

Like so many projects that wind up becoming meaningful, Islands in the Clickstream started by accident. A society of professional engineers asked me to write a monthly column about the Internet. Then I offered the column to friends, colleagues, and clients as an email list. Then my web site www.thiemeworks.com was named a USA Today Site of the Day (remember when the net was so small that 365 sites/year was a big selection?) and the list grew. Islands has been read by thousands of subscribers in more than sixty countries and many more on the web. It has been published in print in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore, Toronto, Djakarta, Dublin, Capetown and many other places.

From the beginning, the genre or literary form of these writings has been ambiguous. They integrate attributes of a number of prior forms – columns, essays, articles, opinion pieces, prose poems, sermons – but because they were distributed online, none of those genres really fit. Writing a column that elicits immediate reader response feels like preaching which I did in Episcopal churches in Utah, Hawaii, and Wisconsin for sixteen years, but while interacting with online readers has overlap with the intellectual products of both oral and written cultures, really, it has created a new thing, a different thing, and we do not yet have a critical vocabulary with which to discuss it precisely.

Over seven years, then, a dynamic community gathered around these writings, focused on the larger questions of our lives related to how technology was changing us.

One reason I left being an Episcopal priest was a feeling that I was suffocating in a thought-world that did not want to examine the profound changes in identity and human destiny resulting from technological transformation. Re-reading early Islands, I think I was mostly right. I was obviously trying to find words for a vision of transformation that could be articulated only through metaphor. While some Islands are therefore prose poems, they were electronic prose poems first, not printed text as you have here. Editing these into a printed book was translation from one medium to another and I encourage readers to be mindful that the originals showed up on a monitor, glowing in the middle of the night, and reader and writer alike often felt each other's presence through the spooky wires.

But these are sermons too, in the sense that sermons form and inform a community that chooses to gather to hear them. There is a moral center, articulated in unconventional images of hackers and hacking culture and the emergence of new life structures on the edges. Images of new kinds of human beings in new kinds of communities could not be forced back into the molds from which they burst forth. These Islands are not about saving the appearances, but transforming them.

So having taught English lit and writing in my twenties, ministered in diverse cultures in my thirties and forties, I was fortunately able to transform myself once again in my fifties and learn from people a lot smarter than myself. My professional speaking, while always focussed on the human dimensions of change due to technological transformation, gravitated toward information security and intelligence because those folks understood best our brave new world of nested simulations at all levels of the fractal. They built and manipulated that world and I learned from young hackers and old intel pros alike how

they did their work. I am deeply grateful to all of them for their wisdom. They taught me that mathematics and mysticism, deception and deep devotion, irreverence and piety, are polysides of the same geometric shape.

Those colleagues, along with diverse readers, fellow writers and editors, friends and companions from around the world, formed a community of learning, but I must salute especially my pals from Def Con, Black Hat and the Galway Group. Among those who said or did the right thing at the right time to help me understand, I think of Jeff Moss and Ping Look, Simple Nomad, Hal McConnell, Marcus Ranum, Dan Geer, Peter Neumann, Becky Bace, Ken Olthoff, Robin Roberts, Clint Brooks, Brian Snow, Bruce Schneier, Jennifer Granick, Sol Tzvi, Terry Gauditus, and Dave Aitel. Then there were Weld and Mudge, Jericho and RFP, Carole and Jon, aestetix and Grep, FX and aj, dear lost krystalia and good old William Knowles, Dead Addict and the real Dr. Evil, Space Rogue, Conrad Constantine, and Ralph Logan, even se7en and Carolyn, unexpected allies who taught me to be more careful. Some I have never met in the flesh like Kathleen Jacoby and Louie Crew, South Africans Jenny Marais, Marthinus Bester, Adrienne Arendse, and Peter Walsh, Sushma Sharma in Bombay, See Ming in Malaysia, and Sue Ashton-Davies in Sydney. Writers Joel Garreau, Michael Joyce, Lew Koch, Gary Webb, and Bill Scott helped me understand life in the Matrix, and there were generous folks like Edgar Mitchell who shared the larger vision of life he discovered coming home from the moon on Apollo 14. He and others helped me know, at the end, that we were not all crazy. Speaking buddies Susan RoAne, Ivy Naistadt, Fred Gosman and Eileen McDargh were always close at hand, and with more than words, Isabel Morel, Jean Maria Arrigo, Lia Nirgad, and Joe Carson taught me to recognize real courage. Thank you for your patience to my editor, Jaime Quigley, who always had an email cookie ready at hand when it was needed, to Andy Briney of Information Security who trusted me, and to Dion Black of South Africa Computer Magazine, who gave me a great run. Day-to-day support, of course, comes always from those we love first and last – my beloved wife and best friend Shirley, our splendid offspring Julie, Barnaby, Rachel, Aaron, Scot, Susan, and Jeff and their companions, and Art, my big brother still who shows me as he did when we were young how to maneuver through the rocky fields of life with dignity and grace.