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A Theology of Interconnectivity:

Buber, Dialogue and Cyberspace

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Submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

School of European Culture and Languages

University of Kent

2015

97, 393 words / 305 pages

Abstract:

Relationships are a fundamental part of being human; they enable communication, a shared sense of belonging, and a means of building identity and social capital. However, the hallmarks of late modernity can be encapsulated by the themes of detraditionalisation, individualisation and globalisation, which have essentially challenged the mode and means of engaging in relationships. This thesis uses the theology of Martin Buber to demonstrate how his dialogical claims about relationships, namely the "I-It" and "I-Thou" model, can provide a new ethical dimension to communication in the technological era. This thesis argues that through co-creation in cyberspace there is a realisation of the need for a new theological understanding of interconnection. Theology can utilise the platform of technology to facilitate a re-connection in all spheres of relationality and, ultimately, to the Divine.

This thesis will first outline the predicament for theology in late modernity. It will discuss how detraditionalisation has led to an emphasis on individual spirituality, as opposed to collective doctrinal beliefs. The global nature of cyberspace has facilitated the means to experiment with these alternative forms of spirituality, which has allowed theology to be commodified and has introduced a challenge to the dimension of relationships. Cyberspace presents a paradox for relationship: the medium transforms modes of relating because the self is re-configured through its contact with technology. This facilitates communication as the individual merges with the machine, resulting in models such as the cyborg. However, this can also be seen to erode the essence of humanity, as humans find themselves on the fringes of relationships. Their hybrid status means that they are no longer fully human or fully machine but become dominated by the latter. They exist on the boundary of both domains and cannot cultivate genuine relationships of the "Thou" variety. This leads to alienation from surroundings, community and the Divine.

Second, the thesis will discuss how Buber's theology can be used to re-position relationships by providing a means to reflect on different aspects of dialogue and communication. By applying Buber's dialectic to cyberspace it will be demonstrated how interconnectivity causes individuals to re-think the notion of self-in-relation. The three spheres of relationship which Buber identified: "man with nature, man with man, man with forms of the spirit" will be re-contextualised in cyberspace to show how the medium manifests both aspects of the dialectic but allows for a greater awareness of interconnection. Buber's insistence on the centrality of creative dialogue provides a solution to overcome this dilemma by bringing awareness of the interconnectivity of the self to all aspects of creation. It is through informed use of the medium of cyberspace that humans can re-envisage relationships characterised by a more genuine ethical dimension. These "Thou" moments begin the process of redemption; each one is part of the relationship with the "eternal Thou" and has the potential to draw the Divine down into the encounter, to re-connect with creation. This thesis is arguing for a new theology of interconnectivity that is able to redeem the potentiality of cyberspace as a medium for genuine "Thou" relationality.

Contents

Acknowledgments

First, my thanks go to my supervisor, Professor Jeremy Carrette, University of Kent, for having confidence in my project and my ability to actualise it. The engaging and challenging discussions that we have had, have allowed me to capture the form of this thesis and dialogue with it. Thank you also for allowing me to see that books can take you only so far and there is always a need for genuine dialogue!

Second, my thanks go to everyone at the Rochester Grammar School, Kent; both staff and students, for their inspiration, support and continuous dialogue which has moulded my initial concept into a reality. Thank you also for providing me with time to complete this project.

Third, to my family, and my husband Ralph. Buber said that dialogue can be without words; I could never communicate in speech what your support, patience and love has allowed me to achieve. Thank you for many fruitful dialogues which have informed, inspired and moulded my final thesis.

Technology changes people's awareness of themselves, of one another, of their relationship with the world (Sherry Turkle, 2005, 19).

Introduction: Mapping the Changing nature of Theology in Late Modernity

From its ancient origins…religion has been about binding relations, either among humans or between humans and gods, relations that have constituted the fabrics and textures, the links and connections, the contracts and covenants of religion (David Chidester, 2005, 75).

The modern era saw a relationship develop between theology and technology. Innovations, such as the telegram, telephone, radio and television, began to alter the way that religion[1] was received (cf Stewart Hoover[2] (1998; 2006)), which, in turn, had implications for theology. Tensions between the two have arisen due to the way in which technology is often seen to replace or transform theology. The boundary between the sacred and the secular has become increasingly blurred as technology has been viewed almost as a god itself. Jennifer Cobb (1998, 44) observes "we live in a culture that worships at the altar of technology. We attribute God-like qualities to computers, assuming them to be all-knowing and all-powerful". This negative view of technology predominates in theology, but this thesis seeks to offer a positive theology of technology through an understanding of the relational qualities and ethical forms of engagement. What this thesis seeks to stress is that there is a genuine, and often overlooked, positive side to the relationship between theology and technology in the world of cyberspace. It is also important to remember there have been positive aspects of technology before cyberspace. For example, throughout history individuals have shown that technology is not a threat to established theology, but a means of

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[1] Throughout this thesis I am predominantly concerned with the Judeo-Christian theological tradition, as opposed to religion in general, which is, in itself, a fluid and generalised concept. In most instances I imply theology as representative of the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, there are instances in the thesis where I refer to different 'religious' traditions (such as Hinduism), and also occasions where an author in the secondary material refers to religion in the generic sense. Thus all references to 'religion' in the text refer to these instances. Buber himself drew attention in his theology to the problematic connotations with the word 'religion' and favoured the concept of "religiosity", which implied doing something active, over the latter, more static position.

[2] Hoover has documented significant changes in religion in America, as it encounters various mediums, ranging from the radio and television to the Internet. In *Mass Media Religion* (1988), he acknowledges both the advantages of the new mediums for evangelising, but is also mindful of their shortcomings. In *Religion in the Media Age* (2006), Hoover broadens his scope to assess global implications of the media, focusing on how events such as 9/11 have been transformed by media technologies, which have altered how religions are received globally.

greater access and connectivity. The foundations of this thesis were instigated by reformers

such as Martin Luther (1483-1546) in the 16th century. He utilised the newly available

technology of the time: the printing press, to connect communities with each other. Luther

opened a new path to the Divine through popular access to "the Word", replacing the need for

the church as intermediary between God and the people. Technology has been seen to

empower the individual by taking authority and control away from institutions. This has

produced a horizontal model of accessibility, connectivity and creativity; power in the hands

of individuals, with opportunities to produce user-generated content[3].

Theology needs to, and is obliged to, embrace technology to cement its relevance in

21st century society. It cannot retreat from technology because it permeates all aspects of life

and has become the central means of dialogue in late-modernity. Mia Lovheim and Gordon

Lynch (2011, 115) acknowledge this when they argue that there is a symbiotic relationship,

an "interplay", between media and religion; they are both able to use each other for their own

purposes. Religion has a new relationship with technology, a developing relationship which

has become known as the "mediatisation of religion."[4] This is a term developed by Stig

Hjavard (2011, 121) to explain the way in which the media is able to shape and influence

political and social institutions. In his opinion the media are not external to society but part of

its "very social fabric". He, however, is not optimistic about the future of religion. He

concludes that the mediatisation of religion will eventually lead to the secularisation of

society. I intend to challenge this claim by refocusing on Martin Buber's (1878-1965)

theological thinking. Hjarvard's argument does have cogent statistical support: in the 2011

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[3] This has been particularly enabled by Web 2.0, a term coined in 1999 by Darcy DiNucci. It refers to the way in which websites can be changed and used. What was once a static interface, has gained the ability to be transformed, thus engaging the creative potential of the user.

[4] This concept will be explained further in chapter 1, in relation to its social context.

census[5], over a quarter of the population had no religious affiliation. Whether this can be attributed solely to "mediatisation" remains to be explored. The statistics are stark, in terms of a decline in religious affiliation, but the desire to explore spirituality and engage with a transcendent reality is still prevalent. Society appears to be about to re-engage with theology in a new way.

The old institutions of theology appear to be increasingly redundant. There has been a change from the hierarchical model to a more individual-centred one. Hoover (2008, 5) observes: "Religion and Spirituality today are thus more determined by individuals and processes of individual choice". Religion can no longer choose to be solely grounded in ancient traditions and instead it has become a fluid concept.[6] Religion's interaction with the media enables new models of theology to arise. Mia Lovheim (2011, 157) argues that theology must utilise the resources available to it to "take advantage of the media for their own purposes", to give itself a voice that will be heard by its followers in the technological era.

In order to engage in meaningful dialogue, it becomes imperative in such a situation that theologians understand the new conditions of relationality that cyberspace sets up. There has been much debate concerning the denotation and connotations of the word cyberspace.[7] Often it is used as a synonym for the Internet but in this thesis I have taken "the Internet" to mean the basic processes involved in a network environment e.g. transferring a file. I have taken cyberspace to refer to an abstract realm which is not based in physical reality. It encompasses network and software tools which enable user-generated content to be

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[5] The office from national statistics (2011) published these results, which indicates an overall decline in those calling themselves Christian, but an increase in the number of Muslims in the British population.
[6] The impact on religion and theology of different mediums and how it has been represented will be discussed further in chapter two, using Hoover's work.
[7] The term cyberspace was first coined by the science fiction writer, William Gibson, in his 1982 story *Burning Chrome* and further popularised by *Neuromancer* to describe "a consensual hallucination." I will employ the term cyberspace where referring to interactions that happen in the medium of virtual reality and not when I am specifically referring to only one aspect of it, such as the Internet, unless I am directly citing a quotation.

visualised and manipulated. Cyberspace allows transference of knowledge, communication and dialogue between inhabitants of the domain. However, here I will be focusing on those aspects of the Internet and cyberspace which are framed through the relational aspect of Buber's spheres.

Cyberspace is the new world frontier, every bit as unknown to modern theologians as China was to the Jesuits. On the one hand, it can appear a trackless wasteland, devoid of traditional religious communities and institutions.[8] On the other, it can be a densely populated habitat, where individuals are essentially "alone together"[9]; connected but separate, lacking an ethical dimension. This may be an alien social habitat but the very lack of binding institutions facilitates interconnectivity between individuals in a way that could catalyse a theological renaissance for relationality. We need even greater dialogue between technology and theology today. In the fragmented era of late modernity, a new voice, that of theological dialogue, is needed to bring awareness to what is a newly formed lacuna in relationships in an increasingly alienated society. Technology has gifted theology the chance of a new beginning, a re-creation, redemption: the opportunity to transform relationships with creation, others and the Divine. In striving to understand individual experiences in cyberspace we can aim to return to the ethical dimension of relationships, which theology calls for in relation to the Divine and each other. This thesis engages that theology[10]. Buber gives us the vocabulary for that opportunity.

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[8] Although there are many traditional religious institutions that have a cyber-presence, be it through websites or online spaces such as Second Life, the importance of these being linked to an offline community is paramount.
[9] The concept of being *Alone Together* is one which epitomises many dystopian concepts of cyberspace, and is also the title of Turkle's 2011 book. Here she expounds how the computer allows us to feel comfort due to the connections it enables, despite the fact that we are also at the same time physically disconnected.
[10] Although Buber can be classed as a theologian because he was essentially interested in the way in which the Divine was active in the world and people's lives, Pamela Vermes (1988) tells us that he rejected the term "theologian" and "philosopher". This was because he was not concerned with ideas or theories but personal experience. He also felt that he could not discuss God but only relationships to God. Instead he preferred to see himself as an anthropologist (Arthur Cohen 1957, 91), concerned with human relationships. In this thesis I will refer to his methodology as a theology because it provides insights concerning the nature of the Divine.

This thesis responds to the current debates relating to the value and nature of cyberspace for theology. Despite the eclectic nature of Buber's theology, it must be acknowledged that it is essentially grounded within the Judeo-Christian tradition. This thesis, therefore, seeks to engage primarily a theological audience and offer a positive theological reading of cyberspace. The thesis as a whole is a corrective to the largely negative assessment of modernity/late-modernity and cyberspace by a number of philosophers and theologians. Those studies which follow Marcuse e.g. Lewin (2006), highlight the exploitative dimension of cyberspace, such as grooming, pornography, gambling, voyeurism and capitalism. This thesis aims to provide a positive solution to the lack of theological engagement with the medium of cyberspace and highlight the possibilities it offers for re-thinking relationality.

Through Buber a new paradigm is proposed, one which seeks to ameliorate the alienation found in the Marcusian model, of a negative view of technology, and embraces the potential that cyberspace provides as a platform for positive ethical relationships. Buber's interconnected theology is able to redeem the potential cyberspace has for creating new forms of "Thou" relationality. It allows us to reflect upon relationships in late modernity and understand how technology has the potential to provide a new transformative aspect to relating. It brings to the fore the implications of relationality and the ethics of cyberspace for the wider theological community. Buber's model also resonates with the individuality found in late modernity. For him, redemption is not achieved through a hierarchically-imposed model, but by humans playing their role as co-creators through injecting an ethical dimension into relationships. In this way the Divine is drawn into the encounter. Buber's dialogical principle therefore allows us to interpret the relational dynamics in cyberspace, and to start to formulate a theology of interconnection through new models of community.

Whilst being mindful of the intended audience, it must also be acknowledged that the thesis has a wider remit. Relationships are at the heart of the human condition and so the

scope of Buber's model has more far-reaching implications for those outside the Judeo-Christian theological community. By putting ethics at the heart of his theology, his notion of the "Thou" can be seen to transcend theological, religious, cultural and secular boundaries, and address humans within their individual paradigms of existence. Buber's theological framework offers reflection on dialogue which takes place in the space of "the between", in the predominantly secular world of cyberspace and facilitates an understanding of the mutuality which should be present in every dialogue. Through awareness of the need for the ethical dimension, the dialogue becomes one of mutuality. This allows the "Thou" to be drawn into the encounter, re-injecting the theological dimension back into relationships.

Technological Challenges and Implications for Theology

The global nature of cyberspace has revolutionised communication. Dialogue has become the way in which modern relationships are formed and maintained. The theological dimensions of cyberspace encompass three forms: space and the "between", identity and the body, and relationships. These underlie the technological experience of theology. Discussions, however, are be-devilled by a lack of meaningful vocabulary, an issue raised by Quentin Schultze (2002, 16-17), who chastises us for adopting "every new information technology uncritically – without…establishing humane practices." It is out of such a lack of ethical awareness about the implications of our words and actions online that there have sprung many uniquely modern evils, such as "trolling"[11]. Schultze (ibid, 17) warns us that "unless we cultivate virtuous character with as much energy and enthusiasm as we pursue cyber-technologies, our technological mindedness and habits will further unravel the moral fabric of society". He encourages us to be morally responsible for our actions and draws our

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[11] The term "trolling" refers to using dialogue to upset, annoy or berate someone, often in cyberspace. It often involves deception and some kind of threat. It has recently been highlighted in the media with high profile abusive messages, as will be discussed later in the thesis.

attention to the fact that the instantaneous approach should be replaced by doing it "carefully, thoughtfully and ethically" (ibid, 18-19).

By employing Buber, we are addressing his challenge. Buber provides us with a largely forgotten framework to map relations in cyberspace and a means to begin purposeful theological reflections on the new technology. This allows us to ethically evaluate the relational nature of cyberspace. There is, therefore, a normative agenda in Buber; he permits an ethical and theological valuing of relationships, which we can translate for a new media age. Buber essentially affords us with the framework for an exploration of the positive connectivity that cyberspace offers. He is a response to the prevailing dystopian view, which is often deemed to characterise interactions in cyberspace.

The possibilities the new medium offers for religion and theology must be acknowledged. Kim Knott (2005) and Catherine Albanese (1981) have remarked that religion is formed at the boundaries of the sacred and the profane; that new spaces facilitate opportunities for transformation and re-creation. Cyberspace is new space and as it interfaces with global process, the possibility for creating new notions of theology are born. Individuals are no longer bound to one locality or institution but have an opportunity to re-think what religion, theology and spirituality might entail now. From a negative perspective, the plurality of ideas means that a plethora of religions can result in a spiritual marketplace, offering a "pick and mix" society, as Jeremy Carrette and Richard King (2005) have discussed. Religion and theology easily become diluted down into a self-aggrandising, egotistical spirituality of capitalism. With the individual approach to spirituality, the collective values that bind religious and theological communities are lost. This is potentially the antithesis of what should characterise genuine relationships: "a concern with community, social justice and the extension of an ethical idea of selfless love and compassion towards others" (ibid, 171).

Cyberspace also changes and challenges identity in complex ways. The medium has displaced the physical: communication is solely through language, or language mediated through virtual cyber bodies.[12] Interaction has moved away from embodied communication, to what Brent Waters (2006, 35 & 39) terms "a disembodied will". Losing the constraints of the physical body initially offers freedom to experiment with multiple identities in new situations and different communities. New modes of existence may be possible in the post-human era. As Heidi Campbell (2005, 9) indicates, computers are able to "offer a way to realise new forms of existence within a controlled reality". However, the lack of a body presents problems too. Firstly, it can inhibit familiar, inter-personal communication in the enactment of ritual[13] and, secondly, can lead to a disengagement of the individual from their surroundings. (This will be discussed further in chapter five). The self-image of humanity is starting to be radically redefined by interactions with technology. Most significantly, human engagement with the computer can produce a blurring of identity; the computer is no longer a tool, but an extension of self. Katherine Hayles (1999, 2) comments that as the human starts its journey to become a cyborg[14] it needs to contemplate a post-human future. Pessimistically, this is a precarious position; technology is shaping human identity in such a way as to alienate them from their own species - the Frankenstein effect[15]. A positive perspective would be that the ability of humans to merge with the machine causes previously insurmountable boundaries to be eroded, such as those associated with time and space. Interconnection in a post-human era may undermine the status that humans have traditionally

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[12] Second Life is a 3D virtual area in cyberspace, which has been created to simulate offline life. In this world you are able to communicate through avatars (virtual characters) which can use bodily gestures and text. A virtual environment compromised of landscapes and buildings can also be created to your desired requirements.

[13] See Sarah Coakley (1997), *Religion and the Body*, for a detailed discussion on the importance of the body within religion and theology.

[14] The term "cyborg" is short for cybernetic organism and is composed or both mechanical and organic parts.

[15] The concept of Frankenstein has been used by Elaine Graham (2002) as a means to explore the alienation that technology can lead to. Humans allow themselves to merge with the computer, becoming cyborgs, a category which defies origin (see 35ff). This is an issue which will be discussed in chapter two and six.

regarded as the pinnacle of creation,[16] the belief that humans are made in the "image of

God"[17] (Genesis 1:27).

The radical technological change to the notion of humanity also has implications for

the relationship with the Divine and it may initially appear that these transformations have

caused an even greater chasm between technology and theology. However, I will argue that

the reverse is true. Technology has caused people to review what it means to be human in the

era of the machine and to explore the need for alternative modes of connecting and

interacting. It is the dissolving of boundaries and the ability to merge with the spaces of

technology that has allowed a greater understanding of interconnectivity. As Knott (2005, 21)

observes: "Religion, then, which is inherently social, must also exist and express itself in and

through space". Through accepting the changing nature of humanity, theology can start to

reformulate itself through dialogue, and by returning to the importance of "the Word",

dialogue becomes the bridge to devising a new theology for the late-modern era. This need

for a new theological perspective is supported by Waters (2006, 96), who remarks: "When

traditional or inherited understandings of "God" no longer fit in a postmodern world they

must be radically reinterpreted". Instead of resisting the changes brought by technology,

theology would do well to embrace them. Graham Ward (1997, x1ii) indicates that "theology

must…subsume postmodernism's cyberspace, writing through it and beyond it". This thesis

is a response to the present predicament of theology and technology and a means of

positively affirming the relationship between the two. Buber's theology opens up dialogue,

allowing the former a means of connecting with the latter.

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[16] In the traditional Judeo-Christian creation story (Genesis 1:26-27), humans are made last, in the "imago deo". This led to the belief that they had a superior position above the rest of creation and were somehow different. This idea, coupled with the phrase "have dominion over them" has led to exploitation and an unethical stance towards the created world.

[17] The impact of humans merging with technology in order to create Hybrid creations such as cyborgs, has been discussed by Graham (2002) in *Representations of the Post/Human. Monsters, Aliens and Others in popular culture.* She highlights the dangers of those creations that exist on the boundaries of recognised species. This idea will be returned to and developed in chapters two and five.

Interconnectivity and Relationality

Relationships form a fundamental part of theology and are essentially about fulfilling the conditions of humanity. They are pivotal to the way in which humans, especially young adults, build their evolving identity and make sense of the world around them. These have been the conclusions of Nic Crowe and Simon Bradford (2009) after their investigation into how young people use cyberspace[18]. The computer has considerably altered the way in which humans communicate. It needs to be determined how the medium has altered the mode, the means of relating, and to what extent it has enhanced, or been detrimental, to relationships. The medium is significant. Buber ([1923] 2004, 19 & 36) says that the space of the "between" is where interaction takes place, which Kenneth Kramer (2003, 78) comments is "essential to all of Buber's dialogical philosophy."

In cyberspace there appears to be two modes of relation taking place, one encapsulated by the other: firstly, the relationship *to* the machine, and, secondly, *within* the machine, in cyberspace itself. Interactions between machines and humans have been documented by Sherry Turkle (2005), in her ethnographical studies on the effect of cyberspace on both children and adults. Many of her conclusions offer parallels with Buber's theology of dialogue. She observes that technology can enable a fusion: there is a connection between the user and the technology. The machines "impose their own rhythm, their rules, on the people who work with them" which results in there being an "oceanic feeling" of fusion and oneness (ibid, 195). This emphasises how technology can allow users to become aware of the magnitude of global space and the connections that are enabled across the networks. Buber provides the potential to utilise the medium to re-connect with all aspects of the created world.

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[18] See Crowe and Bradford (2009), *Identity and Structure in Online Gaming. Young people's symbolic and virtual extensions of self ,* which discusses how young people use gaming to explore aspects of identity online in a variety of virtual spaces.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the motivations of individuals in late modernity, it is important to contextualise the idea of relationships against the social movements that have accompanied the rise of the network age and the impact that this has had on an individual's place within society. The sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) describes individuals questioning their place within society. In the modern age people have started to reflect upon their individual needs, as opposed to accepting the roles they are ascribed by society. This has impacted on the dynamics of relationships and led to a process of 'detraditionalisation[19],' documented by Paul Heelas (1960), where people seek to break out of existing social structures to search for their own narratives of meaning. Another outcome of modernity, pivotal for redefining structures and relationships, has been globalisation. Jan Scholte ([2000] 2005) has discussed how this trend has altered the nature of communication. In all dimensions of life, it is no longer limited by locality but has attained an international dimension. Technology can be seen to be augmenting life in allowing the free-flow of information. This will be discussed later, in relation to Paul Feenberg's (2005) response to the Marcusian predicament of technological alienation.

Undoubtedly technology can be destructive, alienating and enslaving of human self-expression. In its most pernicious forms it can lead to conformity and oppression. Many individuals have largely abandoned the need to work at relationships. People have lost contact with themselves and with nature. They have exploited others in order to satisfy their own desires. They are alienated from sources of morality, truth and guidance. This has resulted in the 'lonely crowd'[20], where individuals face shallow relationships because of the

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[19] Detraditionalisation literally means a decline in traditions and it has been discussed by Heelas (1996) as well as Anthony Giddens (1991). In terms of theology it has often meant a rejection of traditional institutions, such as the Church.

[20] This phenomenon has been highlighted as an aspect of modernity by scholars such as David Riseman, Nathan Glazer, Reuel Denney (see *The Lonely Crowd*, ([1950] 2001); individuals come together more and yet there is no real connection, thus emphasising how Buber's it stance can exist within a community. This issue has been made more pertinent by the influx of technology, which has meant that individuals and community can be offline together but there is no real dialogue taking place; instead it is directed towards the machine or to others

boundaries they have erected around themselves to control the flow of communication. As Michel Heim (1992, 73) remarks: "Isolation persists as a major problem of contemporary urban society – I mean, spiritual isolation, the kind that plagues individuals even on crowded city streets".

The individualism prevalent in the technological era has resulted in cyberspace being viewed as a capitalist construct (cf Manuel Castells [1996] 2000) which is concerned purely with profit and economic growth. The Pew Internet and American life project (2004) says that it can be seen as a phenomenon which encourages individual gain, fulfilment of desires and social isolation, to the detriment of community and family. A tension therefore arises between the individualism that cyberspace appears to promote through capitalist ventures, versus the relationships taking place through email, user groups and social networking sites, which reinforce the need for community. I will emphasise how Buber's theology can enable reflection on the alienation of technology and can lead to an understanding of the need for more genuine and ethical forms of encounter.

Why Buber?

I focus my thesis on the theology of Martin Buber (1878-1965) because he provides a framework through which to address the predicament of the rapid changes taking place in the technological era which theology needs to address. Although grounded within the Judeo-Christian tradition, what he had to say about relationships was so fundamental that it is not solely restricted to one time or institution; his work is still relevant to relationships formed in the network age. The connections that he identifies between the central messages within

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they are globally interconnected with. Riseman stated that people are becoming increasingly anxious about how others' desires change and the only way to alleviate this anxiety is by constant media contact with them, thereby exacerbating the problem.

many of the great religions[21] make him increasingly relevant to examining interrelations in the network age. The core of his message was that human relationships had the power to enact transformation through openness, mutuality and love. Arthur Cohen (1957, 91) says Buber saw himself as an anthropologist, interested in the way that humanity related to each other, as well as to the Divine. Buber is helpful for addressing the new context of late modernity and cyberspace because he allows us to have theological reflections about the need for a more ethical dimension to relationships, with individuals as the instigators.

Like many great figures before him, Buber's life is a series of paradoxes. Paul Mendes-Flohr (2002, vii) remarks that it is this tension and dialectic that helped to shape his ultimate "hermeneutic method, grounded in the principle of dialogue". His eclectic life meant that he exposed himself to lived experiences and pursued those facets which drew him nearer to his goal of seeing the unity of all things. The advantage of Buber grounding his theology in encounters from his own life makes it particularly appealing and accessible. His ideas have not arisen from an abstract theoretical perspective but from his life, lived on what he called the "narrow ridge", where, in relation to the Absolute, there was "no sureness of expressible knowledge but the certainty of meeting what remains, undisclosed" (Buber, [1947] 2002, 218). He has used his own experience of relationships and the way in which they can be divided into different spheres as registers to formulate his own theology. The three spheres of relationship that he identified: man[22] with nature; man with man, and man with forms of the spirit (Buber [1923] 2004, 13) are fundamental aspects of human life and we need to re-

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[21] Although Buber was devoted to Jewish theology he was able to learn from many other traditions, inspired more by their deeds than their doctrine. Paul Mendes-Flohr (2002:168) remarks that "Gotama, Socrates, and Jesus had a common denominator because their message…was not a doctrine but an act". Buber described Jesus as his "great brother" (1951, 12-13). He also gained much from Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, as well as Socratic thought.

[22] The term "man" is not one that sits comfortably in modern scholarship. It is left in the original here and throughout the text when specifically referring to the spheres but changed to "humanity" or "humans" wherever possible. Although the term appears to present a patriarchal stance, Walters (2003, 67) tells us that both Buber and his wife "joined other pro-women forces, championing gender equality at the turn of the century" signifying that Buber meant the term "man" to refer to all of humanity and both were capable of attaining the "Thou" state.

negotiate our relationships within them. This process can begin by charting the possibilities that cyberspace provides for allowing the dimension of "Thouness" to become more apparent in relationships, thus opening up possibilities for theological re-connection.

Buber identified a dialectic of "I-It" and "I-Thou"[23] in order to evaluate the quality of relationships. This became the core of his theology. It allows us to re-assess the notion of dialogue and the ethical implications it should engender. Schultze (2002, 187) thinks that dialogue is important because it is "an act of making ourselves available for community" and so provides a means to build up new means of stronger, genuine relationality. Buber's "I-It" mode reflected an interface characterised by a functional relationship, which often entailed using the other and was centred on an individual's needs. The "I-Thou" viewed the other as an equal; a mutual "meeting" which entailed an ethical dimension to the encounter (Buber [1923] 2004, 15). Buber thought that it was up to each individual to take responsibility to use their freedom not to objectify phenomena, but to turn towards God through the cultivation of the "Thou."

It is only by developing more "Thou" relationships that God is drawn down to creation and can start the process of rebuilding the wholeness of all things, and re-uniting the lost Shekinah[24]. God needs humanity in order to accomplish the redemption of creation, and we must be willing to participate in relationships with each other, in order to begin the process. Through the relationships created in the new social order of cyberspace, humans are able to re-connect with each other and with the Divine by becoming co-creators themselves. Buber's focus on the way in which humans could re-connect with self, surroundings, each other, and ultimately with the Divine, provides great insights into the positive potential of

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[23] There are many conventions used when writing about Buber's dialectic. I have opted to follow what is used in Buber's *I-Thou* and capitalise both the "It" and Thou" modes of relating, throughout the thesis. This is because when the "Thou" takes place within any of the three spheres there is the opportunity for the Divine to be present.
[24] The Shekinah in Judaism represents God's divine presence and is often associated with feminine attributes.

cyberspace. He helps to ameliorate our poverty of understanding regarding the dynamics of relationships in the digital age. His theology provides ways to understand the new medium and the new frontiers provided by cyberspace. It allows us to see the possibilities for relationship and to move towards ethical networks of connectivity, and away from the isolation of self and objectification of other.

Although Buber's work was not originally intended for technological application, in 1923[25] he would have been aware of the first commercial broadcasts being sent out on the radio waves across America. Buber could therefore understand the potential technology has to connect communities and engender feelings of solidarity and community. Many years later, he even commented that "a worker can experience even his relation to the machine as one of dialogue" (Buber, [1947] 2002, 43), anticipating the potential that my thesis is able to actualise. It is his eclectic outlook and interconnectivity of many streams of thought which makes his theology applicable to the 21st century technological era. A theology which places emphasis on dialogue as a way of connection[26] means that God, the essence of "The Word"[27], can find new meaning within the technological paradigm. In modernity and late-modernity the importance of language has often been consumed by mindless communication. I argue that cyberspace allows us to re-think the ethical dimension of dialogue because the medium provides the space for new and renewed forms of encounter. Buber provides a means to address the late modern tensions and to open up the need for genuine relationships through technological dialogue.

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[25] This was when his seminal work *I-Thou* was published.

[26] Buber was proficient in many languages. He believed that it was through language that people were able to understand more about each other and about the Divine (see Buber, [1967] 2002, 13-14).

[27] John 1:1 states "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This stresses the importance of God's word as the central means of speaking to humanity. It was embodied in the person of Jesus, whose death was able to repair the damaged relationship between God and humanity, providing an opportunity for redemption in relationships. The words also echo back to Genesis 1:3ff, where God's word enabled creation to come into being. Through co-creation humans are given that power to use dialogue to repair lost relationships with the whole of creation.

Buber's theological insights, written nearly a century ago, revealed principally in his work, *I-Thou* (1923)[28] can take on new meaning and relevance in the network era. By applying his theology to cyberspace, we can start to see the impact that the medium can have on changing individuals' perspectives and bringing their awareness to the interconnectivity of phenomena. Cohen (1957, 95) comments Buber saw himself as a prophetic figure, who "holds up the mirror[29] of man's self-distortion to his self-congratulation and the image of man's perfection to the reality of man's despair". This thesis will test these insights. Buber's central goal was to redeem humanity and unite communities so that the fragmentation lost through the "It" mode could be re-connected and creation joined to the Divine once more[30]. The divine spark that is re-ignited by the reflective and experimental processes in cyberspace is able to lead individuals back towards a new ethical dimension to relationships and a vision of creation in its wholeness. Buber attempted to bridge the gap between the transcendent, awe-inspiring God of the Old Testament, and the immanent nature and unconditional love of God, demonstrated in individuals such as the prophets and Jesus. Through joining the community on the sacred Land[31] Buber foresaw his vision for humanity, where the secular

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[28] Buber's original work was published in German in 1923. Friedman ([1955] 2002, xi) informs us that today around forty versions have been published in English translation. In my thesis I have used a second edition (2004) of one of the two main translations by Ronald Gregory Smith.

[29] The concept of a mirror, and in particular, reflection, is one which is particular relevant. Firstly because in the book of Daniel (1964) Buber depicts the sea as a mirror, as Wayne Mayhall and Timothy Mayhall (2004, 21) comment: "In its stillness and depth it reflects the face of man back to him and the backdrop of creation behind him". This reflects the way in which in relationships engagement with the other is reflected back onto the self, hence the importance of the "I" in Buber's dialectic. Secondly, the image of a mirror is also picked up through St Paul, who in 1 Corinthians 13:12 observes how at the moment we are only able to see as in a mirror, but when in heaven, we will see God face-to-face. This signifies the way in which through "Thou" relationships in the three spheres, humans are able to glimpse the nature of the "eternal Thou." The online-offline dimension can also be viewed in terms of a mirror because online mirrors relationships which occur offline. Through reflection on the online, we are able to envisage the totality of an ethical, genuine relationship in the offline domain.

[30] This central idea of interconnectivity can be seen to be supported by the work of Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a contemporary of Buber. It links closely with Buber's ideas and finds fulfilment within the network age. De Chardin proposed that connectivity was needed at the heart of life. To this end he developed the idea of the 'noosphere,' a layer of thought and spirit around the globe, which stimulates bonds of unity to a consummation in the 'Omega point' or 'Christ-Omega.' He believed that humanity had the responsibility to develop communities of love, thus echoing Buber's emphasis on this quality, and its importance for providing an ethical dimension to a relationship. However, he differed from Buber in his emphasis on spiritual as opposed to material resources *(*The British Teilhard Association*).* His ideas will be discussed further in chapter five.

[31] For Jews the Promised or sacred Land was Israel, as part of the Covenant that God made with the Patriarchs (see Genesis 9:12-17 and Genesis 12-17 and Exodus 19-24).

could be imbued with the sacred and begin the process of redemption. Cyberspace can begin to actualise Buber's earthly community of people joined together by their awareness of a commonality between humanity, overseen by God.

Despite the new perspective that Buber's theology can provide, it is important to recognise its limitations too. It may appear anachronistic to use a 20th century Jewish theologian, who knew nothing of cyberspace, to try to explain the connectivity of technology in the 21st century. There are also concerns about whether a relationship that exists purely in an online form can ever be considered to be a genuine "Thou" encounter. Buber's insistence on the "lived concrete" appears to render his philosophy irrelevant to an essentially amorphous, disembodied technology. Buber might well have recoiled from the network age, had he been seamlessly translated into it. My contention, however, is that his supposed reactions could in no way undermine the application of his dialectic to the development of an ethical cyberspace. Buber (1950, 144-145) did say that individuals in a community are not always together physically: that they have mutual access to each other and are ready for dialogue mitigates their separation. Cyberspace provides a medium which allows individuals to reflect on their sense of interconnectivity, both with the computer itself, and with the phenomena that they encounter through it. Buber can provide insights into relationships online which can be actualised offline. This resonates with Sherry Turkle's (1995, 203) view of the computer as being used as a "sort of practice to get into closer relationships with people in real life".

Turkle's point really emphasises why a new framework for relationality is needed. Humans have essentially forgotten the essence of community. In the past, when communities were dependent on each other and would engage in daily face-to-face contact, communication was necessary and perhaps, it could be argued, more genuine. The advent of technology and globalisation have meant that individuals are no longer dependent on each other for existence

and the Internet has meant that many day-to-day activities can be carried out online. However, this is why Buber's framework is needed, to draw attention to the alienation which we have engendered (or which has been forced upon us) and how we can now resolve to use technology to re-learn genuine and deep modes of interaction.

Assessing the Current Literary Situation on Cyberspace

The current literature relevant to my thesis, which documents the relationship between theology and technology, can be divided into two overlapping themes: the challenge of late modernity, and the conditions of cyberspace, seen from both a socio-cultural and theological perspective. In the area of social-cultural theory there has been much discussion about the impact and confusion of modernity and late modernity on society, institutions and the individual. [32]Jorg Durrschmidt & Graham Taylor (2007, 1) have discussed how, in the 21st century, we now live in a state of liminality[33] or in-betweenness, which makes our experiences in the world "increasingly difficult for us to comprehend." This confusion arises from a lack of fixed boundaries in all areas of life, which has led to accepted norms being challenged and boundaries becoming fluid and "crossed, transgressed and reconfigured" (ibid, 36). Existing categories and means of classification need to be re-learned and re-configured to address the changing nature of technology and the breakdown of existing models and norms.

The literature assessing the current situation and impact of technology on society and social movements has come some way to addressing these concerns and tracing the pattern and activities of cyberspace users. However, much of the early material has shown a poverty of understanding in regards to the forces and motivations that are apparent in relationships in

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[32] See Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gersheim (2002), and Paul Heelas (1998).

[33] This is a term that has been applied by Victor Turner (1969, 359-360) to the social and political change and its disorientating affects, as existing hierarchies are dissolved and traditions may be destroyed and re-made. It is a term which resonates with the fragmentation brought by late modernity and the alienation that can result.

the space. Authors have started to respond (see Dwight Friesen, 2009) but they do not fully

articulate the dynamics of relationship in the technological age. It is scholars such as Turkle

(1996; 2005; 2011), Campbell (2005; 2010) and Daniel Miller (2011) who have drawn

attention to the way in which the relationships between the computer and the user manifests.

However, few have appreciated the central forces and dynamics that make cyberspace such a

compelling place for theology. Much of the focus has been on how technology changes

individuals in negative ways and not on the possibilities it facilitates for new forms of

relationality between humans and the Divine.

There is a need to refresh the view of relationships in cyberspace. A new theoretical

framework is required that is able to get behind the processes. We must examine the

dynamics of relationships online and their impact offline. We need to explore how

cyberspace allows reflection on individuality and to understand the online relationships and

networks that humans are engaged in. Boundaries have become more fluid since globalisation

and theology has the opportunity to re-make itself in new technological spaces. Knott (1995)

has argued this in her book *The location of religion*[34]. There is no longer a juxtaposition

between sacred and profane and theology can be seen to emerge from the secular. Carrette

(2000, 152) draws attention to this when he remarks: "We need to find religion in the very

fabric of the 'secular' – in the absence".

Relationships that transcend boundaries and pull the sacred into the secular are

discovered by seeing God in the midst of all relationships. Buber ([1923] 2004, 61)

encourages us to do this: "The extended lines of relation meet in the external Thou". God is

no longer transcendent and separate, but a Being individuals can relate to through mutual

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[34] It is the concept of how religion exists at the boundaries of life (which will be developed further in chapter five), which enables Buber's theology of dialogue to find fulfilment both in cyberspace and offline. Through communication boundaries are broken and re-formed to enable new concepts and models of religion and theology to emerge.

dialogue in relationships. Graham Ward (1997, xxii) observes that "in the postmodern cultural climate, the theological voice can once more be heard" (ibid, xxii). These views challenge Hjarvard's earlier claim that the rise of technology will lead to secularisation; technology has the ability to re-create theology in a new era with a new framework of meaning. Theology must not remain static but should seize the opportunities that technology provides to re-engage with the secular and re-inject and ethical dimension into encounters. Ward argues that cyberspace offers this possibility as it provides a "new space where theology can engage in postmodern debates" (ibid). By finding a voice within the realm of cyberspace, theology can speak to communities in a new language of relationship. George Pattison (2005, 5) stresses this urgency: "Theology needs to listen to, to understand and to articulate itself in relation to the contemporary world as never before". It has a responsibility not to shy away from technology but instead, he says, that it should use it as a platform to "articulate what God (or Christ, or prayer, or any other "theological" topic) could possibly mean for beings living through the new axial age we are currently experiencing" (ibid, 9). A new theology is required to understand how technology allows interconnectivity of all of creation and possibilities for renewing relationships in all spheres of life.

Outline of the thesis

There is a popular view that industrialisation and commercialisation have led to a breakdown of relationships, because capitalism has increased self-reliance in a bad way. This view holds that the network of cyberspace has exacerbated this tendency. The individual has become dependent on the computer (and by implication, the self), to the detriment of existing relationships. Buber's dialectic of "It" and "Thou" is acutely aware of this. Through unethical relationships, the other is demeaned. There is a need for genuine interconnection and awareness of the needs of others to recapture the ethical nature of relating. By acknowledging different types of relationship, one is able to cultivate more of the "Thou" mode in

appropriate situations. With care and thoughtfulness this leads to an awareness of the "eternal Thou"[35] and a new means of relating to the Divine. Through Buber, we can frame the means by which a theology of relationships in cyberspace can be formulated.

My thesis argument can be divided into three steps: the predicament of late modernity, Buber's theological model, and applying Buber's model to theology and cyberspace. First, the predicament: The changing nature of relationships in late modernity can be encapsulated by the hallmarks of detraditionalisation, individuation and globalisation. All have been widely documented in social and cultural theory. In chapter one I will demonstrate how these strands are crucially linked and provide the context for Buber. By rejecting traditional structures and creating new frameworks of expression and identity, Buber's work provides the necessary insights to change our thinking about cyberspace and relationships. Jean Baudrillard's ([1981] 1994) dystopian views will be used to show how cyberspace resonates with the reflexive attitude of late modernity and has become a simulacrum[36] of it. Rampant individualism in late modernity has led to a redefinition of what it means to be human in the network era. In many instances it has also contributed to the alienation of the self from others through using technology for self-aggrandisement.

Following this contextualisation, the first chapter will discuss the relationships between humans and the machine. Herbert Marcuse ([1964] 2007) will demonstrate the negative implications - technology has led to apathy, dependency and alienation. Andrew Feenberg (2005) will provide a more positive assessment of the situation, believing that technology can be used for the common good. The influence of technologies on religion and the implications for theology has been documented by Hoover (1998; 2006). His positive

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[35] Buber used the term "eternal Thou" to define the relationship between humans and the Divine, which forms part of every "Thou" encounter.

[36] A simulacrum is literally an imitation or representation of something. Baudrillard used the term "simulacra" to explain the negative affect that resulted when the computer and the virtual worlds it generated had become more real than reality itself. He documented this in his 1981 treatise *Simulacra and Simulation.*

assessment will be tempered by Douglas Groothuis (1997), who holds that technology leads

people away from God and damages their relationships with the Divine. Interestingly, his

view resolves to the position that religion has changed from being a collective institution to a

personal spirituality[37]. I agree that technology has provided an opportunity for individuals to

replace traditional adherence to religion and theology with a more individualistic approach to

spirituality. This view will be supported using the arguments put forward by Paul Heelas and

Linda Woodhead (2005) in their ethnographic study of Kendal[38]. However, despite this need

for individual expression, the need for connection between individuals demonstrates that

relationality is central to humanity. Through mutual dialogue, theology can be re-kindled

online, as the "Thou" becomes part of the interconnected encounter.

Chapter two will explore current literature on the history of religion, theology (seen

predominantly from a Judeo-Christian perspective) and cyberspace. It will focus on the way

in which technology has impacted on individuals and their relationships. I will discuss four

themes which arise from the dialogue between religion and cyberspace and cause concerns

for theology's dialogue with technology. I will look at the findings of the Pew report (2011)

and consider how successfully individuals use cyberspace to access information on religion

and theology and the concerns that access to a plethora of different viewpoints entails. Ritual

may be seen as central to theology and we will see if it can be successfully re-created online

by investigating online pilgrimage. Ritual can presuppose the need for a physical body and

that will be the third theme discussed, particularly in relation to Elaine Graham's work on the

cyborg and the possibilities and dangers that it holds. The need for integration online is

paramount and the possibilities that cyberspace provides for allowing different forms of

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[37] See Timothy Fitzgerald (2007) for a discussion of the way in which the term religion has arisen and also the religious-secular dichotomy.
[38] Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 8-9) conducted a project in Kendal, Cumbria UK from October 2000-June 2002 to study what was going on in terms of traditional religion and new age activities. The aim of the study was to ascertain whether or not a "spiritual revolution had taken place in Kendal".

community will be the final theme to be explored. A number of these themes will be returned to in chapter five to seven, when Buber's theological model is applied to relationships and modes of interacting in cyberspace.

Chapter three will outline Buber's theological model from primary material, namely his three spheres of relation, in which the "I-It", "I-Thou" dialectic operate. We will see how he formulated his position from his own experience, by examining a number of his central, primary texts. We shall also look at the influence of his teachers: Georg Simmel (1858-1918) and Wilheim Dilthey (1833-1911) as well as his own study of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). The central themes which have shaped Buber's theology, such as land and dialogue, and are central concepts in cultivating relationships and community, will be discussed. Finally we will see that the "Thou" position is the one which enables genuine relationships to flourish within the three spheres of nature, man and forms of the spirit. Here, also, is the means through which humans can begin their work of co-creation, in re-learning a new ethical dimension to relationships through valuing interconnectivity, allowing the Divine down into the encounter.

Criticisms of Buber and his theology will be discussed in chapter four. These focus on his dialectical approach to relationships. Taylor Stevenson (1963, 195), for example, asks "whether or not all our experience can be located within these two separate realms". I will also examine the development of the "Thou" through a point made by Nathan Rotensteich (1991, 72), who questions whether relationships, and especially friendship, can grow, if the "I-Thou" is momentary and reverts back to the "I-It". Rotenstreich will also be used to critique the way in which the "It" position is portrayed by Buber in an unfavourable light. Another criticism of Buber's theology is that it is too idealistic. Nahum Glatzer (1981, 11) explores this when he states that Buber ignores the evil that is forever present in the world by postulating the idea that the "I-Thou" will provide the solution to humanity's shallowness.

His idealism also comes under fire from Stephan Strasser (2004), who says that it is problematic that in Buber's theology God appears to be put on an equal footing with man.

Chapter five to seven uses Buber's model of relationships to assess the encounters taking place in cyberspace and to explore new models of interconnectivity. These three chapters correlate to Buber's three spheres of relationships. In each I confront a perceived problem with cyberspace and alienation. Buber's theology will be seen to provide a solution to these concerns.

Chapter five's theme "man with nature" is an opportunity to discuss the way cyberspace is supposed to have led to alienation from physical surroundings. Discussing this, I have opted for a feminist approach. The feminist paradigm resonates with many aspects of Buber's dialogical theology, such as his emphasis on connection and mutual interaction. It also reveals the need for a re-interpretation of traditional patriarchal facets of theology. The body is central to Judeo-Christian theology, as it forms the basis of community[39]. The technological era inevitably presents a paradox for embodiment. Elaine Graham's (2002) work on the cyborg is germane. She is concerned that, through a fusion with the machine, one loses the essence of humanity. I hope to demonstrate how interconnection in Buber's model can allow us to re-think technological space in a positive relational manner. One of the key thinkers on space, Henri Lefebvre (1991) comments on the importance of the space between things, or beings, in relationship, and this can be seen to chime with the way that Buber identified that space can be used to repel (the "It" stance) and to relate (the "Thou" position). I have also used Knott's (2005, 26ff) work, concerning the boundaries of space and

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[39]Coakley (1997, 48) observes how in most religions the body is essential for performing ritual and for understanding and responding to the metaphysical. She quotes Talal Asad (1993, 33) who observes that the inability "to enter into communion with God" may well be "a function of untaught bodies". It is also of particular important for Judaism, as many of the rituals that define religion, such as observing Shabbat, require a physical presence of ten people (a minyan).

transformation, to detail how the medium allows new relationships and connections, including theological ones, to be made apparent.

Two other aspects of interconnection are particularly significant to feminist writings: love and unity, and a gendered environment. Buber ([1923] 2004, 19) said that love was essential to the forming of relationships because it allowed mutuality between the parties involved. I use the work of Linell Cady (1987) to illustrate how love forms the central bond in the relationship, not in an all-consuming way, but in the space of the "between" where Buber said all genuine relationship takes place. This is emphasised by Jennifer Cobb (1998) in her discussion of the work of Teilhard de Chardin and his insistence that love connects all things to Christ at the "omega point". The centrality of connection within cyberspace is mirrored by ecological systems. This is explored with Alice Keefe (1997), who draws parallels between feminist and Buddhist theology, each emphasising a caring and ethical approach to relationships. Sallie McFague (2008) also echoes Buber's theology by calling for a new language and dialogue between all interconnected beings.

Buber's second sphere is that of "man with man", the subject of chapter six. He describes this as "the real simile of the relationship with God" (Buber, [1923 (2002, 79). Through this sphere humans gain a greater understanding into the relationship with the "eternal Thou." I have used Alistair McFadyen's (1990) work on Trinitarian relationships[40] to provide insights into the way in which relationships can be formed and maintained, as well as opening up new possibilities into relationships with the Divine. Alienation in this sphere arises from the way in which technology has the ability to connect but also to compartmentalise. The distinction between public and private, individual and collective, has

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[40] Trinitarian concepts are important for any discussion of relationships. In this thesis I use Trinitarian insights which McFadyen (1990) and Solle (1990) provide to highlight interconnectivity in relationships. However, they already play a pivotal role in theological notions of relationship and by using Buber's framework I am able to provide a new perspective into the way in which relationships are formulated.

never been more apparent than in the cyberspace era. Individuals also use technology as a replacement for genuine relationships. Turkle (2011) has discussed this with relation to robots. I have explored three examples of online communities: the gaming community (through the work of Castronova (2007)), social networking (through Daniels Miller's, 2011) optimistic studies on Trinidad), and the church community (through Campbell, 2005; 2013). All can exhibit aspects of the "Thou" through mutuality, openness and ethical dialogue. They can also exhibit the "It" dimension in shallow interactions.

Buber's last sphere is the most difficult to interpret. He terms it as "man's" relationship with 'forms of the spirit'. Buber ([1923] 2002, 13) tells us that individuals encounter "Thou" moments in this sphere through expressions of "forming, acting, speaking". Robert Wood (1969) says that all forms in this sphere can be reduced to the "prime analogate" of art. Therefore the hermeneutic which I employ focuses on how humans use cyberspace as a means of expression for creative outlets. Alienation in this sphere signals separation from the Divine. Cyberspace has taken the place of the deity and theology has become commodified. Buber's solution lies in dialogue through creative expression and re-connecting with symbols and narratives embedded and shared in communities. I observe how cyberspace can be used as a medium for creation and simulation and examine the implications this has for forming genuine relationships. Waters (2006, 85) argues that in creating humans are using their God-given gifts to fulfil their potential. They are a sign of God's creative work continuing in man. Creativity can allow a re-unification with the Divine. Technology has provided one opportunity for individual expression through blogging and Danah Boyd (2006) has examined this in her work on how blogging is conceptualised. I discuss how blogs can traverse individual boundaries and socially extend an individual across the medium. Symbolism also facilitates a means of connection in the technological era and I

apply Pattison's (2005) example of icons to exemplify how they can provide a means to access a transcendent reality.

My conclusion argues that Buber's theology has provided us with an ethical perspective for mapping online relationships and envisaging a new positive theology of interconnectivity, overcoming the largely negative presentation of the dichotomy between the two. Theology has the responsibility to challenge the secularism inherent in technological models. The new space is one of positive theological opportunity, redemption and re-creation of relationships. Despite fears, outlined by scholars such as Turkle and Groothuis, the interconnectivity that cyberspace provides allows a realisation of the highways that exist in different spheres of creation. Technology provides the medium to encourage individuals to reflect upon relationships and consider the interconnections inherent within creation. Only then can a more responsible approach to dealings with others be realised. This allows humans to re-learn their role as partners to the Divine, leading to a process of theological redemption in all spheres of life.

In an era of uncertainty brought by late modernity, a time with no fixed truths and an increasing sense of relativism and pluralism overtaking the need for absolutes, Buber may offer a way to re-direct people towards what is the essential facet of being human: genuine, ethical relationships, based on the opening of self to other. Through experiences and encounters in the network age, humans can start to see themselves as re-connected to the fluid web of life. They can come to a realisation that they are co-creators with the Divine and have a significant role in re-making creation. As Buber was able to marry a plethora of ideas in order to create his theology of *I-Thou,* so the coming together of individuals in relationships online allows the fragmentary nature of late modernity to be reunified by dialogue enabled in the technological era. Through Buber's dialectic in the three spheres of relationality, a new interconnected theology, which re-envisages ethical relationships in the technological era, is

able to be formulated. This is the value of Buber for a theology of interconnectivity in the age of cyberspace.

Part 1: The Predicament of Cyberspace

Chapter 1: The New Challenge of Late Modernity

Our fascination with virtual reality is a signal of the disillusionment with the postmodern, the fragmented, the uncertain (Rachel Wagner, 2012, 15).

One cannot examine relationships in the technological era outside of the wider social processes from which they have arisen; one informs and shapes the other. This chapter is essential to contextualise the social dynamics of cyberspace and its implications for relationships. These social factors can be seen to create and feed alienation in the technological world. The changing social movements in society provide a challenge to the traditional frameworks of relationships that exist. By opening the broader debate, the value of human life to relationships can be documented. I want to first raise the question of alienation which has characterised much of the relationship between theology and technology. Second, I will formulate three interpretative frames of the contemporary situation. These have reflected the dominant trends in late modernity and underlie the necessity of why Buber's understanding of relationships is unique for re-envisaging the creative opportunities for connectivity that technology offers theology. Alienation can be transformed into synthesis by engaging in a new theology of interconnectivity. Buber offers us a chance to re-assess what is at stake: relationships.

The Alienation Thesis

As is well known in political theory and the sociological tradition, many of the recent innovations in technology have been contextualised in the social situation through which they arose. In order to draw out the tensions in the value of technology, Herbert Marcuse ([1964] 2007), building on the work of Karl Marx (1818-1883), shows us the competing values that are introduced through technology. Their social theories presented a strong case against the de-humanising impact of technology and how it can lead to isolation on an individual level, to the detriment of community. However, this thesis is more concerned with a positive model

of technology, captured at its developmental cutting edge, how it has the ability to connect, to unite, and to empower individuals to begin a new enhanced relationship with it. This is not to underestimate the oppressive potential of capitalist models, but to chart the way in which technology is able to transform the relational world, even inside oppressive structures.

Marcuse ([1964] 2007, xxv-xxix) builds on the Marxist model to explain how technology aids exploitation and causes feelings of worthlessness. In Marx's thesis the Proletariat are oppressed by the Bourgeoisie; the latter using the former as mere "hands". Blind to their exploitation, the Proletariat do not revolt; and between them capitalism and religion squash "the possibilities of radical social change"[41] (ibid). Marcuse ([1964] 2007, 78) suggests that all forms of cultural protest have become sanitised as worker "satisfaction is a way which generates submission and weakens the rationality of protest." The processes of technology are often subtle and prevent reflection, due to their constant and often repetitive nature. Individuals are subdued by their labour and begin to think and acquiesce as a collective, drowning out the voice of the minority[42]. This begins the process of alienation.

Although Marcuse ([1964] 2007, 163) saw technology as having the potential to ameliorate lives, he argues that the reverse is the case; technology destroys both humans and nature. This is because he views the machine as a means to conquer and alienate. The machine may act as a slave but it is able to make others slaves to it. Technology is a product of capitalism and devalues humanity; society has become its slave. Oppression and alienation occur due to the inability to acknowledge technology's dominating influence. Feenberg (2005:162) argues that this is because technology "protects rather than cancels the legitimacy of domination." Marcuse ([1964] 2007, 31) holds that humans lose even more value through

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[41] For a more detailed understanding of Marx's sociologist theories and ideologies see *The Communist Manifesto* [1848] 2003 by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels.

[42] The implications of collective conformity can be seen in dystopian aspects of community, such as cults and alternative religions e.g. the Branch Dravidians, which lead to the atrocities at Waco, where many of their members died. (This will be discussed in chapter two).

labouring with tools and machines as they become detached from the produce of their own hands. Technological tools become extensions of selves, which leads to a demarcation of personal boundaries. There is a human requirement for individual space. This forms a central part of Buber's dialogical principle in which the "I" is essential for genuine relationships, where one does not merge with the other but individual space is maintained. By merging with the machine Marcuse thinks that any value humans had gained through their work will be eroded, technology having destroyed the boundary for self-reflection: "The machine never creates value but merely transfers its own value to the product, while surplus value remains the result of the exploitation of living labor and man is thus alienated from himself" (ibid).

Marcuse ([1964] 2007, 161) suggests that through capitalism technology has become a form of "social control and domination". For me, this point is vital. It is not technology itself that is inherently destructive, but the way that it is employed. Paul Mattick (1972, 4) alludes to this, commenting that, for Marx it is "neither science nor technology which constitute a system of domination but the domination of labour by capital, which turn science and technology into instrumentalities of exploration and class rule." There is an emotive viewpoint which sees technology as no longer neutral.[43] Supporters suggest that technology exerts a power over the user; humans are enslaved by the machine and do not realise it. In this model the relationship between humans and technology is alienating and divisive. There is no ethical dimension to it, only utility, a bleak reflection of the "It" mode in Buber's dialectic.

Technology, Marcuse (ibid, 13) argues, leads to one-dimensional existence,[44] dialectical thinking is swallowed up by shallow pleasures brought by the machine. "The

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[43] This is a point that Heidi Campbell (2010) disagrees with when she claims that technology is neutral. There is an ongoing debate, stretching back to Marshall McLuhan (1964) as to whether technology can be seen as merely a carrier of information or if it exerts an influence back on the user (cf Sherry Turkle 2005).
[44] *One-dimensional man* ([1964] 2007) is the title of Marcuse's book and aptly describes the way in which technology restricts man: his ambitions and his mode of thinking. It coheres with more dystopian ideas

efficiency of the system blunts the individual's recognition that it contains no facts which do not communicate the repressive power of the whole." David Lewin (2006, 131) observes that in Marx's model there is an implicit inability to consider political and social alternatives; the worker acquiesces to the status quo. Technology can start to exercise control over human minds as it engenders feelings of dependence, something which Sherry Turkle (2005) has documented and will be discussed further in chapter two. The power of technology to subliminally dominate relationships is made very apparent through the overwhelming possibilities it appears to offer. Therefore it is imperative that that rational reflection is re-injected into human-computer interface in order to bring awareness to the shallow nature of the "It" dimension. Those who become wedded to their keyboards and screens draw our awareness not to technology's evils but human beings' susceptibilities.

From Marcuse's analysis, technology produces alienation from the self and the environment. It is seen to replace human autonomy and rational processing because it makes decisions as to the most efficient and cost-effective means of production. Its ability to work tirelessly at the same rate of production also is seen as more effective than the mistakes which encroach as the human body and mind become tired. Technology is therefore seen to replace humans, which leads to alienation from self and the boundaries of the body." Marx (1867, vol 1, ch. 15) indicates that this leads to feelings of inadequacy because "modern industry has a productive organism that is purely objective, in which the labourer becomes a mere appendage to an already existing material condition of production."

Alienation from others in the community is engendered through the competitive nature of technology, leading to feelings of hostility and causing relationships to become objectified. The impetus of capitalism and technology facilitates a means to increase output

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concerning technology, such as those found in the works of Turkle (1996; 2005; 2011) and Groothius (1997). It is also a theme which will be returned to in chapter seven, concerning how technology can itself be used to overcome the alienation which it is seen to cause through facilitating creative endeavours.

exponentially. Utilisation of the machine further removes humanity from their environment: domination is allowed to manifest through human power over nature. Technology provides optimal, sanitised conditions and acts as a barrier between humans and their surroundings. This culminates in total alienation; humans therefore focus on an amelioration of the self, often to the detriment of nature and others. Technology is also divisive in human relationships; the requirement for individual enhancement comes at the detriment to relationality.

The interconnectivity that once existed between different spheres of life has vanished. Humans are not merely alienated from each other and their surroundings but also from the Divine. What was once seen to be the beneficence of the transcendent realm, in terms of furthering productivity, such as favourable weather, is now modified by technological forces. Power moves from a vertical to a horizontal model. Humans are in apparent control of their own destinies through creating a post-human, technological future. In relation to Buber, Marx and Marcuse would have believed that the relationship that man has to technology is certainly of the "I-It" variety. Machines are the makers. Technology has de-valued humans, making them surplus to requirements. Only by a more positive and symbiotic relationship with technology can the "Thou" stance be actualised. Then, ethical value can be re-inserted back into the relationship and the divisive nature of technology recognised.

Projected Solutions

Both Marx and Marcuse were despondent in their views of technology but they did see a means of redress. Marx (1868) and Friedrich Engels advocated that the route to freedom was through communism. Marcuse ([1964] 2007, 251) saw a means of escape from the controlling influence of technology and one-dimensional thinking through a return to the

"aesthetic dimension" of higher culture, such as philosophy, critical reasoning, and the arts.[45]

Through philosophy man could be freed from the enslavement of discourse and behaviour

because it offered alternatives and provided a reflective domain to consider the damaging

effects of technology (ibid, 203). Humans would be able to share an aesthetic consensus if

their creative and relational needs were fulfilled.

Buber ([1923] 2004, 16) held that art was a creative outlet, a means of humans re-

connecting with the self and engendering "Thou" relationships with "forms of the spirit". He

was indirectly addressing the concerns that Marcuse had raised with his suggested

reconnection with creative forms[46]. By approaching technology in a creative way, it can be

responsibly employed to enable new relationships and dimensions. Buber's theology can be

called upon to show the need for a radical re-structuring of the way technology is used in

relationships, to maintain human worth and rationality. Through acknowledging technology's

connectivity and possibilities for genuine relationality, it can be used to initiate genuine

"Thou" encounters. The individual becomes aware of something greater, beyond themselves.

Feenberg (2005, 106) said that Marcuse believed technology could be "reconstructed

to respect the value of life,"[47] overcoming alienation. He saw a radical connection between

human beings and nature. Industrialisation and technology have damaged the environment

but paradoxically, a solution can be found through a more thoughtful use of technology. If

used correctly, technology has the ability to affirm life and build connections, as opposed to

devaluing human worth. Feenberg (2005, 89) suggests that under the right condition

technology could be "reconstructed around a conception of the good." He sees a utopia of

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[45] This is an idea also proposed by Jurgen Habermas (1929 -) who saw art as a dialogical means of challenging one-dimensional society (cited in Kucor and Leung [1985] 2005).

[46] The importance of pursuing creativity, and in particular art, as a means to overcome the habitual commodification of technology and to develop oneself is explored in chapter seven.

[47] This stance coheres with my argument that despite the issues that arise from the use of technology, it can also be used as a transformative tool for relationships, and a means to understand connectivity to all aspects of life and the need for an ethical dimension to encounters.

technological rationality in a free-thinking society. As with Marcuse, Feenberg accepts that technological systems are inherently dominating and that there is a need for a change of attitude. He highlights Marcuse's ([1979] 1992) view that correct thinking technology could be used to "enhance life, rather than invent new means of destruction" (Feenberg, ibid, 96). Progress does not need to be bound up with domination, even if the capitalist structures enforce such positions. Technology could be re-modelled and re-engaged to respect the inherent value of life. Feenberg (ibid, 108) argued that this could be through means such as global justice[48] or methods to ameliorate environmental concerns. Technology is a powerful tool and it has the ability to enslave, alienate and devalue humans by enabling scenarios of domination and competition. Conversely, it can enable individuals to reconnect with themselves, each other, and all of creation. By facilitating interconnectivity it can ameliorate alienation and loneliness, albeit that this will always require some form of regulation and transparency alongside its development.

Interrogating Social Theories in Late Modernity

In order to assess the shifting nature of relations, I want to interrogate three interpretative frames of modern and late modern[49] society: detraditionalisation[50];

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[48] Although this is a diverse term, it has significance for my argument because whilst there is discrimination found within relationships between humans, there cannot be a genuine ethical dimension. It will be discussed further in relation to gender equality and liberation theology in chapter five.

[49] Late or post modernity is a term applied to the movement that is said to come after modernity. There is a debate as to whether it is merely an extension of modernism or a new movement, hence the adoption of both terms. It is characterised by many influences, such as the rejection of the scientific paradigm in preference for the idea that truth is relative and not defined by grand narrative (see Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979), *The End of Grand Narratives*). It is often described as a fragmented era because the relativity of truth, fuelled by individualism, has created many competing paradigms. It is often associated with the secularisation of religion but it has provided conditions for many alternative beliefs to arise. Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005) have detailed in their book, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why religion is giving way to spirituality,* how this has often been through a rise in pursuing spiritual activities as opposed to traditional religious models, an idea that will be explored later in this chapter.

[50] Detraditionalisation literally means a decline in traditions and it has been discussed by Heelas (1996) as well as Anthony Giddens (1991). In terms of theology it has often meant a rejection of traditional institutions, such as the Church.

individualisation[51] and globalisation.[52] Each can be seen to create and feed alienation in the technological world, from self, surroundings, others and the Divine. Through these complex social processes, relationships are being re-defined and challenged. Technological advances have facilitated the desire for new freedoms of expression and experimentation but there has not been a sufficient articulation in much of the literature of how processes are changing relationships. I am advocating that a new model is required to understand the place of relationships within late modern society and its new technological paradigm. Social movements and the dynamics of relationship have changed in late modernity and there is a need to find new modes of expression and relationality, especially in connection to theology. The challenges are much more apparent than the possibilities but the assumption that theology is diminished in this environment needs to be carefully re-considered.

Much research has been done on the mediatisation of religion.[53] It is usually concerned with the negative impact of "new media" on religion, and by extension, theology. Lovheim and Lynch, (2011, 112) observe that mediatisation has been defined as a means to "map out relationships between media, religion and social change". Campbell (2010, 4) suggests the relationships between media and religion have often been viewed negatively because technology is seen "as posing a threat to religion and so, it is perceived, that it must be resisted." Despite the prevalent view that media changes signal a move towards

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[51] Individualisation is literally a process of becoming an individual. It was a term first used by Beck in the 1980ies and has been developed by Beck and Beck-Gersheim (2001) in their book *Individualization*. It is often seen to result from movements such as modernity and late modernity: individuals, once removed from institutional control, want to re-establish their identity and create new paradigms of meaning.

[52] The concept of globalisation was originally associated with an increase in business trading. It often meant large businesses succeeding, to the detriment of smaller ones, which has engendered negative connotations. Many anti-globalisations demonstrations which have occurred and in the UK these are held annually in London and other major cities on May 1st). However, the term can now be more loosely applied to any social phenomenon which has a close associated with space. David Held and Anthony McGrew (1999) define it as "a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions." (See Scholte ([2000] 2005), for a more detailed discussion of globalisation).

[53] See Lev Manovich (2001) *The Language of New Media*, for an in depth study of mediatisation and its effects.

secularisation[54], I will argue that, on the contrary, far from negating religion and theology, media-technology is a catalyst which enables new theological models to arise. It is only through embracing and adapting to change that theology can hope to engage with late-modern society in a purposeful way. There has been insufficient reflection from the theological community on the nature of technology and its effects on human relationships and values. Campbell (2012, 81) says there is a "need for a new theoretical and methodological approach" for religion and media. Buber's theological framework neatly enables a new dialogue between theology and technology. By applying his dialogical model to the issues that technology presents, I hope to provide a new means of analysing the dynamics of relationships in cyberspace. I want to consider how the alienation occasioned by disparate models and competing paradigms of late modernity can be ameliorated through an interconnected view of relationality.

Detraditionalization: the loss of the context and continuity of relationships

The arrival of modernism[55] in the late 19th and early 20th centuries started to radically change the structure of society, largely due to the way industrialisation altered people's perspectives of how they lived. It provided a plethora of new ways of viewing the world; through art, architecture, entertainment, and new technologies, which brought with them new sources of power and energy. However, Chris Rodrigues and Chris Garratt (2002:18-19) state

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[54] There are many definitions of secularisation, ranging from the complete absence of religion or theology, to its existence in a private form in a largely secular society (Cf Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas (2000). Philip Hammond (1985, 309) has referred to it as "the idea that society moves from some sacred condition to successively secular conditions in which the sacred evermore recedes."

[55] The terms modernism and modernity are difficult to define succinctly. They encompass a variety of different areas, ranging from the Historical to Literalist to Sociological perspective. Modernity refers to the social order that came to fruition after the enlightenment (David Lyon, 1999, 25). The impact of the movement has been viewed in a multitude of ways and Anthony Giddens (1991, 6) observes it can produce "difference, exclusion and marginalisation" and means to supress the self. It is associated with the search for absolute knowledge in science, technology, society and politics (Graham Ward, 2010). It leads to a process of reflexivity, as the certainties of knowledge begin to be undermined and new thinking causes a risk society to develop, one based largely on trust. In terms of religion, Heelas (1998, 23) states that it destroys many religious institutions, making "church form of religion impossible."

that it also brought with it de-valuing aspects, such as "Taylorism" and "Fordism"[56] where

individuals worked as "labouring units," creating an industrialised and uniform workforce.

This led to increased competitiveness and the collapse of any clear ethical dimension to

relationships, because of the competition for jobs and routinization. Modernity forced a

sceptical questioning of theology and initiated a shift to science as the source of truth.

Individuals began to re-assess their place in society. Traditional roles were threatened. A

realisation dawned that institutions could no longer offer universal truths; truth had become

relative to the individual. Detraditionalisation and individualisation were underway, together

with a drive to break out of existing social structures and a search for new narratives of

meaning.

Modernism has been seen as particularly destructive of theology and the church. It has

witnessed individuals breaking out of existing communities and legitimising their own

concerns; content to become their own sources of authority. Heelas (1996, 4) suggests this

entails a shift in hierarchy. There is a movement from a vertical to a more horizontal model,

where individual paradigms become valid. This individualised authority is a feature of

cyberspace, exemplified in actions such as blogging, (discussed in chapter six). James Smith

(2006, 56) comments, "modernity is characterized by a deep individualism that isolates us

from one another, sealed up in our little egos or private spheres."

In detraditionalisation the basic traditional structures of society, such as the family

and theology, begin to break down. Although, initially, this offers freedom, ultimately the

individual is alienated; traditional structures and their accompanying communities have been

abandoned. In relation to theology, detraditionalisation has been characterised by Paul Heelas

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[56] Taylorism and Fordism are two systems in the 1900s, which "provided a means of increasing the capitalists' control over the worker and increasing production" (Angela Hoffman, 2009, 1). By controlling the workers, the employers were able to control productivity but at the same time, they were de-skilling the workers due to the introduction of technologies. Therefore, the relationship and value that humans had was being undermined.

(1996, 2) as a move from "without" to "within". Individuals no longer rely on external sources for meaning; they look for this within themselves. This is a serious break with traditional concepts of theology. Tom Beaudoin (1998, 73) argues that modernity has caused disillusionment with religion, especially with Generation X[57], who, he argues, are largely suspicious of religious institutions. Gustavo Benavides comments that it has led to the rejection of supernatural elements to life and any notion of a transcendent being[58] (in Mark Taylor, 1998, 190). Theology, in turn, was challenged by the technological paradigm. Dialogue between humans and God has become damaged or non-existent because aspects of modernity and late-modernity, such as science, reason and technology have appeared to render the Divine superfluous[59].

In this detraditionalised world, technology is not merely a platform for theology but, as Hoover (2008, 3) argues, the media "interact with religion in ways that are changing both the media and religion" (Ibid, 3). Hjarvard (2011, 114-121) says the media has, in essence, transformed religion in a way that has led to the secularisation of society. Media are now part of the social fabric of society, not outside it. The media have become the primary source of

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[57] "Generation X" is the generation born after the post-world-war II baby boom and spans the decades from early 1960ies to early 1980ies.

[58] The theological shifts which have characterised religious detraditionalisation are well-versed: Peter Berger ([1967] 1990, 116-117) has observed how, gradually, religion has become more this-worldly and the relationships with the Divine more distant. He comments that, in the Old Testament, it was acknowledged that God could no longer be manipulated by magical means, but through the covenant. People began a new, individual relationship with God, who no longer acts cosmologically but historically. He continues that in Christianity, too, the notion of the transcendent was again changed; God was able to mediate on earth through Jesus and Mary (ibid, 121-122). Don Cupitt (1999, 218) emphasises that the postmodern condition has meant that traditional aspects of religion are dying out. Individuals are more content to focus on this life, as opposed to putting their hopes in some eternal bliss where all the wrongs of this life will be redressed. As an alternative he advocates "Solar living", where "we are realized as ourselves just in playing our part in the life of the public world" (ibid, 223). Jean-Luc Nancy (1996, 237) develops Cupitt's early position and argues that communities need to re-form. They no longer have a need for the Divine; they become self-sufficient and there is the opportunity to ameliorate the ills of this world, of making "heaven on earth."[58] See also John Milbank (2006) *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, who offers a Catholic perspective as a means to ultimately re-define some of the socio-historical movements that have characterised neo-liberalism and its apparent secularisation.

[59] Morgan and Guilherme (2010, 6-7) state that due to science and technology we have become estranged from God, and following Nietzsche state that life has become meaningless because it is devoid of God. However, religion and theology offer a chance of re-connection with the Divine and "is the only way of bringing back meaning to life and of bringing an end to God's silence."

information about religious issues in society, he says, as well as distributing religious

information and experiences. They shape these ideas according to the demand of popular

genres. Theology is seen to have lost control of its message. Hjarvard concludes that, to a

large extent, media has taken the place of religion and theology, as it is able to provide what

consumers in the 21st century require; more freedom for individual expression and

exploration. The social and cultural environments sponsored by the media have taken over

many of the functions of institutionalised theology, such as the provision of moral and

spiritual guidance and a sense of community. We can conjecture, not unreasonably, that the

technological situation exacerbates the forces of detraditionalisation and the challenge to

theology.

If detraditionalisation and technology can be seen as detrimental to theology, Mark

Chaves (2003:5) has successfully argued that secularisation does not have to destroy religion

but instead it can use media to express itself. This is a claim explored later in this chapter. He

says that the notion of changed views is often associated with the decline of religion, but it

would be better viewed as "the declining scope of religious authority" (ibid, 13).[60] As I have

suggested above, challenging existing structures in order to replace them with alternative

beliefs and values is not something that should necessarily be viewed in a negative manner. It

has signalled emancipation and opportunities for new models to arise, such as those which

include influences from women and minority cultures (discussed further in chapter five).

Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 345) argue that detraditionalization can actually lead to

a universalization of religion. Once hierarchical institutions have been removed, divisions are

lifted and there is a move beyond pluralism to reveal elements held in common - such as

shared symbols. Theology needs dialogue with media and to avail itself of the opportunity to

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[60] The secularisation debate is complex and is not necessarily related to a decline in belief or church attendance
(See Robin Gill (2003), *The Empty Church Revisited*).

propagate its message. This parallels St Paul using the medium of writing to evangelise over 2000 years ago. Patrick Dixon (1997) comments that cyberspace can be viewed as a "God-given means of proclamation and explanation." If religion does not use this new technological medium, it risks becoming redundant in this and subsequent generations. Andre Mello (2006, 213) claims: "Religious groups that remain outside (the Internet Communication Revolution) will become ghettos, like some puritan communities in the 18th and 19th centuries, who tried to halt the message of time to preserve traditions…changes arising from computer technology, are inevitable."

Campbell (2012, 6) argues that far from technology disempowering, on the contrary, religious individuals and communities are "active, empowered users of new media who make distinctive choices about their relationship with technology in light of their faith, community history, and contemporary way of life." She continues that these individuals "have equated engaging with new media technologies as simply being a modern extension of traditional religious practices of prayer, textual study, and public presentation of one's faith" (Campbell, 2010, 45). In an interview with Rabbi Nechemia Coopersmith, Campbell shows how cyberspace was used as a vehicle to bring the Torah to the world. The Rabbi defends the Jewish race against any charge of Luddism and, instead, emphasises the Jews' willingness to embrace technology (ibid, 64). I believe his stance endorses a view that Buber would have approved and in this way I have initiated a dialogue between his theology and technology. Buber's relational theology is well-suited to being re-modelled for the media age, not least because it responds to the relationships and issues of a detraditionalised and technological world.

Individualism: the lack of collective forms of relationship

Late, or post, modernism is often seen as a negation of modernism but as many social theorists suggest, this needs qualification. It builds upon the structure laid down by modernism, but continues to push boundaries in terms of values and beliefs. Richard Appignanesi and Chris Grant (1995, 50) volunteer it is often seen as a movement that can be best described as "working without rules", especially in the realms of art and language. New ideas are allowed to flourish because traditional conventions are broken down and alternative paradigms are sought. Relevant to my argument is the view of one of the foremost proponents of late modernity; Jean-Francois Lyotard [1979] 2000. He holds that the postmodern condition is best defined as "the end of grand narratives"[61] and is essential to an understanding of the rise of individualism. Lyotard felt that grand narratives did not do justice to the paradigms that existed in society, something that reason and science can never fully explain: reality.

In late modernity an over-arching "truth" was no-longer a feasible option; the many competing language games[62] meant that truth was relative to the belief held. Late modernity is often seen as a rejecting of the scientific paradigm and being suspicious of reason; so faith, once again, can be seen as legitimised. James Smith (2006, 71) argues that what is at stake in postmodernism is "the relationship between faith and reason." He says that the way faith is re-legitimised in late modernity signals that this era, far from being a secular one, actually opens up space for new meta-narratives, because "all knowledge is grounded in narrative or myth" (ibid, 73). New, shared narratives can be a means of re-connection and escape from the

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[61] A grand narrative can be defined as an overarching paradigm which is accepted by society as a means of explaining reality, such as theology or science.

[62] The concept of language games was coined by Wittgenstein to emphasise how language should be more activity-orientated, as it performs a function. Within each language game are rules, which make the language used either meaningful or meaningless (Anat Biletzki and Anat Matar (2011)). In relation to truth, this means that instead of an over-arching meta-narrative, truth is relative to the game you played. Therefore theology no longer dominates in a realist sense, but there exists only anti-realist explanations of relative truth.

alienation from creation and the Divine. (This claim, the connective power of narrative, will

be explored in chapter seven).

The lack of over-arching frameworks has meant that individuals have sought new

means to express themselves. Anthony Giddens (1991, 33) observes that this process has also

led to more reflexivity, "the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a

reflexive process of connecting personal and social change." He continues, that there is

freedom to start to explore personal narratives of meaning, through breaking out of existing

frameworks and beginning new journeys of personal self-exploration in order to gain "a new

sense of identity" (ibid, 12). Lieven Boeve (2008) observes that in the technological era

"identity is no longer given but has to be constructed." There is a need to question what

influences, guides and conditions who you would like to become: "personal identity has

become more and more (structurally) reflexive"[63] (quoted by Graham Ward and Michael

Hoelzl 2008, 191-192). Likewise, Hoover (1988, 29) emphasises how electronic

communication creates a "transformation of consciousness"; a new space through which

individuals discover themselves and reflect. New media has the ability to make people re-

think notions of theology. Schofield Clark (2011, 181) supports this views and suggests that

media does not replace religion but is essential in "reconstituting religion's role within the

important ritual moments of life."

Technology enables individuals to bring together aspects of the sacred and secular[64],

viewing them not as two separate, disparate forms but as part of the everyday. The sacred can

be drawn down to inhabit the secular, and the latter can be used to propagate views about the

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[63] This is somewhat ironic in the fact that in the technological era time is taken to construct identities which reflect something of self and how one chooses to appear in relationships. However, time is not taken to reflect on the nature of these relationships and the actual processes of interconnection.

[64] The secular/religious debate is a complex one, namely because these terms have become fluid in the era of late modernity, with religion today often being viewed as an artificial construct (see footnote 1 p7). See Timothy Fitzgerald (2000) and Gordon Lynch (2007) for a greater exploration of the interplay between these two concepts.

former. Schofield Clark (2011, 139) thinks that religion can therefore utilise the media in order to make it more visible in everyday life and transfer symbols into a new context. It is important to recognise, that just as society is changing, so the needs of individuals are altering to take account of individualisation. The media is able to aid people to partake in shared rituals and experience, which may be removed from traditional theology, but still demonstrate the need for individuals to be involved in aspects of belief and ritual.

A more negative picture of individualism is portrayed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996). They argue that it forces the individual to be alone and to step out of the support provided by the norms and values that are familiar, exaggerating the alienation (ibid, 24-27). However, they accept that, due to the social conditions of our time, it is something that people cannot escape. They employ Sartre's phrase of "being condemned" to it, rather than it necessarily being a choice. They observe that this puts great demands on the individual. They have to adapt and re-organise their lives accordingly. Ideas about God, nature and the social system ebb away. The individual becomes ever more confused and at a loss (ibid, 32). They ponder how all these individual ideologies and freedoms can be regulated as a coherent whole, so that society can function. In response to this situation, Buber's theology can be seen to provide a solution. It answers their call for a re-invention of society that allows integration, with new, learned paradigms of meaning, uniting communities (ibid, 44-45). There is a need for reflection on how individual beliefs can be a means of re-uniting communities and form a basis for new ethical dialogues of the "Thou" variety to occur.

Heelas (1996, 4), not surprisingly, has concerns over individualism. When many new ideologies have arisen to take the place of traditional structures they "undermine the

authoritative or "sacred" properties of cultural meta-narratives."[65] Abundant supply has led to

an unrestrained, consumer culture and Heelas (1996, 4-5) laments the fact that life has

become a shopping basket of choice, because there is a pluralistic mêlée of new fads. Each

person "dissolves into whatever consumer delights are on offer" (ibid, 7). He remarks that

individuals are empowered to "turn to their own resources to decide what they value, to

organise their priorities and make sense of their lives" (ibid, 5). This has led to a lack of

cohesive ideas about truth, as he sees it, as truth has become "relative to what one takes to be

involved in satisfying one's requirements" (ibid). These are often not shared values. He

sounds a cautious note that this loss of traditionalization can actually lead to a loss of

morality and, as a consequence, a lack of ethical dimension to actions and relationships.

There are concerns when self-spirituality is disconnected from community values. The lack

of shared contexts and symbols means that disconnection quickly becomes apparent. In this

respect, Carrette and King (2005, 87) are concerned about how spirituality has become a

fragmented commodity and just another phenomenon competing in the online global

marketplace. Everyone tries to sell their wares in the global market of spirituality[66] and it

alters the nature of relationships. (This will be discussed further in chapter five).

Individualisation can also lead to the emergence of new and diverse forms of religious

expression and spirituality. Thomas Luckmann (1996, 74) observes that religion has become

more privatised, offering the examples of charismatic preachers and commercial enterprises,

such as astrology. There is a rise in forms of spirituality - of New Age movements and

occultism - because they allow for the "spiritual development of each individual" (ibid, 75).

There is no longer the requirement to belong to an organised institution, or to subscribe to

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[65] The importance of narratives and traditions for uniting a community with learned symbols and meanings is discussed in chapter seven, where I advocate that they provide a shared means of overcoming the commodification of cyberspace by re-learning and re-engaging with new symbology.
[66] See Wade Clark Roof (1999), *Spiritual Marketplace. Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion,* for an in depth discussion of the spiritual culture that permeated modernity and late modernity.

any dogma. Grace Davie (1994, xiii) has coined the term "believing without belonging", to explain how this private and removed stance has led to alienation, because of a loss of collective forms of relationship. There is a lack of commitment and investment in relationships. Berger ([1967] 1990, 138) observes that by focusing more on this world, and by rejecting notions of the transcendent, religion has been forced into a "market situation"; due, in part, to the pluralistic culture that abounds in society.

In their ethnographic study of churches and communities in Kendal, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) offer a more positive perspective on spirituality in regards to relationships. They discuss examples of spirituality to demonstrate how it allows more freedom and focus on the individual needs, as opposed to those imposed by an institution: "It is a turn away from life lived in terms of external or "objective" roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences" (ibid, 2). They argue that spirituality allows humans to validate the experiences and emotions that they have, without seeking acceptance from a higher authority. The individual is therefore empowered to become their own authority (ibid, 4). Heelas and Woodhead observe that spirituality becomes more appealing than religion, as the former is without the baggage of the latter and does not require belief in specific dogma (ibid, 90).

"The subjectivization thesis" is their way to explain the phenomenon whereby individuals have left mainstream churches, where room for the individual development is not always present (ibid, 78-79). They observe that individuals chose not to believe in one truth but "what works by way of truth of one's own experience" (ibid, 61). They document how people are draw towards secular activities that are seen to be life-affirming, and cater for the whole person as seen in the Kendal encounter with homeopathy and Reiki. Heelas and Woodhead (ibid, 87 & 99) say that it is in these and similar activities that participants often feel cared for. This spiritual dimension is "where the individual realizes his or her true nature

in relation with the 'whole'". From a relational perspective, they conclude that spirituality does not involve development of the individual but is a holistic process, "involving self-in-relation, rather than a self-in-isolation" (ibid, 11). They successfully challenge the notion that separation from religious institutions means that individuals do not desire religion or spirituality, or that they are content to pursue their own path in isolation. There is a need to build on these observations to inform relationships within technology.

Individualism has become the desired position but not total isolation; relationships are still needed to prevent total isolation. Individualisation is therefore, perhaps, not as far removed from tradition and community as first assumed. Heelas (1999, 10) argues that many of the activities and freedoms that people now exercise fall into some kind of pattern or routine: "Consumer activities show distinct signs of being profoundly routinized and regulated." Despite the desire to escape over-arching frameworks, new structures impose themselves as individuals interact with new ventures. Individuals are searching for what has been lost through detraditionalisation but in a way that they can control and is not restricted. They have a need to belong, but in a community that they choose, not one that is imposed on them. This is emphasised by Luke (1996, 116), who says that it is impossible to truly break out of traditions. When there is a reaction against one tradition, the beliefs merely move and establish another framework made up of the people's belief who ascribe to that institution, be it consumerism, or technology, new religions or theology. Heelas therefore makes a compelling case for the need for new communities to establish themselves in the technological era.

There is a continual need for communities of meaning, to reinforce and validate individual paradigms. Paul Morris (1996, 225) highlights Bauman's (1991, 246) claims that late modernity, far from being antithetical to communities, is intent on embracing them. He states that post-modernity is also the 'age of community': "of the lust for community, the

search for community, the invention of community." The technological era facilitates new notions of community, which theology needs to engage and re-imagine. Morris argues that we need "differential understanding of "community"" as well as "community beyond tradition", which, he advocates, leads us back to traditional community (ibid, 225-226). This is because, despite the rejection of grand narratives, new paradigms of meaning are essential to cementing identity. This is a compelling reason for a new framework of theology to re-assert itself in late modernity, one which places importance on dialogue.

New cyber communities can therefore provide opportunities for individual exploration coupled with re-connection in relationships. Smith (2006, 78) has observed from his research on the religious habits of Gen X that this is what is required in late modernity: "Gen X seekers: they are looking for elements of transcendence and challenge that MTV[67] could never give them." What is required is a re-modelling of identity in the meaningful context of a community, where one is able to re-learn the meaning of genuine togetherness. Individuals can also learn to relate to the Divine, through relationships in communities of trust. Buber stated that the Divine is reflected in genuine "Thou" relationships and community facilitates such moments. They may be fleeting, they may almost be imaginary, but they make a mark on the tabula rasa[68] in our heads and hearts that will sustain us as individuals searching for transcendence in the everyday.

Globalisation: the loss of the boundary of self

As a context for Buber's renewed importance, the final aspect I wish to address in this chapter is concerned with globalisation, self and space. One of the defining features of late modernity is the way in which boundaries have become more fluid, and this, coupled with

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[67] MTV was launched in 1997 and is a general music and entertainment channel.
[68] This is usually translated as 'blank slate' and was coined by John Locke in *An essay concerning Human Understanding* ([1690] 1997). In relation to cyberspace, due to the fact that humans can create then it can be seen to provide a new start, free from the errors and barriers in offline life.

globalisation has meant that there are new possibilities for connectivity. Space is often a core feature of globalisation. Scholte ([2000] 2005, 60-62) points out that "the term globalist resonates of spatiality" and is now a part of our contemporary, everyday life. He continues that this has been enabled by a new technological era, where boundaries of space have become more fluid and more connections have been opened between individuals. "Globalisation entails a reconfiguration of social geography with increased trans planetary connections between people" (ibid, 16). Globalisation can be a cause both of alienation from the self, and by extension the body[69] but also a means of connection of the self to community.

The interconnected nature of cyberspace has meant that, in essence, communication across national and international networks is instantaneous. This facilitates a means to break down existing barriers between nations and institutions. However, the erosion of boundaries has also meant the loss of individual, personal space. This has resulted in a reaction, facilitated by the rise of individualism, of the erection of personal barriers, demarcating public/private space. In cyberspace individuals have used various devices, such as privacy settings on social networking sites, in order to control the connections that they have with others. This has allowed boundaries to be re-established. Individuals seek to take control of who they communicate with and when they want to engage. From a negative perspective, this has led to increased alienation by controlling access and excluding some from relationships. This is dangerously close to Buber's notion of "It" transactions. After all, settings can be easily changed and manipulated to hurt and exclude. In order to regain a more ethical dimension to relationships, a balance needs to be drawn. There has to be the opportunity to develop the self, within one's own boundaries and protection, but also a need to be open to interconnection and positive genuine dialogue.

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[69] The body and boundaries will be discussed further in chapter two and five in relation to identity, communication and feminism.

Albanese (1981) in her study of American religions has analysed the use of boundaries in religion. These can be divided in two ways; first, ordinary, which is living within boundaries, and is associated with the norms of everyday life. Here are found values and symbols that allow people to "make sense of the everyday world." Second, there is the extraordinary, which actually involves transcending boundaries, in order to reach some higher, often supernatural realm. Although apparently divorced by definition, Albanese notes how, in reality, the boundaries often merged as normal, everyday occurrences became a form of devotion to the god(s). She demonstrates how individuals transcend boundaries to search for meaning and identity, and to begin to feel members of communities, identifying with others in new paradigms (ibid, 5). Identity is developed through the sharing and letting down of personal boundaries, to allow others into your personal space. This allows for development of mutuality between people, providing potential for more "Thou" moments.

Globalisation can also damage conventional communication. In cyberspace communication can be seamless, with symbols often used to overcome language barriers. In order to think new notions of theology, there is benefit in also re-thinking language of connection, particularly in relation to the Divine. There is the need for symbols which emphasise aspects of the relational nature of the Divine, such as those found in the Trinity[70], in feminist and liberation models[71], as well as the relational love displayed in the Incarnation. Erik Borgman takes the point further when he argues that there needs to be a "transformation or metamorphosis of God" (quoted in Boeve, 2008, 197). He argues that we need to re-interpret the idea of religion, so that "the holy is revealed in a new manner" and there is a

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[70] This relational nature of the Trinity is detailed by McFadyen (1990) in his book *The Call to Personhood* and will be discussed further in chapter seven.
[71] Liberation theology is original said to have been started by Gustavo Gutierrez (b. 1928). It is a concept based upon freedom and justice for the oppressed and has been taken up and expounded by feminists, such as Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (2009) in her book, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins.*

new framework for relating to the Divine. He concludes that what are needed are new insights into the idea of God for the current age. This can allow a re-connection with the notion of a Divine, who is able to emerge in the midst of "Thou" relationships.

Global boundaries have appeared to become more fluid as detraditionalisation has created more inclusive and universal connections. Theology is no longer something set apart and isolated from everyday society, but, instead, part of its very fabric. Gordon Lynch (2007, 137) contends that the concept of sacred is now "encountered in and through culture, not in privatized, mystical space that is separate from it." The sacred and the secular are merging as the concept of the "after-life" diminishes. As mortality rates have improved Bauman (1999, 62) says that humans become more self-sufficient, the focus is not drawn away from the world, but remains very much in it. Theology, in particular Christianity, seems to no longer be able to propagate the idea that people's misfortunes will be redressed. According to Michel Foucault (1999, 59), the churches have lost their power to "get individuals to work at their own "mortification" in this world". The religious realm model has been brought down to earth, to an immediate plain of existence, without the need for a promised paradise.

Knott (2005, 26) concludes that boundaries are no longer fixed, rigid, impermeable things. The idea of the sacred is no longer on one side of the line, but must be acknowledged to have to bleed through to, and envelop, the secular. Knott (ibid, 226) refers to Paul Hegarty (2003, 107), who points out that: "the line has always been crossed...[t]transgression is the movement that is continually in operation." In the same way, global communication transcends the fixed parameters of locality. Notably, permeable boundaries are of particular importance to Buber, who stresses the Divine ability to be drawn down into "Thou" relationships. Through a dissolving of boundaries the individual can feel more included.

What is more, the space or epistemic distance[72] between humans and the Divine becomes more permeable. In turn, we become part of new interconnected relationships and communities on earth.

Overcoming the alienation challenge:

The technological revolution exacerbates the forces of detraditionalisation, individualisation and globalisation and challenges theology. However, it also offers opportunities for re-thinking connection and relationships. Buber's thinking is relevant in this new era because he provides us with the tools to overcome the alienation and instead replaces it with an opportunity: the chance to re-think and reflect upon the interconnectivity of relationships in late modernity. Through an examination of the social movements that have led to a reconfiguration of traditional theology, I have sought to provide a context and justification as to why technology is so compelling a force to help individuals re-engage in relationships with self, creation, communities, society and the Divine.

In this new era it is cyberspace that provides a new space for reflectivity about relationships, a space where individuals are able to find interconnected freedom and self-expression. There is, for example, the option to develop alternative forms of spirituality and religious expression, to join online communities with those who hold similar beliefs and values. Boundaries are seen to be fluid and transcended through cyberspace. The positive aspects of this must be acknowledged. Religion is not something separate from life but found within its very midst.[73] I have made a case for technology as a positive influence for

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[72] This is a term, originally referred to in Irenaeus' (early 2nd century – c. C.E. 202) theodicies and later developed by John Hick (20 January 1922 – 9 February 2012). It describes the notion that in order for humans to grow in God's likeness and to exercise their free will, there needed to be a distance between God and humans. This emphasises God's transcendent nature and may have given rise to the belief that God was separate from humans and was perhaps leaving them to their own devices, an idea put forward by deists.

[73] The fluidity of the boundary between the sacred and the secular has always been apparent in many religions such as Hinduism and Judaism where there is no differentiation between religion and culture; religion permeates all aspects of life. However, new technologies have caused many boundaries to become more fluid in areas such

interconnectivity, community and theology. I have also acknowledged its negative potential and the discussion will continue, in greater depth, in subsequent chapters. Scholars such as Heelas, Woodhead and Hoover have demonstrated that there is a need for changing perspectives on religion and the evidence appears compelling that technology can play a major role.

In the symbiosis between theology and media in today's world one can help facilitate change in the other. Brasher (2001, 6) observes that online religion can "make a unique contribution to global fellowship. It uses media to disclose its message and represent what, otherwise, is not accessible." In the same way, Hjarvard (2011, 132) correctly observes that the church needs to adjust to the demands of the media in order to communicate with the external world and to strengthen relationships and communities. By harnessing new technologies, theology has the opportunity to explore the new models of relationality offered in cyberspace, inherent within the new networks that the medium has enabled. Technology is able to provide interconnectivity and cohesion, concepts which have been challenged by alienation. Theology is not separate from everyday life but something which can be embraced through secular technologies. As Stefan Gelfren (2012, 238) comments: "Digital culture can be seen as a way for the church to re-invent its role and to overcome the often-recognised dilemma with established institutions and inherited frozen traditions." Through overcoming alienation and building up communities, the Divine will become part of creation, not estranged from it. This is what Buber's theology inspires – a space for humans to re-make their relationships with each other. It is the aim of this thesis to show that in the striving for new ethical dimensions to relationships, the fissure between humans, creation and the Divine can start to repair itself through the world of cyberspace and new forms of connection.

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as aesthetics, philosophy, science (See Ward (2008) *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics* for an examination into the way in which generic religion has permeated Western culture through mediums such as technology).

Chapter 2: Theology, Cyberspace and the Paradox of Relationships

The digital era has transformed how people live their lives and relate to one another and to the world around them (John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, 2008, 3).

Using Buber's dialectic, I want to uncover the positive potential cyberspace offers. In cyberspace we will be able to re-think relationality in all spheres of creation, including the transcendent. This essentially means that theology is being offered the potential to revalidate itself in the fragmented late modern world. Cyberspace will allow us to re-think the notion of community and the means by which we relate to one another. It is to this that theology must respond or it will lose its vitality in the mêlée of competing late-modern enterprises.

The existing literature on theology and cyberspace documents the communication and activities that are taking place within the new medium. Although work has been completed on online identity ((Kevin Hetherington, 1998), relationships (Sherry Turkle, 2010) and communities (Heidi Campbell, 2005; 2010; 2012)), no specific new relational theological models have been proposed. There appears to be a lacuna in the literature when it comes to marrying the connectivity of cyberspace with the possibilities for theological re-connection. [74] Lorne Dawson and Jennifer Hennebry (2003, 193-194) have drawn attention to cyberspace supporting and nurturing the "rise of a new conceptual framework and language for religious experience suited to the changed environmental conditions of postmodern society." As I have indicated, we need to examine the way the medium is changing the experience of theology, and the impact this is having on personal identity and relationships. Buber's three spheres of relationality provide us with a new framework for such an examination ([1923] 2004:13).

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[74] An exception to this is Dwight Friesen's (2009, 29) *Thy Kingdom Connected*, which is written "to serve as a practical relational hermeneutic." Friesen offers us insights into the connectivity that exists within relationships in all spheres of life, mimicking natural ecosystems and also the Triune God.

A brief history of the dialogue between theology and cyberspace, as well as the online-offline dynamic, will help us further understand the predicament. It will give a context for assessing the impact of the medium on individuals and their relationships. I will explore four themes central to theology and cyberspace, starting with the concrete and moving towards the relational, to show the key direction this study will take and open up new discussions in this area. The four areas are: first Religious and Theological Information, Authority and Authenticity; second, Ritual; third, the Body and Identity; and fourth, Relationships and Communities. They will allow us to examine the secondary literature and at the same time highlight some of the tensions and problems of the relational dynamic of cyberspace. I will engage each of these themes in three ways: first, to show the direction of study to date; second, to demonstrate how cyberspace provides a means of interconnectivity between humanity, creation and the Divine; and last, I will draw out the elements that raise issues about the relational dynamic.

A History of the Internet and Cyberspace

The Internet initially began as an attempt by the US defence department to fund an agency (ARPA[75]) that would be able to maintain communications in time of war. The first social interactions through a networking site were a series of memos by J.C.R. Licklider of MIT University in August 1962. In 1969 Lawrence Robert, a colleague of Licklider from DARPA[76], set out his idea for a network named APARNET, and by the end of 1969 APARNET was made up of 4 host computers[77]. This network was used by research institutions to communicate ideas via email in the 1970s; gradually communication became more and more prolific. The network continued to diversify and was used by a number of

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[75] The Advanced Research Projects' Agency.

[76] The Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) was the new name for ARPA, after it was changed in 1972. It is an agency of the United States Department of Defence, which is responsible for the development of new technologies for use by the military.

[77] See Barry M. Leiner, Vinton G. Cerf, David D. Clark, Robert E. Kahn, Leonard Kleinrock, Daniel C. Lynch, Jon Postel, Larry G. Roberts, and , Stephen Wolff, *A Brief history of the Internet (2012)*.

institutions as Usenet groups[78] began to form. Campbell (2005, 2-5) informs us that the first

religious networks were formed in 1983 and 1984[79]. Throughout the 1980s Internet use

continued to become more prevalent so that "by 1985, (the) Internet was already well

established as a technology supporting a broad community of researchers and developers, and

was beginning to be used by other communities for daily computer communications."[80]

Between the periods 1990-2000 growing interest in the possibilities of the Internet

and cyberspace was becoming apparent. In December 1990 the first webpage was set up at

info.cern.ch.[81] For research purposes institutions were uploading their materials online, to

permit access by a global audience. General communication via email was becoming more

prevalent, with individuals believing that they had a new private, safe space from which to

communicate with others. This led inexorably to personal networking. In 1994 there was the

formation of *Theglobe.com,* and companies such as *Geocities.com*, followed the year after by

Tripod.com[82] seeking to capitalise on the demands of the new techno-savvy generation by

providing tools to build personal websites and spaces. Hoover (2006, 48) relates that this

ability to communicate with a large amount of people was also utilised by religious groups,

who built up websites in order to interface with the new medium and its users.

In the next decade (2000-2010), individuals began to start to actualise the Internet's

true potential. Broadband[83] became main-stream in Western societies and the possibilities of

global, instantaneous connection seemed infinite. In terms of cyber-worlds, the foundation of

Second Life in 2003 was met with enthusiasm. It offered the possibility of escape to another,

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[78] A Usenet is a set of forums when individuals can post comments on a particular topic.

[79] Net.religion was "the first networked forum for discussions on the religious, ethical, and moral implications of human actions" (Matthew Ciolek (2004).

[80] Barry M. Leiner, Vinton G. Cerf, David D. Clark, Robert E. Kahn, Leonard Kleinrock, Daniel C. Lynch, Jon Postel, Larry G. Roberts, Stephen Wolff, *A Brief history of the Internet.* http://www.internetsociety.org/internet/what-internet/history-internet/brief-history-internet#Leiner (accessed 31/12/13).

[81] Ibid.

[82] These three were some of the first social networking sites.

[83] Broadband refers to high-speed data transmission in which a single cable can carry a large amount of data at once.

self-created world, away from the pressures of offline life. Creating an apparent Utopia was instantly appealing. It was also a means to explore new forms of identity and to become a member of new cyber-communities, not fixed by locality. Complex social networking sites were also rapidly developing. In 2004 'Facebook', one of the most popular of these social spaces was launched. This gave individuals ownership of their private space, whilst also being joined to a vast network. By the end of 2010, there were not many facets or communities that did not have a web presence in cyberspace.

The word cyberspace[84] was initially coined by William Gibson in his short story series *Burning Chrome* [1982] 1995 and further popularised in his cyber-punk novel *Neuromancer* ([1984] 1995).[85] Gibson described it as a "consensual hallucination." It signified that everyone was sharing the same dream-like experience, and denotes overtones of a place to escape from reality. Michael Benedikt (1992, 1-3) draws attention to how it can be viewed as "a new universe" through to "the realm of pure information." From a religious perspective Anna Karaflogka (2003, 199) describes it as "a sacred space and a spiritual space" because it can be used to engage in religious practices. It has also been described as akin to heaven[86], a place with no limitations, where you will have 'eternal' life and can create a perfect abode to dwell in, designed by the imagination. Cyberspace can also be seen as a reflective space to engage with (see Campbell, 2005) and one in which to construct alternative aspects of self, free from the rigidities imposed by conventional societies. This utopian ideal raises questions about whether such a space is a place for genuine relationships to occur, which leads us into considering questions of authenticity. This technological displacement of relationships challenges the sense of what counts as valid relations and it is to this question that I will now turn.

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[84] See page 9, footnote 7, for details concerning the relationships between cyberspace and the Internet.
[85] *Neuromancer* is often seen as a seminal work in the cyber-punk genre.
[86] See Margaret Wertheim (1999), *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace. A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*, for a discussion about the way in which cyberspace can be seen to mirror heavenly spaces.

Religious and Theological Information, Authority and Authenticity in online relationships

A persistent theme to emerge from the secondary literature on cyberspace is the question of authority and religious and theological information. This has been explored by Linderman and Lovheim (2003) and the Pew Internet and American Life Project.[87] Theology has used various mediums in order to propagate its message "to the whole (of) creation[88]". With cyberspace there is the opportunity to reach a global audience, both through "religion online" a means of displaying information, and "online religion" a means of participating in services and rituals. Buber believed in being "open to others" and religion online offers an open door to all comers. Cross the threshold and movement towards "I-Thou" has begun, however tentatively. A vexed question, of course, is that of authority. A timorous explorer-after-truth needs their journey to be validated and the issues of authenticity cannot be side-stepped.

Religions and theology are not blind to the global appeal of cyberspace. They were among the first to establish web-presence, both to relay information and as a means to communicate with others. Four types of web-site can be identified. First, there are official sites, set up by traditionally organised religions, such as the Vatican official site, the Holy See[89]; where libraries, the latest stories affecting the Catholic Church, information about the liturgical year, places to donate, are displayed. These sites are endorsed by church leaders. In 1990 Pope John Paul II commented: "It was for God's faithful people to make creative use of the new discoveries and technologies for the benefit of humanity and the fulfilment of God's

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[87] The Pew Internet and American life project (http://www.pewinternet.org/) was initially set up to investigate to facets of Internet use: 1) Who was using the Internet 2) How this use was affecting lifestyles. The first report was published in July 2000 but it has since expanded to look at various aspects of Internet use, such as broadband and gaming.

[88] This commandment from Jesus is found in Mark 16:15 and is particular apt for my thesis, as it does not state to preach to all people, but in fact to all of creation, demonstrating the interconnectivity humans have to the Whole of creation.

[89] http://www.vatican.va/phome_en.htm, (accessed 21/3/09).

plan for the world." Secondly, there are websites devised by newer religious movements, such as the website for Scientology[90]. Here is the information you might expect - the aims of the founder, information about churches and how to get involved.

In contrast to religions that have an offline presence, there is a third type of religious website, based purely in cyberspace. The "Church of the Blind Chihuahua"[91], named after an old dog with cataracts, promotes the idea of "enlarging religion as a source of inspiration not conflict." Finally, there are those which have arisen from secular interests, which are not typically connected to the church or religion. An example is the church of Jediism[92], founded in 2008. Here you can learn about "The Force" and get involved in activities that bring individuals together for common cause. In December 2010, on their homepage, there was an appeal to raise money for victims of the Pakistan floods[93]. Although not traditionally religious, the sites embrace concern for others, the environment and an enlightened stewardship, caring for God's creation.

Websites offer a plethora of information on religious activities and their associated communities. Particularly appealing to followers throughout the world is that sites ostensibly allow direct contact with what is happening at a religion's head-quarters, such as at the Vatican City, for Roman Catholics. This offers solidarity to diasporic religious communities. Hindus in the United Kingdom, for example, are able to find out what is happening in their homeland of India, at times such as the Kumbh Mela.[94] They allow vicarious participation at times of importance, such as the election of a new Pope or the Hajj for those who cannot

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[90] http://www.scientology.org.uk/ (accessed 2/21/09).
[91] http://www.dogchurch.org/index.shtml (accessed 3/21/09).
[92] Jediism officially became a religion after the 2001 census. It has no one founder or central doctrine, although it focuses around the idea of "the Force" as depicted in the Star Wars films.
http://www.churchofjediism.org.uk/home.html (accessed 21/3/09).
[93] These floods happened in August 2010 in the southern Punjab region due to an excess of rain during this period. Over one million people were affected by this disaster. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-23829689 (accessed 12/5/12).
[94] The Kumbh Mela is a sacred pilgrimage every three years, which takes place in different parts of India.

attend[95]. Individuals can be emboldened by the comments and information given by members united on these sites by common cause. Dialogue, however, can become propaganda. The facts about events at Waco[96], when the Branch Davidians[97], led by David Koresh[98] battled with federal authorities were altered and promulgated by the Branch Davidians, in the hope of manipulating the public's perception of what occurred (Karaflogka, 2003, 184). Sites that are self-regulating have credibility issues. Questions about authority can arise in the absence of traditional establishment-credentials.

In these cases there is an issue with authentic religious information online. Rodney Stark (1996, 204) explains that the medium could be used to find out more information about other religions and not to be loyal to any one because "people will seek to diversify." Christopher Hellend (2004, 30) comments that "in many ways these web sites do pose a significant challenge to official religious traditions simply by the very fact that they exist – firmly established and thriving in cyberspace." There is the almost superstitious fear that this will lead to opportunities to express spirituality in non-orthodox ways. This is one of the conclusions of the Pew report: "Higher percentages of Internet users report online activities related to personal spirituality and religiosity than activities more related to involvement in traditional religious functions of organizations" (Hoover, Clark, Rainie, 2004). The concern about removing oneself from traditional religious institutions is whether the alternatives will be offering the same moral framework to govern ethical relationships. Perhaps there will be

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[95] In Islam attendance on the Hajj is one of the five pillars and is therefore seen as compulsory for all Muslims. However, exceptions are made if one cannot afford to travel to Saudi Arabia. In cases such as this, an individual or community may sponsor someone to go and would therefore be interested to vicariously share in their experience of the pilgrimage.

[96] February 28th- April 19th 1993 in Waco, Texas.

[97] The Branch Davidians is a sect that split away from the Seventh-Day Adventist church. Their leader was David Koresh and under him it became a secretive and exclusive cult. Many of their members died during a standoff with federal authorities in Waco. There are many of the original group who survive today and they still have a presence on the Internet, albeit it mostly to address rumours surrounding what occurred at Waco. http://www.religioustolerance.org/dc_branc.htm (accessed 23/4/10).

[98] David Koresh was the leader of the Branch Davidians from 1990-1993 in Waco, Texas, and thought he was "an angel and an agent of God". http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/431311.stm (accessed 5/1/14).

no strong doctrine or guidelines to reinforce something as principled as the search for the "Thou" in Buber's dialectic.

Dawson and Hennebry (2004, 167ff) draw attention to concerns about self-appointed leaders in religious cyberspace. Individualism has provoked a move away from institutionally-sanctioned doctrines, and unregulated ideologies are emerging. Tim Jordan (1999, 79) comments, "offline hierarchies are subverted by cyberspace but are also reconstituted in cyberspace…new and different hierarchies emerge." There are numerous examples. Jeff Zaleski (1997, 249) describes the case of the Heaven's Gate cult suicide in 1997.[99] This "highlights the Internet's ability to harbor and foster spiritual communities of every kind, including the most dangerous" and the fact remains that there can be no regulation. As Chidester (2005, 200) indicates, there is no authentic discernment and every voice could be seen to carry similar authority, "anything you believe is the doctrine of this church." These are legitimate concerns. The ability to build up trust in relationships online can be seen to be diminished by these examples as self-appointed leaders make unnecessary demands of their followers, cynically exploiting, what Buber called, the "It" dimension.

Online participation, however, can be used to change and enrich individuals' lives and transform receptivity to offline phenomena. Linderman and Lovheim (2003, 235) say that, through computer-mediated interaction, participants in their study mentioned they had "encountered new types of information, explored new issues and thereby expanded their knowledge in matters of religion and spirituality." This exposed them to different ways of "doing" religion but also to a wider range of communities. Ken Bedell (2000) observes that information received online can give courage to follow it up in an offline setting, be it at a

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[99] Heaven's gate was a cult started in the 1970s in San Diego, California by a group of web-designers, who used the Internet to recruit others. In 1997, 39 members of its group committed suicide, after believing that behind the comet Hale-Bop there was a spaceship that would take them from this earth, and that they no longer had need of their earthly bodies (ABC News March 26th 1997).

church, synagogue or alternative community. "[T]he reception of information online may empower persons to take some action in their religious lives offline" (quoted in Glenn Young, 2004, 103). The interaction between offline and online was investigated by the Pew report of 2004[100]. Close attention has been paid to this report. Traditionalists were concerned as to adverse effects that could have arisen, due to the competing nature of online religions. These concerns are two-fold: firstly, that online religion could lead to a decrease in attendance at traditional places of worship and secondly, that individuals would not remain faithful to their traditional places of worship.

The report has shown that these fears are largely unfounded. Most of the online faithful were more interested in "augmenting their traditional faith practices and experiences by personally expressing their own faith and spirituality, as opposed to seeking something new or different in the online environment" (Hoover, Clark, Rainie, 2004). The faithful want to use cyberspace to add a new dimension to their existing beliefs, not to totally supplant them. "Faith-related activity online is a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, offline religious life" (ibid). The offline connection is important to most religions and theologies, as Zaleski (2009, 125) discovered in his interview with Nick Ragan, editor of Christian Computing. Ragan stressed the importance of offline worship: "Internet ministries are never meant to be a replacement for real church. It is impossible for anyone to develop a personal relationship with God without being around His people, His church." This is a robustly partisan view and, I suggest, open to more nuance – but within the context of the report, it was what traditionalists wanted to hear.

These findings of the Pew report are still largely valid. Generally, individuals who already attend religious places of worship offline are likely to use cyberspace to supplement

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[100] The research for the Pew Report was conducted in order to investigate the effect of Internet on religious practices and beliefs and the extent to which the religion on the Internet acted as a supplement or substitute to offline religion.

the information they have, or to reach communities of the same faith in the global domain.

Although it can still be argued that for traditionalists of organised religion, cyberspace continues to act as a supplement for offline life, some of the findings of the report can be disputed. This is largely because the initial data was collected over 10 years ago. With congregational numbers, especially in Christianity, continuing to decline, according to *Religious Trends*,[101] coupled with increased access to cyberspace,[102] some individuals are seeking online religions as substitutes for traditional services in churches. This may be purely because many are seeking to move more of their life and activities online. First, there was banking, then music, the office and so on; so too they seek to access the framework of their identity and spirituality online. Cyberspace clearly facilitates such trends and also catalyses new opportunities for religious and spiritual activities, which may be very different from already existing religions offline.

There are other concerns that arise. Brasher (2001, 49) states that because cyber religions can be accessed at all times, this leads to a demarcation of sacred space: "Online religion mimics the restless pace of e-commerce. It, too, is open "twenty-four seven." She continues that the sheer volume of information provided by some sites can be negative, it is "an oversaturated information place, cyberspace adapts best to specialized, niche knowledge distinctly at odds with the integrated wisdom that religion promotes" (ibid, 48). The space is not providing opportunities for reflection and for spiritual development of the self, she suggests. As I indicated earlier, Buber saw that exchange of information is often characterised by the "It" mode. The relationships are often not mutual, nor characterised by a sense of deep engagement. Aversion to the mediatisation of religion and theology is as valid

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[101]Cited in the Times online, May 8th 2008. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article3890080.ece. (accessed 1/27/11). On this issue see Robin Gill (2003) *The Empty Church Re-visited* for a further discussion on the factors and myths behind apparent declining church attendance.

[102] This is documented in the Oxford Internet survey 2009 William Dutton, Ellen Helsper, Monica Gerber. http://microsites.oii.ox.ac.uk/ (accessed 4/12/11).

as is the enthusiasm we have encountered earlier. What cannot be ignored is the potential for a new and valid religiosity to grow in cyberspace.

Mindful of the capitalist control of cyberspace and the dangers of what Buber saw as "It" relationships, we can still acknowledge that technology has also opened up opportunities for spiritual and religious life. Here is an arena for a new dialogue in cyberspace, echoing Carrette's (2005, 73) call for a renewal of scholarly interest in religion. The potential for new paradigms of theology to arise must surely give additional spur to that renaissance. In recent years the 24/7 media has choreographed global emotion, bringing together communities in times of natural disaster and fostering what Dayan and Katz (1992) (2006, 244) have termed "civil religion." The media allows individuals to feel united with others globally. A theological application of such power can provide a more connected and reflective understanding of relationships.

In such a global arena there is a need to consider what might constitute an authentic religion or theology. Dawson comments (2005, 26) that "we have no means of differentiating authentic from inauthentic experiences, religious or otherwise." In the age of late modernity truth becomes relative and discerning what is "real" or "authentic" may no longer be possible, or indeed necessary. Beaudoin (1998, 148) highlights this when he remarks: "All we have are religious simulations instead of real religiousness." However, unlike Baudrillard ([1981] 1994), he concludes that these so-called simulations do not have to be viewed negatively. They are important as they can help us to see reality in a different way. "They can give us new critical lenses" (Beaudoin, 1998, 148), reinforcing the need for a reflective attitude. My claim is that the medium allows us the possibility to reflect and consider how to make, what Buber called, "Thou" relationships within the new cyber-space.

This returns us to the problem of authenticity, an issue cleverly addressed by Chidester (2005, ix) in his book *Authentic Fakes*. He has overcome the problem of cyber religions being considered "fake" by traditional criteria by suggesting that the emphasis could be on "negotiating what it means to be a human person in a human place." He argues that there are religions in cyberspace, which, to many, would not have any real credibility as they lack doctrines, any notion of the transcendent, and are too relativist. However, they can be considered "authentic fakes" because they are doing real religious work. Here we see how cyber communities can be bound together using new beliefs and structures and new forms of relationship. Only through new relationships and spiritual engagement can one can start to become aware of the interconnectivity that exists between all beings and the importance of global community.

Part of the challenge of authentic forms of theology in cyberspace can be seen in particular problems for the concept of the Divine. A repeated question is whether a spiritual being's presence would be able to exist within the medium. Various solutions have been proffered, ranging from the Divine being found within cyberspace, to cyberspace being an analogy for the Divine presence. Joshua Hammerman (2000) believes that cyberspace could be seen to contain God or a part of the Divine. The traditional omnipresent nature of God would allow for this: "God is in the machine too…God is wherever people let God in."[103] In his interviews with religious individuals, Zaleski, in his book *The Soul of Cyberspace (1997)* has investigated how the Divine can manifest in numerous forms. He interviews Stacy, the founder of a site called Echo, who believes that Prana goes with her, and can transcend into cyberspace (ibid, 254).

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[103] This can be seen to corresponds with the biblical teaching that God's presence will be felt when a community is present "when two or three are gathered in my name, I will be with you" (Matthew 18:20).

Many parallels are drawn between God and cyberspace. Brenda Brasher (2001, 186) points out, that, like cyberspace, God is always there, attentive and ready. In Zaleski's (1997, 64-67) interview with Sheikh Kabbani, the Sufi describes the Internet as "energy". Spirituality is therefore always present, and can help individuals to reflect on the Divine. Pat Henderson (2002), who is minister in the First Church of Cyberspace[104] thinks that the Internet can be a metaphor for God, and is a new way of looking at the Infinite . Cobb (1998, 97) continues this theme when she suggests that the space itself can be divine. She draws on ideas from Teilhard de Chardin's concept of an Omega point[105], where science and religion can coincide and humans can progress spiritually. (This idea will be expanded in chapter five). Cyberspace can be seen to provide opportunities for new interpretations and concepts of the Divine; the reflective nature of the medium means that more accessible theological models can be constructed in late modernity by utilising the new technology. Interaction within the medium, coupled with detraditionalisation and individualisation has changed the means of practising religion and theology; text and language have become paramount. Cyberspace has provided a medium for new relationships and communities and therefore a new means of communicating.

These discussions highlight the ongoing relationship between sacred and profane and whether such divisions are redundant in late modernity. Some in the field of social cultural theory, such as Gordon Lynch (2007, 136), have unravelled the wider implications of sacred and profane. He suggests that the distinction fails to realise "the role of the mundane in the construction of the sacred." The emphasis is on the ability of the space itself to facilitate different experiences. This can be through individual spirituality, or through perceived contact with some higher force or being, or through the interaction of the virtual community in the global space. Campbell (2005 (2):30) discusses how the reflective nature of the

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[104] http://www.godweb.org/sanct.html (accessed 13/11/12).
[105] This will be discussed further in chapter seven.

medium allows more opportunities for personal engagement and entering communities in cyberspace, which, in turn, can become sacred places through engendering the "Thou" dimension. "Community is a manifestation of God in the world, a picture on earth of a divine relationship." Buber describes how it is the dynamic in relationships that invokes the presence of God, through the connections that become apparent in the "Thou" mode (which will be discussed in chapter three). Cyberspace can take on a sacred presence of its own.

Ritual and Relationships

If questions of authenticity emerge in relation to the Divine, they are also manifest in questions of online ritual and it is this issue I now wish to explore. What opportunities does cyberspace present for interaction and participation in existing and new rituals? The medium facilitates possibilities for exploration of spirituality. It provides a new space for forming fresh symbols and narratives capable of binding global communities through shared paradigms of meaning. Although Buber is seen to reject blind adherence to religious rituals, as detrimental to true religiosity, he also acknowledged their significance in bringing communities together, reinforced by shared symbols and meanings. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 195) comments that ritual formed part of the unmediated knowing in Buber's dialogical relationships. They were part of "symbolic communication" which "enable men to ever again to enter into relation with that which is over against them."

Symbol is certainly a key means of binding communities, as Emile Durkheim (1947, 47) observes:

> religion does also have an integrative function; it is a form of social "cement" integrating believers by regularly bringing them together to enact various rituals and by providing them with shared values and beliefs that bind them together into a unified moral community.

Symbolism can be seen as a means of strengthening relationships; individuals feel that they have a sense of trust through the sharing of symbols in a collective paradigm of meaning. Brasher (2001, 36) observes how cyberspace has facilitated the means for individuals in late modernity to explore or re-explore spiritual needs, which they may not have been aware of because

> new technologies…open up previously unforeseen realms of religious need. Hence technologies necessitate development of new ritual, theological meditations….building viable bridges to the divine.

In this way reflection within the medium opens up new connections to the Divine. Nevertheless, traditional rituals do not necessarily meet the needs of individuals today. Rachel Wagner (2012, 93) citing S. Brent Plate (2007, 432) observes that "the same old ritual in the same old way, the same old message in the same old medium, leaves people feeling disconnected." Cyberspace offers an opportunity to explore alternative symbology through various communities and rituals online.

A key aspect of ritual is the role of the body and the need for a physical presence. In his interviews with members of different communities, Zaleski (2009, 156) draws attention to this question of the embodied. "Traditional Christianity holds that you have to have an actual body and actual water…there are actual sacred energies involved." For many, it is impossible for cyberspace to ever replace or replicate some important aspects of a religion, such as Shabbat in Judaism. Zaleski (ibid, 19) interviews Rabbi Yosef Y. Kazen, who argues that Shabbat "is an aspect that cannot be handled on the Net". He stresses that physicality is too much part of the essence of religion: "I'd much rather…the person go to the synagogue and participate...it's an actual physical act" (ibid, 17-18). The importance of physicality in ritual is also pursued by Chidester (2005, 31) who thinks that something important is lost in

cyberspace: "the electronic media is devoid of all the smells, tastes, and physical contacts that feature in conventional religious ritual and religious life."

In her investigation of religious communities, Campbell (2010) has addressed some of the concerns that technology and lack of embodiment raises for the Jewish community. She has also highlighted some of the advantages and acknowledges that rituals in cyberspace hold together relationships and maintain a sense of community. Campbell draws attention to the issues cyberspace raises during Shabbat.[106] Creating electricity is considered work and television and Internet access are prohibited. Mobile phones are acceptable, as long as they are not used in private or sacred space (ibid, 71). One way of negotiating some of the concerns and worries associated with the new media is the invention of the Kosher cell phone, which allows Jews to access information such as prayer times and Torah reading, whilst being programmed to exclude the secular (ibid, 162ff). "New media is embraced when it can serve as a tool for community agenda setting and publicizing beliefs" (ibid, 185). Through the use of the Kosher cell phone, Jews were connected to one another and able to strengthen bonds between themselves. By this negotiation with modern technologies, it is tacitly acknowledged that the modern media, albeit potentially disruptive, also provides a genuine means of connection.

Campbell (ibid, 88ff) also discusses Jewish use of cyberspace. Jewish sites have been created to allow Jews to celebrate occasions such as the Seder[107] across global communities.

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106 The Sabbath or Shabbat takes place every Friday evening, beginning at sunset and ending on Saturday when the stars appear. During this time Jews are prohibited to perform the 39 melachot or types of work, as stated in the Jewish holy book, the Talmud. http://www.judaica-guide.com/39_melachot/ (accessed 1/5/14).

107 The Seder meal is celebrated each year by Jews at Passover as one of the 3 pilgrim festivals. It celebrates when the angel of death "passed-over" the houses of all the Israelites (Jew) and killed all the Egyptian first-born. This was because God commanded Moses to tell his people to sacrifice a lamb and to anoint the doorposts with its blood. This was a sign to the angel that these were Israelite houses. This was the last of the 10 plagues and its result was that the Pharaoh allowed the Jews to flee from his land, resulting in the Exodus from Egypt.

Also available are versions of the Haggadahs, stories which tell of Jewish history.[108] This presentation of multiple versions allows individuals to choose ownership over which traditions and views they wish to subscribe and be a part. Cyberspace is increasingly vital for keeping the word of the Torah alive and for spreading traditions across global communities, uniting Jews, especially of the diaspora.[109] Technology, for the Jew, is both a help and a hindrance. It cleverly circumvents restrictions which would cripple a modern society during Shabbat but it also has the potential to distract during the sacred rituals. Technology can allow the moral and ethical dimension of theology to be maintained and reinforced, because it allows communities to strengthen and support each other in their religious observance. The emphasis therefore has to be on a mindful and reflective use of technology.

Ritual is also important for new cyber religious movements. Brasher (1996, 819) writes that "the creative technology of the Web is particularly suited to new religious movements." She observes that communities are first brought together and then have the freedom to create their own rituals, meaningful to themselves. "Cyber-mystics dream of leaving their bodies behind to become one with the Net" (Brasher, 2001, 62). In many new cyber religious movements, the emphasis is often on the importance of the mind to generate experiences and to commune with others. The physical is not paramount. Stephen O'Leary (2005:20) comments that this is because the focus is more on spiritual and identity development, as opposed to adherence to rigid doctrines. Cyberspace, for example, has changed the mode of rituals for techno-pagans, who can now perform them through text. "Both cyberspace and magic space are purely manifest in the imagination…Both spaces are entirely constructed by your thoughts and beliefs" (Erik Davis, 1995, 128).

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108 This will be discussed later in chapter seven in relation to narrative and symbolism and its ability to bind communities together.
109 Diaspora Jews are those who live outside of Israel.

This importance of language in ritual online is emphasised by David Holmes (1997). He argues that in a ceremony breaking of the bread, it does not seem to matter whether the bread is physically present or not. The words take on new meaning, as the mind is stimulated in place of the body, allowing freedom "from the constraints of the flesh." Being language-focused the global community can indulge greater participation in ritual. As Wendy Griffin (2004, 190) comments: "Removing the barrier of physical distance permits real-time group participation in virtual religious rituals" and a strengthening of communities online through language and dialogue.

The need not to be physically present can be viewed positively. For example, it can be difficult for diasporic communities to meet. Brasher (2001, 88) uses the example of Julia, a practicing witch, who started to use computers and became intrigued by cyberspace. "Cyberspace is a unique place to hold a ritual. It can unite many more people than normal physical space." She goes on to remark that it is difficult to keep people together offline. Participants discover a new way of interacting, exploring their spirituality and relationality. The emphasis is not just on the rituals taking place, but the way in which the information and words actually affect the person. Individual identity develops, in relation to other people and the Divine. Relationships are cemented across a global space. When words take on new meaning and empower the community individuals are often more mindful of the language they use to communicate, introducing an ethical dimension to relationships. The emphasis for Buber is on the importance of the language and dialogue which the new medium allows, forming the basis of rituals which are able to facilitate relationships and build communities.

As well as through spoken language, Buber [1952] 1988, 126-127) also emphasised how new means of dialogue can take place with the Divine through prayer. He clearly intended a one-to-one ritual but, intriguingly Wagner (2012, 26) gives the example of a prayer sent through cyberspace being printed out and placed in the Western Wall in

Jerusalem. She questions whether the same effect could not be realised by sending a virtual prayer to the virtual Western Wall, in Second Life. The implication is that it is not so much the physicality of something but the intention which is paramount. Buber would have understood the importance of that blending of ritual and intention. Ritual is often used to transcend the physical, which makes cyberspace an ideal medium and arena for communication with the Divine. Physical barriers are axiomatically transcended.

In many ways transcending the physical in cyber-pilgrimage is counter-intuitive, because the significance of place is central to established religions and theologies. It may sound paradoxical, and indeed, most traditions of organised religion would say that cyber-pilgrimage could never fulfil the true requirements of the physical journey. Hill-Smith (2009) tells us that the Catholic pilgrimage website stated in 2000, at the Great Jubilee Indulgence that "conducting an online pilgrimage does not fulfil the Indulgence requirements." Similarly, the physicality of not only the body, but the place, is emphasised in the Hajj pilgrimage, undertaken by Muslims, as one of their five pillars of faith. O'Leary (2005, 42) informs us that it is the journey to the actual physical places that fulfil the requirements of pilgrimage because the "importance attached to the physical space….isn't the physicality of the space something that cannot be dispensed with?" Brasher (2001, 20) also questions whether if you can replicate Jerusalem many times over in cyberspace, can it ever be seen as authentic? Nevertheless, cyber-pilgrimage is a reality, and even if it would be very hard to persuade religious leaders that Jerusalem, Mecca or Vatican City could ever be the same in cyberspace, there is undoubtedly a role for the cyber-pilgrim.

One example where we can see the inversion of the whole edifice of pilgrimage is in Bishop Jacques Gaillot's (1935 -) disagreement with Pope John Paul II. He was effectively banished to the province of Partenia, a sand-drowned enclave on the slopes of the Atlas mountains, in Algeria. In response, and with supreme inspiration, he moved Partenia to

cyberspace, to become a diocese without boundaries or borders. This diocese for the

disenfranchised was born out of negation. A craven reaction to honest dissent was

ingeniously turned into a haven for anyone who felt marginalised. Partenia was suddenly

more real than its actual sand-swamped reality. Faith and belief has transcended corporeality

magnificently. Somewhere in Bishop Gaillot's re-imagining of possibilities was a profound

"I-Thou" moment; a contact of divine inspiration, as stunning as William Blake's re-

imagining of "Jerusalem, in England's green and pleasant land." It is not geography that is

significant. Even as Buber ([1967] 2002, 16) was profoundly aware of the importance of

Jerusalem as a site and symbol to unite the Jewish community, a century later, as we have

seen, cyberspace has shown that Jews are able to unite through online community. There are

new Jerusalems available, not only to the Jews of the diaspora but to all open-minded

pilgrims. Place is not merely a mark on the map. Bishop Gaillot invalidated his arduous exile.

He turned what would have been a fruitless journey for one into a cyber-pilgrimage for many.

In cyber-pilgrimage many of the reservations about ritual online can be overcome and

the experience can allow a time of reflection and individual transformation. Individuals enter

a new realm, not physically, but mentally; space is given to the mind, to accept new

sensations and to make room for the Divine. Although in pilgrimage the sense of the journey

is often seen as paramount, in this new medium the ability to be transformed by the mental

experience, and to alter perspectives is central to relationships. This echoes the importance

placed on the mental by religions such as Buddhism, which was influential in Buber's

thinking. The power of mind is needed to overcome the material comforts and indulgences of

the body to pass to a higher realm and appreciate what is truly needed in terms of spiritual

nourishment. [110]

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[110] Maurice Friedman ([1955] 2002, 29) informs us that the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism and later
Taoism, was particularly important to Buber in the early period of the formation of his views. His views about

Before totally dismissing the validity of online pilgrimage, we need to be aware that even "real-world" pilgrimage does not have to involve a physical journey. There are many mental pilgrimages, where individuals are encouraged to see things from another perspective, or "free" the mind from its usual activities. As Alan Morinis (1992, 4) understood, "the spiritual life is a pilgrimage, the ascetic learns to visit the sacred shrines in his own body, devotion is a journey to God." Virtual pilgrimage has the ability to engage the mind and the emotions almost to the mortification of the body. Mental images and the ideas that they conjure, can provide a sense of space and calm. Brasher (2001, 5&9) writes: "Religion is now an affair of the mind. This stands in contrast to the immersion of mind and body...cyberspace is substantially determined by the imaginations of those who engage it." Mark MacWilliams (2004, 230) comments that on these pilgrimages there are many visual cues, which replicate exactly what the pilgrim would see on the physical plane. Pilgrims are immersed in the experience through "the power of computer-mediated communication to create a "total sensorium" of sight, sound, and even virtual touch, with his evocative description of the difficult climb up the mountain." In the virtual pilgrimage images may be purely mental but because of mythic awareness and symbolic understanding the mnemonic of the journey persists. Symbolism and narrative can connect communities and individuals without the intrusive narrative of the physical.

MacWilliams (2004, 232-233 & 236) offers specific details of a virtual pilgrimage to a mountain ridge in Croagh Patrick in Western Ireland and how it can be seen as a transforming experience. This virtual pilgrimage can be seen as typical of a rite of passage because it caters for the "spiritual activities of the solitary person…virtual pilgrimage appeals to the individual who reaches out in cyberspace, in his solitariness, to find some form of spiritual connection through communication." It is a ritual that is able to address the issue of

mysticism, found particularly in Daniel, as well as his beliefs about the "eternal Thou" are seen to have their origin in his Eastern encounters.

technological alienation through providing numerous opportunities for re-affirmation of self through dialogue with others in a new, virtual, reflective space. The physical online pilgrimage is also intensely practical. Cyberspace may be the only space for those who are elderly, infirm, or the very young. Pilgrimages can be hazardous[111]. The dangers of the journey might still seem to be signs of devotion but cyberspace can be seen to circumvent the need for this for the above groups, and can offer a more reflective and alternative experience.

The ritual of cyber-pilgrimage shows how the space can perform three functions, which correspond to the spheres of relationship that Buber identifies. First, individuals have a space to connect with their surroundings and to reflect upon the experience. Second, individuals meet and gain support from communities also completing virtual pilgrimages. Lastly, the experience itself provides new opportunities to grow and to develop an understanding of self-in-relation as they develop their creativity and imagination.[112] Thus the experience provides the potentiality for Buber's "Thou" moments and also, in turn, can lead to understanding of a transcendental realm.

The Body, Identity and Relationships

Some of the dominant ideas in cyberspace are the body, identity and interconnectivity and an examination of dialogue is the strongest sense of why it is important to look at relationships. It is a vital aspect of Buber's relational theological model because of the emphasis he placed on relationships taking place in the "between space" (Buber, [1923] 2002, 36-37). The electronic medium creates a key question of where the body and the self are situated in the electronic world. Through engaging in cyber-relationships, individuals

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[111] Many aspects of the Hajj carry significant dangers, not least due to the millions of pilgrims who attend each year. On 12th January 2006, on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, over 345 pilgrims were killed and over 1000 injured, in the stoning of the walls (pillars) ritual. http://www.quran-islam.org/main_topics/islam/pillars/al-hajj/stoning_tragedies_%28P1321%29.html (accessed 12/31/10).

[112] This can be seen to allow an individual to share in the act of creation and can bring them to a closer understanding of the Divine and the original act of Creation. It will be explored further in chapter seven.

have opportunities to explore their own identities in the era of late modernity in order to re-formulate how they should relate to an eclectic and fragmented society. Cyberspace provides a means to experiment with identity and as Wagner (2012, 99) has observed, it is "shaped and transformed through virtual engagement." There are different opinions as to whether a lack of physicality is detrimental or supportive of the individual and their relationships, and we need briefly to explore both positions.

As we have seen, one of the central questions raised by virtual community is the lack of the physical. Most monotheistic theologies regard corporeality as essential to the essence of personhood, community and ritual. Bodies are paramount to identity and play a part in how we wish to be perceived because they are the chief means of communication and forming social relationships. Heim (2002, 188) underlines this point when he writes: "The physical eyes are the windows that establish the neighbourhood of trust". Theology in cyberspace, devoid of physical bodies, stands accused of not being an holistic experience. It engages solely with the mental, to the detriment of the body. Brasher (2001, 42) in a similar vein describes it as "a fantasy universe that stimulates the imagination but ignores the rest of the body". This leads to the accusation that such communication is not authentic. Indeed, physical presence in the Incarnation or Resurrection is often associated with Christian truth claims and is it no less true of theology in cyberspace.

Scholars have criticised the disembodiment of cyberspace where text is the dominant means of communication. They say confusion is caused due to a lack of bodily cues and responsibility is not taken for words. Brasher (ibid, 77) cites an example to highlight this in the Cyber-Seder[113]. In this ritual, some individuals were excluded online by the Jews conversing in Hebrew, which "was a profound contradiction of the human sociability the

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[113] This is an online ritual of the Jewish Seder, a symbolic meal eaten every year to commemorate the Passover meal which the Jews ate whilst in Egypt. They used the blood of the lamb from the meal to mark their doorposts so that the angel of death passed over their houses and killed the Egyptian firstborn.

Seder was dedicated to cultivating." This highlights the negative side of dialogue, the "It" which Buber identified, which can be used to exclude and alienate.

Anonymity in cyberspace also raises concerns about authenticity and ethical quality of relationship. We may be talking to someone in a game or in an online world but have no way of assessing their probity. Individuals may act in ways that they would not contemplate offline. You can also be a secret bystander or observer and no-one will know about it, which raises the issues of commitment, authenticity and truth. Zaleski (1997, 249) argues that individuals are often over-confident in this new place of untold freedoms. This is because "the headiness of cyberspace, its divorce from the body and the body's incarnate wisdom, gives easy rise to fantasy, paranoia, delusions of grandeur." Buber was mindful of the glib, the unaware, the cavalier in dialogue. The lack of physicality that brings diminishing accountability for dialogue and action and a protagonist quickly returns to the "It" dimension. Cyberspace can exacerbate the lack of ethical responsibility that an individual can feel in the absence of physical presence. Vivian Sobchack (1995, 213) argues that without physicality there is no ability to understand life, "a techno-body that has no sympathy for human suffering, cannot understand human pleasure and, since it has no conception of death, cannot possibly value life."[114]

Lack of physical embodiment also facilitates the sordid side of relationships. Cyber-sex and pornography[115] are the essence of Buber's "It" mode. When an individual is freed of all responsibility usually associated with physicality, ethical responsibility can also be lost. Absence of physicality also causes individuals to opt out of genuine relationships. Chris McGillion (2005, 19) wrote that individuals "opt out of the kind of flesh-and-blood relationships that are the indispensable condition of shared religious meanings." This is a

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[114] A key example of this is found in the manipulators of drone aircraft in warzones, who feel exposed to such absence.
[115] There are many consequences of cybersex and implications for offline relationships (cf Feldstein, 2014).

point stressed by Groothuis (2005, 6), who believes that cyberspace can never replace human contact "there is no authentic meeting of eyes, minds, hearts, and souls…silicon has absorbed the interpersonal impact of a face-to-face encounter." He cautions against the idea of cyberspace being a place to hide for those who find the offline world intolerant. As Groothuis explains: "An area that bases its idea of tolerance on simply hiding characteristics the majority are intolerant of is, at best, a digital closet." Cyberworlds are accused of failing to nurture holistic development of the individual in relation to others. Eva Pascoe and John Locke (2002, 161) have even gone as far as to argue that "the bonds of everyday social integration do not receive the reinforcement of physical proximity."

Disembodiment is probably the future for humanity – or, to make the concept slightly more palatable – re-embodiment. The processes have begun, the technology has been initiated and are intensified in the development of the cyborg[116] and the force of military applications, sustained by capital and security needs. In the short to medium term such a prospect is largely appalling. In the longer perspective and dispensing with current moral indignation and emotion, bodies are being redefined by technology. Such an odyssey will be choreographed by the computers across cyberspace. What is required by theologians is meaningful and ethical vocabulary for this changing world.

Positively, the loss of embodiment can mean that individuals do not pre-judge relationships. For example, the barriers that people with physical and mental disabilities have to contend with are removed and people can commune through text and machine on equal terms. Campbell (2005, 89-90), for example, documents the freedom cyberspace gives to those who are visually impaired:

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[116] See Elaine Graham (2002), *Representations of the Post/Human*, for a discussion on the place of the cyborg and the repercussions for humanity of hybrid models of technology.

The freedom from their physical limitations is therefore an important factor for the growth of the community…technology frees them from the physical limitations of their sensory impairments.

This is reinforced by Rick, a member of the Online Church (OLC), who comments: "Through email you see the spirit of the person, and not their limitations" (ibid, 113). Despite the pre-eminence of text, the ability to create avatars[117] means that people can virtually touch and express emotions through their characters. Campbell (ibid, 118) observes such developments when she states: "Cyber hugs within the OLC attempt to bridge the gap between online and offline emotional support, in line with the safe and supportive environment the community tries to provide." However, individuals do not have to hide behind the guise of avatars online. If they choose to, they can create a character of the same physical appearance as themselves. It must be remembered that even in our everyday existence, physicality is frequently a barrier to true relationship. Cyberspace can prove much more inclusive. In the stripping away of the superficial in the search for "I-Thou" interfaces, less – in the way of information – provides more scope for genuine success.

As we explore new realms we are always alert to the presence of serious ethical concerns. Marx and Marcuse identified one in the guise of the capitalist machine. Technology presents as its own leviathan, as it slowly embeds itself within the human psyche and moves from being a tool to an extension of self. Katherine Hayles (1999, 2) comments that the human starts their journey to becoming a cyborg, which they need to contemplate in a post-human future. Pessimistically, this can be viewed as a somewhat precarious position; technology shaping humanity. For a species that has enjoyed prominence at essentially what

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[117] An avatar is an online virtual character, created to aid communication and circumvent the lack of physical embodiment online. Avatars can be designed to look virtually identical to oneself offline, or can be completely different, even a different sex or species, such as a cat. In some cyber worlds avatars can fly, "hug" and disappear and re-appear at will. An avatar can also "die" and be re-created.

is the "pinnacle of creation[118]" the notion of technology elicits both possibilities and

considerable threats. Graham (2002, 158) portrays monsters as those who are keepers of the

boundaries between humans and "others," and they are often "personified as a threat to purity

and homogeneity." Technology has changed the way that humans think about themselves and

the world they inhabit. Optimistically, as I implied earlier, the possibilities arise from the

belief that technology can be used in a symbiotic way to enhance, and to generally

ameliorate, the lives of existing beings.

The concept of cyborgs has always been prone to negative associations, with

"monster" creations, ranging from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein[119]* (published 1818) to the

film Robocop (1987). These creations have always been on the boundary of what it means to

be human as they have been rejected by their own species and are accepted by no other. "The

world is comprised of hybrid encounters that refuse origin" (González (1995, 275). Whereas

it has become almost acceptable for the mind to merge with technology, the inviolability of

the human body has remained. Body control we somehow see as an abrogation of free will.

Coupled with this, Graham (2002, 55) observes that it may be the cyborg's inability to

communicate with language that makes it seem sub-human. The "monster" remains very

much within the "It" category and cannot be tolerated in any capacity other than as a utility,

or as a sub-species on the boundaries of humanity.

The cyborg reinforces the fear of alienation in the technological age. Humans will

become alienated from their bodies and hence their ontology; boundaries merge and implants

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[118] This notion of man as the apex of creation arising from a reading of Genesis 1:26-27, where humans are made after nature and animals. It is implied that all these things have been made for humans by the Divine. However, it is the reading of the term "dominion" which has led to humans exploiting the environment and the dichotomy between humans and creation, as opposed to a stewardship and symbiosis.

[119] Frankenstein has a desire to integrate into human society but is not accepted into any genus; not his own, as he strives to become more human, nor do humans fully accept him, due to his limitations, especially on an emotional and ethical level. Frankenstein's situation is paradoxical. It is the very fact that he is not fully adopted into human society that he does not have the chance to allow his benign character to flourish. He is dehumanised due to his suffering on the boundaries of humanity (Graham, 2002, 65-67).

and extensions mean that the notion of a "divine image" (Genesis 1:26) is lost. Graham (2002, 49) observes that anything that contravened the divine command was considered to be unnatural. Graham (2002, 6), echoing the views of sociologist Jacques Ellul (1965), thinks that "technology will bring about alienation and dehumanization, the erosion of the spiritual essence of humanity". Claudia Springer (1996) likewise is concerned with the fusional dangers. As she writes: "Fusion with computers can provide an illusory sense of personal wholeness; the fused cyborg condition erases the difference between self and other" (quoted in Graham, 2002, 190). Does this erode the essence of the "I", so essential to relationships? Springer may be wrong because fusion could be seen combining rather than eradicating.

The cyborg is able to fulfil two functions in relation to my argument and Buber's dialectic. Primarily it demonstrates that technology can both enhance and detract from relationships. In the latter position, it can cause humans to feel that by interacting with technology they are losing the essence of their identity. Technology appears malevolent wanting to devalue human society and human's inherent worth. This reflection of Buber's "It" position is the essence of Marcusian fears. Conversely, merging with technology has meant that humans have essentially transcended an artificial demarcation. Now they can benefit from the enhancements that technology can provide in a symbiotic relationship, echoing aspects of the "Thou" position. The paradox is plain. As Steven Whittaker (1994) observes, in cyberspace there is "someone who desires embodiment and disembodiment in the same instance," they wish to have sensory experiences, but without the limitations of the body (quoted in Wertheim 1999, 258). Although one may shy away from the idea of hybrid construction, modern medicine with its ability to manipulate organs, to use prosthetics and chemicals to enhance or repair, means that, in essence, many humans change from the way they were initially conceived. Graham (2002, 158) believes that "technologies will overcome

the problems of physical limitations (of strength and intelligence) and finitude (decay, disease and death) by means of implants, modifications or enhancements."

In the final analysis cyborgs represent possibilities of human longing and the fear of mortality. Grace Jantzen (1998, 154) comments that "the necrophilic imagination is apparent in such qualities as "a drive to infinity: an insatiable desire for knowledge, a quest for ever-increasing mastery, a refusal to accept boundaries"". Merging with technology humans can begin to realise how they might adapt in the post-human era. Consequently their notions of theology and the Divine need to be reflected upon in the knowledge of these possibilities for transformation. Graham (2002, 80) wonders how far will humans allow themselves to morph with technology, in order to preserve what is most dear to them. As she reflects: "life becomes a constant struggle to deny those aspects of human experience that remind us of our mortality."

Despite the need to ameliorate our 'imperfect' bodies, we insist on the notion of humanity as opposed to 'cyborg'. Turkle (2005, 272) confirms this in her empirical work, arguing that "[p]eople are afraid to think of themselves as machines." Does this mean we fear even greater alienation if we step outside our flesh and blood? Knott (2005, 17) suggests that "our bodies allow us to experience and conceptualise the relationships between things, places, persons (as well as regions) and to identify differences." Humans are reluctant to engage with the very thing which might allow them to transcend themselves and to grow and evolve. Instead, they resolve to maintain an "It" stance in relation to the machine, viewing it as separate, distant, and something to be mastered and controlled.

Blurred boundaries are particularly marked in the area of intelligence. All programming essentially arises from human minds so technology appears to adopt the mind of humans. Turkle (2005, 144) confirms this in her interview with Alex: "The computer is

like an extension of my mind." Therefore, instead of purely an "It" relationship, through continuous interaction with the computer, the possibilities for "Thou" are there. As Turkle (1996, 30) continues: "People are able to see themselves in the computer". It can be argued that technology does not need to be seen as something separate from humanity. Cobb (1998, 147ff) cites Robert Jahn and Brenda Dunne (1987), who have taken the step of anthropomorposising technology and ascribing thoughts, feeling and even souls to machines. They see love as a creative force and they advocate it can exist between machine and man (ibid, 149). If such a mode exists it would enable a new understanding to take place and allow "Thou" moments to arise as boundaries dissolve. To harness the possibilities, one must no longer remain aloof from technology but allow oneself to become part of what one essentially aims to master. Only by allowing this radical synthesis can one begin to understand the interconnectivity and possibilities that technology allows for "Thou" models of relationality.

Communities and Relationships

The interactions taking place within cyberspace require analytical reflection. The Buberian model of relationships is suited because it is specifically communication-orientated. Cyberspace is fundamentally a communication system and therefore there is inevitably some general engagement with the relational question in the debates of the secondary literature. However, the literature is not theologically engaged and is not sufficiently incorporating all aspects of the ethics of relationality. Turkle has arguably opened the space for theological reflections in her discussions but there are some theological issues outside her analysis. While it is true that cyberspace poses a number of problems for relationships, both with the use of the computer itself in its related communities, it requires wider critical perspectives.

The alienation brought by technology is clearly documented by Turkle, who extends her ideas concerning technology to embrace the idea of the robot, which she discusses in her

book *Alone Together* (2011). She points out that although robots offer the illusion of companionship, there are not the demands of friendship (ibid, 1). Relationships with the machine are seen, therefore, as disingenuous and one-sided. Her stance parallels the views of Marx and Marcuse and their belief in the alienating influence technology can have on humanity. Turkle (ibid, 281) continues that technology has destroyed our relationships; first, it has totally altered the way in which we communicate and it underlines how we no longer have time for each other but instead have more time for technology. She admits that technology has brought people together but in a dangerous and damaging way. As she insightfully suggests: "people come together, but do not speak to each other" (ibid, 155). Genuine relationality is indeed more than just a physical presence it also involves an ethical dimension of relationship.

Although it is important to recognise the concerns surrounding online communication, the positive aspects of cyberspace allow for connecting and strengthening communities. For any group willing to acknowledge Buber's dialogical principle, the rewards can be huge. Far from demeaning traditional religion and theology, Campbell (2005, 31) says that online communities embrace traditions of organised religion. This can help augment membership and allow congregations to commune across many countries, thus giving the church a global dimension. As she indicates: "Church denotes a living structure, having global communities, while maintaining a local emphasis." This is a way of bringing religious communities together, globally, especially those in diasporas. Elena Larsen (2001) explains that cyberspace can be used as a space of strength for its members, allowing them to grow spiritually. The medium has also meant that facets that traditionally constituted theology can be changed and re-explored; there is freedom of expression and opportunities for exploration of individual beliefs. Larsen (2001) suggests that individuals have the desire to engage in experiences online that allow them to explore their own spirituality, which corresponds to

evidence from the Pew report which states: "The most popular religious movements are solitary ones." This is not necessarily a negative position. Castells ([1997] 2004, 186) argues that we misunderstand the notion of individualism if we view it negatively. He points out that it is not social isolation or even alienation…it is a social pattern, it is a source of meaning, of meaning constructed about the projects and desires of the individual. And it finds in the Internet the proper technology for its expression and its organization."[120]

Cyberspace has allowed a re-thinking of how theology is accessed in late modernity and has provided possibilities for creating new forms of relationship that resonate with the social circumstances of the time. This is a point made by Linderman and Lovheim (2003, 231), who use Barry Wellman and Melina Gulia's (1997, 67-162) argument that "new forms of socially meaningful relationships can and do emerge in such sites as email discussion lists, conferencing systems, text chat, websites and graphical worlds". In cyberspace individuals are able to engage in a variety of different religious activities: such as email for support and encouragement, attending religious services and online rituals. The Pew report highlights how individuals feel that they can receive help online, in terms of prayer requests and personal support. In this light Larsen (2001) suggests that "[t]he Internet appears to provide for them many of the benefits of a congregation". This can help those who experience offline alienation. Zaleski (1997, 235-236) records that cyberspace gives support and opportunities for counselling, revealing traumas that may have been hidden. In an atmosphere of security and care "time spent in cyberspace can be therapeutic" This is a concept emphasised by Dawson (2001), who cites Annette Markham (1998, 202) to emphasise how "the strictly textual expression of self-online can seem more real and fulfilling than the physical offline self." This phrase can be seen as having the utmost significance for Buber as it emphasises how cyberspace

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[120] The concept of self-in-relation will be explored further in chapter six in the discussion on networked individualism.

allows not only for individual expression through disembodied textual dialogue but has the potential to allow a new form of online community to arise.

The Pew report says that cyberspace allows new opportunities to engage with religion that may not have been felt offline because it provides "a safe place to explore re-entering a community of faith" (Larsen, 2001). Communities are also being built up through the use of social networks, where there is an emphasis on telling stories and passing on traditions in religious networks. This aids in forming and maintain relationships, as there is a common link between people. Social networking sites have been used by the general population for over a decade. Up until recently the impact on individuals and communities that these spaces were having had not been sufficiently documented until the publication of books such as Miller's (2011) *Tales from Facebook*.[121] Miller has documented the way in which Facebook is used in Trinidad to explore individual identities, to express opinions and to join communities by expressing values and opinions that are distinct to a culture. Although he discusses how some interviewees were reluctant to use Facebook at first, gradually, it has become for many their chief means of communicating with others within the country and the wider community. Miller (2011, 25) quotes a participant, Alana, who observed how Facebook was now very appealing as it is "a much safer version of community, a whole lot less malicious and vicious than the real thing." Miller (ibid, 27) also indicates that it is also evident that Facebook complements offline community and does not replace it. Some participants observe that Facebook allowed a more truthful representation to be given by people. One participant, Vishala, offers a very positive appraisal when she states: "Facebook is in itself more truthful as an encounter with people" (ibid, 48). Another participant, Michael, observed how it is like a family that he never had, and makes him feel supported (ibid, 93).

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[121] A more thorough examination of social networking on communities will be conducted in chapter seven.

In late modernity one of the appealing features of social networking is the lack of a hierarchical model; every person and statement can be seen as having parity. Individuals can feel empowered by being members of online communities, where their voice is listened to and valued. Graham (2002, 161) suggests that those who feel outcast from society may find a place online: "Electronic communication…undermines known categories of race, gender, bodily ability and class." The computer allows escapism and an alternative means of expression and development of self, outside the confines of traditional society and frameworks. Turkle (2005, 160) draws attention to the fact that "cyberspace represents a populist and dynamic realm, free of centralised and bureaucratic control, in which cultural and social constraints dissolve." The lack of hierarchy also adds to the freedom experienced within cyberspace. Dawson (2005, 132) remarks that freedom in cyberspace can mean that minorities can often see that their opinions are more valued than offline, as they are given an equal means of dialogue. Cyberspace allows them to "be more open, personal, and intimate, more self-expressive than in any offline context." This can often lead to more mutual "Thou" relationships than those traditionally found in offline communities.

The existing literature shows us how online relationships are able to be transferred offline which creates important issues for theology about online-offline relationships. It opens the space to re-engage with Buber's dialectic through an appreciation of the different dynamics at work in relationships. However, the literature has not sufficiently grasped the significance of online relationships and their impact for offline communities, which has created a new tension for relationships. I have demonstrated how the space has been able to change not only the content of religion and theology but also the way space, experiences, and virtual communities are able to transform individual identities and relationships. Cyberspace has the potential to modify views of relationships, because the space causes reflection on interconnectivity and interdependence.

Online communities can be viewed as extremely significant for theology and relationships because they are able to alter our approach to the offline dynamic within lived communities. They are also able to enhance and increase membership of offline places of worship. A member of the Community of Prophecy (CP) in Campbell's (2005, 162) study states: "Online community could even encourage involvement in local church." Community is something that can be taken offline; it is permanent, as Campbell says that it can be described as "God-created friendship bonds" (ibid, 182). Cyberspace, for many, is a means to enhance their faith, and to be taken alongside their already existing beliefs and practices as "most combine their online life with that of their own religious communities, seeking fuller comprehension and experience of their faiths" (Larsen, 2001). The way in which interaction takes place in these cyber-communities has an effect on identity and how individuals see themselves and their relationship to others, both online and offline. This is reinforced by Alf Linderman and Mia Lovheim (2003, 232) who state that in recent studies, "[t]here seems to be far more continuity between online identities and relationships and offline contexts than was expected."

The relationship between online and offline is clear in the Anglican Communion online site[122], which emphasises that online is a bridge to the local, and exists primarily to supplement the offline church. The obvious desire for physical community, as we have seen, calls us to question whether a cyber-religious community is a genuine one, especially if based entirely in cyberspace. The House of Netjer[123] exists online and has re-invented aspects of ancient Egyptian religion. Marilyn Krogh and Ashley Pillifant (2004, 206) report that it allows individuals to "learn about this faith, meet kemetic believers, convert, and worship online. Nevertheless, Dawson and Cowan (2004, 206) cite the founder of the site, Ramara

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[122]http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ (accessed 10/1/14).
[123]http://kemet.org/ (accessed 18/1/14).

Suiuda, who suggests that the aim of the site is not to create a religious community online but rather, using the Internet, to reach enough people "to improve their offline connections."

Developing these links between online and offline, Brenda Brasher (2001, 102) provides an example of "The Well" – "a site for fostering social change" - to demonstrate how the impact of community online affects offline. People "shared information that nursed one another back to health, made each other more efficient at work, and mourned one another in death." Her findings are echoed by Dawson (2004, 208) who claims: "online communities are most likely to succeed, to truly affect people's lives, when they are paired with other offline involvements." Through development of self-in-relation online, the fragmented offline self is able to feel re-connected in genuine relationships through the global interconnectivity of cyberspace. The online medium allows individuals to review a different dimension to their relationships. In cyberspace a new form of interconnected theology is emerging, focused on the power to unite and transform relationships. It is a form of relationship that theology can no longer ignore.

The way in which relationships and communities are being transformed by the medium of cyberspace raises a crucial issue for theological reflections by opening up a new space for engaging the relational self. The possibility the medium offers for relationality also sets the ground for a new engagement with Martin Buber's philosophy. What makes Buber particularly pertinent is the fact that theologians have yet to establish how cyberspace opens up new fields of relationship with the Divine. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the new nature of the medium of cyberspace means that boundaries have been eroded and previous divisions between and within religion and theology are seen to become more fluid. The emphasis, therefore, becomes not on whether your religion or theology is the most authentic one for accessing the Divine but on cultivating correct relationships to allow God to become part of communities and within relationship.

Part 2: Buber's Theological Model

Chapter 3: Re-thinking Buber for the Cyberspace Age

The extended lines of relation meet in the eternal Thou (Martin Buber [1923] 2002, 61).

The place of the imagination plays a pivotal role in cyberspace and offers the ability to transcend physicality. As the mind allows new potentials for relationships to be envisaged, the imagination allows us to move out beyond ourselves and to embrace a higher reality; which is often obscured in the mundaness of the offline world. The new space offers a place to reflect as it is not restrained by locality but is a separate dimension which causes us to metacognise about how we form, engage in, and develop, relationships.

The previous section has demonstrated how the new technological dynamic has altered existing relationships and facilitated new models of interconnection and expression for religions, theology and spirituality. Engaging with Martin Buber's (1878-1965) primary texts has allowed me to understand the significance of Buber's work for charting the dynamics of relationships and for considering a theology of interconnectivity. Using Buber's insights into relationships in a new historical and cultural setting allows a new theological perspective to be offered about the impact of relationships within the dimension of cyberspace and also their impact in offline life. In order to set the theological context and position the helpfulness of Buber to cyber worlds, we now need to take two steps: first, to map out the context of Buber and his works, and, second, to review the critical literature on Buber's work. In this chapter I will detail how Martin Buber developed his theology of relationships from within a very different context. I will demonstrate why his views are still important to provide a framework for mapping and categorising the relationships that are taking place through cyberspace today, and how a connection between the two is possible.

Through a systematic reading of Buber's theology I wish to show how his work performs two functions in relation to my argument. First, following the identification of the

key social processes of detraditionalisation, individualisation and globalisation[124], we can apply Buber's theology to map these new forms of emerging relationship. These relationships are facilitated by interconnections made by globalisation. Second, although writing before the invention of the personal computer, Buber's theology has a contemporary value: The interconnectivity which he saw in different spheres of relationships (man with nature, man with man and man with forms of the spirit) are facilitated by the global connections of cyberspace (Buber [1923] 2004, 13).

Buber's work is necessary for an understanding of relationality; it causes us to consider how relationships exist in many spheres of life and reminds us of the interconnection in all of creation,[125] something some theologians think was damaged at the Fall[126]. Buber's theology envisages a time when this separation, the "I-It" stance, can be replaced by the unity of "I-Thou." The global nature of cyberspace can demonstrate the connections that do exist within creation.[127] Despite the need for individuality, there are opportunities to explore new means of global relationality in a variety of spheres. There is justification in using Buber

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[124] As I have already discussed in the introduction and chapter one, these three strands characterise late modernity. They have been developed in what some have argued arose in the colonial to industrial late 19th century and therefore form the seed beds for the digital age. The world wars signalled a new awareness of globalisation and alliances being broken and re-formed; detraditionalisation was apparent in the breakdown of cultures, which allowed new roles for women and individualism. This, coupled with globalisation, fuelled the rise of new economies and opportunities for material investment. These processes were fermenting at the time of Buber and culminated in a new rupture in the 70ies digital age.

[125] The way that humans are connected to the Divine and to all parts of creation is explored by Dwight Friesen (2009, 66) in *Thy Kingdom Connected*. He discusses the connections apparent in relationships and states how humans are "united with all of creation by our shared Creator."

[126] Certain forms of theology teach that at Genesis 3:6ff, when Eve is led astray by the serpent and eats from the tree of Knowledge with Adam, the original relationship with God is lost. They are cast out from the Garden of Eden and unable to re-enter it, due to its entrance being guarded by a "flaming sword" (Genesis 3:24). The relationship of humanity to the Divine before the Fall is envisaged as a perfect one that has been damaged through humans alienating themselves from the Divine.

[127] Traditional models of world history often highlight the discontinuity between different eras with different grand paradigms constantly replacing each other. From the Middle Ages through the Renaissance and early modern period, the scientific paradigm became dominant. In contrast to this, the continuity thesis argues that instead of perpetual change and progression through a series of epoch-altering transformations, history expresses the idea of long-term continuity. This suggests that the apparent disengagement of humanity from their historical identity is a myth. Through viewing history as a perpetual and unfolding linear event, one does not become disengaged from it or begin to objectify it. This echoes Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) ideas about the way in which humans have lost sight of Being due to the influence of Western philosophy, which largely avoids ontological questions (W. J. Korab-Karpowicz). Interestingly Heidegger viewed technology as a means of overcoming the subject-object distinction, which he thought characterised Western Philosophical thinking, thus providing support for my application of Buber's dialectical framework to the technological era.

outside the context of his original work because his theology proposes the need to examine how all relationships are formed and maintained in the created order. The three spheres he identifies (man with nature, man with man, and man with forms of the spirit), and his dialectical approach, offer the opportunity to apply this model to cyberspace and appreciate multiple aspects of relation in the digital age. He can provide a means of re-engaging with different spheres of creation and through an understanding of the need for interconnection, a means of allowing the Divine into relationships. To date there has not been an attempt to formulate new theological models of interconnectivity but Buber demonstrates opportunities to re-connect with the Divine in the midst of creation as an integral part of every "Thou" encounter.

Buber's central ideas are found within *I-Thou* (1923), which is considered a seminal piece of work about human relationships and their relation to the environment in different spheres. Buber felt compelled to write this in order to encapsulate the central ideas that he had formulated about the need for dialogue in all spheres of relation. His love of languages made him sensitive to the nature of dialogue and in this work he wanted to stress the way in which communication could take numerous forms, ranging from the verbal, through to dialogue without words. His key message was an investigation into the two modes of relating that humans engage in: "I-It" and "I-Thou". He successfully demonstrates how the struggle towards the latter, preferable option, is tempered by the need for constantly reverting back to the former: As he states: "without *It* man cannot live" (Buber [1923] 2004, 32). Buber acknowledged that the "It" offers a comfortable state to exist in, "which provides all manner of incitements and excitements, activity and knowledge", but it is a shallow and often non-ethical relationship (ibid). Individuals must comprehend the need for relationships to progress beyond individual desires to genuine dialogue and communion, found in the "Thou".

The focus of this chapter will encapsulate the influences that shaped Buber's central theology of "I-It and I-Thou", and the three spheres of relation that he identifies. However, from a reading of the primary material, it is clear that as he was exposed to various influences and transitions in his life, so his theology mirrors his own encounters. Before exploring Buber's central thesis, it is prudent to consider the motivation behind Buber's drive to propose a theory which encapsulated what he saw as the genuine connection which bound individuals together. In order to demonstrate this I will employ Buber's primary literature, supplemented with a few key secondary texts, to chart his journey from mysticism to his discovery of the centrality of dialogue within relationships. I have identified four major influences which have impacted on his thinking and culminate in an exploration of his central "I-Thou" thesis: his personal early influences; the Jewish influence; Hasidism; *Daniel* and the enigma of mysticism.

The first of these is from Buber's own experiences as a young man, which includes his encounters with other philosophers. These ultimately allowed him to experience a variety of relationships, as well as exposing him to numerous philosophical doctrines and modes of thought[128]. Of equal importance to his thinking was the influence of his Jewish roots and the dialectic that he saw between religion as a set of rules, and religiosity. The latter was a living, spiritual experience, realised in the notion of a new reading of the Torah, coupled with

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[128] It is pertinent here to acknowledge some of the other forms of relationality, a number of which have or will be discussed further in the thesis. As detailed in chapter one, Alistair McFayden has explored models of relation in *The Call to Personhood* (1990, 32), echoing Buber's stance that relationships reflect the image of God only when "lived in a dialogical encounter." In the feminist tradition, explored in greater depth in chapter 5, Sallie McFague has pursued the idea of a new Trinitarian concept of God as Mother, Lover, Friend, in *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (1987). Another model focusing on a woman's perspective is from Carol Gilligan, who explores the causes of division and aggression in relationships in her book *In a different voice* (1993) by examining the reactions of males and females to different relationship scenarios and situations. She concludes that while men often see relationships as replaceable, women try to alter the rules in order to prevent division and conflict. This corresponds to Buber's ethics as not being prescriptive but worked out through dialogue and encounter in the "Thou" dynamic. A model which is also of particular relevance to Buber is John Macquarrie's existential Trinitarian model, explored in *Principles of Christian Theology (1966)*. He admits to being influenced in his work by Heidegger as Macquarrie's model reflects the three part of the Trinity as expressions of Being. He (ibid, 185) argues that the Trinity, especially the Holy Spirit, is able to unify God and the world.

spiritual Zionism[129] and the search for genuine community. The importance of this revival was seen as having concrete applications in the lived experience of Hasidism[130], the third influence that will be examined. The foundations of Buber's main thesis are to be found in the book *Daniel,* his first major work (1913), which is a culmination of many influences on his thinking and details his journey to apprehend unity through dialogue, as opposed solely to mysticism. It marks a transition in his approach to anthropological questions because he considers the dialectical positions of "orientating" and "realising[131]." After exploring the influences behind Buber's thinking, the second part of this chapter will be given over to a discussion of how these factors ultimately culminated in his relational theology of "I-It, I-Thou", which became his central insight, and which remains important for the cyber world of today.

Early Influences

Buber's life is a series of opposites related to his various dialectics, such as distance and relation, orientating and realising. Paul Mendes-Flohr (1947, vii) argues that it is these tensions that helped to formulate Buber's own theology of relationships and to shape his ultimate "hermeneutic method, grounded in the principle of dialogue." His eclectic life meant that he exposed himself to lived experiences and pursued those facets which allowed him to be drawn nearer to his goal of seeing the unity of all things. The advantage of Buber grounding his theology in encounters from his own life, make them particularly appealing and accessible. They have not arisen from some abstract philosophical conception, but

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[129] Spiritual Zionism is a trend in Jewish nationalist thinking and Zionist ideology and was most prominently championed by Ahad Ha'am. It differs from conventional or political Zionism as it does not believe that the solution to the Jewish problem was a return of all Jews to Israel. Instead Judaism had lost its spiritual essence, its creative and national might and if a spiritual centre was established in Israel, this would reach Jews in the diaspora and maintain the links between the communities through education (Mitchell G Bard, 2013).

[130] Hasidism is a movement started in the 1700s by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov who believed that one needed to be attached to God and Torah in everything that one did, said or thought, not just in Torah study (Mitchell G Bard, 2011.).

[131] The two positions of orientating and realising are discussed by Buber in *Daniel*, the former referring to feelings, and the latter to genuine encounters. The implications of these terms will be discussed later in relation to the influence of the work *Daniel* on Buber's thinking.

Buber's life lived on the "narrow ridge[132]" ([1947] 2002, 218). The majority of Buber's early influences came from relationships in and around his family. His early life was dominated by upheaval. First the separation of his parents and being sent to live with his grandparents, then back to live with his father. From his grandfather he developed his love of languages and his ability to see that by being able to address the other, one could engage in a true dialogue of meaning. His grandfather's love of midrash[133] also opened the "leshon hakodesh"[134] to the young Buber. It enabled him ([1967] 2002, 26) a means of communication with the Divine: "The world of the Logos[135] and of the Logoi opened itself to me." The importance placed on the word of the Torah for communicating with the Divine, coupled with his love of languages, demonstrated to Buber the power of dialogue for forging and sustaining relationships and became a central tenet of his dialectic.

By his own accounts ([1967] 2002, 27) his father was "wholly unsentimental and wholly unromantic" but had a great affinity with nature. It was from time spent with him that Buber learned not just of the theoretical nature of dialogue, but its practical implications. This was something he was able to pursue on his grandfather's estate at the age of eleven, when he was exposed to the importance of relationships with all of creation. The young Buber used to steal into the stable and "stroke the neck of my darling, a broad dapple-grey horse" (ibid, 31). It was while doing this one day that he gained his first important realization of the sense of the Other and the relation of "Thou and Thou with me" (ibid, 32). At that moment the macrocosm was opened to him, a gateway was there, a union was formed, but in a second the

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[132] Friedman ([1955] 2002, 3) tells us that Buber used the term "narrow ridge" to express the "paradoxical unity" that he saw inherent in life and refers to concepts such as "I and thou", love and justice, dependence and freedom."

[133] Midrash is a type of Jewish literature which aims to draw out laws and implications from bible passages, to enable the Torah to become more accessible (Joseph Telushkin, 1991).

[134] The Holy Tongue of Hebrew, which was considered important as it was the language that the Scripture was written in and the best means of dialogue between humans and the Divine.

[135] The Logos is the Greek term for "the Word" and was the means through which God was able to commune with people. For Jews, the revelation of God was found in the Torah through the sacred language of Hebrew. For Christians, Jesus was seen as the "Logos" because in him God's word had become incarnate (John 1:1).

experience was lost. It is from such experiences that we become aware that Buber learned to respond to fluid situations. The response needed to come from the whole person; a sign of commitment to the other. The individual puts themselves in a position of vulnerability and yet one is open to the possibility of an encounter of the "Thou" variety. Buber ([1923] 2004, 15) taught that the "I-Thou" relation is mutual: "My Thou affects me, as I affect it." Genuine dialogue involves "experiencing the other side" so that one retains one's own individuality but can also see things from the other position in the relationship as "the barrier of separation has been destroyed" (ibid, 62).

Coupled with his affinity for creation, Robert Wood (1969, 5) informs us that Buber's teenage years were punctuated by concerns about many intellectual, philosophical and metaphysical problems, such as "space and time". It was his desire to alleviate some of the consternation that issues such as this caused him that forced him to examine solutions that philosophers had provided. It was Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who offered much solace on metaphysical issues and Buber ([1967] 2002, 34) comments that his work *Prolegomena* (1783) "exercised a great quieting effect" on him. Although Kant had initially dispelled some of the mystery and consternation concerning intellectual philosophical questions, Buber's continuing education enabled him to realise that philosophies that do not address the needs of the whole person but merely the intellect, cannot be totally satisfying in providing an answer to the human struggle. True living is found in relation and dialogue. Buber's encounter with the works of Feuerbach (1804-1872) at the age of 18 provided a strong foundation for his thought because it caused him to alter his focus. "I, myself, in my youth was given a decisive impetus by Feuerbach" (Buber, [1947] 2002, 176). Feuerbach enabled him to move from inquiring about philosophical problems to looking at the central issue of human need for unity in relationships. Buber (ibid, 32) reveals that Feuerbach (1843) taught him that "[t]rue dialectic is not a monologue of the solitary thinker with himself, it is a dialogue between I

and Thou". However, Buber (ibid, 1975) was later to dismiss some of Feuerbach's ideas, such as "man's being is contained only in community". For Buber, dialogue was not limited to only one sphere of influence.

Buber's teachers also exerted a profound influence on his life and his emerging thoughts about the relationships which humans encounter. Both Wilhelm Dilthey[136] (1833-1911) and Georg Simmel[137] (1858-1918) caused him to consider more carefully the place of man and the workings of the self. The former taught him how the individual becomes aware of the way that their soul interacts with others in meeting.[138] From this Buber ([1965] 1998, 70) formulated his ideas about how an individual was able to discern their "dynamic centre, which stamps his every utterance, action, and attitude with the recognizable sign of uniqueness". Then one was able to perceive an individual's wholeness and could connect with them, viewing them not as a fragmented individual but as part of a whole. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 55) informs us that Simmel was extremely influential to Buber's thinking about man-in-relation: "the relation between man and God, between man and man, and between man and nature". Although finding much to agree with in his ideas, Rotensteich (1991, 56) suggests that Buber rejected what he saw as Simmel's over-emphasis on the individual potentialities of humans, which, although important, did not take account of the mutual dialogue that humans needed to engage in to cultivate genuine encounter with the other. Increasingly, dialogue became central to Buber. Sarah Scott (2010) explains that Buber's philosophy of dialogue was a conscious reaction against his teachers' notion of inner experience, as opposed to dialogue. The need for concrete dialogue was also evident in how

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[136] Dilthey's most notable work is *The Essence of Philosophy* (1907).

[137] Simmel's most notable works are *The Problems of the Philosophy of History* (1892), *The Philosophy of Money* (1907), *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903).

[138] Maurice Friedman ([1955] 2002, 38) informs us that it was from Dilthey that Buber started to formulate his concept of realization, which allows man to have closer, immanent contact with God. This can be seen as significant for Buber's later doctrine of I-Thou; one cannot be a detached observed, as in the "It" model, but to truly understand, one must enter into the "Thou".

he wrote. Iris Murdoch (1992, 463) comments Buber "disliked visual metaphysics because he wants to use the language of encounter or dialogue, not of contemplation".

In terms of demonstrating to Buber the need for philosophies to be actualised in the present, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) provided one of the strongest influences. Buber engaged with Nietzsche's idea that, in order for humans to find meaning, they must engage with life and actualise their individual "will to power" (Buber, [1947] 2002, 178-179). Although ultimately to reject Nietzsche's central idea, his creativity, coupled with his emphasis on the concrete, were strong influences in enabling Buber to create his own theology. Buber ([1923] 2004, 28) taught that it was through relationships that the individual became stronger: "Through the Thou a man becomes I". In fact, Buber (ibid, 29) said that every time that the "I" engaged with the "Thou", the individual was strengthened; hence the need for relationships of the "Thou" variety. These developed self and other, as well as allowing one to grow closer to the Divine.

The last and probably most influential figure that Buber encountered, who allowed him to understand the relationship that could exist between the individual and God, was Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Buber describes the influence that Kierkegaard's (1843) concepts had on him, especially from an anthropological perspective. In *Between Man and Man* he admits his influence "is admittedly of a special nature" ([1947] 2002, 191). It is his ideas about "the Single One"[139] that were paramount. They allowed Buber to become aware that man had to come to a state of self-realization before having encounters with others and the Divine, and to embrace each situation as unique. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 39) says that it was through this self-realisation he understood that a man could then have a direct

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[139] Kierkegaard's notion of "the single one" was his central thesis and discussed in his 1843 book *Fear and Trembling*. Buber ([1947] 2002, 203) records that Kierkegaard thought that it was the necessary for "entry into a relation with God." However, this is where Buber (ibid, 205) strongly disagreed with Kierkegaard, because the latter advocated that one needed to renounce "the crowd", in order to be by oneself. It was only then that one could come into a true relationship with the Divine. For Buber, it was through acceptance of community and relationships with others, that the Divine would become part of the relationship.

relationship with God, whom he could then address as "Thou". Kierkegaard held that a person needed to become "a single one" in order to find himself. Buber ([1947] 2002, 49) explains how Kierkegaard interpreted this to mean that it was necessary to become single "to fulfil the first condition of all religiosity". Buber (ibid, 48-50) determined that Kierkegaard meant that, in order to have a dialogue with God, one must become single; it is only as an individual that man can address God as "Thou" and have a unique relationship with him. Buber (ibid, 55-58) draws a distinction between Kierkegaard's "single one" and Max Stirner's[140] (1806-1856) "unique one" and ultimately dismisses the latter. The former emphasises how man finds and reaches the truth through "entry into a relation" (with God), whereas Stirner advocated that truth was to be found in living the right life, often focused on individualist tendencies and the conformity to religious doctrines. Although Buber acknowledged that the individual was important, he insisted that there was a constant need for "Thou" encounters.

Although Kierkegaard's formulation of the "Single One" and how it is obtained through a relationship with God had a profound effect on influencing Buber's concept of "I-Thou", there was one area where he could not agree. This was Kierkegaard's insistence that in order to reach this state, the world and everything in it must be ultimately rejected. Buber could not overcome the dictate of loving God and the neighbour;[141] it was not a choice between one or the other, as he perceived it to be in mysticism.[142] This is a point made by McFadyen (1990, 45), who says that when we relate to others "we become fully centred

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[140] Johann Kaspar Schmidt became known as Max Stirner and was a German Philosopher whose main work was *The Ego and Its Own* (1845). He attacked all oppressive modes of thought, of which he counted religion one of them, and believed in the autonomy of the ego (Leopold, 2011).

[141] The importance of an ethical dimension to all relationships is embedded in the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20); the first three relate to the relationships with God, the last seven to that with other humans. This is also emphasised in Leviticus 19:9-35, where the ethical dimension to relationships and how to treat others is part of the relationships towards the Divine. This commandment is also re-iterated by Jesus in Matthew 22:36-40.

[142] Cf Richard King (1999) *Orientalism and Religion*, *Post-Colonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* , chapter 1 and Grace Jantzen (1995) *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism,* for further discussions of traditional mysticism.

personal identities through moving beyond ourselves in dialogue with others. Living out the fullness of God's image involves relation in both dimensions." When Kierkegaard rejected his fiancé Regina, Buber insisted that he had misunderstood God. Buber ([1947] 2002, 60) pointed out: "Creation is not a hurdle on the road to God, it is the road itself"[143]. God must ultimately be reached through relationships in the spheres of creation, not by rejecting them. Buber (ibid, 71) went even further, insisting that "the exemplary bond"[144] is marriage. It allows us to perceive the concept of "Thou" in an unconditional way, and come to God. He also took umbrage with Kierkegaard's notion of dismissing "the crowd" i.e. community, in order to reach the state of being the single one. Buber (ibid, 76) advocated that it is through others and engagement with society that there can be genuine relationships: "The Single One is the man for whom the reality of relation with God as an exclusive relation includes and encompasses the possibility of relation with all otherness." It is through understanding the importance of creation and a relationship with it that individuals can grow in their understanding of the Divine. There is not a choice between this world and the supernatural. For Buber, to dismiss communion with humans in preference to a relationship to God was to totally misunderstand the interconnectivity of all relationships and the place of the Divine within them.

Jewish Influences

It was his grandfather, a well-known scholar of Hebrew literature and the Torah, who helped Buber to understand the true spirit of Judaism and the possibilities that it offered for spiritual revival and uniting communities (Buber, [1947] 2002, 22). However, Buber thought

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[143] The notion of creation is an element which is central to Buber's theology as it is human's inability to embrace the connection with creation which has led to the less favourable "I-It" stance. Creation has become objectified; something to be used by humans, but not valued in itself. It is only through re-envisaging a new relationship with creation that a "Thou" relationship can be actualised. The way in this could be envisaged is discussed in chapter five in the context of ecological connection.
[144] In discussing Marriage Buber was reflecting the social situation of the time (1923) when it was the usual union for a couple. However, in late modernity, we could substitute "a strong and loving relationship", which does not have to entail marriage.

that many aspects of doctrinal religion and theology were often passively followed, in comparison to religiosity, which was a choice and required action. Guy Stroumsa, (1947, 26) says that Buber was deeply suspicious of much organised religion and theology and instead believed in a new spirit of Judaism which would "erase the traditional boundaries between the holy and the profane" and emphasise the unity that was needed. He opted to search for a new religiosity which could be traced back to the Jewish prophets and forward to the idea of a Spiritual Zionist community, interconnected through dialogue with the community and with God. Therefore, for Buber ([1967] 1996, 79), renewal of Judaism ultimately meant "renewal of Jewish religiosity". Cohen (1957, 72-73) explains that religiousness focused around the notion of faith and trust, "emunah"[145], which stretched back through the Jewish prophets and was not a faith based on morality or adherence to doctrine but on actions. Through genuine religiosity, actions open up relationships and possibilities for communion with the "eternal Thou".

As mentioned previously, Buber contrasted religion with religiosity; the former focused on adherence to strict doctrines, almost static faith, which would please God, but could be to the detriment of relationships. The latter was a means of bringing God into the presence of creation through dialogue with the other: "Religiousness means activity – the elemental entering-into-relation with the absolute; religion means passivity – an acceptance of the handed-down command…Religion means preservation; religiosity, renewal" (Buber, [1967] 1996, 80-81). He described the latter as the freer of the two because it is the creative, active, spiritual longing, "the will to realize the unconditional through action" (ibid, 80). The former is more rigid in the sense that it is grounded in "customs and teachings…of a certain epoch" Buber (ibid, 81) saw religiosity as offering the best hope for renewal as it is living,

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[145] This literally translates as trust but has a deeper significance for relationships. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 111) informs us that it is a means of binding the spiritual and the physical and is a means of realising the interconnectivity of all things. "Emunah is the realization of one's faith in the actual totality of one's relationships to God, to one's appointed sphere in the world, and to oneself".

active and involves freedom to choose to respond. Religiosity encouraged the urge to "establish a living community with the unconditioned….genuine religiosity is doing" (ibid, 93). Religiosity enabled genuine dialogue because it provides a way in which God can be "realized through us" not merely believed in (ibid, 94). Buber sought to adhere to the spirit of religion[146], but without what he saw as some of the rigid and unnecessary dogma. Religiosity meant that instead of merely keeping the law one used it as an ethical guide for action, which sometimes entailed breaking it.

Buber wanted to stress that faith was active. Two aspects of Judaism in particular were instrumental in revealing God as active in the community: the "Land"[147] and the "Word"[148]. The former he saw as a part of Judaism which bound the past with the lived present. It was a concrete sign of God's presence among the people, and a means of uniting them. The Land symbolised a means of dialogue, of growing closer to God, and binding communities together in 'emunah'. Dan Avnon (1947, 118) says that for Buber "community open to the God" was his goal of Spiritual Zionism. The Land provided the means of uniting the community with each other, with creation, and with God. Community was paramount: Buber ([1947] 1996, 16) saw the Jews as a nation, united as one, the ground of a person's "I".

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[146] Buber was always a strict Jew in observance to the Law but that he saw that Judaism went beyond the Law to reveal the nature of true humanity which was found in relation. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 46) informs us that for Buber "Religiousness means activity – an elementary setting oneself in relation to the Absolute; religion means passivity – taking upon oneself inherited laws". This evokes a similar stance to Jesus, who although adherent to the law, when chastised for the apparent breaking of the Sabbath through healing, revealed in his words that relation must come before adherence to rigid doctrine: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

[147] The Land is a central concept in Judaism because it is a means through which God fulfilled the promised given to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), It is also a means of binding the Jews together in the homeland; a place where they would feel safe after the atrocities of the Holocaust. In chapter five I will explore how cyberspace has meant that the importance of Land has been superseded to an extent by the new spaces brought by cyberspace, which perform a similar function in uniting global communities through similar beliefs and aspirations.

[148] The importance of not only Scripture but dialogue is a central tenet of my thesis and forms the basis for the relationships with humans and with the Divine. In the cyberspace era it has renewed importance because of the way in which communication online is primarily through dialogue.

Engaging with the messages provided in the Torah was also significant to Buber's vision. This was not as a means of following the letter of the law, but understanding God's revelation as dialogue. Cohen (1957, 60) says that he felt he needed to "expose the inner spirit of the bible that he thought had been lost". With a refreshed understanding of the Torah, humans could have a dialogue with God, and the Divine could commune with individuals. Mendes-Flohr (1947, viii) informs us that Buber had a wish, along with his friend Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929), to translate the bible into German and make it more accessible[149]. This was essential in Buber's eyes because the Jewish people are seen to be wedded to God through the Torah. It was only through an understanding of God's word that they could hope to consummate their part of the relationship; God spoke to them in a dialogue through the medium of the Torah. According to Buber (ibid, 215), only through reading the Torah can man come to the ultimate realisation "that our life is a dialogue between the above and the below". Steven Kepnes (1992, 7) tells us that the Torah is so important because it is the first record of "the most rich and spontaneous dialogues that ever existed, the dialogues between God and His Chosen People".

The importance of the Torah was not solely in its usefulness as a means of law-giving. Buber (1951, 22) thought that the dialogue contained within it needed to be extended to "the whole dimension of human existence". Kepnes (1992, 70) notes that Buber thought that when reading a text one was able to engage in a "Thou" relationship with it. The reader could enter into dialogue with the text. He says that "[r]eading a book, like meeting any Thou, is the experience of otherness" and a means of relation to the Divine (ibid, 72). Buber sought a new means of forming relationships and uniting the community through dialogue. He hoped to open one to the other in the "Thou" mode of communication. He thought that this could be

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[149] There is an intriguing parallel here: Buber's knowledge of language enabled him to dissolve barriers and dialogue with text, especially the Torah, more accessible for the Jews to access. The global nature of cyberspace means that barriers are also destroyed and communication is expanded, so that dialogue can take place more readily in the network era.

achieved by a renewal of religion and a moving away from the traditional, rigid adherence to a moral law, where people lacked zeal and fervour[150]. Instead he advocated a new form of active religiosity, based on true faith grounded in spiritual community.

Hasidism

In his desire to understand the true message of the Torah and the essence of Judaism Friedman ([1955] 2002, 17) informs us that Buber devoted five years of his life to the study of Hasidism. Cohen (1957, 26 & 46) tells us this is a form of mystical, Orthodox Judaism, popular around the middle of the 18th century and focused on the directness of relationship with man, nature and God. It allowed Buber to formulate a theology where people could start to realise that God was not just accessed in transcendent form, but was able to become immanent (whilst still maintaining transcendence). This would be revealed through encounters in the everyday life of creation. Hasidism was different from other forms of mysticism: it did not renounce the world but embraced it and required "rejoicing in the world", which would in turn lead to "rejoicing in God" (Buber [1950] 1994, 19). It was no longer enough to access the Divine just by keeping the commandments, or enjoying a personal mystical communion with him to the exclusion of meeting, it was action that was a means to reach the Divine: "To Hasidism, the true meaning of life is revealed in the deed" (Buber [1967] 2002, 48). This implied that relationships had an ethical dimension to them[151]

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[150] This contrast between rigid adherence to the Jewish law and putting it into practice alludes to the famous story of the Rabbi Hillel. When asked by a man to be taught the Torah in the time he could stand on one leg, he merely said: "What you do not like, do not do to your friend. The rest explains it, go and complete it entirely" (Rabbi Yehuda Prero, 2005). This demonstrates that the true spirit of Judaism, which Buber thought had been lost, could be summed up by the essential commandment of how to treat your fellow man, giving an ethical dimension to all relationships.

[151] Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) knew Buber as an associate and friend (Peter Atterton, Matthew Calarco, and , Maurice Friedman, 2004, 1). He is of central importance to my thesis for two reasons: firstly because of his dialogues with Buber concerning the nature of the Other, and secondly because of his insistence on the ethical dimension to relationships (Colin Davis, 1996, 2-3). Like Buber, he was concerned with dialogue and in his most famous work *Totality and Infinity* (1961) he debates the terms "Same" and "Other" which invokes Buber's "It" and "Thou" dimensions. However, for Levinas, the "Other" was totally beyond comprehension, whereas for Buber the "Thou" could be reached through relation with other, which allowed the Divine to be drawn down into the relationship. Levinas was influenced by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and thus had an

and it lead Buber ([1923] 2004, 17) to declare in *I-Thou* that "all real living is meeting". This emphasised that in order to enter into genuine relations, one must cultivate a meaningful life on earth, lived through encounters with others. Dialogue was not solely an individual pursuit with God, but had to be grounded in the lived reality of the present, demonstrating practical love for humans.

Thus we are reminded that the ethical dimension was paramount for Buber in relationships and it is a crucial strand in my argument in the assessment of cyberspace. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 233-234) informs us that it sprang from two foundations: in his philosophy of dialogue and also his philosophical anthropology. Ethics was not concerned with a mere adherence to the law but entailed the concept of ability, so that each person could reach their unique potential. For Buber ([1947] 2002, 16) ethics did not entail the idea of an imposition, or absolute code; more a respect for human dignity and a means of response: "[g]enuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding".

Hasidism appealed to Buber because it no longer emphasised just the transcendent, almost inaccessible nature of the Divine, but instead brought God among the people and creation. The main goal of the Hasidim was to bring awareness of the Shekinah, the divine spark within all people. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 22) says that the Hasidim placed a great emphasis on the immanence of God in the world and the way in which humans are God's co-workers in "the perfection of the world towards redemption". It was not God solely who brought about the redemption of the world, but it was the ultimate partnership between humans and God. The Divine wants to come to this world, but this is only enabled through humans re-turning to God and taking an active part in re-making creation. In Buber's ([1950] 1994, 23-25) view humans needed to work towards being rid of duality and attaining a

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interest in ontology and the question of being. He therefore thought that ethics arose from the sense of being of the self, as opposed to any prescribed doctrine, something which Buber concurred with. The relationship between these two will be pursued further in chapter four.

"united soul," body and spirit together. He thought that it is only when humans can be rid of conflicts within themselves that they can have a relationship with the whole of creation (ibid, 29). In promoting the idea of unity, Buber reveals that Hasidism stresses the need to value the relationships that humans have with all creatures, because "no encounter with a being or thing in the course of our lives lacks a hidden significance" (ibid, 38). He stressed that man needed to value the special relationship that these encounters can bring; through cultivating genuine relationships, humans are helping things to move towards perfection (ibid, 39).

There are three principal ideas central to Hasidism, which helped to formulate Buber's ideas in his "I-Thou" theology. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 24-25) suggests that the primary emphasis was on love, which Buber reinforced in the commandment to love God and your fellow man. Hence the need for genuine relationships within humanity; the spark of God is found within all people, so to reject another human is tantamount to rejecting God. Secondly, joy was needed; God is found in all things of creation, the first sphere Buber identified in *I-Thou.* In this model some view God as panentheisitic,[152] part of all things in creation. For Buber God was in 'the Land', which was the symbol of God's presence with the people and would be the ultimate meeting place for bringing community together under God. Buber ([1967] 2002, 47) felt genuine community among the Hasidim and he stated that "common reverence and common joy of soul are the foundations of genuine community". Thirdly, humility was essential, to put off the false self and affirm the true. Humility could be found through prayer and detachment from the craving for material possessions. This was essential. One could not enter into relations fully with another, without an understanding of self and the ability to put no barriers before the other.

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[152] Panentheism is the concept that God and the world are interdependent and that God is in the world and the world is in God. This concept therefore demonstrates the need for the relationship between God and creation to be integrated. There are many ways of interpreting this concept and it has been described by Moltmann (1974) in *The Crucified God* and more recently from a scientific perspective (see Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacock, eds. (2004) *In Whom We Live and Move and Have our Being)*.

The importance of the self is emphasised by Buber in *I-Thou;* humans must have an understanding of their own self before being able to engage in "Thou" relationships. If humans cultivated these three elements Buber ([1950] 1994, 32**)** thought that they would accomplish the goal of helping God to overcome separation by turning (teshuvah) to Him through re-making that which was lost (at the Fall). Teshuvah is the ultimate decisive turning point in a man's life and signals renewal. Buber (ibid, 67) says that when this decision is made, then humans can reach unity and begin the process of re-creation with God. Through this act humans can redeem what has been lost.

Daniel and the Enigma of mysticism

Daniel (1913) is the first major book detailing Buber's evolving theology and there are two major strands that are prevalent in his thinking: firstly, the influence of mysticism[153] and secondly, the existential influences from Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. However, it is evident by the end of the book that these will ultimately be rejected in favour of dialogue, grounded in lived reality. Buber soon came to a realization that in pursuing a purely mystical path to God, one cannot have an encounter with one's fellow human. Instead Buber ([1923] 2004, 28) says it is through genuine "Thou" relationships that one can come to God. As he comments: "The inborn Thou is realised in the lived relations with that which meets it". *Daniel* reveals Buber's dialectical way of thinking, where he draws a distinction between "orientating," seeing things in an objective way, and "realising," where a person develops a genuine relationship with their surroundings and is able to reach a state of wholeness. In *Daniel,* as Mayhall and Mayhall (2004, 21) inform us, Buber casts the image of the sea as a reflection of man's life, with creation behind him, which allowed humans to see the two-fold

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[153] Friedman ([1955] 2002, 29) informs us that Buber was greatly influenced by both Hinduism and Buddhism during his time of interest in mysticism, as well as Taoism. Buber was also probably familiar with the Kabbalist mystical tradition in Judaism, which views interconnections between different aspects of this world and the transcendent one. These influences were undoubtedly significant in helping Buber to see the interconnection between all aspects of the created world.

way in which they approach the world. It is from this standpoint that he was able to develop his theology based on the two modes of "I-It" and "I-Thou". The latter of these two being the genuine core of relationships and the position which should ultimately be sought as a means of truly connecting with creation, and through it, with the Divine.

The book demonstrates, through a series of dialogues that Daniel has with his friends, how Buber's thinking moves from desiring mystical union with God, to striving for moments of meeting or union with others. Language is central to the cultivation of dialogue in these relationships. It does not have to be in spoken form; words can get in the way of true meeting. Language is important to Buber as a means of communication and representation because it "provides the images with which we represent our experience of the world". Mayhall and Mayhall, 2002, 343-35 say that true dialogue is based on "true understanding of the other and listening for the questions that are not asked." Buber ([1947] 2002, 56) seems to chastise himself (and perhaps others) over the fact that in some relationships meaningless language takes over. He says "[r]eal listening has become rare in our time"[154], reflecting the prevalent "I-It" position.

The first dialogue in *Daniel* prepares the ground for Buber's ([1913] 1964, 55) engagement with nature, which he identifies in *I-Thou* as one of the three spheres of relation. It is through an engagement with nature that man is able to build up an affinity with his surroundings. Buber here also introduces us to his dialectical thinking; he contrasts the states of "orientating" (feeling and experiencing) and "realising," (genuine encounter). Buber (ibid, 91& 96) continues to expound these ideas in the second and third dialogues, where he informs us through the mouthpiece of Daniel that orientating is "thoroughly godless"; it is often bound to doctrine and religious orthodoxy, which can turn God into what Buber later terms the "It". By contrast, Buber (ibid, 69) says that realising is to "relate the experience to

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[154] Cf Carl Rogers (1950) for a discussion on psychotherapy and relational thinking.

nothing else but itself". There is a need to realise God and to risk all, to step out of the comfort promised by orientating (ibid, 98). Buber (ibid, 78) reinforces the need for genuine community and fellowship in order to "live the realizing as real". Here is where Buber (ibid, 96ff) first uses the term inclusion. He much later elaborated on this in *Between Man and Man (1947)*, where he described how in inclusion you experience the event from the other side. "Inclusion…is the extension of one's own concreteness, the fulfilment of the actual situation of life, the complete presence of the reality in which one participates." He continues that both parties are aware "without forfeiting anything of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other" (Buber, [1947] 2002, 115). In "I-Thou" relationships there must be a sense of sharing something of self with the other, but at the same time a need to retain individuality. Rotenstreich, (1991, 21-23) suggests that in the "Thou" relationship one extends oneself to the other. This is not by showing empathy, which can impose one's own feelings about an experience onto the other, but through inclusion, seeing things from the other's perspective, without forfeiting anything of the self.

The fourth dialogue continues the dialectic and anticipates the polarity between "I" and "thou." Buber employs the theatre and the dialogue present within it to demonstrate the duality that humans face in life and the way that it can be used to mediate theology. He describes the poet as the messenger of God; he is at home both in the sphere of God and in the world (ibid, 124). Here he anticipates the relationship that humans have with what he later terms "forms of the spirit", as they have a dialogue that is active in the present through individual creativity but also captures something of the Divine. The final dialogue addresses the problems surrounding unity and is the most significant indication of Buber's move away from purely mystical union with God, to where unity is found in the dialogue of the lived concrete. Once again he employs the analogy of the sea to demonstrate the duality that

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humans endure, and how at one point it can be horrifying and dangerous, and the next comforting. He continues that duality will always be apparent, but can be unified through realisation. Buber employs a story he returns to in other works (ibid, 140), demonstrating how his teaching has been shaped by his own experiences. He had found a piece of the mineral mica and became aware that the dualism between subject and object was lost, "in my looking I had tasted unity".

Daniel shows Buber's move away from a mystical approach to life. The decisive turning point in his ultimate rejection of traditional mysticism as the sole means to encounter the Divine came in 1914. As a professor at the University of Frankfurt Buber received a young man who had come to talk to him. Cohen (1957, 42-44) reports that Buber had been engaged in "religious enthusiasm" that morning and was not listening with his full-being to the unasked questions of the young man, tacitly indicating that he was not fully engaged with him. He later learned that the young man had committed suicide and the experience taught him that one cannot be preoccupied with mystical states to the exclusion of genuine meeting. It was then that Buber ([1947] 2002, 16) decided to give up the "religious" in terms of following a prescriptive way to live his life: "I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken." Instead he opted to embrace the daily relationships that he was exposed to with his fellow humans. He realised that true living, and a genuine ethical position, is found in meeting. It is discovered in the lived life of man, not in some abstract mysticism, removed from creation. Hence, the desire for concreteness and rejection of abstractions made him reluctant to call his central ideology a "philosophy". Instead he preferred the term "dialogue" or meeting. This marks his move away from the metaphysical and philosophical to an approach grounded in the empirical.

All these influences, coupled with his experiences and the lived reality of Hasidism, allowed Buber to formulate his central theology of relationships encapsulated in *I –Thou*.

Although his previous writings demonstrate a progression in his thinking towards this point, Wood (1969, 20) tells us that Buber found this work particularly hard to write. He began in 1916, but not actually publishing the work until 1923. First there came a re-draft in 1919. Then he spent three years occupied in Hasidic studies and studying the work of Descartes. What Buber was trying to capture was a form of dialogue that he himself acknowledged was almost ineffable.[155] Buber's ideas encapsulated within *I-Thou* announce the importance of communication and the way in which relationships can exist in a variety of different forms and dimensions within creation. Innovations within technology have produced many modes of communication available to individuals and Buber's dialectic of the transition between "I-It" and "I-Thou" becomes essential to understanding their validity. It offers a way to explore how relationships can be built within and through technology.

Relational Theology

The influences in Buber's life culminated in the formation of his relational theology, which provides the ground for my work on interconnectivity. In order to address the key themes apparent within the work, this last section will be divided into four themes that encapsulate the central points that Buber focuses on in *I-Thou.* I will begin by identifying the dialectic between "I-It and I-Thou" and the way that the self is changed by engaging in these two modes. I will secondly explore the three spheres of relationship and the nature of dialogues that take place within them. This will be followed by the foundational relationship with God, begun at creation, which is seen to underpin all. I will conclude the investigation of Buber's key work by showing how love and unity play a central role in defining genuine encounters and overcoming the distinction between self and other.

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[155] Although dialogue was critical to his theology of relationships, the fact that it was often indescribable has been the focus of some criticisms against his theology, and this will be returned to in chapter four.

I-It, I-Thou

Buber formulated the terms "I-It and I-Thou" in order to describe the two dimensions of relationships that human engaged in, which were consistent with human attitudes towards phenomena within the world. He contended that it was this dynamic which defined how people related to creation, to each other, and to God. They emerged as phrases from the study of relationships in Daniel, where he employed the terms "orientating" and "realising" (Buber, [1913] 1964, 21-22). There is a common misunderstanding that Buber advocated that, out of the two, only the "I-Thou" dimension was needed. This is to wholly misunderstand the need for what Buber ([1965] 1998, 50) described as "setting at a distance". In fact he emphasises that, eventually, "Thou" relationships will revert back to "It" because the "Thou" relationship, which has taken place outside of time and space[156], needs to return to the physical plain: As he remarks: "The particular Thou, after the relational event has run its course, is bound to become an It" (Buber, [1923] 2004, 32). Once the moment has taken place, the "Thou" relationship will come to an end as "every thou in our world must become an it…[A]s soon as the relation has been worked out or has been permeated with a means, the Thou becomes an object among objects…fixed in its size and its limits" (ibid, 21). Buber (ibid, 61) said that it is only with God that the "Thou" can remain; the Divine is the "eternal Thou".

Buber ([1947] 2002, 24) acknowledged the need for distance in relationships. "Certainly in order to be able to go out to the other you must have the starting place, you must have been, you must be, with yourself". By this Buber meant that individuals could not hope to enter into genuine relationships if they did not have knowledge of themselves first,

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[156] Although Buber did state a need for the "lived concrete" in favour of purely the mystical way to encounter the Divine, he accepted that "Thou" relationships did take place outside the ordinary, everyday realm of interaction.

without any falseness or masks.[157] Buber also realised that it was only when humans were at a distance that they became aware of the need for union. It was the separation from unity that forced them to reflect on the need for moments of encounter. These, Buber said, took place in the space of "the between" (1998, 97). He employed the analogy of a "leaping fire" to successfully express how the between space operated so that the two were joined, only momentarily but very powerfully (ibid).

"I-It" relations arise in everyday life and are defined by the way individuals use others and treat them in an objective way. Buber ([1923] 2004, 28) believed humans have lost the "inborn Thou", which they had at conception; they have become sick and alienated and evil has arisen. He thought that humans had forgotten the relationships that should exist between them in a community and in creation. Rotenstreich (1991, 26) notes how Buber thought that there was a sickness of our time which meant that "our alienation from the basic and normative human situation, a derivation from the primary situation which has been forgotten, or abandoned and must be restored". When humans engage in the egotistical "I-It" mode, they treat all their encounters as subjective, categorising experiences using causality and their usefulness to self. This is the primitive state. Buber ([1923] 2004, 28) said that when humans grow, they label things in order to learn. In this mode deep "Thou" relationships are turned away from in preference to superficial ones. This often suffices, fulfilling a desire for communication without commitment; a defining marker of late modernity.

In the "I-It" mode, both subjects are aware that they are not fully committed to the experience. There is a sense of separateness and detachment because neither wants to risk full encounter with the other. There may be communication through speech but Buber ([1965]

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[157] This impetus to "know thyself" is indicative of the mystic's aim, and shows how Buber's interaction and reflection with mysticism has helped to shape the work. These ideas concerning the self, link to my discussion of individualism in chapter one, where I acknowledged how social movements left humans seeking to know more about oneself and spirituality.

1998, 68) observes that people "do not really speak to one another". There is no fullness of encounter and value is not seen in the other. In this experience the other remains at a distance, able to analyse and converse, but not on a genuine level of a truly meaningful encounter. "I-It" experiences are limited, grounded in time and space, and the parties never give openly of themselves to the other (Buber, [1923] 2004, 12). In contrast, "Thou" relationships have "no bounds" and so can develop individuals by bringing them into genuine dialogue.

The ideal relationship, the "I-Thou", is significant for fulfilling human potentiality. The two sides of the relationship confirm each other, allowing each to grow. Buber ([1923] 2004, 21) draws an analogy in nature to illustrate his point: "The I is the eternal Chrysalis, the Thou, the eternal butterfly". Buber's writing suggests that as the realisation of the need for true relationships becomes apparent, so individuals will progress. They become open to being and to the possibility of dialogical relationships of the "I-Thou" mode (ibid, 28). There is always the potential to reach the "I-Thou" and, through risk and accepting the other, one is able to actualise this.

Through each genuine encounter Buber (ibid, 28) thought that individuals become more aware of their "inborn thou" and the need to cultivate relationships which allow them to flourish: "Through the Thou, a man becomes I." The "I-Thou" embraces and actualises the idea of relation, and one becomes aware of the other because "Thou" can only be spoken of with the whole being. Buber (ibid, 11) said that "only with the whole being can a man address his thou". In these relationships the soul of each person is seen to encounter the other's soul, and although words can be used, there is another dimension to the encounter. Buber (ibid, 36-37) infers that the individual is able to transfer to a higher mode of existence: "Man lives in the spirit if he is able to respond to his Thou". These "Thou" relationships are seen to take place on a different plane of existence; both parties enter into a mode which transcends that of the everyday "I-It" experiences (Buber [1923] 2004, 17). Ultimately, these

relationships are not forced but take place through the grace of God: "The Thou meets me through grace". Initially this appears to mean loss of self, an aim of mysticism, where one seeks to merge with the Divine. However, Buber stresses that the opposite is true. Individuals need to be first "with yourself", and understand themselves fully. It is only then one can retain the "I", but also be part of the "Thou".

In the "Thou" mode, the goal is not individual pleasure or experience, but the task of entering fully into relation with another. Buber ([1923] 2004, 25) says that the "Thou" is a relationship ultimately founded on love and characterised by "turning towards the other…with the soul". "I-Thou" encounters are a challenge on many levels. There is the need to be open to the encounter, hence the idea of vulnerability, which is never encountered in the "I-It" mode. There is also challenge in the dialogue. Although it is based on mutuality, there arises the pain of losing the relationship, with the inevitable reversion back to "I-It". Despite this risk he emphasises that all "Thou" relationships allow people to glimpse the "eternal Thou" as "the extended lines of relations meet in the "eternal Thou" (ibid, 61). This is the only relation which cannot become an "It" and therefore consummates all others.

Dialogue and the Spheres

Having established the extent of the two modes of relating, Buber ([1923] 2004, 13) proceeds to describe the three spheres of relationship: with nature, with men, and with spiritual beings. These relationships are characterised by the dialogue that they use, which does not always have to be in spoken form. In dialogue Buber ([1965] 1998, 70) thought humans are able to become aware of the other, and to "perceive his wholeness…to perceive the dynamic centre". The uniqueness of the individual is maintained within the relationships and the parties within it are valued. In genuine dialogue one is able to "turn" to the other, accept them "as a person" (ibid, 75), emphasising the ethical nature of the "Thou" relationship. Buber ([1947] 2002, 22-23) continues that there are three kinds of dialogue

which take place: genuine dialogue, where there is a living relation; technical dialogue, prompted by the needs of practical understanding, and monologue disguised as dialogue, where the aim is solely to affirm one's own self-importance. It is only the first of these which can be classed as true dialogue and it is enabled when there is openness to the other. As Buber ([1965] 1998, 59) comments: "Genuine conversation, and therefore the actual fulfilment of relation with men, means acceptance of otherness". In the third form of dialogue individuals are not able to live in true community. They miss opportunities to cultivate true dialogue with man and nature and to reach wholeness.

These three spheres of relationship are instrumental in humans drawing nearer to God. It is within them that the "inborn thou" is awoken. The Divine can be glimpsed through the relationships, as God is the foundation of all unions that humans encounter. Buber ([1967] 1996, 157) demonstrated the importance of the interconnectivity of the human spheres of relation with those of the Divine. "In the life of the Jewish people no sphere is unconnected with the religious one". Similarly, all relationships are interconnected by the global nature of cyberspace, which is able to facilitate communities coming together and allow the sacred to permeate the profane.

The first of the spheres involves the relationships that man can have with nature[158], which Buber ([1923] 2004, 13) declares is "beyond the level of speech". He employs the example of a tree to demonstrate how, in this sphere, one can see it merely as an object and can "classify it as a species and study it as a type." This entails seeing it in an "I-It" manner. However, he continues that through "will and grace...I became bound up in relation to it" (ibid, 14). In this instance the experience moves to a "Thou" encounter. He also insists that

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[158] The interconnectivity of all beings invokes the concept of animism, which has been much misunderstood. It is often associated with a "new age" idea; humans living in harmony with nature. In reality it can provide deeper insights into interconnectivity and the need for understanding between different aspects of the environment. Graham Harvey (2005, xi) informs us that this is enabled by the realisation that "the world is full of persons" and the concept of personhood extends beyond the human category. It also has an ethical dimension, as it entails finding out "how to be a good person in respectful relationships with other persons" (ibid).

"Thou" relationship is possible with an animal, as "an animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language" (ibid, 75). Buber describes how he has been drawn into an encounter by looking into the eyes of a cat, before the moment was taken over by the world of "It" (ibid).

As indicated earlier, this sphere was of great importance to him. The incident that he recalls when he was eleven and sensed the otherness of the mare he was stroking gave himself a glimpse of dialogue beyond speech (Buber [1947] 2002, 26-27). He relays how the moment lasted only a short while before he became conscious of his hand and the horse again became an "It" to him. Nevertheless, the "Thou" moment had a profound effect and encouraged him to find this relationship again, by moving away from the everyday "I-It" stance to the realm of genuine relation. The "Thou" experience is something that an individual will want to repeat and cultivate. In so doing, each encounter will help to build up relational communities. Buber ([1923] 2004, 76) also specifies that relations can take place with inanimate objects, and returns to his description in *Daniel* of his "I-Thou" encounter with a piece of the mineral mica. It became apparent that he could realise the possibilities of "Thou" relations with things within nature, living and inanimate. This sphere has great relevance to Buber's concept of the Land and environment and its importance in bringing people together in a spiritual form of renewal. The natural world can act as a means of gathering people together in community.

Buber (ibid, 79) points out that the relationship with humans, which he identifies as the second sphere, is the most important: it is described as "the real simile of the relation with God". The relationship is characterised by speech, our primary means of communication, and it holds the means of meriting a response. Buber ([1947] 2002, 5) also makes it clear throughout his primary literature that this sphere can also be beyond speech: "Human dialogue, therefore, although it has its distinctive life in the sign that is in sound and gesture…can exist without the sign". He further states that although the relations between

men often seem to be characterised by feelings, true encounters go beyond this: "In distinction from relation a feeling has its place in a scale" ([1923] 2004, 65). Buber (ibid, 19) expands on the explanation in relation to the love "between I and Thou" in a genuine relationship when he states: "Feelings are 'entertained'; love comes to pass. Feelings dwell in man; but man dwells in his love." Love is between the two parties in a genuine relationship and can never objectify the other.

He expands his ideas of relationships between humans by suggesting that they can take one of three forms. The first is described as resting on an abstract but mutual experience of inclusion, and relates to man as a spiritual being. The second is a relation of education,[159] which is often one-sided (as alluded to above). The third (and most satisfying) is friendship, based on "a concrete and mutual experience of inclusion." (Buber [1947] 2002, 117-119) It is this third type where there is a meeting, not just of bodies, or speech, but of souls. Buber (ibid, 71) allows that dialogue can take place through marriage (or strong unions), the "exemplary bond". In this act the couple are able to give themselves fully to each other in relationship. Paradoxically, in this bond one can also become truly free because, although bound, Buber ([1923] 2004, 48) holds that freedom is found in "Thou" relations. However, dialogue between humans does not have to be solely with those that are familiar with us. Buber suggests that it can arise in "an unsentimental and unreserved exchange of glances between two people in an alien place" (ibid, 42). He expounds on this idea of relation in the workplace further, and discusses an example - which underlies my central argument - of how humans can have a dialogue with a machine ([1947] 2002, 43). To draw a parallel, the computer might not just be seen as an object but as a means of enabling dialogue and

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[159] For a discussion on the importance of relationships and the obligation to "love the neighbour" see Anna Strhan (2012), *Levinas, Subjectivity, Education. Towards an Ethics of Radical Responsibility*, especially pp 144ff. Strhan cites Michael Morgan (2007) to illustrate the ethics of responsibility needed in a relationship, "Whenever I am engaged with another person or persons, whatever I am doing, my relationships and my actions are ultimately of significance….the necessity that falls on me to respond to that other person's needs and very existence" (Morgan, 2007, 160).

communication, in a similar way to that through which art is able to encapsulate the dialogue of form. In this sense, the frame of dialogue does not diminish the exchange.

The last sphere is the most ambiguous of the three, and it is what Buber ([1923] 2004, 13) terms our relationship with "spiritual beings" or "forms of the spirit." This relationship "does not use speech, yet begets it"; it is a means of communication with our "being" (ibid). There has been considerable debate as to what Buber meant by this sphere. It could be taken as referring to our relations with God. In some respects this forms part of the answer: all spheres ultimately bring us to the Divine. However, an indication as to what he may have been referring to comes in the way that he describes the relationship and how we answer when we feel addressed: "forming, thinking, acting" (ibid). This third sphere is fundamentally different from the others because Buber (ibid) holds that one does not actively seek "Thou" relationships but employs the self to produce the relationships, which is both "a sacrifice and a risk".

Buber says that when man makes form into a work, he can "withhold nothing of himself" (ibid). This work can return to the notion of an "It" but Buber reminds us that it can also "face the receptive beholder in its whole embodied form" (ibid). The true artist has captured the essence of "Thou" and is able to display it in a manner that allows others to glimpse the awesomeness of relation. Buber expands upon the way in which art can encapsulate the higher form of a dialogue in *Between Man and Man.* He declares that "all art is, from its origin, essentially of the nature of dialogue" ([1947] 2002, 30). Art is able to communicate something beyond words, even though the creation itself is a monologue, the inspiration and true form comes from dialogue. The man who makes art is able to create unity by forming what he meets into an image, which although appearing subjective retains the essence of relationship, as it is a response to dialogue that is beyond speech.

By defining the three spheres, Buber was exploring the ability to enter into the depth of relationship through an awareness of the interconnectivity of life. What connected all of these spheres was the foundational relationship that humans were able to have with the Divine, the underpinning of all relationships. It was axiomatic to him that God is present in all genuine relationships, an echo of Jesus' promise: "When two or three are gathered in my name, there am I" (Matthew 18:20). God is the true foundation of all "Thous" that humans encounter. He can never become an "It" and a mere object (Buber, [1965] 1998, 68). Through "Thou" relationships, Buber ([1923] 2004, 79) insisted that humans could glimpse the Divine. There are no statements about God which do not ultimately say something about humans: "The relation of man is the real simile of the relation with God". Although humans are seen to need God, Buber ([1947] 2002, 219) says that the relationship is reciprocal:

> Man has the power to unite God, who is over the world, with his shekinah, dwelling in the world. Through being drawn down in his immanent nature God has the ability to overcome the duality that exists and instead exists as one with his creation. In this way there arose in me the thought of a realization of God through man; man appeared to me as the being through whose existence the Absolute, resting in its truth, can gain the character of reality.

Buber ([1923] 2004, 64) observes: "Men do not find God if they stay in the world" but similarly they do not find God "if they leave the world." God is encountered in relation, in the "between". Buber (ibid, 66 & 87) continues that God has a need for humans.[160] It is through the "Thou" relationship with God that humans realise that there is meaning and value in the world and the relationships which exist within the interconnectivity of creation. It is this realisation that is able to bring about the process of redemption.

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[160] The desire for the Divine to have relationships with humans was exemplified on many occasions in Jesus' life, such as the Transfiguration (Matthew 17) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). Jesus felt the need to have his disciples' presence with him, showing for dialogue between humans and the Divine.

Buber (ibid, 64) emphasised the transcendent and yet immanent nature of the Divine. He said that God was "wholly other",[161] also the "wholly same, the wholly present" and could be encountered through relationships with people. Buber's theology had made God become immanent among the people. It was only when humans realised this that they could turn back to God and begin the process of redemption through genuine ethical encounters in the three spheres of relation. Buber's theology reminds us of alternative ways of encountering God, which emphasise the importance of the relationships between both God *and* humans. Despite his adherence to Hasidism, Buber was not afraid to break with traditional Judaism and advocate his own form of detraditionalization, by stating that God was no longer to be found solely in a transcendent manner.

Buber for an age of cyberspace: new "I-Thou" connections

Buber foresaw the unity of the Jewish race, oppressed and tortured by unforgivable horrors. At Auschwitz it had been the reliance of humans on each other and the strength that they drew from those meetings which had sustained the survivors and allowed God's presence into the relationships. Buber was ever mindful of this. Instead of advocating a solitary pursuit of the mystical path, where humans would find relative safety in private pursuit of God through silent contemplation, he inverted this idea. He insisted on dialogue and meeting as being the key to unity, grounded in encounters which exposed humans to risk themselves for the sake of encounter and genuine unity. Despite his rejection of a formal, and perhaps prosaic, following of theology, Buber still had the insight to believe in the true spirit of religiosity. It was this that encouraged him in his pursuit of dialogue as the core of unity of humans with creation, with other humans, and with God. It was his belief that dialogue and a

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[161] The traditional idea of the Divine being transcendent is reinforced by many numinous encounters, where a separation is maintained (cf Exodus 3:5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground"). This can be perhaps one reason why the Divine starts to become objectified in the relationships with humans; the focus is on the latter becoming an object of worship and veneration and not part of the relationship.

greater understanding of creation and the human place within it would allow individuals to be open to more encounters. These, ultimately, would bring community, nature and God together, in the supreme relationship of unity, defined by love. Buber's ([1914] 1999, 30) thinking had changed from concern with the static unity of all things, to the living meeting between humans as the means of realisation and communion with God: "Unity is not a property of the world but its task". The concept of unity which can be actualised by cultivation of "I-Thou" relationships has implications both for the emerging forms of relationship in the global world of cyberspace.

Buber's dialogical principle is essentially concerned with the interconnectivity among humans. Scott (2010) indicates that at Buber's 1938 inaugural lectures as Professor of Social Philosophy, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem he termed himself a "philosophical anthropologist"; demonstrating for him it was the nature of man and his relationships which had become paramount in his thinking. He chose to focus his theology on examining how the interconnection of man with his surroundings was essential for life and the source of higher "Thou" encounters with the Divine. His theology demonstrates the shift in focus from a divinely-centred paradigm to, ultimately, one that finds humans as an essential part in any relationship. It is Buber's vision concerning interconnectivity, and the interdependent relationships that can be forged, which has anticipated the global network of cyberspace. By using Buber's model, I want to show how his dialogical framework is able to map the significance of relationships in the technological era; aligning his three spheres of relation with facets of global encounters within cyberspace. This presents possibilities for re-thinking human relationships to creation as well as to others and to the Divine, envisaging new models of interconnectivity within cyberspace.

Chapter 4: Critical Perspectives on Buber's Thought

Thus at the heart of Buber's philosophy the problem of evil and the problem of man merge into one in the recognition of relation as the fundamental reality of man's life (Maurice Friedman, [1955] 2002, 117).

The significance of Buber's work for a theological analysis of cyberspace is to be found in his discussion of relationships. Despite the vastness of cyberspace and the over-arching power of interconnection throughout creation, the nature of those connections can have an intimacy that echoes Buber's belief in dialogue. Yet before giving a detailed analysis of the correlation of Buber's work for a theological analysis of the relationships, it is important to outline some of the potential weaknesses and flaws in his concepts. It is necessary to test the validity of the ideas before assessing their potential for contemporary engagement.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a close engagement with the critical texts and commentaries to ascertain the value of Buber's work for the digital age, as well as to set the ground for the central importance of relationships for cyberspace. It is crucial to draw attention to the complex ambiguities in Buber's work to show hermeneutical slippage and problems with application of his work to connections in technology. It is also important to recognise that his theology can command a greater scope than its original context. I contend that Buber's dialectical theology is extremely pertinent to the technological era but this is not without careful scrutiny. In application, there is always the challenge of cyberspace as a capitalist venture in the "It" mode, whilst simultaneously foreseeing the potential for reconnection in all spheres of relationships. Simultaneously, it embraces the new possibilities for "Thou" encounters. Such multiple facets make his theology realistic and relevant for "inter-community relations", as W J Morgan and Alexandre Guilherme (2010, 1) have argued. Pertinently it opens up broader debates and dialogues in the era of global connections. In acknowledging potential issues and concerns with Buber's theology and

relating it to cyberspace, I have followed three steps: the first briefly showing general criticisms of Buber's work; the second, more specific criticisms of his theology of relationships; the last, highlighting the potential concerns with applying Buber's theology to cyberspace.

As we saw in chapters one and two, there has been a notable lack of understanding in theology as regards to how its meanings are relevant and applicable in the technological era. Instead, there has often been a negative appraisal, maintaining that technology has led to alienation and disillusionment of the self from institutions and community. I have attempted to show that Buber's theology is able to address many of the issues associated with fragmentation and alienation in late modernity. By calling for a return to the interconnectivity that exists within all spheres of creation, exemplified in the connections facilitated by cyberspace, Buber's work offers a new opportunity to theologically re-think relationships in cyberspace. He comments: "What is central to [being-human] is not the relation of the human person to himself….What is central, rather, is the relation of man to all existing beings" (Buber, [1967] 1996, 199). His work has an essential relevance for providing insights into the nature of relationships in the context of cyberspace and how these interconnections afford a new means of re-engaging with creation and ultimately to re-connection with the Divine.

Buber: the critical reception in Judaism

Much of the critical literature on Buber's work has focused on his observance and interpretation of Judaism and Jewish Law (haggadah). Maurice Friedman ([1955] 2002, 311) observes that a "frequent criticism is the fact that Buber does not regard the Jewish law as essential to the Jewish tradition". For this reason his work was rejected by some. Mendes-Flohr (1986, 116) quotes the literary critic and novelist Chaim Potok (1966), who claimed that "Buber was treated with suspicion by his fellow Jews" who questioned his loyalty to the

traditions handed down through the Torah and in particular the importance of the law above all else. This point is taken up by Gillian Rose (2002, 149), who believed that Buber displayed antipathy to the Law itself. Buber was also chastised for his attitude to scripture: Tamra Wright (2004, 214ff) observes that Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) accuses him of a lack of adherence to the importance of the Scriptures, in particular, the Talmud.[162] It is claimed that in his writings he fails to acknowledge the importance of the history and law of Judaism, conveyed through the Rabbis. Buber faced such accusations because his works could be interpreted as advocating a new way of approaching the faith, one which was not universally accepted or liked. Gershom Scholem (1947, 45) notes that the Jewish people were often dismissive of him and his concepts. His relational theology shows that he ultimately rejected precepts in favour of the law of love that he found in meeting with others. Some have interpreted this to mean that he totally rejected the Jewish law.

In this respect, Rotenstreich (1991, 61) observes that he was anti-Kantian[163], because he believed that the situation should weigh over and above any maxim. Buber (1951, 12) can be seen to echo Jesus' teachings, whom he termed his "brother", which made him appear as if he was totally disregarding the Jewish Mitzvot (commandments) in favour of the law of love for humanity. He appeared to put love of humans before love and devotion to God. Such interpretation was to misunderstand his dialogical theology which was not exclusive but actually demonstrated love for God and fulfilment of the law through an ethical dimension to relationship in all spheres of life.[164]

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[162] The Talmud is the written version of the Jewish oral law and its commentaries.

[163] Immanuel Kant was a deontologist whose stance on morality was an absolute one. He advocated that individuals had a duty to follow certain maxims (categorical imperatives), which were worked out using a priori reasoning (given by God) and could be universalised, an example of which would be not killing or not lying. He did not believe in assessing situations on an individual basis, but instead following the same rules for all. In not adhering to rigid rules, Buber could be accused of essentially rejecting the law and allowing morality to dissolve into relativism, signalling that humans had put themselves in the place of God.

[164] This idea evokes Jesus' teaching about serving God through helping fellow humans in Matthew 25:40: "whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me."

During his life Buber had many exchanges with Emmanuel Levinas, who can be considered his primary critic. However, as Colin Davis (1996, 1) tells us, Levinas also had a great respect for him because he, like Buber, was concerned with "the ethical nature of the Other."[165] Davis (ibid, 3) suggests that Levinas' main criticisms focus around the nature of the relationship with the Divine and with humans, "the problem of otherness", as he termed it. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 343) notes that Levinas chastised Buber because his ethics and adherence to the law appeared to be horizontal, as opposed to vertical[166], as in Levinas' case, and he therefore did not see all of the precepts of Judaism as morally binding. By this he meant that he appeared to put duty to humanity above duty to the Divine.

In his defence, Buber did not reject the precepts of Judaism; instead he saw them as part of an ethical dialogue that was the foundation of all "Thou" relationships. Leora Batniztky (2011, 79) reminds us that, for Buber, the Law, especially the 10 Commandments, represented "the mark of a personal relationship each has with the divine." Friedman ([1955] 2002, 349) points out that Buber thought that it was necessary to judge each situation individually (again following Jesus' example)[167], otherwise relationships would be defined by "It" and not the openness of "Thou" where the other's situation is validated. Cohen (1952) pinpoints the issue when he observes that a fixation on the law becomes "more important than the relationship with God itself."

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[165] Levinas' main philosophy focused on the concepts of "Same" and "Other" to describe relationships and the manner in which the "Other" is completely beyond comprehension. He was deeply concerned with the ethical nature of relationships and sought to analyse the way in which this dialectic was affected by encounters. He was influenced by both Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and his phenomenological approach, where consciousness was outside the world, as well as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who took the opposite approach to ontological questions (Davis, 1996, 3ff).

[166] By horizontal, Levinas meant that Buber appeared to put concern for his fellow man, above the precepts of Judaism, which had been given by God. Buber therefore appears to be adopting a similar position to Jesus, who was accused of this by the Pharisees (see John 5:18).

[167] Jesus was often accused on breaking the Jewish Laws or Mitzvot, which forbade activities, such as work, on the Sabbath. On a number of occasions Jesus was seen to have disregarded these Laws, when he healed the sick or let his disciples pick ears of corn. However, Jesus always emphasised that he had not come to abolish the Law but to uphold it (Matthew 5:17). Instead he was just re-interpreting the Law to put love, and a genuine ethic of care towards the other, at the centre of theology, not merely blind adherence to a precept.

For Buber, the crux of the problem lay in that fact that one of the issues with religion

and theology was that they were often divorced from life and relationships. One should be

entwined with the other. The religious life was not simply a case of keeping the

commandments and attending the synagogue, but was part of how one lived on a day-to-day

basis. This part of Buber's ethics was influenced by an experience he had at school.[168] He

realised that ethical obligation does not come from some absolute precept but rather that

which addresses the person in their situation and calls on them to respond: "God tenders me

the situation to which I have to answer; but I have not to expect that he should tender me

anything in my answer" ([1947] 2002, 81). Instead of adherence to a static law there was a

need to judge the ethical requirements of each specific situation. Buber (1952, 47) believed

that the Torah showed that "our life is a dialogue between the above and the below".

Friedman defends Buber, holding that there was a misunderstanding of Buber's relation to

Judaism; he did not advocate a rejection of the law, merely a renewal of it. The law needed to

be approached with mindfulness. It was not a static, rigid phenomenon but an ethical

guideline, which needed to take account of the ethical needs of others.

In order to clarify his position on the Law, Guy Stroumsa (2002, 28) shows how

Buber often referred to "faith" as opposed to religion (ibid, 28). As I commented in the

preceding chapter, Buber drew a distinction between religion and religiosity; the former a

static, doctrinal belief, the latter able to respond to the other and the need to (re-)build

communities. He felt that it was "prophetic Judaism and the Hasidic movement" which were

the best ways to express the collective dimension of Judaism (ibid, 37). This is evident in the

way that Buber (1951, 170) drew a distinction between the living faith or "emunah" of Jesus

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[168] There was an incident which Buber recounts (Buber, [1967] 2002, 29-31) where two classmates were playing
the fool and then their behaviour became sexual in nature. When asked by the headmaster what happened Buber
could not reply. He later reflected on how maxims conflicted with the situation because one had to have the
conviction to make the correct choice, whilst empathising with the human situation.

against the "pistis[169]" of St Paul, where faith was based on belief, not action. Stroumsa (2002, 36) continues that Buber attributes great importance to "the communal dimension of faith", one which could bring communities together through right relationships, worked out through dialogue with each other.

Buber admitted that Judaism needed to form the basis of the new spiritual movement.[170] By taking a wider approach to religion and theology, which encompassed faith and spirituality, he revealed how his teaching could have a more global appeal, bringing cultures together. He was often seen as a builder of bridges between different religions and theologies. Buber's attitude to the law shows why he eventually rejected traditional mysticism as a means of encountering the Divine. One focuses solely on the transcendent realm to the exclusion of genuine relationality in the everyday. Moore (1996, 43) observes that this is because the individual can appear to follow the path of solipsism because they encounter God on their own, often estranged from the community. Buber was also against Gnosticism[171] because it leads to trying to encounter God through intellectual means. By becoming self-reliant, the Gnostics believed the Divine to be within their soul[172]. Buber thought that in order to stay open to the possibility of dialogue and "I-Thou" encounters, one has to continually engage in dialogue and relationships in all spheres. His embracing of the Hasidic way (as detailed in chapter three) taught that the true meaning of life is revealed in the deed and ethical actions and relationships towards others (Buber, [1967] 1996, 48). The

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[169] One reason that Buber could have been against the teachings of St Paul is because of his emphasis on salvation through faith alone, not through works (Ephesians 2:8-9). His statements that man is also "slave to the Law" did not sit well with Buber's preference for the deed, as opposed to following a dogma or doctrine.

[170] By a new spiritual movement Buber was implying that Judaism could be renewed, so that the Jews re-engaged with the text and the Word of God. Through this dialogue a right relationship with creation would be enabled, as well as a new understanding of the importance of the ethical dimension to relationships and community.

[171] The Gnostics were always searching for knowledge and they believed that this could be found by rejecting everything material in this world, created by the Demiurge, and instead embracing the spiritual.

[172] Due to the Gnostic belief that the Divine was found within their soul and they had a mystic union with God, they did not see the importance of relationships and dialogue to strengthen the bond between them and the Divine.

basis of all of these relationships for Buber ([1923] 2004, 19) was love, because it was able to bind individuals together.

A central means of binding the Jews was through the Torah and Buber showed his loyalty to his faith and his fervour for Judaism by constantly engaging with the Holy Scriptures. Buber (1952, 50) saw engagement with the scriptures as a means of spiritual renewal and a new means of dialogue; he stated that "whenever we truly read it (Hebrew Bible), our self-understanding is renewed and deepened". The bible was therefore central to understanding the content of dialogue because it recorded the original relationships with the Divine. As Kepnes (1992, 55) reflects, "the speech in the bible holds something of the original dialogical events that occurred between God and humanity". If one could have an understanding and a "Thou" dialogue with the holy text, one would be able to understand the desires and wishes of God for his creation, accelerating the process of redemption. Although he never claimed to be a prophet, Buber's vision for Judaism's survival rested on a transformed attitude to the Torah and the Jewish spiritual community, which made him somewhat of a visionary. Stroumsa (1986, 36) informs us that Buber regarded the prophets as representing "what was best in biblical Judaism." By looking at the Word afresh Jews could connect with the central message of the prophets from which they had become detached, due to their belief that the law was the basis of faith.

A further criticism of Buber's lack of commitment to the Law comes from Rose (2002, viii), who questions how he can unite the Jewish community in Israel with no law to bind them. She continues by pointing out the fact that his plan never came to fruition, which demonstrates that it was a purely idealistic notion (ibid, 150). Mendes-Flohr (1986, 122) also focuses on his lack of ability to unite the Jews because he lost the favour of many when he did move to Israel and did not go to live on a Kibbutz. This would have demonstrated his commitment and actualised his theories by partaking in what was essential to the Jewish

community: the Land and community of Israel. This viewpoint was exacerbated by the fact that Buber did not take a real interest in the politics of Israel and eventually withdrew from the Zionist movement altogether. In many ways, it appears that Buber had become estranged from those who had seen in him a new revolutionary way of approaching the faith, which encapsulated the Zionist vision and the hope for a united Judaism in Israel. Buber had, for many, become too scholastic and theological. Mendes-Flohr (1986, 122) suggests that he seemed to spend more time engaged in the academic circles of the Hebrew university than with his fellow men. He again cites Potok's (1966) derisory comment that there is a "bitter irony…that the great philosopher of dialogue is today virtually incapable of entering dialogue with his own people" (Mendes-Flohr, 1986, 116). For someone who had formed their theology from their own lived experiences and encounters with creation, Buber therefore appeared, at times, remarkably isolated from humanity. Moore (1996, 107) continues that it seemed as if his ideas could take place purely in a utopia and dialogue could only take place among intellectuals, further alienating him from the Jews.

There was a sense that Buber's theory could appear elitist and out of the reach of ordinary people (ibid, 108). The polemic that his theology was too idealistic and estranged from his fellow Jews is conveyed by Nathan Glatzer (1981, 11), who observes that Buber "seemingly ignores, or at least underrates, the power of evil in the world". He refers to the book of Job (9:22) to demonstrate that God "destroys the innocent and the wicked" and that there is evil in the world, which Buber fails to acknowledge. Glatzer (1981, 11) argues that it was this view that prevented him from seeing the evil in World War1 and in the coming-to-power of Hitler.

However, the accusation that he did not fully participate in the Kibbutz and life of Israel seems somewhat unfounded. Mendes-Flohr (1986, 122) reminds us that Buber was sixty when he moved to Israel. It was surely unrealistic to expect him to take up the life of a

young labourer. Such critiques also rarely acknowledge that Buber formed relationships with "young kibbutzniks" who came to him for counsel when he was eighty years old (ibid, 124). Buber saw education as a means to change attitudes and therefore he did not isolate himself. Morgan and Guilherme (2010, 14) comment that he "challenged teachers and professors of his age, who were contemptuous of some of their peers and students, to accept and educate whoever presented themselves as students, as well as to accept and enter into dialogue with their peers, whoever they might be."

However, Buber supported the idea of the Kibbutz as the ideal community for facilitating "I-Thou" relations, because as Morgan and Guilherme (ibid, 11) illustrate, it was centred on "mutuality, on mutual respect and dialogue between participants of both sexes and all ages in community life." Buber was devoted to the notion of spiritual Zionism but rejected the fierce political Zionistic movements due to the way that they were often detrimental to relationships[173]. Instead he focused on the way in which his "I-Thou" dialogue was able to facilitate "conflict resolution between individuals and communities because it encourages people and communities to discuss problems and grievances and to find points in common" (ibid, 2010:10). Buber's vision was not idealistic but pragmatic, offering goals which could be achieved every day by changes in attitude towards relationships and community.

What Buber ([1947] 2002, 22) wanted to emphasise is that dialogue concerns itself with everyday situations. He said that a meeting with a stranger could illicit the "Thou" response and that genuine dialogue could take place anywhere, in any situation, even in an office or factory. Often it was the unspoken dialogue that was able to bring individuals

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[173] The way in which Buber rejected any associations with political Zionism and his subsequent criticism parallels the way in which Jesus refused to align himself with the Jewish Messianic ideal of a political figure who advocated violence in order to achieve the goals of political Zionism (see Zephaniah 3:9). Instead, both Buber and Jesus emphasised love for all humans as the fulfilment of the law.

together because the encounter was not complicated by meaningless words[174]. Buber again

returned to the prophets, expounding how they had chastised individuals for advocating belief

in God but treating their fellow humans as if God did not exist[175]. Levinas (1984, 317)

agrees, writing that "the whole of Buber's work was "a renewal of ethics"" and it was up to

each individual to be responsible for their own actions. Morgan and Guilherme (2010, 8)

likewise show that Buber's dialectic emphasised this ethical dimension. The "I-Thou" is the

only ethical domain because it allows "inclusion" so that the relationship is mutual, as both

parties are valued. "Through mutuality we ascribe the other with rights and duties and vice

versa."

Buber himself sought to put the importance of the "Thou" dialogue into practise when

he made personal efforts to encourage Jews in the face of the coming evil of the Holocaust. In

a letter to Gandhi (1939) he commented: "For I cannot help withstanding evil when I see that

it is about to destroy the good. I am forced to withstand the evil in the world as the evil within

myself." The accusation that he was not concerned with the plight of his people seems

unfounded; once Hitler came to power Buber was fervent in his desire to unite Judaism.

Mendes-Flohr (1986, 123) reports that whilst in Germany he travelled around, encouraging

all sectors and groups of Jews to stay strong in the face of oppression. He was, according to

Ernst Simon, one of the "faithful shepherds of German Jewry in its direst hour, which was

also its finest" (quoted in Mendes-Flohr, ibid). However, in order to stay strong to his faith

whilst living in the shadow of the Nazis and the unsettled times, Buber felt that Judaism

needed to be re-born, both in order to appeal to new generations, and to unite the existing

community. This attitude helped to repair the broken relationships that ensued after the

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[174] This is particularly pertinent to the Holocaust era. Due to the enforced silence in the concentration camps, it was often the unspoken dialogue which was able to sustain the Jews (Cf Livia Bitton Jackson, *I have lived a thousand years) (1997)).

[175] Cf the books of Amos; Hosea; Isaiah, where the prophets continually chastise the people for turning away from God and destroying their relationships by their unethical behaviour towards others, which, in turn, destroyed their relationships with the Divine.

Holocaust, where some, such as Albert Friedlander, believed that a new perspective was needed. Mayled (2004, 58) quotes Friedlander: "We cannot sustain the old belief in man, not the old belief in G-d and His moral ordering of the world, but we can search for new beliefs". This chimes with Morgan and Guilherme's (2010, 1) perspective that Buber's theology "holds a dialogue with its zeitgeist" and can speak and start to address ethical conflicts in every age. It is no great leap to see how, in the technological era, Buber's theology would be able to be revitalised through the new platform of cyberspace with dialogue as the starting point to address global conflict.

As mentioned previously, the Torah was always uppermost in Buber's concept of dialogue. He wanted to equip Jews with the means to embody the essence of Torah, not merely to follow it blindly. In order to actualise this vision, Mendes-Flohr (1986, 121-123) underlines how Buber founded a magazine called "Der Jude"[176], coupled with his translation of the Torah to help the "renewal of German Jewry". The title "Der Jude" was deliberately provocative but Buber was seeking to "restore dignity to the term" in the face of the constant persecution that Jews had faced since the Middle Ages (ibid). Buber wanted to try to re-build the notion of community and to instil in the Jews the need for trust; in God but also in their fellow humans. Morgan and Guilherme (2010, 15) indicate that despite fierce criticism Buber "advocated German-Jewish dialogue soon after the Second World War and the Sho'ah[177] as a way of reconciliation". He sought to use his framework of dialogue to provide a means of resolution to conflict for future generations. Mendes-Flohr (1986, 124) shows how Buber's influence spread to the American Jewry, who felt drawn to his strong belief in God,

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[176] *The Jew* was a German monthly magazine, which was founded by Salman Schocken and Martin Buber. It was published from 1916-1928 and was read by German-reading intellectuals. In it Buber demanded "liberty and freedom of work for this oppressed people" and it included topics such as anti-Semitism; Judaism and Christianity and education (Mitchell G Bard, 2012). However, the fact that this magazine was mainly read by Jewish intellectuals, raises another issue of whether Buber's theology was readily accessible to the ordinary Jew, or if it was elitist.

[177] Sho'ah has become another means of referring to the Holocaust. It literally means a "whole" and "burnt" and may refer to both the way the Jews were burned in the furnaces at the concentration camps, as well as those who died, sacrificing their lives in the hope that Judaism would survive.

community and interpersonal relations. Within his lifetime the seeds were sown for both a global acceptance of his message, as well as, serendipitously, a means to interconnect the globe.

Buber's belief and the practical application of what he advocated demonstrated that his theology of relationships was able to reach many people and communicate with them through dialogue. Mendes-Flohr (1986, 126) supports this by quoting Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, who declared, "the agenda of Martin Buber is our agenda…he addresses our own situation." The whole basis of renewal rested on community and a spiritual re-awakening of humanity. Individuals needed to overcome their own inner, fragmented desires and instead embrace dialogue within the three spheres of relation in order to re-develop openness and trust. The implication is that dialogue is able to unite people universally. Through global cyberspace individuals can be moved and motivated through speech, and through the "meeting" of ideas.[178]

The interconnected meeting-of-minds appeals not just to those who have a fervent belief in God, but those who can draw together their own spirituality in a non-traditional way. This is supported by the work of Heelas (1996) and Heelas and Woodhead (2005) who discovered a need for spirituality in the face of detraditionalisation. Cyberspace, they found, facilitates a medium for experimentation and community. Communities can re-build relationships of trust and learning, finding ways to hold dialogue to demonstrate commitment and equality with each other, the very basis of the "Thou" dimension. Buber's theory is relevant to 21st century late modernity because it returns us to the underlying dimension of inter-relation within networked societies. It has the ability to penetrate divisions and fragmentation and embraces interconnectivity on many levels. It holds the facility to

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[178] The Arab Spring showed the potential power of the concept. This was a wave of protests and civil disobedience in the Arab world, which began in December 2010 and spread throughout the region.

articulate a common unity of humanity and creation and an ethical means of resolving disputes.

Re-thinking Buber's Theology of Relationships

While the wider criticisms in relation to Judaism reflect the community reception, the conceptual understanding of relationships needs to be addressed in order to help us to understand Buber's dialectical theology and whether it stands up to analytical scrutiny. In promoting a new perspective on relationships it was inevitable that Buber would expose himself to a considerable amount of criticism, especially in connection with his categorisation of the three spheres of relating (man with nature, man with man and man with forms of the spirit). This is where the primary hermeneutical focus in Buber's theology of relationships rests. By stating that there are just three spheres he is espousing a limited notion, which does not allow for, or take account of, the totality of communication throughout creation. It can also be questioned whether, within each sphere, there could also be degrees of relationship. For example, in the first sphere that he identified, "man with nature", he fails to distinguish how a relationship with a tree may be different than one with a dog, and indeed, how one can cultivate a mutual "Thou" relationship with an inanimate object (see Buber [1923] 2004, 75-76). Perhaps Rosenzweig answers the point by asking if it is possible to have an "I-Thou" relation with the sphere of nature at all, or whether one only could merely objectify natural phenomena in the "It" mode (cited in Friedman, 1993, 115).

In response, although describing only three spheres of interactions appears to set limitations to his philosophy, Buber has demonstrated that they do allow scope for the development of a variety of relationships. He has used the spheres to simplify his description of the way that relationships operate by giving examples of how "I-It" and "I-Thou" manifest. It can be acknowledged that his detailing of relationships within nature can seem to

be more on a microcosmic than macrocosmic scale. However, he acknowledges the wider qualities of nature, particularly in *Daniel*. Nahum Glatzer (1981, 9) also notes that it is significant that in his reference to creation and also to the book of Job, he acknowledges the inability within us to fathom the totality of creation, due to our limited perspective. Therefore his viewpoint may be more understandable through the cultivation of more "Thou" moments with surroundings. Individuals can become more aware of their place within the cosmos and the need for a closer affinity with nature through them, viewing the totality of the natural world as something which is interconnected and empowering. There are connections here with movements such as Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis[179] and Peacock's panentheism,[180] both of which emphasise the inter-dependence between humans and creation; something which Buber's theology seeks to re-capture.

Buber's second sphere can be seen as the most significant because he termed the relationship between "man and man" as the "real simile of the relationship between man and God" (Buber, [1923] 2004, 79). However, a central criticism of this sphere is that, in promoting the typology of just two forms, the "I-It" and "I-Thou", Buber limits the ways in which human relationships can be constructed and sustained. His theology of relationships does not seem to take account of the multitude of feelings that are apparent within relationships. He leaves no room for any gradation. He describes marriage as "the exemplary bond" (Buber, [1947] 2002, 71) but within a relationship such as this, or indeed a friendship, there are a multitude of feelings, which do not appear to be able to be contained by restricting

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[179] The Gaia hypothesis was promoted by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis in the 1970ies. It is the belief that the earth's physical and biological processes form a self-regulating system, which means, essentially, that the earth is like a living organism (and should be treated as such). It claims that living organisms and their organic systems have evolved together and so are mutually dependent (Martin Ogle, 2009, 275-292).

[180] This is the theory that God penetrates every part of nature. God and the world are inter-related as God is in the world and the world is in God but they both maintain their distinct identities; God is not the world, and the world is not God. It has often been suggested as a means of combing both science and religion and is also embraced by women writers as an alternative means of examining the characteristics of God. Among its chief advocates are Philip Clayton, Arthur Peacock, Keith Ward, Paul Davies and Ruth Page. See Clayton and Peacocke (2004), *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being*, for an introduction to the many ways in which panentheism can manifest.

relationships to solely two modes. We might also ask questions about the notion of development within relationships. From a reading of Buber's ([1923] 2004, 21) primary material, it appears that the experience of "Thou" is a momentary phenomenon: As Buber states: "every Thou in the world by its nature is fated to become a thing." The individual must return to a distance (the "I-It" stance) in order to prepare for other "I-Thou" encounters.

Detractors have therefore suggested that it is difficult to envisage how, if one is engaging in a lasting relationship with someone, one could not maintain the "Thou" stance indefinitely, because feelings would become stronger as one is able to fully embrace the other's "Thou". In relation to these issues, there is robust criticism from Rotenstreich (1991, 72), who remarks that "I-Thou" is not permanent and does not appear to be able to develop, whereas most relationships do. He questions whether relationships, and especially friendship, can actually develop if the "I-Thou" is momentary and reverts back to the "I-It." Concern is also voiced about the oscillation between the poles of "It" and "Thou". When one has just had a "Thou" meeting, it seems preposterous to assume that one will then automatically revert to using or treating the individual in an objective way. Presumably after a "Thou" moment, there is a connection between the two people, meaning that there will still be respect and openness for each other. This is something that Buber unfortunately fails to clarify, and one can only speculate that the "Thou" can be open to degrees of relationship that can be sustained. There is the possibility that once the "Thou" has been reached with a person it could then be reached again, as with the Divine.

The reason that Buber does not address feelings in detail in his work is because "I-Thou" is not something that is concerned with feeling. It is more encompassing than that. He describes it as "inclusion" which allows both parties in the relationship to see things from "the standpoint of the other" (Buber ([1947] 2002, 96). This is one reason he suggests that the "Thou" can take place with someone one is not fully acquainted with, or someone one does

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not know, as well as a friend or lover. One does not have to like, or adore the person for the "Thou" to take place; it goes beyond feelings, and is concerned to embrace the wholeness of the other[181]. It is significant that Buber describes marriage as the "exemplary bond". The use of the superlative implies that there are different types of "Thou" relationship, answering the charge that his dialectic does not allow for degrees of relating. Buber ([1923] 2004, 40) acknowledges a system of graduation when he talks about marriage[182] as "the revealing by two people of the Thou to one another". Buber [1923] 2004, 52 also stresses that the connection in the "Thou" mode does remain: "Its sharing is preserved in it in a living way... "the seed remains in it". The point is again emphasised by Buber ([1947] 2002, 25) that when one becomes aware of the "Thou", one becomes aware of the life of dialogue. "He who lives the life of dialogue knows a lived unity". This implies that one will continue to cultivate this life, therefore the "Thou" will start to become more recognised and frequent. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 112) captures this point when he states: "The lived unity of the life of dialogue, born out of response to the essential mystery of the world, makes this response ever more possible."

Buber's third sphere of relationship appears the most problematic in both its meaning and translation. A central concern focuses around the translation of the term "geistige Wesenheiten" which Buber employs. The translation sometimes used is of "spiritual beings" (cf Kaufmann and Smith)[183] which can be problematic because it is unclear exactly what this entails. Does its metaphysical dimension imply that this sphere is more important than the other two? However, Buber's theology outlines how all the spheres are a means to cultivate

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[181] This is said to echo the Christian concept described as agape, which denotes an unconditional love for all people, irrespective of whether they are friend or enemy. This emphasises Jesus' message to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44).

[182]Throughout *I and Thou* Buber acknowledges that marriage is the supreme relationship showing mutuality. However, in the 21st century it must be noted that although marriage is still highly thought of, the "Thou" can manifest between those who are not bound by any legal union.

[183] *I and Thou* has been translated by Ronald Smith (1937) and Walter Kaufmann (1970). Here they agree on the translation, but at many other junctions there is variation in their hermeneutics.

"Thou" relationships in order to draw God down into the relationship: Importantly, no one sphere is given preferential treatment over another. Kepnes (1992, 23) has suggested that Wood's translation of "forms of the spirit" is closer to Buber's original meaning of "spirit in phenomenal forms." This is because Buber ([1923] 2004, 13) elaborates on how the spirit manifests through "forming, thinking, acting", which Kepnes (1992, 23) tells us can encompass creative activities, such as "art, language, knowledge, action." These are the ways in which spiritual gifts can manifest in human lives and are a means to expressing and accessing the Divine. Another concern with the third sphere is the preference for some creative talents over others. Wood (1969, 50) informs us that for Buber art is the "prime analogate", but what it entails and the ramifications it has for creative expression are not evident. There are problems when one scrutinises how these creative gifts can allow a "Thou" relationship with the Divine when the form implies some limitation of divinity to a particular expression.

Buber's theology implies that relationships within this sphere are as possible as in the other two, but the variation in creative abilities makes this problematic in terms of access. On one level, all are able to engage in creative endeavours, but whether everyone excels to the extent that one is able to capture the essence of form is open to debate. For example, I can pick up a paint brush in order to depict a scene, but if I lack a talent for painting I will merely use the brush as a utensil to actualise (however badly) my interpretation of the scene. I will not necessarily be moved by it, or engage in dialogue, if my piece does not come to fruition in the manner I had hoped, the ability for "Thou" relationships is diminished. The relationship appears to remain at the "It" level and the ability to actualise a "Thou" relationship appears lost. Similarly, with language, I may be able to communicate with someone, but, again, it is usually a utilitarian process initiated to convey a meaning.

Due to ambiguities in the dialectic of this third sphere, these concerns could be addressed by suggesting that they reflect interpretative assumptions. To suggest that one may not be able to have relationships in the third sphere of relations due to a lack of talent is to misunderstand the way in which "Thou" relations develop. Although individuals will have varying degrees of creative talent, the "Thou" relationship in this last sphere does not develop solely due to ability. On the contrary Buber ([1923] 2004, 30) has acknowledged it is often instantaneous and does not have to be something that is built up. Therefore, a mediocre hobbyist can have an "encounter" with the form of the art that they are creating in the same way that a talented artist can. If they are able to dialogue with the creative form there is an encounter. The "Thou" is never forced.

Ultimately, the artists will "share" the dialogue of his creative impulse with others, hoping to affect some transference of a transcendent moment implicit in the iconography of his creation. This shows how creative dialogue can strengthen a community with the Divine at the centre of the expression of the artistic gifts[184]. Buber acknowledges creative endeavour as a means of dialogue and as a necessary part of the development of self in late modernity.[185] In cyberspace the medium has provided creative outlets for people to experiment with alternative realities, through such things as gaming, programs such as Second Life, or "The Sims[186]." In these there is the opportunity to connect with the places and characters that one creates. Individuals can then explore their own identity and ontology

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[184] A related way of understanding this sphere could be seen in parallels with Paul's "gifts of the spirit" in 1 Corinthians 12, where he details how each person is given a gift in order to "build up the body of Christ". In this same way, the gifts that Buber refers to could also be seen as being given by God and actualised in a unique way by each person as an expression of the Divine and a means to inspire the community.

[185] It has been argued by Jonathan Feinstein (2008) that individuals form their creative interests in and through their engagement with the world around them. Therefore, creativity allows individuals to understand the interconnectivity of themselves to creation which surrounds them.

[186] "The Sims" is a game that simulates life and was developed by Maxis and first released in February 2000. It is often termed a "sandbox" game, as there is generally no pre-defined goal, the characters or avatars live in houses and go about their day-to-day business and the player can choose to satisfy their moods and desires.

within a new community context, reinforcing and re-envisaging their place and role as co-creators in the ultimate redemption of creation.

Philosophical and Theological Criticisms

I turn now, more specifically, to concerns with Buber's theology of "I-It" and "I-Thou", the two states of relationality found within his three spheres; the primary criticism of the dialectic. I have also discussed concerns over whether the dialogical position allows for all aspects of relationality. Taylor Stevenson (1963, 195), for example, asks "whether or not all our experiences can be located within these two separate realms." Likewise, Buber ([1923] 2004, 11) indicates that "I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being". However, one could argue that this is ambiguous; he is very unclear exactly what the "Thou" entails. Is this a state that one can enter into and what are the signs that it has been reached? Can it be authenticated? Rotenstreich (1991, 4) explores the issue of whether the "I-Thou" state can be immediate between people, or whether it is something to aspire to. The concept of the "whole being" is a difficult one to define and to reconcile with Buber's assertion that one can have a "Thou" relationship with someone who is not a friend and is unknown on a deeper level. Other charges have been levelled against Buber, especially from one of his major critics, Levinas[187]. He states that "Thou" "is reversible and has no content" (Friedman quotes Levinas [1955] 2002, 340). There seems to be nothing to substantiate what it is, especially if it is said to be beyond feelings. It appears to exist on a spiritual plane, not grounded in immanent reality. The fact is that "I-Thou" seems almost involuntary, which poses the question of why one might try to cultivate a state over which one has little or no control.

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[187] Emmanuel Levinas admired much of Buber's work; he too was interested in ontological questions and the ethics of relationality (See *Totality and Infinity*, 1961). However, their relationship was a complex one, and it is not my intention here to explore the totality of their encounters, instead I indicate points of conflict concerning relationality. Primarily because they differed on how the Divine could be accessed; the latter believed that it could be through relationships with humans and creations, which the Divine was drawn into, whereas the former believed that in order to preserve God's transcendent nature, it was necessary for the Divine to be a separate Being.

In Buber's ([1947] 2002, 11) defence, he does not indicate any specific signs that one should look for, or expect to experience in the "Thou" state. However, it is clear that when one enters the moment, it is unmistakable, a mutual experience, one not characterised by feeling. Many aspects of life, such as love are ineffable and incomprehensible by the intellect; they cannot be explained clearly to another, and yet they are genuine and self-authenticating. Buber ([1923] 2004, 13) makes this clear in his many discussions, that language cannot fully convey the experience, which may be beyond words. Buber's discussion of the "Thou" also reflects his Eastern influence[188], where we find description of a sense of moving towards enlightenment, but, in the moment of awareness, the feeling is indescribable.[189] This is testament to the uniqueness of the encounter; there is something that is unfamiliar, and yet it arises from something familiar. Buber ([1923] 2004, 28) describes this as the 'Inborn Thou' longing to be re-united to other 'Thous'.

Arising from these concerns is the question of understanding when one has attained the "Thou" stage. Kaufman's (1979, 35) somewhat shallow reading states that it could be merely a hallucination, or exaggeration. He also believes that Buber allows a "Manichaean[190] denigration of the I-It", whilst his notion of "I-Thou" is "unduly romantic and ecstatic". He thinks that Buber mistook "intense emotion for revelation" and did not realise that what was needed to encounter the "Thou" was rational reflection. This causes us to return to a central criticism of his dialogical theology, which came from Buber's friend, Franz Rosenzweig. Friedman (1993, 110) states that Rosenzweig chastised Buber for the polarised nature of the "I-It" - "I-Thou" stance, which seemed to reduce all human relationships to just two. He also

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[188] Friedman ([1955] 2002, 29) informs us that during Buber's early period of mysticism he was influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, with Taoism coming slightly later. By this statement, Kaufmann could have meant that Buber was drawing a dichotomy between the states of "It" and "Thou", with the former being rendered worthless, in comparison to the superior latter of "Thou".

[189] There is a long-standing debate about the issue of ineffability from William James (1902) to Steven Katz (1978).

[190] Manichaeism was a Gnostic religion started by the Iranian prophet Mani. Its main doctrine was dualistic, focusing on the contrast between the evil world of materialism and the spiritual world of light.

pointed out that the dialectic devalues the former stance: "in the I-It you give the I-Thou a cripple as an opponent," emphasising his mistaken opinion of the uselessness of the former state. Those who do not attain the "I-Thou" mode can appear to be shallow, not worthy of the encounter with the "eternal Thou" as they appear to be lacking in some ineffable quality.

Closer scrutiny of Buber's hermeneutic shows that Buber does not dismiss the "It" stance and acknowledges that it is useful for giving scientific knowledge. He expresses the need for "It" to move to "Thou" in order to have genuine dialogue with aspects of creation, but the "It" stance allows humans to function in the world. Although the "Thou" is the desirable position, it is not permanent. The "It" relationship is needed to give people distance to reflect and develop themselves, and make them aware of the need to move back towards "Thou" positions (Buber ([1923] 2004, 32). He makes it apparent that it is a necessary state; it allows one to gain distance and perspective before engaging in "Thou" relationships. Buber (2002, 73) demonstrated this in his life: "I do indeed, close my door at times, and surrender myself to a book, but only because I can open it again and see a human being looking at me." What is significant here is the need for concrete encounters to allow the full potential of physical relationships to be actualised. It is unfair to accuse Buber of idealism with his dialectic, because he was fully aware of the limitations of the "Thou". Morgan and Guilherme (2010:4) astutely observe that there is an "inter-play between the I-Thou and the I-It rather than an either-or relation between these foundational concepts." Buber ([1923, 62-63) implies that because the "Thou" state is so special it cannot be sustained indefinitely but allows people glimpses of what is possible and also gives an insight into the ultimate "Thou" relationships with the Divine.

Although precisely defining the "Thou" state is unfeasible, throughout the thesis I argue that cyberspace is a conducive medium to allow it to occur. There are three reasons to support this claim. Firstly, the connectivity of cyberspace brings more of an awareness of the

relationships that one is able to entertain and the ability to feel constantly validated. Secondly, the space provides a reflective medium, which enables one to consider the manner in which one communicates. And lastly, the anonymity which cyberspace offers can allow individuals to dialogue on a non-judgmental basis and offer opportunities to see the other on an equal basis to oneself.

Concerns can also be raised about the way in which Buber explained God was encountered. Ultimately, he said that God is to be found in the concrete situation, i.e. in living relationships. This causes us to ask two questions: firstly, is this the only way that God can be encountered, through the relationship with the other? Secondly, does this then mean that, in some ways, Buber is using the relationship with another as a means to an end for an encounter with the Divine? This would relegate the phenomena within the three spheres to little more than helpful rungs on a ladder to true encounter, thus diminishing the importance of what must appear to be lesser "Thou" meetings. His view can also be seen as diminishing the transcendent nature and power of God, if the Divine is to be mainly accessed only through relationships with others. Andrew Kelley (2004, 226-228) says that Levinas accuses Buber of reducing God to an equal by his insistence that he is brought down into the relationships, and does not maintain his transcendent nature. He accuses Buber of attempting to make God an equal, a partner or a friend. He continues his critique by stating that Buber limits God by placing him at the same level as humans within the "I-Thou" relationship. Strasser (2004, 44) underlies how Levinas thinks that "Buber does not hold the transcendence of God to be sufficiently radical" and accuses Buber of putting God on the same level as man. He insists that this is reducing God to a being, which by definition cannot be the case (ibid).

In responding to the first objection, Moore (1996, 259) states that Buber places great emphasis on the importance of prayer, which consisted in "relating to God with the fullness of our being." Prayer was the means by which one was able to engage in a continuous

dialogue with the Divine; it was able to form the centre of the community and draw people together. Hence, although somewhat reluctant to acknowledge purely the mystical path, Buber felt that the individual had a role and responsibility in developing their own dialogue. This would provide knowledge of God and ultimately strengthen their faith, and that of the community. Secondly, at no point does Buber state that a relationship in one of the spheres is purely a means to access God; the relationship is valued in itself. Instead he implies that it is through entering into "Thou" relationships that one becomes aware of the ultimate "Thou", suggesting that one needs others in order to draw the Divine down and begin the process of redemption.

Buber's language is significant when discussing transcendent and immanent modes of encounter; individuals do not use relationships to access God, instead God chooses to be drawn down into the relationship. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 24) explains, "for God is immanent in man as in all of His creation." Buber ([1923] 2004, 77) uses the term "teshuvah" or turning to show that individuals are able to turn back to God. As Buber ([1923] 2004, 77) indicates: "Turning is the recognition of the Centre and the act of turning again to it". It is not that it is an equal relationship. Bringing the Divine back into the dialogue also ensures that the ethical dimension simultaneously returns because through the "Thou" one becomes aware of the connectivity of all beings. Two further issues can be raised in relation to the Divine: the first that Buber does not specify what role God plays as the "eternal Thou" and whether the Divine can be encountered in a relationship without the need for man. He also does not specify how many "I-Thou" relationship it will take for God to be drawn back down to redeem creation, whether it is a gradual process, or one that is cumulative. Leading on from this, it can be asked whether, for some, "Thou" relationships can take place without the need for God at all, and can become purely secular or non-theological acts.

In relation to these concerns, Buber stresses that there is mutuality in a relationship, but at no point does he suggests that God is diminished; the Divine is brought down to interface with creation by the power of the "I-Thou" dynamic. Although the traditional Jewish view is to emphasise God's transcendent nature, Buber [1923] 2004, 61 claimed: "The extended lines of relation meet in the eternal Thou", thus illustrating that God could be accessed through an immanent relationship but could still maintain a position of authority[191]. Kelley (2004, 226) reveals how Buber (1947, 82) reflects on a Hasidic utterance which states that in order to "love God truly, one must first love man"[192]. God will not be drawn down into creation until humans can show that they can have a relation with those in the community around them. This is a point emphasised by Shmuel Eisenstadt (2002, 179) who recognises that "it is the combination of the social and sacred modes of communication that is the crux of fruitful dialogue." There is therefore a need to see that a connection between the sacred and the secular allows boundaries to be dissolved and the dialogue between the above and below to be re-kindled.[193] Buber was advocating a new form of dialogue that was able to cross the boundary from the religious and reach into and be made applicable to the secular. Individuals did not just reach up to God, but God was once again drawn down into creation. It can be argued that in late modernity the boundaries between sacred and secular have already become fluid (cf Lynch, 2007 and Fitzgerald, 2007). In the "Thou" relationship humans could be unaware that through encountering another's "Thou", they have in essence shared in the "eternal Thou", as God is part of the relationship. It is no longer a question of

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[191] This can be seen to reflect the Trinitarian position because the nature of the Trinity reflects that fact that God can co-exist in more than one state. God is able to adapt himself to facilitate the needs of the relationships (See Alistair McFayden, (1990) *A Call to Personhood*, for a more detailed discussion on the Trinitarian nature of relationships).

[192] This verse echoes 1 John 4:20 which states that one cannot truly love God if one does not love one's fellow human.

[193] Buber's theology again provides a solution to the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular by suggesting that through the "Thou" dialogue the boundary which separates the two is able to be dissolved because the "Thou" with creation facilitates the "Thou" with the Divine. This recalls Knott and Albanese's work in relation to the way religion has allowed boundaries have become more permeable (discussed in chapter two). It also for-sees how cyberspace can act as a means to allow this interconnection and dissolving of boundaries, so that the above and below and the sacred and secular are seen as connected.

initially seeking the Divine in the vertical stance but, instead, of God partaking in the communion between humans and creation.

Levinas (1969, 79) continues to press this concern about the relationship with the Divine when he questions Buber's idea of the reciprocity of the "I-Thou" relation. He suggests that "the other is…the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed." Levinas implies that as the "Other" is ultimately the Divine, there can be no real mutuality here. In Buber's interpretation the Divine becomes an equal, or a friend, removing his transcendent status. Continuing from this Levinas (ibid, 171) questions whether one can learn from the Divine in an equal relationship. God needs to be above humans in order to maintain the attitude of reverence that humans have for the Divine (ibid, 79).

This question of mutuality is further challenged by Levinas (1969, 79) continuing his attack concerning the manner in which the relationship takes place. He questions whether it can be mutual because he thinks that "the relationship to the other is essentially asymmetrical." This pertains to the fact that one is acknowledging that they are in an inferior position and need something from the other; hence there is no mutuality in the encounter. This draws us back to what appeared to be Buber's anti-Kantian stance, because it could be interpreted to be using others as a means to an end[194] and failing to value them in themselves. This is a significant challenge for Buber and his importance of community; if one can only have a "Thou" relationship with only one person at a time, then this will be to the exclusion of others. Rotenstreich (1991, 72) questions how an exclusive relationship, such as this, leads to the idea of a nation. Similarly, when Buber ([1923] 2004, 28) argues: "Through Thou a man becomes I" does this mean that one is engaging in "Thou" relationships purely as a

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[194] This is the second part of Kant's interpretation of the duty that humans should have towards each other (cf Immanuel Kant, *Anatomy of evil*, 2010, 100).

means to self-aggrandisement? One is not valuing the other as a genuine person with their total being, but merely as a means to an end, accentuating the "It" mode of relating.

In order to address the issue of the exclusiveness of "Thou" relationships, one needs to remember that Buber's main aim was to unite the Jewish community under a new spiritual vision. Therefore, to suggest that he would advocate a practice that is merely exclusive to two people seems nonsensical. Although Levinas is right to suggest that the relationship can seem exclusive, one only has to acknowledge that an individual can have an exclusive relationship within a friendship or partner, and yet concurrently be very much part of a community. Buber ([1923] 2004, 16) envisaged that as more "Thou" relationships were cultivated this would begin the process of renewal and draw God down to creation again. Therefore a "Thou" relationship can be seen as a catalyst that begins the process of re-creation and is not exclusive, but rather a means to renew modes of relationality within creation. In relation to the Divine, Buber ([1923] 2004, 64) has addressed this criticism when he states that God is "wholly other" and is found through meeting, through genuine relationships with others. Hence the Divine is able to be encountered as the "eternal Thou" through relationships with others and can still maintain a position of transcendence.

In relation to creation and others, Neve Gordon (2004, 103) argues that Buber acknowledges that sometimes the relationship can be asymmetrical. It may be forged between people who have dependencies or need, for example, a patient. In some relationships there may not be parity, in terms of strength, intelligence or empathy. However, the very nature of the "I-Thou" relationship means that one would not seek to take advantage of the weaker person but, instead, aid them in the meeting. A distinction needs to be drawn between equality and mutuality; the former cannot be easily changed, the latter requires the "I-Thou" to take place and be cultivated. Buber ([1965] 1998, 231) stresses that "I-Thou" allows the other person to be fully themselves and accept their otherness, even if they appear to be

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inferior in other ways.[195] The mutuality of the "Thou" is beneficial to both parties involved because the relationship is grounded in an ethical dimension of respect. As Buber said (1964, 110): "I live ethically when I confirm and further my Thou in the right of his existence". In a "Thou" relationship both parties involved in the encounter are able to allow the other to fulfil their needs through mutual dialogue taking place in the "between" space. Love is the foundation and characteristic of all "Thou" relationships because it is unconditional and gives without having to receive. The foundational nature of "Thou" relationships are indeed that they are mutual; both parties choose to engage with their whole being.

In the postscript to a reprint of *I and Thou* Buber ([1923] 2004, 94-96) attempts to clarify some of the issues raised from the first edition. He explains that although there may not initially appear to be mutuality in human relationships with an animal or plant, reciprocity is still possible. In the former case he discussed how humans can win the trust of animals, and in the latter, how they can see a unity with a plant and with nature. It is again not a question of equality but how relationships change perceptions and allow one to see interconnections and mutuality.

Applying Buber to the Cyber-age

Applying Buber's theology to cyberspace in the 21st century is not a straightforward exercise. As discussed in chapter one, late modernity is characterised by movements such as detraditionalization and individualization, which have changed forms of religion, theology and spiritual expression. In this new context, theology has a duty to address the concerns that cyberspace and late modernity pose. In applying Buber's theology we can find a template for re-thinking theological relationships in the complex interconnections. However, applying Buber's theology to cyberspace is not straight forward, not least in understanding how the

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[195] This has echoes of Pauline teaching, where the church is encouraged to "build up the weaker members" (Romans 14:1) for the good of the community.

Divine is accessed in a cyberspace model. This has been discussed by scholars such as Cobb (1998), who has suggested that God can actually be sought and found within the medium. Although there may not be general agreement that the Divine is found in cyberspace, it can be argued that "Thou" encounters can bring individuals closer to a realization of the importance of interconnectivity and the awareness of a transcendent realm. Due to global cyberspace, individuals are enlightened as to the possibilities for unity and community which exists within the world and which are held together by the Divine, or another unnameable external force.

A second concern in applying Buber focuses on the importance of the physical in relationships. Being a virtual medium, cyberspace has a distinct lack of physicality. If Buber ([1952] 1988, 35) indicates that the essence of relationality is in the "lived concreteness" then a relationship based primarily on language and virtual reality, with no tangibility, cannot immediately be seen to fulfil Buber's criteria for "meeting" and genuine "Thou" encounters. In response it could be argued that although cyberspace does not, at present, allow for total physicality, the addition of avatars in cyber worlds does enable a projection of the person in the relationship to be sensed, and one that can gesture, and virtually, hug the other. One also needs to stay mindful of the fact that each avatar is tied to a physical "I" offline, so there is still the possibility of the "I" uniting with others and forging a "Thou" relationship, despite the lack of physicality. It has also been argued by feminists that the absence of physicality online allows more connection, because barriers of prejudice are removed[196]. Therefore cyberspace provides a vehicle for dialogue to take place between individuals in a new, interconnected setting, bringing awareness to the way in which global networks can facilitate new modes of relating.

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[196] This idea has been suggested by Judy Wacjman (2004) and will be discussed further in chapter five.

A related concern focuses on dialogue, essential in Buber's theology. Yet in cyberspace language can often be seen to be abrupt and misunderstood; text is without tone and meanings can be lost, or misinterpreted. The anonymity afforded by cyberspace can also mean that individuals may not take ownership of their words, seen in the frequent outpourings of abusive language.[197] Buber accepted this negative aspect of language, which characterised the "It" mode of relating. However, whilst acknowledging its negative traits, dialogue in cyberspace can also have the opposite affect; conversations through text can be more considered because the pressure to respond immediately is not always as evident as in offline life. Despite the increase of more brief and spontaneous exegesis in cyberspace, there is potentially more time to reflect and give a considered and edited response online. There is potential for the deep epistolary friendships of Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian times, as well as those maintained from the front line.[198] These refute the need for face-to-face contact. For many writers geography and personal health precluded any chance of physical contact and yet there were many dynamic relationships maintained by letter. With text-based communication in cyberspace, we have the opportunity to return to this thoughtful and reflective dialogue that is able to sustain individuals and communities.[199] This point has been argued in relation to email by Esther Milne (2003) in her article *Email and Epistolary technologies: Presence, Intimacy, Disembodiment*. She states that email, despite being disembodied, can provide a sense of "presence": "For many correspondents, "absence" is creative; it opens a discursive space in which desires and subjectivities that might not otherwise be

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197 Cf Brenda Brasher, 2001, 77ff concerning how offensive and exclusive language can be used in cyberspace.
198 See Amy Culley (2014) *British Women's Life Writing, 1760-1840*
Friendship, Community, and Collaboration, for a discussion on the importance of writing for exploring how women wrote collaboratively, emphasising the network of relationships which they were part of.
199 The need to write in depth and for an audience can be seen in the practise of "life-logging", where salient events in one's life are recorded. This is often used today by parents as a record of their child's life, to pass on when their child is at an appropriate age. See also Sian Price (2011) *If You're Reading This...: Last letters from the Front Line*, a collection of letters from soldiers in the front line of the World Wars, as well as more recent conflict, and the impact that these letters had on their families and the love that is conveyed, despite a physical absence.

articulated can be explored." This opens up possibilities for technology to re-kindle the connections made in epistolary writings in the new network age.

Through the employment of "text-speak" and shortened forms of communication, one can also facilitate a different dimension of dialogue, something that Buber stated could be present in a relationship. An emoticon[200] could convey as much as a paragraph, and also enhance understanding. The medium of cyberspace can also be seen as negating the need for language. One is able to be in the presence of another avatar, without feeling pressure to inject conversation into the encounter. More reflection is available within the relationship and during the encounter, the very real possibility of the 'It' being transformed into a 'Thou' can be realised.

Cyberspace, and the dialogue available within it, opens up an entirely new realm for forms of relational theology, capable of realising Buber's model. The emphasis here should be on "new". Cyberspace does not conform to conventional social norms. The body-language and prejudices of everyday social encounter are suddenly removed. The opportunities to learn and experiment with new modes of communicating and interaction are plentiful.

To return to concerns about the technology, fears are expressed about the addictive qualities that have been documented pertaining to the over-use of computers (see Young 2010). Dependence on the machine as a facilitator of relationships and interaction could reduce relationships to "It" experiences[201]. Mark Vernon (2010, 104-105) holds that online relationships are often merely acquaintance, characterised by a lack of trust, especially when taking place on social networking sites. Vernon (2007) argues that the need for dynamic

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[200] An emoticon is a meta-communicative pictorial representation of a particular emotion, for example ☺ would convey that someone was feeling happy.
[201] This is also discussed at length in the works of Turkle (2006; 2010; 2012) and will be a key focus in chapters five to seven.

interaction between online and offline is also required. "Intimacy ultimately depends for it

flourishing on contact in the real world, face-to-face."[202] In fact, Cyberspace can mirror

offline life; as in the cyber worlds of Second Life. These are often portrayed as Utopian

versions of reality. The medium is intriguing for theology because it provides individuals

with an ostensibly new dimension. They have an opportunity to reflect, to hold up a mirror to

themselves and their relationships with other interdependent phenomena. Utilising Buber's

dialectic would be an opportunity for them to re-examine how to change their encounters so

that they contributed to a re-unification of the fragmented parts of creation, be it on an

environmental, human or religious and theological level. Turkle (2005, 299) confirms this

point: "If our encounters with computers do not help us to deal more compassionately and

carefully with one another, then what will our attitudes, formed through our relationships

with them, contribute to our fragile and threatened world?"[203] The cyberspace medium has

potentially transformed relationship by providing a space for reflection. Here is a chance to

renew encounters and address issues that have arisen out of our alienation from the

interconnectivity of creation and the Divine in late modernity.

In this chapter I have discussed some of the issues pertaining to Buber's theology of

relationships and its application to cyberspace. Displacing any concept from its original

context will always provoke issues that need to be overcome. However, I have shown, and

will continue to do so in the proceeding chapters, much can be gained by a re-appraisal of a

theological concept in a new context. It is salutary how Buber's vision of interconnectivity of

relationships is apt for the 21st century global era. Although intended primarily for a Jewish

audience, Buber's theology has universal appeal and the relationship of humans with creation

was uppermost in his thoughts. These dimensions enable us to see how his three spheres can

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[202] This will be discussed further in chapter six and the conclusion.
[203] The way in which the ethical dimension of human relationships mirror the way in which humans relate to
God is discussed in chapter five (See also Sallie McFague, 2008).

find a renewed theological meaning in cyberspace. Despite the modern desire for individualism, we must also be mindful of how there are undeniable interconnections between humanity and the rest of creation. One cannot live purely for self, to the detriment of community; there is a need for the "I" to be strengthened by the "thou." By re-learning the ethics of relationships, individuals are given a new means to relate to all aspects of creation, allowing the Divine to be once more drawn down into encounters. Humanity has been estranged from creation and the Divine for too long. Theology needs to utilise a new model of interconnectivity to bring awareness of global connectivity and the immanent place of the Divine within the networks of life. It is my contention that Buber's dialectic facilitates such a model.

Reflecting on the information age, Google Protagonists Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen (2013, 31) observe: "The advance of connectivity will have an impact far beyond the personal level; the ways that the physical and virtual worlds coexist, collide and complement each other will greatly affect how citizens and states behave in the coming decades." These reconfigurations need to be addressed and the purpose of the next three chapters is to explore the ways in which Buber's model for relationships can be used to map the connections in cyberspace and provide theological insights into relationships taking place in the network era. As I have explained in chapter three, Buber ([1923] 2004, 13) discusses three spheres of relationality: "man with nature; man with man, and man with forms of the spirit", which I will apply to different aspects of cyberspace to understand the ethical challenges that they present. Although Buber's three spheres do not map precisely onto cyberspace, they provide unimpeachable standards by which to grade and assess human interaction in the new medium. Further, they can be utilised as tools to aid the construction of a new blueprint for the electronic future.

Theology needs to re-open the relational debate and it can utilise the medium of cyberspace as the means to facilitate this. George Pattison (2007, 9) indicates that theology has an obligation to alter its thinking and to respond to the technological situation: "Theology today has a need of a freedom that the very connotations of 'theology' seem to deny." It needs to dialogue with the new medium, in order to provide insights into a means of getting individuals to re-connect with each other and with the Divine.

The relationships that are taking place among different communities in cyberspace have been documented by many scholars.[204] However, this information has not been analysed theologically and significant conclusions have not been reached about the way the medium impacts on relationality. I want to demonstrate how engagement with technology has led to a greater awareness of interconnectivity and of the multi-faceted nature of relationships (within the new space). A new language for assessing the impact of relationships in cyberspace must also be devised. Buber is already here, acknowledging through his insistence on the centrality of dialogue, that ethical communication is the future of our species. The shift in socio-cultural movements has meant that terms that were once fixed, such as "community" and "religion" and "theology" have become more fluid. They need to be re-envisioned in late modernity. It is paramount that theology responds to these changes and understands how they have altered the dynamic of relationships and the essence of community.

The concept of "I" will be a prevalent one in the following three chapters. Firstly, it is essential to the Buberian dialogical claims and secondly, the way in which the individual relates to society will come to play an increasingly important role in the technological era. This was understood by Schmidt and Cohen (2013, 36) who observed how "[I]dentity will be the most valuable commodity for citizens in the future, and it will exist primarily online."

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[204] Cf Turkle (1996; 2005; 2011); Brasher (2001); Campbell (2005; 2010).

However, despite this need for recognisable individuality, the rise of the network era has also allowed a realisation that there is connectivity between not only humanity but other spheres, all of which attribute meaning to human life. In late modernity, characterised by changing symbols and fluctuating boundaries, the need to feel a sense of belonging and interconnectivity is becoming more and more apparent. Cyberspace has contributed to processes such as globalisation and given individuals a chance to re-think their place within a wider network of existence. As Friesen (2009, 65) argues, "We cannot understand ourselves without the larger web of others who give language, story and shape to our existence."

By identifying with the network of life, individuals are given a sense of belonging and a chance to re-work their identity and relationships to self and others. Friesen (ibid, 22) picks up the theme when he observes: "The time has come for us to reflect on the complexity and the interdependency of created life". Buber's dialectical theology offers a means of escaping technological alienation. It provides a model for reflecting on relationships and a means of understanding the possibilities which cyberspace offers for connectivity, community and creativity. This can lead to a re-assessment of humanity's place within the interconnected network of creation. I will now turn to Buber's three spheres to demonstrate how these can transform our understanding of cyberspace.

Part 3: Engaging Buber's Theology and Cyberspace

Chapter 5: Alienation from the Environment: the ethics of gendered interconnectivity

The web gives us an opportunity to rethink many of our presuppositions about our nature and the world's nature (David Weinberger, 2002, xiv).

The aim of this research is to gather the existing empirical studies on individual and social engagement with cyberspace and provide a theological and ethical assessment of its results. It is seeking to consolidate theological reflection after the first wave of studies reveal important insights about our engagement with this new phenomenon.

This chapter explores the issues which become apparent in Buber's first sphere of "man with nature". These concern the way in which humans relate to their environment, as well as the nature of embodiment. I maintain my overall assertion of the affirmative potential of cyberspace. I regard it as theologically transformative as opposed to its problematic potential for alienation; technologically-induced alienation preceded cyberspace by decades.[205] This new medium allows for interconnection and reflection on relationships, such that new understanding of our intimacy with space and nature is needed to overcome

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[205] Modernity and late modernity has been perceived to be largely characterised by the reductionist capitalist paradigm that material wealth can guarantee happiness. Efforts to ensure this goal is reached have meant that individualism has pervaded society (discussed in chapter one), as competition and capitalism have taken the place of embodied community. The dichotomy has become pronounced in cyberspace. There are dubious financial deals, possibilities for exploitation and a lamentable lack of ethical concern on display in the transactional marketplace. Relentless media marketing also attempts to subvert the user, as products flash up on the screen. Wessels (2010, 164) believes that in cyberspace there is a "tension between the consumerism of the Net and free, unregulated communion; something which promised new opportunities for those who have access, at the same time, very quickly, became a divisive phenomenon as capitalism came to dominate the Internet." The impression capitalism gives in today's unstable financial climate can largely be viewed as an inherently negative one.
Ziauddin Sardar (1996, 19) draws attention to cyberspace's exploitative nature because it is a space which is not open to all and it is often dominated by "Western imperialism." Wessels (2010, 141) says that this has resulted in social exclusion and what is now known as "the digital divide – between wealthy, educated users, and poor, disproportionately non-white users." She adds that there is inequality to access (echoing feminist concerns), both in terms of purchasing a machine that enables the Internet, but also in being able to access a broadband speed that makes searching the Internet an enjoyable and useful experience (ibid, 110-118). Concerns are also raised about access for minorities, those living in rural areas and developing countries. The invention of cyberspace has managed to produce fresh technological alienation through a lack of access to the very global exchange it was designed to facilitate.

Marcusian alienation. Relationships and connections which have been lost have to be re-made. Buber's theology affords us the blue-print to embark on this journey.

Space is a facilitator of relationships. It provides fluidity, which reminds us that theology needs to adapt its traditional ways in order to dialogue with late modernity, to have a voice within a fast-paced and constantly adapting society. What I have established about Buber's relational thinking in chapter three is now at the heart of my argument, in terms of linking together the dialogue and ethics of "I-Thou" in the dimension of cyberspace. Crucial to this discussion is the fact that cyberspace provides a new environment for engaging in relationships. Rabbi Dennis Ross (2003, xv) comments that "the I-thou relationship is a bridge of words spanning the space between people." This chapter sees implications for transformation from the way in which the cyberspace medium provides new relational space and a new means of re-connecting with all of human and divine creation. As Wertheim (1999, 299) has observed: "The very essence of cyberspace is relational." This is theologically significant. It is through relationships within creation that we can come to access the Divine, because creation is part of God. Moore (1996, 141) likewise observes that "we cannot love God, in truth, without also loving the world God has created." It is not a choice between the sacred or profane because the Creator is part of creation and so the two realms are interconnected. Buber ([1947] 2002, 60) emphasised this point in his dialogues with Kierkegaard when he remarked that "creation is not a hurdle on the road to God, it is the road itself."

Attention has already been drawn, in chapter three, to the alienation and defragmentation that has occurred as a result of unbridled materialism and capitalism. The implications of this have often been felt in relation to the environment when technology has caused a disconnection with reality through the way it has been exploited to fuel capitalist extremes. Alienation from surroundings has been further exacerbated by continuous

technological innovation. Coupled with this, the possibilities for creating Utopias in cyberspace have contributed to detachment and lack of ethical responsibility with regard to the natural world. Buber's theology allows us to reflect meaningfully about the apparent amorality of the new technology and seek solutions.

Buber enables us to see that, in this sphere of nature, the "in-between" space in relationships is paramount; it is where real "meeting" of the "Thou" is able to take place. Buber comments that the real takes place "between them in the most precise sense, as it were in a dimension which is accessible only to them both" (Buber, [1947] 2002, 241-242). Cyberspace is essentially about connection and space and it holds potential for relating in new and innovative ways. Buber's relational theology hails an interconnectedness found in the true "Thou" relationships, characterised by the universal relationship to the Divine: "There we find only the one flow from *I* to *Thou*, unending, the one boundless flow of the real life" (Buber [1923] 2004, 82).

We can interpret Buber's first sphere of "man with nature" as the foundational sphere to examine the medium of cyberspace and the impact of this new space on relational activity. Buber provides us with an affirmation of spatial interconnection which offers us, in cyberspace, the potential to engender the "Thou" mode of relationships. Although it must be acknowledged that, in cyberspace, relationships still exhibit the dimensions of 'I-It' found in offline life, the interconnectivity of this global space makes individuals more receptive to "Thou" encounters; they come to understand how the different spaces are inter-linked, enabling new possibilities for connection. I want to test out Buber's thinking on nature and the realm of "the between" to discover how his theology can provide insights into the way in which interconnectivity allows new potential for ethical relations.

I have chosen to use a feminist lens through which to access Buber's contribution. Feminists have acknowledged that women have an ability to acknowledge connections in all spheres of life, especially within nature, as well as an openness to seeking more gender-neutral and inclusive means of relating to and interpreting the Divine.[206] The commitment of feminist theory to relationality carries forward Buber's work to the wider dimensions of cyberspace. Although this may initially appear incongruent with Buber's three spheres of "man's" relationships, the lack of gender-awareness in his language did not mean that women were unable to achieve the "Thou" dimension: the language obviously merely reflects the conventions of Buber's 1923 context. In fact one of the central messages that Buber emphasised in relation to the Divine is the female aspect or shekinah[207], which would endorse the validity of a feminist model through which to view relationships.

Buber's emphasis on mutuality and reciprocity in relationships are also very prevalent themes in feminist circles[208]. Buber, we saw earlier, regarded marriage (or intimate relationships) as the supreme ideal, a means of encountering God. Between a couple there were no divisions ([1923] 2004, 81): "He who loves a woman, and brings her life to present realization in his, is able to look in the Thou of her eyes into a beam of the eternal Thou." Levinas (2004, 198) stated that women support Buber's emphasis on valuing people within the context of a relationship; he locates ethical authority in a relational matrix, rather than in the realm of abstract, impersonal, universal imperatives. He is clear about the need for the ethical mutuality to relationships, which needs to be manifest in concrete dialogue, not in some abstract ideal. The ethical nature of the "Thou" interface is a guarantee that the other is not taken advantage of. This concern is uppermost in the thoughts of feminists, both in

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[206] See Carole Gilligan (2003) *In a Different Voice,* on the place of relationships in feminist ethics.

[207] The word Shekinah literally means "the dwelling" and it is used to describe the act of God dwelling amongst the people. It was used by the rabbis to prevent the anthropomorphosim of the Divine (The Kopelman Foundation, 2002-2011).

[208] See Nel Noddings, *Caring: A feminist approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (2003) for a discussion of how Buber relational theology is used as a basis for an ethics of care.

relation to gender and minority issues. Feminist insights into the need for connection can illuminate how cyberspace might allow possibilities for interconnection and open up opportunity for a genuine ethical dimension.

A feminist approach has much to bring to my theology-technology debate about cyberspace as it is able to convey the need for interconnection and holism, reflecting the natural ecosystems inherent within nature and embodiment. McFague (2008, 148) remarks that "individuals exist only in networks of interrelationship and interdependence". The alienation and disconnection from surroundings, created through a materialistic and largely patriarchally-controlled approach to technology, can be overcome by a more interconnected and caring approach. I will test out this model by applying three facets of interconnectivity in cyberspace: the body and dialogue, love and union, and a gendered environment, to show how they assist the development of the "Thou", but first I want to explore the idea of "space" in greater depth in order to draw out its relational quality.

Space and Interconnection

Discussion about space will always provide us with a paradox: it is a phenomenon that we wish to contain and master, and yet it is also infinite and, hence, cannot be clearly defined. Globalisation has brought our awareness to the complexities of new technological spaces. Lefebvre (1991, 48) draws attention to different levels of space: from natural or "absolute space" through to "abstract space," complex spatialities where the significance is socially produced. Knott (2005, 13) reflects that "spaces are both material and metaphorical, physical and imagined." At one level space can be viewed as nature and the surrounding environment, whereas at another level the social relations that occur within space mean that it is more abstract and defined by the interactions and dialogue which take place there. These are just some of the potential theatres that can be constructed in cyberspace. Knott (2005:23)

continues that we need to have an awareness of the "interconnectedness of events and relational nature of the persons, objects and places that constitute space." The concepts of space, boundaries and territory have always been significant in the formation of identity and belonging (cf Manuel Castells, [1997] 2004), because they enable the formation of new types of relationships. Territorial boundaries can be used as a means of division, but also of integration, by allowing others to cross over a boundary through the sharing of codes or beliefs.

Albanese (1981, 6) considers how boundaries need to be respected in identity-formation. She points out that one is able to discover one's identity through "finding the inner space and social space within which it is possible to thrive and grow." She argues that religion is concerned with space that we make around ourselves when we partake in it, but also with time, through stories and traditions, passed down as community and personal narratives[209], which express our beliefs (ibid, 5). This significance of space to religion is remarked by Knott (2005, 21) who sees religion as "inherently social" and so has to "exist and express itself in and through space, and must play its part in the constitution of spaces." Albanese (1981, 7) continues how religion is concerned with transcending boundaries and going beyond the everyday. One significant aspect is the role played by language in transcending boundaries because it gives "access to the world beyond". Cyberspace provides new space for experimentation with identity formation. In such a vacuum Buber's relational theology provides the necessary conceptual tools. He said that that the "I" needs to develop in and through encounters with external phenomenon, "in order to go out to the other…you must be, with yourself" (Buber, [1947] 2002, 24). Through dialogue cyberspace is providing a space for language to transcend boundaries, to reach out to global communities and

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[209] The themes of narrative and symbolism will be discussed further in chapter seven in relation to forms of the spirit, Buber's third sphere of relating.

minorities in the "Thou" mode of mutuality, as well as ultimately providing a space to re-think relations to the "eternal Thou."

In cyberspace, territories and boundaries that were important in the past have become almost redundant. Microcosmic spaces become macrocosmic in cyberspace. One is able to move seamlessly between different spaces and sense the interconnections. There is a fluidity of connection between disparate models as the fragmentation characteristic of late modernity can be seen to dissolve under an overarching sense of unity. Castells ([1996] 2000, 408) comments in the network society today there are no longer defined spaces but a "space of flows;" places of power and function in society. This is because cyberspace, although labelled as one single phenomenon, cannot be contained within a limited area. Albert Benschop (1997) remarks that "cyberspace is something that cannot be demarcated in geographical terms at all. It is a reality that can be localized 'nowhere' and yet its presence is felt 'everywhere.'" The all-pervading medium of cyberspace draws awareness to its global impact and provides insight into the inter-connectivity of nature and its surroundings and the way it impacts on, and facilitates, relationships.

Cyberspace creates its own new space which can be used to transform the way that relationality is viewed. John Inge (2003, 26) argues for a "relational view of place", where the emphasis is on the interactions which take place within it. There therefore needs to be an awareness of the personal and social changes that take place when humans extend themselves using new technologies, because cyberspace facilitates a change in how exchanges and relationships are viewed. Lefebvre (1991, 30 & 83) has observed that space is a social product: "Space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products)." Cyberspace is different from other spaces, which David Weinberger (2002, 51) sees as "essentially passive," but the Web "actively holds itself together". This is because the space has a radical effect on interactions and relations which take place within the medium.

Knott (2005, 15) agrees that space can be dynamic, reinvigorating connections and relationships and can never be seen merely as "an abstract arena or passive container." Cyberspace holds immense importance for the phenomena that are contained within it, and the individuals or objects that are found there actually define and give meaning to how the space is viewed and used. This allows a greater reflection on the dynamics of the space and the interactions which take place within it. The space becomes a new dimension of relation requiring ethical awareness.

Bodies and Dialogue

I have argued that new space is able to transform boundaries. Couple this with the ability to re-think how the body is perceived and the role it plays in defining identity and communication and a new future appears to be unfolding. In cyberspace people have the ability to create an identity. If they wish, they are free from the constraints of the flesh and barriers of the body, and from the offline stereotypes that so often accompany them. The body is of particular significance for space and relationships, which Lefebvre (1991, 405) acknowledges: "The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body, even though it so metamorphoses the body that it may forget it altogether".

The traditional, patriarchal, theological perspective[210] has produced a two-fold standpoint towards the body: First, there is a positive perspective, established from the way

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[210] The book of Genesis provides early guidance for Jews and Christians on the significance of the body and soul and has been influential in guiding ritual and beliefs in Judeo-Christian theology. In Genesis the body was made first and then God "breathed life into it" (Genesis 2:7) emphasising the dual importance of body and soul, as the former provided a dwelling place for the latter. This was reinforced by the doctrine of creation "imago deo" which essentially stated that humans had been made in the image of God and therefore the body was sacred because it was given and formed to resemble and communicate with God. It was also a means of communication between man, both through language and also sexually in being able to fulfil the command to "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). Therefore essentially without a body, one could not fulfil the divine plan, set out in creation. This paradoxical view is echoed both Greek and Western Christianity's views on the body and soul. Greek Christianity was initially influenced by Platonic beliefs, where the true self is the soul (Coakley, 1997, 92) but also by St Paul, who took a holistic approach to body and soul (ibid, 93ff). This stems back to the Resurrection, where Jesus appeared fully embodied. Hence the emphasis in the post-Resurrectional appearances of the fact that Jesus was fully embodied, such as where he challenges Thomas to touch him to affirm his

God became embodied through Jesus ("the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" John 1:14) and the re-embodiment of Jesus after his Resurrection[211]. Conversely, Coakley (1997, 99) reminds us that a negative view is often taken of the body, and in particular of women's bodies, a bigotry which stems back to the Creation myth, where Eve used her body to commit the Original Sin (Genesis 3:6). Such instances, coupled with Jesus' saying that "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41), have been used as a means to oppress women in a framing of their bodies as temptation and sin. This is emphasised by Philip Mellor and Chris Shilling (1997, 71), who observe that the Christian view of the body has contributed to the oppression of women and child bearing has been seen as a punishment for sin.[212] For feminists the paradox extends to the way that the body is seen as a symbol of motherhood, pleasure and creativity, but, at the same time, gives rise to the oppression and subjugation of women in patriarchal society.

Women wish to change these misogynistic myths, in which their bodies are co-opted. Cyberspace provides a space to facilitate such change. Castells ([1997] 2004, 234) refers to Jane Mansbridge (1995, 29) reflecting on how women are seeking to re-define their identity in their own right and to end patriarchal dominance. Women do not want to just resist patriarchialism, they want to see changes and a new society in which they are valued, where equality is the norm in every country. Globalisation through cyberspace has demonstrated a hunger for a new society founded on the identity needs of all members. Movements such as

physical presence, "for a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have (Luke 24:39). In Judaism the body is essential in that it forms a key part of the habitual rituals, such as Shabbat and the belief in a physical resurrection (Isaiah 26:19), hence the traditional forbiddance to cremate the body. Coakley (1997, 71) observes that Judaism puts "stress above all on the physical body in its relationship to the divine." She continues that many of the Mitzvot (Jewish commandments) are carried out by bodily activities and so the body is paramount to fulfilling the law. Shabbat, the most important rite for Jews, involves the paradox of cessation from all bodily activity, but at the same time, fulfilment of bodily needs through food and celebration (ibid, 74 & 78). In contrast to this, the body can also be seen as a source of ritual uncleanliness, as blood is always considered impure (Leviticus 15:19). Hence, during her period and for a week after, men do not have intercourse with their wives, so that they are not contaminated (Leviticus 15:19-24). Also at death, anyone coming into contact with a dead body would become ritually contaminated (Coakley, 1997, 82).

[211] See Luke 24:42-43 and John 20:27 for instances of Jesus being fully embodied after his Resurrection.

[212] In Genesis 3:16 God's punishment towards woman for eating from the tree of knowledge was pain in childbirth, and this have contributed to the traditional view of women's bodies being seen as sinful.

liberation theology have been co-opted by feminists to these ends. Knott (2005, 98) uses Judy

Tobler's (2000, 90 & 96) call for a "feminist reoccupation of sacred space" in order to

demonstrate the potential cyberspace holds for equality. In cyberspace, there is more

"fluidity", because the medium can strip away prejudicial barriers. Through solidarity with

others in cyberspace, women are able to rise up and take control of their sexuality. Through

movements of resistance, women assert their views against a patriarchal society, which they

can no longer afford to ignore. Cyberspace offers new means of relating for women. Sadie

Plant (1997, 178-180), a cyber-feminist, explains how it offers possibilities for new freedoms

for women due to the release from the physical body (although this could be interpreted as

endorsing patriarchal rejection of the body too).

A contrary view, from the other side of the embodiment paradox, is taken by Ken

Hillis (1999, 196). He suggests the body helps us to understand space and is essential to how

people are perceived. It facilitates what one wishes to portray about oneself and allows us to

make sense of our surroundings. Avatars provide opportunities to experiment with identity

and new cyber-bodies. Kevin Hetherington (1998, 18) argues that avatars are important for

forming relationships because they produce "alternative social orderings" and pre-existing

prejudices can be broken down. By taking on an avatar of choice, one can lose a body which

may have been a target of discrimination, and adopt a different, race, sex, or even species.

This can be empowering, individuals acquire confidence in new modes of existence and

equality.

A feminist perspective is concerned not only with gender but with all minority groups

which suffer oppression. So discussion of the use of avatars to help eradicate barriers for

those who are physically disabled is germane. Tim Guest, in his book *Second Lives (2007)*

discusses a group of severely disabled people who form an avatar called "Wilde

Cunningham" in Second Life. He explains that, for this group, the limitations that they have

in real life are removed. The computer gives them a voice, as by using text, they engage in an accepted and unimpeded form of communication, unknown to them in reality. Exhilaratingly, they discovered that they could fly, revealing a real sense of freedom and a new identity: "Second Life makes them almost free" (Guest, 2007, 54).

This emancipation has been remarked upon negatively by Charles Ess (1999), who sees "the fulfilment of the apocalyptic quest for individual salvation in the form of a disembodied existence in the cyberspace world" as threatening "to remove the individual still further from real-life communities" Cyberspace can undoubtedly act as a means of escape from the offline world and the problems and prejudices that may have been encountered there. Individuals may have rejected the need to address issues and have found sanctuary online. This does not have to be viewed negatively; cyberspace can aid individuals to grow in confidence until they feel that they can open themselves to the possibilities of "Thou" relationships. Online experimentation can help people to feel more secure in their offline identity and build better relationships, secure in the knowledge that they have a better chance of being accepted. From a religious perspective the importance of the physical is not uniformly important in all religions. The main tenets of Buddhism stress that it is attachment to the physical that is the source of suffering[213].

Cyberspace offers women, especially in patriarchal societies, the possibility of achieving a more equal level to men as they move out of socially-prescribed routines and pre-defined gender roles and expectations. As Vivian Sobchack (1995, 211) observes: "As we increasingly objectify our thoughts and desires through modern technologies of perception and communication, our subjective awareness of our own bodies diminishes." In the technology era Waters (2006, 35) states that it needs to be acknowledged that there has been

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[213] The way in which physical cravings can causes suffering was a key part of the Buddha's teachings. It is when one is able to eliminate the need for physical dependence that one is able to be free from suffering (cf http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/qanda02.htm. (accessed 10/1/14)).

a shift in people's view from an embodied presence to a disembodied will. Technology has

allowed us to place more emphasis on thoughts and desires and gender inclusive language, as

opposed to physical limitation of embodied presence offline. Sheila Davaney (1987, 86)

concurs when she urges women to "create new space, new community, new ritual, and new

language," all of which can be achieved through technology and cyberspace. Technology has

allowed gender roles to be altered. Judy Wajcman (2004, 66) has shown how the machine has

been able to alter the "relationship between body and self." Technology has meant that

without a physical body women can be judged on a more equal basis and the "interactions are

fundamentally different" (ibid).

Buber's emphasis on the way dialogue can manifest in many forms makes his

theology pertinent to these new modes of online relating. Cyberspace provides a new

perspective on how individuals present themselves, and how they are perceived globally[214],

allowing barriers that are often erected by the physical body to be eradicated.[215] One

"sees"[216] the person in a different way, thus allowing a greater chance of mutual meeting. Val

Plumwood (2002, 201) recalls the parallels with feminist models: "We need a concept of the

other as interconnected with self, but also as a separate being in their own right…Feminist

theory can help here…eliminating difference in favour of sameness, or vice versa." This

endorses Buber's argument that, in genuine relationships, one retains one's own identity

because the meeting takes place in the "between". Women are in an ideal position to provide

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[214] Castells ([1997] 2004, 267) exemplifies this by citing the case of sexual liberation in Taipei, such as the anti-harassment parade in 1994. This took place due to the global awareness of the plight of these women, who were able to use cyberspace to reach like-minded people and to gain a sense of solidarity from the relationships they experienced there, hence emphasising the way in which online relationships can be empowering for acting in the offline world. Technology allows experimentation but also alters the concept of self to a view which is "decentred, multiple and fluid" (Ibid, 67).

[215] Castells ([1997] 2004, 195) comments that due to increases in biological technologies, women have also gained control over their own abilities to produce the family that they want, at a time that suits them.

[216] This echoes the religious experience of St Teresa of Avila, who stated that in her mystical religious experiences she saw "not with the eyes of the body but the eyes of the soul." Hence, cyberspace, can also allow a new perspective on seeing the other to be realised, and also a new means of seeing God. Traditional images and methods of dialogue are replaced by a more spiritual communion.

insights into interconnectivity; they are able to understand the connectivity that exists both within cyberspace and across the globe. Women have been bound together as sisters by their common plight. Now they have a means of resistance and subversion gifted by cutting-edge technology.

Following such a position, Wajcman (2004, 63-66) is correct in her assessment that the computer is able to deliver "a post-patriarchal future." She says that she took a new approach to the Web by re-interpreting the way the world was seen; no longer linear but more fluid: "It (the Web) is the ideal feminine medium where women should feel at home. This is because women excel within fluid systems and processes." In the same way Sadie Plant (1997, 65) suggests that women have always been at the forefront of technology, stretching back to the loom and weaving. Weaving was a means of "communication and information storage" long before writing was invented. Traditions of design and pattern promulgated myth and history through the medium of women's skilful fingers for centuries. Women, as Plant (1997, 24) suggests, have a special connection to creation, because they are able to "imitate nature". Women, arguably, have a special insight into the interconnectivity found in the Web. An early exemplar was Ada Byron (Lovelace)[217] who, Plant argues, has been instrumental in showing women that they could overcome the technological dominance of men and inject something of their creativity and compassion into the discipline.

Plant (ibid, 121) successfully makes the case that women have already adapted to the digital age, and even had their own form of language code through which to communicate: shorthand. The title of her book is *Zeros and Ones,* where she observes that women, represented by zeros, are empowered by the language of the computer. Wajcman (2004, 64)

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[217] Ada Byron (Lovelace) was the daughter of Lord Byron, who developed an intense relationship with Charles Babbage (who is seen as producing the template for a programmable computer, the analytical engine). Instead of pursuing the usual pastimes of women, she used her knowledge of activities such as weaving to work with Babbage and wrote notes to explain his inventions, using footnotes to highlight connections between parts of the work (Plant, 1997, 5-18). Some of her work is now considered to contain algorithms which were used in the computer language, Ada. Hence she had invented her own language, a means of dialogue and of connection.

suggests Plant depicts "a new gendering of technology;" zeros are now as important as ones in the binary language of cyberspace. Wajcman (ibid, 66) continues that, for feminists, the ability to exist in a disembodied state in cyberspace means that conventional gender roles can be transformed with exchanges that are largely text-based.

Feminist interaction in cyberspace provides fertile soil for the seeds Buber's template germinates. Feminists understand the need for interconnection and want to use new forms of dialogue to build more inclusive relationships between all aspects of the created world. The centrality of dialogue, which feminists emphasise, concurs with the importance that Buber placed on it as a means of "the between" in relationships. The new means of communication in cyberspace allows a new form of technological language,[218] which is able to connect individuals in a relationship characterised by the dimension of the "thou." Communities in cyberspace are sustained by genuine dialogue, which reintroduces the ethical dimension.

Dialogue is the platform that Buber builds on. Buber's hope of translating the Hebrew Bible into the accessible vernacular of his native German bespeaks his determination to demonstrate the vital importance of dialogue to all. Feminists, too, have reached into the Bible for words of empowerment. Following such as view, Solle (1990, 69-70) refers to the words of the Magnificat, taken from Luke 1:46-55, as particularly liberating for women and minorities. "He has looked upon the humble state of his handmaiden…he has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted the humble and weak". In such phrases she finds emphasis of the importance of the Word for empowering individuals to interconnect with others in creation and to give a voice to the oppressed. Solle (1997, 178-179) indicates that the psalms promise that "God will always hear my voice" (Psalm 5:4) and draws attention to

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[218] Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media* (2001) has discussed how language takes on different forms in the new media of technology, where text and transmission create certain tensions. Manovich examines language in the history of modern visual and media cultures, questioning the way in which media is dependent on language and symbols but also requires new conventions. He explains how the computer's language is used as a means of communication, "the computer interface acts as a code that carries cultural messages in a variety of media" (ibid, 64).

three ways women are able to be involved in dialogue: it must be free from domination; it must be characterised by intersubjectivity, so all are involved, and have the possibility for change. Cyberspace offers possibilities for women and minorities to engage in these forms of dialogue, to change others and be changed by the experience. This emphasises the importance of communication in changing, reforming and sustaining relationships through new means of interconnectivity online.

Whilst acknowledging the freedom and fluidity that cyberspace offers, concerns about communication in the absence of a physical body must be acknowledged. We need to consider whether genuine dialogue can take place within a virtual medium. Lorne Dawson (2005, 32) has a poor view of disembodied language, which would reflect the possibilities for the "It" dimension to dominate. "Online communication is marked by...anonymity, multiplicity, and disembodiment, and the problems they entail (e.g. impersonal communication, loss of inhibition, deception and stereotyping)." With a similar note of caution, Wajcman (2004, 7) remarks that: "Bodies play an important part in what it means to be human and gendered." The same concern is expressed by Sharon Farmer (1987, 6) who believes that embodiment is also a necessary component of communication and essential to constructing personhood. In her view, by rejecting the body, there is, in essence, a rejection of a defining aspect of womanhood. The question also needs to be raised as to whether, without physical contact, space actually becomes a barrier. It may be the case that distance of communication diminishes ethical responsibility. Elaine Graham (2002, 105) acknowledges this point when she discusses the work of Vara Neverow. Neverow (1994, 22) stresses the importance of maintaining embodiment as it is "linked to personal identity, to responsibility, to emotional health, to sensuality and to choice. Incorporation, by contrast, is linked to the

annihilation of the individual"[219]. For many, physicality is a link to identity and Heim (2006, 56) indicates that it is imperative for humans to be anchored in such reality. It is only through a connection with ourselves, enabled through our physical bodies, that we can begin to allow our new understanding of interconnection to impact on our offline lives.

Although disengagement from the physical body can entail much freedom, it can also have marked consequences, not least the fact that one disengages from responsibility for the actions that one takes in cyberspace. Anonymity can lead to hurt, as individuals take on false identities and create new avatars. This freedom to explore new persona afforded by cyberspace can lead to fragmented selves, entailing shallow encounters incapable of achieving any aspect of the "Thou". The dilemma is outlined by Dawson (2005, 185) when she argues that "the creation of multiple selves on the Internet may come in conflict with identity integration." The problems can probably be traced to rampant individualisation, one desires to express identity in a variety of ways, but without necessarily having a grounded self. In this sense Cobb (1998, 2) astutely observes that "technology is shifting our understanding of who we are."

A well-known case of anonymous identity and betrayal is that of a male psychiatrist, Sanford Lewin, who joined CompuServe[220] chat line and took the role of a severely handicapped and disfigured New York resident called Julie Graham. In the process he gave advice to many women and when his true identity was revealed - many years later - many women felt betrayed and violated (Wajcman, 2004, 68-69). While it is second-nature to feel

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[219] The concept of inclusion evokes the earlier discussion on the cyborg, which again presents an embodiment paradox because there is a cross-over between the realms of physicality and technology. Graham (2002, 207), whilst acknowledging the difficulties posed by the introduction of the cyborg, states that the fact that it "straddles the boundaries of nature and culture" meaning that women are no longer as marginalised but can engage with and use the new technologies. Donna Haraway (1985, 180) has indicated how the cyborg can be seen as a useful aid in allowing some of the "It" boundaries that are erected in offline life to be transcended.
[220] CompuServe was founded in by Jeffrey Wilkins and was the first service to offer email communication in 1979. And one year later was the first service to provide real-time chat online. It has subsequently run into difficulties in terms of the service it provides (Mark Liberator, 2005).

total sympathy with "Julie Graham's" victims, the situation may bear further examination. Lewin's ingratiation, via professed disability, disfigurement and sex-change is repugnant. Undoubtedly, as a psychiatrist, he was aware of the generosity of response he would encounter from empathetic women. That he went on to give advice and counselling, which was well-received, makes the situation slightly more ambivalent. In such cases we need to ask, does the end justify the means? If, as a Lewin victim, you received excellent counsel, felt strengthened by the encounters, and were asked for nothing in return, where does your victim-hood lie? It may be a question of pride, but also of honest relation. You might well feel that your trusting nature had been taken advantage of, your confidence dented and that others were laughing at you. There is no doubt that it was a form of deception, but some good came of it when the illusion was a real benefit to both parties. There can be no blame attached to the recipients of Lewin's wisdom; they are both guileless and guiltless. They are innocent in the strongest sense of the word but this case sows the tensions within cyberspace that Buber's ethical framework can address.

Can this case tell us something about the potential for our medium of cyberspace? Negatively, it is easy to list the downside to all this and caution against anonymity and disembodiment, but there is a positive: Trust produced something good. Out of simple text on a screen good works were done, albeit arguably for the wrong reasons. It reflects the ability of words to connect, enrich and transform across empty space. We have to ask was the "Thou" moment fleetingly achieved? The answer is probably "yes" but it would have to be admitted that deceit caused it to fall away meteorically to a resounding "It". Is it also worth mentioning that the case of "Julie Graham" (nee Sanford Lewin) is regarded by some as an urban legend, which does not make it any less provocative and rather neatly plays back the original script of betrayal.

The advent of cyberspace has provided an opportunity for humans to conceive of themselves and their surroundings in a new way[221] and the ability to actualise this notion. This sleight of hand can carry hidden costs. Children may be eager to take on invincible personas in cyber games, such as characters in World of Warcraft[222]. Over indulgence can be extremely damaging to them and their concept of relationships. Cees Hamelink (2000, 34) comments that in games "the greater the distance to potential victims, the easier it will be for people to inflict harm that they would refrain from in face-to-face situations." Although the games purport to be just "games" they can lead to behaviour that is anti-social, damaging and lacking an ethical dimension. In this respect, Campbell (2005, 23) observes that "identity construction in an online fantasy-based environment can have real-world psychological and sociological effects on participants." There are complex relations between on and offline life. In a cautious way, Wertheim (1999, 247) states that "in the physical world we are physically dependent on one another for care and support. Social bonds established in cyberspace can

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[221] The opportunity to form an identity is especially appealing to young people, increasingly disillusioned by rigid frameworks that exist in society. Stewart Varner (2007, 165) observes that young people appear to need space to "allow for the expression, testing and development of identity…at a time when their identity is very much in flux." Crowe and Bradford (2007, 230) observe that through social networking sites such as Facebook, Beebo, Formsprings and Tumblr, there are opportunities to try out different personas and paradigms in their own private playgrounds, where they are "relatively free to experiment with a range of discursive positions." Social networking in particular, emphasises the private/public dimension of cyberspace and the new boundaries that have been erected to demarcate the new space. Therefore, paradoxically, although cyberspace is seen as a place of flows, it also enables virtual boundaries to be erected, and with that the possibilities of more 'it' relations, as the boundary acts as a means of division. Paul Hodkinson and Sian Lincoln (2008) have compared the offline space of the bedroom with online social networking sites, following from the work done by McRobbie and Garber (1977), about the importance of the bedroom, in *Girls and Subcultures*. Hodkinson and Lincoln (2008, 3ff) have also examined the way that cyberspace, like a bedroom, has offered young people a new controlled, safe space. It is a space that they can call their own, where they can exercise control about who enters and what adorns the walls, as well as the activities that take place there. Due to the advent of numerous technologies, the bedroom can no longer be seen as an individual, demarcated space, but because of the numerous means of accessing the wider world, through computers, mobile phones, it has also become a gateway to a larger space. This echoes sentiments from Lefebvre (1991, 87) when he comments: "The space of a room, bedroom, house or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by barriers and walls, by all the signs of private property, yet still remain fundamentally part of that space." However, Hodkinson and Lincoln (2008, 13) argue that young people still want to control who accesses their spaces and to feel that they have ownership of that territory that they have made their own, and often limit access to close friends and those whom they already knew offline. Lefebvre continues (1991, 86) the computer provides a space through which you can encounter another person's space, and vice-versa and begin to develop through interactions: "Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another." This again emphasises the alienation that technology can bring.
[222] World of Warcraft is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game which was created in 2004 by Blizzard Entertainment. It allows players to creative avatars and to work individually or together as a team to complete quests and missions.

be, and often are, deep and powerful, but these "parallel lives" are not equivalent to the lives we experience with our physical bodies."

Embodiment itself, however, is not some exalted state. The fact that someone is physically present does not mean that they are truly engaged or "meeting" another person. This is discussed in *Cybernauts Awake (1999)*[223]: "Being physically present with someone can give us the illusion that we are sharing ourselves, when in fact all we are doing is sharing some geographical space." Buber ([1947] (2002), 16) would have agreed. We recall that he admitted to a meeting that became a turning point for him – the case of the student who committed suicide after he came to him and he was not totally present, even though he was physically there. A paradox also lies in the fact that, despite depicting one's identity through an avatar online, one still retains a body and so many of the social customs and conventions are still in force in cyberspace. Wagner (2012, 128) indicates that "a sense of togetherness can effectively emerge online." Michele DeLuca (2009) rightly reminds us that because real people lie behind the cyberbodies online we are able to make a level of commitment that can make "a real difference in people's lives, even if we never meet" (Wagner on De Luca, 2012, 133). The body is also still present, albeit in a different way. In this way Graham (2002, 189) correctly points out that: "Far from abandoning the body, forms of virtual interaction retain many of the conventions of face-to-face community." In games goals are achieved, self-esteem can be built up, communities are formed. This can have a direct effect on online situations, which can lead to more confidence and trust in relationships online, allowing more "Thou" encounters to take place. It is a means for individuals to develop skills and confidence to take to the offline world, to improve relationships. Murdoch (1992, 470) observes that "acting rightly toward another person does not necessarily, in fact more often does not, involve face-to-face encounters."

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[223] This is an Official Report, commissioned by the Church of England board for social responsibility on issues relating to Christians, the Church and the Internet.

In cyberspace the possibilities to connect and to build up new ways of relating through dialogue, with a virtual body and without offline prejudices are enormous. However, one needs to be mindful of refusing to allow the space to act as a screen and to consider that each avatar is embodied offline and it merely acts as a vehicle for communication with an embodied person. There needs to be a realisation that although someone is not physically present in cyberspace, the dialogue is still embodied and has the power to harm, or to comfort.

Love and Union

The tensions within cyber-relations are the tensions between "It" and "Thou" and these are directly highlighted by joining Buber and feminist thinking. The patriarchal forms of theology remain the dominant means of relating to the Divine.[224] In consequence, conventional male characteristics, such as power, violence and revenge,[225] dominate those of love and care, especially within the Old Testament and the Greco-Roman tradition. It is through the work of feminists such as Lucy Irigaray (1977), Grace Jantzen (1998) and Dorothee Solle (1990) that these traditional male forms have been challenged. These feminist thinkers have developed many parallels with Buber's theology, which emphasise the need for actualising mutuality in all relationships. Solle (1990, 183-184) argues that the "I-Thou" relationships which Buber advocates are the supreme form of connection that arise from mutuality. This is frequently exhibited by women, who are not aiming for dominance and control over the other person. The basis of the relationship of mutuality is love and it is an active love: "Doing, proving, living," which itself, Solle suggests, forms the basis of Judaism.

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[224] Most monotheistic theologies, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam portray a predominantly male dominance in both language used to describe the Divine, as well as the elevated status of males. This can be seen in examples such as Christianity's insistence for many years on only men being able to represent Jesus as priest, which still occurs in Roman Catholicism. Similarly in Hinduism, although feminine aspects of the Divine manifest through the consorts of the gods, as well as avatars such as Durga, it is believed that only men, the Brahmins, were charged with interpreting the Hindu scriptures or Vedas.

[225] See Genesis 19 for an example of when God used his power to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

According to Buber ([1923] 2004, 68 & 76) what characterised all "Thou" relationships was love and unity. Love is an encounter which engages with the whole person; it is the selfless giving of one to another and it never uses them as an object. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 67-72) observes that in marriage there are often signs of risk and sacrifice: one must commit fully and suspend everything else, be chosen by the other, and also choose. There is the possibility of rejection and loss (as Buber saw in Kierkegaard's rejection of his fiancé, Regina in preference for sole devotion to God). However, the ideal relationship allows individuals to reach their full potential and to develop themselves through the relationship. Buber ([1923] 2004, 21) suggests that this is something we are called to do because through the other we move from "the eternal chrysalis to the eternal butterfly."

Love is also able to transform the person and to allow them a glimpse of the relationship with the "eternal Thou," the ultimate source of all love. Buber ([1947] 2002, 264) believed that through relationship one is able to encounter and accept the all-encompassing love of God, which "begins with the love of man". Buber believed that one was able to love one's fellow-man as God loved; we cannot love God but not love our fellow humans. He believed that it was through the love that people had for their community that they would be able to establish relationships and in this way bring God down to earth once again, to embrace the relationships that were taking place. Humans would experience unity, as gradually the oscillation between "I-It and I-Thou" would be reduced; humans could see in relationships with others the sense of the unity that is found in God.

Feminist writers have not been afraid to acknowledge that love is the essential aspect of relationship and a prominent Jewish female leader, Ellen Umansky (1987, 202), recalls Tehilla Lichtenstein (1938) who believed that relationships had a two-fold purpose: "a responsibility towards one another" and "the feeling of love that served as a model of the relationship between the individual and God." She uses the model of a parent and brother to

demonstrate that in true relationships there is no hierarchy; the relationship is one of mutuality, love and trust. This underlines Buber's ([1923] 2004, 19) argument that love was essential to the forming of relationships. It does not allow the other to be objectified but values the "between": "love is between I and Thou". Buber's theology of the "Thou" allows one to go out to others but still maintain one's own individuality because love defines the space in the relationship, it is not a smothering or all-consuming emotion.

Linell Cady (1987, 140-141) makes a strong case for the ability for love not to just exists as a self-sacrificial virtue, but argues that it is what sustains relationships and that we need to "consider love from a relational perspective." She argues that through considering the needs of the other and not just the self, love means the other "becomes part of one's expanded self" (ibid, 141). Love plays a central role as the foundation of community, both online and offline, because individuals are able to maintain their identity but also share their commitment to the well-being of others within the community relationship. Love is the means by which a unity or connection is formed between individuals and this constitutes a community. Individuals are able to maintain their identity but also care about the values of the whole. Love is the means that is used to deepen relationships. As Cady (1987, 143) continues: "Love" is "continually seeking to create, deepen, and extend the bonds that unite self and others in more inclusive relationships." Love enables people to extend themselves "beyond their biological and experimental borders" and connect with others (ibid), thus allowing more opportunities for the "Thou" dimension.

Love in cyberspace is able to transcend the physical as the "Thou" enables one to reach out beyond physical boundaries. This is illustrated by Campbell (2005, 117) who has discussed how love can be depicted and shown online: "cyberhugs are a means to express love in the community." They provide a means for emotion to be integrated in the space, which can often seem devoid of emotions due to lack of physicality. The space again plays a

paramount role because it allows the cyberhugs to "bridge the gap between online and offline emotional support" (ibid, 118). The interconnections in cyberspace draw attention to the ability of this new medium to offer a platform for re-connection. The globality of the space engenders a sense of power and an awareness of a force stronger than themselves, the possibility of a "Thou". It is as Friedman ([1955] 2002, 31) observes finding that "[L]ove is the bridge through which a being unites itself with God."

As Solle and Jantzen indicate, women are more readily able to view the alternative Divine in an immanent and relational form. This is essential for an understanding of feminist theology and it supports Buber's ([1923] 2004, 64) concept of God being drawn down into a "Thou" relationship as part of the world. Solle (1990, 190-192) underlines that there is a need to understand that there is not a radical dichotomy between aspects of God: "Transcendence is radical immanence" and God is involved in our everyday affairs. We need to be able to appreciate this by seeing the connections between all things. Solle (ibid, 195) argues that what holds all creation together and allows us to see God as the source of all is "the strength of love among human beings", the foundation for genuine relationships. In all these cases, contemporary feminist articulations of a relation between God and the world, or God and female subjectivity, depicts the Divine as continuous with the world rather than radically transcendent, ontologically or metaphysically. Likewise, Nancy Frankenberry (2011) points out that divine transcendence is seen to consist either in total immanence or else in some dialectic between horizontal transcendence and immanence, there is fluidity between the two. This fluidity is seen in Buber's ([1923] 2004, 21) emphasis that the "It" and "Thou" modes were constantly interchangeable by using the analogy of a chrysalis and butterfly. Both Buber and feminist models of the Divine allow us to see how the interconnectivity of relationships is very much part of our inherent humanity and a template for all relationships and it becomes revitalised in the cyber-space age.

Cyberspace, therefore, provides us with new means of relating and in particular transcending the boundary between the natural and supernatural. In this respect, Cobb (1998:89ff) echoes the feminist calls by providing us with a new model for connecting with the Divine, which allows us to become aware of the unity of all things. She engages the work of Teilhard de Chardin and his concept of the omega point, which concentrates "pure consciousness" with "absolute unity" and is where "all being is synthesized and organized." She continues that cyberspace can provide a place of connection and reflection, where "love can manifest itself in many forms" (ibid, 90ff). Cobb (1998, 95) says that de Chardin sees love as that which connects all at the omega point, "consciousness is love" and it "alone is capable of uniting human living beings in such a way as to complete or fulfil them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves". Through this understanding of love, Cobb (ibid, 96) argues that cyberspace is able to "create new forms of faith communities that exist on a global level and yet are based on deep, personal interactions." She accepts that although cyberspace allows us to become more individuated, at the same time, this allows us to "create strong and healthy communities" because there is a recognition of the connections that exist between phenomena (ibid, 97). The connections within the network cause Cobb (ibid, 100) to consider cyberspace as an ecosystem, mirroring nature, which aids our spiritual development, as "everything is connected to everything else in an endlessly nested system."

Cobb's work has a number of implications for aspects of interconnection in feminism and ecology. Although she makes it clear that offline connection is still needed in faith communities, the importance of being virtually "released" from the physical body allows one to focus on the spiritual and appreciate more of the unity and interconnectedness of all things. Christ (1987, 63) points out in sharing significant spiritual experiences that she has encountered "a spirituality that can reawaken our sense of connection to all living things, to

the life force within and without us."[226] It allows individuals to see beyond "I-It"

relationships, which can sometimes occur due to a judgment on physicality, and through to

the love that is found at the heart of all. Buber ([1923] 2004, 20) said what lay at the heart of

all meaningful creation is the way of love and this provides an ethical dimension to all

relationships because "love is responsibility of an I for a Thou." Cobb therefore allows us to

envisage how the connectedness of people through a spiritual network demonstrates the

possibility of connections and relationships shaped by love. She has stated how she believes

online communities to be spiritual networks and a place where science and religion can re-

connect. We can start to experience healing and redemption "of ourselves, our communities,

and our world" (1998, 45). This emphasises the importance of overcoming alienation through

inter-connection and communities moving forward together to provide new inclusive models

of relationality.

A Gendered Environment

There has always been a close connection between feminist and environmental

theology and the symmetry with Buber's thinking emerges in the relationality they promote.

They both possess the ability to view connections which have often been overlooked in

traditional patriarchal theological models. The importance of nature and cyberspace evokes

feminist liberation theology, discussed by Rosemary Radford Ruether (1987, 67), who states

that it "bases itself on the dynamic unity of creation and redemption," which are also central

themes for Buber. The need to re-connect with creation is cleverly portrayed by Alice Keefe

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[226] Without digressing from my primary thesis, a note here on the subject of panentheism would add to the understanding of the notion that the concept of God is changing to facilitate this notion of interconnectivity. Panentheism is a group of related views with common basic affirmations. It literally means that all is in God. It is a term that was popularised by Charles Hartshorne in the mid-twentieth century (John Cooper, 2007, 26-27). God is not aloof from creation is some transcendent domain, but learns and benefits from what happens within the world. This is an example of how the Divine is interconnected with creation and affected by them. It echoes Buber's belief that God is not is part of it. The burden therefore remains on humans to acknowledge this fact and to see themselves as part of creation and therefore connected to the Divine.

(1997, 61), who links Buddhist[227] and feminist theology because "a vision of interdependent reality is at the heart of both." She uses these movements to explain how individuals can build new relationships with each other by becoming aware of how each individual is connected and that we are all "inseparable from the web of life as the cells in our body are inseparable from us." This sentence is particularly apt; it recalls Buber's ([1919] 2002, 249) analogy of society as "an organism of dying cells", symbolising that interconnections have been lost. However, Buber also signifies his optimism in recalling his relationship with nature through a tree, which forms a particularly telling analogy for his theology, with its "flowing veins" symbolising the interconnectivity of all parts to the whole (Buber, [1923] 2004, 14).

Buber ([1950] 1994, 19), too, realised that one could not reach the Divine just through spiritual pursuits, such as mysticism, instead this was achieved by embracing the world through the "hallowing of the everyday." Keefe (1997, 62) argues that Buddhism and feminism bring awareness of global interdependence which consequently entails that we "adopt a more inclusive ethics of responsibility for all beings." Buber's ethical dimension of the "Thou" needs to be inherent in any relationship in order to allow mutuality and the cultivation of genuine community. Keefe (ibid, 70) maintains that there is a need to practice selflessness and to live, not for the individual, but "for the benefit of society, placing the common good above personal interests." As all are part of an interconnected creation, we need to be united to others and not maintain an individualistic position; we are dependent on each other for survival. She too adopts the analogy of weaving and argues that re-connection

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[227] The traditional Buddhist view of non-self or "anatta" informs their belief that everything is connected and there is no one individual who is separate from this; everything is governed by the law of interdependence. They believe that it is the idea of self and duality which has led to the exploitation of nature, as man envisages himself as superior to his surrounding, which are there to be utilised in an 'it' fashion. Keefe (1997, 64) cites the monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, who taught that humans must "wake up from the illusion of separateness and individualism, and thus to put aside selfishness and to act for the good of the whole" and with an attitude of compassion. Keefe (1997, 66) continues that Buddhists feel that oppression towards humans and creation needs to be embraced by acting in the world as this is how they can bring about "social transformation."

can be achieved when "one finds a common thread…in a shared language about interconnectedness, mutuality, and relationship between and among all things". In this new model the sacred is reimagined as this thread which binds all together (Keefe, ibid, 66), echoing Buber's call to discover the Divine within connectivity. Friesen (2009, 19) follows this position by showing how engaging in online relationships humans gain a greater understanding of their place within the whole of creation and their role in the renewal of God's networked Kingdom. This emphasises a person's role and responsibility for ensuring that correct and genuine relationships develop within this sphere.

Theology's traditional interpretation of Genesis as "dominance" rather than stewardship towards creation has been fuelled by capitalist exploits, causing increased alienation in relationships to each other and the natural world. Following this line, Solle (1990, 49-51) argues that the world has been hostile to creation and therefore God needs humans to work towards redeeming themselves through a renewed relationship to creation. Humans have an ethical responsibility to "continue the creative act of God." Significantly Solle comments that "being-in-relation" (the basis of Hebrew ontology) represents the connection between all living things, including plant and animal life. Likewise, Buber ([1923] 2004, 66) emphasises the need for a right relationship with creation, characterised by the ethical "thou." In order to achieve this re-connectivity with creation humans have to become part of the solution. We need God, just as God needs us to bring about redemption. McFague (2008, 3) agrees that we need to re-interpret our relationship to the environment and to God. We need a "different language for talking about God and ourselves." This supports Buber's ([1923] 2004, 13) dialogical theology, where the importance of communication in relationships is of essential importance. In the realm of nature "our words cling to the threshold of speech." McFague (2008, 29) suggests that there is a need for humans to re-envisage "our interrelationship and interdependence with all other human

beings and other life forms". This is because the relationship has been broken and alienation has ensued, not least due to the "consumerist/militarist paradigm.

In modernity and late modernity humans have continued to seek ways to better themselves from an individualist perspective, without concern for the wider impact. However, what is required is a need for more holism, in terms of the interconnectivity of one action on another, in any relationship or transaction; an awareness that one space impacts on another. There is a call to re-examine our perspective toward those that form part of our relationships; our surroundings, others and the Divine. McFague (2008, 49) reminds us that if theology were to re-visit the Genesis creation story we would understand the need to "broaden our perspective from "the soul and God" to the whole earth: in Christian faith, the redeemer is also the creator."

McFague (2008, 33) discusses the work of George Hendry (1980), who recognises "the three contexts in which Christian theology has and should be done: the cosmological, the political, and the psychological: the earth as a whole, the world of human oppression, and the inner life of the individual." These three dimensions are not unlike Buber's three spheres of nature, man, and forms of the spirit. The spheres have a universal importance that transcends agendas. As McFague (2008, 102) indicates: "Religion is not primarily about belief in the existence of God; rather, religion is about doing something, enacting love in the world". This is akin to Buber's ([1967] 1996, 80-81) insistence on the need for religiosity as opposed to mere religion; faith needed to be acted upon, in order to enact change. Affirming the links with Buber, we can note how McFague calls on us to realise that we need to act in harmony with our surroundings because they are essential for the formation of identity. They help us to realise we are not separate individuals but part of an inter-connected web of life, "we must start with the world in order to understand ourselves" (ibid, 50). She advocates that we should

pursue a path of "ecological anthropology"[228] as a way of reminding ourselves that we are not separate from our environment nor from the Divine; all is interconnected.

Through a re-appraisal of this idea we can re-formulate our attitude towards creation so that we are "decentred as God's darlings, and re-centred as God's partners, the ones who can help work for a just and sustainable planet" (2008, 50). Buber's argument that humans should become co-creators with God in helping to bring redemption for the planet demonstrates the mutuality of their thought. The concept of co-creation is also discussed in relation to the computer by Noreen Herzfeld (2005, 45-46). She discusses the relationship humans have to God as they are working for God in the world. She also acknowledges that we have become "computerized co-creators" and can share "the task of agency in this world, both with God and with our own creation, the computer." Humans are given a task of ethical responsibility towards creation because we are an essential part of it. McFague (2008, 71) uses the analogy of "God's body" to allow us to see all parts of creation as interconnected[229], interdependent and deserving of care and an ethical attitude of responsibility.

Buber's theology is centred round this need for redemption of creation[230] and humans have the obligation to be part of it. As Friesen (2009, 148) quotes television host Jim Fowler:

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[228] This concept of ecological anthropology was suggested by McFague (2008, 43ff) as a way to re-interpret the anthropocentric attitude toward the environment that traditionally seemed to dominate theology. She argues that instead it needs to be replaced by one which allows humans to be seen not as dominators but as part of God's created world. It can be summed up in the view that "we must start with the world in order to understand ourselves: who we are and where we belong" (ibis, 50).

[229] This recalls 1 Corinthians 12 where the church is seen as Christ's body and the talents of the many members parts of his body, which make up and contribute to the whole. This allows us to see that in relationality the actions of one can impact on the whole community in a positive or negative way, depending on whether one decides to use the "It" or "Thou" mode of relating.

[230] This 21st century hope for a new creation culminated in the making of the James Cameron film *Avatar* in 2009[230], which demonstrates the need for a symbiosis with creation. It is analogous to the way in which industrialisation and the network age has ridden roughshod over the concerns and habitats of individuals and small communities, in the need for global expansion and progress. The film is based on the premise that in 2154 earth's resources are severely depleted and mining takes place on Pandora, a moon habited by the Na'vi, who live in harmony with the planet and worship a mother goddess called Eywa. A battle ensues between those mining the moon and the native species called the Na'vi, who are supported by one of the scientists, called Jake, who forms an affinity with the Na'vi as he understands how all creation is interdependent.

Although the film received mixed reviews from a cinematic point of view, what was more interesting from an ecological and technological sense, was the stark contrast between our world and the one projected on the

"Our challenge for the future is that we realise we are very much a part of the earth's ecosystem." We have lived many years with the idea of humans as the dominant species and taken quite literally the world dominion, whereas in effect a much more apt interpretation would be that of stewardship.[231] These relational responsibilities cohere with Buber's ([1967] 1996, 67) belief that it is only when humans see themselves as part of creation that God would be able to start the process of redemption. As McFague (2009, 67) once more comments: "God's household is the whole planet; it is composed of human beings living in interdependent relations with all other life forms and earth processes." It is only by inter-dependent co-creation that relationships can be built up. Buber ([1930] 2002, 252) argued precisely in these terms, showing that humans have an obligation to pursue the idea of an ethical, inclusive community, following the interconnectivity found in all of creation: "The world and humankind are predisposed by creation alone to become a community."

The need for humans to become one with creation picks up Cobb's earlier argument regarding the symbiosis of creation and the Divine. It is also linked to the idea of deep ecology; a movement championed by Arne Naess and George Sessions[232] (1984). Here the emphasis is on interdependence between humans and all sentient life, including the planet, which is not to be exploited to satisfy human need or greed. Policies need to be changed to allow a more "gentle" mode of existence, in harmony with nature, something that was central

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screen. This affected some individuals and they felt depressed and even suicidal by the thought that they had to remain in this world and could not enter into Pandora (Blake, Telegraph 13th January 2010). One website user who had seen the film commented: "Ever since I went to see Avatar I have been depressed. Watching the wonderful world of Pandora and all the Na'vi made me want to be one of them." This example draws attention to how a medium which provides reflectivity on human's relation to the planet, can allow a greater understanding of the need to preserve human's place as not dominators, but stewards, of creation.

[231] See Lynn White Jn (1967) *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, for an insight into how the Western World exploited the natural world through in the Middle Ages. This paper opened up debates about how technology was being used to damage the environment.

[232] Arne Naess and George Sessions used the term "deep ecology" to describe the way in which humans are not the centre of the world, nor the dominant force, but there is a need to think philosophically about human relationships with the environment. This is in contrast to "shallow" ecology, where humans are motivated to be environmentally friendly because it will be of benefit to them (Harvey, 2005, 180). Essentially the environment is used as a means to better human ends in the latter model but has an intrinsic value, in the former.

to Buber because it was integral to the Hasidic sect of which he was a part.[233] Hasidism emphasised the ethical dimension of the relationship with the environment and stressed the need "for the theological foundation of an inspired life in responsibility – the responsibility of each individual for the piece of the world entrusted to him" (Friedman, [1955] 2002, 23).

By looking at cyberspace from a feminist perspective we are able to perceive that our relationship with the environment and all beings within it have intrinsic value, which should be valued for itself. Despite concerns that cyberspace produces alienation in relationships, I have argued that, conversely, it provides the ideal environment for Buber's renewal of creation to be envisaged. Cyberspace is continuous, just as nature is, and allows genuine connectivity to be revealed. There is a greater understanding of the way in which life is a continuous stream of interconnections as humans become one with their environment and experience the notion of "thou." In Biblical terms this parallels the initial creation myth in Genesis 1. In Eden, Adam and Eve had a greater connection to the entirety of creation. They were part of it and connected to the "Thou", not separated from it until after the "Fall". Cyberspace provides the opportunity for humans to re-connect to that initial relational moment, where there was not the subject-object distinction between humans and their surroundings, but divine unity.

By linking Buber's thinking to a feminist perspective I have been able to demonstrate how an interconnected model is able to bring cyberspace, relationality and creation together. I have shown that relationships in this new medium are not merely a transaction in the "It" mode but should be characterised by a sacredness of exchange, defined by mutuality and an ethics of care, found in the "Thou" dimension. A change in attitude is required, from an

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[233] Hasidism stressed that there was a divine spark in all of creation, thus emphasising their belief in Panentheism. R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Habad (Lubavitch) Hasidism, says: "To all the world's creatures God gives life and He continuously brings them from nothing to substance through the light and vitality which influences them. Also in the material body, and even in inanimate stones and dust, there is light and vitality from Him, which will not return to naught and nothingness as it was" (Manfred Gerstenfeld and Netanel Lederberg, (2002)).

individualist, materialistic perspective, towards one which sees the interdependence of all

beings as central to an ethically functioning society. Carrette and King (2005, 18) sound an

optimistic tone when they remark how market tendencies can be overcome, and different

expressions of religion can prevail, as individuals make sense of "life, community and

ethics"; hence the need for the latter two of these facets to be found in "Thou" relationships.

McFague (2008, 87) argues that the solution lies in caring for all of this planet's life forms to

ensure that there is justice and equality for all by sharing the earth's resources with all who

need them. There needs to be recognition and re-learning that humans have needs which

extend beyond the idea of greed. McFague confirms that "we are relational beings from the

moment of conception to our last breath. The well-being of the individual is inextricably

connected to the well-being of the whole" (ibid, 88). The space helps us to realise the

importance of interconnection and the impact each relationship has on the whole.

As I have argued, there is a need for a change in the approach to all relationships

which has implications for models of the Divine in the technological era. This view is

supported by Baab (2012, 281), who comments that "theological reflection about God's

presence in human places can be extended to a consideration of the internet." Human

understanding of how the Divine can be accessed may need to be re-learned, through

applying a more interconnected and gender-aware model of relationality. There is a need for

negotiation with the sacred in a new space, and of using the medium as a means of re-

connecting in genuine relationships with the Divine. Knott (2005, 113) highlights John

Caputo (2001, 67-68), who supports the need for religion to adapt and find ways "of

flourishing in a new high-tech form and of entering into an amazing symbiosis with the

'virtual culture.'" It is this which makes Buber's thinking ever more relevant.

Buber has emphasised that genuine "Thou" relationships are characterised by ethical

dialogue, where one is open to the other which allows the Divine to be present within the

exchange. God is present within "the Word" and can be revealed through it. Revelation is the means through which humans are able to enter into the "Thou" relation with God because, through it, Buber ([1952] 1988, 135) said, "we are revealed to ourselves." At such moments both parties are open to encounter, just as when Buber said YHWH revealed himself in the burning bush as "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14). The Divine was open to the encounter and so a "Thou" moment was able to occur through the interconnection.

Cyberspace allows us to see this same vision of inter-connected beings, which provides opportunities for equality for humans and also contains a realisation that all persons, as well as the environment, have an intrinsic value. By seeing that the desires of the individual for progress cannot be achieved without considering the ethical impact on other inter-dependent beings, we can see cyberspace – life, as life itself, as part of a sacred exchange. It is a realisation of inter-connections, coupled with a change in attitude towards the sacred that is needed. This forms the first steps towards starting the process of becoming co-creators with the Divine and beginning the process of redeeming creation. Paul Fiddes (2001, 189) rightly suggests in this vain that there will be new possibilities in the "interaction between God and the world in a genuine co-creativity." God can be seen to be using technology as part of the creative process to make humans more aware of the interconnectivity that exists. God is not a being estranged from creation, but one who participates in the redemption of it through active involvement, even within cyberspace. In the next section I will explore a new dimension to relationships in cyberspace by looking at the interaction between humans and the way the space facilitates both dimensions of Buber's dialectic but importantly, more opportunities for the "Thou" dimension.

Chapter 6: Alienation from the Other: the ethics of community

The Internet can also be positively framed as a technology that can be used to affirm the religious life of the community (Heidi Campbell, 2010, 39).

As religion and theology develops, the sacred and the profane collide. Nowhere is this collision more apparent today than in cyberspace. Despite an obvious spiritual hunger, expressed in the multitude of quasi-devotional sites, the religious establishment maintains a broadly dismissive stance of such new-age confusions. My purpose here is to explore these tensions, through an analysis of the gaming, networking, and online church communities. Focusing on Buber's second sphere of "man with man", I propose to identify the moment when the transcendent meets the mundane and "man with man" becomes man with the Divine. Inevitably the negative aspects of my profiled subjects will reveal themselves but I intend to investigate the positive aspects of cyberspace, countering the negative themes by demonstrating that communities online can provide support and build self-esteem, developing the self-in-relation.

Sherry Turkle, in her extensive works on relationships and cyberspace (1996; 2005; 2011) presents the essential problem of technology for relationships: individuals are connected to a greater degree than ever before and yet are, paradoxically, more alone[234]. Individuals are becoming dependent on technology and its seductive, interactive interface and non-judgmental execution of wishes is fast eclipsing the ethical transactions made in traditional offline community. To make sense of these changes, we can use Buber's model to enable us to appreciate and regulate what is offered by the new medium. Buber provides us

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[234] These sentiments were conveyed in a Newsnight program (2/12/13) which portrayed the increasing loneliness that technology has caused. It discussed how if one was disconnected there was a fear of missing out, which could lead to mild paranoia. Through examining more modern forms of communication, such as Google glass (where a simulated world is superimposed over the real world through the use of specially formulated glasses) individuals were always connected but became detached from reality. It also picked up the issues of barriers being eroded, discussed in chapter five, and how technology has broken the public/private barrier, which will be developed further in relation to social networking.

with a way of reading the conditions of cyberspace while simultaneously, ethically and theologically confronting Turkle's scenario of being "*alone together*."[235] Buber allows us to rescue the connectivity of cyberspace because his theological model provides a rationale for "Thou" communities within a global domain of interconnection. This is a position advocated by Baab (2012, 277), who champions the view that we need to theologically re-conceptualise the relationships provided by cyberspace. She says that "theological discussion about human relationships is necessary because the internet presents unprecedented opportunities for connections with others."

Buber's dialogical theology allows us to understand the way in which the structure of relationships and communities are changing. We are also able to acknowledge the tensions between the 'I' and the other, which have become pronounced in the technological era. Buber reminds us of the value of being human in relationships. He offers us a positive theology of interconnectivity, which enables us to address isolation and alienation. With his help we can re-envisage the need for new genuine communities, bound by the ethics of the "thou." Moore (1996, 123) explains that in Buber's view "[C]ommunity exists only where there are real persons, only those "capable of truly saying Thou to one another can truly say We with one another." Implicit is that through the development of the "Thou" dimension between individuals, an ethical community of mutuality will start to evolve and a "spirit of solidarity will develop" (ibid).

Genuine communities are essential to Buber's model, not only do they form the basis for "Thou" encounters but they also allow the individual to develop in an ethical manner; "Thou" encounters have an innate depth of responsibility. His understanding was that relationships and communities were needed in order to develop the true self: "Through the

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[235] This is the title of Turkle's book (2011), which explores the way in which technology, especially associated with robots has led to greater alienation from relationships and communities.

Thou, a man becomes I" (Buber, [1923] 2004, 23). Moore (1996, 222) makes reference to a talk Buber gave in 1937, where he said "true community among men cannot come into being until each individual accepts full responsibility for the other." Communities are the essence of Buber's model because they foster development of the individual on an ethical level, combatting individualism which has so often led to an inability to understand the needs of others.

Although writing before the rise of cyberspace technologies, the new connections of the modern medium are enabling for Buber's vision of genuine community. Buber, as a diasporic Jew, felt an urgency to re-make broken relationships through establishing new, genuine communities, especially after the horrors of war and the Holocaust. He thought that all of history pinned its hopes on "a genuine and hence thoroughly communally disposed community of the human race" (Buber, [1931] 2002, 243). There is also an understanding in Buber's model that these communities would not only be of a secular nature but would reflect something of the expectations that the Divine had for humans. Moore (1996, 208) comments that Buber saw Israel as "called to embody God's justice in the life of the community", and in cyberspace this call now has a wider remit for all of humanity.

Out of the three spheres this second one is the most accessible for understanding the 'Thou' relation because it permits an understanding of communication with the Divine." Buber ([1923] 2004, 70) acknowledged that the relationships of "man with man" was "the real simile of the relationship with God." Buber (ibid, 70) saw it as the main portal and means of access to the "Thou." He says that all communities are brought together under God, who exists at their centre because they are "built up of living, mutual relation but the builder is the living, effective centre" (ibid, 40). Buber's theology therefore places God back at the centre of every real community: "Men who long for community, long for God. All craving for real relationships points to God; and all craving for God points to real community" (Buber, 1919,

251). His theology provides a means of bridging the supposed divide between the religious and secular realms by showing how the two are actually interlinked with the Divine as the "eternal Thou." In Buber's model each community which comes together based on "Thou" relationships, engenders a theological dimension with the Divine at the centre. Thus secular relationships can still enable the Divine and the palimpsest of cyberspace is an ideal area for such encounters. It is this very layering of texts that enhances relations. In living authentic human lives, Buber ([1923] 2004, 64) recognises how God becomes part of the relationship: "Every relational event is a stage that affords him a glimpse into the consummating event." Through the dimension of "Thou" relationships, the Divine is drawn down into human rapprochement.

Friedman ([1955] 2002, 50) emphasises Buber's relational theology when he states: "God is all things but he is realized only when individual beings open to one another, communicate with one another, and help one another, only when immediacy establishes itself between beings." It is the space "between", he argues, which allows the "Thou" experience to build. In cyberspace the global medium provides this opportunity for communion: "There in between, in the apparently empty space, the eternal substance manifests itself. The true place of realization is the community, and true community is that in which the godly is realized between men" (ibid). As discussed in chapter five, cyberspace facilitates for the "between" space, which Buber ([1923] 2004, 36-37) claims is vital for genuine encounter. "Spirit is not in the I, but between I and Thou…like the air that you breathe. Man lives in the spirit, if he is able to respond to his Thou." The concept of space is foundational to these claims. It is by immersion within the medium of cyberspace that a greater understanding of human relation to the network is made apparent. This is understood by Heim (1999, 25) when he points out that it is cyberspace which has enabled new means of communication and interaction, as well as between and within communities. He argues that cyberspace is "a godsend in providing

forums for people to gather in surprising personal proximity." I will now re-work Buber's second sphere – "man with man" – within the context of cyberspace and show the value of Buber for a new networked society.

Network Individualism[236]: Self in relation

The concept of relationship is fundamental to individuals. A point underlined by Friesen (2009, 49 & 64) in his understanding of how "human life finds its meaningfulness in relationships and they are the means through which humans build identity and gain a sense of belonging." In the new context of cyberspace, Bernie Hogan and Barry Wellman (2012, 42ff) observe that communities in the network era have changed to facilitate "networked individualism," where life is made up of a network of connected communities which have been chosen to facilitate the desires and beliefs of the individual concerned." They suggest that the implication of networked individualism is that one is no longer in fixed communities, based on locality, but rather individuals choose to become part of many communities (ibid, 47). Albanese (1981, 5) recognises the same possibilities, when she stated: "A person locates others who occupy the same inner territory and because of the shared internal space, feels at one with them and their concerns." This is the meaning of identification with others. Despite needing space for individual development, humans are social creatures. Identity is socially produced and, as Stephanie Lawler (2008, 7) indicates, identities are formed "between, rather than within persons." This view is echoed by Lovheim and Linderman (2005, 121) who confirm that "identity construction still seems to be a social process – a process taking place in relation to other individuals." Steph Lawler (2008, 129), in taking up Pierre Bourdieu's (2002, 126) work, sums up this sense of identity being produced by socialisation in his concept of "habitus", which is his way of "theorizing a self which is socially produced." All

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[236] Networked individualism is a term coined to describe how individuals are becoming more networked through the constant use of mobile phones and computers, which facilitate their social needs. The person is the focus of the network, more than the family or the social group (Rainie, Horrigan, Wellman, Boase, 2006).

these engagements with self, relation and society confirm the vitality of relations and open the potential of cyberspace.

The theological implications of this new "networked individualism" can be seen in McFadyen's (1990, 9) discussion of the nature of personhood. He argues that humans can only be understood in social terms and acknowledges that "we are what we are in ourselves only through relation to others". McFadyen echoes Buber in believing that only through moving towards and being in relation with others, can one become orientated themselves (ibid, 40). Buber held that one cannot live in total isolation, as one is not able to fulfil one's potential without the communion of others: "The inborn Thou is realised in the lived relations with that which meets it" ([1923] 2004, 28). Within cyberspace the interconnectivity allows one to exist as an individual but also in relation to genuine communities. Cobb (1998, 97 & 117) rightly comments that cyberspace

> is a place that shows us that we can be distinct and yet not atomized, joined together through our common humanity and sense of self…cyberspace has the potential to help us embrace the basic truth that as we become more fully individuated, we can find the inner resources we need to create strong and healthy communities…Cyberspace is relational to its very core.

In Christianity the notion of relation is exemplified in the idea of the Trinity[237]; a concept that has been continuously used in discussions of relationships[238] to demonstrate the bonds of equality and connection between the three dimensions of God. McFadyen (1990, 27) illustrates this concept when he proposes his model of the "Trinity as a unique community of Persons in which person and relation are in interdependent moments in a

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[237] See Solle (1990); McFayden (1990); McGrath (1994) for a discussion on various Trinitarian models.
[238] McGrath (1994, 247-270) outlines various Trinitarian models and the interdependent relationships that exist between the three persons of the Trinity.

process of mutuality". Buber's theology reflects aspects of the Trinity when it speaks of interconnection and dependency. This Trinitarian relation is emphasised by Kathryn Tanner (2001, 79), who says that the "shape" of human relationships "must mirror the incarnation and the Trinity." The Trinity also provides a suitable model for ethical human relationships, reflecting, as it does, how genuine connections are not to be formed at a shallow level, but deeply, with a sense of communion and inter-dependence on the other. Baab (2012, 278) asserts the same relational ground of theology when she argues that "we were made in the image of a relational God" and because of this we need to imitate the Divine relational nature." Baab (ibid, 289) follows Millard Erickson's (1995, 333) work and the notion that the love between the persons of the Trinity should act as a guide to the love we should demonstrate towards others. This is implicit in Buber's theology, which emphasises love as the binding force in all "Thou" relationships ([1923] 2004, 25). As discussed in chapter five, love enables an ethical dimension to the encounter because it encompasses the idea of sacrifice, which changes the dynamics of the encounter and assumes that one is prepared to sacrifice something of the self for the other.

Just as the interconnectivity of the Divine is brought out in Trinitarian models, so Buber stressed the interconnectivity of all things and believed that through dialogue one could be opened to the possibility of "Thou" relationships. This notion of dialogue is paralleled in the work of McFadyen (1990, 7). His emphasis on dialogue as a means of connectivity demonstrates how genuine communication is the foundation of relationships. He acknowledges that communication is not just found within speech but "wherever there is change or exchange – between people, between them and their environment, them and God,[239]" demonstrating the importance of the "between" space of all parts of creation (ibid, 126). Dialogue is essential to relationships and holds immense significance for a theology of

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[239] This echoes Buber's 3 spheres of relationship; man with creation, man with man, and man with spiritual beings.

interconnectivity. It is the means through which God forms the essential relation to his creation. "In the Beginning", God spoke and creation came into being (Genesis 1). Dialogue is actualised in flesh through Jesus, who was described as the "logos" or Word of God (John 1:1) and embodied in human form. McFadyen (1990, 61) builds this idea and suggests that we are "called by Christ into a dialogue with the transcendent reality of others and of God".

By using dialogue one immediately moves from an orientation on self and individual needs, the 'It' position, towards genuine communion with others, found in the "Thou". This parallels Buber's notions of community, which, he says "is the being no longer side by side but with one another of a multitude of persons…a flowing from I to Thou" ([1923] 2004, 37). This is endorsed by McFadyen (1990, 126), the view that through dialogue mutuality is reached and the 'thou' can be embraced as "dialogue can only be sought where the meaning one has for oneself, is the meaning one seeks to have for others." It is vital then to have a developed sense of "I" before going out to others, because one needs to have an understanding of individual need to be able to reflect when entering "Thou" relationships. Buber ([1954] 2002, 215) suggests that "genuine dialogue is an ontological sphere which is constituted by the authenticity of being."

McFadyen (1990, 32) provides examples of genuine dialogue, exemplified in the example of Adam and Eve[240], who became fully human only through relation to each other and to God. It is important to reflect on the initial creational moment to determine the genuine basis for dialogue. It is, therefore, only through dialogical encounter that humans can hope to fully live in the image of God. Created beings – in creation and at the Creation - have a responsibility to continue this dialogue and to draw God down into them. McFadyen's (ibid, 59) work echoes Buber by believing that it is through allowing true and meaningful

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[240] In Genesis 1 it is God's word which brings all creation into being. This shows the supreme relationship that fruitful dialogue is able to enact and the continuing relationship that the Divine has with his creation sustained through the interconnectivity of the Word.

relationships with others that the Divine becomes present and so the process of the redemption of Creation can begin. Dialogue forms the key part of a relationship because the encounter is then based on "independence, freedom and uniqueness of partners" and is the central means of allowing individuals to communicate and to grow in their understanding of each other. Through correct ethical dialogue, found in the "Thou" position, genuine communities can be formed. "The Word is not something individually possessible, but the subject of communication within community" (ibid, 62). In the light of this theological ground of relationship we find opportunity for rethinking cyberspace.

Defining Cyber-Communities

In chapter one I stressed the fragmented nature of late modernity. Cyberspace can amplify amorphousness by facilitating ever more dynamic and fluid situations than those encountered offline. Manuel Castells ([1996] 2000, 386), perceiving this, recognises that cyberspace has provided the space for a new form of society, and a new means of interacting[241]. He defines a virtual community as "a self-defined electronic network of interactive communication organized around a shared interest of purpose." He continues that such groupings are important, as individuals can build up "personal portfolios" and "Internet users join networks or on-line groups on the basis of shared interests, and values, and since they have multidimensional interests, so are their on-line memberships" (ibid, 388-390). What is interesting to note here is the self-defined, horizontal aspect of relationships, formed through choice and not imposed or bound by locality. These online communities are supportive and appeal to minorities, who can use cyberspace as the means to vocalise their rejection of oppression.[242] However, it is important to remember that a group of individuals

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[241] Castells ([1997] 2004) has observed how due to social movements, such as globalisation, identity and community have become much more fluid phenomena.
[242] This echoes solutions muted in the previous chapter about how minority voices can be strengthened by online communities.

with similar interests does not necessarily make a community. Buber ([1967] 2002, 40 & 43) felt that a genuine community is not primarily based on feelings but has a living centre. Such a centre is found in the Christian view of agape[243], which is not based on likes and emotions but an opening to all, friend or enemy.

The hope for community is radically changed by technology. John Palfrey and Urs Gasser (2008, 4-5) underlined this when they observed that "the digital network is transforming human relationships in fundamental ways." There is, inevitably, more emphasis on dialogue, due to the lack of physicality in cyberspace. Wajcman (2004, 60) points out that "communities are based on social exchanges rather than physical location." It is here that Buber's vital sense of community emerges. As Buber (1950, 143) suggests: "In a real community people are not always together but they have mutual access to one another and are ready for one another." The 24/7 nature of online activity is an unlikely but nonetheless valid echo of that fact. Cyberspace has allowed us to engage in relationships that we tailor around our new lifestyles and individuality. Realistically, the self-centred level of control this implies could easily be detrimental to relationships striving for possibilities of the "Thou".

The need for genuine dialogue is vital to establishing a living core in the new cyber-communities. Dialogue is able to bridge the gap between the 'I' and the other. One can still maintain individuality but global interconnectivity means that one can also be part of a community. Campbell (2011, 42) suggests that what makes a group develop into a community is "the ability to contact and interact with other members." Interaction could overcome the selfishness of pure individualism, reinforcing Buber's argument ([1914] 1999, 102) that community is enabled by the "overcoming of otherness in living unity." There needs to be a realisation that one can no longer be dependent purely on one's self, there is a

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[243] Agape is a Greek word for love and has been interpreted to mean unconditional love for all, friend or enemy. It is not bound up with an emotional sentiment, but is viewed as the main Christian commandment, after loving God.

need to reconnect and reinvest in communities. Buber ([1967] 2002, 17) understood that "all real living is meeting" and one cannot pursue solely a mystical life, to the exclusion of the neighbour: In Buber's world meaning comes through communion with others and cyberspace offers a vast communion. Likewise McFayden (1990, 57) confirms that "[U]ltimate meaning is no longer found in one's own space-time, which has henceforth to be related to that of others and God."

Cyberspace has facilitated the formation of different types of communities. Warren Sack (2004, 240) believes we have become "network-based communities, of a different kind than geographically-based communities such as neighbourhoods, cities, nations." The same issue emerges in the work of Linderman and Lovheim (2003, 231) following a research-based project on computer mediated communication in Sweden. Linderman and Lovheim claim that in the Network age the notion of community is in need of "refinement or redefinition". There is a need to take account of the changes that the medium of cyberspace has brought to relationships and communication. Campbell (2013, 57) acknowledges that the meaning of community in the technological era has altered, because the notion is now "linked to a networked understanding of community rather than a notion of shared geography and familial ties." She explains that online religious communities have developed from individual email conversations to communities where "members are prepared to emotionally invest in a group." She also acknowledges that just because the means in which online communities are formed has changed they are still essentially able to fulfil the same purpose online as offline (ibid, 58-59). Barry Wellman (1997, 179) concurs, as he believes that computers have the ability to connect people in a social network, which he describes as "a set of people (or organizations or other social networks) connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships." Like-minded individuals or those with similar interests or hobbies can

encourage each other and allow expression of their hopes and beliefs about society and possibilities for new social frameworks and experiences.[244]

Highlighting another prominent aspect of online community, Castells ([1996] 2000, 388-389) draws attention to the fact that they are not physical and so do not work on "the same patterns of communication and interaction as physical communities do." However, he stresses that they are still able to provide "reciprocal supportiveness" through interaction. Cyberspace may be a transitory space for some, but it has the potential to open up new possibilities for interconnection and real relationality. Buber's ([1923] 2004, 37) idea of community as "a life lived in communion with one another" could be realised, but community requires continuity. Campbell (2005, 187) suggests that what makes a community is the idea of commitment. She comments later that individuals are orientated by finding and joining a community online because they become "rooted in the community's ethos" (2012, 134). Online communities provide an alternative means of support, a safe environment to work through tragedies and violations. Yet emotional investment in online community is vital if they are to become genuinely ethical. In such a way Monica Whitty and Jeffrey Gavin (2001, 630) believe that "ideals that are important in traditional relationships, such as trust, honesty, and commitment, are equally important online". To enable communication to develop into genuine community one needs to be open to the possibility of encounter. Wagner (2012, 131) assesses the different ethical forms when she points out that "a network is a possibility. A Community is commitment." So although many networks exist, not every link will develop into a community and will remain at the "It" level. Some communities can be temporary and transitory and provoke concerns about a lack of commitment.

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[244] It has been documented in The Church of England document, *Cybernauts Awake !: Ethical and Spiritual Implications of Computers, Information Technology and the Internet*. (1999) that cyberspace can be used by professionals in the community, such as dentists and counsellors to inform of their services, so that individuals are able to feel more connected to a caring community (The Church of England Board for Social responsibility, 1999).

Buber ([1923] 2004, 29) did acknowledge that in offline society the 'it' was the dominant position. It needs to be remembered that cyberspace is not a place of perfection, nor do people behave in ways that are necessarily better than offline. Campbell (2005, 60) discusses a Buddhist website in illustration of this point and reflects on the different responses. As she states: "The Net breeds both positive and negative behaviours, reflecting the very human nature of we who use it." There is, therefore, a need for reflection about how the medium is used, and the way theology can play its part in encouraging a re-thinking of technological relationships. How can cyberspace exhibit more of the "Thou" through the attitude and mindfulness towards the encounter? Wellman (1988) emphasises, as I have argued previously, that the relationships that people develop online often have similar characteristics to those offline. "Ties people develop online are much like their real-life ties: intermittent, specialized and varying in strength" (quoted in Campbell, 2005, 38). Both the 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' position will exist in cyberspace. However, it is the possibility the medium offers for transformation which makes it appealing for theology, as a means of renewed and re-envisaged relationality.

Authentic and Inauthentic Online Communities

The fluid nature of communities online has already been discussed by Wagner (2012, 11), who has observed that they "tend to be informal, transient, and governed by temporary rules." The implications of this are significant for relationships. Can one sustain meaningful relationships if one is involved in diverse and fluid communities? Victoria Vesna (2006) offers the phrase "distributed presence" to describe the networked self. She concludes that, due to the way in which our relationships have become "distributed", we are no longer able to "build community" as we never have enough time to spend in one. Dawson (2004, 77) has also suggested that virtual communities are no more than pseudo-communities and a difference needs to be drawn between social interaction and meaningful relationships. These

concerns raise important questions about the Buberian mapping of cyberspace that underlines my argument and therefore I will briefly address this issue.

Quentin Schultze (2002, 185-187) is scathing about the ability of cyberspace to foster any notion of community. He believes it to be too self-orientated, consumer-driven and lacking in virtues to provide genuine relationships: "The Internet is a marketplace for the self, not a community for virtue." Schultze rejects the idea that community can take place merely through communication. He contrasts cyber communities with Jean Bethke Elshtain's (2000, 128) notion of real community which "implicates us in a world of others who bind us to them, as well as to time and space." The concerns about physical identity mean that, although virtual communities can appear liberating, Holmes (2007, 152) for example, believes that lack of physicality can devalue "many of the positive and ontologically important aspects of those very connections." Campbell (2012, 67), likewise, is concerned that the temporary nature of online communities means that people may have less commitment to them and any relationships that occur within them.

The more distasteful and dangerous side of cyber-communities has been identified by Sherry Turkle (1995, 2005, 2011) and others. She has detailed her interaction and experiments with children and adults from which she has drawn many insightful conclusions about the impact of technology. In her book, *Alone Together* (2011), Turkle takes a largely negative view about technology and relationships, concluding that the enticing nature of technology is making us more dependent on it. It "teaches us to need it" (ibid, 154). As Turkle's sharp analysis suggests: "Technology is bad, as people are not as strong as its pull" (ibid, 227).

Turkle (2011, 3) describes cyberspace as a seductive companion, appealing to Americans, whom she portrays as "increasingly insecure, isolated, and lonely" (ibid, 157).

While humans have a fear of being alone and disengaged, at the same time she implies that the connections online are often so superficial and our expectations of each other so lessened "that we can still feel utterly alone" (ibid, 154). Turkle (ibid, 18) also discusses the way robots are able to offer companionship, but without the demands of friendship. Individuals want to be alone and have an intimate, personal relationship with the robots, but this can remove the need for physical offline contact with other humans. She records, in a 2010 survey of over 14,000 college students over the past thirty years, that "young people have reported a dramatic decline in interest in other people" (ibid, 293). In the study she indicates that robots have been seen to replace the very actions that should be taking place between individuals: "We ask technology to perform what used to be "love's labour": taking care of each other" (ibid, 107). Taking a robot as a "friend", as opposed to a human has many implications for socialisation and development, especially in young children. In befriending and communicating with a robot, children are seen to be neglecting the socialisation process.

These conclusions support Marcuse's position of alienation and technology. Turkle's (2011, 207) analysis is that people have become slaves to the very technology which was to enhance our lives and our relationships: "We are consumed by that which nourishes us." Humans are alienating themselves from the once safe and often static communities that they were a part. Technology appears to offer safety but in reality it is actually isolating the individual. Instead of encouraging a means of working together to solve offline problems, it can provide a place of individual indulgence and a means to begin an alternative virtual existence, leading ultimately to alienation and a lack of care for all relationships in creation. As Clifford Stoll (1995) comments: "Computer networks isolate us from one another, rather than bring us together." Individuals become divorced from community and support networks, and they have no frame of reference for their new experiences.

This desire for individual technological fulfilment is extremely damaging to genuine communities. Baab (2012, 286) quotes John Zizioulas (1985), who has suggested that relationships are broken due to sin; causing an objectification of the other which "encourages fragmentation and individualization, a phenomenon clearly visible in the online world." One cannot have proper relationships when one has a narrow and subjective view of the other. Stanley Grenz (1996, 100) suggests that sin is a failure of 'community: "Because we are alienated from God, sin alienates us from other humans as well." We do not have the relationships that God intended us to have, but instead look to use people. Online there are too many instances of individuals hurting and abusing others. Grenz goes as far as to suggest that on websites and in blogs, people too often try to inflate their own power and influence. This is, in Buber's terms, choosing to focus on the 'It' aspects of relationships in order to enhance the 'I'. Humans try to be perfect themselves, without relying on each other or God's gifts. We have lost the love that was initially given to us by God through the need for individuation and have forgotten too, that many parts are needed to provide and sustain a community.[245] One has broken away from the initial unity that bound humans together with each other and with God. As Buber (1919, 240) acknowledges: "Society today is an organism of dying cells…community in all its manifestations must be replenished with reality, with the reality of immediate, pure and just relations between man and man, between men and men."

Nevertheless, cyberspace provides room to cultivate genuine "Thou" relationships which would lead to an ethical dimension of true community, united and sustained by a living centre. Openness is the key not only to make connections but to give and receive love in the

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[245] An interesting point of reference here would be to consider St Pauls' discussion of community in his letter to the Romans. He uses the analogy of the body and the function of all parts of it being necessary to build it up: "For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ" (Romans 12:4). Paul continues how all members and gifts need to be valued for the way they can contribute to the whole: "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us…exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, in diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:6-8). This shows how diverse communities can be drawn together and sustained by the ethical dimension that exists among its members.

context of dialogue and meeting. Kramer (2003, 77) takes this position in his comprehension of shared understanding. As he reflects: "True community is not set forth as a goal to be obtained, rather it arises when people learn to really listen to one another again." We must accept the need for a change in approach towards relationships in the network era. The new medium can be used as a means to genuinely reconnect, with shared mutuality, in genuine relationality. It does not need to merely reflect alienation.

Despite her views about technology, Turkle (2011, 1) does admit that it can appear to offer some form of genuine relationality, a tacit acceptance of Buber's premises. She describes the interaction of some of her interviewees with two robots, Cog and Kismet. They referred to a robotic "I and Thou" and thus felt a close, personal relationship, without barriers; seeing them not merely as objects but as means to deeper relationships (ibid, 85). She suggests that in some respects robots could be seen as the saviours of technology, re-instating what the network has removed from people. In Japan, robots are "facilitators of human contact. Technology has corrupted us, robots will heal our wounds" (ibid, 147). Robots are seen to give us the companionship and relationships that the Internet has deprived us of and a cure for the sickness that cyberspace has inflicted (ibid, 109). They are able to offer individual companionship and attention without the risks associated with relationships with humans. Therefore, seen from a positive perspective, robots could be a means to re-build trust in relationships and to cultivate the qualities that allow 'thou' relationships to flourish. In some ways it is an experiment in progress. Buber described the relationships of "Thou" as a meeting of hearts and minds on an equal basis, where one is able to value the other. So far this cannot be the case in terms of robotics but they do open up the possibility of encounter and give insight into what is needed in a relationship.

Turkle's research shows that individuals want someone who will listen to them: "What we ask of robots shows us what we need" (ibid, 87). This is what appears to be lacking

in relationships that take place today, much communication, but no genuine dialogue: "People come together but do not speak to each other" (ibid, 155). Robots can actually show us how to re-learn what is needed in relationships; they offer up the possibility of openness. One can feel a sense of symmetry with a robot because there is time to reflect without fear of criticism. They reveal possibilities for community-building and preparation for relationships. Wagner (2012, 128) illustrates the potential when she states: "Far from being bankrupt of human connection, wired culture offers an unlimited pool from which to create and intentionally sustain meaningful connections." Robots can be part of the learning and interactive process, re-teaching individuals about the importance of relationships and interaction, and the value of friendship. By cultivating the 'thou' with robots, this form of technology does have the means to re-build trust and robots act as a means of experimentation with forming new relationships in a late-modern context. Campbell (2012, 84) suggests that there is a need for "a more human-centred, rather than technology-centred analysis, to the study of digital media." This perfectly highlights why using Buber's model, which begins with human relationships, is so pertinent to analysing technological relationships and their theological impact.

What is also important to understand is that it is a misnomer to use previous notions of what a community should be like, or how it should function, in order to ascertain whether online communities are meaningful and authentic. John Palfrey and Urs Gasser (2008, 5) point out that online communities "are also perhaps enduring in ways we have yet to understand." Holmes (1997, 158) observes that beings exist in and through the way that they relate to others, community cannot be made "it exists at an ontological level within the relation between beings." Community is not a static thing, like relationships, they need to be continually renewed and strengthened through the ethical dimension of the "Thou" dynamic. This is a point which Kramer (2003, 81) reminds us of when reflects on the participation:

"Real community originates and continually renews itself as a group of people participate in and around a dialogical centre", something which cyberspace is able to provide.

The objections that online communities are inauthentic are often related to the lack of physical meeting, of eye-contact and touch (which has been discussed in chapter five). However, as late modernity has caused our conceptions of such phenomena to be re-assessed, the understanding of community and embodiment has also changed. I would argue that it is due to the lack of physicality online, not in spite of it, that individuals can use dialogue as a means to connect and to start to build relationships of the "I-Thou" type. Individuals can 'meet' each other and communities can develop without physical barriers. In the network era dialogue becomes ever more prominent and allows for the transitory lifestyle apparent in late modernity. Wagner (2012, 134) argues that a community does not have to be built physically but can still maintain nurturing relationships: As she states: "physical proximity is not required for community and the sense of belonging it can provide". Although Buber was not writing in the age of cyberspace, his relational insights about community are still applicable to new online relationships forming in cyberspace.

> A real community need not consist of people who are perpetually together; but it must consist of people who, precisely because they are comrades, have mutual access to one another and are ready for one another. The internal questions of a community are thus in reality questions relating to its own genuineness, hence to its inner strength and stability (Buber, 1950, 143).

Online communities exist across cyberspace where physical communion is not the primary need for genuine community. Buber ([1923] 2004, 40) insists that communities are no longer built up due to locality, or simply emotions, but instead they are grounded in "Thou" relationships formed from "living mutual relation."

So despite concerns about online communities, especially their ability to facilitate individualism to the detriment of genuine relationships, they can actually provide a means for theological re-connection. Buber (1939, 229-230) suggests that communities are able to form a solution to the crisis of faith. This solution is found not in individuals isolating themselves, but "in the life of a community which begins to carry out the will of God, often without being aware of doing so, without believing that God exists and that this is his will." Technology enables the sacred/profane boundary to be permeable as the latter becomes imbued with the former when genuine "Thou" relationships take place. This is the context from which Buber's thought had arisen. As Moore (1996, 84) remarks: "For Buber it is clear that Judaism rejects a dualism of a "religious" life that is opposed to a "secular" life." There no longer needs to exist a boundary between sacred and secular. The Divine can start to be drawn back down into creation to heal the self-alienation and loneliness characteristic of late modernity. Following this view of the applicability of the sphere "man with man" I will now apply Buber's dialogical principle to three examples of online communities in cyberspace in order to demonstrate how it can help us to interpret and respond to the relational dynamics that each exhibits. I will bring together insights from empirical studies with Buber's insights to establish an engaged theological reflection on cyberspace.

Gaming Communities and Relationships

For all the intellectual disdain the gaming community produces it is one of the most common types of online forums. It is also significant because it can mimic similar goals and values to a religious community, in the nature of the rituals that are enacted or quests that are undertaken. Games require the participants to act out many rituals, and though not religious in themselves, they can, as Chidester (2005, 18) observes, do real "religious work". It also makes apparent the inter-connections that can be enabled through joint venture and shared experiences in a new space. Gaming undoubtedly fosters notions of community and group

enactment is unified by shared symbols; while joint goals echo religious symbolism and ideology. Such sites re-enforce self-belief and communion with others, bringing individuals together and allowing new relationships to be forged.

The gaming community unites those of similar interests into a space where they are able to experiment with identity. Physical boundaries become fluid and restrictions that exist offline are temporarily lifted. Cyberspace becomes an arena of experimentation with alternative notions of self. As Turkle (1995, 180) outlines: "The Internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterised postmodern life." There is apparent limitless freedom to develop in cyberspace. This is something Hetherington (1998, 70) observes when points out that "the contemporary world does not allow sufficient room for self-expression and development in the context of some form of supposedly authentic communal belonging". In a similar way, Turkle (1996, 189) remarks that games offer an opportunity to express attributes and behaviours that would be seen as anti-social in offline life, without fear of censorship by society.

Online gaming can help individuals build up self-esteem, role-playing characters and scenarios. Edward Castronova (2007, 8) argues that gaming helps us to "improve our well-being" and can be personally fulfilling as individuals are able to seek validation from others. One aspect of this is role-play, which, as Wagner (2012, 109) remarks, is particularly important as it forms part of both our virtual and "real" lives, and what we practise online can "spill over into our daily lives." Baym (2010, 116) agrees that online is able to help offline life when she states: "Practising skills such as assertiveness can help people to work through issues involving control and mastery, gain competence, and find a comfort which they can transfer to their embodied encounters." It allows space for freedom of experimentation. In an equally supportive way, Wertheim (1999, 234) explores the importance of gaming as a means

of self-exploration: "For her MUDing[246] is not so much a game, as a way to explore and express important aspects of her "self," which (she feels) could not easily be exercised in flesh-and-blood society." The affirmative position can also be seen in a gamer interviewed by Turkle (2005, 200). Turkle observes how online communities allow individual control but also space to interact. As she states: "With social interaction you have to have confidence that the rest of the world will be nice to you. You can't control how the rest of the world is going to react to you. But with computers you are in complete control, the rest of the world cannot affect you." Is this anxious strategy replacing genuine relationships? It is a low-risk interaction but sadly "It" is the essence of the transaction.

There is a well-chronicled downside to gaming, which has been discussed in chapter two. The amount of time devoted to playing online can have a negative effect on offline life. Robert Kraut (2006) observes that online communities come to be seen as a distraction and this seriously affects psychological well-being. But there is the opportunity to experiment in games; they offer an escape from normal life into something neither limiting nor restrictive. This escapism is highlighted by Turkle (2005, 84-85) in her interview with David, who uses gaming as a means to refresh himself before having to deal with the realities of life. It provides a place to escape and to regain his own personal space, lost through constant interactions in the world: "I can sort of cleanse myself in a sense…I play these games, and I've found myself again…when I play it is my picture...getting back into my own video game."

Despite concerns, it can be acknowledged that cyberspace can be used as a means to re-connect or re-formulate an identity. Contrary to the notion of games encouraging a false sense of self, they can actually allow the genuine 'I' to emerge, which is essential for

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[246] A MUD is a Multi-User Domain and it is a term which refers to when several users are connected at the same time in a game.

cultivating genuine 'thou' relationships. Turkle (2005, 89) believes that they can be viewed as "a preparation for life": They give reassurance that people can cope with difficult situations, but in a safe environment, where it is acceptable to get things wrong. They allow individuals to take greater risks, and in so doing, to be transformed by other individuals who inhabit the space, sharing the experiences. Gaming space can therefore give participants the means to improve communication and build up confidence and trust.

As Turkle (1995, 203) quotes interviewee Robert: "The computer is sort of practice to get into closer relationships with people in real life." Players can also experiment by adopting online avatars for games with admirable qualities, such as strength and intelligence. This can boost self-esteem for those who are not used to praise or achievement, or feel undervalued offline. Turkle (ibid, 191) suggests that the identity of the individual may then be changed by the recognition and encouragements received online by other players of the game: As Turkle writes "his chivalrous MUD persona has won considerable social success" (ibid). In gaming communities individuals can feel empowered through completing quests and also by having other people encourage them. Florence Chee, MarceloVieta and Richard Smith (2006, 163) also observe how "Ever Quest[247] activity is rooted in real kinds of community-based actions and interactions". This builds up trust and social capital[248] between members of the community and allows trust and commitment, characteristics of a 'thou' relationship, to develop.

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[247] Ever Quest is a 3D fantasy role-playing game, which can be played by many at the same time. It was released in 1999.
[248] Social capital can be defined as "the resources accumulated through the relationships among people" (Coleman (1988)). Robert Putnam (2000) has drawn a distinction between bridging social capital, where there are weak ties and often no emotional investment and bonding social capital, where there are strong ties and emotionally close relationships. These two reflect Buber's 'I-it', 'I-thou' dialectic and demonstrate how online and offline, both aspects are prevalent.

Games foster the importance of community and Castronova (2007, 174) suggests that there is a sense of empowerment from games: There is recognition of what has been achieved and individuals feel validated by others. It also enforces the fluid private/public space indicative of individualism: There is a sense of personal quest but also of being part of a wider networked community. As Castronova states: "in virtual worlds, you can be a steadfastly individualist person, yet also feel a member of a team, a guild, and a community" (ibid). Although there is the opportunity to inhabit an individual space, Castronova (ibid, 48) sees opportunities for community are always more rewarding: "Single-player play is better when embedded in a multiplayer context." He emphasises the community aspect of gaming in that it is something that people can partake of together: "And sociality...is what makes digital games a transformative technology as well. The big difference here is not that people feel very immersed, it is that they feel immersed together" (ibid, 36). This reinforces the interconnectivity that can be felt within the gaming fraternity and the reliance members of the community have on each other. In this environment an individual can learn mastery over the games they play and gain respect; they can learn to control the space. Therefore, as McLuhan (2008:266) observes, gaming brings out the importance of community to aid people's development of identity because "games are extensions, not of our private, but of our social selves, and that they are the media of communication."

Although initially it appears that gaming indulges the "I-It" part of relationships, as the focus is primarily on the self and its enjoyment, an argument can also be made that through fostering ties with the community aspects of the "Thou" are initiated. In gaming one develops a sense of 'I' and also of belonging to a community. Relationships are able to be forged and developed through ritual. Individuals indulge in similar pursuits and are able to strengthen each other through their common sense of achievement and prowess in the game. Over time this can lead to "Thou" relationships because there is a meeting of minds and

hearts, the bond between those engaged in the same ritual quest is continually strengthened.

Gaming also builds up the notion of loyalty and responsibility to others. These were key

facets for Buber's concept of a community and Moore (1996, 233) reminds us that each

member has a responsibility to the others in the community. He refers to Buber ([1937] 1963,

47), who remarks that membership of a group "can be the place for the truest and most

serious responsibility." In this way new, purposeful communities can be formed and

sustained. Online gaming is also able to allow the development of self-esteem and trust

within a community, qualities which can be transferred into an offline community setting, re-

engaging all members in a common goal.

Temporary Relationships and Social Networking: Deception and Anonymity

One of the main means of connecting and relating in cyberspace is by social

networking sites.[249] These emphasise the private/public dialectic of online communities but

the boundaries that users impose – their privacy settings in particular – are what defines their

willingness to participate in the forum. What is allowed to penetrate these parameters is what

will define the authenticity of the "in-between" space, which is so important to Buber. Will

users utilise settings that are essentially "I-It", or will they allow traffic that may facilitate

movement towards "I-Thou"?

Although developing an individual identity is of the utmost importance, there is the

constant need to facilitate this in a space that involves interaction with another or others**.**

Cooke (2009, 156) draws attention to the importance of the space that technology allows:

"Many young people today enjoy their digital space as much as their people space." Cooke

(ibid, 159) emphasises that although there is a need to be connected to a community, there is

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[249] Social networking sites have existed since 1994 and are spaces where individuals can interact, share information, using a variety of multimedia from text to video-sharing. Each individual may have their own personal site or space through which they are able to access other personal spaces, permissions allowing. Some of the most commonly used sites are Facebook, Myspace, Twitter and LinkedIn.

also a requirement for individual space: "When people post to a social networking site – which is available to millions of viewers – they still feel that it is somehow a private space." Social networking sites facilitate communities where individuals feel validated as they interact with those who have similar views to them, reinforcing their thoughts and feelings. Hetherington (1998, 4) agrees that social networking sites are useful tools to seek affirmation and validation of a changing identity, as they re-affirm the need for both public and private identity spaces. Individuals welcome others who share similar ideas to them and there is a known frame of reference in which to interact and express oneself. The computer provides them with a safe, demarcated space through which to grow. He continues that these spaces

have some form of symbolic attachment for a particular group become spaces for the occasion of adopting and expressing an identity, and for developing identification and solidarity with others of a similar mind (ibid, 72).

The way in which communities can arise on social networks has been documented by Daniel Miller (2011, 27 & 97) in his study of the use of Facebook by people in Trinidad or 'Trines', as he affectionately refers to them. The inhabitants of Trinidad see Facebook primarily as a means of supplementing offline relationships[250] because, in some ways, the trivial discussions online mean that when people meet face-to-face the dialogue is more in depth. This casual but familiar affection favours the possibility of more 'thou' relationships taking place. Facebook can allow individuals to relax with one another and be more open than in face-to-face meetings. It is also a useful tool for offering support, especially for those who are separated by physical distance. Some of the participants identified Facebook as a safer community, due to the levels of crime in Trinidad. It is also a place where "Trines" felt that they could share in suffering together as part of an online community, allowing emotional connection (ibid, 25 & 172). Although this is not essential to "Thou" encounters, it

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[250] This coheres with the results of the Pew report, detailed in chapter two.

can help to develop communities. One participant referred to it as "a different type of family" (ibid, 93), emphasising the bonds and care which take place across the network, clearly echoing Buber's "Thou" dimension and demonstrating genuine ethical care.

This support and genuine care for others was explored by Miller (2011, 185), who investigated how cyberspace was used to initiate aid offline after events such as the earthquake in Haiti. Online global communities can not only support each other but can mobilise help for the offline world. Buber's ideas ([1930] 2002, 253) about genuine community can be seen to exist in social networking sites, as he argues:

> When people really engage with each other, experience each other and respond to this experience with their own lives, when people have a "living middle" at their centre, then community can arise among them.

Miller agrees that Facebook is also able to teach us something about the new structure of relationships and the yearning that people have to belong, to feel part of a network and connected to others over shared concerns. He comments:

> Above all, Facebook really is, quite literally, a social network. Its importance lies in its perceived and actual ability to reconstruct relationships…to help us to return to the kind of involvement in social networks that we believe we have lost (Miller 2011, 217).

Through the "Thou" a new ethical dimension to encounters can be seen to be taking place. Social networking has allowed participants to see the positive energy in others. Disparate groupings now recognise that they are interconnected parts of creation, not merely "It" objects of communication, but of support and genuine "Thou" encounters.

Despite Miller's optimistic stance, the depressing aspects of social networking sites are well documented. Miller (ibid, 172) is aware that there are dangers. For example, Facebook can make public what is said in private[251], violating people's trust, through insensitive use of dialogue, destroying relationships. Another issue raised by social networking is its addictive quality. Kimberly Young (2005, 48) highlights this negative assessment, arguing that cyberspace is used to fill relational needs until it becomes a means of escaping from reality. Online relationships are illusory, Young suggests, because they are based on "created personae, which are deliberate misrepresentations of the real person". [252] The conceit of temporary relationships is reinforced by a Facebook phenomenon where the sole goal is to accumulate as many friends onto your area as is possible. Mark Vernon (2007) quotes a YouGov survey to argue that the Internet destroys the idea of relationships and true friendship. As Vernon points out, "up to 20 per cent of the information displayed on one social networking site, Myspace is fabricated."

Many of the issues of online dialogue are highlighted by Turkle (2011, 184), who shows how we use technology to limit our relationships and to make contact, but not actually have meaningful dialogue. She discusses the results of her interview with Brad, who has so many "friends" on Facebook that he feels rude that he cannot respond to them all or keep up with them. She cites the views of a 13-year-old who, in effect, censors his friends by texting and not calling: "Texting offers just the right amount of access, just the right amount of control" (ibid, 15). Here is the antithesis of the "Thou" relationship, spotlighting how the "It" objectifies and controls the other for individual gain and lacks any ethical motivation. Turkle

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[251] On Facebook through altering privacy settings, an individual can control who accesses what information contained on their site.

[252] The concerns about online relationships in Japan have been documented in light of the declining birth rates there. This has been partially attributed to the fact that many Japanese men have online virtual girlfriends. They find these relationships easier to engage in, as they lack the pressure to marry that is often applied offline. In these online relationships the Japanese men take on an avatar and change their ages, using games such as "Love Plus" on Nintendo in order to engage in these fantasies. This has been documented by the BBC, (see Rani, 2013).

also interviewed Ellen who admitted to doing e-mails during calls to her grandmother: "I'm not really paying attention to our conversation" (ibid, 14). In such cases technology and the medium can be seen to be more appealing than the humans that are behind it. The relationships formed lack an ethical dimension. It could be argued that some physicality, a visual image, as available through Skype[253], would improve the relationship.

Turkle (2011, 13) argues that there is a lack of commitment online: As she indicates: "Technology makes it easy to communicate when we wish and to disengage at will." Technology is a barrier to proper meeting; the lack of face-to-face engagement means there is not full commitment to the relationship. There is less risk found in the "It" position. She suggests that the anonymity and lack of responsibility online can often lead to harsh comments and negative 'it' dialogue, due in part to "throw-away" comments. She quotes Marcia, aged 16, who says that online she gives herself "permission to say mean things…You don't see their reaction or anything, and it's like you're talking to a computer screen so you don't see how you're hurting them" (ibid, 241). Many individuals do not wish to reflect and do not consider the consequences of their actions, or the repercussions. Dialogue has in some respects been reduced to instantaneous responses, without any depth. Baab (2012, 285) thinks that Facebook "encourages consumerism and individualism in relationships." Friends have become like commodities and are continually used in an 'It' sense, as a symbol of status and popularity. This underlines problems with social networks and the lack of genuineness in many of them.

Time spent on the computer, as well as leading to alienation and isolation, can also affect other aspects of identity in terms of physicality. Catherine Elwes (1993, 65) details some of the problems of technology:

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[253] Skype is a free voice-over Internet service, provided by Microsoft, with text-chat capabilities as well as video-chat.

Individuals are increasingly locked into the isolation of their homes (it isn't safe to go out) and they only make contact with the outside world through telecommunications and networked computer-information systems.

In a similar way Vernon (2007) argues that online is not the place to have real friendship in the sense of "close intimacy of embodied exchange." He remarks that individuals need to realise the difference between friendliness and friendship and continues that friends really want to know each other, and be known by them, hence there is a need for face-to-face contact. He agrees that cyberspace is "not so much a new forum for friendship, but rather a tool for sustaining friendship – intimacies that ultimately depend for their flourishing on contact in the real world, face-to-face" (ibid). There is the need for interconnection between online and offline in order to sustain meaningful friendships and communities. This has implications for relationships in the Christian community. For example, Chris McGillion (2000) believes cyberspace "encourages people to opt out of the kind of flesh-and-blood relationships that are the indispensable condition of shared religious meanings."

However, as, I have previously argued, most online communities and relations exist to supplement offline ones. This means that despite the issues that they raise, online communities are also able to offer a means of augmenting offline life. Wagner (2012, 132) supports this understanding when she states: "The Internet can serve as a gateway to embodied connections." In the same vain, Jenny Preece and Diane Maloney-Krichmar (2012, 130) observe that "online communities rarely exist only online; many have off-line physical components." As Campbell (2005, 49) observes, online communities can also give constant help and support; they can be accessed 24 hours a day and are not limited. Individuals have opportunities to be helped, listened to, or be comforted at any time: "It is cyberspace's ability to provide a bridge between online and offline relationships that enables it to support community."

Recognising the need for a balanced assessment, Groothuis (1997, 141) states that although cyberspace presents hazards to the idea of community, we need to acknowledge the benefits if linked to offline life. As Groothuis (ibid) states, "the medium can help create and solidify community when it is used carefully and is tethered to the real world in tangible ways." In order to substantiate his point, he cites the example of Alzheimer's Online[254], an organisation set up to offer support to the spouses of those with Alzheimer's; a place where they can give and receive advice and encouragement (ibid, 142). The online medium can create communities that ameliorate offline problems. All these evaluations of online and offline relationships are confirmed by Castells (2001, 123), who observes that there seems to be "a positive feedback effect between on-line and off-line sociability, with Internet usage enhancing and maintaining social ties and social involvement for most users."

Tim Hutchings' (2010) ethnographic studies on a group of five online churches provide further evidence that the offline is vital to the online communities, because the members were able to combine technology and physicality. However, he stresses that online church was not merely acting as a supplement to offline, but each operated as a "complement to each other in a fluid, many-layered, digitally-infused, religious life (Ibid)[255]. Campbell (2005, 128) also states that studies have shown that "internet contact does not weaken face-to-face interaction, and in some cases strengthens or encourages it." She has observed, in following the Community of Prophecy, "online community could even encourage involvement in the local church" (ibid, 162). This could well indicate that when community is found then God becomes part of the relationship and the Divine is present in dialogue.

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[254] http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/onlineforum (accessed 13/10/13).
[255] This is in contradiction with the findings of the Pew report. It reflects the idea that since the report online communities have developed to an extent that they are not merely a supplement to religious life but part of the many facets of a religious life in late modernity.

Social networking communities in cyberspace are able to provide a new form of interaction, which facilitates the need for evolving identities, and the search for individuality, as well as the desire to be connected to others. There is increasing evidence to suggest, as Baab (2012, 284-285) has discussed, how social networking can be used to enhance relationships and to "nurture healthy connections with others." The space is of extreme importance for exploration of self but also for forming community away from localities which may pose risk or danger. While the dangers of social networking leading to short and curt dialogue and opportunities for thoughtless and hurtful comments it does not diminish its value[256]. Facebook can sometimes be characterised by banal dialogue, but this does not mean that the exchanges are not open to the possibility of "meeting", or indeed, development. These communities have resources and space for interconnection among individuals. They offer the possibility of fellowship, tolerance, understanding and ethically supportive dialogue. Buber's thinking about the "Thou" enables us to enter these potential communities with a stronger ethical sensibility to test the quality of relation.

Online Church Communities

As I have already discussed in chapter two, technology is changing the way we communicate, and in particular, the way Christian communities operate. We have noted how

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[256] Likewise, Twitter has a limit to how much can be written; a message can only be 140 characters of text or less in length, emphasising a lack of depth in the dialogue. There has been much negative publicity about Twitter. There are numerous examples of negative dialogue used on tweets: such as Jofi Joseph, a senior white house official, who was fired due to offensive tweets sent to public figures over a series of two year. http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-10-23/white-house-official-fired-over-anonymous-tweets/5041714 (accessed 7/11/13). This connects to the notion of dialogue and whether the lack of physicality means that individuals commune with those who they would not offline, thus invading their private spaces. Also there is often a lack of awareness of the language and tone with which comments are made, as on Twitter the lack of formality in stylistic terms means that the dialogue can be of the 'it' variety. However, it can also be a positive means to reinforce and build church community. Pauline Cheong (2012) has documented how Twitter feeds can be used to daily update prayer requests and recommendations. These can lead to "deeper dialogue and a more wide-spread consciousness of faith." In offline service prayer "walls" from Twitter feeds can be displayed in services, again emphasising the meaningful connection between online and offline (ibid, 199). Wagner (2012, 140) recognises that there are also what are known as "meet-up" groups, where technology facilitates later physical meetings, and allows the possibility to further develop online relationships offline. There is a palpable dynamic, the dynamic between online and offline relationships.

Campbell (2010, 112) is mindful of the way that technologies and new media offer "new challenges for religious communities." I have also indicated how technology is transforming religious expression and I will argue here that the medium can also be used as a means of strengthening religious communities and relations to the Divine. Community was at the heart of Buber's theology. He wanted to unite all of the Jewish community together, in Israel, under God. In Buber's ([1930] 2002, 253) understanding "community arises when people respond to each other and engage." I suggest that his theology now commands a remit beyond its original scope and can be central to a discussion of church communities in cyberspace.

Campbell's (2013, 62) work has shown how cyberspace is able to facilitate "new religious identities outside traditional structures." Recognising the significance of these changes, Campbell (2010, 153) cites one of her interviewees who discusses how cyberspace provides a means for a movement called the emerging church to connect to one another. "We are a dispersed community and the internet keeps us connected, it provides a platform where we can share our lives and prayer requests. Because of the internet we can be the church". This is substantiated by Campbell and Teusner (2011, 60) who stress that cyberspace is able to "provide Christians with new ways to explore religious beliefs and experiences through a growing number of websites, chat-rooms and email discussion groups dedicated to a variety of faith-related issues." This positive cyber-awakening can be seen in Hammer man's (2000) work. He notes that cyberspace is causing people to change how they think about God and personal faith; it can be seen as "potential holy ground, a meeting place between God and humanity." Constantly the theme of the "between" space, as a place of encounter and a means for interconnected theological dialogue is reiterated.

Online church communities are important due to detraditionalisation, they are able to facilitate new communities in the wake of offline declining ones. Bala Musa and Ibrahim Ahmadu (2012, 74) acknowledge this when they state: "Online religions fill the void left by

bricks and mortar churches." Katherine Moody (2009, 239), likewise, concurs with the view that "the Internet is vital for the emergence and development of emerging Christian communities" and the church is able to "incarnate" in the locality of the Internet as here there is a space for "encouragement, experiment, inspiration and challenge between and beyond these geographically dispersed communities" (ibid). This suggests that the medium provides a body which links the disparate parts through interconnection. Global online communities can strengthen each other and develop a sense of genuine community and care. Online church communities are able to embrace the "Thou" aspect of relationships and to convert that into a "we". Campbell (2005, 179-185) is right to observe that they can provide a "sense of belonging" and "being valued" and religious groups online can be "intentional, purposeful, and focused." They can provide a focal point for Christians because they allow individuals to be supported at all times and they are able to reach out to others who are like-minded in their beliefs. This is especially important in an era of changing theological expression, because individuals may no longer be able to find theological communities in their locality or may feel alienated from traditional theology. Campbell (2010, 26) also observes how cyberspace can be used to affirm "one's religious community, background or theology". Believers are able to maintain their identity by "connecting into a global, networked, community of believers".

Campbell (2005, 88) draws attention to two online Christian communities as evidence of the support that online communities can bring: the Online Church and the Anglican Communion Online. The former concerns itself with how people should treat each other, with the main emphasis on "supporting or encouraging individual members"; it functions as a network, and "individual problems become the community's problems" (ibid, 94). She details how the majority of members are physically impaired, which gives them a bond "physically as well as spiritually" (ibid, 89). She also argues that due to the physical limitations

experienced offline, online members discover freedom from physicality in cyberspace, which is enriching and enables them to grow (ibid). Elements of care and support are also found in the Anglican Communion Online. She quotes an interviewee explaining that individuals are able to open up emotionally and, through sharing their stories with others in the group, "a personal element of caring" about one another grows (Campbell, ibid, 99-101). The emphasis in the online community is about being able to offer help and support to members having issues offline, highlighting the ethical dimension of the new online communities. The very lack of physicality can enable more relationality online, refuting those who insist on physical manifestation for community building. Campbell (2010, 27) takes up Rosen's (2000, 10-11) vision of a spiritual community because she believes that online can provide a "new virtual home for the global Jewish community." Online communities can bind Jews of the diaspora by a shared ideology and collective stories[257]. This insight goes some way to fulfilling Buber's vision of a new spiritual community for the Jews, characterised by shared "Thou" relationships.

Buber ([1923] 2004, 11ff) taught that dialogue was central to relationality and in cyberspace a productive and inter-connective means of dialogue can be seen through email in church communities. This phenomenon has been documented by the Church of England board for social responsibility (1999), which acknowledges that "email has become one more method for building and maintaining relationships." Campbell (2005, 110-112) indicates that the Online Church allows its members to "feel empowered." Email is important to this community as it allowed them to transcend physical boundaries and to access people for support and encouragement. She cites a member of the Community of Prophecy who says that email is there to facilitate the needs of members and to "encourage a supportive, honest community" (2005, 114). Email can be a reflective way of communication; unlike instant

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[257] The concept of narrative, symbol and story as a means of encounter will be discussed further in chapter seven.

messaging, there is usually thought and planning in it. It can be used to support, encourage and inform and to reach those who need support and care, making them feel that they are part of a community, even if they cannot physically see or be with the members of it. This can be seen particularly in the action of prayer.

Prayer, for Buber [1952] (1988, 126), is an important form of dialogue in relationships, and a means through which humans can have "Thou" encounters with the Divine. It is, as Moore (1996, 259) suggests, a means of "turning to God with mind and hearts, our relating to God with the fullness of our being." Prayer can also be used as a means of interconnection. Baab (2012, 280) has shown that on Facebook there are "people promising to pray for their friends in times of crisis…the internet is a place for connection with others and with God." In Campbell's (2005, 134) interviews we find further evidence from members of the Community of Prophecy that being online enabled them to see the impact of prayer on "the whole community of believers;" it allowed individuals more connection with each other. Through prayer requests members could be brought closer together as they were able to "track how others are doing, thus deepening their investment in the community" (ibid, 132).[258] The community is formed of networks of relationships connected through communal life practices.

In order to remain a relevant force, theology has to align itself with prevailing modes and customs. Stine Lomberg and Charles Ess (2012, 176) believe that Facebook functions as a means to allow young people to connect to the church and can be used as a "tool for building and reinforcing group identity within the congregation, emphasising the way in which theology can re-engage with individuals through the use of a medium that is familiar and in use every day. They have researched how Facebook is used in an activist church in

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[258] An example of how prayer can have a global impact can be seen in the way in which an online memorial service for the victims of the space shuttle challenger disaster, on the Unison network BBS, was able to "unite a community in a time of crisis beyond the limits of geography or denomination" (David Lochhead (1997:52).

Denmark and conclude it can be used to strengthen relationships between pastor and congregation. The pastor's presence on Facebook "creates mutual trust and a sense of togetherness between him and the congregation" (ibid, 179).

Just as Buber sought to unite a community through correct relationships offline, so Wagner (2012, 138) argues that cyberspace can be used in a positive sense by Christians and is a tool to "create connections to foster relationships and only then to e-evangelize." She believes that there are many online sites which can be used to build relationships, such as "fishthe.net" and these can help fulfil the church's mission of evangelism (ibid, 136). Cyberspace is a place of identity formation and social bonding and Gelfgren (2012, 238) records how "social networking through digital media is seen as one way to reach out, share stories, develop relationships, and thereby to build sustainable communities." Narrative is essential to building and binding communities with a shared understanding, (a phenomenon which will be investigated in chapter seven). However, Lomberg and Ess (2012, 181) conclude that Facebook is probably not the best place for having long conversations or in-depth religious discussions without, as we note, reinforcement offline.

Church communities have utilised many social networking and blogging sites, such as Twitter, which Anatoli Gruzd, Barry Wellman and Yuri Takhteyev, (2011, 1) describe as "an asymmetric micro-blogging service"[259]. Its use allows us to understand "how people use new technologies to form new social connections and maintain existing ones" (ibid). They also comment that with social networking, such as Facebook, individuals can develop global consciousness and raise awareness, as was done following disasters (as mentioned above) in Haiti, Chile and Taiwan (ibid, 9, 16-17). Members of Twitter are able to influence each other online and come to act as part of a community, re-tweeting information that was originally

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[259] Although the fact that "Twitter" is asymmetric implies that it will lead to more "It" communication this is not necessarily the case; Buber himself acknowledged that the "Thou" position could be asymmetrical due to one party having more of a need to learn from the other.

posted.[260] Like Facebook, it is both a "collective and personal" space, echoing the notion of networked individualism. Personal concerns are raised and responded to by a collective online presence. This affirms the interdependence and shared emotional relationships prevalent in online communities. All these examples of Buber's second sphere "man with man" underline a depth and presence of "Thou" communities in cyberspace.

Despite the positive aspects of online church communities, drawbacks and concerns must be made apparent. Many of the issues concerned with secular, online communities are also applicable to religious online communities, in particular the notion of embodiment, discussed in chapters two and five. Quentin Schultze (2012, 83) suggests that cyberspace "promotes a technologized culture, which works against Christian values of community, truthfulness and reciprocity." This goes against the values which should characterise the "Thou" interface. Relationships can also occur which take advantage of or place others in vulnerable positions. There are some applications and websites online which present individuals with opportunities to treat others in a shallow, non-ethical way, largely due to lack of embodiment. Musa and Ahmadu (2012, 77) cite Wayne (2008), who points out that a note of caution needs to be sounded: "When it comes to communicating the church's brand, we must be aware of the potential of new media technology to both help and harm our theology".

As a response, Campbell (2010, 85) argues that religious communities should not reject new technology but they need to "undergo a sophisticated negotiation process." She thinks that they are a "new social formation that is changing our understanding of social relationships in significant and often unintended ways" (Campbell, 2005, 174). However, many have acknowledged the limits of the web. Campbell (ibid, 14) quotes from a personal

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[260] However, the negative connotations of re-tweeting information have also been made apparent by high profile cases, such as Alan Davies re-tweeting a claim against Lord McAlpine. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24654289 (accessed 10/25/13).

interview: "Websites are important because they can be a vehicle that connects you with the church, or can excite you with vision through a faith story, but they never replace connection with the local church." Theology, therefore, needs to attune itself to the benefits of the medium of technology, which Pattinson (2005, 5) makes clear when he asserts:

> Theology needs to listen to, to understand and articulate itself in relation to the contemporary world as never before…the theologian, too, cannot but participate as much as anyone else in the realities and intellectual currents of his, or her, age.

Through allowing the space to forge a new means of interconnectivity and community, one is able to see how dialogue online can join disparate individuals together in genuine relationships under God. These insights provide theology with the evidence that technology is utilisable as a platform to combat the alienation of individualisation. Cyberspace is able to provide global connections and the interconnectivity of the medium is able to support and sustain relationships within the church community. One aspect of the revision of secularisation is to see how theology has a need to re-build itself on the strength of these global inter-connections, so that it can fulfil Buber's main purpose of communities: "humankind working as the co-partner of God" (Buber, [1913] 1964, 73-74).

Cyberspace has altered the perception of community and relationships. Networked individualism has shown that there is a desire to heal the fragmentation associated with pluralism and competing individual paradigms of truth, which have damaged relationships. There needs to be a desire to return to the time in creation when dualism did not exist and humans and creation were one. Buber ([1930] 2002, 256) acknowledges this when he says that there is "no extraordinary moment in our ordinary lives where world and creation are not linked. Community can only be realized in the governess of everyday life at its lowest level". Through online community and the connections it affords, humans have the ability to set their

relationships right, not only with each other but with the whole of creation. Buber ([1950] 1994, 32) postulated that what was needed was a turning, 'teshuvah', back towards God and through embodying this attitude one can begin an ethical relationship with both other humans and God. One therefore needs to be mindful of the ethics of relationships, because one has a duty to act towards others in a spirit of openness and forgiveness. This allows cultivation of responsible relationships; ones which embody the "Thou", which defines communities with God as the living centre. Interconnectivity is at the heart of relationships and in Buber's final sphere I want to show that the new relationships and communities online are part of a theology of co-creation.

Chapter 7: Alienation from the Divine: the ethics of co-creation

Technologies are important vehicles for human creativity and redemption (Elaine Graham, 2002, 219).

Since its inception, cyberspace has been viewed with suspicion by some traditional sectors of the church. This is primarily because it is seen to diminish church authority, holds a lack of physical presence, and has potential to become a distraction from God. There is a fear that cyberspace will replace the need for God or that it has the ability to become a god. Campbell (2003, 215), for example, refers to Tal Brooke's (1997) concerns that cyberspace will lead "towards the spiritual landscape" of Genesis before the flood where "man creates his own universe with no god in it but himself" This is a shortcut to alienation as individuals are separated from God and from reality. Groothuis (1997, 15) echoes this anxiety, commentating that "technology has taken the place of deity and people serve it instead of God." This is because cyberspace offers diversions that many do not find in traditional offline theology. A point substantiated by George Barna (2001) who observes: "Christian Internet users already spend more time surfing the Net than they do communicating with God through prayer." Cyberspace can easily be seen as a demon, destroying the relationship between individuals and God, leading inexorably to feelings of spurious self-sufficiency.

Buber's dialectic offers a framework for understanding these late modern tensions and provides a means of alleviating them. His emphasis on language, seen in his dialogical principle, forms the basis of the solution. It is a solution found in creation, for, as Mendes-Flohr (1947, 24) observes that dialogue is "the primal ground of all that is true and creative". The new technological era calls for new meanings and symbolism which would resonate with the individualism of late modernity but also form a means of connecting communities. My argument here is two-fold: first, it is through utilising creativity in cyberspace that humans are able to become aware of their potential as creators. In doing so they are able to re-connect

with narratives, symbols and means of expression which bind them to others in relationships and communities. Second, in the act of creating, humans are made aware of their role as co-creators because there is a dialogue with forms that are produced. Through ownership of these creative outlets humans develop a response: an ethic of care towards, not only their own creation, but all the created world, through an embodiment of the "thou." This begins a process of redemption, as the Divine is drawn down into the "Thou" relationship. Cyberspace, therefore, provides the canvas on which individuals can create a new vision of creation and of their role within it. By becoming creators in cyberspace individuals are able to overcome their alienation in different spheres of relationality. It is precisely this issue of creation in Buber's third sphere where we can find resources to illuminate cyberspace.

Buber's third sphere of relationship initially provides some challenges of interpretation, not least due to the ambiguity in the original text of *I-Thou*. In the works of Ronald Smith (1937) and Walter Kaufman (1970)[261], this sphere has been translated as "spiritual beings" which may suggest that the individual undergoes some form of religious experience. However, an alternative translation needs to be sought because, if this was accepted, it would suggest that this sphere was to be elevated above the other two. However, Buber at no point indicates that the spheres are hierarchical, all modes of relationship provide a means to access the "eternal Thou." Steven Kepnes (1992, 23) indicated that in a letter Buber suggested a different meaning, that of "spirit in phenomenal forms." However, perhaps a more helpful translation is given by Wood (1969, 43), who translated it as "forms of the spirit." This implies that the sphere does not pertain to some direct form of revelation but the emphasis is placed on the creative activities of humans, which Buber ([1923] 2004, 13) states as "forming, thinking, acting." Buber is not precise in what he means by this, although he does mention "language, art, knowledge and action" within the text of *I-Thou*. Wood (1969,

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[261] These are the two main translations of *I-Thou*. However, there are many points of difference between them, as well as in relation to other translations.

50) believes the "prime analogate" of these is art. He suggests that "all the areas seem reducible to some form of art i.e. to the creative activity of man" (ibid). This third reading of Buber's final sphere is the one which I will rely on in this chapter.

My discussion centres on the way the forms of the spirit produce creativity in humans as they attempt to capture some aspect of the Divine. This reflects the views of George Pattison (2005, 218), who refers to Friedrich Schiller's *Lectures on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*: "Art and poetry are recommended as pre-eminent ways in which the fragmentation and alienation of modern life was to be overcome and healed." Through new symbols developed in cyberspace, individuals are given the means to dialogue with the creative forms. Kepnes (1992, 23) goes as far to suggest that "art arises from an I-Thou relationship between the artist and the form." It is my contention that cyberspace has enabled humans to share in the creative act and become creators themselves.

In this chapter I will explore how creativity has the potential to overcome alienation by allowing individuals to build identity, form new relationships through new shared paradigms, and provide the means for developing new forms of ethical spirituality, engaging with the "eternal Thou". As I have already suggested, as Buber's original text was written before the cyberspace era, applying the germane parts of this third sphere is never going to deliver a neat alignment. I have therefore chosen to discuss those activities in cyberspace which derive from artistic endeavours and demonstrate how Buber's concepts of "forming, thinking, acting" can find application in cyberspace. This is aptly remarked upon by Cobb (1998, 44), who declares positively: "Creative process forms the soul of cyberspace". The scope and importance of art and the imagination will firstly be discussed, paying particular attention to the way in which symbols can be used to form relationships. I will then, secondly, explore the ways in which creativity can manifest in cyberspace, noting the examples which have particular significance to Buber's theology: dialoguing with technology

and blogging and narrative. Finally, I will argue that the possibilities for humans to use their creativity in cyberspace to provide insights into co-creation, allows a means of redeeming relationships through the ethical "Thou". The creative process of cyberspace becomes a channel to dialogue with the Divine.

Art, Symbolism and the Imagination

Creativity is a significant part of human expression and communication. Art has often been the chief way of fulfilling that potential because it provides a symbolic means to capture the ineffable. It has previously been discussed how language can be shallow, reflecting the "It" mode of relating, but the alternative form of expression is also possible. According to Buber ([1923] 2004, 13), the final sphere "forms of the spirit" "does not use speech, yet begets it"; showing that creativity can permit a new means of dialogue which can be "apophatic"[262] and more considered. The dialogue which takes place means that one is able to capture something of the "Thou" which, although objectified by it, allows for further "Thou" moments to occur, due to a continuing dialogue with creation. Art in cyberspace becomes a means of facilitating dialogue between the individual and the form. "Art is the realm of the between which has become form" (ibid, 210). Through cyberspace forms of creativity are able to capture something of the Divine nature, allow dialogue with others, and demand a response. Through creating relational opportunities, a new vision of the relationship with others and with the Divine can be envisaged. While it may only provide a glimpse of what will eventually be realised, recalling St Paul's words about this world as a mirror of things to come, it can provide a template of the ideal relationship with the "eternal Thou."

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[262] Apophatic theology is often referred to as negative theology, as it attempts to use negative words to describe what the Divine is, in order not to diminish transcendence or anthropomorphise God.

Creative forms communicate through some means of symbolism. In late modernity there has been a change in the meaning of many symbols. The network age is peppered with a plethora of symbolism. Influences such as detraditionalisation, multi-culturalism and secularisation have contributed to religious symbols being co-opted by market-forces and incorporated into fashion and music[263]. Fredric Jameson (1996, 44) has lamented that this has meant a lack of meaningful symbology. Old meanings have changed and there has been a lack of objects that could clearly represent ideas. The rise of individuation in late modernity has called for new symbols, which cater for individual expression, not just acquiescence to an institution. The technological era has also seen the need for symbols to take on new meaning, as communication shifts from offline to online and a new "code" of dialogue is required. As Hoover (2008, 6) observes: "Media provides rich symbolism, visual culture, salient contexts and practices of social participation and identity, and opportunities to make and re-make identities and social relationships." This challenge of new symbolism in cyberspace is an opportunity to engage Buber's thinking on creativity.

Buber ([1923] 2004, 13) identified different forms of dialogue to best enable relationality within each sphere and so, with a new medium of relation, a new means of dialogue is required. This is a point reinforced by Wertheim (1999, 303) when she argues that "any kind of new space requires the development of a new language." Cyberspace allows a new means of communication through the use of symbolic language, a key means of communication online. Being able to utilise known methods of communication means that theology can dialogue with the zeitgeist of late modernity and start to ameliorate the

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[263] The loss of meaning can be clearly seen in the area of fashion, where religious t-shirts, bracelets and necklaces are used to accessorise, often without recourse to the traditional meaning of the symbols. This has been followed in the music industry, with Madonna's "Like a Prayer" video in the 1990ies, which caused extreme outrage within the church, because it contained a scene of burning cross. Lady Gaga has employed religious imagery in her music video "Judas" (2011) which contained much religious iconography, such as a man dressed in a crown of thorns and other characters wore leather jackets with the names of Jesus' disciples written on them. Jean-Paul Gaultier's 2007 Couture collection also contained models being depicted in the guise of religious figures, such as the Virgin Mary.

alienation which can exist with traditional religious symbols. Art is pivotal for development of the self, a point underlined by Turkle (2005, 146) in her own reaction to cyberspace: "In literature, music, visual art, or computer programming, they allow us to see ourselves from the outside, and to objectify aspects of ourselves we have perceived only from within." Art is rich in symbolism and, as David Fontana (2010, 8-10) indicates, symbols allow a sense of value and to share in learned meanings with others, be it through narrative or language. They allow the participants to understand, not just rationally, as a sign permits, but emotionally, as symbols have learned connotations. Symbols allow profound sense that cannot be put into words to be conveyed and can therefore function as a creative means to re-connect communities through new learned forms of dialogue.

Psychiatrists, such as Carl Jung[264] (1964), have drawn attention to the importance of symbols within society and the role that they play in cementing an identity and allowing groups to gain a sense of shared identity and belonging. Fontana (2010, 13-18) describes how Jung thought that primordial images originate in the collective unconscious, and how these result in shared archetypes that "motivate us instinctively towards enduring values such as love, truth, heroism, and toward fundamental themes such as God, creation, nature, wisdom, birth and death." While open to critical assessment[265], these archetypes can be used to demonstrate how we are interconnected by common themes and values and how we all have a disposition towards them. Acknowledging these shared senses and portraying them creatively in cyberspace allows a new interconnection to be realised. It has the potential to make individuals and communities more receptive to shared concepts and more open to 'thou' relationships because symbolism provides a common means of dialogue.

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[264] The concept of symbols being used to create archetypes has long been associated with Jung, (whom Murdoch (1992, 461) tells us that Buber detests). This could be due to the fact that Jung did not accept the idea of God as a distinct entity. Despite this, many parallels can be drawn between them, such as the "I-Thou" and the collective unconscious.

[265] See Jeremy Carrette (1994), *The Language of Archetypes: A Conspiracy in Psychological Theory.*

Understanding cyberspace through its creative potential is important for a new theological understanding, but it requires us to overcome the negative view. Cyberspace can be viewed almost as a "tabula rasa", an untouched space, which provides endless creative possibilities. Henri Lefebvre (1991, 920) thinks that it is difficult to define because it is "neither subject nor object". Cyberspace can provide the means to envisage another life, a Second Life, in a new, simulated space. Those who feel alienated from reality and their society can use cyberspace as a means to generate their own reality, created from symbols and ideas that they conceive in their imagination and utilise this to understand more about self and their relation to others. One of Turkle's (1996, 46) interviewees expands on this idea when they state: "Simulation offers us the greatest hope of understanding. The computer offers us the hope that through simulation we may gain another handle of understanding." A creative imagination can be employed to create new, perfect spaces of freedom, imbued with meaning for the individuals who create and inhabit them. Space is not solely about the phenomena within it. It can be an imagined place that transcends the physical, where humans create meaning and project their hopes and visions for something better, without limitations from physical phenomena. Cyberspace, therefore, offers new possibilities for interacting and communicating, not only with other humans but also gaining an awareness of the interconnectivity to other physical and non-physical phenomena.

The medium of cyberspace provides the space and tools to bring a vision or dream seemingly to life, as one is able not only to create a building or a place, but a whole new world.[266] Castronova (2007, 19) describes the numerous possibilities provided by cyberspace:

Synthetic worlds allow people to form new societies in new lands almost at will. When the American frontier was open, it made space for whole communities built

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[266] An example of this can be seen in Second life where there are numerous buildings that are being constructed daily, some abstract, others meant to resemble offline buildings, such as churches, mosques and the Western Wall.

around alternative views of the meaning of human life…Now that such space is exploding before our eyes and under our virtual feet, we can expect all kinds of new thoughts to emerge.

It opens a vision of new relations and communities. In this way Crowe and Bradford (2007, 223) suggest that in this space people are free to re-create what may be totally impossible in the real world, so cyberspace can provide the tools to actualise a new Utopian vision. In his lifetime, mindful of historic atrocities, Buber envisaged the concept of a community being brought together by shared values and vision, focused on the "Thou." Through the global dialogue in cyberspace, this model now starts to find fruition and commands great scope. Therefore the unfettered imagination can be seen to give hope to those who experience discrimination or hardship. It provides new freedom and possibilities.[267]

I have established that cyberspace can act as both a creative canvas to portray new symbolism and shown its potential as a means of creative expression; a creativity that represents Buber's forms of the spirit. However, it must be acknowledged that art and the imagination also pose a number of theoretical concerns. Art, firstly, can be seen as a means of self-indulgence and escapism; one is not obliged to connect with it. It can lead to alienation and isolation, the antithesis of Buber's theology. Plato (380, Book X) spoke out against the futility of art because he saw it is a poor attempt to replicate what was essentially impossible to capture in an imperfect world. He thought "the painter is three times removed from reality." Art was incapable of depicting the Divine, associated, as it was, with the lowest part of the soul and the artist was copying what was essentially an imperfect and illusory world. Secondly, representation of religious figures is anathema in some religions[268], which has the

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[267] The imagination is able to offer hope, such as when it has kept people alive during times of persecution. This is seen in examples such as Primo Levi (31th July 1919 – 11th April 1987) in the Holocaust, or those, such as Terry Waite (incarcerated in Beirut from 20th January 1987-18th November 1991), who have imagined a time when they would once again taste freedom.

[268] See Exodus 20:4, for the Jewish prohibition of depicting "idols".

effect of pushing art and artists to a secondary secular status. Art even strives to be offensive, a cause for resentment and alienation in many observers. These conceptions of art unsettle the Buberian position.

The problems can also be seen in Jean Baudrillard's ([1981] 1994) seminal work *Simulacra and Simulation*, where he has attested to the negative connotations of symbols in late modernity. He has detailed how in the technological age symbols have lost or altered their meaning and become more real than the reality that they are portraying. His views contrast starkly with my optimism about the potential of cyberspace and the Internet. He suggests that cyberspace continues to blur the boundaries between real and simulated, with the result of "less and less meaning" (ibid, 79). He sees technology as forming a simulacrum that portrays its own distorted truth, one which does not adhere to reality. "Simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary" [269] (ibid, 3). Baudrillard (ibid, 1) thinks that old meanings dissolve and a new reality develops, the "hyperreal", which has become more real than the territory that it represent through the process of simulation. As mentioned previously, William Gibson ([1984] 1995, 128) has termed this a "consensual hallucination", where boundaries between the real and simulated become blurred. This hallucination removes us from the 'real' by devaluing the physical aspect of relationships. [270]

Baudrillard laments the fact that despite the influx of information offered by globalisation and the network era, there is confusion and frustration caused by transitory symbols and

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[269] This can be seen as a modern interpretation of the Platonic notion of the cave in *The Republic* (written about 280BCE) Prisoners within the cave are deluded by the shadows that are produced on the wall in front of them are reality. They do not question or attempt to challenge these notions because they are content with this understanding of reality.

[270] Dyer-Witheford (1999, 175) tells us that Baudrillard has been influenced in his views by the media portrayal of the Gulf War, which he said, hid the real meanings behind what was happening. Communities believed the language and disinformation the media portrayed. The use of genuine language demonstrates how it can be used to connect and enhance relationships, when employed in the "I-Thou" stance. However, it can also be used to manipulate and hide the truth; a reflection of the "I-It" position.

unfixed paradigms. With loss of distinction, meanings become blurred and there is nothing to differentiate real from simulation. Hence the potential of cyberspace as a new space is lost; the real "bleeds" into the simulation and vice-versa. According to Baudrillard, art is bracketed firmly with Buber's "It" category; presented as a form that does nothing more than gratify the artist and fails to capture what it attempts to portray. This harsh analysis of art is something Murdoch (1992, 463) recognises when she writes: "Without the truth of the encounter, all images are illusion."

From the perspective of theology, the creative imagination can be portrayed in a more positive light; it opens up possibilities for re-envisaging a transcendent realm. The symbols created in cyberspace can be employed to construct places online which reflect something beyond themselves, things which cannot be captured in the everyday. Simulations such as Second Life, have parallels with the traditional view of heaven and the possibilities of "a new Jerusalem." The parallels with heaven have been discussed by Wertheim (1999, 21), who sees cyberspace as a "repackaging of an old idea of heaven, but in a secular, technologically sanctioned format." The possibilities cyberspace offer for new freedoms recall Revelation 21:4: "Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away…and death shall be no more." Such euphoria might be available in cyberspace, where detached from the material plane you can acquire a new, non-physical body. You live with the continual reassurance that you cannot die because you are able to be re-born. As Wertheim (1999, 17) provocatively suggests: "Cyberspace supposedly washes us clean of the "sins" of the body". This reductive and negative viewpoint is easily maintained and evidenced. My argument is that Buber's theological dialogue will allow us to re-interpret this "garden of earthly delights" and allow us to utilise the new creation of cyberspace in a useful constructive manner.

By utilising their talents, humans are able to engage in the act of creation and build a network of meaningful relationships. Through engaging in basic creative endeavours, such as building in cyberspace, they are able to capture spiritual "form" and express it anew. Immersed in such work, they can come to view what they create, and indeed, the means to creating – interaction with the computer – on a level that aspires to the "Thou". Individuals are, in effect, engaging in dialoguing with the computer and initiating a meaningful relationship. They are beginning the process of re-creation, by seeing things in a new way, fulfilling the prophecy in Revelation (21:1) positively: "and there will be a new heaven and a new earth." Cyberspace provides the potential for this vision to start to become a reality. We again recall the rapture that St Paul had when he expressed his vision of heaven: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12) [271] Cyberspace can act as a mirror, offering the between for our engagement, as it provides a window into the transcendent realm. St Paul finishes the passage on mirrors and meeting by emphasising that love is the virtue above all others. After the mirror is the "face-to-face" encounter, love, and it is love that Buber ([1923] 2004, 19) believes characterises all "Thou" encounters: "love is between I and Thou".

The medium of cyberspace is able to capture something of the Divine and give it form. However, as Buber suggests ([1923] 2004, 16), creation also involves "a sacrifice and a risk". By allowing the form body and structure, one starts to objectify it, falling away from the ideal "Thou" relationship. Buber (ibid) puts it thus: "I lead the form across – into the world of it." The artist first realises but then immediately diminishes the form, so that separation of "I" and "Thou" is inevitable. However, Buber (ibid) indicates that creation also

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[271] In 1 Corinthians 13:12 Paul describes how at the present time Christians are based in this world so are only able to see the partial glory of their eternal life with the Divine. However, when they are received into heaven they will not see God an in a mirror, but face-to-face. Therefore, forms of expression and creativity in cyberspace may act as in a mirror, providing a means of understanding "Thou" relationships, so that they can be cultivated further, both with other humans and with the Divine.

provides the solution because the art can again take up the "Thou" position. It means "from time to time it can face the receptive beholder in its whole embodied form." As the work demands a response, it means it can also become a window into a spiritual and religious dimension, providing a means of reflection and re-thinking spirituality and religiosity through symbolism and imagery. Paul Tillich (1957) [272] agrees with this view. For Tillich, a symbol "opens up levels of reality otherwise closed to us" (quoted in Daly, [1984] 2001, 25). In this way a symbol has the ability to allow insight and connection with the spiritual realm.

In Buber's opinion art had an eternal relevance and although symbols may change with different eras and mediums, the reality behind them was fixed. This is reinforced by Iris Murdoch (1992, 4), who argues that art can be viewed as a collection of symbols and a means of conveying the zeitgeist, as well as being able to point beyond itself and have eternal relevance. As she continues: "Symbols of God come into being, some of which allow themselves to be fixed in lasting visibility, even in earthly material" (ibid, 45). Art can be used to express rich symbolism and narrative but also speak to its audience about metaphysical matters that are eternally relevant. Meaning is generated from being part of a new symbolic creation and there is the opportunity to re-learn new means of communication through dialogue with the medium.

Art is able to transcend time, being eternally relevant and is therefore a mean of dialogue which is able to speak to individuals in all ages and draw them into knowledge and awareness of the Divine. The fluid nature of the medium means that images in cyberspace can change but the meaning can be more lasting and significant. Murdoch (1992, 8) points out that the quality of the art is not as important as its function in providing a means to perfection. She states: "The art object conveys, in the most accessible and for many the only

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[272] Paul Tillich's work on symbols (see *Symbols of Faith*, 1957) is pertinent for my work on Buber as he believed that symbols were able to take us to "being itself", providing a bridge between the Divine and human and opening the way for "Thou" encounters.

available form, the idea of a transcendent perfection." It is interesting to note how the earthly portrayal can be used as a means, not to worship the art or image, but instead to point towards the Divine. She believes that the art points beyond itself and engenders feelings, such as love, truth and beauty: "Love of beauty in art and in nature can be (as Kant thought) a symbol of goodness since such love is naturally, or readily pure and unpossessive" (ibid, 16). Thus we are brought to an understanding of the eternal qualities of the "Thou" relationship, depicted in art.

Linking creation and art to cyberspace enables us to see how cyberspace can host an "I-Thou" relationship between the individual and the form. It can capture something of the Divine vision for humanity and display it in symbolic form for others to share. Buber (1922) explained it as follows: "The work appears to the artist not as an It in the world of things…but as a Thou pure and simple": One has an exclusive relationship with it. Buber here reflects something of God's relation to creation. In actualising creation the Divine took a risk and lost something of the perfect image for creation[273]. There is an intriguing parallel between the vision that cyberspace offers and Creation, which allows us to envisage Buber's vision of humans beginning the process of the redemption of their relationships through imagining the possibilities of redeeming creation. As Wertheim (1999, 235) comments:

> The digital domain provides a place where people around the globe can collectively
> create imaginative, "other" worlds and experiences, which has implications for
> renewing and repairing creation.

Through becoming creators in cyberspace, humans have been given the medium and tools to re-create the initial conditions of Creation by removing many of the faults that have arisen as

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[273] This recalls Plato's concept of creation where the Demiurge was not able to fashion a perfect creation due to the imperfection of the raw matter which existed for him to work with. This immediately created a chasm between humans and the Divine.

the consequences of alienation and sin. Buber understood that through the "Thou" relationship one would be able to begin this process of re-creation by forming new, genuine, ethical communities. By humans becoming creators themselves they are able to share in that vision of a new creation, and the ability to become one with their surroundings, accentuating opportunities for the "thou." Through self-awareness humans realise their separation from the Divine, naming and objectifying, but also destroying the initial relationship with the Creator. Overcoming this alienation is by becoming co-creators; they share in the act of creating and can re-learn the relationship to other created beings, and ultimately to their Creator. Buber ([1952] 1988, 44-45) emphasised that God needed humans to begin the process of re-creation; they act in partnership with God. "The dialogue of I and thou finds its highest intensity and transfiguration in religious reality in which unlimited Being becomes as an absolute person, my partner."

Embodied and Disembodied Language as Forms of the Spirit

Beyond mundane utility, language is a symbolic form of communication and central to Buber for facilitating relationships. It is a central means of relating, a very powerful tool for forming relationships with others; "it creates the platform for communal acceptance, boundary setting, and ideological promotion" (Campbell 2010, 161). Kepnes (1992, 22) argues that it is an essential part of Buber's dialectic because it is the primary tool of human communication and has an ontological power, a power to bring about existence. This is particularly pertinent for theology; it recalls how language has the power to transcend the physical but also act as a means of connecting with the transcendent realm. As many theologians have reflected, this power is found in the words contained in John (1:1): "In the beginning was the Word…and the Word was with God." Language originates with the Divine and through a correct, ethical use of it one can re-make the Divine connection. Cyberspace is an ideal medium to enable a realisation of "the Word" because words are not embodied they

can develop a metaphysical quality, accentuating the "between" as a means of interconnection.

Understanding the language of the computer means that dialogue has been opened within technology and this has initiated new channels of communication across different domains. This has been analysed by Walter Ong, who, in his 1982 book *Orality and Literacy* shows how communication has evolved from "primary orality" or pre-literary stage through chirographic writing and printing to "secondary orality", including electronic media. Ong (2012, 77ff) demonstrates how different senses - "the sensorium"- were needed in each stage of language development and how "writing restructures consciousness" and moves communication from a group phenomenon to a solitary, individual one, as the sensorium moves from sound to sight. Advancing technology exacerbated the move towards isolation, facilitating entrenched individualism and alienation. Writing and printing empowered the individual, arguably beginning the decline of ecclesiastical authority when Bibles became printed in the vernacular. He draws attention to the moving of words to private homes as "print created a new sense of the private ownership of words." However, despite the power that access to print had given the individual, the result was two-fold: alienation of the individual from the community with power transferred from the community, and a divorce between words and images, with symbols being replaced by text.

However, technology has also solved part of the problem. O'Leary (1996, 785) tells us that, with the arrival of electronic media, "the divorce between word and image, begun by print culture, is reversed." Electronic media can provide a total sensorium of "sight, sound, image and music" and a re-engagement of the whole person in the experience of dialogue as opposed to mere language and text. O'Leary (ibid, 786) notes John Coate's (1992) work in this regard. Coate suggests that the medium provides a new form of "talking and writing." Electronic media has helped to put dialogue back at the centre of communication. A theology

of the Word and of Creation needs to respond to this change and the possibilities of re-engagement through symbolism. It requires re-locating theology in a new context, a point made by O'Leary (ibid, 792), who concludes that "religious discourse will have to re-invent itself to keep pace with modern technology." Theology has an obligation to use the medium of technology to make the "Word" relevant today and to open up new means of dialogue which engage all of the senses and multiple channels of communication.

Dialogue with the Machine

One way that individuals can exercise creativity in cyberspace is by learning the language of the machine. Programming is a creative outlet which allows dialogue with the computer as individuals learn to "speak" its language through coding. Although this might appear to be an "It", one-way relationship, there can be dialogue. Turkle (2005, 137) quotes one of her interviewees on this issue of programming, and discovers a view that sees "there is a little piece of your mind and now it's a little piece of the computer's mind." The computer provides a space where humans can express themselves and exercise their creativity. Turkle suggests that "programming" for young people is "a canvas for personal expression" (ibid, 132). They feel in control as they manipulate the computer to produce symbols and pictures and they learn to express themselves creatively. Much of this programming and building takes place in gaming or virtual worlds such as Second Life. Building in cyberspace is a process whereby individuals can use symbols and objects and link them together to create a new area, or place, or character. In some respects this is profoundly "It" territory, as objects are manipulated to suit the user's ends and aims. Individuals frequently build and create in cyberspace (as in the offline world) for simple financial gain,[274] sometimes creating

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[274] In cyberspace, someone could build a shop, for example, and trade goods or services e.g. virtual clothes, furniture, jewellery.

dystopian worlds and unsavoury visions[275]. Used in this way the interaction with technology is no longer a journey towards genuine dialogue but is exploitative, devoid of any ethical dimension and totally valueless. Such cynicism should not obscure the fact that the programmer striving to create their vision of a sacred space, where pilgrims would be welcomed and valued, is engaged in God's work, however humble their contribution.

Dialoguing with the machine means that one is able to utilise technology to actualise creative potential. In cyberspace many of the barriers to creativity are removed. The user can interact with the space in order to actualise their mental vision, using the symbology offered by the machine. As the machine exerts influence on the user, perhaps in the form of suggestions for improvement, dialogue is enabled between the interface and user. This positive act of creation can provide an understanding of the initial theological creative act. The computer provides individuals with the means to become creators themselves and can relate to and value what they have created, moving the relationship from 'it' towards 'thou.'

There are many forms of human communication within cyberspace, which mirror Buber's forms of dialogue in the three spheres. There is dialogue "beneath the level of speech" through visual interaction and "being" within spaces such as Second Life. Individual blogging, email and virtual chat reflect dialogue "in the form of speech" and prayer and creating online allows dialogue which "does not use speech, yet begets it" (Buber, [1923] 2004, 13). Offline dialogue can be inhibited, often due to fear of judgment. However, by contrast, cyberspace offers freedom from stereotyping, so that communication can take place without barriers and expectations. This very freedom can also present a barrier, because, as we have noted, much of communication relies on bodily signals.[276] Hillis (1999, 166) insists

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[275]There are many Sims (or virtual areas) within Second Life which enable people to partake in pornographic activities. There are also dystopian Sims, such as 'Thinis' in Second life, where the area is post-apocalyptic and constructed of ruins.

[276] See Jens Allwood (2002) for a discussion on how bodily communication is a central part of human communication.

that "[H]uman bodies form a basis for social relationships" and loss of the physical can mean emphasis is lost and communication is diminished. The lack of ownership of speech, due to anonymity, can allow Buber's "It" dimension to manifest in cyberspace. Campbell and Teuser (2001, 62) suggest that this can promote behaviours which "exacerbate social isolation and disconnection from local communities." This appears, at first, to be the antithesis of what Buber meant by genuine dialogue ([1965] 1998, 86), which allows a person to be revealed as they truly are. It can "bring out an aspect of the human person which would otherwise remain dormant." In terms of Buber's dialectic, it therefore seems that dialogue online can enable a person to have the courage to express themselves in alternative ways, but not without risk. Buber ([1957] 1999, 234-238) expressed concern that people were no longer able to speak to one another in a genuine manner. The human inability to listen to each other in relationships suggests that people have stopped listening to God. Buber ([1923] 2004, 61) points out that many have turned God into an object. Moore (1996, 134-135) agrees; holding that the Divine has become an "It" object of faith, because individuals try to control God.

Cyberspace offers the opportunity for fresh dialogue with God, utilising a new medium to capture and respond to forms of the spirit. Buber ([1965]1998, 78ff) thought that genuine dialogue is listening to the call of the spirit, a process which can be enabled through the reflective nature of cyberspace. Whether one accepts that God is in cyberspace (see Cobb, 1998) or can be accessed using it, a dialogue can be opened through prayer. Buber ([1923] 2004, 80) reminds us that this form of communication is "beyond language". Prayer would be using cyberspace as a means of reflection and of facilitating a new relationship directly with God in a sacred space: As Buber writes: "And we speak with Him only when speech dies within us." The forms and potential of speech mean that new ways of relating to the Divine emerge in late modernity through the creativity and symbolism of cyberspace. The medium

means that we can relate to God in the "Thou" dynamic: "Though God surrounds us and dwells in us, we never have him in us" (ibid).

Buber ([1923] 2004, 13) states that this final sphere "does not use speech." This can best be interpreted to mean that it does not involve dialogue in the same way as the second sphere does, because Buber goes on to say "yet begets it", implying that speech and dialogue are generated in this sphere. Although avatars usually communicate in cyberspace through textual dialogue, they do not always require speech and there are also opportunities to just be present and reflect with other avatars. Dialogue can, therefore, be seen as a means of becoming aware of another, not just engaging in the meaningless conversation of social convention born from a desire not to offend by staying silent. Buber ([1957] 1999, 234-238) argues that there can still be a genuine dialogue where an individual "heeds, affirms and confirms his opponents as an existing other", an exchange which can take place in the medium of cyberspace. Here is the context of more open dialogue, one not inhibited by the roles that one is often required to assume offline: There is potential for speech and communication to be genuine and meaningful.

As we have repeatedly seen, physicality is the vexed question in this thesis. We need to again consider the use of avatars, as a means of bodily self-expression, identity-building, and communication within cyberspace. An avatar can be seen to provide two functions in relation to cyberspace; firstly, the possibility of exercising creativity within identity expression (also eradicating prejudice from offline physical forms); secondly, to be able to give some form of embodiment and physical cues to disembodied words, hence opening up more opportunities for encounters online. This way of forming an identity is concerned with creation through mental projection. One creates by employing mental faculties to engage with the computer and to project the imaginings onto the screen. By using avatars, individuals can explore identity using physical images to portray various aspects of the self they want to

manifest. Rachel Wagner (2012, 128) argued that "if we can inject 'traces' of ourselves into the avatars that represent us, such that our digital 'bodies' are, in some real way, inhabited by us too, then online connection takes on an entirely different hue."

Through the imagination, individuals create a new cyberspace body. The mind is given the opportunity to transcend the physicality of the body through the new medium. Benedikt (1992, 15) contrasts our visions of spiritual cyberspace, as the heavenly city, with the physical Eden. He suggests that cyberspace is viewed as "our state of wisdom and knowledge….our transcendence of both materiality and nature…the world of enlightened human interaction, form and information." In this way images of avatars help to re-enforce the religious images and heavenly promises which cyberspace facilitates. Adding a different kind of challenge to this discussion, Chidester (2005, 5) observes that while the human body is "the basic ground of religion, it also is important to recognize that much of the creativity of popular culture involves changing or leaving the (physical) body." What this means is that there are theological connotations for cyberspace in St Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:44, when he discusses how the body will be sown a physical one and raised a spiritual one.

Cyberspace allows individuals to transcend the physical body, if even for a short while, and provides a means of envisaging what heaven may be like through simulation. The online body can therefore act as a place of meeting, a between, which allows the offline physical body to gain a new perspective on the Divine. Just as God is part of creation, so is creating a virtual body. There is something of ourselves in the virtual world. It is through embracing human creation that individuals can start to gain an understanding of how everything is connected within the technological era and create better "Thou" dialogue with others. Humans are able to create, sharing in the creative act of the Divine. If there is a "Thou" potential in the creativity of the avatar, we can also recognise the potential of other parts of cyberspace.

Blogging as dialogue

Although we need to be alert to the damage language can cause in cyberspace, we also need to be mindful of the possibilities it offers. One form of communication which develops the self-in-relation is the creative act of blogging,[277] which Kerstin Radde-Antweiler thinks "serves as a platform for identity building." This has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, but it is germane to the way dialogue in cyberspace allows for expression and exploration of self. Although essentially a disembodied form of communication, it can be seen as important in nourishing the self and others, as it is a shared experience of dialogue. Danah Boyd (2006) suggests that blogs are particularly important to young people and alienated populations because they are trying to "figure out who they are…Blogs and profiles are particularly supportive of this." They act as a means of self-exploration, a "reflection of their interests and values."[278] Boyd continues his discussion by suggestion that blogging has become a means of projecting oneself in cyberspace: "For the blogger, the blog is corporeal, but for the reader, it is a space for conversation" (ibid). The

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[277] Blogging is a means through which individuals can comment on themselves or their interaction with various aspects of society or institutions in a diary-like format online. The most recent posts are at the top and previous ones below, so that someone can go back and understand what has taken place before the current moment. You can also upload photographs and video files. It is a way of showing one's thought processes to an audience but also a means of identity formation, as one metacognises about one's own life and various aspects of it. Other individuals are able to comment on the blog and write suggestions or points of interest, so that a dialogue takes place, with many participants leaving comments. Blogging is undoubtedly falling out of favour. This does not diminish its illustrative qualities for the point of my argument. It is, in fact, being replaced by "life-logging", which refers to the way in which individuals choose not just to write to respond to an incident or event in their lives but the dialogue becomes a stream which provides a constant narration to their lives. This can be seen in examples such as Ian McLeod who choose to take a picture of his son, Cory, every day of his life until he was 21. http://thestir.cafemom.com/baby/145429/dad_captures_every_day_of. (accessed 7/1/14).
No doubt "life-logging" will eventually be replaced by "soul-surfing" or "spirit-flight". The fads of cyberspace will come and go but the core dimension is the need for self-expression and a craving for peer-approval, which I explored in the now slightly old-fashioned context of blogging, above.
[278] This was commented on by Michel Foucault (1998, 18) who thought that writing was at the heart of caring for oneself, by "taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends to help them, and keeping notebooks". Thus, there are many examples throughout history of the diary being used as a means of self-exploration from Augustine's Confessions (397-398CE), to the Diary of Anne Frank (1947).

blog allows creativity and a relationship is built through interaction in the medium through language. Boyd has shown that through the use of blogs people have taken ownership of space and it becomes part of them and their identity: "A blogger does not perform to the space, but creates it as an artefact. Yet in future engagements with the blog, they do not see it as a space they visit, but as part of themselves. Conversely, the reader addresses the blog like a space" (ibid).

The language of the blog is also able to take on an embodied form of its own. Boyd (2006) argues that it allows people to "extend themselves into a networked digital environment that is often thought to be disembodying. The blog becomes both the digital body as well as the medium through which bloggers express themselves" (ibid). Blogs blur the distinction between orality and textuality. This recalls the views of Walter Ong, who introduced the term "Secondary Orality" to describe how certain new mediums, such as blogs, have textual and oral qualities. The blogger feels that they are in their own space in addressing an audience. Boyd says that for the blogger, the blog is corporeal; it embodies their ideas and stands for how they want to represent themselves (ibid). The blog allows the development of the "I" but also permits the individual to dialogue and to form relationships of the "Thou" type, because others are permitted into the private space, where relationships take place in the "between."

Blogging can cause the individual to reflect on how they relate to others. Katharine Moody (2008, 240) observes that the language also allows distribution of ideas and these are then "extended and reformed in dialogue (or dia(b)logue) with others, to produce richer understandings and to construct notions of identity, theology and society in community." The interface of blogs holds its own creative potential. We can see this in Benjamin Myers (2010, 56) reflection that blogging is also one way in which an individual becomes not only open to another but, through what they write, open to the community and the power to influence. He

terms it "reading-together". A way in which a community can be united by an interest and be open to each other's comments and input, in the hope that they will alter how they see things. Blogging is therefore a method which is able to use creativity and interconnectivity to build relationships and community in cyberspace.

As has already been discussed in chapter six, blogs can be used to reinforce religious activity. Campbell (2012, 153) suggests that that they are seen to provide freedom of expression but also to allow theological work to be done. "Theology becomes a communal activity as theological discussion or statements are open to outside input." Blogs show how language can be creative and have the ability to empower individuals as they present a horizontal model; where there is no over-arching authority telling people what to believe or how to act. Theology can become part of this dialogue and use technology in order to speak to individuals through the language of cyberspace. Blogs are particularly pertinent to theology in late modernity because they are immediate and flexible, echoing the need for theology to lose its rigidity in order to speak to a new technologically-savvy generation. Myers (2010, 54) aptly comments that "the immediacy of blogging begins to mould theology into a more flexible, provisional form of discourse." It is also important to consider how blogging can open individuals to a transcendent reality by providing a new means of relating to the Divine. It is the moment of Pentecost (Acts 2) that fills the disciples with the Holy Spirit, which came down and enabled them to "speak in tongues" (glossolalia). Cyberspace holds this Pentecost potential in its language manifested as a form of the spirit and a means of globally uniting communities by acting as a channel to the Divine. These possibilities of "forms of the spirit" show Buber's richness to theologically re-think cyberspace in positive ways for the future.

Buber would mistrust the lack of space and time for reflection of the blog its instantaneous engagement with little time for reflection on dialogue. Blogs can also be very

individualistic and self-aggrandising, grandstanding personal views without regard for the others' concerns. However, what blogs do offer is a chance for individuals to learn about self through a collective journey.[279] They open themselves to others and trust them to respond in a way that will allow them to develop through dialogue. Within the blog, genuine dialogue is able to take place and, for those partaking, to encounter "Thou" moments through shared symbolism and paradigms of meaning. It teaches about self and other, as connections are made through journeying together. As language is seen as a "form of the spirit" dialogue in cyberspace can be used as a creative means of spirituality, where one can express genuine thoughts and reflections, opening up to dialogue with others. This enables a transformation from an orientation purely on self to one which values and accepts relationships with others. Alienation can be overcome by re-learning new modes of interconnection through enabling new means of dialogue.

Narrative

Another means of creativity and journeying together can be seen through the creation of new narratives, which contain shared symbols of meaning. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the wider literature on narrative theology[280], it is worth noting that narrative was an essential means of dialogue for Buber in his understanding of the Torah[281], and in particular the prophets. It was a key means of relating to the Divine.

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[279] It is interesting to note the transition in dialogue in the technological era, which is brought to the fore with this concept of journeying. Just as in Jewish history, the theme of journey is central to their identity as a nation; from Egypt to the Promised Land; to Israel for the Pilgrim festivals. Buber (1911) envisaged that his ideal community would be actualised by all Jews returning to Jerusalem**,** echoing a somewhat Zionistic model. In the technological era the journeying is not through physically reaching a place but through dialogue providing a journey, through which individuals can be united.

[280] For a discussion of narrative theology see Alexander Lucie-Smith (2013), *Narrative Theology and Moral Theology: The Infinite Horizon* and Hans Frei (1993), *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays.*

[281] Marc Krell (2013) reminds us: "The foundation of Jewish sacred narrative is the Hebrew scriptures, and its thematic center is the evolving relationship between God and Israel that is presented in a linear fashion with three temporal coordinates: creation, revelation, and redemption." For Buber it was the text of Scripture, the Torah, which was the narrative instrument which symbolised the relationship of the between of God and man. It was a means to understand the Divine. Kepnes (2002, 81:84) revealed that "the text can be a thou….the word is a special kind of event." He continues that narrative has an ability to "draw and reveal relationships between

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Narrative, in this sense, is integral to Buber's explanation of the "Thou" because, as Kepnes reminds us, "[O]nly story can hold within it the web of relationships within which I-Thou occurs" (ibid, 87). This view follows in the tradition of all the great rabbis, including Jesus, who employed narrative in order to convey the relationship that is needed with others and with the Divine. [282] What is significant in this discussion is the way narrative has been used effectively in biblical history to explain relationships and how theology can continue to utilise this method in understanding cyberspace as a means of linking people together by a common set of beliefs.[283] Cyberspace is a new space for narrative theology, a bridge between popular and classical thinking.

What makes narrative symbolism important is the way it is used as a means of uniting the community. As Fontana (2010, 18) reminds us, "the great spiritual traditions frequently relied on symbols, in the form of both narratives and images, to represent realities that are difficult or impossible to express in words." Fontana suggests that in Christianity there is vast symbolism and narrative portrayed in the architecture, ranging from the shape of the church to the iconography found within it (ibid, 19). The symbols do not just represent objects but are able to bind the community together in common symbolism and point beyond to a higher reality. In a similar way, Ong (2012, 136-137) tells us that narrative is ubiquitous as a means of religious communication and as a "major genre of verbal art...it underlies so many other art

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event and event and person and person, is particularly apt to reveal the dimension of 'the between' (ibid, 81) which is so important to Buber.

[282] Jesus used parables such as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) to explain how to relate to others.

[283] Like Christianity, Judaism is rich in narrative symbolism; the symbolism of the relationship between the Divine and the 'Chosen People' throughout the ages. Symbolism forms the basis of relationship: the Hebrew word for symbol is '*ot*', which in Judaism denoted not only a sign, but a visible religious token of the relation between God and man. Buber was drawn to mysticism. Moreover, Friedman ([1955] 2002, 132) tells us that he drew comparisons between Hasidism and the Kabballah. He would, no doubt, have been familiar with the symbolism found in Kabballah, which Fontana (2012, 38) describes as "a complex symbolic explanation for the origin of the cosmos, and the relationship between God, humankind and the rest of the created world." Although this does not form part of Buber's relational theology, the interconnections evident in the tree of life, which represents the ten emanations or 'sefirot', demonstrate the interconnections between all aspects of life, including creation and the Divine.

forms." It is able to deliver insights into the divine nature. Fontana (2010, 18) extends his thinking to observe that "[S]piritual truths are expressed in art and architecture." This spirit can become "It" and an object but in artistic form can also inspire and communicate spiritual truths, thus elevating such expression to the "Thou" of genuine dialogue.

Symbols also form key parts of individual narratives and are a means of dialogue as they enable one, through prayer and reflection on them, to open oneself to "Thou" relationships. It reinforces Buber's notion that one could have a "Thou" relationship with an object (1913, 140). Christian symbolism, as Murdoch (1992, 82) indicates, provides "mythology, a story, images, pictures, a dominant and attractive character, (it) is itself like a vast work of art." Kepnes (1992, 144) comments that theology is about "telling and re-telling stories" and cyberspace provides a new means of expounding these narratives of meaning to the global audience in the technological era. It is, arguably, the new frontier of theological narration, creation and art.

More importantly, narrative is essential for development of the "I"; it allows humans to understand their place within the paradigms that they inhabit. Social Identity theory[284] suggests that the primary identity of a person is essentially formulated through a narrative, which gives an individual meaning and purpose. Steph Lawler (2008, 14) acknowledges that whilst a narrative is personal, it is shaped and contextualised within "wider cultural narratives." It is also through identifying with others, who have undergone similar experiences, either of adversity or contentment, that the individual is able to validate their own experiences and make sense of them within a wider cultural norm. Narrative can act as a means of building up individuality, while at the same time connecting with others and re-

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[284] This theory was proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) who believed that the groups that people belong to give them a sense of self-esteem and value. This can often lead to feelings of 'us' and 'them,' hence the 'I-It' stance becomes increasingly relevant here. It is due to the ways that we build up our own narrative through the groups and relationships we make (and those we reject), which causes us to treat others in a less favourable way and often as a means to an end, reflecting the 'It' position.

engaging through validating experiences. Campbell (2010, 21) argues that media is often seen to be a God-given resource to be utilised to further the Christian mission, "especially in an era of televangelism and religious internet use." Religious evangelists now have an obligation to harness new technologies to appeal to the audience and capture their attention. However, the use of technology can also be seen to undermine the capacity to listen and engage with the story. Cooke (2009, 129-130) highlights this concern when he points out that "we are rapidly losing our ability to share our story in a compelling way and as a result, the church continues to slide into cultural irrelevance." In Cooke's (ibid, 16) view it is this need for "connection, community and conversation" that the church has an increasing responsibility to provide. It also underlines the urgency to find these within cyberspace.

What is clear is that in cyberspace narrative is able to provide connections and does so through relationality. Kepnes (1992, 87) is right, therefore, to draw attention to the significance it provides in "the relationship between event and event, person and person." Narrative is able to bind individuals to each other. We can, for example, see the importance of the connective power of narrative and symbolism in the Christian concept of the icon[285], typically found in the Eastern Orthodox Church. If we shift to the canvas of cyberspace we can see how it contains the same symbolic power of an icon; it is a medium of communication between humans and the Divine. An icon is able to provide a means of connection because the space transcends the everyday and is itself beyond the physical. It has more depth to it than merely a representation; the technique and colours used to create the finished piece means that some aspect of the Divine is captured in the work and the process becomes a means of devotion. Through technique, something of the supernatural becomes

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[285] An icon is a religious work of art, usually found in Eastern churches and used to depict a religious figure or object, such as Jesus or Mary. It represents what it is depicting either literally or analogically and it is said to not just be a static image but to open up a path to the Divine. It is worth mentioning the intense preparations by artists to ready themselves before daring to paint the faces of the saints, Christ and God. Fasting, penance and prayer are as much of the process as paint and palimpsest.

embodied in the physical, creating a bridge between the earthly and heavenly realms. The icon is created and displayed in the hope that those who view it will again be able to connect with the supernatural through the mystical encounter that it facilitates. This enables a movement from the "It" position of the captured form to the "Thou" of encounter. Icons permit a two-way relationship, a dialogue with the holy family. Pattison (2005, 161) comments on the significance of Rublev's icon of Christ the Saviour[286]; it permits a "saving view, a view that gives us the possibility of entering into a re-creating God relationship"[287]. If the icons of paint are now being replaced by the icons of cyberspace it is time for theology to shift its reflection on "Thou" encounters with God.

Co-Creativity and Interconnectivity

In this chapter, I have suggested, through reflection on Buber's third sphere that creativity can manifest in different ways in cyberspace, each of which facilitates a form of dialogue and allows a sharing in the creative act. Through creativity communities are connected by creative acts in cyberspace. Through creating, humans begin to understand the world from another perspective and, I would argue, assign it more value. They have become an intrinsic part of it through their creativity. This offers more opportunities for individuals to dialogue with nature, each other and the Divine. Humans realise that through creativity they re-connect with all parts of divine creation, including cyberspace. It is therefore important to see Buber's ([1923] 2004, 66) comments on the significance of creation for dialoguing with the Divine in new ways in cyberspace: "There is divine meaning in the life of the world, of

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[286] This icon was completed in C1410 in Zvenigorod on Wood by Andrei Rublev. It is now displayed in the Tretyakov gallery in Moscow.

[287] Although Buber largely rejected the metaphysical in favour of meeting, the idea of art capturing something of the divine parallels, to some extent, Plato's metaphysics of the "Forms" in The Republic. This is epitomised in the idea of his two-world cosmology, where images that exists in this world are imperfect copies of the "Real" world of perfect Forms. However, Plato's God, the Demiurge, was able to put something of himself into the world when he created it, capturing something of the heavenly forms. In the same way, the icon and cyberspace can be seen to capture something of the Divine.

man, of human persons, of you and of me." As Cobb (1998, 56) tells us technology is a process in flux, just as creation is, and it is "itself alive, moving, changing and growing."[288]

It has been my contention in mapping Buber's work to studies of cyberspace to show how theology needs to adapt to this fluid approach of dialogue in the 21st century. We need to affirm Ralph Abraham's (1994) suggestion that dialoguing in cyberspace is a form of theological creativity; as the network of connections grows, so the relationship between this and natural ecosystems become more obvious (ibid, 47). Cobb, likewise, points out that cyberspace can start to provide us with a means to understand creation and the natural world. She argues that although we have created cyberspace and the phenomena within it, it is due to "divine creativity working through the medium of human consciousness" that is significant (ibid, 71). Humans are able to realise that the world is interconnected and there is a need to dialogue more with the world. She thinks that theological creativity opens our minds to the "ways in which divinity flows into each and every aspect of creation" (ibid, 72), which can include technological networks. As more infrastructure and conversations take place in cyberspace, theology must embrace the possibilities and challenges that online dialogue poses. It needs to have a voice to make itself relevant to the global creation in the network era. I have argued that by creating, albeit by using technology, humans are sharing in the creative act in the "forms of spirit"; which is guided by a divine force utilising cyberspace as a medium of relation and inter-connection.

The continuousness of creation is taken up in the image of humans as co-creators. In cyberspace there is the ability to create and therefore embody the notion of caring for what one has made. This injects an ethical and spiritual dimension into the institution of cyberspace. In this way Waters (2006, 135) observes that human are co-creators with God

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[288] This position has been reached by Cobb after her discussions with John B Cob Jnr, who embraces the concept of Whitehead's process theology, which posits the idea that the universe depends on a divine reality.

and this entails an ethical responsibility.[289] "The fate of creation depends as much on the co-creator as it does on the creator." Theological stewardship is as relevant in cyberspace and begins the process of redemption. The Divine is once again reconciled to his world, and humans understand their place at the centre of creativity, not as an exploiters or users of resources. Humans therefore begin the process of redemption, not through a hope of return to Eden, as Oliver O'Donovan (1986, 137) comments, but by seeking to be reconciled with the creation, of which they are a part as co-creators – creators of cyberspace.

Where humans can gain a greater understanding of interconnectivity is by accepting (as has been detailed in chapters two and five) that they are gradually being fused with technology. Philip Hefner (2003, 88) succinctly summarises the way in which cyberspace allows co-creativity:

> Technology is itself a sacred space. Technology is itself a medium of divine action, because technology is about the freedom of imagination that constitutes our self-transcendence. Technology is one of the major places today where religion happens. Technology is the shape of religion, the shape of the cyborg's engagement with God. Since we are cyborgs, technology is also the place where, like Jacob, we wrestle the God who comes to engage us.

Technology is able to bridge the divide between "I" and "other". By allowing a symbiosis between the humans and the machine, the former are opened up to networks of interconnectivity, which informs how they see themselves in relation to their surroundings. A point underlined by Pattison (2005, 51):

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[289] In Genesis 1:26-31, humans were given dominion over everything but in the form of stewardship, to take care of creation on behalf of the divine being. Humans have a responsibility to continue to create and to allow God's plan of redemption to come to fruition.

Who we are is so inseparable from our technological cultural practice that we can already speak of ourselves as cyborgs, as no longer defined by "humanity" alone, but by our human technological practice.

Technology has allowed us to start to utilise Buber's vision ([1923] 2004, 66f) of humans in a co-creative role in redeeming creation, overcoming alienation through forging genuine relationships through the strength of the "Thou."

Conclusion: Redemption of Relationships through Interconnected Co-creation

But the event that from the side of the world is called turning is called from God's side redemption (Martin Buber, [1923] 2004, 90).

Why Buber's theology?

This thesis is arguing for a new theology of interconnectivity that is able to redeem the potentiality of cyberspace as a medium for genuine "Thou" relationality. The greatest strength of applying Buber's theology to cyberspace lies in his ability to provide us with a framework for confronting the changing nature of relationships in the technological era. Genuine relationships in all spheres of creation are vital to maintain an ethical dimension to communities. This has been obscured in the fragmentation and individualism which characterise late modernity. Just as technology is likely to change us through the introduction of the cyborg, so we need to re-think relationships within these new technological paradigms. Buber's dialogical principle of "I-It" and "I-Thou" allows us to re-think relationships through an understanding of the interconnectivity which exists throughout creation and by becoming co-creators with the Divine. It is through recognition of the connectivity that is shared by all phenomena that there can be a shift from an individually-centred paradigm to one which allows possibilities for encounter. Buber ([1923] 2004, 14) makes us aware that humans are fundamentally connected, through the possibilities provided by the concept of "the inborn thou"; an innate connection binding all phenomena together. His dialogical principle is able to bring us to the fundamental ground of relationships which makes it pertinent for re-examining the ethical dimension in the cyberspace world. Through Buber we are provided with a framework to read the conditions of late modernity and a means of resolving the technological Marcusian alienation in a re-evaluation of our relationships in the network age. Buber offers us the opportunity to redeem cyberspace from the "It" dimension by

demonstrating its potential for "Thou", through applying a solution of interconnectivity, community and creativity.

Buber is, therefore, a significant theological resource, one who has allowed us to interpret the changing situations in the technological era by drawing our focus to the themes of dialogue, interconnectivity, relationality and co-creativity. The thesis has shown the value of using Buber to challenge the alienation of technology. His dialogical principle provides a means of assessing relationships, coupled with possibilities for establishing genuine dialogue. As I have shown, his ideas resonate with feminists and ecologists, showing how his ideas extend beyond his original audience. Buber's approach is a dynamic one, which does not advocate a set of principles to adhere to in relationships but instead offers a "Thou" vision of relationality, centred on love, mutuality and open dialogue. In late modernity detraditionalisation has shown that theology, like cyberspace, needs to become an adaptable phenomenon, which can entertain an active and ethical dialogue with communities today.[290] It can do this by addressing their concerns and leading the way in offering new means of re-engagement and re-connection within all spheres of creation.

The Importance of Buber's Theology for Cyberspace

In conclusion I wish to underline some of the important ways in which Buber is able to illuminate ideas about relationships in cyberspace, which have significance for the theology-technology debate. I have tied to show how Buber is important as a new theological resource because his dialogical principle enables us to establish a sharper ethical appreciation of the relationships in the technological era. Technology has provided a new platform for

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[290] This coheres with the views of Pope Francis, expressed in 2013, where has advocated the need for theological to command an ethical dimension amongst the poor and a means of dialoguing with those typically ignored by society. He put the concept of faith in action and helping the poor at the heart of his message for the world (BBC news, 2/10/13). This also evokes the teaching in James 2:17 that one cannot have faith without genuine action. The Pope's vision embodies Buber's relational theology. Through a disregard for material wealth and an active means of strengthening connections to humans in all spheres of life, Buber's means of overcoming alienation can start to become a reality for offline communities.

theology and it is important to seek to overcome the limits and challenges of the medium. Overcoming the alienation, theology can use cyberspace as a means to expound God's creative relation to the world. Buber's insights can be used to draw conclusions about the way in which relationships of interconnectivity can be made apparent through global connections in cyberspace. Technology allows us to re-think our relationships and interconnectivity with others, overcoming duality and preparing the way for humans to begin God's work as co-creators. The power of global interconnectivity and its potential can be seen as Campbell (2005, xviii) suggests in the way that "technology could be used to bring people back into relationship with each other in a digital world that seems to separate us more and more from face to face contact with others."

Buber is of central importance because his vision of relationships is one that is adaptable to a global framework. He stresses the centrality of relationships and allows us to take a more reflective stance on them. Engaging his work allows us to re-conceptualise the relationships taking place in cyberspace; categorising them within interconnected spheres of influence. It is interesting to note that it is because of the ability of Buber's theology to be adapted to cyberspace that his prophetic vision can be more clearly understood and resonate with the 21st century social situation. By altering the notion of territorial land to virtual space, cyberspace allows us to understand how Buber's ([1967] 1996, 16) interconnected community can be actualised.[291]

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[291] The Land, in Judaism, was seen as the means to unite the Jews by providing a spiritual homeland, and allowing them to recall their sacred journey with God to the place that was promised them. David Chidester and Edward Linenthal (1995:21) argue that land is central to forming a collective identity. It is often imbued with spiritual and religious meaning and is viewed as sacred. Lefebvre (1991, 110) continues that land is very much tied with history and the identity of a nation or group of people. "In short, every social space has a history, one invariably grounded in nature." For Buber and the Jews, the land of Israel holds a special significance and Maurice Friedman ([1955] 2002, 53) rightly understands how the Land was of the utmost importance to his theological mode. This is obviously due to the values embedded in Jewish theology concerning the promise given to Abraham and their Messianic beliefs about where the Jews will be gathered when he comes[291]. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 309) continues that Buber was also insistent that his ideal of a new spiritual community under God would occur in Zion, the land of Israel, because Israel is called to play a special part in God's work of redemption. As described in the previous chapter, Campbell sees cyberspace was able to form a "new

Applying Buber to cyberspace has caused a re-thinking of the role and function of humans in relation to themselves, creation, others but most importantly, in accessing the Divine. Alienation from relationships has also led to the Divine being seen in the "It" mode. Buber ([1923] 2004, 86) asserts in this way that God becomes "an object of faith." Applying Buber's thinking to cyberspace allows us to comprehend how the application of his thought to technology can be used to develop a new theological means of dialoguing with the Divine. The place that the Divine has within the new technological model and the means through which God can be encountered, needs to be reflected upon and adapted. This is what Buber's dialogical principle is calling us to do: re-examine the fragmented relationships that we have and to use cyberspace as a means to overcome the division through the interconnection of the "Thou". It is a process of redemption through cyberspace.

Redemption

The pre-fix in redemption signifies the act of turning, which was key to Buber's entire vision and this notion signifies the crux of my argument. It underlines the need to return to reflecting on how we engage in and facilitate genuine, ethical relationships in all spheres of life. This will counter the Marcusian alienation which is implicit in developing technology and one I have challenged. I am arguing for a re-evaluation of relationships in cyberspace and the value of interconnectivity. Buber's dialogical principle has drawn attention to the need for a change of attitude and methodology in analysing relationships in cyberspace. In late modernity, theology can no longer limit itself in the assessment of relationships and deeper engagement with the created order is precipitated by the technological revolution. One needs to be mindful of the way in which humans are interconnected, not just to their species, but to the whole of creation. Employing Buber to understand the relationships that are taking place

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spiritual landscape" for the Jews and within this new space they can share new symbols and images of meaning which point towards the Divine and in this way reinvigorate their narrative in the new space.

within the technological medium today has drawn attention to the importance and necessity of interconnectivity in all spheres. As Solle (1990, 180) suggests: "Hebrew thought represents an ontology of being-in-relationship. Being in relationship to others is the basis of not only all human life but also all plant and animals life." The "Thou" interconnectivity of cyberspace links us to the ethical relation of all creation online and offline.

The concept of interconnection, facilitated by technology, provides the opportunity to move from a somewhat shallow theological vision of technology to one which Friesen (2009, 22) sees as embracing "the interdependency of all aspects of created life," which recalls the "original relational moment" in Genesis 1:26-28. Through an understanding of being in a network, individuals start to give meaning and purpose to their relationships, viewing themselves as part of a global interconnectivity. As Friesen (2009, 47) continues: "Networks provide context and relational meaning to individuals." Through cultivating right relationships with others and nature, we are in effect bringing God into that relationship. Buber ([1947] 2002, 60) thought that the more humans are able to embrace their connectivity with creation, the closer they come to the original relational moment.

When humans overcome the individualistic stance that they have adopted and realise that they are interdependent on nature and others, they can re-form these disconnected and shallow relationships. As McFague (2008, 33) reminds us: "God's household is the whole planet: it is composed of human beings living in interdependent relations with all other life-forms and earth processes." Buber ([1923] 2004, 66) realises that when we can truly understand the need for harmony among all living beings we will find harmony with God and realise the need that God has for humans. In order to embrace the interconnectivity amongst

all living things, Brent Waters[292] (2006, 85) thinks that humans need to accept this role as co-creator "and cooperate with God towards creating a more harmonious and humane world".[293] The "Thou" calls individuals to join in the Divine's creative work. As Buber ([1923] 2004, 66) stressed, God needs us to complete his redemption of creation[294].

I postulate that what could be termed the beginning of redemption for humans is a change in attitude towards self, surroundings, other and the Divine in cyberspace. According to Friesen (2002, 34-36) this can only take place though the creature overcoming the "inner duality." Humans can no longer afford to see themselves as separate from creation and need to return to the "Thou" relationship with the Divine. The solution is to engage with technology as a way to find re-connection and overcome the duality which humans exhibit in their relationships.

The lost relationship between the Divine and humans is raised by Graham (2002) in connection with the golem, or unformed being, which is important for understanding Buber and cyberspace. She explores how we had a relationship with God in the womb; something signified by the Psalmist's words: "You knit me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139, 13-16). This coheres with Buber's ([1923] 2004, 14) claim that everyone has an "inborn Thou" which has been lost. Graham (2002, 107) suggests that Israel can be taken as a golem, created to defend the Jews and Jewish integrity. She also draws attention to the way in which

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[292] In Waters' most recent book, (2014), *Christian Moral Theology in the Emerging Technoculture. From Posthuman back to Human,* he modifies the criticisms made in his 2006 book and focuses on how theology plays a role as part of emerging technologies. Christian theology and moral life needs to acknowledge and embrace the more techno-centre culture that characterises late-modernity.

[293] This is emphasised by Arthur Peacocke (1979, 297-308) in his discussion of panentheism. He states that humans should treat nature in the same way that they do their own bodies. He rejects stewardship, as it sets humans apart in an objective stance from nature, which coheres with Buber's theology that the "Thou" does not objectify but instead has a relationship with no boundaries or limitations.

[294] This was also indicated in the Second Vatican council where redemption was interpreted as God's renewal of creation (O'Collins, 2004, 19) and the means through which humans can begin the process of making amends for the damage that they have done to creation. O'Collins (2004, 18) refers to Irenaeus, who observed that creation and redemption are "interconnected moments in God's saving plan for all humanity and the entire cosmos".

the golem is interpreted by Marge Pierce as "Yod", guardian of the Jewish future and the "exemplar of a new post/human utopia in which human, animals and machines might forge a world of shared governance in which difference and hybridity thrive free of persecution" (ibid, 108).

The golem can be portrayed as a means of redemption, not just for the Jewish people, but for all of humanity, as it symbolises "Other." It has much to teach us about ourselves and our connection with all of creation and its beings, both animal and machine. Graham suggests that the golem can act as a mirror, allowing humans to reflect upon their status as post-humans and to consider the possibilities of interconnections without limitations. She believes that it can allow humans to reflect upon relationships that are taking place within technology. This idea of the golem carries forward the work of Graham on the cyborg and the way in which it encourages reflection of the relationship between humans and machines. It encourages them to work towards change by re-introducing more meaningful dialogue, as technologies are important mediums for creation and redemption (ibid, 219).

In Christian theology redemption was achieved when God incarnated in immanent form in Jesus and began the creative work of repairing relationships broken by sin. However, in the age of the post-human, just as models of God, Creation and humanity are being re-worked, so too the notion of redemption cannot remain a static one: there needs to be recognition that the seeds of redemption can be sown through technology online and not restricted to specific realms. Redemption is an on-going process, not just amongst humans, but all creatures. In discussion of the scope of redemption, O'Collins (2004, 4) indicates that it is essential to allow God back into many different and marginalised relationships.[295] Humans have a responsibility to welcome each other and renew their online and offline

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[295] St Paul (Romans 8:18-23) observed that the human race was in "bondage and decay" and was "groaning" for "redemption."

relationships with themselves and the Divine. Importantly, what has been lost can be re-gained and alienation can be overcome in the relations of cyberspace.

In Buber's model redemption is no-longer something which God "does" to humans it is more part of a joint partnership. It enables humans to see relationships in a different light. This is a point emphasised by McFadyen (1990, 46), who shows how this process of redemption not only "restores the condition of creation but, in doing so, also exceeds them. God's redemption of fallen persons and relations does not restore Eden but gives people, where they appropriately respond, a transformed orientation within a world which remains fallen." Humans therefore have an obligation to take up the role of God's collaborators in completing creation. They can take the first steps towards the process by seeing the world and their relationships in an interconnected and ethical form.

McFadyen (1990, 45-46) reminds us that redemption is God having a dialogue with us as "free dialogue-partners". This provides us with "new possibilities of living responsibly in God's image, properly orientated on oneself through dialogical relation with God and others (and so through a proper orientation on them)." Redemption is about human change and the chance to use technology to re-learn the connections that exist between humanity, nature and the Divine. Miller astutely (2011, 217) observes, in relation to Facebook, that it "is not what is new about it, but the degree to which it seems to help us return to the kind of involvement in social networks that we believe we have lost." It is through using cyberspace to understand connectivity and the need for more genuine relationships that we can use dialogue as a means of connection.

One of the means of achieving genuine relationships is through a re-embracing of the concept of unconditional love, central to feminist models of relationality. Buber ([1923] 2004, 19) informs us that "love is between I and Thou" and humans have to re-develop their

idea of love for the other in order to open themselves up to unconditional relationships.

Significantly, Buber ([1947] (2002), 264) thinks that one can only come to God when one has

love for others: "True love of God begins with the love of man." This attitude of the "Thou"

enables the Divine to be drawn down into the relationship and for us to reach up to God.

Solle (1990, 192) is able to reconfigure our theological understanding by seeing that

"[t]ranscendence is radical; in other words, it is immanence loved and affirmed from the

roots. If in our immanence, in what we experience and do, we really enter into the radicality

of love, then our immanence contains transcendence."

Buber understood the scope that his vision could bring when he felt able to reach out

to the German people after the Holocaust. Friedman ([1955] 2002, 317) informs us that in

1952 he was awarded the Goethe prize by the University of Hamburg for his "activity in the

spirit of a genuine humanity." He was able to embody his teachings on relationships through

his actions. This means of enacting redemption is echoed by the Holocaust survivor Elie

Wiesel (2010). He wrote about the mission of a Jew by stating: "His mission was never to

make the world more Jewish, but, rather, to make it more human." Buber has shown us that

redemption is not a hierarchically-imposed action, but something that comes from a change in

the human desire for intimacy and openness that can be gained when one is totally aware of

the interconnection of the whole of reality to the Divine.[296] Relationships are dynamic

processes, where one is able to respond to the other in genuine openness. In the art of

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[296] This model of the three redeeming features in Buber's theology: interconnectivity, co-creativity and community can be seen to reflect already existing Christian theology in a saying of Jesus, found in John 15:5: "I am the vine, you are the branches." The analogy is one taken from nature, which incorporates aspects of Buber's three spheres. The vine is represented by the Divine, who is the "living centre" of all relationships. From this centre the network of branches are able to grow, which represent the inter-connected "Thou" relationships and communities, which can develop from having a living, ethical centre. This analogy is also particularly apt for Christianity because the grapes which grow on the vine pertain to wine, representing the blood of Jesus, a means of redeeming the sins through broken relationships. There are also Trinitarian overtones in the analogy: the Divine is the creator of the vine, Jesus sustains it, and the relationships that take place allow the spirit of the "between" to be drawn down.

creation, the channel to the "eternal Thou" becomes open because the Divine is able to respond to the needs of humans.[297]

In applying Buber's dialogical principle to the studies about cyberspace, my thesis has provided a means for theology to reflect upon relationships in the technological era and engage in a new dialogue with technology. Buber's dialectical template of "I-It" and "I-Thou" has shown how despite the prevalence of "It" relationships in cyberspace, the medium offers a new means of creativity and global interconnection, with opportunities to support connection and strengthen communities. What I have sought to stress is that, despite the isolationist tendencies of technology, cyberspace can facilitate many opportunities for re-connection. This thesis has re-positioned Buber's dialogical model in order to answer the issues of alienation and to use technology as a positive means of re-connecting and redeeming communities. Buber's model of redemption places humans as co-creators with the Divine and puts the emphasis on the former to instigate encounters defined by the "thou." Overall, I have shown that Buber's theological principle provides a model to facilitate reflection on the ethics of relationship in the technological era.

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[297] There are numerous examples of the Divine's mind changing as a response to love that he felt for his creation: In 2 Samuel 24:16 God appears to respond with compassion to his people: "When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand." In Jeremiah 42:10 the Divine appears disturbed by the punishment he has inflicted: "If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you, for I am grieved over the disaster I have inflicted on you."

References

In the technological era, where much of the material that I have used to research my thesis can be accessed both online and offline, it seems unnecessary to divide the references into different sections due to the interdependence between the two mediums. The references include online and electronic material such as articles, webpages and journals, and where these have been accessed online the relevant URL has also been included, along with the date accessed. Where I have referred to specific websites, I list the URL within the text in footnotes.

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