

Art and the Future: An Interview with Suzi Gablik by Russ Volckmann

One day, I was interviewing a particle physicist (Basarab Nicolescu, Integral Review 4) and he called my attention to the work of an art critic. I wondered to myself if this was a case of transdisciplinarity. Well, in a way it was, at least at the level of valuing meta approaches to life. He indicated that the art critic, Suzi Gablik, had referred to transdisciplinarity and also the integral theories of Ken Wilber in her book, Has Modernism Failed? Well, I just couldn't let that drop. It was just too intriguing to see if I could find the themes that brought these two unique individuals together. I wanted to play in that sandbox, too.

First, I turned to Gablik's book, Has Modernism Failed? Here is a summary of what I found that encouraged me to take the next steps. Her thesis is that the world of art has become competitive and exploitive and that the focus in the world of art had become profit. Not only are these limiting to artistic expression, but they ignore essential concerns of art: aesthetics and ethics. "Aesthetic autonomy is a deeply rooted idea—autonomy implying moral and social separateness as the condition of art-making," she wrote. She saw the need for a unified vision of the world where art and ethics would not only coexist, but cooperate.

Gablik found in the works of Ken Wilber the promise of integralism where diverse perspectives can be engaged to address the world as one undivided whole with the "well-being of each part is the responsibility of every part." Here she found a promise for an end to art dominated by economics and consumerism, an art liberated to be an essential life of individuals and of communities. She found examples of this in the world of art. Two high school teachers engaged their ceramic students in the Empty Bowls project to help a local food drive. This simple project has grown into a nonprofit organization, The Imagination/Render Group, which supports drives around the world.

She then turned to Basarab Nicolescu's Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity, which she sees as pointing the way to dealing with multiple levels of reality at the same time. Gablik observes, "Also, it has a unique goal: to propel us beyond either/or thinking into a coexistence of nested truths." This leads to the potential for the individual artist to become an integral component of a larger social network, which she sees as a generative creative force. Seattle's ARTS UP program that pairs artists with communities around the United States has led to engage in a civic and artistic dialogue. These dialogues have led to numerous projects "founded on the idea that art can have a vital role in community building, and in giving voice to those whose lives are otherwise unrecognized or isolate."

Her book closes with a note of optimism in which she senses

that significant changes in power relations are occurring as these decentralized network structures now offer the possibility for artists to interact with each other, and share information, in a democratic and cooperative atmosphere that was mostly absent within the hegemonic, competitive, institutional structures of modernism.

This would lead to “a new kind of art that can help realize needed change in the world.”

Now this was going somewhere interesting, I thought to myself. This sounds like a whole new perspective on growing a healthier world. The edition I read was published in 2004 (1984 was the original), so here is an opportunity to explore that perspective. After setting up a date to have the interview with Suzi Gablik, she helped me access a couple of her other books.

Conversations Before the End of Time (1995) is a series of interviews about the themes related to the development of a relationship between art and community, art and a healthier future for the world. It includes discussions with James Hillman, Thomas Moore and many others more directly involved in the world of art. Living the Magical Life: An Oracular Adventure (2002) is an intimate focus on her own life at a time when she seems to be a coming to peace with her having moved to Virginia from London in 1991.

Everything is collage. In a sense, the parts ‘give themselves.’ Living the magical life means learning to recognize and connect them to the whole. We are translators and mediators in the field from which our experience arises. In this field, all is analogy, relation, revelation, by the laws of correspondence. Imagination is what opened the connection between one level and another.

She has learned that “the universe is a better organizer than you could ever think of being, so give it a chance and stay out of the way. Surrender to the world, receive it in your stillness:

And it will happen. For miracles gravitating
To earth, know just where people will be waiting.
And eagerly will find the right address
And tenant, even in a wilderness. (Joseph Brodsky)

Her account of relationships, experiences and explorations leads ultimately to this:

Psyche’s secret has finally become transparent to me: Let go of the consciousness of disappointment. Release your belief in the promise unfulfilled. Sacrifice the need to know, and trust the invisible processes that are at work. Develop a mind that can work with whatever happens. Allow everything to be all right as it is and simply remain true to the quest. When you learn to stop struggling and do nothing, everything is possible. Submit, surrender, become an embodiment of the feminine principle. Don’t assume you know the right answer in advance. We are simply part of the vaster design that is unfolding.

I hope that these glimpses into the work of Suzi Gablik prepare you for this challenging interview. It is challenging, perhaps, because I have not yet learned Psyche’s secret.

— **Russ Volckmann**

Russ: *Suzi, it's a great pleasure to talk to you. I've read three of your books, and it seems as though you've been on a quest—perhaps more than one. Initially it seemed you were concerned with the commercialization of modern art, particularly in the New York art scene, and next, the relationship between art and the ecological and sociological crisis we face in the world. Then, you seem to go on to looking at the role of esthetics and ethics in art. Finally you have engaged in the discovery of the mystical in your own life. How would you amend that summary of your quests?*

Suzi: I don't know that I would amend it. I think it's nearly perfect. I definitely would say that my initial concerns with the idea of art being so commodified, and my subsequent search for alternative models of art making are still a concern to me. Since I first started writing and talking about these things, a kind of alternative parallel art scene has developed that is quite fluent and rich, but at the same time, the hard-core art world is more commodified than ever, and is still firmly entrenched in those same patterns of behavior. So in one sense things have changed, but in another, nothing much has changed.

Q: *One of the things that really struck me in thinking about art in some very new ways as a result of reading your work was the idea of art as a social expression, as a political expression, and so forth. A colleague of mine called my attention to a quote from the German artist, Joseph Beuys, which states:*

Only on condition of a radical widening of definitions will it be possible for art and activities related to art [to] provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the death line, to dismantle in order to build 'a social organism as a work of art'...every human being is an artist who—from his state of freedom, the position of freedom that he experiences at first-hand—learns to determine the other positions of the total art work of the future social order.

Does this comment of his, written in 1973, and the kinds of work that he did in Germany in the '80's with, for instance, the 7000 Oaks project, represent the sort of thing you are looking to have happen in the art world?

A: I would say very much so. In many ways, Beuys was possibly the first person to put forward a significant and radical idea that ultimately became a ball many of us took up and ran with: the idea of "art as social sculpture." With this small phrase, Beuys laid claim to the idea that art doesn't have to be made from specific physical materials like wood and stone, or paint and canvas, but rather you could sculpt society itself, shaping it through ideas and modeling behaviors. He made use of social processes and contexts that went beyond familiar art institutions, like museums and galleries.

Beuys is a particularly interesting figure, however, because he was like a shaman in that he could navigate freely between different worlds. Many of his art works consisted of things like projects for planting trees and he was even the founder of the Green

movement in Germany. But he was also quite comfortable making art in more traditional modes, which he exhibited in the usual art world channels. They were not necessarily the most predictable kinds of objects, however—his sculptures were often made from bizarre materials like fat and felt. They were exhibited in a huge retrospective show at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Beuys was unusual in the way he was able to straddle and bridge two worlds. Most artists tend either to follow the predictable, lockstep scenario for becoming “professional” and competitive in the art world, or they go off in a completely different direction and make their own path. Beuys was interesting because he did both.

Q: I recently read your book, Conversations Beyond the End of Time, and thought it was just an extraordinary work. I don't think I've ever seen anything quite like it where over a period of about a year and a half, you had conversations with all kinds of people—artists, critics, psychiatrists, sociologists, and more—discussing these themes. You were able to create a work that shows art as a developmental path, not only an expression of the individual, but as an evolving social expression as well.

A: My work over many years has been to articulate the vital role of artists in society, and along the way, to create a new paradigm as well. In my early years of writing art books, I was very influenced by New Age, or new paradigm thinking—that included things like systems theory and the eco-philosophies that burst forth on the scene during the 1970s. Many books were written that influenced my own approach greatly. I tried to apply these ideas to the sphere of art.

I guess I've always been trying to deconstruct the cultural narrative which pins art to careerism, self-promotion, and the creation of “art stars,” and which is linked to the obvious gallery and museum nexus. I wanted to validate and expand the possibilities for art making, so that they could include many more options than that. This was not meant to negate the former, but rather to help those artists who found careerism a deadening path break out of the mold. I wanted to encourage them to feel validated if they work outside the familiar contexts.

Others have taken up the same banner, so at this point there is a whole world of post-studio practices, and of artists who see themselves not just as makers of valuable commodity objects, but who see themselves as active participants in a global world, and who are willing to make art in the service of something more positively social or environmental. Many of them set out to try to solve social and ecological problems as artists. That often entails embracing what probably interests you most in my work: a willingness to embrace a healthy confusion of genres, to cross boundaries and disciplines at will. In a way that often decentralizes the act of creativity. This stands in direct contrast to the heightened individualistic modality of “look at me and admire what I've done” that is so much a part of the art scene.

Q: There are several themes in what you've just said that are really interesting. I'm reminded of how during the Depression, artists and architects were used to create public works, be they paintings, buildings or sculptures, to try and help bring some income to

them, as well as make a contribution to the public. We had an example of an economic crisis that brought a very special role for art in the culture. Would that be an early example of what you're talking about, at least in the last century?

A: Up to a point. But those public works' projects, in the context of the time in which they happened, pre-date what we can call the "paradigm shift," which refers to a change in the whole modus operandi of making art. Mural artists then were still making art in acceptably traditional ways, although they were oriented towards a different kind of public and site, and they were more socially directed in their imagery.

Q: *In more contemporary terms, I've seen public programs that work primarily with at-risk youth who paint murals on public buildings; they're being guided by muralists, and that's another example of the same phenomena.*

A: Yes, but there's an important difference between the two. Both produce murals, but in the more community-based art of today, there are other creative social processes going on, such as building communities for these youth, and positively altering their lives in the process, by giving them a sense of purpose, or bringing out artistic talents they didn't know they had. It offers a more healing component rather than just a purely visual experience.

Q: *That's one of the streams that I think your comments brought out—that of the healing potential of art. Another one is that art can be an expression of a desire for change. It is a desire to have the world be more aligned with aesthetics and beauty, perhaps even with social justice and other humanistic criteria. Is that also a stream you were alluding to?*

A: Yes, definitely. The whole idea being to open art up to a larger definition of itself, and allowing it to engage with more aspects of life and the world than is possible if you are functioning alone, behind closed doors in a studio. A lot of this sounds pretty old-hat now, but at the time that I first started writing and talking about it, these ideas were pretty blasphemous. Sometimes I'd be greeted in a lecture hall as "that woman who hates art objects." At other times, I'd get a standing ovation, so it was a very emotionally intense kind of stand to take at the time. What I was saying really challenged accepted ideas that were strongly in place and still are, for that matter, in terms of the culture. If you work with young people (which I don't do much anymore), you will find that, in any group of art students, there are always the ones who want to go the accepted cultural route. That is to say, if there are megabucks to be made, they are certainly up for it, willing to give it a shot and abide by all the rules of that game. Then there are others who are not drawn by that at all. They want to pursue a kind of art oriented towards a different vision of "success."

Q: *You talk about ecology as well. In the nineties, the threat to our world was very prominent in your thinking. Is that accurate?*

A: That is accurate, but it can't hold a candle to where my thinking is now. My distress at what is happening to our world is so consuming now that art has just about dropped below the radar and become almost irrelevant.

Q: *So are you saying there is no role for art in trying to address the ecological challenges we face?*

A: No, I wouldn't precisely say that. I still consider that an "eco-vention" by an artist—meaning, for example, the reclaiming of a contaminated landscape or restoring a polluted river, is arguably a more honorable and interesting form of engagement with the world at this time than seeking to get one's work favorably reviewed in a major art magazine. That sounds very judgmental, I know, but I'm only speaking for myself here.

Q: *But with the intensity of the ecological crisis we have in the world, that's what's calling your attention, is that correct?*

A: What is calling my attention right now is a book I'm reading, called *Endgame*. Its author, Derrick Jensen, puts forth a rather unforgiving and radical thesis—one which those of us who have been thinking about these things for decades already know, but haven't ever quite put in such drastic terms. Jensen claims that civilization is unredeemable; it has catastrophically degraded the planet and has given us license to destroy life on many fronts—species, plants, humans—in order to get whatever resources it needs to keep itself going and continually moving forward. Meanwhile we've vastly overreached the earth's carrying capacity, yet we continue to expand as if this were not the case. Jensen calls this a "traumatic situation," because no action we can take at this point is of any avail.

There is a second volume in which he actually encourages the dismantling and destruction of civilization—taking it out before it takes us out. I think he's right about the intransigence of the cascading crises that confront us. I don't think there is any escape from situations like the polar ice caps melting. Nothing we can do at this point is likely to reverse that, and this is just one example of an intractable situation.

There's another way that we are under total threat as a civilization and as a species and that is the virus of holy war. I've spent the last year reading about the threat of global jihad and the clash of civilizations: jihadism versus democracy. What it comes down to is a sort of lust to annihilate at any cost. For us, it's a matter of taking control of markets and devouring resources to sustain our way of life, whereas jihadists want to take over the world under the umbrella of a very sinister religious control. If we think that America is bad in the department of imperialistic agendas, I can tell you that al Qaeda is far worse, albeit for different reasons than ours.

Q: *That leads to a kind of pessimistic perspective that is a little different from 1994 when you were talking with Laurie Zuckerman in your Conversations book about the ecological crisis. You had some sense, then, of optimism about a paradigm shift. I remember one statement in which you were talking about living in a transitional time, when the values*

and way of life we've been taught to live by in our culture have come to be seen as toxic. This brought up issues of healing and transformation. You said, "It seems as if there is a spiritual and social obligation to participate in this process of healing our world, however one can." Does that mean that if things are as bleak as you've just described, that you've moved away from that?

A: I don't know what I think at this point. I'm trying to come to terms with the unpalatable fact that despite decades of so-called "paradigm shift," little has really changed for the better. It seems instead as if things have gotten much worse. So I think I would want to frame your question differently: "If you were on a bus going down a mountainside, and you realized that the bus was careening out of control and about to go over a cliff, what would you be doing? Would you be looking out the window, or would you be hiding your eyes?"

Q: *I guess I'd be looking out the window.*

A: That may be our primary task at this point: to come out of denial and bear witness. To really confront the sheer deadliness of our present circumstances. It's a moot point as far as what the human race can do about all this now, since too many genies are out of the bottle and we can't put them back in. The human race has proven itself to be deeply dysfunctional. We've known for a long time that we're destroying the planet, yet we continue to do it with no let-up. Everyone knows that this war in Iraq is lethal, but we've managed to create a situation where nothing we do can solve the problem. Whatever we decide to do, the truth is we're trapped—or as Jensen prefers to put it, more grandly, "We're fucked."

Q: *Back in 2004 when you published the new edition of Has Modernism Failed?, your closing chapters indicated that you had an interest in transdisciplinarity and integral theory—in the works of Basarab Nicolescu and Ken Wilber. It seems that you saw something about the work they were doing as providing frameworks or perspectives that added value.*

A: I definitely believe that's true and I haven't changed my mind about that. Integralism is a great antidote to perceiving reality in the dualistic mode that plagues Western civilization. It calls for reciprocity and equality among all the levels of reality, and all levels of being. If I seem to have developed what you might call a bad case of "disheartenment," it's because I see that all the information we need is out there—all the philosophies and spiritualities that could guide us through—were we but to espouse them. But make no mistake, we haven't espoused them, and now our problems may no longer be amenable to amelioration by such means. So the question really is, "What is it about the human race that prevents it from following its own wisdom?" We've learned so much, but failed to put it to use.

Q: *Do you have an answer?*

A: Like I said, I think we're a flawed species, and we've managed, unwittingly, through our many technological advances and our unwavering belief in them as desirable, to write ourselves out of the picture. Obviously this is very unfortunate, both for us and for all the other species of the world that we're taking out along with us.

Sometimes I think I shouldn't be talking like this at all—I don't enjoy the Cassandra role. A friend of mine sent me an article that she had written a year or two ago about "peak oil," and how supplies are running out. She described how whenever she brings the topic up in conversation at dinner parties, she never gets invited back. This is not the kind of thing that people want to hear.

There's a conversation I had with an artist friend of mine, James Marriott, who does environmental art work in England. (I think you can find the text of it on the website of www.greenmuseum.org). We get into an old idea of James Hillman's and Michael Ventura's from their book *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—And the World's Getting Worse*. What should you be doing when the ship is going down? I don't know that anybody has a suitable answer to that question. Something James and I discuss is, at what point do you actually accept the fact that the ship *is* going down, and how does that affect what you think or can do about the situation?

Q: *One of the things that seemed to happen in your life, and was expressed in magical ways in your memoir, Living the Magical Life, was that you seemed to turn to a larger sense of life and to invest yourself at the level of faith. Is that still there?*

A: Yes! I still find synchronicity the most interesting spiritual phenomenon that I've run into in terms of human experience. I consider it to be the biggest pointer to the possibility that there is indeed something out there that we can't see, something that may be orchestrating events in a way that we don't understand. If I were to say I had any hope for the human race—and to counter everything else I've said so far—it would be that if there really are such forces, they may be operating now in a way that could save us.

I saw a movie recently about the Mayan calendar ending abruptly in 2012. The speculative thesis about what this could mean is that maybe time as we know it, time as delineated by historical narrative and the continuity of a certain way of life, will suddenly come to an end in 2012, precipitated by we know not what. But the spin that many scholars have put on it is that there will be cascading crises that will lead eventually to opportunities for evolution. We will come out in a place of higher consciousness. I would say that it's possible. But the odds don't look that way to me. However, I'm only one person, and I may not have any special insight into the future.

Q: *One of the comments you make in Living the Magical Life is that the universe is a better organizer than we are. We just need to stay out of the way. Is that a principle that still applies under current circumstances?*

A: I am basically Taoist in my spirituality. Non-interference is a very Taoist approach. So yes, I do think that many of the problems we are experiencing in the world at this time

are the result of human actions, especially untrammelled ego and ambition and greed. If you are a Taoist, you are trained to see yourself more as a speck of dust than as a towering rock star. Taoism says instead of striving for something, going somewhere, needing something, be happy over long periods of time with almost nothing. Economize. Simplify. Do not try to continue the pretense of more opulent times, as the *I Ching* counsels.

Q: If the bus is going over the cliff—

A: Russ, do you think it is?

Q: I don't know. There's a very good chance that it is. History suggests that there are surprising things that happen that we can't predict. I don't know if it is, but I'm concerned for my children and my children's children.

The question that came up for me was, if we're going over the cliff, and all we can do is either watch or close our eyes, is there anything about the transdisciplinarity or integral approaches that you see that helps us, at least if we keep our eyes open, better to comprehend what we're seeing?

A: I am of the persuasion that knowledge and the ability to confront and metabolize what's happening is the first order of the day. I absolutely agree with Alice Walker in this regard, when she says that even if there is nothing you can do personally—for instance, to stop the war—it's important to face what's really going on. People often avoid confronting how bad things are because they feel vulnerable and helpless, and are afraid of becoming too depressed. Alice Walker says we need to have the courage to be more depressed! I agree with that. She says that in today's world, where we are, who wants to be Little Miss Sunshine anyway? It's scary.

Q: Could you be more specific about the things that you think help you get a sense of the whole picture that you're seeing?

A: I'm a collage artist with a special gift for synthesis. It means that I can take the bits and pieces from everywhere and see how they connect, perhaps in ways that someone else might miss. That is, of course, the ultimate integral theory—which is that everything is interconnected. There is a wonderful Zen saying that embodies this: "When you pick up one piece of dust, the entire world comes with it." This is a basic idea that seems very hard for our atomized and individualistic society to grasp.

Richard Rorty, the philosopher who recently died, once said there is no big picture. He is very highly thought of, but personally, I think that is a stupid statement, an essentially misguided idea. I believe there is a big picture, and integralism—moving between inside and outside realms, between individual thoughts and collective worldviews, and seeing how all these things interact and interconnect, is very helpful. It creates a multi-dimensional, non-compartmentalized view of reality in which boundaries are permeable and divisions are transcended. Only then can one begin to grasp the infinitely complex

cat's cradle that is out there. Without that grasp of the totality, it's no wonder that no one has any workable idea for a solution, say, to the Iraq problem, or any way to navigate through this awful maze.

Q: If the bus is going over the cliff, and you're keeping your eyes open, even if there are only a few minutes to be able to pay attention, is there anything you would be doing for your fellow passengers?

A: I think it's one of those situations that until you're in it, you don't know. If the real question is, "What is our task?" I suppose our task is, at the very least, to be constantly vigilant in considering what our task is, rather than mindlessly pursuing our own agendas. We can enter into the Apocalyptic mysteries, as one writer I read suggests, by looking seriously into the realities of the times. This is a "gift" to the community. Obviously, beyond that, we can try to mitigate whatever suffering we can and undermine the levels of destruction.

Q: A friend of yours is promoting a different way for us to be in the world. Riane Eisler's new book, The Real Wealth of Nations, continues to build on her partnership model versus the dominator model.

*A: Her model of partnership was very influential for me in my early writing about art, to construct a notion of art that's built around relationship, participation, collaborative communities, and interaction with others. This is in strong contrast to the modernist construct of art as radically individualistic. The whole possibility of art as dialogue rather than monologue (an idea I also borrowed from David Bohm), puts it back into a *social* context, instead of the artificially constructed context of the marketplace. Putting art into the marketplace is, for me, a bit like putting animals into a zoo.*

So much has come down the pike since then that much of this seems quaintly historical now, but the *modus operandi* for being an artist in this culture is still very much in lockstep with the idea of selling yourself and becoming an art star, even if it's only for the fifteen minutes that Warhol so astutely allotted. When you start to bring in something larger, such as a social purpose or a use value for art, you will still run into vociferous opposition from people who consider art's value to reside in the fact that it serves no purpose beyond itself. It's the paradigm of freedom and autonomy.

Q: The diagnosis of the world being already at its end is terminal, so it cuts out all possible interventions—we can keep talking until it happens—but the interventions of someone like Riane Eisler to shift to a partnership model, or the use of dialogue or any other human creation, doesn't it make all that seem rather pointless?

A: These ideas have been out there for a long time now. Riane's books, my books, many other peoples' books, have been out there for some 30 or 40 years. These ideas have taken hold on a certain level in the culture, but in terms of affecting any real transformation and change, what is your view? Do you feel that it's all happening, that we're getting closer to where we need to go?

Q: For me, it's important to keep the focus on trying to create what's important, and that includes the survival of the planet. I'm not so sure there's a lot we can do at this point; that's partly why your position is so strong in my opinion, and difficult to react to other than with a sense of loss.

A: And it was not what you expected.

Q: I wasn't really expecting anything in that regard. I knew that your more recent writings were strongly about the political and ecological challenges we face.

For me, as long as there's life, there's hope. I'm in agreement with you, Suzi, that we all need to do whatever we can to try and make a difference.

*A: Have you read *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy?*

Q: No, I haven't. Maybe I'm avoiding the pessimist.

*A: Well, Russ, you're hardly alone in that! In the case of *The Road*, what McCarthy has done is to write a novel which takes place in a post-apocalyptic world; it is so cinematic and intense and drastically simple that you actually get to live inside that experience. You follow a father and son, who are two of the rare survivors in a disfigured landscape where everything has been destroyed. It's raining all the time and everything has become ash, and the two figures are slowly walking south, hoping to get to a warmer place. The scene McCarthy sets seems to me to be a more likely outcome of all these impending crises than this big transformative thing, but I could be dead wrong.*

Q: Others are suggesting that destruction of the human race is a step in the evolution of the universe. Who knows what our destruction will make room for? I'm reminded of a close friend whose grandmother taught her as a child to expect an apocalyptic event, the Nostradamus predictions that people see as predicting the end of the world. In our culture the doomsayers have always been people to laugh at, ignore, or treat as strange. It seems like the case you're making is that it's really where we need to be thinking these days; it's where we need to focus.

A: It's a question of how reality-based one is, and how willing to enter into painful spheres of thinking. I agree with Alice Walker who says that we are living in "probably the most dangerous, frightening, unstable times the world has ever known." It's not a position that I necessarily want to defend; I'm just speaking from my heart, and that is how I see things. Pipe dreams and soap bubbles aren't working at this point. It's hard for me to deny what I see. Perhaps I have got a kind of negative spin on things. Who knows? But I can tell you that spending a year reading some ten books on jihadism has made me understand that we are in way over our heads. I don't know whether our government truly doesn't understand the forces it has unleashed, or whether they can't afford to admit what they've done—but what is clear is that I don't think we're going to emerge from this gracefully or intact.

Q: Is there another book in Suzi Gablik's future?

A: I don't know—some of my feelings about this can be found on my blog. I've perversely taken to blogging, given that I think technology is part of what's going to undo us in the end. Al Gore's newest book says that because of computers and the Internet, we can revivify our stolen and dismantled democracy, and rebuild it again at the grass roots. He doesn't mention the fact that the biggest tool for the Islamists is also cyberspace. It's the place where the jihadists are recruiting their terrorist converts and selling their anti-American propaganda around the globe. What we have defined as the "war on terror," they call the "war on Islam."

Q: *The point there is that any tool can be used for various purposes.*

A: No, I'm afraid it's not as simple as that. Technologies like the car and the computer are *not* neutral. They change us. They arrive in our world, and society builds all these narratives celebrating them. But then, they actually change our lives, and we become addicted to them. Only much later do we discover that we've got holes in the ozone, that we're destroying the biosphere, rewiring our brains, or that there is such a thing as cyber-terrorism. But by then, we've become prisoners of these technologies, and it's too late to change. We feel like we can't survive without them. Eventually, we hardly remember there was once a world where you could actually do things without having to mediate it all through machines.

The way we're going, there will be less and less that you can do that isn't mediated by technology. Once that happens, it will be very hard to live our lives any other way. So it's not just a matter of technology being good or bad only in relation to some hypothetical user's intention; technology affects things in ways we don't foresee and didn't figure. By the time we find out the consequences, it's too late to do anything about it.

Q: *What is your blog address?*

A: <http://virgilspeaks.blogspot.com>

I feel timorous that I sounded so bleak. You wouldn't know it, but I'm a great lover of life and believer in life. It's very painful to watch it all going under and being systematically destroyed. I find myself like an alien member of the human race—how can people act like this? How did this happen?

Q: *If you weren't such a lover of life, then you wouldn't feel the pain.*

A: Well, I suppose that's true. Sometimes I find myself thinking of the small bands of Eskimos that Gretel Ehrlich describes in one of her books. Even when they are starving, they laugh and enjoy life. They are not fazed.

Q: *Thank you very much Suzi.*