

Nardi and O'Day's Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart

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Information. The word has become ubiquitous with the computer and the so-called revolution that has occurred as a result of this electronic gizmo so many of us use on a daily basis. We have linked the word with many other terms to describe how information functions in this new electronically-driven world: information technology, information management, information superhighway. Nardi and O'Day (1999), however, have hitched information to another term—ecology—that provides us with another way to think through what it means to work, learn, and play with and through the computer-mediated medium. As with any descriptor that has metaphoric possibilities, inventive minds can conjure a seemingly infinite number of ways to probe the expanded meanings that a metaphor can provide.

The four commentators in this issue take the task of probing the metaphor of information ecologies to heart by offering us three essays that ask hard questions about the use of the ecology metaphor in computerized technology contexts. Frances Ranney and Bill Hart-Davidson focus primarily on the technical and professional communication context. They argue for the greater presence of technical communicators and computer users in the more visible, higher levels of the information ecology “food chain.” In a collaborative effort, Dickie Selfe and Dawn Hayden examine the metaphor through an education-centered lens, asking questions about the role of teachers and students in the ecology of computer-mediated curriculum and pedagogy.

These four authors do a thorough and thoughtful job of examining this important new book. They stretch the metaphor, play with it, and offer new insights into a different—and productive—way to think about what it means to be a technical communicator in this new electronic environment, this electronic ecosystem.

References

Nardi, B. A., and O'Day, V. L. (1999). *Information Ecologies: Using Technologies with Heart*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

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