

Barbara Duden

**Ivan Illich. Beyond Medical Nemesis (1976):
The Search for Modernity's Disembodiment of
"I" and "You"**

**(Notes for a contribution at the Bremen Symposium "Ivan Illich
zum Abschied", February 7-8, 2003, translated by Jan Lambertz)**

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Ivan Illich. Beyond Medical Nemesis (1976): The Search for Modernity's Disembodiment of "I" and "You" (Notes for a contribution at the Bremen Symposium "Ivan Illich zum Abschied", February 7-8, 2003, translated by Jan Lambertz)

The many obituaries of Ivan Illich's life and work had one thing in common: they suggest that by the end of the 1970s his hold on the public imagination had grown faint. It is as if his life and thinking stopped there. Almost all of these posthumous testimonials focus on the period between the 1950s and the late 1970s; they describe the unparalleled challenge that Ivan Illich's "independent and catalytic thought" in the Center for Intercultural Documentation (CIDOC) presented to the vision of development nurtured by church and state. They recall Ivan's studies of the disabling gestalt of modern institutions, his argument - hardly controversial any more - that modern institutions alienate a majority of people from the goals for which they had been planned, created, and financed. With growing intensity they instead place their consumers at an unbridgeable distance from that goal: compulsory schooling had derailed our capacity to think and learn freely; the speed of our cars and the proliferation of traffic and machines had blocked our ability and desire to walk out into the world; medicine itself threatens the health of its patients; planned, standardized housing had made it difficult for us to make homes for ourselves. Occasionally an author takes a cue from Medical Nemesis, the book that secured Illich's reputation, and lays out the three specific levels on which medicine has become a disabling profession: medical treatment harms the patient (medical iatrogenesis), the medical system has made it almost impossible to give birth, die, or be sick at home (social iatrogenesis), and in particular, through the creed that health is an attainable goal, it has destroyed our capacity for suffering and the art of dying (cultural iatrogenesis). This is how the memorial tributes have described Ivan, as the most important critic of the global development project of the postwar period, as someone who saw and uncovered the underside of that project clearly while all the world still clung to the promise of setting the world right. Finally, these memorialists never fail to mention that while Illich left the priesthood, he did not leave the church. But they did not ask what this meant.

At the conclusion of this story, Illich embarked on a quarter century of constant travel, moving between Japan, India, America, Germany, and Mexico. And here the obituary writers abruptly fall silent. They collapse Ivan's life into his public persona, equating it with the junctures and turning points that can be culled from the mass media. The question of what he accomplished these last three decades becomes moot, for they implicitly assume that his major intellectual contributions and his importance lay somewhere in the distant past. In this vein Thierry Paquot told his Le Monde Diplomatique readers, "whenever his name came up in the past few years, I was asked, when did he actually die?"¹ The second half of his working life has thus been rendered a blank page, a map without features, on which two islands unexpectedly break up an expanse of empty space, his books Gender (1981) and In the Vineyard of the Text (1991). The first of these books has been dismissed as a politically incorrect blunder,

¹ Thierry Paquot, "Zum Abschied von Ivan Illich: Vagabundierendes Denken," Le Monde Diplomatique (Jan. 2, 2003), 2. (see also the English and French edition).

the other as a learned, somewhat eccentric excursion into an obscure theme, namely, the advent of silent reading in the twelfth century. Ivan dropped out of the public eye for various reasons: his determination, drawing on the deep well of his intellectual curiosity, to wander in uncharted territory; his acute ability to see issues just coming up on the horizon; his uncompromising rejection of illusions; and his willingness to revisit and reassess the positions that had brought him to public notice. This is what David Cayley understood when he concluded: "Illich is a man who has managed to outrun his reputation by refusing to become captive of the positions he has explored and staked out."²

It is not possible in my short account to lay out a complete map of Ivan's life in these years, even to guide you fleetingly around all the crucial corners he turned and on to all the paths he traversed. It would also be premature. And yet, drawing on both Illich's published and unpublished works as well as my memories, I wish to sketch in some small segment of this landscape for you, invite you to leave the most well-traveled road of Illich's work and negotiate the more unfamiliar terrain of his journeys for over two and a half decades. I spent a long night thinking about how best to characterize the fruit of these years and, in the end, three insights emerged that I would like to comment.

First, the enormously wide range of subjects that he pursued simply astounds me, themes that led him again and again into new terrains. Second, the many memorial tributes summing up his life left me perplexed, for in paying homage to a man they saw as a social critic who went his own way, they left out the most vital thing about him. All of Ivan's works during these last decades were deeply collaborative projects hewn from long-lasting friendships and from close work with like-minded colleagues.³ He inspired friends to embark on new research or propelled their projects in new directions; these in turn furnished new material for Ivan's own thinking, insights that he would weave into his own work. Finally, Ivan, the teacher, scholar, and author, was deeply anchored in the riches of hospitality in these last decades, held fast in the embrace of a long stream of guests and visitors.

I will now turn to some of Ivan's major intellectual preoccupations, revisiting conversations of his peripathetic "academy" citing some of the friends whose work and ideas he struggled with and fostered. He would have been pleased if I succeed in identifying - amid the long series of subjects that he pursued - the continuous ascending spiral of his insights, the underlying pulse that drove his intellectual quest. One of his favorite metaphors for history was the image of a hemp-rope continually reinforced with new strands, in which the short segments of hemp disappear but the line holds fast and runs through times. The person writing history searches for signs of rupture, breaking points in the rope running through the past. My object here, then, is to hold fast to the twists and turns in Ivan's thinking against the ruptures of his life and times.

² David Cayley, Ivan Illich in Conversation (Concord, Ontario, 1992), xiv. In the mid-1980s Cayley conducted a series of interviews with Ivan Illich for a Canadian radio program.

³ To name some of the friends in Ivan's peripathetic discussion circle: Lee Hoinacki, Jean Robert, Wolfgang Sachs, Johannes Beck, Lenz Kriss-Rettenbeck, Uwe Pörksen, Ludolf Kuchenbuch, David Cayley, Carl Mitcham, Majid Rahnema, Sajay Samuel, Matthias Rieger, or with Mushka Nagel (Mother Jerome OSB), Valentina Borremans, Ruth Kriss-Rettenbeck, Marianne Gronemeyer, Silja Samerski, Samar Farage, and with me. Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham edited a book: The Challenges of Ivan Illich (Albany, 2002) which gives further testimonies of the "challenges" in conversations with Ivan.

From a Critique of Development to the “Archaeology of Modern Certainties”

Between 1986 and 1990 we made our home in State College, in a spacious house on Foster Avenue. Charlie, a local farmer, delivered bushels of vegetables, the local farmers' market offered ranunculi and an abundance of tulips every May, and an aging Italian woman kept the household and its constantly changing array of guests well-supplied with fresh bread. A stream of visitors descended on the house for Ivan's "living room consultations," for long, disciplined discussions at the dining room table or on benches out on the veranda. The conversations stretched over days. During these years his major preoccupation remained work on an "archaeology of modern certainties." And here his critique of development took a sharp turn in a new direction. Rather than scrutinizing the structure of institutions and its direct cultural impact or the power of experts - as he had in the past - he now focused on the deep-running symbolic power of modernity. After burying the myth of progress, he now took aim at the axioms embedded in the "mental topology" - the worldview produced by industrial modernity. He took on the archaeology of those certainties that orient human actions, those beliefs that are taken for granted, the a prioris constituting the given as something natural. Inspired by these conversations, Wolfgang Sachs published a dictionary of concepts constitutive for the age of development; the entries delve into such basic terms as needs, progress, equality, poverty, help, environment, 'one world' and so forth. This compendium offered an historical and systematic critique of the "self-evident" and foregone conclusions that had burrowed their way into the mentality of "homo oeconomicus, homo educandus, homo transportandus". This "development dictionary" lays bare the myths of modern man which are generated through these concepts in the epoch of Development. Collaborating with Marianne Gronemeyer on her analysis of "help", Ivan traced the social genesis of "needs," of the appearance of the needy human being, and this entailed much more than the dependence on goods and consumption, because the "needs that the rain-dance of development kindled (...) acted on a deeper level. They transmogrified human nature. They reshaped the mind and senses of homo sapiens into those of homo miserabilis. 'Basic needs' may be the most insidious legacy left behind by development."⁴

Illich's essay on needs summarized his long-term study of the peculiarly disabling nature of modern service institutions. His question of how institutional liturgies operate now turned to confront the pervasive vision of the human being embedded in modernity. He focused on how the institutionalized rituals, the mythmaking power of daily practices have become relentlessly internalized. "Certainties" then could be scrutinized as symbolic effects of the "mythopoiesis" of modern rituals. Illich's hope that sharply focused social criticism and carefully honed analysis of current developments could change the course of events gave way to the painful realization that the transformative power of political resistance had been limited, for even the critics had not relinquished a perspective that assumes a world of scarcity. He gradually moved away from assumptions that sparked so much of his writing in the 1950s and 1960s, a vision of salvaging a life worth living for human beings by protecting "communality" and what he called "the commons", by calling to mind the "tools of conviviality," by preserving traditional

⁴ Ivan Illich, "Needs," in: Wolfgang Sachs, ed., The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1992), see also the entry of Marianne Gronemeyer: "Help". Ivan Illich Toward a History of Needs (NY, 1978); Majid Rahnema's research on poverty since then was just published in his: Quand la misère chasse la pauvreté. Essai, Paris 2003.

and customary ways of living. Even he was amazed by the breathtakingly rapid disappearance of "traditional" orientations and practices in Third World villages, and he shed his own illusions that the social critic could help protect the fabric of these villages. He had come to realize that progress and development had created an unprecedented "mental topology." This is what he focused on now.

Emblems that Elicit Empathy: "Life" as an Idol

At State College Wolfgang Sachs decided to pursue an analysis of the "Blue Planet." By this he meant the vision of earth from the vantage point of a satellite, a perspective that reduces the earth to a round, biological, and geophysical fact. Sachs understood the sentimentality aroused by a glance at the "Mother Earth" poster taped to the refrigerator in countless communal households, its reminder to behave in good ecological fashion, its inspiration for a raft of well-meaning slogans and arrogant claims: the image suggests that we should take "responsibility" for "the cosmos," it offers for the first time a visibly objectified idea of "one world" whose inhabitants are "all in one boat". At one glance the world appears as something that is apparently manageable. The satellite picture compellingly promotes the arrogance of the eco-bureaucratic management of climate, environment, species, and "biodiversity."⁵

It was at this time that I began preparations for a polemical book about the transformation of the unborn into the "public fetus". Just as the "Blue Planet" became an idol representing "the earth," the curled-up pink fetus became an idol, an emblem eliciting sentimental empathy for both, planet and fetus, represented the ultimate value: "substantive life."⁶ Dirk von Boetticher, a friend who was a medical student in Germany, took time off from his studies to carry on an intense conversation with Ivan about the assumptions built into what was then the still new field of medical ethics. In the rising flood of debates and treatises around medical ethics, a novel thing had emerged: "substantive life." The medical ethics boom transformed the living human being - homo - a concept replete with meaning, into a manageable thing, namely, "a life." An abstraction that up to that point had only been used in military terminology, but that had no precedent in everyday language, it now became a catch-all term that could include women, children, the unborn, embryos, old people, the dying people. But "life" had not existed in this way before, neither in routine conversation nor in the "life sciences." Only through repeated authoritative proclamations and an intense media presence did substantive "life" acquire the semblance of something concrete, and, within a decade, came to signal the ultimate value. A new form of "epistemic sentimentality" could take hold in the name of protecting "life": sympathy for "technogenic constructs"⁷ like the "public fetus", care and protection, dignity and rights for a thing that lacks hands or feet. Long before the word became the central concept of "bioethical" debates, legitimizing the categorical erasure of "you," of the

⁵ Wolfgang Sachs, "Der blaue Planet: Zur Zweideutigkeit einer modernen Ikone," *Scheidewege* 23 (1993-94): 168-89; Wolfgang Sachs, "Satellitenblick: Die Ikone vom blauen Planeten und ihre Folgen für die Wissenschaft," in I. Braun and B. Joerges, eds., *Technik ohne Grenzen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1994), 305-46. See also Sachs, *Planet Dialectics: Essays on Ecology, Equity, and the End of Development* (NY, 1999).

⁶ Barbara Duden, *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993, orig. 1991): by giving to *life* this substantive meaning, I transform the being whom I would call a person into a life, while on the other hand "substantive life" allows to attribute ultimate value to cells, eggs etc.

⁷ Constructs borne of modern technologies, notions generated by that which technologies "say".

concrete human being, Ivan recognized not only the powerful appeal of this catchphrase of a managed inhumanity, but he also recognized a new characteristic in the management of public emotions: the growing tendency to confuse concern for one's neighbor with sentimental attachment to a value-laden fiction.⁸ "Life" as the ultimate value turns on its head the tidings that Jesus said to Martha: "I am the resurrection, and the life." [John 11:25] Through millennia, substantive "life" was never equated with a stage in biological development; people were alive, they were not "lives". Here Jesus speaks to the hope attached to bodily redemption, the salvation through Him. Ivan was bitterly disappointed by the inability and unwillingness of the churches to see this devastation of the precepts of faith: by in not protesting, the churches, he believed, gave legitimacy to "substantive life" as a technogenic construct superceding the person and allowed an idol to become the basis and focal point of faith. And this moved Illich to begin a sermon with Will Campbell in the southern United States, held before a gathering of advocates for "life" - opponents of capital punishment, anti-vivisectionists and anti-abortionists - by emphatically declaring "to hell with life!"

The Mathematization of Speech and Conceptual Frameworks

In his work leading up to Gender in the late 1970s Illich came to recognize that he had to rethink his familiar conceptual tools. While writing the book he suddenly found himself linguistically trapped in a "double ghetto"⁹: the key words of modern language made it impossible for him to describe the perceived world of "gender" in a bygone era. Modern, and particularly popularized social science terms (such as reproduction, role, and sexuality etc.) do not render a gendered perspective on reality, but come clothed in the language of a-perspectival objectivity.¹⁰ But above and beyond this Ivan slowly realized - mainly through his conversations with Uwe Pörksen in Berlin during the winter of 1980-1981 - that his own analytical scaffolding was propped up with the popularized key words of an industrialized language. When he came to this realization, he shed the language he had used in his earlier books and began to focus on what his conceptual terms themselves resonated: "I had to get into the question of the epoch-specific apriorisms which generate not only our mental conceptions, but also our sensual perceptions and the feelings in our hearts about what constitutes social reality."¹¹

Words are vessels that hold the "forma mentis," modes of understanding and contemplation. But they also orient how we perceive the world through our senses, how we grasp that which surrounds us. For nothing can be conceived in our minds without having first been perceived in our senses. "Quod nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerat in sensu", medieval philosophy tells us. Modern language thus affords an entry into sensual and emotional apriorisms. Prompted by his conversations with Ivan Illich, Pörksen began to study a new class of words that had emerged from the language of diverse academic disciplines and had become globally

⁸ Ivan Illich, "The Construction of a New Fetish: Human Life," in In the Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses, 1978-1990, Ivan Illich (London, 1992), 218ff.; Ivan Illich, Selbstbegrenzung: Eine politische Kritik der Technik (Munich, 1998), chap. VI (revised), esp. 172ff.; David Cayley, Conversations, 253ff.; Marianne Gronemeyer, Das Leben als letzte Gelegenheit (Darmstadt, 2001, orig. 1993).

⁹ Ivan Illich, Gender, 8.

¹⁰ This language turns on the systematic exclusion of a point of view, as distinct from a position that assumes either a mutual constitution of complementary perceptions (gender) or one authoritative point of view.

¹¹ Cayley, Conversations, 172-73.

disseminated in the vernacular. Those he termed “plastic words.”¹² Like amoebas, these plastic words, words such as “information,” “communication,” or “sexuality” swallow up and assimilate familiar words, the myriad precise, richly resonant, colloquial words infused with the textures of everyday experience. Plastic words transform their historical variety into something flat and one-dimensional, remaking the world into the domain of experts, stripping away depth and richness. Through their “ring of objectivity,” this new order of words operates as though they represent facts, the real, while they recast the world as a fall-out from scientific laboratories.

Ivan Illich knew rerouting the waters from a conversation into the streams of ongoing work. He turned the insights gained with Uwe Pörksen to push his own critique of the present in new directions. Pörksen sought to show how plastic words erode the resistance of real life to the arrogance of planners. Ivan looked beyond the social violence of bureaucratic language to the power of that language to disembody human beings and destroy the “flesh of the world”. The dissemination of plastic words had a disembodiment effect, analogous to the disembodiment power of modern technology. Sometimes in public disputes Ivan was challenged by sceptical audience members who declared, “I can’t communicate with you like this!” He in turn responded that he was not the transmitter of “information” in a “communication.” These were words and concepts that were drawn unreflectively from information technology. And, he refused, even in large lecture halls, to address audiences with a microphone. A speaker throwing out plastic words, a hail of terms shorn of meanings, seemed to him analogous to the disembodied sound produced by loudspeakers, which erased breathing, the emphases, tone, and timber of the speaker’s voice. Pörksen wanted to understand the “mathematization” of everyday language, while Ivan sought to understand the transformative power of technical systems on people’s actions and reasonings. Silence was the only appropriate action when circumstances demanded that one become the conduit for techno-babble.¹³

Already in the 1980s Ivan analyzed the man-made technical forms through which human beings are turned into appendices of technical systems and through which a world replete with multiple layers of meaning disappears. Thus, after his confrontation with “plastic words,” he turned to the disembodiment effects of diagrams and all kinds of the visual crutches, be they bar and pie graphs, distribution curves, or feedback-loops, which were increasingly spreading through written material. Uwe Pörksen wrote a book about these “visiotypes” as the “visualization props” for abstractions, for constructs, graphic shorthand for a whole bodies of knowledge that they replace.¹⁴ Ivan came to understand them as imperative signs delivering dictates, calling for “visual command performance”: “Look,” a bar graph tells us, “This is how the population in India grows: One, two, three million! Catastrophic!” One or two million are of course aggregates, head counts, never actual human beings. Such graphic devices turn calculations and statistical correlations into comprehensible and apparently tangible facts. As matrixes for conformist thinking and understanding, these diagrams disturbed Ivan in particular because they could make “statements” without requiring a “copula,” a syntactical connecting

¹² Uwe Pörksen, Plastic Words: The Tyranny of Modular Language (University Park, Penn., 1995, orig. 1988).

¹³ See the declaration on silence that Illich drafted together with Sigmar Groneveld in the wake of the stationing of Pershing bombs in Germany.

¹⁴ Uwe Pörksen, Weltmarkt der Bilder: Eine Philosophie der Visiotype (Stuttgart, 1997).

link. They “say” something without linking subject and predicate; they are in effect authorless, disembodied commands for the apprehending gaze. In his lecture courses at the University of Oldenburg (1990-1991), in Freiburg, and at Penn State, Ivan lectured on the development of the diagram and its epistemic content: how in early diagrammatics abstractions were still deduced from reality and given visual form, how later ideograms were visualized, and, finally, how the function of most diagrams in modern media would become the visualization and reification of statistical calculations and algorithms in graphic representations.

Ivan took these questions up again in the late 1990s in his collaboration with Silja Samerski: he wanted to understand the path through which the health care system

reduces and distills patients into little “specks” in calculable patient populations. Ivan collaborated with Silja in her research on genetic counseling sessions to pregnant women. Unlike other social science approach to this topic, Silja tried to understand what a genetic counselor actually “says” to the woman about her unborn, and how he reframes the future she has to face when listening to his “information”: willy-nilly the woman is turned into a new type of “decision-maker” grounding her actions on statistical probabilities and imputing personal meaning to riskcalculations. Most diagnostic concepts conveyed to the patient in our “age of “risk” are based on algorithms, that is, on probability calculations based on characteristics that in no way correspond to actual “bodies.” Yet they become “real” through the belief in the facticity and constitutive power of the “gene.”¹⁵ The “reflexive gene”, the “gene” in popular conversations, so he argued with Silja, functions like a Trojan horse, by transporting the concepts of riskcalculations and self-management into personal futures. I will return to this below.

From “Vernacular Customs” and “the Commons” into the Past as point of departure, orientation and repoussoir

“In my biography ‘Gender’ marks the turning point from an aggressive critique of the degrading ceremonies of rituals of development towards a careful historical research on the transformation of ways of perceptions, because these transformations will allow us to understand the death of innumerable dignified ways of living.”¹⁶ An invitation to the universities of Kassel and Marburg in the early 1980s and a return to German, a language of his childhood, were opportunities that Ivan used to rethink the meaning of the dead in contemporary times. He began to delve deeply into the world of the twelfth century, a period that had long preoccupied him. Here, too, he found a springboard for articulating his critique of the present day. Up until then as a point from where to look he had concentrated on worlds lived in the “vernacular,” or on “traditional” orientations and modes of daily practice, above all, in non-European and particularly Latin American cultures. Here he sought to plumb the contrast to the immensely deep-reaching and rapid transformation of his own times, an excursion that brought him back to history. Now he sought clues in the past. He used this vantage point, this foothold and lookout point, not to find commonalities between past and present, but to probe their distance

¹⁵ Silja Samerski, Die verrechnete Hoffnung: Von der selbstbestimmten Entscheidung durch genetische Beraterng (Münster, 2002); Silja Samerski, “Die Freisetzung genetischer Begrifflichkeiten,” in Theo Steiner, ed., Genpool: Biopolitik und Körperutopien (Vienna, 2002).

¹⁶ Illich, Genus. Revised introduction to the German 2nd edition, München 1995.

from one another, to make an argument for the heterogeneity between the now and the then. It was only much later that he ran across Droysen's fitting observations. Droysen distinguishes between two attitudes toward the past: the stance of the antiquarian, for whom the past is "passé," and a stance in which memory of the dead helps to shed fresh light on the present and can even encourage a person to embody orientations of those who had passed on. Ivan was a passionate historical researcher in a double sense: he studied "epoch-specific" acts and attitudes of both the present-day world and times past, and hoped thereby to uncover the "leftovers" of what had gone before. His study of the European medieval world would always serve his analysis of the present.

This approach to the past has become unconventional, even derided, particularly among academics. Showing a serious interest in those aspects of the past that were lost in progress is dismissed as romantic or ridiculed as a kind of dubious atavism. That history can serve as a heuristic guide is an alien concept to most people. But Ivan's conviction, that only the person who "imagines a bygone reality as something real and possible, is also able to confront the present as a distinct period in history"¹⁷ met with considerable resistance when he first floated it in *Gender*. None of his arguments has been greeted with such resounding disinterest as his discovery of "asymmetrical complementarity," which constituted the foundation of cultures predating modernity. In *Gender* he assembled a wide array of findings from social anthropology to make an argument about the premodern: "I have adopted this term [gender] to designate a distinction in behavior, a distinction in vernacular cultures. It distinguishes places, times, tools, tasks, forms of speech, gestures, and perceptions that are associated with men from those associated with women."¹⁸ At the same time he argued against the illusion of fighting for equality in a regime of "sex," that - operating in the "logic" of scarcity - would result in an even sharper form of discrimination and inequality between women and men.¹⁹ Both sides of his argument were doomed to be misunderstood by the public, for they - like his critiques in the 1970s of faith in development - stood diametrically opposed to the dominant trend of the day. *Gender* was simply unpalatable for a women's movement that had chosen to pursue a vision of equal rights.

Ivan had hoped in the early 1980s to develop his studies on gender further, including work on a history of the legal codification of marriage and on the sex-neutral nature of the soul. While the preliminary groundwork for these studies had been completed, they ultimately failed to come to fruition when he tried to encourage a friend to take up this work. In 1997 at an ethnological conference on "feminine-masculine" we again addressed the questions raised in *Gender*: in a joint lecture we sought to show that the world we have lost was not only one of the constitutive complementarity of "gender", but should be studied by investigating the "soma", the embodiedness of past cultures. We called for the study of the constitutive complementarity and proportional somatization of places, things, times and deeds.²⁰

¹⁷ Ivan Illich, Proposal for a Research Project (2001), 2.

¹⁸ Illich, *Gender*, 3.

¹⁹ The German Subtitle to *Gender* is: "A Historical Critique of Equality", pointing towards the book's argument about the history of scarcity.

²⁰ Barbara Duden, "Der Genus und das Objekt der Volkskunde," in Christel Köhle-Hezinger, Martin Scharfe, and Rolf Brednich, eds., *Männlich/Weiblich: Zur Bedeutung der Kategorie Geschlecht in der Kultur* (Münster, 1999), 66-74.

The Waters of Forgetfulness: On the Historicity of “Stuff”

“The spinning rooms of society lie deeper than its weaving sheds or its tailor shops,” Ivan wrote in the introduction to his essay on water, searching out the traces of premodern western culture at an even deeper level.²¹ Initially this essay was prompted by an invitation to speak in Dallas, where he held the keynote speech for a project to herald an artificial lake in the middle of the city. What in fact is water? What in fact is pumped from city sewer lines into the pleasure park of Dallas? Is the “water” in Dallas the same that fills the fountains of the baroque public gardens in Kassel? The same substance as the divided waters that run through the myth of creation? Is “water” always the same ahistorical substance, the fluid stuff evoked in the formula “H₂O”? The sharp separation of modern tap water, reprocessed sewer water from those fluids that have through centuries humidified and permeated “the interior and exterior chambers of the imagination” of the West, was the theme of the essay in which Ivan again moved against the current. Here he reached back into the evocative fluid orations of Mnemosyn, goddess of memory in ancient Greece, before the spread of the written word. He followed the waters of history back through centuries, not only to recount what had flowed across time in singular fashion through metaphor, dreams, and rituals, but also to chart its pathways, to reveal the historicity of this substance itself, which had been completely overlooked. For Ivan this surely amounted to recounting the history of the lamentable drying up of inner streams of perception and imagination through drainage or canalization, through industrial processing and the production of a scarcity of water resources, and on through the emergence of H₂O, the scarce resource that must be parceled out and managed through a web of modern technologies: “It is an observed fluid that has lost the ability to mirror the water of dreams.”²²

Ivan saw his task as an historian to show the “possibility of writing history of the spools from which the material culture of an epoch has been spun.” He wanted to extend and radicalize the idea about what should be understood as “historical.”²³ The “stuff” of history needed to be extended to water, the body, space, and all this should be approached as epoch-specific experiences: “For not only does the way an epoch treats water and space have a history: the very substances that are shaped by the imagination - and thereby given explicit meanings - are themselves social creations to some degree. I want to explore the historicity of matter, the sense that an epoch's imagination has given to the canvas on which it paints its imaginations (...).”²⁴ Thus this book also explored the contrast between lived places and Cartesian uniform, geometrical homogenous space, the contrast between the bustling, stinking districts of Rio de Janeiro and the nineteenth-century utopia of a city sanitized and purged of smells; the contrast between a local atmosphere of home and the chemical obliteration of smells in the modern hygienic bathroom. Ivan was deeply indebted to the studies of Joseph Rykwert who investi-

²¹ Ivan Illich, H₂O and the Waters of Forgetfulness: Reflections on the Historicity of "Stuff" (Dallas, 1985), quote from the introduction to the German edition: H₂O und die Wasser des Vergessens (Reinbek 1987), which Illich wrote for the German version of his text.

²² H₂O, english edition, p.76.

²³ Ivan radicalized a theme that I had explored in The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-century Germany (Cambridge, Mass., 1991, orig. 1987). In this study I listened to the aches and pains of women long dead, as they spoke about themselves to their provincial physician. All their complaints revolve around inner flows, “humors”, fluxes stagnating and liquifying. In this book I argued that epoch-specific corporeal experience is a legitimate subject for historical inquiry.

²⁴ H₂O, english edition p.5.

gated the macrocosmic orientation, the "contemplation" of the site in the founding of a town and the rules and rhythm of columns in antiquity.²⁵ The historian and architect Jean Robert, one of his oldest friends, took up some of the contrasts that Ivan had briefly sketched out around this topic and wrote a highly original series of studies on dwelling places and cities. Robert's history of place took up the challenge that Ivan's semantic radicalism laid down by juxtaposing "place" and "space," the comfortable "home" and mere "warehousing" or "garaging".²⁶

Mumblers in the Vineyard of the Text: A Way Station in the Quest for a History of Sense-Perception

Since the 1980s Ivan worked with Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham exploring the historicity of technology by studying changing meanings of "instrumentum", the "tool." Here he concentrated on the alphabet as a tool. He revisited a topic that he had scrutinized closely many years earlier under the influence of Walter Ong and Milman Parry: the displacement of the power of oral speech as the art of memory in antiquity and the objectification of knowledge through the written word.²⁷ An invitation from Ludolf Kuchenbuch to develop a teaching unit on the history of the "written document" for the Fern-Universität Hagen²⁸ took Ivan to Hugo of St. Victor's 1128 Didascalion, the first treatise on the art of reading. The aim of the book was a comment on the present: the end of bookishness in an epoch in which "the screen, the medium, and 'communication' have surreptitiously replaced the page, letters, and reading."²⁹ Here I will enter the Vineyard through only one path, namely, the history of the senses that it offers. Its subject is the transformation of the page "from a score for pious mumblers into an optically organized text" in the twelfth century. This represented a crucial step in the history of the arrangement of alphabetical writing through a series of seemingly inconsequential techniques such as word division, titles, captions, underlining, or references to notes between the lines or in the margins. Other scholars had previously noticed and described all of these innovations in the techniques of the "scriptorium". For Ivan they were the stuff, on the one hand, of a significant turning point in the history of devotion, on the other hand, they pointed to a completely overlooked new order in the relationship between eye and ear. Both are, of course, intertwined sides of the same story, but here I will only focus on the latter aspect of this transformation.

As Ivan had already argued in Gender, things become embedded in our habits and they "create" them. They enter our sensibilities, become a "hexis", the form of "second nature." The ethology of the older practice of reading, reading audibly, of mumbling one's way down the

²⁵ Joseph Rykwert, The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World (1988); Joseph Rykwert, The Dancing Column. On Order in Architecture. Cambridge / Mass. (1996).

²⁶ Jean Robert, Raum und Geschichte, a teaching unit in 6 vols. for the Fernuniversität Hagen (1998).

²⁷ Ivan Illich, Schule ins Museum: Phaidros und die Folgen (Bad Heilbrunn, 1984), 39.

²⁸ See Ludolf Kuchenbuch, Alteuropäische Schriftlichkeit: Einführungskurs in die Ältere Geschichte, a teaching unit in 9 vols. for the Fernuniversität Hagen (1st ed., 1986); Ludolf Kuchenbuch, "Sind mediävistische Quellen mittelalterliche Texte? Zur Verzeitlichung fachlicher Selbstverständlichkeiten," in Die Aktualität des Mittelalters, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz (Bochum, 2000), 317-54; Ludolf Kuchenbuch and Uta Kleine, eds., 'textus' im Mittelalter: Komponenten und Situationen des Wortgebrauchs im schriftsemantischen Feld (Göttingen, forthcoming, 2003); and Ludolf Kuchenbuch, Vom Kerbholz zum Text: Schriftpragmatische Studien zum Mittelalter (forthcoming, 2004).

²⁹ Ivan Illich, In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon. Chicago 1993, 1.

trellis of a manuscript's lines - in contrast to the new silent assimilation of an optically structured text - was a key to understanding a far-reaching break in sentient and spiritual conduct. In the Vineyard Illich showed that reading had been an embodied activity, one that had engaged and nourished the soul and all the senses, the eye and the ear, one's gestures and heart. One could only experience God's wisdom through acts of tasting, chewing over, savoring, and re-incanting His Word, that is, through its haptic internalization. Ivan found inspiration in the writings of a strange fellow, a forgotten Jesuit, Marcel Jousse, who had observed the rhythmic swaying of youth as they learned to read in Jewish and Muslim religious schools. "Reading was a haptic, psychomotor act of devouring and comprehending the resonant word, always a noisy activity."³⁰ Before texts began to be read silently, a page of the Holy Word was above all an acoustic means of disclosing and listening intensely to and taking in the Word of God, an engagement of all the senses in the "lectio" that incarnates the text.

The search for the proportionality of the senses was a focal point of Ivan's work in the 1990s in Bremen, and here his friendship with Matthias Rieger, his student and drummer extraordinaire, touched Ivan in special ways, though Ivan had always described himself as singularly unmusical.³¹ Together they read Aristotle's Poetics, a text that itself bears witness to a fundamental break in the history of the senses, and the ancient philosopher's struggle with the question of whether tragedy is conveyed more poignantly through the ears or the eyes. Aristotle lived in a time when the spoken word was still immensely powerful, pulling the listener toward mimetic experience and empathy through rhythm, accentuation, and melody. This intense listening induced "assimilation" and "catharsis", a proportionate echo and "mimesis" between what is happening in the other and in the self, hearing and listening as something haptic, being played out and felt in one's very flesh.

Ivan's lecture courses in Bremen in the 1990s and the work of his closest associates, those in the "Poodle Group"³², focused on the bygone proportionality between the inner and outer senses, on the ways in which heart and mind were attuned to one another. Here he again entered a completely uncharted realm of historical knowledge: the demise of the "sensus communis", a sense that recognizes and judges the fit among perceptions, and which ancient philosophers had conjectured in a bodily organ behind the eyes. Ivan pushed his friends to study the "proportionality" - he mutual constitutiveness - of all being in the premodern age and the decline and disappearance of a sense for this proportionality.³³ The destiny of the "inner senses" was one theme in his lectures in 1999-2000, using the story of the good Samaritan, the

³⁰ Ivan Illich, "Lectio divina," in the Festschrift for Lenz Kriss-Rettenbeck's 70th birthday, Frömmigkeit: Formen, Geschichte, Verhalten, Zeugnisse, ed. Ingolf Bauer (Munich, 1993), 13-26; this article will appear in an enlarged form as: "Lectio in Early and Late Antiquity" (forthcoming in a collection of essays by Illich).

³¹ Matthias Rieger, Helmholtz Musicus (Darmstadt, 2003), describes how in the nineteenth century the standardized parameters of a physical sound pattern replaced the previous harmonies of musical consonants. Rieger thus writes about the shift from listening as mutual constitutive fit between ear and harmonies to the physics of sound and the physiology of a disembodied ear that registers.

³² Ivan gave the study circle on proportionality this nickname because they had received some funding from a veterinarian.

³³ Samar Farage is currently studying notions of the pulse in Galen's writings and in classical Arabic texts; I have looked at the experience of *Krasis* or the good mixing of bodily humors during the early eighteenth century: see Duden, Die Gene im Kopf, der Fötus im Bauch: Historisches zum Frauenkörper (Hanover, 2002).

Palestinian who is viscerally moved to take pity on the Jew lying by the wayside and reaches out to him. The parable offered an account of somatic compassion, of **compassio** being felt in the innards. The story is one that Illich invoked often to show the transformation of synesthesia, through their progressive technogenic paralysis.

A Call for an "Ascesis of the Gaze": A History From the Seeing Person to the Recording Eye

Through his study of changes in the visual arrangement of writing and in reading habits in the twelfth century Illich noticed a shift that opened new heuristic possibilities: the disassociation of synesthesia; the interplay of the senses; the subordination of knowledge derived from the ear to that derived from sight; and the demise of "sensus communis" as knowledge acquired through vision claimed a monopoly over that acquired through other senses.

The German word Gesichtssinn - sense of sight - provides a fruitful point of departure for exploring these themes, for "sight" signifies both the act of seeing and that which is seen, visio and visibilia. The disabling of the gaze that literally touches and grasps what it sees had already begun with the construction of pictures that employed a central vanishing point in the fifteenth century and through Galileo's use of the telescope in the seventeenth century. Still, this proportionality between the activity of the eyes and the visibility of the world until the beginning of the seventeenth century to a large extent remained a lived certainty in western cultures.

In 1609 the Prague astronomer Johannes Keller then demonstrated in his study of how light was refracted in glasses, that the eye does not actively reach out with rays, grasping the visible surfaces of external reality, but rather, that it is like a darkroom, passively reflecting the world according to the laws of optics. Just a few decades later Descartes built on this work through his experiments with the eye of a dead ox. Kepler suggested that the world "paints a copy of itself" on the canvas of the retina and that seeing was nothing more than the reflection of a picture (ita visio ut pictura). Yet Kepler also inhabited a transitional moment in which the concept of active looking, a sense of sight that reached outward, still existed. This sense of sight was a "little messenger" for him that brought the sights gleaned back to the eyes in the most rapid and direct way, and from there transported them to the "common sense". Yet Kepler in fact demonstrated the "de-anthropomorphization" of the sense of sight, the de-humanization of vision, the demise of the active, seeing human being in favor of a passive, dis-embodied eye that registers pictures as objective scientific facts.³⁴ What does this story tell beyond the mere history of optics and neurophysiology?

Between 1989 and 1995 Ivan collected whatever he could glean from the histories of science, art, religion, and medicine for a manuscript on the history of the gaze. Two articles and a number of unpublished drafts grew out of this work, each representing another turn of the lens, a refocusing.³⁵ The bygone perception of seeing as a tactile capacity in antiquity and the

³⁴ Ivan Illich and Barbara Duden, "Die skopische Vergangenheit Europas und die Ethik der Opsis," Historische Anthropologie 3, no. 2 (1995), 203-21, English version in STS-Working Papers, to appear in a collection of essays.

³⁵ Ivan Illich, "Die Askese des Blicks im Zeitalter der Show: INTERFACE," in Interface 2: Weltbilder - Bildwelten (Hamburg, 1995), 206-33. English version to appear in a collection of essays.

debate about the status of visual icons between the churches of the East and the West provided Illich with the opportunity to make an urgent call for an ethics of the gaze. Ivan wrote a commentary on Nemesius of Ephesus' work on nepsis, or the act of looking chastely and of deliberately averting one's eyes. The outgrowth and dominance of technologies of visualization in modern everyday life that have reshaped how we see - the computer screen and TV, graphs and tables, diagrams - provoked Illich to stress the contrast between epoch-specific habits of the gaze, of opsis and optics, the science of physics. He differentiated between successive characteristic modes of visual pleasure, of looking, viewing, and observing as customary ways of seeing, and to contrast them with the human eye today, which is trained to register and process information, and shaped by diverse media. He thus referred to television as an instrument that trains the modern gaze through daily visualization exercises.

A variety of friends joined Illich in this pursuit: Gunhild Pörksen, who focused on deciphering how Paracelsus understood seeing³⁶ and described his concept of a fire nested in the sense of sight during a meeting at a little castle in Donaumünster. In Bremen Ivan consulted with Heinz Buddemeier, the original and daring critic of the "television gaze."³⁷ Mother Jerome OSB (Muska Nagel), a member of Regina Landis's convent community north of New York, delivered an analysis of early modern concept of nepsis. In another memorable gathering she, together with Lee Hoinacki and myself, drafted the first English translation on the manuscript on the gaze during an autumn in the woods surrounding State College.

Beyond Medical Nemesis

Ivan originally wrote his most successful book, Medical Nemesis (1976), not primarily as an attack against the medical system, but as a contribution to economics, and as a comment on what he called "radical monopolies." It was an attempt to distinguish between different levels of "counterproductivity."³⁸ I had long been disturbed by Ivan's claim that he had originally intended to explore the book's main themes using illustrations from the postal system and how mail is delivered. Equating "mail" and "medicine" seemed problematic to me. I was annoyed by the very idea that the sluggish delivery of letters could in any way be viewed as commensurate with a medical system that contributed to human illness. I was irritated that Ivan was evidently oblivious to the peculiarity of the symbolic power exercised by medical services. But in 1976 the "stuff" that medicine had transformed in just a few generations in the twentieth century, "the body," had not yet penetrated Ivan's critical understanding of institutions.

The difficulties in describing Ivan's work as it evolved beyond Nemesis can be traced back to a variety of causes, including the fact that Ivan's work on "the body" consciously drew not only on his studies of medicine, but also his lectures on tempo or "speed,"³⁹ on proportionali-

³⁶ Gunhild Pörksen, "Paracelsus und der Augenschein: Notizen zum ärztlichen Blick," in Heinz Schott and Ilana Zinguer, eds., Paracelsus und seine internationale Rezeption in der frühen Neuzeit (Leiden, 1998), 1-12.

³⁷ Among the scholarly works by this unique thinker, see Heinz Buddemeier, Illusion and Manipulation: Die Wirkung von Film und Fernsehen auf Individuum and Gesellschaft (Stuttgart, 1987).

³⁸ Ivan Illich, Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health (London, 1975).

³⁹ Ivan Illich, Matthias Rieger, and Sebastian Trapp, "Speed? What Speed?" in Jeremy Millar and Michiel Schwarz, eds., Speed: Visions of an Accelerated Age (London, 1998).

ty in the thought of Leopold Kohr,⁴⁰ on “sensus communis,” in unpublished notes for lectures delivered in Bremen, or in the studies of his friends in his latter-day discussion circle. Likewise, some of his early works on “dwelling” had already indicated his understanding that a place could become “somaticized.” While these diverse scattered approaches should be acknowledged, I want to focus here on some stumbling blocks that made him self-critical, forcing him to re-evaluate what he was doing.⁴¹

When Ivan wrote Nemesis in 1975, he had not yet understood - as I have indicated - that importing terms plucked from information sciences and cybernetics to other disciplinary fields actually undermined his goals. The book, like some of his other early works, was full of categories taken from information technology and its systemic reference system. It was only in the late 1980s that he stopped short and began to feel uneasy about what he had written, thanks to the Greek mathematician Costas Hatzkiriaku. He convinced Ivan that concepts bound up with the computer did not work as metaphors, for their substance and form are indivisible.⁴² Using computer terms as such inevitably ends up treating the human being as a programmable component in a system, even if this was not an author’s intention.⁴³ “When process becomes substance” - this would be the most fitting definition - then concepts tied to the language of programming would inform everything described in this way cybernetically. Our uniqueness as humans would essentially be “deleted.”

A second turning point pushed him even further away from Nemesis. Ivan had at the time still thought that a critique of certain crucial institutions would suffice to show the disabling tendency, the counter-productivity of modern institutions more broadly. In his previous critiques of institutions he had thus studied the school and medicine as social or cultural “instruments,” scrutinizing the purpose behind the instrument, its effects and its fallout, and so forth. It was only later, in conversations with Costas Hatzkiriakou and with Bill Arney,⁴⁴ that he realized a critique of the unique character of the algorithmic logic that is conveyed ritually through institutions was necessary to succeed in a more fundamental critique of modern institutions. Thus, for example, medicine - apart from its specific instrumentality (making humans sick, appropriating health and preventing it from being defined and experienced by the individual) - operates as pure ritual; working in synthesis with other similarly functioning service institutions, it trains thinking, assumptions, and especially self-perception to conform to functions and programming.

Compulsory schooling undermines curiosity and the desire to learn, medicine impinges on the art of suffering - this is how Illich argued in the early 1970s. In his critique of schooling, for instance, he concentrated on the professional disempowerment of the pursuit of learning and knowledge. But the power of experts has changed since then. The new systemic organization

⁴⁰ Ivan Illich and Matthias Rieger, “The Wisdom of Leopold Kohr” (E.F. Schumacher Society, 1994); the article will appear in a forthcoming collection.

⁴¹ Cayley, Conversations, 142ff.; Illich, afterword to Medical Nemesis (Munich, 1995 ed.); Barbara Duden, “The Quest for Past Somatics,” in Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham, eds., The Challenges of Ivan Illich (Albany, 2002), 219ff.

⁴² Cayley, Conversations, 124.

⁴³ See his self-criticism in the afterword to the German re-edition of Medical Nemesis (Nemesis der Medizin).

⁴⁴ William Ray Arney, Experts in the Age of Systems (Albuquerque, 1991).

of services cannot be understood in this way today: its ability to bring human beings into conformity with the technogenic world now functions by providing appropriate options, opportunities, and decisions. Whatever the particular contents of these options may be does not matter in the end, for their very form keeps them compatible to the larger system. The “everyday pedagogical furor,” as Johannes Beck calls it, has long run its course.⁴⁵ The more acutely Ivan became aware that society needed to be analyzed as a kind of “operating system,” the more clearly he saw the unprecedented reshaping of human beings themselves into an adjustable, adaptable system. He thus saw the propaganda for “life-long learning,” for instance, as an immoral impudence for telling people to seek expert advice about their options at every turning point in life, with all options mapped out in statistical probability profiles. These contacts with professionals shape not only one’s senses, but much more fundamentally the form of how the self relates to the world. The “subject” is increasingly urged to conform to a system in all realms of activity; freedom, choice, possibilities, and one’s relation to the future are being redefined so that they conform to (and are confined to) the options that the system offers.⁴⁶

Sajay Samuel, a close friend and someone deeply familiar with the culture of business administration and accounting, took over the study of this transformation of institutions and experts, showing their new function in transforming human beings into calculating “self-managers” and “decision-makers” responsible for themselves.⁴⁷ Sajay Samuel demonstrated how “freedom” was redefined so that the increasing number of “options” presented to clients were in fact tied to growing controls over them by experts and producers. Ivan himself described the medical and health system as a similar case and health as an “attempt to arrive at the optimal calculation of winning or losing odds in a game of chance.”⁴⁸ He subsequently embarked on expanding Sajay Samuel’s study of the tyranny of experts and Silja Samerski’s research on the “pop gene.” As the emblem of a program, the “pop-gene” that is circulated in conversations dis-embodies the person who ascribes a genetic makeup to herself or himself. It linguistically transmogrifies her or him into the phenotype of its genotype. Thus, the “I”, the somatic referent of the first person singular, the speaker embodied in her exquisite concreteness and presence, is literally being “programmed”.

Gleanings

I realize that these comments remain preliminary and sketchy. Only too briefly could I touch on what Ivan Illich offered to the audiences who came to hear his lectures in Bremen, or what he had to say about “body history,” or the core of work that emerged from his conversations with close friends in Bremen, which included lectures on the history of friendship, the demise of proportionality, the fading of “sensus communis,” on the “ought” in contrast to the norm,

⁴⁵ Johannes Beck, *Der Bildungswahn* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1994).

⁴⁶ The joint lecture by Johannes Beck, Silja Samerski, and Ivan Illich, “Der verhältnismässige Mensch” (given at the 2nd European Conference on Lifelong Learning) touched on this. A published version appeared as “The Conditional Human,” in Peter Alheit et al., eds., *Lifelong Learning Inside and Outside Schools* (Roskilde, 2000), 26-38.

⁴⁷ Sajay Samuel, “Collective Solipsism,” lecture manuscript (Bremen, autumn 2000).

⁴⁸ Ivan Illich, lecture at the Bologna symposium “Sickness and Health as Social Metaphors” (1998), French translation published in: *Le Monde diplomatique* (April 1999), English translation to appear in a collection of essays.

the rule. I have not invoked his insights here into the contrast between "the good" and "values". Finally, I have completely abstained from speaking about his faith in the Incarnation, which was the prime mover in all of Ivan's thinking and doing.

The series of tangents that I offer you here describes not a succession of projects, but more a "spiral ascending to something ever more fundamental"⁴⁹: from Ivan's polemics against the promise of service institutions and from his study of their powerful everyday liturgies he came to see the "technical milieu's" expropriation of human beings in all their avenues of expression. In a variety of attempts he felt his way across the wide expanse of what technogenic hunger for progress had made impossible: conversation had become "communication," going somewhere had become "transportation," the home had become a living unit or garage, dying had become refusing to further consume medicine's offerings. The extraordinary speeding-up and intensive consolidation of the destructive impulses against which he had spoken out over many, many years spurred him to move into a different register. Social criticism, once concerned with practical, feasible change, had moved to a position that emphasized personal powerlessness. He understood that it was no longer simply distinct technologies and institutions that had to be exposed. It was the assumptions and perceptions generated by them that had to be laid bare. He thus altered his approach, jettisoning contemporary language as unusable and again turned to the past, to the history of the "soma", of perception and the senses. This ultimately brought him to reflect on the contemporary destiny of the "I" and the "you", the destiny of mutual love, charity and forbearance. He titled one winter's lecture series in Bremen: "In the Convergence Point of the 'I'". Again he sought to topple secure premises, and his evolving arguments became accordingly more difficult to convey: the ontic proportionality of all earlier forms of being in the world, the harmonious relation between the senses and the "common sense" for the good as a characteristic of the **conditio humana**. Ivan always attempted to examine questions from several imaginable sides, and so he followed the latest updates of "Windows 95" closely, asking how we humans are made "system-compatible" through these innovations, while at the same time seeking out his friends in the twelfth century or commemorating the oral in ancient Greece. And he lived in anticipation of the next conversation, one that might bless him with something he had not known before.

Ivan only appeared to move on to wholly new topics. Yet he wove the strands of his conversations with friends into one ever-expanding tapestry. As his knowledge grew and he registered new developments, nothing was discarded, nothing cast aside; what had come before was preserved in that densely patterned fabric, in new layers and insights. At the same time he focused those insights on something increasingly fundamental. Having explored the school and schooling, he moved to the history of the written word and from there to the text and on to a world divested of reality through diagrams, to "homo systematicus," which takes the human being as an element that organizes itself according to statistical profiles.

The striking feature of Ivan's intellectual style in conversation - and this is something Ludolf Kuchenbuch has emphasized - was his talent for **semantic polarization**. With this Kuchenbuch meant his distinctive way of distilling the most crucial questions through contrasts: place as opposed to space, murmuring aloud as opposed to reading silently, scrutinizing something sharply as opposed to absorbing it passively, the good as opposed to the valuable, living and

⁴⁹ Ludolf Kuchenbuch, radio broadcast, Sept. 4, 2001, on the occasion of Ivan's 75th birthday.

alive as opposed to “a life.” This “semantic radicalism” uncompromisingly challenged each participant to recognize clearly his or her own standpoint and to confront the conceptual rough edges of the language we use, its failings.

Only with hindsight do I begin to fully grasp what Ivan sought out through these continuously changing tangents and shifting approaches, which he drew and fostered from countless conversations with friends and the blessings of their questions. I believe that he wanted us to mutually come to know about the "convergence point of the 'I'" reflected in the face of "you": "pupilla". That I - by free will and with compassion - turn toward you who is facing me. The "I" mirrored in the eye of "you," in the face of the neighbor. Here Ivan saw the only path out of the "Absurdistan" of the modern system he lived in. In this way in every encounter he tried to live out with friends or as a teacher the voice of the Gospel, the unconditional gift of trust.⁵⁰ He had hoped to pursue an analysis of the subversion of this expectation in the institutionalization of love through service institutions, particularly the Church. It never came to that. But a long interview conducted by David Cayley touches on this desire and will shortly appear as a book.⁵¹ In it Ivan argues why "global and worldwide (literally 'catholic') modernity, that is, the determining elements of the epistemic axioms today take form in this modernity's mental topology. The condition at the end of time which today takes its form in our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions - can only be grasped by those who unequivocally believe in the reality of the Gospel."⁵² At the Bremen symposium in February of 2003 I closed with a quote from the Book of Luke, 12:49, which Mother David OSB and Mother Jerome OSB had chosen for Ivan: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled."

⁵⁰ On the occasion of the awarding of the Culture and Peace Prize of Bremen in March 1998, Ivan spoke about the contrast between the free "conspiratio" of friends and "conjuratio," which is formalized and codified in law. See English edition: Ivan Illich, "The Cultivation of Conspiracy," in Hoinacki and Mitcham, eds., The Challenges of Ivan Illich, 233-42.

⁵¹ David Cayley, "Ivan Illich: The Corruption of Christianity. Ivan Illich on Gospel, Church and Society," transcript of a CBC broadcast, Jan. 2002 (currently in manuscript form); German trans. by Klaus Beier and Sebastian Trapp.

⁵² From a letter to Sebastian Trapp (April 21, 2002).