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Events

April 2005

5th – 6th **“Information and records management”** Convened by Lwelaphanda Business Intelligence in Johannesburg South Africa. Contact Phone +27126430640 Fax +27866766245 Email: marketing@lbi.co.za
Website <http://www.lbi.co.za/>

13th – 15th **“Effective electronic and document management”** Convened by Professional Corporate Training International in East Gate, South Africa. Contact Borne (Sales Manager) Tel: 011 781 6922/7 Fax: 011 781 6933 Email: pctint@telkomsa.net

May 2005

10-13th **“Records Management course”** Workshop convened by National Archives of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. Contact Arie Bot, Phone: (012) 323 5300, Fax: (012) 323 5287. E-mail: rmc@dac.gov.za **website** <http://www.national.archives.gov.za/rms/rmc.htm>

18-20th **Focus on Managing: Spam, Viruses, Internet and Intranet Security** Convened in Johannesburg South Africa by Marcus Evans. Contact Terri Yutar Phone + 27 11 516 1184 Fax: + 27 11 516 1001 Email: TerriY@marcusevanssa.com **Website:** <http://www.marcusevans.com>

23-25th **Electronic Document and Records Management** Convened in Johannesburg South Africa by Marcus Evans. Contact Marius Pitzer Phone Tel: +27 (0) 11 516 1065 Fax: +27 (0) 11 516 1001 Email: mariusp@marcusevanssa.com **Website:**

<http://www.marcusevans.com/events/CFEventinfo.asp?EventID=9541>

30-1st June **Developing standards, policies and systems for Electronic Document and Records Management** Convened in Johannesburg South Africa by International Quality & Productivity Centre (IQPC). Contact Fran Lupton Phone + 27116695034 Email: fran.lupton@iqpc.co.za **Website:** <http://www.iqpc.co.za>

June 2005

7th – 10th **“Records Management course”** Workshop convened by National Archives of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. Contact Arie Bot, Phone: (012) 323 5300, Fax: (012) 323 5287. E-mail: rmc@dac.gov.za website <http://www.national.archives.gov.za/rms/rmc.htm>

20th – 21st **“Paper based documents and records management”** Workshop convened by Intelligent Africa Marketing and Training in South Africa. Contact Faith Kafula Tel (27) 12 997 5424 Fax (27) 12 997 7034 Email info@intelligentafrika.com

22nd – 23rd **“Electronic records and document management”** Workshop convened by Intelligent Africa Marketing and Training in South Africa. Contact Faith Kafula Tel (27) 12 997 5424 Fax (27) 12 997 7034 Email info@intelligentafrika.com

22nd – 24th **3rd annual conference on managing electronic records”** Conference convened in Johannesburg by Long Sight Communications. Contact Richard; Phone +27113393300 Fax +2711 3393325 Email richard@longsight.co.za Website <http://www.longsight.co.za>

27th – 28th **Advanced electronic records management conference**
Convened in Johannesburg, South Africa by Knowledge Up-grade. Contact
Vanessa Phone +27117840888 Fax +27117849091 Email:
sales@knowledge-upgrade.com

July 2005

19th – 22nd **“Records Management course”** Workshop convened by
National Archives of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. Contact Arie Bot,
Phone: (012) 323 5300, Fax: (012) 323 5287. E-mail: rmc@dac.gov.za
website <http://www.national.archives.gov.za/rms/rmc.htm>

21st – 22nd **Electronic records management conference** Convened in
Johannesburg, South Africa by Knowledge Up-grade. Contact Vanessa
Phone +27117840888 Fax +27117849091 Email: sales@knowledge-upgrade.com

27th – 29th **XVIII Bi-Annual ESARBICA Conference: The African Agenda**
Convened in Gaborone Botswana hosted by the Botswana National Archives
and Records Services. Contact Dr Nathan Mnjama, E-mail:
mnjamanm@mopipi.ub.bw Website: <http://www.geocities.com/esarbica>

Aug 2005

15th – November 4th **“The 7th Regional Course on Conservation and
Management of Immovable Cultural Heritage”** Convened by AFRICA 2009
Programme in Mombasa Kenya. Contact AFRICA 2009 Regional Course,
ICCROM, Via di San Michele 13, 00153 Rome, Italy, Tel: (39-6) 585 53 314 /
Fax: (39-6) 585 53 349 Email: africa2009@iccrom.org Website:
<http://www.iccrom.org/africa2009/home.asp>

16th – 19th **“Records Management course”** Workshop convened by National
Archives of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. Contact Arie Bot, Phone:
(012) 323 5300, Fax: (012) 323 5287. E-mail: rmc@dac.gov.za **website**
<http://www.national.archives.gov.za/rms/rmc.htm>

Sept 2005

13th – 16th **“Records Management course”** Workshop convened by National
Archives of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. Contact Arie Bot, Phone:
(012) 323 5300, Fax: (012) 323 5287. E-mail: rmc@dac.gov.za **website**
<http://www.national.archives.gov.za/rms/rmc.htm>

18-21st **50th Annual ARMA conference** Convened by ARMA in Chicago USA
Website: <http://www.arma.org/conference/index.cfm>

Oct 2005

11th – 14th **“Records Management course”** Workshop convened by National
Archives of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. Contact Arie Bot, Phone:
(012) 323 5300, Fax: (012) 323 5287. E-mail: rmc@dac.gov.za **website**
<http://www.national.archives.gov.za/rms/rmc.htm>

Nov 2005

8th – 11th **“Records Management course”** Workshop convened by National
Archives of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. Contact Arie Bot, Phone:
(012) 323 5300, Fax: (012) 323 5287. E-mail: rmc@dac.gov.za **website**
<http://www.national.archives.gov.za/rms/rmc.htm>

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE
STUDY OF THE PRESERVATION AND
RESTORATION OF CULTURE PROPERTY

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL D'ETUDES
POUR LA CONSERVATION ET LA
RESTAURATION DES BIENS CULTURELS



Ref. AFRICA 2009/39-2005/WN-mfa
FF: Regional Course - Mombasa 05

1 February 2005

Re: Regional Course on Conservation and Management of Immovable Cultural Heritage

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of all of the partners of the AFRICA 2009 Programme, it gives me great pleasure to announce the 7th **Regional Course on Conservation and Management of Immovable Cultural Heritage** to be held in Mombasa, Kenya from 15 August to 04 November 2005. AFRICA 2009, a joint programme of ICCROM, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, CRATerre-EAG, and African cultural heritage organizations is aimed at improving conditions for the conservation of immovable cultural heritage in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The course is aimed at professionals with a university degree and a minimum of 3 to 5 years experience who are either in charge of the management/conservation of a major site or region within their countries, or have a significant decision-making role in regard to management/conservation of immovable cultural heritage within the central structure of their organizations.

We would be pleased to receive applications from qualified professionals recommended by the National Director or head of the principle national institution responsible for conservation of immovable cultural heritage in the country from which the candidate comes. *Qualified women are encouraged to apply.*

For further information, you can contact the project management at the address indicated on the announcement. As a reminder, all applications must be received at ICCROM by **30 April 2005**

With regards,

Webber Ndoro, Programme Manager, AFRICA 2009

Via di San Michele 13
00153 Rome, Italy
Tel: (39-6) 585 409
Fax: (39-6) 585 53 349
Email: wn@iccrom.org

Please find details of the announcement and application package on the website

<http://www.iccrom.org/africa2009/english/events/anncourse-e.shtml>

Jack and the beanstalk: were we on the Right Track or on our way to the Cannibalistic Giant? By Ms. Marié Botha

The Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) came into existence on 1st April 1980 (Act no 40 of 1967). It was also the only Technikon that provided distance education at the time. It had its meager beginnings in Johannesburg and eventually started to grow exponentially until it moved to its own buildings in Florida, Roodepoort in 1989.

In March 1993, an Archives Committee was established to investigate a filing system, and also to investigate the feasibility of placing documents on an imaging system for retrieval purposes.

In July 1994 a first attempt was made to establish an Archive or at least a Business Archive in the Technikon. The Archive became operational in July 1995

On 1 November 1995 a consultant was appointed for twelve months with the commission to:

- Assist the Head of the Archives Service of TSA to manage the Archives
- Give guidance to an existing member of staff in the Archives to administer the Archives Department on a professional basis
- Give professional training to the Archives staff members (two assistants)
- Help with the problems experienced with the new filing system

It was also decided that the consultant needed to be in the office only three days per week. The consultant's report revealed that a new filing system was required.

The Archives function had to start from scratch with a few documents transferred. Some were transferred under cover of transfer lists, some without. The Archives also received a number of inactive student files on microfiche and a number of inactive student files in paper (currently totaling 300 000 in the Archives and Records Center alone). The physical space allocated to the Archives was a section of the ground floor of the library.

From 1996 onwards the responsibility of the Archives was taken over by the senior staff from a section of Committee Administration. The problems experienced during period included

- Lack of systematic transfer of records from offices
- Lack of disposal instructions for records
- Poor physical shelving facilities

Insufficient skills and training in use of computers and management of electronic records

The new direction:

In September 1997, a recommendation was served at Rectorate, that TSA's Archive "must be managed by an expert". It was also recommended that the Archive be placed under the Directorship of the Library Services, and that the record management of TSA become the responsibility of a skilled Records Manager. According to Rectorate's, the Archives was incorporated into the Library and Information Services under Dr. J Henning who accepted the transfer of the Archive to the Library, on condition that an Archivist would be appointed. In November 1997, Ms. Botha took over the management responsibilities of the Archives.

An analysis of the Archives at the time indicated that among other things:

- There was a serious lack of a policies and procedures
- There was an absence of electronic records access/retrieval system
- No uniform filing system and retention policy existed
- Staff was not sufficiently trained, lacked sufficient supervision and poorly motivated.
- No access restrictions to documents existed
- No official budget was assigned to the Archives
- There was no reading room for research purposes
- The physical space and conditions in the Archives did not adhere to international archival standards and space was severely constrained

A start be made ... but where?

In April 1998, the name of the Archives officially changed to Archives and Records Centre of TSA (ARC). Ms. Botha decided to concentrate on those areas in which remedies could more easily be made. A progress report of September 1998 indicated that some of the actions taken included:

- the staff of the ARC were contracted to formal performance areas
- Weekly meetings were held with staff. Supervision was in place and management of the ARC established
- A records management assistant with experience was appointed
- An additional temporary staff member was appointed and trained to handle transfers from offices. (This brought the number of staff to three assistants. The temporary staff member was eventually appointed to permanent staff and received records management training from the National Archives. She subsequently enrolled later for her Certificate in Archival Science at TSA)
- A transfer program was worked out. The three records management assistants in the ARC were separated in three groups, each having responsibility for their own offices from which transfers were to be acquired and received
- The “Access” package of Microsoft was utilised for inventory work and to help with ease of access to the files in the ARC
- A backlog of several years in the ARC was worked off successfully within four months. Supervision also helped to give guidance and the performance of the staff was monitored.
- The possibilities of digitizing the records in the ARC was investigated. We needed some sort of retrieval ware as a matter of urgency and the ARC worked in close collaboration with the Computer Services Department and the Committee Administration services in search for possible solutions.

Ms Botha also began by designing the job description of both the archivist and the records officials. Eventually – **after long deliberations** – these positions were approved to be filled. Due to the severe lack of trained archivists in South Africa, the process to appoint an archivist took almost two years.

Two options were investigated and the Ms. Botha prepared a business plan for the

ARC requesting special funding for projects:

- The first option was to acquire an electronic system for the ARC. Due to the need that was expressed in the Technikon, a system was instead acquired by the Computer Services department for the entire Technikon to which we could add the Archive's documents.
- A second option was that we looked to obtain bulk filers for the ARC records to address the severe shortage of space

In January 1999, the amount of R1,4 million was approved from strategic funds to fund special projects in the ARC. Some of the strategic funds were used to contribute towards the acquisition of the electronic system acquired by Computer Services. The Technikon acquired the Excalibur system, which constitutes retrieval ware. Document Management software was still needed in the Technikon but due to its high cost it remained unaffordable. The rest of the budget was spent on Bulk filers that were desperately needed.

The ARC outward focus:

The request from Rectorate to expand ARC operations beyond the historic records of the Technikon needed to be honoured. It was decided to focus on political active people and to obtain of their archives as well. The ARC successfully obtained part of the archives of Dr. Boesak. His archival documentation is scattered however, with documents in the Netherlands as well as in South Africa.

What did the ARC achieve in the past 7 years (excluding 2005)?

Among other things

- We have managed records in the Offices of Origin – from **creation** to either **disposal** or **permanent preservation**. We were successful in **most** administrative offices. Gradually we were called upon by the offices of Human Resources and Finance for guidance. We also managed to obtain some of their records – but a great break-through was still needed.
- We trained former TSA staff in the handling of records and sensitized the TSA community to transfer in-active records to the repository

- We have well trained staff! (Archive and Records Management qualifications were obtained by the individuals from the National Archives, Technikon Southern Africa and from Chippewa Valley Technical College, Wisconsin)
- We managed to established a functional records management unit for TSA and a functional Archive for our Business records
- Offices started to migrate business records to an e-environment for ease of access and retrieval – using RetrievalWare® (Excalibur). Computer Services obtained the specifications for the software from Ms Botha on 18 August 1999, providing direction in the final preparation of the specifications for the relevant software needed to govern the records of the Technikon at large.
- With the expert guidance from the new Archivist, we successfully started to identify records due for disposal. We handled the disposal according to legislation and National Archive guidelines.
- We ensured that our work adhered to accepted national Archival standards – according to the guidelines from National Archives
- We created an Archive and Records Management Policy – approved 30 October 2000
- We managed to negotiate transfers of records of resigned staff, to the ARC
- We provided input into our legal offices regarding Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000 (PAIA)

The merger has clearly stopped all future plans we had, and we are currently concentrating on day to day ARC operations.

But... what was in our Future Planning?

- A classification/filing system – two offices' classification/filing system was completed, ready to be implemented
- A lot of planning was done regarding the management of e-records (according to the National Archives Guide)
- We planned the acquisition of more archival material according to our theme and related areas, such as that obtained from Dr Boesak.
- The ARC staff were invited to extend their managerial activities to the offices where revised and new study material was scheduled for printing

- We planned to undertake a comprehensive audit trail of records created in the Technikon
- We wanted to become more involved in regional offices, giving guidance regarding the disposition of records
- We wanted to establish Records Management as a strategic objective in originating offices
- We were part of a project team that planned the migration of student information and other important records to an e-platform (approximately 300 000 inactive student files in ARC and 800 000 in other offices)

Conclusion:

The saying: “if in doubt throw it out” has good merit in records management practices. Good management of records requires thorough planning and ultimately expensive investment of both time and money. It must always be remembered that archive repositories serve as custodians of our historical treasures therefore records management practices are needed to eliminate unnecessary migration of documents to them. It is never too late to start – **but** should only be introduced after doing thorough investigation of world class best practices.

About the author

Ms. M Botha received training as Librarian at the University of Pretoria in 1977 She worked at the University library for two years. The family moved to Krugersdorp and she started to work in the Public library. She changed job and started to work at the Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) library in 1992, where she was appointed as Manager for the Cataloguing and the Information Systems departments as well as for the Archives and Records Centre (ARC). She also managed the Library's Acquisitions Department for three years. She enrolled for the National Diploma Archival Science at TSA in 1992 and completed the diploma in 1993. She also completed a certificate in Knowledge Management at the University of Pretoria in 2004. Ms. Botha has a keen interest in e-books and is the project leader of the African Digital Library. She presented papers ranging from acquisitions to the digital divide, at various library conferences. Due to her responsibilities as Manager of the ARC, she is also involved in the establishment of a Records Management Department at the New UNISA (University of South Africa).

Contact

Work:

E-mail:

The Tall Horse ¹ By Oliver Nicholas Barstow

Abstract: This essay looks at the potential of digital technology to refigure institutional memory and unleash a creative violence that disrupts notions of genius and authorship. The intention is not to sight the death of the author but to show how the digital platform facilitates the Derridian conception of reading – where a text assumes a life of its own in the *absence* of the author. The essay applies this theme to the gift of a giraffe that was given to the king of France by the Pasha of Egypt as a contract of war. It moves on to examine the digital dialectic as a response to the global flow of information and finally, illustrates its conclusion through a reading of a passage extracted from J.M. Coetzee's *Youth*.

In 1827 the Pasha of Egypt, Mehemet Ali, delivered a giraffe to Charles the Tenth, the King of France as a diplomatic gesture to strengthen political ties between the two countries, both of whom had vested interests in invading the Ottoman Empire. It was a long and often perilous journey for the giraffe, its Malian keeper and the French scientist sent from Paris to evaluate the Kings gift – a crossing of frontiers between the ‘heart of darkest’ Africa and the Enlightenment of continental Europe. The spectacle of the giraffe’s slow travels through the towns and countryside of France towards the capital left in its wake an array of cultural reformations (higher heels, lower-necklines to create the impression of a longer neck and perhaps even a child or two of mixed decent, conceived in the fever of exoticism, which drew the French women to the animals keeper) and occasional sites of violence. The giraffe, cloaked in a silk cape, and presented to the King at the Royal stables in Paris, invoked nothing of the violence of its capture, of its tumultuous journey through France nor of the blood that its presence symbolized in the contract of war against the Turks.

After the initial viewing by the King the giraffe was itemized and contained amidst the other rarities held in the Paris zoo. For a time it created a stir within the public gaze until its presence, disconnected from its origins, faded into the structures of institutional memory.

¹ *Tall Horse* is the title of the latest production of the Hand String Puppet Company.

The distance between observer and object (both the distance invoked by the zoo's display cage and the distance in space and time from the frontier) was critical in maintaining the detached and objective viewpoint that established Darwinism and brought Europe into the age of Modernism (Hall 336). In the sturdy nationalism of this age the archive became an uncontested place of power and the focal point of learning and discovery. Knowledge, in the Modernist conception, was created by the student, isolated within the silence of the library, museum or archive, absorbed in the special collections that are the remnants of the colonial legacy. It was through these sites of heritage that the nation-state propagated the visceral boundaries of its enlightened community (Hall 337). This is prominently displayed by the popular myth that amongst the giraffe's initially large and varied audience was the young Eiffel who would later be commissioned to construct Paris's most familiar landmark in a form strikingly familiar to that of the giraffe's.

In many respects viewing the Eiffel Tower as a representation of the giraffe's living form is important to maintain for the purposes of this discussion. Perceived in this light the Eiffel Tower is evidence of the inseparable link between the construction of local identity and the global flow of information (Hall 336). This is also a clear example of how memory changes its form in relation to developing technology – what has been termed “new media” in contemporary theoretical discourse – to reflect ways in which society orders space and time (Brody 138). The Eiffel Tower constitutes the refiguring of the colonial archive facilitated by the building technologies of Modernism. Its sheer mass and height are representative of the predominance of science and reason, as if man felt it necessary to test his knowledge against the limits of nature. If the message is contained by the organisation of space and time (or culture) then technology and the message conflate to reform societies memory. New technologies allow for the refiguring of memory and open spaces for new explanations and new forms of contextualisation.

The public's reaction to the giraffe's unusual form invokes the contemporary axiom that is often applied to digital technology - “the medium is the message”².

² “The medium is the message” is attributal to Marshall McLuhan who established the phrase in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).

Contemporary media theorists claim that we cannot learn anything of importance about a medium by looking only at its content. Rather, we must refocus our attention on the ways in which the technological characteristics of the medium itself reshape our lives, not just by giving us new tools with which to work, but by reshaping our consciousness on a fundamental and subliminal level (Wilson 36). As the example of the giraffe illustrates the medium itself imposes a model of response. Technology and the various forms it assumes directly structure the world in which we live today.

Thesis / Antithesis

“He is reading in the history of logic, pursuing an intuition that logic is a human invention, not part of the fabric of being, and therefore (there are many intermediate steps, but he can fill them in later) that computers are simply toys invented by boys (led by Charles Babbage) for the amusement of other boys. There are many alternative logics, he is convinced (but how many?), each just as good as the logic of *either-or*. The threat of the toy by which he earns his living, the threat that makes it more than just a toy, is that it will burn *either-or* paths in the brains of its users and thus lock them irreversibly into its binary logic.” - J. M. Coetzee *Youth* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002)

The argument outlined above by Coetzee’s protagonist in the novel *Youth* is shaped by a dialectic that has a long history in Western philosophy. The etymology of the word dialectic is associated with the Greek phrase for the art of conversation (*dia logou*) and the structure of its meaning is attributed to the Socratic method of argumentation, which depended on question and answer to extract the truth (Lunenfeld xvii). Today the dialectic is most commonly associated with Hegel and Marx. For Hegel, the dialectic is the logical process of all thought. Thought proceeds by a pattern of contradiction in so far as each thought contains its own negation. The basic structure of Hegel’s dialectic is situated by the formula, thesis-antithesis-synthesis, which in turn becomes the new thesis (Childers & Hentzi 80). Marx adopted Hegel’s schema but abandoned his idealism for a materialist approach. Dialectical materialism, as it has become known, hopes to account for the contradictions of economic and historical development.

The teleological drives of both Hegel and Marx embody much of what might today be referred to as the digital dialectic. At the end point of Hegel's thought is the Spirit, while history is seen as the story of man's movement towards the Spirit. For Marx, history embodied the contradictions of capitalism whose only end point was the proletariat revolution and communism. The digital dialectic moves in two similar, mutually opposed directions. While these discourses are both founded on the development of information technology (and subsequently access to this information), they propose as their end points, utopia and salvation on the one hand, and dystopia fuelled by claims of retribution on the other.

For cyber libertarians the computer holds the potential to function as a memory machine that will continually store up societies records. As technologies spread the large-scale libraries and archives that govern societal memory will be deaccessioned and all records will be unified in one place, the computer. What the computer constitutes within this context is a radical refiguring of the space-time continuum whereby space comes to organize time (Hall 336).

Proponents of this ideal within archival discourse argue for the establishment of standard rules of appraisal for the space of electronic records, which set "known benefits and current costs against future, long-term and unknown risks" as a means of limiting subjective record creation (Bearman 326). Through quantum increases in storage capacity the electronic archive has the potential to eliminate appraisal practices altogether and so create a full, easily accessible and paperless record. The application of a universal policy for the question of what constitutes a record would reduce the disruption of human intervention and situate the archivist as a functionary or something more akin to an IT operator. The archive will become a complete, accessible and uncorrupted environment that is always working towards the ideal of a post – bureaucratic utopia.

In keeping with Marxism, the opposing side of the digital dialect views information as a commodity. With the invention of writing and the printed text orality and oral memory was transformed into an external medium that could be held and exchanged as a commodity. The Frankfurt School (Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse) whose critical theory brought together the ideas of Freudianism

and Marxism, claimed to discern a dialectic in the progressive and repressive history of the West and Capitalism that was inextricably linked to advances in technology (Watson 226). The wealth generated by the Capitalist trade in commodities was increasingly used for preventing rather than constructing a more decent society. French theorist George Bataille proposed that from a general perspective the economy is structured by the highly organized manufacture of waste, and that the general question of economy is not how to save more but how to waste more so as to generate demand and growth (Reynolds and Roffe 138). This is evident in the rapid turnover of digital technologies where industry leaders continuously advance the machines capability in order to maintain market demand. Silicone Valley is built upon a graveyard of disposed monitors and discontinued hard-drives.

With the onset of globalization and global flows of information the Marxist dialectic establishes that information itself has become a commodity in the establishment of local identity. Increasingly, ethnic nationalisms strewn across the globe are digging into the rubbish heap to unearth artifacts that lay claim to their 'origins'. As digital technologies have overcome distance so has the capital drawn the frontier towards itself making the bloody history of the past overtly present. In short, the rubbish heap is no longer sanitized by distance as in the days of the imperial botanical gardens and zoos displaying exotic species. With increased access facilitated by global technology once homogeneous cultures dispersed from their homelands lay claim to pieces of the archive, while local ethnic groups gain land and commodity through universal claims of 'first-people' rights. The distinct combination of global media and local identity has resulted in new sites of violence, as the need to entrench national identities becomes something worth fighting for in the fluid information scape (Hall 336). The stage of global conflict has shifted from the frontier to the capital and today we are constantly exposed to the dark heart of modern civilization.

By synthesizing the views outlined above and extracting specific traces I believe it is possible to move towards a humble but potentially liberating thesis. While the cyber utopia is a metaphor for the positivism invoked by the prospect of a new frontier it is important not to dispel the potential of technology to be manipulated as a tool that might work towards the Derridian conception of Justice. At a similar moment it is important to realize the potential destruction that such a tool might hold for those in

search of power. If placed in the right hands and used in a creative manner the computer has the potential to uproot and refigure the archive and in so doing topple the discourse of power by dispelling the myth of the one, patriarchal voice.

Synthesis

“Although Atlas is not a machine built to handle textual materials, he uses the dead hours of the night to get it to print out thousands of lines in the style of Pablo Neruda, using as a lexicon a list of the most powerful words in *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, in Nathaniel Tarn’s translation. He brings the thick wad of paper back to the Royal Hotel and pores over it. ‘The nostalgia of teapots.’ ‘The ardour of shutters.’ ‘Furious horsemen.’ If he cannot, for the present, write poetry that comes from the heart, if his heart is not in the right state to generate poetry of its own, can he at least string together psuedo-poems made up of phrases generated by a machine...” - J. M. Coetzee *Youth* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002)

When confronting a new technology it is important to look beyond content, or the message, and focus our attention on the form that contains the message.

Computers, and the potential they hold to store large amounts of information, reshape our lives not only as a new tool but also through changes in the way we read and write and the ways in which we perceive the self. In order to integrate with the electronic environment users are required to discard their expectations of the paper-based record and adapt to the fluidity of a stage where everything is composed as a never-ending series of 0s and 1s.

In this flattened information landscape codes are free to move and to join other codes in an endless branching and multiplication of networks. This system shatters and then recomposes and shatters again the sequential, linear narrative that has always composed the paper-based record. To grasp this continual refiguring the reader must abandon the order of beginning and ending for an ordered-disorder of multiple entry points and an infinite number of reading directions that have no ending.

The basis on which such a reading is conducted is determined by the ‘link’ that joins the fragments of the once composed narrative and always draws the reader

outwards, away from any sort of centre or origin. The potential for fragmentary pieces of information to link has been named “hypertext” by certain digitally minded communities (Wilson 36). The ability for multiple texts to float in a universal space requires that we reformulate our reading habits. What will emerge is a new memory culture shaped by the development of new reading techniques. If we are to follow the claim that the medium is the message then it is not the technology that changes in accordance to the contents of the message, but the message that changes in accordance with the technology (Brody 148).

The word ‘hypertext’ is a clear example of how language is reshaped by technology. In truth, the structure of written text in the technological age has its roots in the advent of literacy. The shift from oral to literate culture had profound effects on human consciousness, bringing about the abstract and linear forms of Logic that are implicit to Western discourse (Wilson 37).

Derrida defined writing as a technique or technical instrument for communicating an ideal meaning over a far greater distance than is possible by speaking (Reynolds & Roffe 9). In this respect the technology of writing appeals to the concept of absence. From the point of view of the sender of a letter, the receiver is always a distant presence. Writing then must remain readable and as such is based on the presupposition of its repeatability (or ‘iterability’ as Derrida called it) despite the absolute absence of the receiver (*absolute absence* is death in this case) (Reynolds & Roffe 9). Of course the same situation applies to the author(s) of the letter in so far as the letter must continue to function in their absence. An event in which this possibility of absence does not occur is, in fact and in principle, not an event of writing. Writing then is the “logic that ties repetition to alterity” in so far as it is universal in its ability to function in the absence of sender and receiver. At the same moment writing is specific to the context of any single repetition.

The working method adopted by Coetzee’s protagonist facilitates the Derridian definition of writing. Pablo Neruda wrote the *Heights of Macchu Picchu* in response to the ruin of pre-Columbian civilization. The poem is constructed in a dialectical method, synthesizing images of birth and death against a backdrop of rural peasantry in Chile. By feeding the Atlas computer with the Marxist lexicon of

Neruda's poem Coetzee's protagonist transforms the canonical, authorial voice into a fluid series of 0s and 1s³.

Inserted into the digital matrix Neruda's words are no longer subjected to the patterns of self-censorship imposed by the author. They move, join, rupture and join again in an ordered chaos of endless combination and in the *absence* of the author. Cut off from consciousness the words take on unintended connotations and their meanings reformulate in unexpected ways. Neruda's words are no longer fixed to the to the images of peasants but move beyond to create new images that are the subject matter of chance encounters. In short the words join and differ and join again until the user shuts down the system. The reams of printed text that emerge constitute a radical refiguring of the canon and the *absence* of full control or ownership of the text.

It is also useful to view Coetzee protagonist as a reader. The refiguring of Neruda's text signals a relocation of power from the author to the reader, in this case a reader who is also an aspirant writer but who cannot write poetry of his 'own'. The system he adopts liberates the mind from entrenched notions of genius and the single-voice capturing the communal essence of society. Replacing this is the idea of a plethora of authors – who are in fact readers – all of whom possess the power to add an additional link. The writing process becomes transparent to the reader who is made aware of its highly constructed method of creation – a series of links between words. The process of montage or "assemblage" in which the reader participates demands that we construe and decode by observing the same procedure through which the work was assembled (Landow 151). In its new form, poetry must be read as a perpetual examination of the code.

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³ In his lifetime Neruda received the Nobel Prize for Literature. His political ideologies are marked by his involvement in the Communist Party and his election as Senator for the centre-left government in Chile.

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