

IMAGING PLACE AS IMAGING THOUGHT: DELEUZE, ELECTRACY AND SECOND LIFE

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“A new image of thought—a new conception of what thinking means is the task of philosophy today.” --Gilles Deleuze¹

“We come to know what it means to think when we ourselves try to think. If the attempt is to be successful, we must be ready to learn thinking.” --Martin Heidegger²

I. ORIENTATION

As a Ph.D. student of Greg Ulmer in the early 1990s, years just prior to the web’s widespread adoption, I employed his grammatological approach³ to the study of the humanities in order to develop a rhetoric of hypertext composition which saw in hypertext a precursor of the three-dimensional writing spaces that are now coming available in virtual worlds like Second Life. My research included study of Greek and Renaissance rhetorical practices, especially use of the memory palace as a mnemonic strategy, as well as the return of allegory and the rise of the “superficial” in contemporary literary theory and philosophy.⁴ The memory palace tradition, with its practice of storing startling images in imaginary places familiar to the orator, can be a powerful rhetorical tool in the age of virtual reality as well as extremely relevant to the (on-going, perpetual) Invent-L conference focused as it is on “imaging place.” The Imaging Place work of John Craig Freeman and the Florida Research Ensemble, for example, can be viewed as a kind of collective memory palace on a global level. Given the emergent popularity of virtual worlds like Second Life, based as they are on a video-game interface with which many “digital natives” (Prensky 1) already feel comfortable, the grammatological milieu of the “virtual memory palace” has much to offer us today as we work to theorize relevant uses of these new technologies.

My original abstract for the Imaging Place conference asked the question of how the electronic medium (specifically a 3-D virtual reality like Second Life) would change the way that we think spatially, given the context, from cognitive linguistics, of the conceptual metaphor of the mind as a body moving through space as conceived by Lakoff and Johnson.⁵ The question of how thought will change, or rather how new media will augment human brain capacity differently, is central to Ulmer’s development of “electracy” as a neologism referring to the skill and facility necessary to exploit the full communicative potential of new electronic media such as multimedia, hypermedia, social software, and virtual worlds.⁶ In the following passage, Ulmer concisely states how electracy will be different:

What literacy is to the analytical mind, electracy is to the affective body: a prosthesis that enhances and augments a natural or organic human potential. Alphabetic writing is an

artificial memory that supports long complex chains of reasoning impossible to sustain within the organic mind. Digital imaging similarly supports extensive complexes of mood atmospheres beyond organic capacity. Electrate logic proposes to design these atmospheres into affective group intelligence. Literacy and electracy in collaboration produce a civilizational left-brain right-brain integration. (Ulmer)

During his keynote speech at the Imaging Place conference, Ulmer further developed this idea of augmentation when he spoke of electracy as supporting the daemon, which he said was best defined by Garcia Lorca's idea of "duende" (i.e. the spirit or voice of the body).⁷ Ulmer finds "what that voice of the body really says, what it knows, what its wisdom is that we're going to augment in electracy" in Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, which is our "capacity for being affected. . . experienced as joy or sadness." Electracy supplements literacy by calling forth in electronic composition "an aesthetic practice that supports and augments the experience of *conatus*."

In other words, it is not the *way* we think that will change but the *way we think about the way we think*—the way we think about thought. This change is already underway, not only in the work of Ulmer. Thought is no longer viewed as merely a rational and logical activity but also something that includes the emotions, considered for so long merely secondary to the rational mind. This changing perception can be seen in the handful of recent books that acknowledge the centrality of emotions in thought: Antonio D'Amasio's *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Joseph LeDoux's *The Emotional Brain*, and, more recently, Marvin Minsky's *The Emotion Machine*. Western neuroscientists are conferencing with the Dalai Lama to discuss the physiological origins of "destructive emotions" and how techniques of meditation can steer brain activity away from the amygdala—the center of fear in the brain—to the prefrontal lobes, the center of rationality and creativity, while the presence of "Emotional Intelligence" ("E.Q.") and "Social Intelligence" is recognized and studied as well.⁸

This change in thinking about thought is also underway in philosophy, especially the work of Gilles Deleuze. This is widely recognized in recent commentary on his thought. Reidar Due, for instance, writes that "Deleuze's philosophy. . . aims to produce a *revolution* in how we think" (1). Peter Hallword writes that, for Deleuze, "the main task facing a creature capable of thought is to learn how to think" (2). Tom Conley, writing about the "key concept" of the *fold*, says that "There is opened a dramatic reflection on the character of thinking, which belongs as much to Deleuze as to Foucault. . . ." (174). For Claire Colebrook, Deleuze's whole project is for "provoking and mobilizing thinking" (12), for "Deleuze's created concept of philosophy refers to a capacity to think differently" (25). John Rajchman elaborates on Deleuze's invented practice of "noology" ("the study of images of thought"): ". . . philosophy starts. . . with the encounter with something that doesn't fit in habitual ways of seeing and thinking, that 'shakes up' thinking and puts up something new to be thought" (44). And Eric Alliez concludes an essay on "Deleuze's Virtual Philosophy" with the following peroration:

Thus Deleuze's question will always have been that of a material and virtual-actual image of Thought-Being, of the rhizome and of immanence, with the superior ethology it calls for in order to follow the unknown furrows traced in the world-brain by every free creation of concepts: new connections, new passages, new synapses for new compositions which make the singular into a concept... (103).

Deleuze himself often writes about thought, enough, obviously, to prompt the above conclusions. For example, in “On Nietzsche and the Image of Thought,” he writes, “Well, then, philosophy, too, must create worlds of thought, a whole new conception of thought, of ‘what it means to think,’ and it must be adequate to what is happening around us” (*Desert Islands* 138). A little later in this same essay, he continues: “Hume, Bergson, and Proust interest me so much because in their work can be found profound elements for a new image of thought. There’s something extraordinary in the way they tell us: thinking means something else than what you believe. We live with a particular image of thought, that is to say, before we begin to think, we have a vague idea of what it means to think, its means and ends” (*Desert Islands* 139). In thinking about Nietzsche’s particular style of thought in the essay “Nomadic Thought,” Deleuze writes, “This is perhaps Nietzsche at his most profound, a measure of his break with philosophy, as it appears in the aphorism: to have made a war-machine of thought, to have made thought a nomadic power” (*Desert Islands* 260). And, of course, in his great act of meta-philosophy (in partnership with Guattari) *What is Philosophy?* he writes of philosophy, art, and science as the daughters of chaos: “the *Chaoids*—art, science, and philosophy—as forms of thought or creation” (208), as “the three planes, the rafts on which the brain plunges into and confronts the chaos” (210).

In many ways, then, Ulmer’s conception of electracry can be viewed as the new image of thought that Deleuze continually calls for throughout his career. Ulmer himself is Deleuzian insofar as he is a creator of concepts—“applied grammatology,” “teletheory,” the puncept, heuristics, and electracry, to name the most significant.

Ulmer modeled the new form of thinking in a response to a post of mine on the Invent-L discussion list. One thing I hoped for from the conference but wasn’t very good at producing (perhaps my fault, perhaps the fault of the conference format) was a conversation about how a 3-D electronic space like Second Life will change the way we think spatially. I wanted to ask the following questions based on Lakoff and Johnson’s cluster of conceptual metaphors that emerge from the Mind as Body metaphor (Thinking is Moving, Thinking is Perceiving, Thinking is Object Manipulation) and consider these in light of using virtual reality as a prosthesis for thinking (Ideas are Locations, A Line of Thought is a Path, Understanding is Following, etc):

- What happens to thought when our understanding of space changes?
- What happens to thought when we consider the space of non-Euclidean geometries?
- What happens to thought when we begin to navigate virtual spaces like Second Life?

Upon returning from the conference and thinking these things over, I began to wonder about thought itself, to think about thinking, about what is happening when one thinks, and I posted this question to Invent-L: “What is thought?” (Smyth, “whacky question #1”).⁹ Ulmer’s response was to post the following:

What is thinking. Part One: an allegory.

The ice-cream store of Reason.

The most popular flavors are vanilla and chocolate but some ask for bubblegum-clam

with sprinkles. Thinking is the child exiting with a double-dip thought already melting down his hand (a self-portrait, 1950 perhaps) nestled insecurely in a waffle-grid sentence.

A proof (reconstructed scene with parable feature turned on):

1.mmm.....m.....n...nn.....-----ZZZ---,,,
2. (Sees trail of ants crossing a deep crack in sidewalk). ?????
3. (Leans over 90 degrees at the waist. Double-dip top-heavy cone discharges plops reverse order onto sidewalk altering ant train movement with several casualties).
!?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?
4. (says Waaaaaahhhhhh!) Oops oops oops.
5. It still looks ok mostly (reaches for upper portion).
Mother: Don't touch that!
Father: A lesson: vertical and horizontal. Nicely done.
6. (Looking at sister's cone). It would be funny if hers plopped. (Ulmer "allegory")

My follow-up post asked the following questions:

1. Why is it the ice-cream store of "Reason"? Is thinking only about reason, or is there more to it than that?
2. Since this allegory invokes a landscape metaphor (what else is there?), I wonder what other stores and places there are to go and what they represent other aspects of thinking.
3. Why is thought represented as something solid that melts (e.g. ice cream)?
4. What is the mother of thought? What is the father of thought? Why is thinking represented as a child?
5. Why does the mother tell the child not to pick up the fallen ice cream? Why does the father say "nicely done" after clarifying the lesson learned? What does this suggest about the nature of thought and thinking?
6. Am I thinking too much about all of this?

Some implications for thought and thinking:

1. Thought is slippery. Thought doesn't last long: it's transient, it melts away.
2. Thinking is something to be enjoyed, while it lasts. The joy is ephemeral, though.
3. Thought is something we try to contain. The "waffle-grid sentence/cone" suggests the striated space of Deleuze and Guattari. Thought inevitably escapes, however; it cannot be contained.
4. There is plain thought (vanilla and chocolate) and there is specialty thought (bubblegum-clam flavor with sprinkles).
5. Curiosity about something else (here, about the ants) leads to losing your thoughts. You must stay focused in order to engage in sustained thought.
6. The visual nature of allegory/analogy provides *the* way to think within the electrate apparatus. A "proof" will be a scene unfolding in the space of allegory/parable. (Smyth "Re: allegory").

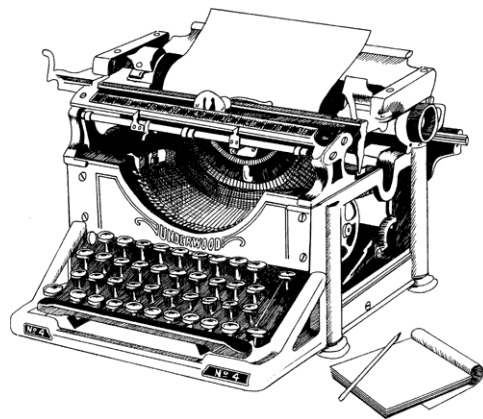
In other words, responding with an allegory is perfectly in line with Ulmer’s whole project, which has to do with *changing the way we think*. It is ultimately about having us *think with images, through images* rather than (or as a supplement to) thinking only with words.

And with that in mind—as a thought perhaps, or perhaps as an image—I must begin to think in these new ways, or be thought in these ways, to be *affected* by these thoughts of imaging thought, of imaging place.

According to Deleuze, affects are the basic components of mental activity. . . . To understand an affect is to see it as a *force*, a particular type of energy and this energy does not presuppose self-consciousness. . . . In this philosophical perspective, the mind is a site of thoughts rather than a center of consciousness. These thoughts are not defined by the fact that someone can say: they are my thoughts. Thoughts, in other words, are not defined as *belonging to a subject*. (Due 10)

II. DISORIENTATION

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. Or the lazy dog’s *back*. That’s the way I learned it—he (he?) jumped over its back. But the back is not necessary. When I was learning how to type, way back in 1978, on huge—*huge!*—monstrous Royal typewriters with long metal typebars and big round black-pearl keytops, my father told me that the sentence “The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog’s back” contained every letter of the alphabet and was therefore good for practicing one’s typing. But if you actually account for all of the letters in the alphabet, there’s no need for the back.

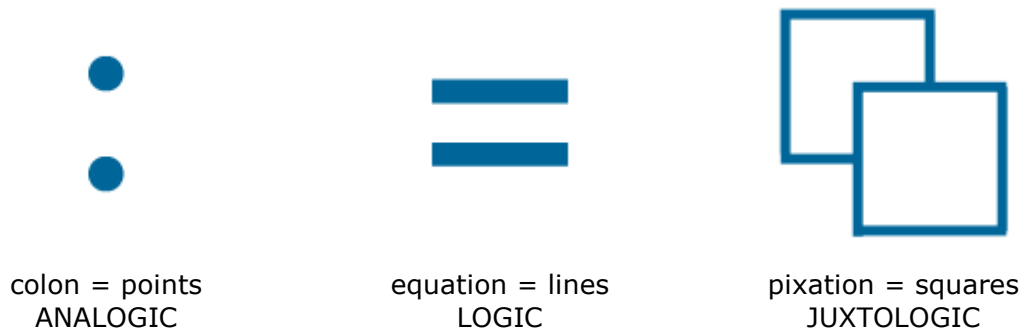


One way or the other, the quick brown fox and the lazy dog are convenient insofar as they invoke alphabetic literacy, one of the most powerful inventions of Western civilization and one that images thought as an individual, autonomous act of an authority. They may not, however, rise to the level of the “conceptual personae” that Deleuze and Guattari say are necessary for the creation of new concepts: “Conceptual personae are the philosopher’s ‘heteronyms,’ and the philosopher’s name is the simple pseudonym of his personae. I am no longer myself but

thought’s aptitude for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places. . . . The conceptual persona is needed to create concepts on the plane. . .” (*What is*

Philosophy? 64, 75-76). They will at least serve as allegorical figures who will enable me to experiment with the form and content of this, this, *what?* Let me call it a *condensation*.

So, despite the invocation of alphabetic literacy, we have in this scene, this image, an allegory of electracy: it suggests a going forward, a becoming-electrate: the *quick* brown fox jumps over the *lazy* dog. The dog is slow. The fox achieves speed, races forward, is going on. The dog wants to slow things down, the way scientists and mathematicians minimize dimensional complexity in order to comprehend, to *grasp*, the nature of reality.¹⁰ The fox turns the point into a line, and the line into a square, by dashing forth: what you see is a blur, the fourth dimension manifest.



Once upon a time there was a Quick Brown Fox and a Lazy Dog. This is a story of how they came together, what they said, and what they did. It's the kind of story you've heard before but never listened to—a small story, a light story.

The Quick Brown Fox was a wanderer. He never stayed anywhere longer than a short time, and he never stayed in the same place twice. He liked to cross over but never get to the other side. He liked to go fast and feel the breeze in his wavy brown hair.

For these reasons, he traveled light. He carried a laptop computer, a cellphone, and a telescope, all in a little black bag he wore over his shoulder. He wore black clothes and black shoes. You'd think he was just at a funeral. He had black sunglasses; you could not see his eyes. Black leather jacket.

The Fox was peripatetic, presocratic, sophistic and sophisticated. He was, in a word, cool. So cool as to be cold. So cold he burned to the touch.

When the time came he left the place he was and came to the place he is now, which is on the road walking toward the Lazy Dog.

At another moment, the Lazy Dog is lying on the ground, taking a nap. The Dog isn't really lazy; he just thinks slow thoughts, and likes to take his time. He is a scientist, and he lives in the doghouse at the border of three states, at the point of their intersection, inside the boundary.

The Lazy Dog is wearing a white laboratory coat, in the fashion of scientists, and in its pocket he has a pocket protector, three pens (blue, black, and red), a small notebook, and a magnifying glass. His house is full of books, which is why he sleeps outside all the time. He also has a particle accelerator out back.

At long last the Quick Brown Fox arrives, and jumps over the Lazy Dog's back. This is the moment we've all been waiting for.

Then what happens? A dialog, of course. Or, rather, a *diapath*. For dia-logos must yield to dia-pathos.

What Is Thought? A Neo-Presocratic Diapath

The Lazy Dog: I *must* get organized. My thoughts keep swirling around one central question: “What is Thought?” It’s like a funnel, sucking my mental energy into a vortex. I have no control. Yet I never make any progress. I am stuck at that one location, that one point, as if a young child waiting to go forth into the world (first day of school, perhaps) and is afraid to do so. How can I think these thoughts about thought? I am not qualified. I have no credentials. I haven’t read the entire oeuvre of Western philosophy and all commentary on each major thinker. Who will listen to what I have to say? I will waste my time. I *am* wasting my time, for I can’t think of anything else.

The Quick Brown Fox: You spin and spin but you haven’t gone *through*. Dive in. You are swept up in the swept, the spinning. You are not traveling with it. Come with me through the vortex, to a new dimension of thought, to whatever is beyond the here of now.

The Lazy Dog: No, no. I *must* get organized. There is no time for wandering in multidimensional phase spaces. (Not to mention there’s a *deadline*.) This requires a particular kind of thinking, to think about thought in a systematic way. It requires *analysis*, a breaking down into this and that, and then a spreading out, an anatomizing of thought, an atomizing of thought. Ah yes, that will be my most erudite title: “An Atomy of Thought.” A resurrection of an ancient genre, a return to a classical age. Fox, I have no time for your non-sense. I have real work to do. My intention is to develop this genre within a contemporary context, accounting for all current thought in psychology, cognitive science, conceptual integration theory, the electrate apparatus.

[the QBF branches off of the Lazy Dog’s dialogue: he has multiple responses as it unfolds... below is a link from “non-sense.”]

The Quick Brown Fox: Oh but Dog, there is a logic to nonsense. A higher logic some would say :the logic of chaos, a theory of complexity, a recognition that all is in flux, nothing is stable, there are only flows, flows of matter (which are flows of energy, for the Einstein showed that each is a manifestation of the other, wed by speeds and slownesses), bloodflows to the parts of the mindbrain bridged by a concept, the flow of our conversation from me to you, from smooth to striated, from rhizome to tree :fractal half-dimensional web of unfolding potential :spider

dropping from the leaf and falling free, web trailing from behind :banyan branch dropping down, seeking for an earth :

The Quick Brown Fox: [the following branches off from deadline]. How can there be a deadline? There are only lifelines. There is only life. Even the rocks are alive :have you ever seen a lava flow? have you ever seen a mud slide? Dog, you're too lazy to even open your eyes and pay attention to what is happening around you! You only attend to that which you can control, that which will fit your little simplistic equations. You're scared of nonlinear equations, or, rather, you have no way of conceiving of them :this is the limitation of your view of the concept, residue of literate thought. You must go beyond the concept to capture these new modes of thinking. Here's a (partial?) list:

- the receipt
- the decept
- the incept
- the except

So the questions you should be trying to answer are these: How to be, not conceptual, but receiptual? How to be deceptual? Inceptual? Exceptual? How to create receipts, decepts, incepts, excepts? If you want to think with Deleuze, you have to think *beyond* Deleuze. He spoke of philosophy as the creation of concepts. You must speak of philosophy as the creation of receipts/decepts/incepts/excepts.

The Lazy Dog: Your talk is all jumbled. How is anybody supposed to follow you? It's all really a bit much. You're interrupting me once again. Now, to get down to it. Let's see. Okay. First of all an explication of terms: I will use "mindbrain" to indicate the origin or source of thoughts in order to acknowledge the current recognition of the problems that a Cartesian split (of mind from brain) poses for a current philosophy of mind. This term will be a way of acknowledging the embodied nature of thought, how it emerges from our "wetware," from a brain and its experience of being in a body immersed in a three-space (three spatial dimensions). This recognition is in line with all of the current thinking about neuroscience: David Dennett, Antonio Damasio, Joseph LeDoux. These thinkers point to the central role that emotion plays in reason, and therefore to misconceptions regarding the

The Quick Brown Fox: Umm, Dog?

The Lazy Dog: Yes, Fox? Yes?

The Quick Brown Fox: Preeeee-cisely.

The Quick Brown Fox: I must get dis-organized, I must loosen up, become-mud, become-lava, become-bubble, become-dust :mixtures, thought-as-mixture (earth + water = mud; earth + fire = lava; water + air = bubble; earth + air = dust), I will be expressed as one with the mixture, this

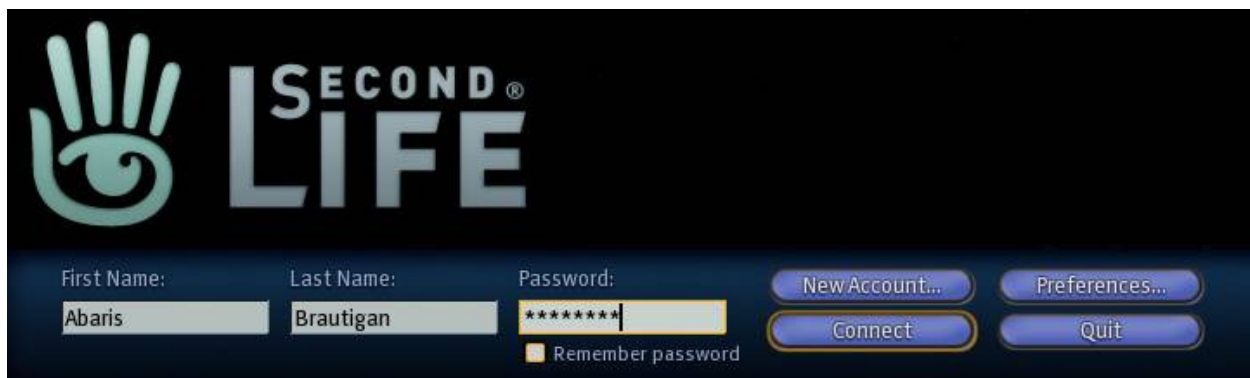
will be how I become a new image for thought, no more I but eye: perceiving the image of thought : eye must get dis-organized.

The Lazy Dog: Fox, your feeble attempt at some kind of avant-garde surreal rant regarding a post-Deleuzian act of thought comes across as pseudo-intellectual gibberish. If you think you are going to get far with that kind of babble, I will be exiting this conversation. My endeavor is a serious inquiry into the nature of thought, and a consideration of how it will change in light of a new electrate apparatus. If we want grammatology to be considered a serious endeavor, a utilitarian panacea for sociological intervention into the woes of 21st century social problems, we must remain within institutional boundaries, expectations and norms of intellectual exchange and exploration.

The Quick Brown Fox: The eyes/ayes/I's have it: aye, bucco: affirmative, captain. Affirmative. Carry on then, goDDog-it.

The Lazy Dog: All right then. I was saying that emotion is now recognized as not inferior but central to the thinking process. We see this in Minsky's recent book *The Emotion Machine*, which regards emotions as alternative ways of solving problems (explaining their presence in our evolved mindbrain). Ulmer of course works to create a 21st century rhetoric that in-volves the excited *eureka*-shriek of discovery as a way of turning the humanities into something practical and useful. As his former student Barry Mauer put it, "in the age of literacy logos was the gold standard, but in the age of electracy pathos and ethos will be the gold standard..."

The Quick Brown Fox: Dog. You need to cut to the chase. And I ought to know about that: If you want to use a virtual reality like Second Life as a prosthesis for thinking, you need to log on and just do it.



Abaris Brautigan and the Quest to Find the Edge of the World

I, Abaris Brautigan, am a Second Life avatar of Richard Smyth, who likes to think about how three-dimensional spaces like Second Life will change the way meatars (pronounced **me-ah'-tars**) think with their "wetware." As an electronic projection of his self, I share his concerns and

interests. I have no choice, really: I go where he goes, I say what he says (or, rather, types, though the new voice chat interface has possibilities), I appear the way he chooses for me to appear. Most of the time. I say that because, on the day we went on our quest to find the edge of the world, there was some glitch, and he/I had the form and shape of a woman: I had been “ruthified.”

[21:38] Abaris Brautigan: I think it's interesting being a woman, but I worked so hard to cultivate that strange signature appearance of mine....
[21:38] Lyr Lobo: hehehe
[21:38] Lyr Lobo: we all get "ruthed"
[21:39] Lyr Lobo: it is a data error
[21:39] Lyr Lobo: even women...with the brown hair under our prim hair
[21:40] Abaris Brautigan: Yes--I've got the brown hair at the moment. And earrings even!!
[21:41] Lyr Lobo: hehe

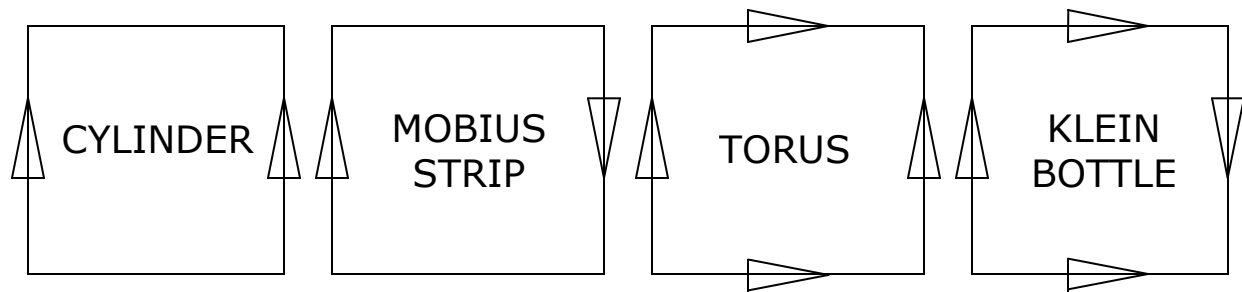


Given the conceptual metaphors of the Mind as Body metaphor (Thinking is Moving, Thinking is Perceiving, Thinking is Object Manipulation) that recent scholarship in cognitive linguistics identifies, the possibilities of imaging thought by means of imaging place become clear.¹¹ According to Lakoff and Johnson, thought is grounded (or “imaged”) in an allegory of the mind moving through a physical space.¹² If we extrapolate from this, then a meatar embodied as an avatar in a virtual information space is engaged in an act of thought when it moves through this space: the virtual reality becomes a prosthesis for thinking insofar as Ideas are Locations, A Line of Thought is a Path, Understanding is Following, etc.¹³ In his presentation at the Invent-L conference, Smyth asked the following questions:

- What happens to thought when our understanding of space changes?
- What happens to thought when we consider the space of non-Euclidean geometries?
- What happens to thought when we begin to navigate virtual spaces like Second Life?

He spent some time during his presentation trying to present a condensed introduction to the topology of mobius strips and klein bottles as well as the dimensional mathematics of superstring theory.¹⁴

As a result of this presentation, I became curious about the topology of Second Life. Was it a torus? Or a klein bottle? That is, were the edges attached in a particular way such that, like in the old Asteroids video game, when one flies off the eastern edge of the screen, one reappears on the western edge of the screen?

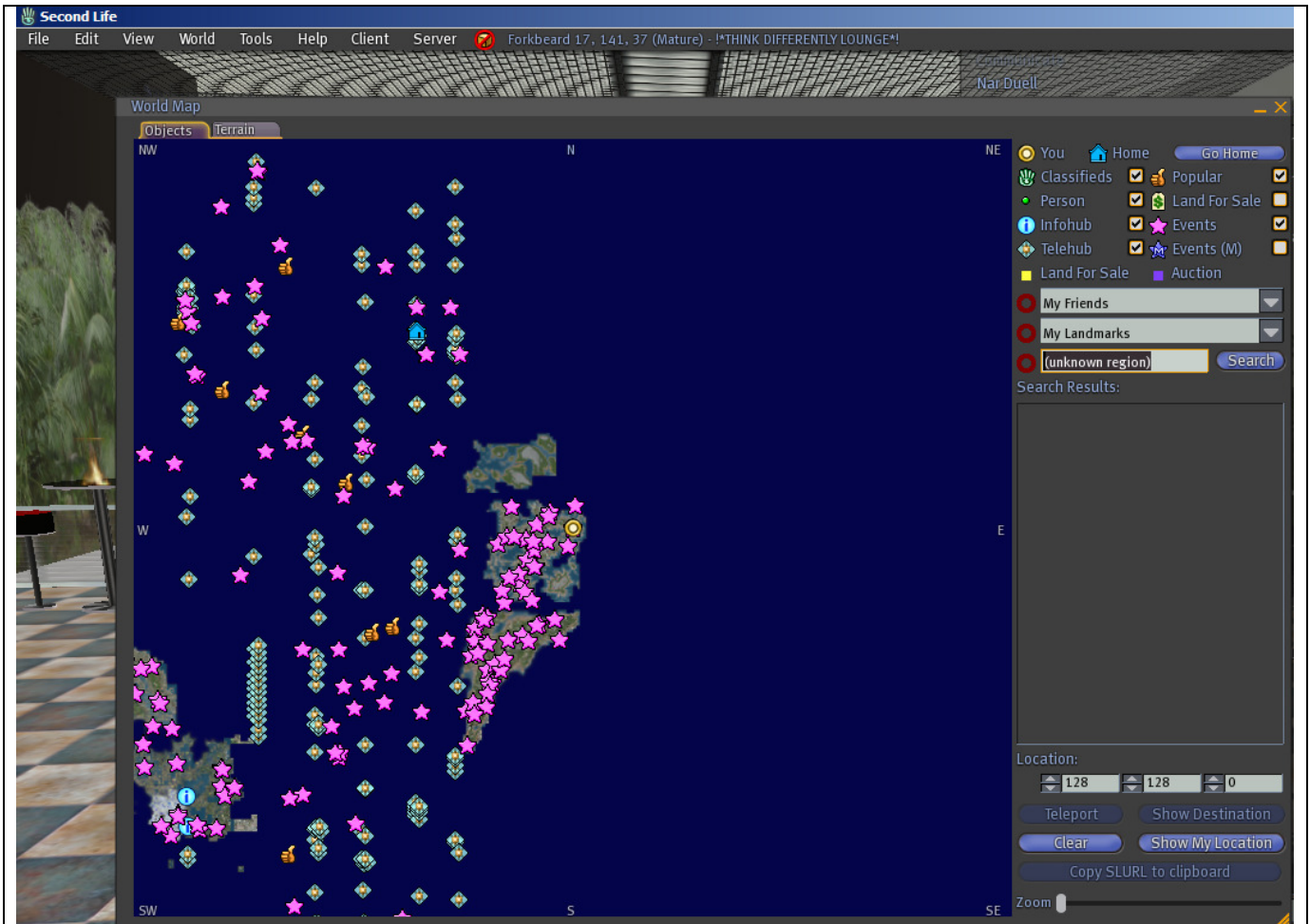


By lining up and joining the triangles, you will create the topological form indicated. In some cases, you must twist the edge first before joining (or “identifying”) the edges, as with the mobius strip and the Klein bottle.

So I went on a quest to the edge of the world, to see if the edges joined up.

[20:41] Abaris Brautigan: Hi Puglet! Are you busy?
 [20:46] Puglet Dancer: yes
 [20:46] Puglet Dancer: in a million IMs
 [20:47] Abaris Brautigan: Good for you. You are well-webbed. I've decided to go on a quest to seek the edge of the world. Let me know if you care to join me....
 [20:47] Puglet Dancer: interesting proposition
 [20:49] Abaris Brautigan: I wish to explore the boundaries of thought, and I'm curious about the topology of Second Life. Is there a real edge? And what happens if we try to cross it?
 [20:49] Puglet Dancer: hmmm
 [20:49] Abaris Brautigan: At the moment, my avatar (for reasons unknown to me) is in the form of a woman. If you join me, we can be like Thelma and Louise....
 [20:51] Puglet Dancer: lol
 [20:51] Puglet Dancer: you are Ruth
 [20:52] Puglet Dancer: the first av
 [20:52] Puglet Dancer: happens when you don't fully rez
 [20:52] Abaris Brautigan: A quest of this nature is not the kind of thing one should do alone....
 [20:53] Puglet Dancer: true
 [20:53] Abaris Brautigan: Ruth? The first av? Please explain. I believe I'm fully rezzed--curves and all....
 [20:53] Puglet Dancer: but i'm in the middle of my b-day party
 [20:53] Puglet Dancer: i'm a year old today in sl
 [20:53] Puglet Dancer: the first av was female
 [20:53] Puglet Dancer: and all avs are based on her
 [20:53] Puglet Dancer: so everybody starts out the same
 [20:53] Abaris Brautigan: Happy birthday!! One should never quest during a birthday party. It's really not a good idea.
 [20:54] Puglet Dancer: and then "rezzes" into what their av is supposed to be
 [20:59] Abaris Brautigan: I'll let you get back to your party. If I come back from the edge of the world, I'll give you a full report....
 [21:00] Abaris Brautigan: If I don't make it, have a nice secondlife....
 [21:01] Puglet Dancer: please let me know how it goes
 [21:02] Abaris Brautigan: I'll send you a postcard from the edge....if they have any for sale that is.

[21:02] Puglet Dancer: mm hmmm
[21:02] Abaris Brautigan: I'm assuming there'll be a tourist trap out there of course.
[21:02] Puglet Dancer: lol
[21:02] Puglet Dancer: i'm sure there will be
[21:02] Puglet Dancer: lol



Abaris Brautigan demonstrates the location of the “Think Differently Lounge” on the SL World Map. The yellow circle indicates his present location. The menubar of the window behind the map shows the slurl location: “Forkbeard (17, 141, 37): !*THINK DIFFERENTLY LOUNGE*!”

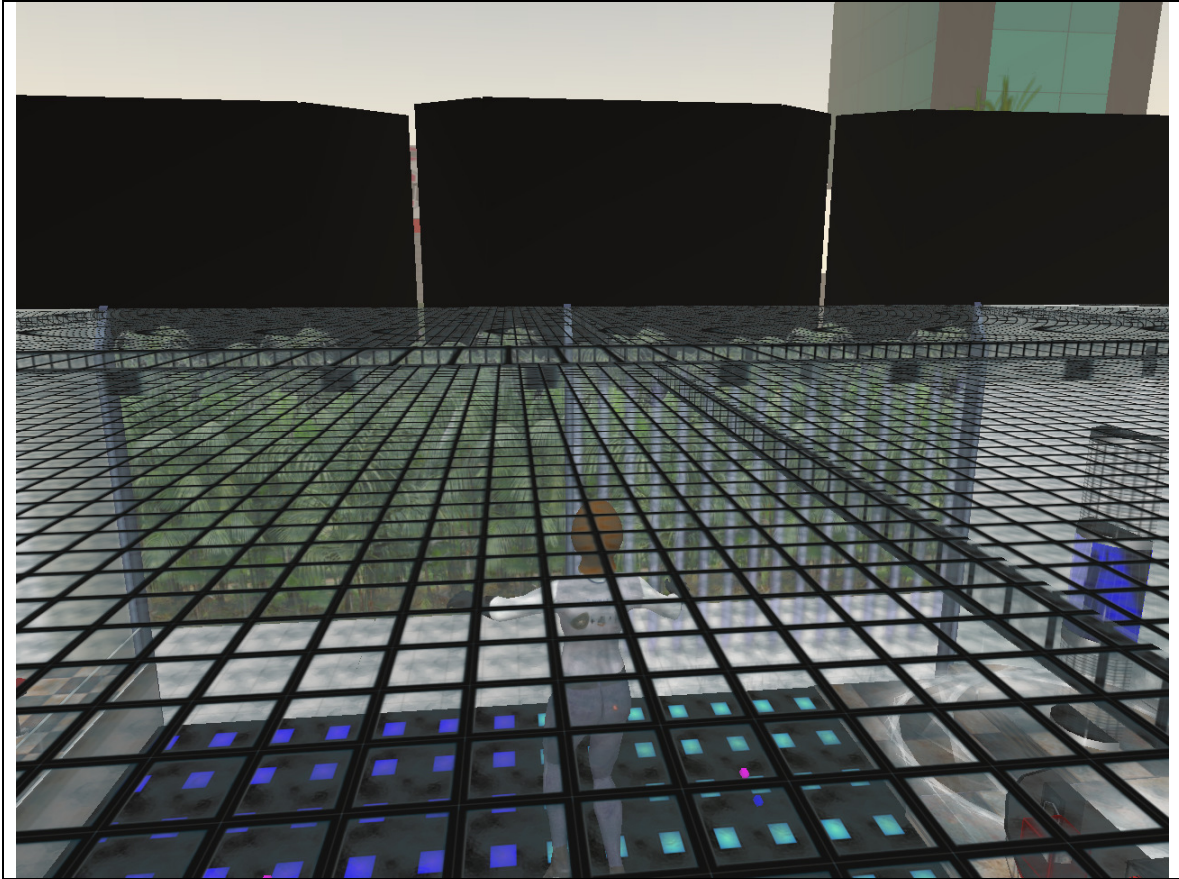
In order to find the edge of the world, I looked at the map and randomly selected a pink star (indicating an “event”) on the furthest eastern island and simply double-clicked to teleport to the location. Now you’ll have to trust me on this: I randomly chose this place, which turned out to be the “*Think Differently Lounge*.” Coincidence? Fate? Luck? Or the whims of an allegorical/imagistic interface to thought? You decide.

[21:06] Abaris Brautigan: hello Nar! I'm wondering if you're busy at the moment....
[21:06] Nar Duell: no, just hanging around. where are you?
[21:10] Abaris Brautigan: I am seeking the edge of the world. I am on a quest to seek the edge....
[21:10] Abaris Brautigan: I'm wondering if you want to join me....
[21:15] Nar Duell: sure where are you? I guess you said the edge of the world but unsure where that is. . .
[21:18] Abaris Brautigan: I'll offer you a TP....
[21:19] Nar Duell: please send tp.
[21:22] You: Thank you for joining me out here on the edge of the SLuniverse....
[21:22] You: Look at your map to see what I mean....
[21:23] You: Notice that this is the "think different lounge." I believe that is highly significant, seeing as it's out here on the edge of the sluniverse....

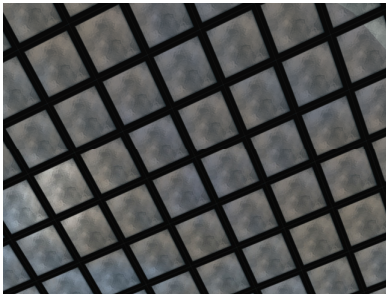
Despite having joined me in the Think Differently Lounge, my fellow quester, Nar Duell [pronounced "Ne'er Do Well"?!!] was sore tempted and began to dance on the dance floor by activating an animation ball. Then she couldn't stop! She became trapped in the animation. This is a glitch that sometimes occurs in Second Life. Temptations are common in epic quests, and in this case Ne'er Do Well fell victim to the pervasive animation balls. Given her name, I was not surprised.

[21:46] Abaris Brautigan: I'm about to set forth on my journey to find the edge of SL....
[21:47] Nar Duell: Fare thee well -- bon voyage!
[21:47] Abaris Brautigan: Thank you.... I'll send a postcard from the edge. If I survive.
[21:48] Abaris Brautigan: Being in the form of a woman, I have more courage and strength to carry on....

And so I sallied (or "ruthed") forth. But I immediately found a problem: there was no way to exit the Think Differently Lounge.



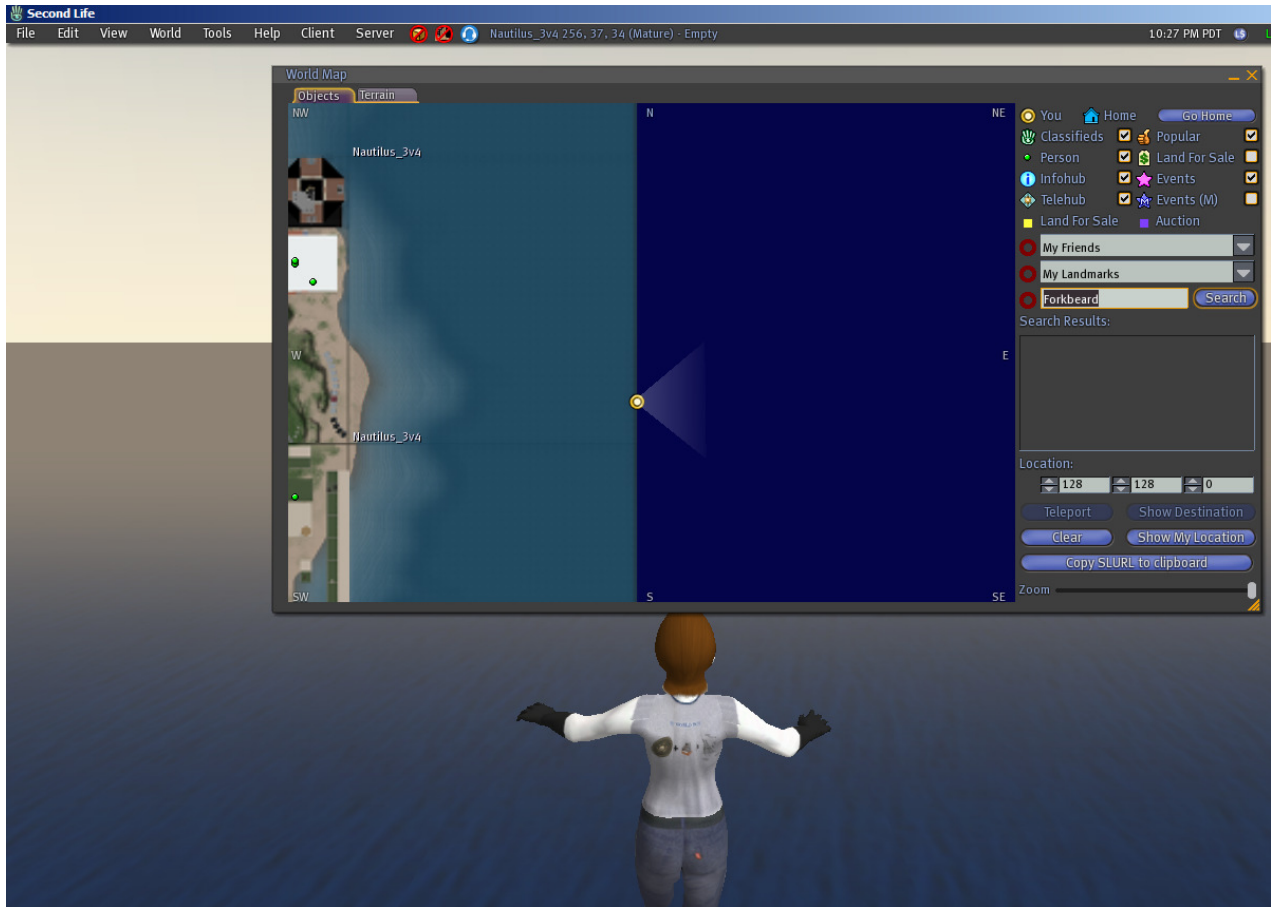
Abaris Brautigan, trying to escape the Think Differently Lounge, encounters a highly striated boundary above the dance floor.



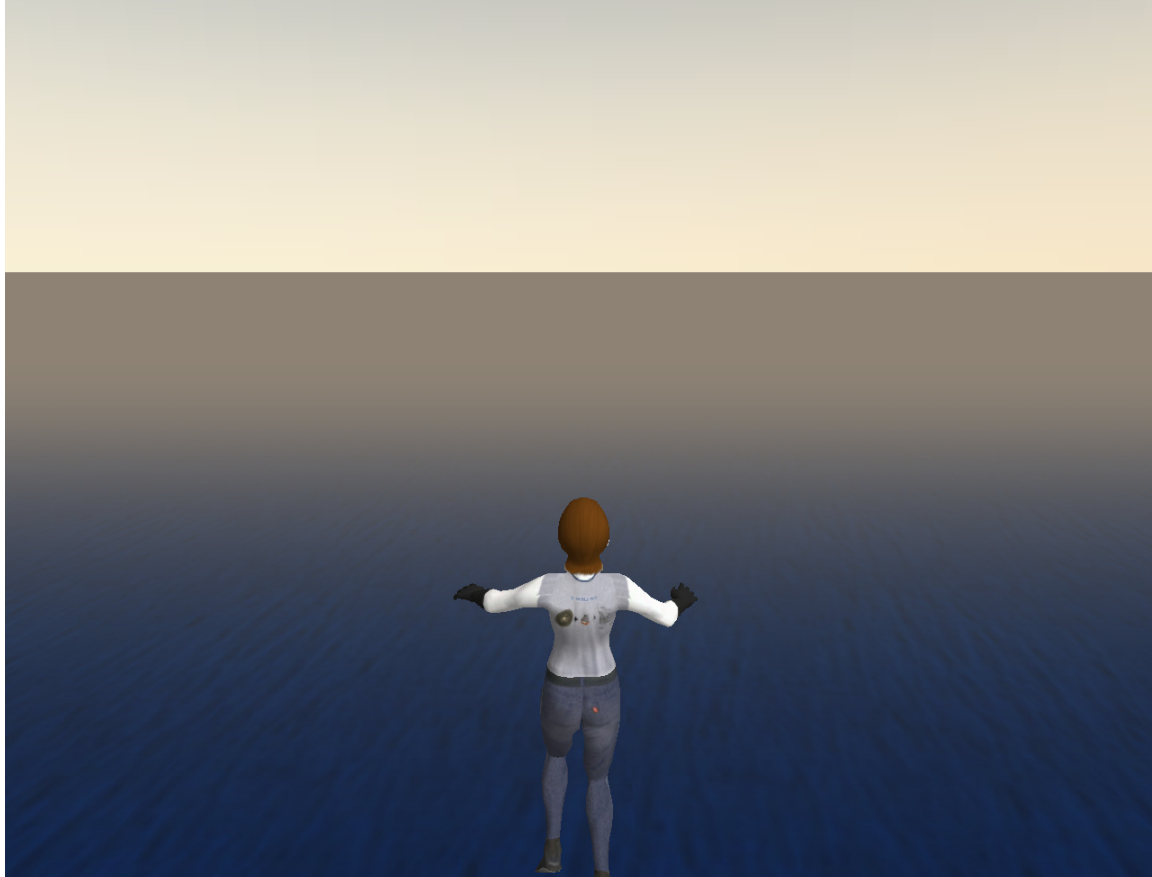
I found myself surrounded by a highly striated, grid-like structure. I tried everything: I flew about, I walked the perimeter of the inside, but there was no way to simply walk or fly out. In the end, I had to teleport out, using the same means of getting in. . . .

I had yet to consider the allegorical implications concerning electrated thinking strategies, simply because I was still seeking the edge of the sluniverse.

Finally, I reached my destination, only to find an impenetrable barrier. I was unable to go any further.



Hovering there at the edge, I stared out at a purely Deleuzian virtuality, where the ocean merged into a brownish haze. Perhaps, if the SL gods add new server farms to their array, this will be the site of new “sims” (“A **simulator**, or ‘**sim**’, is a 256m x 256m (65,536 sqm) area in Second Life in which all things for that area exist (land, avatars, objects, etc.”).¹⁵



My quest to the edge of the world was over. I got my answer: Second Life is *neither* a torus *nor* a Klein bottle. The edges are not joined at all. I won't say that I wasn't disappointed, but, somehow, I was not surprised.

Weary from my quest, I wandered aimlessly out on the eastern edges of the sluniverse, at one point entering an empty but beautiful house with a startling white interior, where I gave myself to an animation of playing a soundless, white piano. If I were to add a soundtrack, it would be from *Solo Piano* by Philip Glass: "Metamorphosis (Parts 1-5)", ending on "Mad Rush."

And it is here that I end my story.



ENDNOTES

¹ From “Humans: A Dubious Existence,” *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*.

² From *What is Called Thinking?* p. 3.

³ For Ulmer, grammatology is the study of the “theory and history of writing” and includes consideration of prior moments of transition in communicative technologies as analogical heuristics to guide the invention of new institutional practices in the coming era of “electracy.”

⁴ The rise of the “superficial” (i.e. the “surface”) overturns an ideology of depth privileged in the era of alphabetic literacy (the profound vs. the shallow). This rise can be seen in the emergence of the “puncture” as employed by Derrida and Lacan, as well as in Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, which spreads out and covers a surface rather than penetrating deeply as arborescence or “tree logic.” The “puncture” is Ulmer’s term. The dissertation is available online at <http://www.anabiosispress.org/rsmyth/writings/diss>.

⁵ See their *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, pp. 236-40.

⁶ For a more detailed definition, see the fuller definition of “electracy” that I inaugurated as a Wikipedia entry at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electracy>.

⁷ The speech can be seen/heard in its entirety at http://www.archive.org/details/Invent_07_Ulmer_Keynote. Cf. “Cyber Duende” in *Internet Invention* pp. 227-29: “The point to note for now is the experience of emotion in the body described in terms of possession by a god or spirit.”

⁸ Daniel Goleman is one of those at the center of these efforts with books that he has written (*Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than I.Q.* and the more recent *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*) as well as one that he has “narrated” (*Destructive Emotions: How Can We Overcome Them? A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama*).

⁹ Messages in the Invent-L archive are available here: <http://lists.ufl.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=invent-l&T=0>.

¹⁰ “Chaos is an infinite speed of birth and disappearance. Now philosophy wants to know how to retain infinite speeds while gaining consistency, by *giving the virtual a consistency specific to it*. The philosophical sieve, as plane of immanence that cuts through the chaos, selects infinite movements of thought and is filled with concepts formed like consistent particles going as fast as thought. Science approaches chaos in a completely different, almost opposite way: it relinquishes the infinite, infinite speed, in order to gain *a reference able to actualize the virtual*. . . . Philosophy proceeds with a plane of immanence or consistency; science with a plane of reference. In the case of science it is like a freeze-frame. It is a fantastic *slowing down*. . .” (*What is Philosophy* 118).

¹¹ A digitized version of Smyth, featured in John Craig Freeman’s “Imaging Place: Haverhill,” discusses Lakoff and Johnson in the context of the “broken bridge” of metaphor. Use the following “slurl” to teleport directly to the IP Haverhill platform: <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Emerson%20Island/140/192/75/>.

¹² For a critique of Lakoff and Johnson’s theory, see Rosenberg’s comparison of their “top-down” paradigm to that of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela’s “bottom-up” paradigm: “Lakoff believes that he has created an emergent-properties account for metaphor-making” (173) but what they have done is to impose a top-down paradigm by positing “space as a structuring principle for the representation of concepts” (177). Rosenberg questions the extent to which the systems of meaning that they identify actually emerge from bodily experience. In other words, Lakoff and Johnson aren’t radically embodied enough. However, Rosenberg himself ends up using a key conceptual metaphor of spatiality as he sets up his critique: “However, it is the grounds that we are most interested in, and we *can approach those grounds from another direction* by examining their claims for an ‘experientialism’ that explodes the distinction between objectivism and subjectivism as fundamental epistemological stances” (177, my emphasis).

¹³ See Lakoff and Johnson, chapter 12 for numerous examples of other conceptual metaphors associated with the Mind as Body system of conceptual metaphor.

¹⁴ The PowerPoint show, broken into two parts, is available at <http://www.slideshare.net/rsmyth>.

¹⁵ See <http://www.slhistory.org/index.php/Sim> for a full definition at the SL History Wiki.

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