

## An Interview with Mark C. Taylor

Thomas Rickert and David Blakesley

Mark C. Taylor is the Cluett Professor of Humanities at Williams College and cofounder, with Herbert Allen, of the Global Education Network (<http://www.gen.com/>). Taylor's groundbreaking *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (2001, U of Chicago P) has quickly become a must-read for those working in rhetoric, computers and writing, cultural studies, and critical theory. His cultural analysis blends elements of information theory, and evolutionary biology with art, architecture, philosophy, religion, and education. This interview was conducted with Taylor by blog, email, and chance encounter in late 2003 and early 2004.

Taylor earned his PhD in Religion from Harvard University in 1973 and earned a Doktorgrad in Philosophy from the University of Copenhagen in 1981. He has edited and authored numerous books: *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption* (2004), *Vito Acconci* (2002, with Jennifer Bloomer, Frazer Ward), *Grave Matters* (2002 with Dietrich Christian Lammerts), *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (2002), *Journeys to Selfhood* (2000), *About Religion: Economies of Faith in Virtual Culture* (1999), *The Picture in Question: Mark Tansey and the Ends of Representation* (1999), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (1998), *Hiding* (1997), *Imagologies: Media Philosophy* (1994), *Nots* (1993), *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (1992), *Tears* (1990), *Altarity* (1987), *Erring* (1987), *Deconstruction in Context* (1986), *Deconstructing Theology* (1982), *Unfinished . . . : Essays in Honor of Ray L. Hart* (1981), *Religion and the Human Image* (1976), and *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (1975).

His recent contributions to books include: "Skin," *The Light Construction Reader* (New York: Montacelli P, 2002); "Body of Work,"

*Stelarc* (Reaktion, 2001); “Cyberscapes;” *Interactive Learning: Vignettes from America’s Most Wired Campuses* (Boston: Anker, 2000); “Cult@edu.com,” *Adrift in the Technomatrix*, ed. David Erben (U of Minnesota P, 1999). His articles, reviews, and essays have appeared in *EDUCAUSE*, *Style*, *Cultural Values*, *Mass Humanities*, *Metroland*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *Los Angeles Times Review of Books*, and the *New York Times*. Additional publications include *The Réal: Las Vegas, Nevada*, with José Marquez. He has been interviewed by the *New York Times Magazine* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. His NPR interview (with José Marquez) is available online as well. In 1995, the Carnegie Foundation named Taylor the College Professor of the Year.

### Opening Question

**TR/DB:** In Chapter 7 (“Screening Information”) of *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*, you write, “I, Mark C. Taylor, am not writing this book.” You go on to describe the interactivity and conversation of thought and writing and, even, the act of “channeling experience.” You’ve certainly complicated the customary opening question of *JAC* interviews: “Do you consider yourself a writer?” But we’ll ask anyway. Do you? Or perhaps we should ask, “How do you consider yourself a writer?” Or, “Why?” Or, “Why not?”

**MT:** Yes, I consider myself a writer, but not everything I have published is writing in the strict sense of the term. The explanation of this point is a bit complicated.

The sentence you quote marks an important juncture in the argument of *The Moment of Complexity*. In this work, many different strands are woven together to form the argument. From one point of view, I attempted to read information theory through Hegel and reread Hegel through information theory. But this task is undertaken in the context of developing an effective extension of poststructuralists critiques of systems and structures. In both structuralism and deconstruction, there is a decentering of the humanist subject (the self-conscious ego who is a purposeful actor). Though not usually realized, this decentering of the subject can be found as far back as St. Paul, who insists that his actions are not his own but are Christ acting through him. Indeed, Hegel’s absolute spirit also acts through individuals who are its agents. And in the so-called masters of suspicion—Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche—we see a similar decentering of the subject through various structures and networks that operate through individuals. I was

trying to bring together these philosophical ideas with theories of emergent self-organizing systems that can be found in nature, society, and culture. From the genome to global markets, webs act through those who appear to act on them. I do not think human subjectivity is completely passive; rather, there is a codetermination as well as coevolution between the individual and the web or matrix. It is, therefore, too simple to say “I write” or “I have written this.” It is more accurate to say, “In writing, I am written as much as I write.” Others write through me even when I am not aware of it. I call these others “my” ghosts.

But why, then, do I resist calling everything I have written “writing.” There is no simple answer to this question. Somewhere, Heidegger distinguishes scholarship from thinking. Writing is thinking, but scholarship is not writing. Rather than try to define the difference—indeed, I am not sure I can do so—let me indicate the difference with some of the works bearing my own name.

Not writing: *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and Self*; *Journeys to Selfhood*; about half the essays in *Notes* and some of the essays in *About Religion*; *Altarity*.

Writing: *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*; *Imagologies*; the other half of the essays in *Notes* and *About Religion*; *Hiding*; *The Real: Las Vegas, Nevada* (CD-ROM); *Grave Matters*; *The Moment of Complexity*; and my forthcoming book—*Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption*.

**TR/DB:** Have you, over the years, noticed any difference in how these works have been received that would shed light on the writing/not writing difference? Do you have any advice or insight concerning this difference for young or established scholars?

**MT:** The general maxim is that the more creative the work the more hostile the reception. Works that I have labeled not-writing are regularly reviewed positively in scholarly journals. They conform to accepted protocols and can be engaged in traditional terms. Many of the writerly texts—ranging from those that are primarily graphic to those that are graphic as well as visual—tend to be more problematic for readers. It is surprising how little patience readers have. In many ways, *Hiding* is the most inventive book I have written, and, yet, it is the least understood book. Though it looks more like *Wired* than a university press book, if you were to read the reviews, you would not know it looked any different from standard university press books. It's as if the images do not exist.

Advising young scholars about tactics and strategies for writing is difficult. I would like to encourage them to be as creative and inventive as possible. But the reality is that the academy is incredibly conservative. I would never have received tenure for *Hiding*. The sad truth is that it is prudent to write more traditional texts in order to get tenure. The danger is that by the time many people get to that point, they have so repressed their creative impulses and accepted the norms of the academy that they have no creativity left. Thus, it is important to do more adventurous works at the same time. Needless to say, this is not easy but it is very important. If you are not pushing the envelope, why write?

### Writing as Thinking

**TR/DB:** Do you see any role, then, for “writing as thinking,” as opposed to scholarship, in the contemporary university? What flavor might it have? Or motive?

**MT:** Yes, there is a vitally important role for writing as opposed to scholarship in the contemporary university. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that the future of the university depends upon creating and maintaining the “space” of writing. In most cases, this space does not currently exist.

For scholarship to be acceptable, it must conform to codes and procedures that, though varying from field to field, follow long-established patterns. As fields develop, areas of inquiry become evermore specialized. The process of peer review ensures the inviolability of these codes and, in this way, discourages innovative work. What does not conform to the code is deemed unacceptable.

Writing, by contrast, is transgressive. It violates accepted codes and crosses boundaries guarded by scholars. Creativity and invention occur, if at all, in the gaps between disciplines. With the development of new technologies, the notion of writing must be expanded to include multimedia forms of production. We can no longer write merely with words but now must learn how to think and write with images and sound. Design—visual as well as graphic—becomes integral to writing.

Scholarship attempts to domesticate writing by subjecting it to established codes. As I have suggested, people receive tenure for scholarship but not for writing. If the university is to have a future in the twenty-first century, writers rather than scholars must lead the way.

### **The Future of Writing in the Humanities**

**TR/DB:** Among all your works, *The Moment of Complexity* seems the most future-minded, or centered on transformative possibility. It speculates in the interest of action and agency in ways that you say decentered subjectivity does not. Building on this or any other insights, how do you see writing (or thinking) in the humanities changing in the future, perhaps in terms of content, shape, and/or role?

**MT:** One of the arguments in *The Moment of Complexity* is that physical, biological, social and cultural systems are bound in intricate loops of codependence and coevolution. This means that the cultural influences the natural as much as the natural influences the cultural. What makes such codetermination possible is the development of an expanded notion of information. Information is not simply something that sits in a computer or circulates through media networks. Rather, information is distributed throughout nature and society. We are coming to understand that physical, biological, economic, and political processes are to a large extent information processes. This recognition increases the importance of cultural process and, accordingly, underscores the significance of the humanities. Never has it been more important to have thoughtful agents who are informed about and sensitive to humanistic ideas and values. The decentering of the subject does not result in the dissipation of agency but leads to nodular subjectivity in which self and other are inseparably bound together. Within these webs of mutual influence, images and ideas shape reality as much as reality shapes images and ideas. Just as we need an expanded notion of information, so we need an expanded notion of writing. In contemporary network culture, we must learn to think and write not only with words but also with images, sounds, designs. The university has a long tradition of iconophobia, which must be overcome. To be an effective writer today, one must be an iconophilic who always plays on multiple registers at once.

### **Writing and the University**

**TR/DB:** The value of writing and not just scholarship is near and dear to our hearts. However, like you, we find that there is much about the contemporary university that forestalls such writing. Interestingly, you mention that genuine creativity takes place largely between the disciplines. We see parallels at work here between your specification of where writing occurs and the theories concerning how complex systems function—at points far from equilibrium. Given that you have

much of interest to say about the university in your book, would you talk more about how we can move the university toward a valuation of writing, and not just scholarship, and further, what such a university might look like?

**MT:** The contemporary university traces its roots to the end of the eighteenth century. In 1789, Kant published a work entitled *The Conflict of the Faculties* in which he defines the structure of the modern university. It is remarkable how little that structure has changed. The structure of the university reflects and reinforces the structure of knowledge. But the structure of knowledge is not hardwired; rather, it changes with the modes of production and reproduction in a given society. Kant's text is remarkably prescient. He associates the structure of the curriculum with mass production and hence with what eventually becomes industrialism. The current curriculum is divided into divisions that are structured hierarchically and linearly.

As we move into digital space and network culture, this structure will change. Try to imagine a curriculum structured like a hypertext rather than an assembly line. It will not be divisional, hierarchical, and linear but relational, distributed, and nonlinear. As the shape of knowledge changes, the structure of the university will have to change. If I were trying to develop a curriculum that reflects the hypertextual structure of knowledge in network culture, I would begin by abolishing departments. I would then reorganize the curriculum around different problems, which could be approached from different perspectives. In order to keep the development of knowledge and, thus, the university open, I would not make the foci of inquiry permanent and would abolish tenure. Programs and appointments would be term, though they could be renegotiated and perhaps renewed. It is also necessary to extend this network principle from the "inside" of the university to other institutions. With new technologies, it is not only possible but also critically important for institutions across the globe to cooperate and collaborate. Universities must become open networks rather than closed systems.

### **Criticism and Complexity Theory**

**TR/DB:** Many factions in the humanities today are concerned with maintaining a critical perspective on technological advancement and corporate encroachment, especially as they are perceived to threaten established disciplinary boundaries and practices. For example, Kevin

Kelly's populist account of systems theory and emergent logics (*Out of Control*) has been sharply criticized by some scholars, such as Douglas Kellner. Although you already address this issue concretely in terms of the university, suggesting that criticism must be constructive, would you speak further about it as it relates to complexity theory in general? Does complexity theory retain a critical capacity (positive and/or negative), or does it suggest that in a networked society we might have to rethink what "criticism" is beyond such polarities?

**MT:** Much of the criticism coming out of the university today is simply negative and has little or no positive or constructive dimension to it. As you suggest, there is considerable concern about the implications of growing interrelations between the university and the corporate world. It is important to realize that these concerns vary from division to division and department to department. The most suspicious are the humanists and the most inventive are the scientists. As I have migrated between the corporate and university worlds, I have been struck by how resolutely ignorant many if not most members of the university are about the broader world in which they live and work. Like it or not, global capital is the reality with which we have to deal and simply bemoaning that fact or devising futile strategies of resistance will accomplish nothing. It is simply disingenuous for the very people who depend on global capital for financial support to dismiss it as immoral for financial support.

I do think that complexity theory offers important critical resources. It is absolutely essential to develop a better understanding of the ways in which networks transform social, economic, and cultural structures and programs. A sophisticated reading of complexity theory suggests that there are multiple feedback loops among the physical, biological, social, and cultural dimensions of experience. It is important to note that though they are embodied in different phenomena, these systems and their operations are largely isomorphic. This approach opens a line of analysis that is insistently non-reductive and creates the possibility of connecting and associating phenomena without reconciling or synthesizing them in a way that mitigates their distinctive differences. Finally, the ingredients of a new understanding of creativity can be found in the notion of complex adaptive systems. When extensively elaborated, the interpretation of complex adaptive systems can be applied to everything from literary and artistic texts to biological systems and financial networks.

### Capitalism and Academia

**TR/DB:** It has become a common refrain in academic discussions to bemoan the corporatization of the university these days, a subject you discuss at some length in the early chapters of *The Moment of Complexity* and then in your discussion of GEN. Marxist critiques of the capitalist exploitation of labor in academia have, for example, generated considerable resistance from those charged with being “managerial faculty,” not “real faculty.” [See, for example, Marc Bousquet’s “Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers” in a recent *Minnesota Review* essay online at <http://www.theminnesotareview.org/ns58/bousquet.htm>.] How do you respond to the complaint about capitalist intrusions into the intellectual life of academics? Do you buy the “managerial faculty” / “real faculty” dichotomy? How would you explain it?

**MT:** I have heard these criticisms endlessly and, in all honesty, find them very irritating. The only place that does not know that Marxism is dead is the university. I have learned much from my involvement in the business world over the past six years and have been astonished to see how closed-minded the university is about the business world. Indeed, my colleagues from Wall Street are much more informed about the world than academics who think they know what is going on. Moreover, many people in the business world are much more open to creative change than are university professors. I get sick and tired of the empty rhetoric about political activity in the university. It never moves beyond the halls of the academy and makes absolutely no difference in the world in which we find ourselves. Like it or not, global capitalism is the hand that we have been dealt for the foreseeable future. If we are to be politically effective, we must find ways to turn this system to humane and humanistic ends. I have absolutely no doubt that this can be done but only if we are willing to work with members of the business world with whom we have more in common than we realize.

### GEN’s Progress and Development

**TR/DB:** At the end of Chapter 7 in *The Moment of Complexity*, you remark, concerning the tipping point, that “When change occurs, it is never as planned and thus is always surprising.” The following chapter outlines an ambitious, innovative approach to rethinking education that moves beyond theory into actual practice—your enterprise, the Global Education Network (GEN). Can you share anything with us about what has been surprising about GEN’s progress and development?



**MT:** Almost everything has been surprising! Sometimes I'm tempted to take as my motto for my recent experience: I've seen the future and it's the past. Indeed, we have had to revise almost all of our initial assumptions. There are many reasons for this turn of events. The collapse of the dot.com bubble came at the worst possible time. Just as things were gearing up for lift-off, the collapse occurred. While this created financial difficulties, the larger issue was the shift in attitude. The failure of the dot.coms seemed to justify the suspicions of people about new technologies. And nowhere are these suspicions greater than in the university. Almost no institution is more conservative than the university. The greatest resistance to what we've been trying to do at GEN has come from faculty members. While there are many reasons for this resistance, what unites them all is a resolute ignorance of the changes that are occurring in the world today.

On a more mundane level, we have found that broadband is coming more slowly than we expected. This has required us to modify our effort to deliver media intense courses. We now provide much of the media material with CDs rather than over Internet.

We always knew that the high-end market of liberal arts, humanities and sciences would be difficult. Courses that are more professionally or vocationally oriented are beginning to gain traction. In the past eight to ten months, some companies have turned a corner and are beginning to show profits. I continue to believe that in the intermediate run, it will be possible to deliver the kind of courses we are producing. What discourages me is that this work will be done by private companies with educators and universities standing on the sidelines.

### **“Thinking Religion Otherwise”**

**TR/DB:** Near the end of your 1992 book, *Disfiguring*, you state that a postmodernist approach to religion must decline the dream of salvation, but that such an approach also opens up the possibility of “thinking religion otherwise.” Do you think this is still true today? And, further, do you think complexity theory also opens up the possibility of thinking religion otherwise?

**MT:** It has never been more important to think religion otherwise and it has never been more difficult to do so. I believe there is an inescapable religious dimension to all of culture—though the forms of religion obviously change. The emergence of network culture would not have been possible without the intricate interplay of neoconservative politics, neoliberal economics and neofundamentalist religion. I label the

religion prevalent today as “neofundamentalist” to stress that it is not a return to premodern forms of belief as is often argued but a reaction to modernity and modernism. Neofundamentalist religion operates differently within and beyond the U.S. Within the U.S., neofundamentalism—which tends to be Protestant, white, male and red state—supports and underwrites global capital; beyond the U.S., neofundamentalism provides a strategy to resist the growing hegemony of the West. In a complex world, true believers are the real danger.

In my next book, I am going to try to explain how theories of complexity can open different ways of understanding religion and being religious. This will involve tracing these theories back to some of the founding figures of modernism—Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schlegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche. The divine is, I believe, emergent creativity that is related to but cannot be contained by our systems of representation and organization. In contrast to neofundamentalist forms of belief—which provide certainty, security, purpose and meaning—the religion I imagine calls everything into question and leaves us open to the creative uncertainty of the future. That future does not, I think, involve anything traditional believers imagine as salvation. There is no transcendent beyond; we are destined to dwell in an arising and passing away that does not arise and pass away.

### **Destiny and the Divine**

**TR/DB:** In *The Moment of Complexity*, we were struck by the quote from Stuart Kauffman that “the motto of life is not We the improbable, but We the expected.” What theological implications obtain from this, especially concerning how we think about destiny and the divine?

**MT:** This is one of the points at which Stu expresses his own profound belief in the order and intelligibility of the cosmos. In contrast to traditional evolutionary theory, in which development is a function of chance variation, Stu insists that the dynamic structures that emerge in the physical world create conditions that make life not only possible but likely. I neither completely agree nor disagree with this claim. I do think that there is an order to/in things that establishes the parameters of constraint that are the condition of the possibility of all becoming. And within these parameters, some things are more likely to occur than others. But I think Stu goes too far to insist that human life was expected. Complex systems always leave room for the aleatory and this makes expectation a tenuous affair. As for the religious or theological

implications of this point, they are multiple. What happens in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that the traditional notion of providence is reinterpreted in terms of what Kant calls “inner teleology.” Purpose, in other words, is not imposed from without but emerges from within. This can be seen in the process of evolution as well as the operation of markets. Indeed, few people realize that one of the primary inspirations for Darwin’s theory of evolution was Smith’s account of the market. In terms of my own take on this problem or cluster of problems, I would return to my response to the previous question. The divine, which some might call God, simultaneously emerges and withdraws in moments of creative emergence.

### **Fundamentalism and Global Complexity**

**TR/DB:** Do you see fundamentalism as a reaction to emerging global complexity?

**MT:** I have answered this question in a previous response. Here I would only add that global neofundamentalism is definitely a symptom of increasing complexity. As things become more complex, people long for greater simplicity. Moreover, the radical reassertion of certainty and secure foundations are a sign that they are slipping away.

**TR/DB:** Let us elaborate on our question, then. Do you separate Western fundamentalism from other forms? We’re thinking especially of radical Islamic fundamentalism, which is largely predicated on the belief that the sacred and secular must be reunited. Indeed, this constitutes one of its proponents’ strongest criticisms of Christianity, which they regard as a perversion of Jesus’ teachings that has allowed a “render to Caesar what is Caesar’s” attitude absolutely powerless to reunite the sacred with the secular. How does our Western moment of complexity stand in regard to such challenges?

**MT:** During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a widespread consensus that modernization and secularization were inseparable. Moreover, the process of secularization, many argued, is irreversible. During the era of the Death of God, religious belief and activity did not simply disappear but took alternative forms and in many cases was privatized. This reinforced the separation of church and state that is such an important part of our system. In recent years, the political and religious right has hijacked religion. As I have noted above, this neofundamentalism tends to support the expansion of global capitalism. For many people, so-called Islamic fundamentalism presents a very different understanding of modernization and global capital. The

separation between church and state does not play a role in these traditions. It is interesting to note, however, that the Bush administration is much less concerned about protecting this separation and, thus, is in some ways in agreement with strands of Islamic fundamentalism. In all of its forms, neofundamentalism is a reaction to growing complexity. As things become more and more complex, there is an understandable but dangerous longing for simplicity. Not all versions of religion have to be simplistic. Indeed, one of the challenges we face is to articulate a form of religion that is relevant for and responsive to the moment of complexity. I will attempt to meet that challenge in my next book.

### **Postmodernism and Complexity**

**TR/DB:** The title of your book, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*, suggests on the one hand that complexity theory can be seen in moments of emergent, nonlinear change, but it suggests on the other that this moment, this here and now, is itself a “new,” more complex moment in time. If our age is in fact a postmodern one, and given your critiques of key postmodern thinkers in the second chapter, how are we to understand the relation between postmodernism (understood as something larger than French philosophy and its theoretical legacies) and complexity *qua* network culture?

**MT:** After much reflection, I have finally decided that the well-known postmodern critique of meta-narratives is wrong. While certain narratives are no longer plausible, there *is* a direction to history. In the course of development, things become more interconnected and, therefore, more complex. I want to stress that I am not suggesting any normative claim about this trajectory. That is to say, greater complexity is not in and of itself better than more simplicity. This development is not continuous but is characterized by what some evolutionary theorists describe as punctuated equilibrium. Periods of relative equilibrium eventually lead to “the edge of chaos,” where there is a phase shift to another stage. I think we are living through such a period. In such moments, more becomes different.

There is a close relationship between what is commonly described as postmodernism and the moment of complexity. This is an enormous topic and I can only hint at its implications here. It is important to note that there have always been two strands in postmodern theory, which I describe as the culture of simulacra (in which reality and image collapse into each other) and the deconstruction of systems (be they

social, political, religious or literary) that purportedly totalize. Complexity theory develops an analysis of systems and structures that is sensitive to the critique of the second type of postmodernism but can effectively analyze the first type of postmodernism. I have just completed a book on money and markets in which I attempt to show the relationship between postmodernism and the emergence of finance capitalism in the past four decades. What becomes clear is that we now live in an economic economy that can only be described as postmodern. We no longer primarily exchange things but now swap images and information in networks that virtualize reality. The finance-entertainment complex has displaced the military-industrial complex in a way that transforms reality.

### **Rhetoric and the Conversation after Philosophy**

**TR/DB:** During the late 1980s and 1990s, philosophers and rhetoricians grappled with the question of what conversations were still possible in the wake of the so-called linguistic or rhetorical turn in the human sciences, the epistemological challenge to Philosophy (with a capital P). One response (from Frank Lentricchia) was a call for a return to early pragmatism, with its emphasis on tracking down the implications of our terminologies in all of their historical complexity. Another—attributed to Kenneth Burke by Giles Gunn, Timothy Crusius, and others—argued for a renewed appreciation of irony and the comic perspective. We sense that your work offers a third response, one grounded in complexity theory but also sharing allegiances with rhetoric and dialectic as systems of inquiry. In what ways might complexity theory be a satisfying (or challenging) response to the conversation after Philosophy. And, if you see any connections, how might complexity theory enrich our understanding of rhetoric's epistemological bent?

**MT:** All too often discussions of discourse and rhetoric lead to a subjectivism or constructivism—they are indistinguishable—in which objectivity is the fabrication of subjectivity. While there is undeniably a creative dimension to all cognitive processes, it is too simple to insist that the ostensibly objective world is actually a psycho-social construction. We need a more nuanced and, indeed, dialectical understanding of the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity. By bringing together an expanded notion of information—in which social, economic, biological and even physical processes are information processes—with an expanded notion of networks, it becomes possible

to reimagine epistemology. Pragmatism is, in my judgment, trivial; irony is nihilistic in a bad sense of the term. Rhetoric is inescapable but not all-determinative. Subjectivity and objectivity are coemergent and coevolve.

### **Ethics and Complexity Theory**

**TR/DB:** What is there about complexity theory that suggests an ethics?

**MT:** It was, in many ways, the interrelated issues of ethics and politics that led me to turn to complexity theory. Having been deeply involved in the debates about deconstruction and poststructuralism during the 1980s, I became increasingly frustrated by the inability of these critical trajectories to develop plausible ethical positions and political strategies. Though proponents of deconstruction consistently talk about ethics and politics, they never get beyond declarations of resistance and academic politics with no relevance for what is going on in the world. In addition to this, what started as a philosophy of difference turned into a politics of identity, which leaves people little room for corporate action. Complexity theory provides a perspective from which it is possible to understand the interrelation of the multiple systems and structures constituting life at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Most importantly, complexity theory shows how natural, social, and cultural systems coemerge and coevolve. This means that we are integrally related to other people and other systems. In our world, *to be is to be connected*. This recognition carries important implications for social action. One can see the devastating consequences of the failure to recognize this condition in the policies of the Bush administration. Though Bush and his buddies talk about a new world order, their eyes are fixed on the past. We no longer live in the either-or world of walls but now live in the both-and world of webs.

### **The Humanities to Come?**

**TR/DB:** If you were to speculate, utilizing what knowledge you have acquired of the logics of complexity and the emergence of network culture, what would you say the humanities will look like fifth to one-hundred years from now? We ask this in part because *The Moment of Complexity* implicitly argues that the sciences and the humanities must begin again to have a productive relationship, at least one more productive than they have been in recent years (à la the Sokal Affair and the so-called science wars). Certainly this suggests one area of real change; what others do you foresee?

**MT:** Hegel famously wrote that the Owl of Minerva takes flight at twilight. By this he meant that the philosopher only interprets what has already occurred and refuses to make claims about the future. The question you ask is both impossible yet important to answer. If history unfolds according to the principle of punctuated equilibrium, then there will be creative disruptions, which are impossible to anticipate. Having said this, I will offer a few observations. I think the most important development in the not-so-distant future will be the disappearance of disciplines as they have been traditionally constituted. This is already beginning in small ways. Today's disciplines are obsolete; they persist primarily as a way to distribute power, which means economic resources. There is very little logic to the structure of disciplines and hence the structure of the curriculum. Where does religion end and art begin? Where does chemistry end and biology begin? Are social sciences scientific? There is no end to the questions. As disciplines disappear, inquiry will be guided by problems and thematic foci, which will be approached from a variety of perspectives. The structures of inquiry that emerge will not be permanent but will persist for a period and then disappear. As disciplines unravel, the structure of the university inevitably will change. These changes will also have an impact on the governance of the university. As the world becomes more interconnected, the necessity for careful and imaginative cultural analysis increases. At the same time growing financial difficulties will create greater and greater pressures on the humanities. Humanists must become much more creative about the ways in which they stage their disciplines. This will involve everything from developing new alliances with people working in other areas to devising new research and writing strategies. To survive in network culture, humanists cannot do the same thing differently but must do something different.

### **Setting the Record Straight**

**TR/DB:** We'd like to conclude our interview by giving you the opportunity to respond to any criticism of your work that you'd like to address. Would you like to set the record straight?

**MT:** If the record is straight, everything I have said is wrong.

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