to speak in cost-benefit terms but certainly more materialist terms - do you think that academics can get the most discourse for the least amount of pain?

D Yeah, right. Every one of us is struggling with this question in our own little micro worlds.

L It's not a question you have to answer.

D Well, I just finished in my own individual life negotiating a 25 percent reduction of my job so that I'm a 75 percent person not 100 percent. A very large part of the reason for doing that was an attempt to open up more spaces in life for something other than work, including friendship, sleep, not being under pressure every minute of every day, which I think is just routine and a fact of everybody's life. Remember Marx; perhaps he's more eloquent on this than anybody. I think perhaps the fundamental issue remains time, struggle for the control of time, and the ability to say these are the conditions of work, these kinds of time commitments make sense - the ability to draw limits and mean it. That means both for students and for faculty, I think, often doing less, resisting the speedup of publication, resisting the constant audit culture ethic that says you always have to do more or you won't get your merit increase. Our career lives from, well, let's say from graduate school on - although it starts before then - are lived in a kind of audit culture moral system, where we're auditing what we're doing along some kind of constant approval axis that is a speedup axis. I experience this as always having to show more stuff. You know, we have to always write and make our students write in such ways as to speedup production. The whole moral system, we impose it on ourselves and our students, even as it is imposed on us structurally.

L Well, it seems to me to be part of the narrative in which people see their lives, the narrative of progress.

D It's very much part of that, and a narrative of "If I don't do it, someone else will do it and they'll get ahead of me and I'll lose my job." Or, "I'm a soft-money person"; or "I'm not tenured"; or "I am tenured, but I need to get my promotion." These are not made-up issues; these are real structural issues. We can't just call this approach a neurosis and treat it like a private problem because it's a structural problem. And if Marx argued that the control of the length of the working day was the factory worker's issue in the 19th century, he was quite right. The source of surplus value had everything to do with labor time. I think that remains true, that the source of value production remains the intensification of work in ever shorter periods of time and that somehow or other that's what we need to learn to get a grip on in our academic cultures. You know, how do we ask students to read less, write less, think more? How can open up spaces for ourselves and our students in our daily work practices?

L Right. Open the spaces and at the same remove the rhetoric of "quality," which has invaded our rhetorical system, I think, recently as a sort of corporate move.

D That's right, and the kind of hurry-up culture which god knows the.dotcom culture and the start-up company is hurry-up culture in spades.

L Right. And also I've heard that described as "just in time delivery."

D Yes.

L Which always makes me think of, "I'm not going to give you any notice but I'm going to ask you for a lot."

D That's right. Well, and the just-in-time warehousing systems, the just-in-time productions, it's basically a lot of various types of inventory control. It's being applied to us in a deep cultural and moral way; it's more than just which parts are available and go on the truck on a certain day. Our lives are being lived in a kind of inventory management for speedup. So I suppose I'm, in this regard, an old-fashioned Marxist - I still think the fundamental struggles are about time.

L That seems very correct to me, especially in light of Arlie Hochschild's book The Second Shift. It's time and gender too, I think, time and everything.

D You know, that gets us back to where we started this whole discussion in terms of the pseudo-universalist categories of "human" and "machine." Those entities exist in a kind of ideological time that I call the techno-present. It's a very thin way of thinking about time that loses track of the thickness of history or the complexity of lived time. The techno-present is like the unmarked categories of "woman" or "man" or "machine" or "white" or, for that matter, of color. These pseudo-universals that lose track of the thickness of lived time. The philosophical struggle for what I call situated knowledge, it seems to me, is very closely allied to the practical struggle for lived time.

L By the way, I think that when we talk about our work it is in terms of always, are you "half-time," "full-time," "part-time," making no reference to the nature of the work a lot of times, or the feeling of the work. It seems that it's about the techno-present.

D Right. Exactly. Well, we've covered a lot.

L Yeah, I think this is going to be quite a meaty interview.

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