that other kind, the kind that is fully embodied and richly sensual.

My own experience suggests that online communication is much less cacophonous than the hype surrounding it. I have encountered instances of the unbuttoned aspects of Internet communication, but they occur with comparatively little frequency. In the 100 or so e-mails I receive daily from academic and political lists, and the 10 or so e-mails I receive daily that are personal or professional in nature, there is occasionally a rude, angry, or thoughtless comment. But even these few are followed more frequently than not by profuse apologies from their senders, who, upon second thought, not only recognize their unseemly behavior, but apparently deeply regret it. In my own e-mails and in those which I receive, a consideration and accommodation to the needs of the addressee is far more often the rule than the exception.

Rather than embodying a new psychological style, I find that the Internet simply provides a new tool of communication, one that fills a very distinct niche. I use the Net to write and to receive responses to very specific inquiries. This niche has the two properties of immediacy and brevity. As a means for immediate and rapid response, it is far more useful than telephones or "snail mail." At the same time, its primary value is for brief messages, usually no more than a paragraph or two. The medium itself works against longer messages being read with any degree of thoroughness; for these, older forms of communication are often preferable. But the brevity of response should not be confused with spontaneity. One writes just as carefully, but more directly. One may write with less stylistic flourish, but this is partly due to the fact that one does not compose drafts to be revised and rewritten for Net communications. At the same time though, the prose style one adopts may be both more natural and demonstrate more wit than non-Net communications.

The Net obviously is also of use as an alternative means of transmitting documents, but here I find it supplements existing means rather than creating a new one. While the Net may transmit documents quickly, I find I must still download and print them in order to be able to make use of them. To this extent, what the Net offers is not that much different than what snail mail and fax offer.

Indeed, if one wishes to invoke a Freudian metaphor to understand the psychology of online communication, *secondary* rather than primary process thinking would better describe it. But I find this metaphor to be inappropriate, distorting far more than it reveals. We generally do police ourselves in our Net behavior, but not punitively or out of guilt as a superego would, nor even as a result of a panoptic normalization to this new discursive practice, as a Foucauldian perspective would. Rather, we do so as social beings living in a social world who learned long ago to take account of the needs of the other, of our audience. And when aggression does slip out, it does so precisely with, rather than against, the sanctions of the culture. Our discontents are not experienced in opposition to our civilization, but are completely congruent expressions of it.

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The Psychosphere: A New Online Consciousness

Philip H. Farber
Feature Editor, *Tree of Light*

In an issue of the widely distributed, family-oriented *USA Weekend* magazine, the physicist who invented HTML [hypertext markup language, used on the World Wide Web] and the Web was quoted as saying he believed the Internet (Net) was forming an artificial intelligence. He's not the only one to have expressed that seemingly science fictional opinion. In an interview with the esteemed *Paradigm Shift* Web zine [online magazine] a couple of years back, Genesis P-Orridge, in an updated take on Teilhard de Chardin's philosophy, speculated that a consciousness, a deity, was taking form in the Internet.

P-Orridge proposed four levels of consciousness relative to the Net: the Nanosphere, which he connected with the information available from DNA; the Neurosphere, the individual human brain; the Kaosphere, a group consciousness, social or tribal consciousness; and the Psychosphere, the entire collection of human brains, computers, and linking technology that has come together as the Internet. P-Orridge said,

> Literally a whole brain is being built, it's not a metaphor for a brain, it actually is a brain.... What we're really thinking about is when you plug in and go online, you're plugging into all the brains of all the other people who've been there, some of those people being psychotic and paranoid, some of them being into control, and some of them being very benign.…

He further proposed that the Psychosphere itself would take on the characteristics of a god,

> with the flaws and the gifts of everyone on the planet almost -- millions of people -- with no real unified agenda and no real dialogue about what the psychic and neurological and social and economic effect really will be of that acceleration and separation of this larger brain.

When I first heard P-Orridge say that, I thought it was fairly provocative, but now, after years of observing online "civilization," I am beginning to think that it is a fair model of the situation. As integral parts of the Psychosphere, it is sometimes difficult to see how we interact with it -- a case of not being able to see the forest for the trees, perhaps. Exploring how we interact can also demonstrate how the Psychosphere "remembers" things and acts of its own volition. My own observations have led to the following postulates.

Postulate #1: Every experience you have online affects you and changes you to a greater or lesser degree. Just as in "regular" space, every impression that you take in changes you to some extent. In the case of more powerful impressions, or ones that you resonate with, or ones that persuade, induce, explain, etc., the action on your consciousness is obvious. In the case of more subtle experiences it is less so, but equally lasting on your consciousness. For instance, if you are in a chat room and someone posts something relatively insignificant, then you are changed by the wait for it to scroll by, the necessity of having to ignore it, or by a change or confirmation of your general impression of the chat room. These small changes may be cumulative, or may have only a small impact, but a change in your consciousness occurs nonetheless. Also, note the kinds of indirect changes that occur: if you are bored by something, you may communicate unconsciously to others, by leaving a particular area or changing the subject; if you are angered by something, you may hold that in your own consciousness as muscular tension or other activity, which will continue to change your own consciousness for a period of time, thus affecting your subsequent actions. Likewise, if you are pleased or aroused or happy about something you encounter online, that attitude, muscular release, change in consciousness continues. And, likewise, you respond on unconscious levels to the subtle cues of others in this regard.

Postulate #2: Every action that you make in cyberspace affects the Psychosphere indefinitely. Other elements of the Psychosphere are affected by your actions as you are by theirs, as in Postulate #1. The change in consciousness, however small or large, radiates out from your action. If your actions or words project happiness, then that happiness spreads in ripples from that point of action.

Postulate #3: The memory of the Psychosphere is held in your nervous system and body, and the nervous systems and bodies of all other elements of the collective, as well as in the digital memory of the computers. Your own responses and changes in consciousness and physicality, as described in Postulates #1 and #2, remain as a resource to the group consciousness, for better or worse. If you are upset by something online, the Psychosphere will remember that upset for the time that you are experiencing, no matter how long, and ripples will extend from that point and be "remembered" in the consciousness/ physicality of those who encounter the ripples. The ripples themselves become archives of memory, spreading indefinitely, however diluted, through the Psychosphere.

Postulate #4: Deliberately changing your own consciousness and making consciously-chosen actions in relation to the Psychosphere can change the consciousness of the collective. Any "change in conformity with Will" will affect the Psychosphere just as any other action, as in Postulates #1, #2, and #3.

Postulate #5: Acting in harmony or conformity with your own True Will or innate sensibility (a concept isomorphic with the Tao in Chinese philosophy) will have the effect of harmonizing or purifying the general consciousness of the Psychosphere. In our bodies, a cell that is operating in conformity with its own True Will, its genetic code and determined function in the body, will tend to support and increase the comfort, effectiveness, and general health of the whole. A cell that deviates from its True Will will inhibit the health and action of the

whole, and, indeed, may itself be considered a disease. Likewise, the elements of the Psychosphere -- us -- operating according to our True Will, in harmony with ourselves, will support the health and comfort of the Psychosphere as a whole.

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Online Communication Is Still Offline

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Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

Much has been made of hypothesized psychological change via an online communication revolution. Specifically, e-mail and the World Wide Web are said to entail novel communication modes -- virtual realities (VR) -- that may induce change in behavior, emotion, cognition, and motivation. There is further elaboration of the salience for psychological change of the VR itself versus the nature of the content it conveys -- assuming content can be decontextualized from VR, the psychological processes of the recipient as constructor of meaning, the sociohistorical moment, and so on. Yet the online communication revolution presents neither a new conception of reality -- a virtual reality -- nor a new VR technology (VRT).

The Construct of VR Is Old But Only Viewed as New. VR is implicated in the oldest and most basic pursuit of philosophy and philosophical psychology -- epistemology. Is there an objective reality towards which one can virtually approach through sensation (cf., Hume) or reason (cf., Plato or Kant)? Is objective reality *a priori* an apocryphal conception masking what can't be apperceived (cf., Hinduism-based texts), falling away through a succession of appearances (cf., Buddhism-based texts), or flying away before language clarification (cf., Wittgenstein)? If there is an objective reality, does *mind* preshape perception and cognition as VR experience, or is it the product of VR experience? These questions and attempts to answer them may reflect the angst of being in a world of ambiguous and tenuous meaning and stability as posited by existential philosophers.

In lay psychology, VR usually denotes approximating one's notion of reality through self-reflection and reflection of the other. In one's naive phenomenology, thinking and feeling about the past, present, and future underlines that VR as construct is anything but new. In fact, psychologists have long noted that varying conceptions of VR often become a basis for cooperation or conflict within the self or between self and other. Ultimately, conceptions of VR -- under assault by alternative logics and rationalities that may be perceived as illogics and irrationalities -- are girded only by faith and can become motive forces in the world's sublime and evil moments. For example, to foster the sublime or attenuate evil -- with mixed results at best -- revolutionary movements target government, science, technology, art, society, and culture through engendering VRs as utopian mythologies.

The Construct of VRT Is Old But Only Viewed as New. Mental health intervention techniques have long constituted VRT via role-playing, psychodrama, hypnosis, meditation, cognitive and cognitive-behavioral therapies, psychochemotherapies, and tension-relaxation exercises. VRT also comprises ritual -- above and beyond mental health intervention techniques -- through the immersion in cultural experiences such as dance, drama, epics, myths, paintings, sculptures, and even computer-generated prostheses supporting intrapsychic processes. Moreover, VRTs have been espoused by purveyors of so-called "brainwashing," "thought control," neurolinguistic programming, and mass marketing geared towards commercial products and political candidates and policies.

Conclusion. The VRTs exemplified by online communication modes -- e-mail and the World Wide Web -- are as offline as past modes. They are as instantaneous or slow, as reality-approximate or reality-divergent, as immersion-