The Pedagogy of Momus Technologies: Facebook, Privacy, and Online Intimacy

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Abstract

Through cable and wireless connections at home and at work, through Wi-Fi networks and wireless spots in hotels, coffee shops, and town squares, we are indeed connected to each other. But what is the phenomenology of this connection? Technologies of expression such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and other social networking technologies increasingly become like Momus windows of Greek mythology, revealing one's innermost thoughts for all to see. They give access to what used to be personal, secret, and hidden in the lives of its users, especially the young. In this article I explore the pedagogy of Momus effects of social networking technologies in the way they may alter young people's experience of privacy, secrecy, solitude, and intimacy. In addition, I examine the forms of contact afforded by instant messaging and texting on wireless mobile technologies such as the cell phone (and its wireless hybrids) for the way young people are and stay in touch with each other, and how intimacies and inner lives are attended to.

Privacy, secrecy, and innerness in young people's lives play a critical role in the development of self-identity, autonomy, intimacy, and the ability of learning to negotiate closeness and distance in social relations. The experience of privacy and personal secrets is the inevitable collateral of the emergence of inwardness or inner space. To keep a secret is to hide. What is hidden in personal secrecy is the evanescence of interiority that harbors the singularity or alterity of the person. In learning when and how to keep things inside and when to share, young people learn to confer their sense of identity, independence, uniqueness, and autonomy. Are Momus technologies profoundly altering the quality and nature of social relations, and especially the possibility of and need for self-identity, solitude, intimacy, and closeness among young people?

The idea that secrets inhabit some kind of inner space or inner self has a curious history in Western cultures, dating back at least to the Greek mythology of Momus, the lesser-known god of mockery and sarcasm, and his conflict with Hephaestus, the divinity of technology, fire, and the crafts. Hephaestus designed, among other things, the thunderbolts for Zeus; he fashioned the invincible armor for Achilles, and he made arrows for Eros, the god of love. As well, Hephaestus created the first woman after Zeus had ordered that there be a new kind of human being because Prometheus had only included one gender, which was male. And so Hephaestus formed the first woman from clay. Her name was Pandora.

The legend tells that one day Hephaestus became involved in a dispute with Athena, who had conceived a house, and Poseidon, who had made a bull. They were arguing about which was the superior creation. So Momus, son of Nyx (goddess of the night or dark), was requested to arbitrate and appraise the creations. Now, Momus was known for his critical skills and he immediately started to mock the house because it had not been made moveable so as to travel, or to be able to avoid living next to bad neighbors; he ridiculed the bull for not having eyes positioned above his horns to let the bull take better aim when he gored something; and he criticized Hephaestus' creation of the woman for not having placed a window or door into her breast so that one could see her secret thoughts and feelings.

As the god of poets and authors, Momus became the first to express the desire to access what was hidden in the human heart by means of a technology of surveillance. Momus' mockery caused him to be expelled by Zeus

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Figure 1. Maerten Jacobsz can Heenskerck, "Momus Crticizes the Gods' Creations," 1561 (detail)

from Mount Olympus. It may be noted, in passing, that Momus had also made the mistake of ridiculing Zeus for his infamous insatiable lust for the womanly creatures. But two more incisive observations need to be made with respect to Momus' interest in the hidden nature of the inner life.

First, the popular psychology of everyday life is still very much caught up with Momus' conceptualization of the inner life as a space located inside the human breast or heart that can be opened up, if only there were the technology to do so. To keep a secret is to guard the inner space of the soul from the piercing glance of Momus. Second, it should not be overlooked that Momus was known as the patron of authors and poets, for whom the hidden interiority or the secrecy of innerness constitutes the very focus of their writerly gaze. The genre of fiction may indeed be regarded as the narrative explorations of secret interiorities. There is no other form of narrativity or inquiry so well suited to give access to the inner life of the head and the heart: the uniqueness or singularity of the person.

In *Childhood's Secrets: Intimacy, Privacy, and the Self Reconsidered*, van Manen & Levering (1996) showed how the play of ordinary secrets in children's and in young people's lives is a requisite part of the normal and healthful development of the person. Young people crave intimacy and closeness, and desire to belong. And intimacies are cultivated through a fascination with the hidden—the interiorities of self and other. But the hidden can only reveal itself when the exteriorizing of the interiorities of inner life are safeguarded by the private. The point is that it is the private that is at stake in the new social networking technologies such as Facebook, MySpace, and Bebo. The Momus effect of these technologies is that they provide direct access to what is most innermost, and, simultaneously, they may also have the effect of trivializing and broadly casting the private onto scattered planes of the public.

The Privatization of the Public and Publicization of the Private

On first sight this may seem like a counterintuitive claim. How can the intimate and the private be threatened by the presence of the public? In 1974, Richard Sennett wrote (in *The Fall of the Public Man*) persuasively about two tyrannies of intimacy: the dulling oppressions of domestic life and the dangers of oppressive political surveillance. He sought to privilege the impersonal relations of the public over the personal relations of the private (community). Now, some 30 years later, in Western as well as oriental cultures, all aspects of the common, community, and public spaces are increasingly being privatized and infused with corporate and market values. The forces of capitalist privatization have been widely theorized and are easily observed in the various capitalist theaters of global economies.

But what we seem much less aware of is that the privatization of the public is accompanied by the publicization of the private. However, the publicization of the private has consequences that Sennett would not have intended. On the one hand, the private is invaded by creeping technologies of surveillance that affect virtually all aspects of social and cultural life. And, on the other hand, equally subtle and perhaps ultimately more destroying of the inner values of the private are the technologies that seduce the young into surrendering the privacy that normally creates and supports the space for intimacy and secrets to be treasured and shared. Indeed, in the lifeworlds of the digital generation, the very meaning and significance of the private may be changing if not disappearing altogether for habituated users of social networks. On the one hand, mobile technologies allow for secret messaging and texting. And, on the other hand, social networks such as Facebook and MySpace may exteriorize, reveal, and wear away what was secret and what was personal, what was depthful and what was innermost—now for all to see. Blogs are somewhat different in that they are usually constructed as personal Web pages, presenting one's work and opinions. But when these Web pages are frequently updated through microblogging then they, too, tend to become means for broadcasting what is going on from moment to moment in one's personal life.

Social networks such as Facebook (launched by Mark Zuckerberg for use by students at Harvard in 2004, opened to the public in 2006, and in 2008 claiming 70 million active users worldwide) and synchronous messaging systems such as MSN invite young people to "spend time with their friends," which translates into pressing thumbs or fingers on a mobile handset or computer keyboard. For many of these young people (and older people as well), Facebook, Twitter, and other ever-changing social networking sites have become the new

commons: the place where you hang out, commiserate, and gossip with your friends. In the digital environment of the first decades of the twenty-first century, young people don't use email. Why? Because it is too narrative and "would be considered the least intimate," commented the sociologist Pascoe (2007). Email is the medium of communication for the older generation. Email, "That's where you'd write a letter," young people say (Pascoe, 2007).

The name Facebook originally referred to the print facebooks containing names and pictures that some universities and colleges provide staff and incoming students as a way to get to know people on campus. But the irony of the name is that it seems to emulate and allude to face-to-face closeness. Of course, it is well-nigh impossible to text message online through phatic intimacies such as glances and gestures, tone of voice and physiognomic expressions, attentiveness and corporeal subtleties. And yet, there is no denying that computer-mediated social networks as well as the modes of contact afforded by mobile technologies are surprisingly compelling and addictive to their users. The feeling of being constantly connected and in touch with others online has been described as ambient awareness—being aware of other people's moods and concerns by being physically close.

Social networking technologies are designed with an appealing, and in many respects, irresistible "invitation" to their users (Adams, 2006, p. 20). Contemporary Momus technologies allow people to feel close and in touch while they may be separated in space and time. Whereas in previous years teenagers would keep secret diaries, now these young people may keep diaries online, for all their friends to read.[1] So, we need to ask, what happens to intimacy among young people engaged in collecting hordes of "Friends" on Facebook. And what does it mean to "feel connected" among mobile users who now habitually check, monitor, and text message on their cell phones, iPods, iPhones, Blackberries, and other wireless handheld devices? What is the nature and attraction of digital intimacy (intimacy gained through digital media)? What does it mean to experience a pronouncedly and profoundly public private life?

First, it should be noted that social network and video sharing Web sites may be used helpfully by an array of groups and individuals for a variety of purposes. Professional groups form and subscribe to Facebook to stimulate contact among its members. Book clubs and other interest groups engage in online conversations about readings or issues. Teachers may use social networks to create virtual classrooms or to complement their teaching with assignments. Academics, artists, or any interested individuals may use blogs to present, advertise, or advocate themselves on the Web. Communities and artists use YouTube as a vehicle to experiment, trigger the imagination,

and publicize their work. Graduate seminars use Facebook as a convenient Web board to post and discuss readings and writings. But these are not the uses that form the interest for this article. Here, the focus is on raising questions about the pedagogical significance and implications of the new technologies for especially the younger users who increasingly live their personal and private lives in digital worlds. In particular, I wonder, how do digital relationships and intimacies differ from face-to-face and physical interactions and relations?

The default settings of social networking software are such that its users are persuaded by their peers—but also by the design of these persuasive technologies[2]—to upload pictures of themselves, to share information about their daily feelings, moods, activities, preoccupations, disappointments, happiness, hobbies, jobs, interests, friends, and plans for the weekend with hordes of others, many of whom they may or may not know through previous face-to-face contact. Young people may not experience privacy as their elders did and still do. They may see no need for privacy, or have a different sense of privacy. They may experiment with their identity, con-structing textual, pictographic, video, and photographic images of themselves that reflect less who they are than who they would want to be. Or they may play with privacy by creating staged lives and staged personalities as manifested in many of the videos on YouTube.

The observation that users of social networks expose their inner lives online is no longer in dispute, though the psychological and cultural motivations are interpreted variously. For example, Bauman proposed that the reason is that we live in a confessional society:

> Teenagers equipped with portable electronic confessionals are simply apprentices training and trained in the art of living in a confessional society—a society notorious for effacing the boundary which once separated the private from the public, for making it a public virtue and obligation to publicly expose the private. (Bauman, 2007, p. 3)

And it is not only the young who are infected by the confessional virus:

> It would be a grave mistake, however, to suppose that the urge towards a public display of the "inner self" and the willingness to satisfy that urge are manifestations of a unique, purely generational, age related urge/addiction of teenagers, keen as they naturally tend to be to get a foothold in the "network." . . . The new penchant for public confessions cannot be explained by "age-specific" factors—not only by them at any rate. (Bauman, 2007, p. 3)

Other social scientists and culture critics provide alternative explanations for the exposure and the eroding of the intimate and the private. It is suggested that (young) people who engage in the public sharing of their inner thoughts and private feelings on networking Web sites and blogs fear aloneness and solitude; that people want to gain visibility and fame; that Facebook and MySpace are signs of a new social narcissism; that the experience of privacy is disappearing or changing, and so forth. But rather than trying to explain, it may be more interesting trying to describe what it means to say that young people do not experience privacy, or that they experience it differently. What do we mean when we speak of digital intimacies? What do people experience when they wittingly or unwittingly experiment with their identities online?

Clearly there are many issues at stake in the personal sharing of private material on social networking Web sites.[3] Blissfully oblivious to the secret designs of Facebook, millions of joiners post a wealth of spontaneously and instantaneously produced personal data.[4] The problem is that these personal data are made available to businesses that may profit from them. On May 30, 2008, the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC) filed a complaint, calling Facebook "a minefield of privacy invasion" and asking the Privacy Commissioner of Canada to review some 22 privacy violations. Not surprisingly, some of these infringements concern the exploitation of personal information for commercial purposes. Users are put at risk of cyberstalking and cyberharassment. Some are becoming aware of the darker sides of the design of Facebook and its intent to develop a market corner for its commercial backers.[5] But apart from the commercial dimensions of Facebook, the CIPPIC also takes issue with design issues such that all of a user's "friends" (who they may or may not personally know) can see personal postings left by other friends. It is in this context that pedagogical questions arise regarding the formative consequences that social networking technologies have on the lives of young people.

Sharing personal information can be unexpectedly risky—in part because sexual predators and pedophiles prey on unsuspecting social network users; for example, pedophiles who write well and know how to use language that belongs to young people, to their interests, and cultures. They know how to use language seductively, in a manner that stirs and traps young people into a sphere of trust and seeming closeness or intimacy. And sharing personal feelings is precarious when online intimacy is betrayed through false representation of self, or through cyber bullying. The social effects can be devastating to young people who desire intimacy or who crave to be loved, or to belong.

So, there is risk in the ease with which one may unguardedly or unwittingly spill one's personal information or even innermost feelings with those others in the mutualities of what Giddens called "pure relationships" (1993). Even with strangers whom we have never met face-to-face we may "build" an uncanny sense of closeness. Through fantasy enhanced by evocative texting and (true or false) images, we may become "virtually enchanted" (Ihde, 2002, p. 82) with someone distant. And we may say things and reveal intimacies that we may not so easily share with people around us. Many young people do not realize (or may not care) that whatever they put online can no longer be withdrawn and controlled, and may become forever the picking of the treasures, trash, and debris circulating cyberspace. Of course Facebook, like most social networking tools, allows users to adjust the settings for levels of privacy and security. For example, "friends" with whom one maintains "strong ties" can be separated (through privacy settings or by using a separate account altogether) from Facebook "friends" with whom one feels only "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973,1983). But young people, especially, may not be aware of the issues and need for privacy, and simply use the default settings.

Text messaging on mobile phones and other communication technologies tends to be abbreviated, coded, and lacking in depth in a traditional narrative sense. The language of keeping in touch tends to be narratively undifferentiated. With respect to wireless handheld devices, one would suspect that the shallowness of texting through abbreviated messages would not seem to be a favorable recipe for meaningful conversations. And of course, texting is mostly intended for purposes of sending brief messages, making appointments, or simply feeling in touch. Even shallow communication online, ironically, may provide the participants the feeling of a certain kind of depth and certain qualities of intimacy. The more important question is, therefore, not just what is lost but also what is gained in the way that technology alters the experience of intimacy, social nearness and distance, and personal proximity.

Young people are tuned in to the cultural codes of online communication that is part of their way of texting. A professor of English discovered that there exist subjective sensibilities to the codes and linguistic habits of texting that quickly betray that privacy is trespassed by a stranger to the code:

> While I personally use alphanumeric shorthand to speed my writing, many of the teens with whom I communicate in the course of my work don't. They use the intuitive text feature of their phones. So when I jokingly grabbed a phone one day and

texted something silly to a friend of one of my friend's daughters, the girl laughed at my attempt at humor: "she'll know it's not me because I don't use shorthand like that." And she was right—a text came back, with no alphanumeric abbreviation: "What? Who's using your phone?" And the girl used the apostrophe—something I often don't see even in formal writing.

Sometimes the private may get compromised unintentionally. One young woman said,

My boss at work asked me if I would accept him as a "friend" on Facebook. I did not want to do that since I want to keep my private life separate from work. But then I felt I could not refuse him since he is my boss. And now I feel embarrassed that he is reading the things that I have put on Facebook but that I would otherwise never tell him. I feel uncomfortable that he can see pictures of me in my bathing suit that I had uploaded after my holiday in Mexico.

Social network users, like this young woman, quite literally are "putting their life on(the)line," so to speak (Smith, 2008, p. 135).

Textual Intimacy

In *Mobile Communication and Society: A Global Perspective*, Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, and Set (2006) offered a detailed empirical view of the use of mobile technologies by young people in nations around the world. They found that young people often receive mobile phones from their parents so that they can be reachable, safe, and thus under parental control when away from home.[6] But, ironically perhaps, these mobile technologies also have the opposite effect of freeing young people from parental surveillance, and giving them a certain independence and autonomy because they have more license to roam in a virtual and real sense.

Many youngsters (and perhaps increasingly older people as well) report that throughout the day, they are constantly in touch with others through text messaging on their mobile device—in school and outside of school. They feel "naked" without it. For young people who are shy or less verbal, text messaging by mobile phone may be psychologically an attractive (safer) way to communicate with each other exactly because texting does not require engaging in extended conversations, as one may be required to do when talking over the phone. Texting allows one to feel in touch with friends and acquaintances without, it seems, having to be too close: a virtual experience of present absence.

The experience of proximity through texting is a distant kind of intimacy. Of course, lack of distance is not equivalent to nearness. Although computer-mediated and wireless technologies overcome physical distance between people, they do not necessarily bring them intimately near to each other. In interviews with young people, one young woman said,

I have been thinking of quitting Facebook. All I really see is people who are trying to make themselves look good by showing off how many friends they have and all the pictures they post. So now I learn every day what all these people are doing in their lives, but actually I hardly know many of them.

When I have not seen a friend for a year or a couple of years and I happen to suddenly see them or talk with them on the phone then the occasion is surprising, meaningful and fun. We are catching up by telling each other stories of what has happened in our lives or we discuss something significant. But that is very different from getting all this Facebook drabble. I am not really interested how friend X or person Y is feeling right now and the daily pictures they are putting up.

The absurdity of constantly checking how your friend is doing and feeling right now, what he or she is having on his sandwich, that your friend has a third coffee by 10:00 a.m., how she hates a certain song on the radio, how he found some moldy food in the refrigerator, the clothes your friend is wearing today, the disagreement she had with her boyfriend, how she feels tired after shopping for groceries—all these trivialities of daily life would bore many people. And yet, constantly monitoring how your friend is doing as the day progresses can have a mesmerizing effect that may appeal to some (if only a few) people: "I'm so totally, digitally close to you," is the somewhat mocking phrase that Thompson used as the subtitle of his article, "Brave New World Digital Intimacy" (2008). In a strange way, social networks like Twitter that encourage constant contact and short messaging let you get to "know" your friend in ways that is unexpectedly personal and "intimate," as if you are living with this person. And yet, this kind of intimacy, too, is largely textual intimacy, enhanced perhaps with snapshots taken with the built-in camera of the mobile device one is using. Of course, intimacy experienced through texting and instant messaging is not a new phenomenon. Lovers have used computers, phones, and email to keep in touch with each other while apart from each other. Sometimes textual intimacy may be experienced as an indecisive kind of intimacy:

> I check my phone and I smile: there is a message or email from my love. As I read the message the physical distance between us seems to be bridged. I had only contacted him a minute ago and already he has read and now responded to my message. And yet, in the closeness of this immediacy I also feel a distance: I wonder how and what he is really doing—after all he is not physically here with me. But, later, as we are sitting opposite each other in a coffee shop, we talk about the things that we earlier mentioned through texting. I feel close to him again. Yet, this is a different nearness from the closeness I feel when receiving a message. His physical presence somehow touches me in a way that my body feels coupled with his, even though he is sitting over there and I'm sitting here. And yet, things aren't quite right. He seems preoccupied and does not really seem to see me. So the troubling thing is that I still feel some kind of distance.

In online communication we may feel close even though we are physically distant. We may also feel distant even though we are physically near. Ambiguously, closeness is not the same as nearness.

How does digital intimacy differ from nondigital intimacy? On first sight, digital intimacy is obviously different from physically proximal closeness in that it is a distant intimacy—it is intimacy at a distance mediated through texting. But distant intimacy appears somewhat of an oxymoron. Does one not need to be close to experience nearness? It depends on how one understands nearness. Digital intimacy may offer the sensibility of one-to-one closeness, but the one-to-one may be "real" or illusory. I am sitting at my computer chatting on Facebook and feeling that I am here with you. Within this binary sphere of intimacy between myself and the screen, you are addressing me, only you and only me (even though many others may be reading your writing and feel the intimacy I feel). But at the moment of reading Facebook I may not "know" this or I may not want to know of the presence of these others.

From an experiential phenomenological point of view, contact through mere words on the screen may provide an uncanny sense of intimacy or closeness. In a peculiar sense, language itself is already contact: presence that is so direct that it annuls mediation (Blanchot, 1986; van Manen, 2006). It is only after I remove myself from the digital screen that I may admit to myself that you were not just revealing yourself to me. Wittingly or unwittingly, digital intimacy can be polygamous intimacy. I felt close to you but did not realize that it was not you. Or, I may realize that you were not really yourself when you seemed to be showing off and "posturing" to your readers online through your primed postings and pictures.

It is also possible that the mediated experience of the other may be preferable over immediate or unmediated presence. For example, when I email someone I may experience an openness that I may not experience when in the physical presence of that person. The fact that I do not feel hindered by the scrutiny of eyes or the vulnerability of physiognomic and physical expressions may allow me to be more vulnerable in my writing. Conversely, in reading the other's writing, I may feel addressed, stirred, or touched by the written words. I experience a depth in the written words that spoken words may not easily possess, or do not possess in the same manner.

As well, textual intimacy through email and Facebook and other narrative forms of social network technologies (such as WebBoard in online teaching) may benefit from a certain reflectiveness regarding my thoughts that would not be likely when we are in the immediate presence of the other (Adams & van Manen, 2007; van Manen & Adams, 2009). In writing to the other I may weigh my words, taste their tonalities, feel their evocations with a subtlety and a sense of emotional intimacy that face-to-face contact may not achieve, precisely because of the pathic power of the linguistic intimacy of written textual contact. The conversational nature of writing may sometimes draw the person closer to the point toward which the conversation is oriented. When writing to a friend about a topic, a book, or a movie it may happen that we get so involved in the writing that we temporarily seem to forget that we are writing to someone or that we are writing for others.

It is also possible that the feeling of online intimacy is an intimacy with the self: a kind of reflexive sphere of intimacy. I am sitting at the computer late at night, emailing a close friend or writing personals into Facebook (as I may have written in my personal diary of yesteryear). It is possible for people on the Internet to think they are close but, in the sober light of the next morning, the closeness was an illusion, or perhaps a simulated intimacy. It could have been an intimacy that consisted of seducing oneself through one's own writing: feeling moved, stirred by our own words, as if they came from the outside—something that Roland Barthes (1975) termed "jouissance," the blissful pleasure of the text. This, too, may be an unexpected benefit or gain from writing online.

The Secret of Intimacy is Never Revealed

The phenomena of secrecy and intimacy stand in a direct relation to each other and to the relationalities in which they are engaged. Intimacy is the occurrence of togetherness when the interiority of secrets is exteriorized and

brought into naked contact with the interiority of a trusted other. Both secrecy and intimacy lay claim to inner space. Sharing a secret is an act of discretion, of tact: to make contact with the other. Relational tact means to touch or be touched by the other. Contact is intimate in-touchness (see van Manen, 1991), and intimacy is the relational ambience of exposing, disclosing, making known, revealing what is concealed. We speak of intimate lovers, intimate glances, intimate feelings and thoughts, and intimate knowledge: to be in intimate contact with the other is to touch the other's secret: his or her uniqueness or singularity.

In the sexual context, intimacy is what we experience in the relational state of undress with a lover. Taking off our clothes and entrusting the reach and depth of the secrecy of our embodied being to the other means that this other must know how to dwell in this intimate space by being tactfully respectful, receptive, and available. By definition, intimacy is selective and exclusive. Properly speaking, intimacy is a binary relation—when one person shares a unique aspect of his or her interiority with another. The question is whether and how digital lifestyles and technosocial relationalities may enrich or erode, deepen or alter such sensibilities, notions, and relations of intimacy.

When young people are in touch with each other through text messaging and sending multimedia images, their writing and communicative practices are simultaneously extended and constrained, freed and restricted by the media. As mentioned above, SMS (short message system) and MMS (multimedia messaging system) have sponsored forms of writing that commonly include symbols, abbreviations, contractions, and acronyms. The writing has the appearance less of narrative story than of codes or haiku poetry. The sometimes highly condensed texts may consist of mundane communications (such as arranging meetings or providing simple information), but even brief texting may aim to be expressive of sensitive thoughts and feelings (such as between close friends or lovers):

> [M]y phone vibrates in my pocket while I'm in a meeting (psychoanalyze that); no one knows I've been contacted; furtively I pull my phone from my pocket and glance at the note telling me where to meet my lover for dinner: "HL@6? ly"; with two motions of my thumb I text ":-) ly2" and send; I face those gathered in this antagonistic meeting, who have noted nothing, with a changed heart, knowing it will end soon, that I will leave this place, and that I will soon be with someone who actually cares about me.

Acronyms, symbols, and ever-inventive neologisms are used as shorthand but also as a secret language meant to disguise and share private feelings and inner thoughts. This is like hiding one's identity online (the Internet is a treacherous space) and yet aiming to achieve a certain intimacy by wearing virtual burqas: words substitute for veils and eyes. Symbols that represent winks and warnings can be used for letting each other know that someone is watching or that the conversation is under surveillance, thus covering hidden relations. And yet, the experience of furtive secrecy in secret messaging on the cell phone can hardly substitute for what is lost in the opening of our inner life to hordes of online "friends." In keeping and sharing secrets with a friend who is physically present we may gain glimpses of the depth and ultimate enigma of the experience of intimacy.

To evoke some of the more depthful and enigmatic dimensions of intimacy it is helpful to touch upon that special meaning of intimacy when used in the context of lovers and physical intimacy. Imagine that your friend shares with you his or her intention to break up the relationship with his or her partner. As your friend spends several hours, perhaps, confiding the private thoughts and feelings that have gone into this decision, you become aware of the intimacies that are being forged and betrayed in these confessions. Hanif Kureishi's (2001) novel, *Intimacy*, is a fictional exploration of such a situation. The protagonist, Jay, confides that he has secretly decided to leave his wife and two children the next morning, while they are at work and at school. The first line reads: "It is the saddest night, for I am leaving and not coming back." The entire novel consists in the sharing of the complex content and history of this secret plan. Jay intends to leave no message. No warning. Nothing. Just walk out. He describes how his life is bereft of true love, lust, and passion—except, perhaps, for memories of a past lover. That is why he resolves to leave. As readers of the novel we become the confidants of this secret. The secret is shared with us as we learn about the complex inner stirrings of that last night. And yet, the more the secret is revealed, the more we become aware of the ineffableness of human experience.

Kureishi's story seems really about the hidden desire for love and, self-righteously perhaps, refusing to live with infidelity to what love should be. How does the secret infidelity to this loveless relationship with his wife weigh against the secret of infidelity to love itself? To understand Jay's confessions we must grasp the hidden intimacies of love and lust. We must recognize the phenomenology of desire and of what remains ultimately hidden in any secret kept or shared. Can we ever appreciate the hidden contours and complex contextualities of this secret? Perhaps what the novel shows us is that no secret can ever be truly and fully disclosed.

The secret and furtive use of a cell phone or wireless texting device in a classroom or in the company of others should not be confused with the experience of personal secrecy and intimacy that we may feel in our relationship with someone we love. But erotic intimacy can be used as a source for understanding the more profoundly significant dimensions of human intimacy that is (from some pedagogical point of view) hopefully also part of adolescent love of the young users of social networks and wireless devices.

A Pedagogy of Secrecy Must Restore and Guard the Hidden

We can identify and trace the economies and culprits of capitalistic and corporate privatization and their cultural effects on the commons, but it is much more difficult to determine the forces of publicization of the private that dissolve perhaps traditional aspects of spheres of intimacy, or alter and augment them into new modes of intimacy and proximity that describe our digital lives. The forces that influence and alter intimacies of the private are concealed in the rationalities of the technological that pervades the lives of the young and their elders who have become inhabitants of this digital landscape. And depending on the pedagogical commitment with which we approach the notion of the Hidden, we are challenged to grasp and deal with the meaning and significance of its effects, especially on the young.

A person without secrets, just like life without secrets, may have little to hold our interest. The psychiatrist van den Berg once wrote, "Every friendship, every marriage, every love relation can only exist thanks to the grace of the secret that one person is for the other" (1969, p. 153). The same may be true of life. Secrecy is the condition for a meaningful relation with life in general, and in the necessity of secrecy for a meaningful life resides a pedagogical interest. The pedagogical question is: How can we, in the context of present day technologies, still have opportunities for the experience of secrecy and the Hidden in the virtual and real relationships of young people as well as adults? How can young people still experience the formative effects of solitude in a society where they are relentlessly distracted by the hectic demands of a constantly digitally connected and information-driven technological environment?

Secrets are the common currency of our relational intimacies, and in moments of solitude we may experience intimacy with what is innermost and ultimately the enigma of the Hidden. These are moments when we come to ourselves and become intimate with the secret parts of ourselves. These are also moments when we discover the Hidden through the desire for intimacy, in depthful friendship or the loves and lusts of eros. Indeed, we may perceive the Hidden as the absolute point of singularity or mystery toward which our desire moves us, and that ultimately makes living and loving and the showing and hiding of intimacies and secrets possible in the first place. In a sense, the absolutely Hidden is the source for all desires to experience the elusive intimations of the inner eros of the Other, and ultimately the eros of life itself.

Phenomenology is the study of the hidden (van Manen, 1990/1997), and phenomenologically we know that the question of the meaning of the Hidden is not a problem that can be answered with solutions. When the intimate is exposed to the bright light of problem-solving rationality, then not only does the mystery disappear, but intimacy itself becomes ungraspable. To say young people should learn to value and respect the Hidden does not foolishly require that we must know the source of secrecy in life. On the contrary, what young people should learn is that the meaning of life's secrets can never be completely comprehended. The meaning of the Hidden in life can only be properly approached when one is able to grant the Hidden its enigmatic value, to let the secret of intimacy in all its variations be experienced as secret. But it is possible and perhaps even likely that the technological impulse that seems to reach across the entire global sphere leads to a disregarding of the Hidden, an undervaluing of the secret and a shallowing of our interpersonal relations and intimacies. We need to ask, what may be getting lost and what may be gained in the dwelling of the media in our digital world? In what ways can intimacy and the Hidden remain a possibility in our increasingly technological and digital world?

Notes

1. Googling the Internet yields a variety of resources for gaining insights into the uses of social network sites and mobile technologies among young people from researchers, commentators, and young people themselves. For an informative example, see the site Growing Up Online at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kidsonline/

2. For the notion of Facebook as "persuasive technology," see http://www.bjfogg.com/

3. Some older people are more suspicious of the beneficial effects of new technologies:

   I'm getting near the big 60 and I've been around long enough to see some of the changes. Where we once ate meals together and chatted amicably about weather or minor personal matters we now zap frozen burgers in the microwave and fire up the computers to debate celebrity nonsense or politics. Where our personal problems used to be discussed one-on-one with parents or friends we now splatter them all over public forums for all to see. Manners—"Please" and "Thank you"—are fast becoming a thing of the past. Simple courtesies are vanishing at an astonishing rate . . . it's been a long time since someone under 40 held the door for me when I have an armload of stuff.

   These are artifacts of detachment. As we move more and more towards a society of isolation, using technological means to stay in touch, we are becoming less and less aware of the feelings of others. People speak more bluntly, disagree more vociferously, because they are unafraid of the reprisals they would suffer in person. Anonymity and distance are creating a sociopathic level of interaction that frankly should scare anyone.

   Confrontation is the new conversation.

   (Retrieved September 5, 2008, from http://www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2008/09/04/facebook-privacy.html#socialcomments)

4. In a recent exchange about the virtues of Facebook and public vs. private sensibilities, one person wrote:

   I too am one of those people who fall somewhere in the middle, I do banking, shopping, read the news, email friends around the world and do much of my work on line. But I would never post personal information on a site like facebook.

   In responding to a CBC story that "young people have a unique sense of Facebook privacy," one person commented,

   The interesting thing is I have co-workers in their early 20s that use facebook, but then tell me they are shocked by some of the things their friends and other co-workers post. The comment I often hear is "Don't they realize everyone can read the stuff on their wall," and yet they would never say a thing to the person posting, they just tell the rest of us all the embarrassing details. This to me is an odd definition of friend. Our co-worker with the most facebook friends (as she tells us frequently) is the one sitting home almost every evening because she lacks real friends. She may find more satisfying relationships if she got off the computer and left her house, although I can understand the appeal for lonely people. Many of us share our most embarassing moments with close friends, it is part of a bonding experience with those we trust. Perhaps this sharing of such details on sites like facebook is seen as bringing you close to others in a similair way - problem is it is like sharing an intimate conversation with a friend over the PA system at the hockey arena on game night.

   And as for young people, I know many 30 and 40 year olds who participate wholeheartedly. Common sense has no age limit.

   (Retrieved September 5, 2008, from http://www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2008/09/04/facebook-privacy.html#socialcomments)

5. In an essay entitled "Facebook Suicide" in *Adbusters, Journal of the Mental Environment*, Micah White wrote:

   Facebook is a scary, commercial dead-zone that's killing our real-world relationships…

   The first step toward demand generation was encouraging users to share information about their interests, favorite movies and books, and political beliefs that would allow Facebook to send advertisements targeted to their demographic. The second controversial step that Facebook took is to partner with dozens of online retailers so that when a member buys a widget on a partner's site, all their Facebook "friends" find out. This sinister system would be akin to my computer automatically e-mailing my address book when I purchase a book online.

   By turning members into consumers who involuntarily advertise to their friends, Facebook hoped to extract profit from social interactions. However, by commercializing friendships, Facebook has irrevocably destroyed its image. Now a vanguard of the anti-Facebook movement is developing out of an increasing disenchantment. No longer a fun, harmless place to hang out, Facebook has become just another commercial enterprise.

   (Retrieved June 4, 2008, from http://www.adbusters.org/magazine/77/facebook_suicide.html)

6. In *Mobile Communication and Society: A Global Perspective*, Castells and colleagues (2006) offered an extensive portrayal of the popularity of mobile technologies among youths in various nations.

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