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## The Self in the Age of Information

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## The Self in the Age of Information

As patterns of cultural life become increasingly dependent on technology, questions of cultural direction become paramount. How are our lives being shaped, what traditions are being eroded, what values and ways of life are being changed by technological developments, and to what extent is our capacity to determine our cultural future being undermined? These are only a few of the concerns now demanding attention.

I will focus here on an issue that is rapidly rising to prominence in the social sciences: How are we to understand the impact of emerging communication technologies on individual psychological functioning? In what ways are processes of cognition, motivation, and emotion, for example, reshaped by the increasing enmeshment of the individual in rapidly accumulating, ever-shifting, and increasingly complex arrays of information produced by the Internet, television, faxes, cellular phones, and more?

There is ample precedent for such inquiry. As is explored in Walter Ong's groundbreaking *From Orality to Literacy*, new forms of thought emerged in the Western cultural shift from a primary dependency on oral interchange to print technology.<sup>1</sup> Redundancy and simplification of thought, favored by face-to-face conversation, gave way to the kind of precision, coherence, and complex analysis that reading and writing make possible. Even today, the psychological capacities honored in contemporary, print-based educational systems are primarily those fostered by the technology of print.

Yet there is an important sense in which this concern about the impact of technology on psychological processes is premature. Setting out to trace the effects of, for instance, "information overload" on cognitive processes al-

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ready presumes the existence of cognitive processes. In the same way, research into technology's effects on motivation, emotion, or individual values is predicated on the assumption that motivation, emotion, and values are there to study. In effect, to embark on such study requires a set of preconceptions about the nature of human psychological functioning. In this light, we must ask, Is it possible that the technological milieu is transforming the grounding assumptions themselves, our very conceptions of the human self?

For example, as David Olson proposes in *The World on Paper*, the shift from oral culture to print technology may have changed cultural beliefs

about human beings.<sup>2</sup> In ongoing, face-to-face conversation, we are little concerned with the mind behind the words; meaning is shaped before us in the course of the interchange. However, with the emergence of printed text, important questions were created about the "author's meaning." Thus, with the development of print culture, the mind behind the words became an important topic of discussion. This malleability in our beliefs about our human selves has interested numerous historians and cultural anthro-

pologists. It should be addressed now in light of changes in the contemporary technological ethos.

So, I pose the following questions: In what respects are the emerging technologies transforming our fundamental understanding of the psychological self? And if our understanding of who we are is changing, what are the repercussions for cultural—and indeed global—life?

My particular concern here is with a core belief in contemporary U.S. culture, namely a belief in the self as a bounded and integral agent, capable of conscious self-direction and self-control. This view, largely coming into prominence during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has been a mainstay of Western cultural life. It is belief in the self as an integral agent that rationalizes our institutions of democratic governance ("one man, one vote"), our institutions of public education (the training of "individual minds"), and our practices of moral accountability that hold individuals responsible for their actions. As I shall discuss in this essay, the dramatic changes occurring in the technological ethos are, both directly and indirectly, undermining belief in such a self. The concept of the self as an integral, bounded agent is slowly becoming untenable. The outcomes of such a transformation deserve close attention.

## What values and ways of life are being changed by technological developments?

In my discussion of the transformative forces at work, I shall first touch on the cultural conditions that seem essential to sustain traditional beliefs in the self. Both the character of communal life and the institutions of truth have long furnished support to this tradition. For both of these sources of sustenance, information technology plays a potentially destructive role. I shall then turn to processes of self-erosion favored by technological immersion and consider multiple ways in which traditional beliefs in the self are challenged. Finally, I shall consider several repercussions of this transformation. Although there are potentially serious consequences of this conceptual shift, it also expands the horizon of opportunity in interesting and important ways.

### **Community in Crisis**

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Understandings of self are inherently rooted in community. From the moment we are given proper names, we enter into domains of relationship, and through relationships we develop a sense of who we are and what we are worth. A solid sense of self derives from relationships that are coherent and consistent over time. By living in communities where we are known by many people, who also know each other, we each derive a strong sense of “being somebody”—somebody endowed with particular characteristics, capacities, and proclivities. However, the technologies of communication are largely destroying this form of coherent and consistent community. This destruction has several facets:

*Increasingly mobile populations.* As a result of our heavy reliance on automobiles and other forms of rapid transportation, jobs and schools are increasingly separated geographically from a family’s place of residence. More and more, the neighborhood is emptied of participants; in a typical family, both parents may be employed elsewhere, and the children are away throughout the day, spending their time in school, day care, and after-school programs. Recreational activities, business trips, and socializing with friends across town also reduce presence at home in the evening hours. Further, as businesses find it easier to relocate, families increasingly find themselves moving households. The average American will occupy about a dozen dwellings during a lifetime.

*A wider range of relationships.* The increasing span of everyday travel is paralleled by the increased potential for frequent use of electronic communication (e.g., telephone and e-mail). Further, television and film invite more recreational travel; tourism has become the world’s largest industry. Among the results of such expansions is a wider range of relationships (friends, acquaintances, colleagues, distant relatives, and so on). More and more, for example, one’s network of friends may be spread across the conti-

ment and the globe. Each relationship may bring new information, opinion, and values into play, and there is often little interconnection among those to whom one is connected. The cast of “significant others” is thus dispersed and fragmented.

*An erosion of strong bonds.* Each relationship—whether with a friend, relative, or colleague—generates its own set of expectations and obligations. However, as relations accumulate and expand geographically, the amount of time available for any particular relationship decreases. The result is a reduction in strong, committed bonds; a limited number of deep relationships is replaced by a broad array of more superficial engagements. The joy of spontaneous participation is often replaced by a burdensome feeling of obligation. In addition, the potential of any relationship to generate or affirm an indelible sense of self is reduced. Scarcely anyone knows us in depth, so few can be trusted to furnish the kind of affirmation or opinions that are significantly formative or informative.

### **Truth: From Certainty to Social Construction**

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In the deterioration of a consistent, coherent, and significant set of relationships, the grounds for strong belief in a substantive self (a sense of bounded and integral personhood) are removed. The anchoring process for strong claims to being a particular sort of person, with clearly identifiable characteristics, is subverted. Yet there is a second source of such beliefs about the self: cultural authority.

For centuries, religious institutions had primary authority on matters of self. Thus, sanctioned by church and temple, belief in the individual soul became broadly prevalent—a fact of life as obvious as the existence of what we call “emotion.” However, over the past century in particular, science has displaced religion’s authority on matters of the self. Psychology and psychiatry, along with biology, anthropology, and sociology, have become primary sources of knowledge about human beings. For example, the concept of depression scarcely existed a century ago. Yet, with the authoritative counsel of the mental health profession, it has come to be understood that depression is a “common disease,” and prescriptions are written for more than \$8 billion worth of Prozac a year.

Largely owing to the rapid development and dispersion of communication technologies, strong forces have been activated that erode the power of cultural authority. Authoritative claims to truth about the self are becoming less believable. Two dimensions of this transformation are noteworthy:

*Multiple truths and the loss of faith.* In an expanding sea of available information, along with an expanding domain of relationships, we are exposed to

an increasing array of authoritative claims—opinions, data, arguments, and proposals. This array is augmented by the increasing potential of otherwise marginal groups to gain public prominence, supported by the news media’s need for the drama of deviancy. The result is that for virtually any issue of broad significance there is a virtual chaos of competing claims. Whether the issue concerns economic planning, foreign policy in China, programs for weight loss, Supreme Court nominations, or the origins of the universe, authoritative opinions are multiple, mixed, and often contentious.

And so it is with matters of self-definition. For example, we have witnessed in this century a steady accumulation of “schools” of psychiatry, psychology, and sociology—all vying for authority over matters of individual selves. There are competing claims for the centrality of unconscious process, childhood conditioning, genetic determination, and information processing, with each enclave touting arguments and evidence. One significant result of multiple and competing claims to truth is growing confusion and distrust: Where in the sea of conflict can the island of truth be located? Over time, the very idea of transcendent truth, truth surpassing anyone’s particular perspective, becomes suspect. Foundationalism is replaced by relativism; strong truth claims seem increasingly parochial.

*Self-interest and suspicion.* The growing sense of multiple and constructed realities is coupled with an emerging cynicism. If claims to truth are increasingly seen as representing a perspective, as “one way of looking at it,” questions are soon raised about the bases of such perspectives. If perspectives are not driven by objective fact or impeccable rationality, what are the grounds for such claims to truth? One readily available answer is that of human interest. Proclamations of truth increasingly appear to serve individual purposes. This possibility has been acutely dramatized in the heated, irresolvable debates over the guilt and innocence of O.J. Simpson and Bill Clinton. It has also been made manifest in the ways that audience ratings shape the reporting of news, commercial interests determine public accounts of various food and drug capabilities, ideology influences the opinions of Supreme Court justices, and party politics determines the “independent opinion” of members of Congress. Slowly, “objective opinion” gives way to what we understand as “spin.”

And so it is in matters pertaining to the character of the self. Expert opinions of “insanity” can be purchased by defendants in criminal trials,

**Over the past century, science has displaced religion’s authority on matters of the self.**

pharmaceutical companies have a vested interest in psychiatric diagnoses favoring their products, and those favoring the concept of a genetic determination of intelligence invariably are privileged white scientists. With respect to the nature of the self, what authority can be trusted?

## **The Erosion of the Essential Self**

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The hypertrophic technological condition of contemporary culture is slowly undermining the grounds for confident belief. In particular, as the cast of significant others in one's life becomes increasingly dispersed and variegated, and as cultural authorities lose their credibility, confidence fades in the traditional concept of a bounded, integral self. However, the technological ethos also has more direct effects on the sense of self. If confidence in the traditions is eroded, we stand increasingly vulnerable to such effects. In my view, the technological context works directly to undermine the intelligibility of the traditional self. The reasons are many and cumulative; here, I limit discussion to several interlinking tendencies.

*Polyvocality.* By dramatically expanding the range of information to which we are exposed, the range of people with whom we have significant interchanges, and the range of opinions available from various authorities through various media, we become privy to multiple realities. Each of these sources becomes a potentially formative influence on the development of our views of the world and ourselves. Such absorption of the social surround lends itself to a shift from the centered self to polyvocality, a condition in which the individual is capable of holding a multiplicity of views, values, and sentiments—many of which are implicitly or explicitly conflicting. For example, in the recent Clinton scandal, the deluge of motley opinion would have led many in the public to understand that Clinton was morally at fault, but that he was also a victim of partisan politics and an overly zealous prosecutor; that Clinton was an effective leader, but that he also had the good fortune to preside in prosperous times; that Clinton lied, but that he was also a religious man, and so on.

If one acquires an increasingly diverse vocabulary of deliberation, how is a satisfactory decision to be reached? The inward examination of consciousness yields not coherence but cacophony; there is no unified standpoint available within the self (the mark of an integral individual), just a chorus of competing contenders. And as one becomes increasingly polyvocal, to what degree do one's internal resources continue to guide or direct? If my "looking inward" becomes increasingly less useful for directing action, doesn't concern with my "state of mind" lose its urgency? Rather than looking within, the more compelling option is to turn outward to my social con-

text: to search the range of ambient opinion, to “network,” and to negotiate. In this immersion in the public sphere, the private interior loses authority, and the presumption of internal agency is subverted. If negotiating the complexities of cultural multiplicity becomes the norm, the concept of mind as the origin of action grows stale.

*Plasticity.* As the technologies of sociation increasingly immerse us in information, opinions, and values, they expand the scope and complexity of our activities. We engage in a greater range of relationships in numerous and contrasting sites, ranging from friendly relationships in the neighborhood to professional relationships that span continents. Further, because of the rapid movement of information and opinion, the useful life of various products and policies is shortened and opportunities for new enterprises expanded. The composition of the workplace is thus in continuous flux, and the single-career commitment gives way to a continuous process of “repackaging” the self. The working person shifts jobs more frequently, often with an accompanying household move. By the early 1990s, one-third of U.S. workers had been with their current employer for less than a year, and almost two-thirds had been there for less than five years.

As a result of these developments, the individual is challenged by an increasingly varied array of behavioral demands. At each new location, new patterns of action may be required; dispositions, appetites, and personae all may be acquired and abandoned as conditions suggest or demand. With movement through time and space, oppositional accents may often be fashioned: firm here and soft there, commanding and then obedient, sophisticated and then crude, conservative and then liberal, conventional and then rebellious.

For many people, such chameleon-like shifts are now unremarkable; they constitute the normal hurly-burly of daily life. At times these challenges may be enjoyed, even sought. It was only four decades ago when David Riesman’s celebrated *The Lonely Crowd* championed the virtues of the inner-directed person and condemned the other-directed individual as someone without a gyroscopic center-of-being, someone without character.<sup>3</sup> In the new technology-based ethos, there is little need for the inner-directed, one-style-for-all individual. Increasingly, such a person seems narrow, parochial, and inflexible. In the fast pace of a technological society, concern with the inner life is a luxury, if not a waste of time. We now celebrate the

**The growing sense of multiple and constructed realities is coupled with an emerging cynicism.**



protean being capable of moving facilely across a sea of complex conditions. In the world of Plastic Fantastic Man, the interior self loses significance.

*De-authentication.* A more subtle mode of self-erosion also results from the increasing inundation of images, stories, and information. Consider those confirmatory moments of individual authorship, moments in which the sense of authentic action becomes most fully transparent. Given the Western tradition of individualism, these are typically moments in which we apprehend our actions as unique, in which we are not merely duplicating models, obeying orders, or following convention. Rather, in the innovative act we locate a guarantee of self as originative source, a creative agent. Yet, in a world in which technologies facilitate an enormous sophistication about cultural conventions, such moments become increasingly rare. How is it, for example, that a young couple, each of whom has been indundated for twenty-some years by romance narratives—on television and radio, in film, magazines, and books—can utter a sweet word of endearment without a haunting sense of cliché? Or in Umberto Eco's terms, how can a man who loves a cultivated woman say to her, "I love you madly," when "he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland?"<sup>4</sup> In what sense can one stand out from the crowd in a singular display of moral fortitude, and not hear the voice of John Wayne, Gary Cooper, or Harrison Ford over one's shoulder?

*Commodification of the self.* These arguments are closely tied to a final, technology-induced shift in cultural understanding. Because the technologies of sociation enable information to be disseminated widely at low cost, popular entertainment has become a major industry. Critical to the entertainment industry are individual performers—individuals who, because they are entertaining, command a broad audience and vast remuneration. In effect, the "self" becomes available as a saleable commodity. Individual performers may take on new names, spouses, and lifestyles in order to increase their fame and income. As the entertainment industry expands, and as television channels become more numerous, the demand for "characters" becomes ever wider. Increasingly, the common person—owing to a peculiar passion, unique story, act of heroism or stupidity, or possession of inside information—becomes a potential candidate for fame and fortune. Consequently, there is a growing consciousness of the self as a commodity. Being true to one's self, possessing depth of character, and searching for one's identity all become old-fashioned phrases; they are nicely suited to earlier times but no longer profitable.

Each of these tendencies—toward polyvocality, plasticity, de-authentication and commodification of self—undermines the long-standing importance placed on the integral self, that core to which one's actions should be

true. Although this erosion is lamentable in significant respects, it is also important to take note of growing criticism of the Western, traditional concept of individual selves.

On the conceptual level, the problem is not simply that the conception of a private mind carries with it all the thorny problems of epistemological dualism (subject vs. object, mind vs. body, minds knowing other minds), but also that the very idea of an independent decisionmaker proves unconvincing. How, it is asked, could mental deliberation take place except within the categories supplied by the culture? If we were to subtract the entire vocabulary of the culture from individual subjectivity, how could the individual form questions about justice, duty, rights, or moral good? In Michael Sandel's terms, "to imagine a person incapable of constitutive attachments ... is not to conceive an ideally free and rational agent, but to imagine a person wholly without character, without moral depth."<sup>5</sup>

These conceptual problems are conjoined with a widespread ideological critique. Alexis de Tocqueville's observations of nineteenth-century U.S. life set the stage: "Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows ... he gladly leaves the greater society to look after himself."<sup>6</sup> In recent decades these views have been echoed and amplified by many scholars. Christopher Lasch has traced the close association between individualist presumptions and cultural tendencies toward "me-first" narcissism; R. N. Bellah and his colleagues argue that modern individualism works against the possibility of committed relationships and dedication to community; for Edward Sampson, the presumption of a self-contained individual leads to social division and insensitivity to minority voices.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, the concept of an interior origin of action defines the society in terms of unbreachable isolation. If what is most central to our existence is hidden from others, and vice versa, we are forever left with a sense of profound isolation, an inability to ever know what lies behind another's mask. With strong belief in an interior self, we inevitably create the Other to whom we shall forever remain alien.

## Repercussions: From Conflict to Confluence

The emerging technological ethos not only removes key supports for the traditional belief in the self as an individual, integral agent, but simultaneously functions more directly to undermine the very experience of this self. We must finally consider several repercussive effects of this emerging condition.

*Retrenchment.* At the outset, any movement that challenges long-standing traditions within a culture is likely to provoke a defensive reaction. Thus,

for example, the modernist secularization of Western culture sets the stage for a revival of fundamentalist religion, and broad-scale critiques of truth claims in the academic sphere have provoked a range of vociferous counterattacks (e.g., “the science wars”). In this light, we can understand the emergence of various cultural movements acting to revitalize a sense of a palpable self, to furnish internal bearings or a foundation for belief in the centrality of the individual. In my view, we find impulses toward retrenchment in widely disparate movements. New Age religion and the broad-scale romance with meditation reflect an attempt to remove one’s self from the hurly-burly of everyday life and to locate a center within; in the revitalization of far-right politics can be discerned a celebration of individual character, moral fiber, and willpower; in the flowering of psychobiology, genetic psychology, and psychopharmacology are located strong impulses to materialize the self, to define it in biological terms; and in the “cult of personality” (a composite of celebrities, mass-market magazines, consumer products, and electronic entertainment), the individual is at the center of celebration. Despite the current technological ambience, we are not likely to witness the full demise of the integral and bounded self.

*Group identification and conflict.* With the passing of the individual as the palpable center of societal life, the way is opened for revitalization of the group. Harkening back to premodern times when the family, the guild, the lineage, the clan, the principality, and other collective configurations were focal denominators, there is again a strong invitation to identify the self with the group. In effect, self-definition is conflated with group definition.

Movements in this direction have been manifest for some decades, particularly in the pervasive search for one’s “roots” in various ethnic, cultural, and national traditions. There is also a link between the dissolving of singular selves and the emergence in the United States of strong teamism (an increasingly evident commitment to local, regional, and national athletic teams). Allegiances to fundamentalist religions also display many of the same signs, as do emerging tendencies toward communitarianism. And perhaps most prominent is the significant emergence of identity politics, a political form deriving its power from the willingness of individuals to define themselves in terms of an otherwise marginalized group (e.g., African American, feminist, gay and lesbian). Of course, the availability of low-cost means of communication and organization—including radio, television, telephone, and e-mail—facilitates effective organizing processes. Virtually any small group of the committed can, through the World Wide Web, now generate appeals on a global level. However, more significant is an apparently increasing willingness to abandon a hallmark of individualism—the glory of “doing it my way”—in favor of group participation.

At the same time, this shift from individual to group commitment is not without cost to the society. Implicit divisiveness is a primary negative repercussion of the individualist tradition: To construct ourselves as independent agents is to set in motion a dynamic in which we are separate from all others, no one has the right to direct our actions, and all others are suspect. To be sure, the capitulation of self to the group is accompanied by a diminution of such tendencies. But in the move toward group commitment, the divisiveness characteristic of individualism now simply shifts to another level. Society is composed of a Hobbesian condition of “all against all,” not in terms of individuals, but on a group level. Thus, in the realm of identity politics, multiple groups are pitted not only against what is left of the “mainstream,” but against each other as well. In James Davidson Hunter’s terms, we exist now in a state of “culture wars.”<sup>8</sup>

**T**here is a growing consciousness of the self as a commodity.

*Temporary loyalties and growing interdependence.* While intergroup conflict is favored by emerging technological conditions, there is reason for optimism in the extended future. As I have mentioned, available technologies are steadily expanding the range of relationships in which we engage. While an initial result of this immersion is a lessening of one’s sense of a coherent or fundamental self and a resulting vulnerability to group allegiance, the long-term effects may be different. With expanding associations, interdependencies, and commitments, the tendency toward singular group allegiance may abate. At a minimum, individual commitments to groups are likely to be shortened. Individuals may enthusiastically join a group, actively participate, donate time and resources, then move on. This kind of temporally situated commitment has already been evidenced in the political sphere, with election-dependent party allegiances now commonplace. “Temporary ecstasies” are also apparent in the deterioration of brand loyalty and in the rapidly shifting terrains of celebrity worship, team loyalty, and spiritual allegiance. And in the realm of identity politics, an increasingly common complaint is that an identity commanded by a political standpoint inadequately represents the complex lives of the participants.

If this trajectory is extended, with individuals multiply engaged, we may approach the point where intense or lethal conflict between groups will recede. There will be little enthusiasm for harsh attacks on other groups, because members of groups on the offensive will share membership, allegiances, or interdependencies with those under attack. For example, it is now exceedingly difficult to envision an outbreak of war between the

United States and any nation in Western Europe, because economic, institutional, and personal interdependencies are so fully developed that such a conflict would be self-defeating for both sides. More generally, we are approaching a time when no nation-state will be sufficiently powerful to command the allegiance of multinational corporations to make international warfare possible. Or, as was evidenced in the bloodless collapse of the Soviet Union, national governments may find it increasingly difficult to stifle

**Neither the self nor the group will command ultimate significance in our deliberations.**

antigovernmental countermovements now made possible with low-cost communication devices. Aggressive conflict may thus give way to an impasse of action.

*New relational concepts and practices.* A potentially dramatic shift in cultural consciousness is becoming increasingly apparent. If, as I have argued, we are witnessing the slow erosion of belief in an integral and basic self, and if the return to the group ultimately proves futile, then our traditional concepts of the fundamental building blocks

of society will be thrown into doubt. Neither the self nor the group will command ultimate significance in our deliberations and practices. In my view, the door is thus opened for the creative construction of alternatives to these traditional but tired concepts. One of the most fascinating alternatives on the cultural horizon represents a shift toward the relational—that is, turning away from the concepts of self and group in favor of such concepts as interdependence, conjoint construction of meaning, mutually interacting entities, and systemic process.

Recent and emerging technologies contribute significantly to this relational imaginary. Particularly relevant is the development of chat rooms, bulletin boards, e-mail lists, and other Internet features that facilitate bodiless relationships. On the Internet, identities can be put forward that may not be linked in any specific way to the concrete existence of the participants, and these cyber-identities may carry on active and engaging relationships. Most significant is that these relationships proceed not on the basis of “real selves” (integral minds in physical bodies), but on the basis of positionings within conversations or the discursive flow. Further, it is only the coordinated functioning of these discursive formations that enable “community” to be achieved. In effect, community has no geographic locus outside the web of discourse. Here we approach pure relatedness, without self or community in the traditional sense.

The image of relationship without self or community also has other

sources in the technosphere. For several decades, the computer itself has served as a chief metaphor for human functioning. The cognitive revolution in psychology, along with the artificial intelligence movement and cognitive science, have derived much of their intelligibility from various equations of person and computer. However, as the Internet and the World Wide Web dramatically expand, the computer is gradually losing its rhetorical allure. The Internet brings instantaneous relationship to an exponentially increasing population throughout the globe. It is a domain so vast and so powerful that it can scarcely be controlled by the nation-state. It is legislated by no institution; it functions virtually outside the law. In this context, the computer is merely a gateway into a relational domain without obvious end. Slowly “the network” is becoming a central metaphor for understanding social life.

In my view, these movements of metaphor are reflected in a range of emerging practices. In the educational sphere, “collaborative classrooms,” apprenticeship programs, and group-project designs are widely being developed. In organizational development, numerous training and intervention programs are now built around concepts of organizational culture, meaning-making, teamwork, and collective vision. In therapeutic circles, newly emerging practices emphasize the co-construction of meaning, narrative, and systemic interdependence. And in world politics, the traditional autonomy claimed by nation-states is slowly giving way to regional, economic, and ideological coalition- and alliance-building. The relational world is gathering form.

### **A Concluding, Unscientific Postscript**

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In this essay, I have moved over exceedingly broad terrain in a rather foot-loose fashion. There has been little attempt to prove my arguments with a bevy of statistics, authoritative support, surveys, and the like. This is not because it is impossible to generate such evidence. Rather, given the assaults on authoritative truth that I have discussed, it is disingenuous now to make such claims. Indeed, this essay cannot be extricated from the very technocultural context that I have attempted to explore. This does not mean that the proposals made in this essay are “untrue.” Rather, I suggest that an essay such as this be viewed as a cultural lens, as a way of comprehending the highly complex, ever-changing sea of events in which we are immersed. My hope, then, is to furnish conceptual resources with which we can collectively deliberate on the direction of events and possibly intervene in ways that can bring us safely, and even joyfully, into the future.

## Notes

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