Ethics and Information Technology (2007) 9:251–258
DOI 10.1007/s10676-007-9146-2

CyberBabel?

David Loy
Ethics/Religion and Society Program, Xavier University, 3800 Victory Parkway, Cincinnati, OH 45207-4442, USA
E-mail: loyd@xavier.edu

Abstract. The new information technologies hold out the promise of instantaneous, 24/7 connection and co-presence. But to be everywhere at once is to be effectively nowhere; to be connected to everyone and everything is to be effectively disconnected. Why then do we long for faster connections and fuller connectivity? The answer this paper proposes is that we are trying to fill our existential lack, our radical sense of inadequacy and incompleteness as human beings. From such a perspective, our pursuit of speed and connectivity is doomed to failure insofar as it only exacerbates the condition we are fleeing. Rather than rushing faster, the Buddhist-inspired solution would have us slow down and directly investigate our sense of lack.

Key words: attention span, Buddhism, clock time, cybertime, groundlessness, lack, paradox of choice

There will be a road. It will not connect two points. It will connect all points. It will not go from here to there. There will be no there. We will all only be here. (MCI television advertisement)

Here, there, and nowhere

To be only *here*, and for here to be always *now*: would that be the technological fulfillment of our dreams, or a dystopic nightmare? Or both? Our new cyber-environments have begun to compress space and time so radically that we cannot help wondering if, or how, they are also altering consciousness itself. Are we on the cusp of some kind of profound transformation of the human condition?

If so, not everyone is looking forward to it. According to one of the sharpest critics of cybertime, Paul Virilio, instantaneous communication and almost-as-fast transportation are creating the 'desert' of a global endless-day time. His main concern is that remote control and long-distance telepresence technologies are producing an 'ultimate state of sedentariness,' both terminal and final, opening up "the incredible possibility of a 'civilization of forgetting', a *live* (live-coverage) society that has no future and no past, since it has no extension and no duration, a society intensely present here and there at once – in other words, *telepresent to the whole world*." Virilio believes that, instead of augmenting our awareness, such a telepresent society degrades the life of subjects and the mobility of objects by "atrophying the *journey* to the point where it becomes needless." (Virilio 1997, p. 33)

Why should we make the effort to go anywhere or do anything if everywhere is already here, if everytime is now? The differences between here and there, now and then, become so vitiated that they also become meaningless. Our relationships are constructed of encounters and departures, people (and things) who were *there* coming *here*, and then going *somewhere else* – in short, a dialectic of presence and absence. Because we cannot relate to everything and everyone at the same time, we take for granted the spatio-temporal schema that meetings and farewells presuppose. Virilio is concerned that cybertimelessness is eroding that schema. Without such a dialectic, continuous telepresence tends to become indistinguishable from continuous loneliness. "The resistance of distances having ceased, the lost world will send us back to our solitude, a multiple solitude of some billions of individuals whom the multimedia are preparing to organize in quasi-cybernetic fashion." (Virilio 1997, p. 128)

In a 2004 *Washington Post* article, Catie Getches seems to be describing what this actually means:

> All it takes is a little time alone, especially late at night, to confirm how much technology has transformed culture and how it has changed the way we relate to each other. That's because being alone is not what it used to be. These days, even momentary solitude seems like something to be avoided at all cost. And technology makes it possible: Thanks to cell phones, no one has to face that

> stroll down the street, the five-minute commute or the lunch line without companionship….
>
> So it seems as if it should be easier for everyone to connect, late at night or whenever. But the more technology we turn on, the more relationships we have to manage simultaneously – and the more likely we are to ask our best friends if they can hold. I have programmable phone lists and speed dial at my fingertips, and yet I feel more disconnected than ever – somehow, it's easier than ever to be two places at once but nearly impossible to, as my mom says, just "be here now." Yet being in two places at once has become strangely familiar: You don't just go out to lunch with a friend anymore. You go out to lunch with the friend and the friend's cell phone book….
>
> It's so common now to correspond by e-mail alone, it's easy to go for days without actually interacting with a real live human…. (Getches 2004, p. B1)

Getches' insight does not stand alone. There is evidence that, under certain conditions, increased internet usage is associated with higher rates of loneliness and depression, with less family communication and a reduced social circle.[1] "The frequency of contact and volume of contact does not necessarily translate into the quality of contact," according to John Powell, a counselor at the University of Illinois. "All the students I work with have incredibly many pseudo-intimate relationships online – but without the kind of risk and vulnerability that goes with sitting across a café booth from another person." The result is that students are having increasing difficulty "maintaining really satisfying connections."[2]

Getches captures the paradox: to be connected to everyone is to be disconnected, to relate to everyone is to lose the ability to relate deeply. Is that because of an 'economy' to our relationships? If interacting with an actual physical presence is what might be called a 'very high-context information medium,' telecommunication is a low-context medium that sustains lower-context interpersonal meaning – that is, lower-context relationships. When we communicate with so many more people, we are likely to find ourselves communicating less with the people most important to us. Given that we have a limited amount of attention and energy for relating to others, a profusion of low-context cybercommunications will have to be at the price of our most important high-context relationships.

Can this point be extrapolated? To be *attentive* to everything telepresent would spread one's awareness so thinly that it would amount to *ignore*-ance. In terms of my *responsiveness* to that infinity of information, doesn't infinite possibility likewise imply paralytic indecision? How do I decide what to do, what should have priority, when nothing is more present than anything else, physically or temporally?

Of course we are not yet in that situation, and may never be, but perhaps we are getting close enough to appreciate the problem.[3] For a minor example, consider how compact disc players and iPods have changed the ways we listen to music. Today, when I happen to hear some interesting composition by someone hitherto unknown to me, I usually – often immediately – go online to check it out, to find out what other CDs are available from that performer or composer, and what other listeners think about those CDs. Instead of focusing on the CD I've been listening to, I want to acquire more of the same. I can order other CDs instantly and sometimes do. What happens to those CDs when they arrive? To tell the truth, they tend to pile up unheard for a while, because although there is time to buy them (that doesn't take long, with 1-click ordering) there seems to be less time to listen to them. My desire to hear them becomes internalized as another, if pleasant, aspect of the time-compression that increasingly squeezes my life. A decade or so ago, my attention would have been focused on appreciating that particular CD for several days or weeks, but now it is all too easy to explore related possibilities. In other words, my interests and desires can propagate effortlessly. The *increasing choice* that has been identified as central to modernity[4] has become closer to *infinite choice* today, for many of us. Thanks to

[1] See, for example, Christopher E. Sanders, et. al. The Relationship of Internet Use to Depression and Social Isolation among Adolescents. *Adolescence*, 35(138): 237–242, 2000. It is worth noting, however, that the extent of the correlation between internet use and reduced social ties is still a subject of much discussion and debate.

[2] Quoted in "Lonely Nation" Associated Press article, from, http://www.cnn.com/2006/HEALTH/07/31/lonely.nation.ap/index.html, accessed August 18, 2006.

[3] In these initial remarks, I don't mean to deny the various ways in which people today actually use the new technologies to establish deep and meaningful connections. But in looking at the long-term trends, I do see a powerful pull within our culture – driven in part by certain existential tendencies that I will elaborate below – in the direction that Virilio and Getches identify. See Levy's discussion of "more-faster-better" (this issue) as well as Loy (2007).

[4] See Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*. Doubleday, New York, 1979.

Amazon and other online services, my problem is not obtaining the CDs I want, but finding or making the time to listen to them with the attention they deserve.

The paradox of choice

In *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*, Barry Schwartz argues that, instead of making us happier, ever-increasing choice is linked to decreasing well-being, by making it more difficult for us to decide among so many options. Along with several other psychologists recently, he emphasizes that what does enhance our well-being is close personal relationships such as family and church communities. Social *ties* – spouse and children being the obvious example – actually limit our freedom, which implies that freedom in itself might not be as important as we sometimes think (Schwarz 2005).

What does the paradox of choice mean for *how* I listen to all my CDs? When I do have the time to hear one of them, often downloaded into my 60Gig iPod, I'm constantly aware, at some level of consciousness, that if I'm not completely satisfied with what I'm hearing, there are a thousand other CDs on that iPod I could be listening to right now. A century ago, someone who loved Beethoven's music might have only a few opportunities, or maybe none at all, to hear some of his piano sonatas, even if the ticket price of a live performance were not a factor. I can listen to any of those 32 sonatas anytime I want. A century ago, one is part of a live audience, each member having made efforts to obtain a ticket and gather for that specific event, and once there you are *there*, you settle down *then* and focus on the music being performed. For me, the decision to listen to any particular *selection* is never completely settled in the sense that I can immediately change it if I become dissatisfied with it, for any reason at any time. Like it or not, this aspect of perpetual choice is continually there, at least in the back of my mind, and consciousness of these other possibilities works to distract me from the music I am actually hearing. I must, in effect, *continually decide* to listen to this particular piece.

What gives this rather trivial example some significance, of course, is that the point applies just as much to so many other aspects of our lives: books, TV channel-surfing, DVDs, video-games, surfing the net, etc. Needless to say, this near-infinite choice isn't all bad. I have enjoyed exploring the classical repertoire, discovering obscure composers and new performers. I'm far from suggesting that we should give all this up, even if that were possible. Nonetheless, how all these options are affecting our attention span is an important issue. Lately I seem to be listening to fewer symphonies and more short, simple pieces; am I the only one?

The Norwegian scholar Thomas Eriksen has distilled this phenomenon – the effect of expanding choice on our use of time – into a temporal principle. As he sees it, what we lack most now is lack of information: we are drowning in an info-glut (Ericksen 2001, p. 19). Our old time-habits were based on info-scarcity, hence the traditional importance placed on learning how to forage for the facts we needed. Suddenly, like Mickey Mouse the sorcerer's apprentice, we find ourselves trying to survive an information tsunami, and the scarcest resources have become *attention* and *control over our own time*. Eriksen formalizes this relationship into a general law of the information revolution: "When an ever increasing amount of information has to be squeezed into the relatively constant amount of time each of us has at our disposal, the span of attention necessarily decreases." (Eriksen 2001, p. 69).[5]

I think Eriksen's insight can be extrapolated to include the near-infinite range of consumption possibilities that also besiege our attention and proliferate our cravings. That gives us the reformulation shown in Figure 1. Even without the omnipresent seduction of near-infinite consumer alternatives, such an avalanche of information (and therefore shorter attention spans) challenges our ability to construct narratives and logical sequences. Info-excess puts pressure on traditional, more complexly structured ways of thinking that emphasized cause/effect and organic development. In their place, "the World Wide Web inculcates a strong and almost reflex-like preference for heightened visual stimuli, rapid changes of subject matter, and diversity, combined with simplicity of presentation" (Dawson 2001). Sherry Turkle has noticed that some of her MIT students now reason and arrange their ideas differently. "There is this sense that the world is out there to be Googled," she says, "and there is this associative glut. But linking from one thing to another is not the same as having something to say. A structured thought is more than a link."[6] Has linking replaced thinking?

[5] "The use of drugs to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in younger adults more than doubled from 2000 to 2004" (Gardiner Harris. Use of Attention-Deficit Drugs Is Found to Soar Among Adults. *New York Times* (Late Edition (East Coast)), September 15, 2005, page A18.

[6] Quoted in Oliver Burkeman and Bobbie Johnson. Search and You Shall Find. *The Guardian*, February 2, 2005.

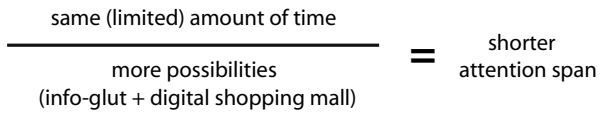

Figure 1. Reformulation of Eriksen's insight.

A cascading glut of de-contextualized signs, with an inelastic amount of attention to make them meaningful, results in link-glut, association-glut. Does infinite linking become equivalent to no links at all? This may be a new problem, but it is not a new metaphor, for it was developed in Jorge Luis Borges' prescient story "The Library of Babel" (1998).[7] Borges' narrator describes a world consisting only of a boundless library with endless bookshelves of books containing nothing but line after line of apparently random letters and punctuation.

> In all the Library, there are no two identical books. From these incontrovertible premises, the librarian deduced that the Library is 'total' – perfect, complete, and whole – and that its bookshelves contain all possible combinations of the twenty-two orthographic symbols (a number which, though unimaginably vast, is not infinite) – that is, all that is able to be expressed, in every language.

If they exhaust all orthographic possibilities, the library's books must encompass all (linguistic) truth and wisdom, including the correct answer to every conceivable question. But at a price.

> When it was announced that the Library contained all books, the first reaction was unbounded joy. All men felt themselves the possessors of an intact and secret treasure. There was no personal problem, no world problem, whose eloquent solution did not exist – somewhere in the hexagon….

We rejoice in having so much information at our fingertips.

> At that same period there was also hope that the fundamental mysteries of mankind – the origin of the Library and of time – might be revealed….

Might such a Library transform the human condition, perhaps even alter our consciousness?

> That unbridled hopefulness was succeeded, naturally enough, by a similarly disproportionate depression. The certainty that some bookshelf in some hexagon contained precious books, yet that those precious books were forever out of reach, was almost unbearable.

Out of reach, because an all-inclusive data-glut turns out to be equivalent to no data at all, if it is impossible to locate texts providing the information one seeks. This is a problem that could not be solved even if the Library had a Google-like search-engine, because the basic issue is not how to find the right books, but rather the meaningless (because completely random and de-contextualized) nature of the infinite data that the Library's books contain. Without being able to evaluate the context we have no way to evaluate how correct the data may or may not be.

Eriksen reflects on how our own data-glut affects the way we experience the present:

> The moment, or instant, is ephemeral, superficial and intense. When the moment (or even the *next moment*) dominates our being in time, we no longer have space for building blocks that can only be used for one or a few configurations with other blocks. Everything must be interchangeable with everything else *now*. The entry ticket has to be cheap, the initial investment modest. Swift changes and unlimited flexibility are main assets. In the last instance, everything that is left is a single, overfilled, compressed, eternal moment (Eriksen 2001, p. 119, author's italics).

An eternal present?

Is Eriksen's eternal moment the *eternal now* that religious mystics yearn for? Not quite. What makes the mystic's *now* eternal is that it is neither ephemeral nor superficial. According to the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus, "There is all one day, series has no place; no yesterday and no tomorrow." Nicholas of Cusa made the same point: "All temporal succession coincides in one and the same Eternal Now. So there is nothing past or future." The Chan (Zen) master Huang-po: "Beginningless time and the present moment are the same…. You have only to understand that time has no existence."[8] Instead of repeatedly falling away, replaced by a different *now*, the eternal presence that these mystics claim to have experienced does not exclude past and future but encompasses them. Cybertime, however, aspires to a different timelessness. "*When time is chopped up into sufficiently small units*, … it ceases to exist as duration

[7] Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley. Penguin, New York, 1998, the following quotes are from pp. 114–116. See also Borges' 1944 story *Funes, His Memory* (also known as *Funes the Memorious*).

[8] These examples are cited in Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*. Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL, 1977.

(which presupposes that events take a certain time) but continues to exist as *moments about to be overtaken by the next moment*." (Eriksen 2001, p. 123, author's italics).

What is the difference between these two types of eternal presence? The cyber-present results from slicing time ever more thinly until sense of duration disappears, replaced by accelerating speed. Our awareness usually hops from one perch to the other, yet now it hops more and more quickly because we are running on an accelerating treadmill. Eriksen's point is that this is possible, however, only because now-moments – our treadmill steps – are denuded of meaningful content. Each step tends to become interchangeable with the previous step, or the next one. Whatever content there is, is immediately replaced by different content. Without a relationship to previous and following moments, the present becomes de-historicized, autonomous, and fungible with the next moment. "To define the present in isolation is to kill it" (Paul Klee).[9]

This point may seem abstract, but aren't we already experiencing the psychological implications? As Margaret Gibbs, a psychologist at Fairleigh Dickinson University, points out: "We've become a society where we expect things instantly, and don't spend the time it takes to have real intimacy with another person."[10]

From a Buddhist perspective accelerating cybertime still perpetuates the dualism that we experience between things (including ourselves) and the time they are 'in.' The sense of a self *within* (and therefore *distinguishable from*) time is a delusion that causes us to suffer. From that perspective, however, this perceived split between things and their temporality is not something real or objective but mentally constructed – which opens up the possibility that it can be deconstructed.

According to Buddhism, to end our *dukkha* 'suffering' we must realize *anatta* 'non-self.' This does not mean getting rid of the self (since there never has been a self) but rather realizing that one's sense of self is *sunya* 'empty' – in modern terms, a psychological and social construct. Existential psychology emphasizes the consequences of repressing our fear of death, but from a Buddhist perspective dread of death still projects our main problem into the future. The Buddhist emphasis on *anatta* implies that our worst *dukkha*, and therefore our most troublesome repression, is our groundlessness right now. We do not feel real enough, because there is an emptiness at the core of our being.

We experience this emptiness – in psychoanalytic terms, the repressed returns in a disguised fashion – as a sense of something missing that haunts us. What is wrong with me? I usually understand my problem as something outside myself that I lack. I do not have enough money, or fame, or sex, etc. The difficulty with those responses is that none of these things can ever satisfy us if they are not really what we want. When we do not understand what is actually motivating us – because what we think we want is only a symptom of something else (the urge to become more real, to ground our groundlessness) – we end up compulsive.

In short, according to Buddhism there is no self but the *sense*-of-self is haunted by a sense-of-lack (Loy 1996), which it always tries to resolve or escape. What does this have to do with cybertime? Norman O. Brown gives us a good hint: time is "a schema for the expiation of guilt." (Brown 1961, p. 277) If his word 'guilt' is replaced with 'lack,' we can say that our usual ways of experiencing and understanding time are tied up with our ways of trying to resolve or evade our sense of lack. That is why we are usually not comfortable with the *eternal present* of the mystics: to really live in the *now* exposes our groundlessness.

In contrast to pre-modern preoccupation with tradition and authority – its search for security in the past – modernity emphasizes the future, hoping that our lack will be resolved and we will become more fulfilled (grounded) if and when our projects have been successfully completed. In sociological terms, Western cultures emphasize achievement more than affiliation; tradition is less important than the freedom to change and improve our situation. The psychoanalyst Neil Altman realized this when he was a Peace Corps volunteer in India:

> It took a year for me to shed my American, culturally based feeling that I had to make something happen... Being an American, and a relatively obsessional American, my first strategy was to find security through getting something done, through feeling worthwhile accomplishing something. My time was something that had to be filled up with progress toward that goal.[11]

Since the goals we accomplish bring no satisfaction (our sense of lack still itches), we always need more ambitious projects.... Unfortunately, this same dynamic also seems to be operating collectively, in

[9] As quoted in Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, p. 10, translated by Julie Rose. Verso, London, 1997.

[10] Quoted in *Lonely Nation*, 2006.

[11] As quoted in Robert Levine, *A Geography of Time*, pp. 204–205. Basic Books, New York, 1997.

our preoccupation with never-enough economic growth and never-ending technological development. As Max Weber pointed out, this historical process has become all the more obsessive because it has lost any teleological end-point.[12] We feel compelled to grow ever faster because there is nowhere in particular that we are trying to get to. Such a future-orientation, however, no more reflects the 'true' nature of time than does the Mayan obsession with keeping the sun on its course by ritual sacrifice, insofar as our modern orientation remains motivated by an individual and collective groundlessness that has not been understood.

To become comfortable with that groundlessness – to transform it – the sense of a self that is distinct from the time it is 'in' must be deconstructed. The rest of this essay adumbrates the Buddhist solution, which provides an experience very different from the duration-less, disconnected cybertime(lessness) that Virilio fears and Getches laments.

The Buddhist solution

In his *Shobogenzo*, the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master Dogen Kigen conflated the usual dualism between time and the things 'in' it, by reducing each pole to the other. *Objects are time* because they lack any non-temporal existence. Things like apples and cups have no atemporal essence outside of time, because their impermanent 'being' is actually a temporal *process* (an apple is eaten or rots, a ceramic cup eventually cracks). This point may seem rather abstract, but the same is true, of course, for the temporal processes that are you and me. In other words, it is not quite right to say that 'I' am 'in' time, because I am *essentially* temporal.

Conversely, Dogen also demonstrates that *time is objects*, for our awareness of time depends on the way things change (for example, the way the hands circle around the face of a clock). This too conflates the usual duality of things 'in' time. Time is not an objectively-existing 'container' of self-existent things; rather, it manifests *as* the temporal processes we experience as objects – in which case time too is quite different from how it is usually understood. ''The time we call spring blossoms directly expresses an existence called flowers. The flowers, in turn, express the time called spring. This is not existence within time; existence itself is time.''[13] In short, time is not something objective, just 'out there.' Time *is* flowers, apples, and cups – and you and me.[14] Dogen devised a new term to designate such nondual process-things: *uji*, literally 'being-time':

> 'Being-time' here means that time itself is being... and all being is time....
>
> Time is not separate from you, and as you are present, time does not go away....
>
> Do not think that time merely flies away. Do not see flying away as the only function of time. If time merely flies away, you would be separated from time. The reason you do not clearly understand being-time is that you think of time as only passing.... People only see time's coming and going, and do not thoroughly understand that time-being abides in each moment....
>
> Being-time has the quality of flowing.... Because flowing is a quality of time, moments of past and present do not overlap or line up side by side. … Do not think flowing is like wind and rain moving from east to west. The entire world is not unchangeable, is not immovable. It flows. Flowing is like spring. Spring with all its numerous aspects is called flowing. When spring flows there is nothing outside of spring. (Dogen 1985, pp. 76–80)

Paradoxically, however, if there is *only* time, there is *no* time. I become 'being-time' when I no longer situate my activities within a clock-time understood as external to me. Then, in place of the fungible cyber-present as an ever-thinner line moving between the infinities of past and future, I live in (or *as*) an eternal now whenever I *become* what I am doing. Ironically, to *be* time is also to *be free from* time. If every thing already *is* time – if, for example, the 'being' of a flower *is* its gesture of blossoming – then we are freed from the delusion that time is something external to the flower, an outside 'container' that the flower is 'in.' The same is true for our own lives, of course. This experience is something that professional musicians and athletes are quite familiar with, as 'being in the flow.' But the experience is not limited to them. When I 'forget myself' as someone who is *doing* the dancing and become *one with* my dancing, I am living in what might be called *timeless time*. In this sense I have always been living in an eternal present. Or

[12] Rogers Brubaker, *The Limits of Rationality: An Essay on the Social and Moral Thought of Max Weber*. London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 10, 36 and *passim*.

[13] Dogen as quoted in Reiho Masunaga, *The Soto Approach to Zen*, p. 68. Layman Buddhist Society Press, 1958.

[14] This point is expressed much better by Michael Ende in his wonderful novel *Momo* (1985).

rather, 'I' am not 'in' it, but life is experienced as an eternal present.

In contrast to such a nondual resolution of our problem with time, the space-time compression of cyber-technologies merely aggravates the delusive split between time and the things 'in' it, because all it does is enable us to quantify objectified time more minutely and coordinate our schedules more precisely. Cybertime achieves near-instantaneity by speeding us up, but it still presupposes the basic, problematic duality between objectified time and the supposedly separate things (most problematically, us) that are *in* it. It celebrates that so many more things can happen so much more quickly, yet we remain ungrounded, lack-ridden subjects subject to all the *dukkha* inherent in the delusion of a being trapped in an external, objective temporality.

As clock-time became central to modern social organization, life became "centered around the emptying out of time (and space) and the development of an abstract, divisible and universally measurable calculation of time." (Aveni 1995, p. 135) Cybertime does not provide an alternative to this historical development; it completes it. We experience time as increasingly dominating our lives. We must run faster and faster trying to do everything that needs to be done.

The collective objectification of clock-time means that now, insofar as we are social beings, we must live according to this commonly-agreed standard. The complexities of social interaction require such a mechanism for their coordination, though it alienates us from natural temporal rhythms, including our own bodies' natural biorhythms. In order to get to work (or class) by 9:00 a.m., one has to catch the 8:22 bus. But to live *only* according to that collective construct is to 'bind ourselves without a rope,' to use the Zen metaphor for a self-imposed mental constriction. In contrast, with Dogen's *uji* being-time the temporality of an activity is intrinsic to the activity itself. We can sometimes notice this difference in, for example, the way music is played. Often the notes march along precisely following the time signature, but sometimes we become so absorbed in those notes that we do not notice the time signature at all because the music embodies its own time. According to Buddhism, *anatta* – our lack of a substantial self – opens up the same possibility for us. Awakening to my nonduality with the world, 'I' realize that I am a manifestation of it. This frees me from the self-preoccupation involved in always trying to ground myself. There is no separate self that needs to become real, and therefore no need to use time efficiently to do so. To experience Dogen's 'being-time' is to become aware of a present that does not change, which is not gained or lost, although its content constantly transforms.

According to Dogen, we have always lived in/as an eternal present. If he is correct, our technological preoccupation with ever-increasing speed is the problem, not the solution. There is no technological solution, because what is required is changing the ways our minds work. To counteract Eriksen's law (more information means decreasing attention span), Buddhism, as well as other spiritual paths, offers meditation practices that can transform us. Such practices increase our attention span by slowing us down, yet they also enable us to 'forget ourselves' so that we can realize what Buddhism calls the true nature of our minds (Dogen 1985) and become one with whatever we do.

References

Anthony Aveni, *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks, and Cultures*. Kodansha International, New York, 1995.

Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*. Doubleday, New York, 1979.

Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley. Penguin, New York, 1998.

Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History*. Vintage, New York, 1961.

Rogers Brubaker, *The Limits of Rationality: An Essay on the Social and Moral Thought of Max Weber*. Routledge, London, 1991.

Oliver Burkeman and Bobbie Johnson. Search and You Shall Find. *The Guardian*, February 2, 2005.

Lorne Dawson. Doing Religion in Cyberspace: The Promise and the Perils. *Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin*, 30(1): 3–9, 2001.

Eihei Dogen. In Kazuaki Tanahashi, editor, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*. North Point Press, San Francisco, 1985.

Micheal Ende, *Momo*, translated by J. Maxwell Brownjohn. DoubleDay, 1985.

Thomas Eriksen, *Tyranny of the Moment: Fast and Slow Time in the Information Age*. Pluto Press, London, 2001.

Catie Getches. Wired Nights: In the 24-Hour Universe, There's No Winding Down. *Washington Post*, Sunday, October 17, 2004, page B1.

John O'Grady and Peter Scherle, editors, *Ecumenics from the Rim*. Lit Verlag, Berlin, 2007.

Gardiner Harris. Use of Attention-Deficit Drugs is Found to Soar among Adults. *New York Times* (Late Edition (East Coast)), September 15, 2005, page A18 (Accessed on September 16, 2005 at http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/15/health/15disorder.html.

Robert Levine, *A Geography of Time*. Basic Books, New York, 1997.

Lonely Nation. Associated Press. *CNN*, May 6, 2006 (Accessed on August 18, 2006 at http://www.cnn.com/2006/HEALTH/07/31/lonely.nation.ap/index.html).

David Loy. The Attention-Deficit Society: Awareness Fragmented, Commodified, and Controlled. In Grady and Scherle, editors, *Ecumenics from the Rim*, 2007.

David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*. Humanity Books, Amherst, NY, 1996.

Reiho Masunaga, *The Soto Approach to Zen*. Layman Buddhist Society Press, 1958.

Christopher E. Sanders, T.M. Field, M. Diego and M. Kaplan. The Relationship of Internet Use to Depression and Social Isolation among Adolescents. *Adolescence*, 35(138): 237–242, 2000 (Accessed on July 20, 2005 from http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2248/is_138_35/ai_66171001).

Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*. Harper Perennial, New York, 2005.

Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, translated by Julie Rose. Verso, London, 1997.

Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*. Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL, 1977.