Doing Liturgy in a Technological Society

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The recent capture of Theodore Kaczynski, accused of being the famed "unabomber," has captured the imagination of the American public.   This fascination is partly explained by the way in which the actions of the unabomber and the World Trade Center, Murray Building and Centennial Park bombings have brought home to the American public that horror of terrorism which has been a regular feature of life in places like Ireland and the Middle East.   However, the terrorist actions of the unabomber are quite distinctive in the tragic paradox which they reveal. This anti-technology zealot, who insisted on the publication of his rambling treatise on the evils of modern technology, could only get the attention of the world by employing that same technology through the construction of letter bombs and the publication of his treatise through the technological apparatus of the   modern media.   The very condemnation of technology   was at the same time a damning act of complicity with modern technology.

The unabomber tragically demonstrates the reasons why technology can no longer be viewed as a neutral entity to be either affirmed or rejected.   It has entered into the fabric of our lives; we are truly members of what Jacques Ellul called the   "technological society." [1] Because of this, I believe that a   critique of   not only the fruit of technology but of the technological shape of daily existence is a pre-condition for effective Christian pastoral ministry and Christian community formation in the post-modern world.   In the first and largest section of this essay I would like to offer such a critique   as developed in the writings of the Catholic

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[1] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*   (New York;   Knopf, 1964).

social philosopher, Albert Borgmann.   In the shorter second section I will explore the usefulness of Borgmann's critique by considering its implications for an understanding of the interplay between liturgy and modern culture in North America.

I.   Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life

Albert Borgmann is a German born social philosopher who teaches at the University of Montana at Missoula.   He studied under the Heideggerian philosopher,   Max Müller, at the University of Freiburg and his critique of technology clearly owes a heavy debt to Heidegger. However, his sophisticated analysis goes well beyond Heidegger's own more programmatic consideration of the topic.[2]   In the beginning of his work, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life,* Borgmann identifies three approaches to technology: the substantive, the instrumentalist and the pluralist.[3]   The first view, the *substantive,* portrays technology as an autonomous, omnipotent and largely pernicious force in modern society that cannot be controlled.   Technology as means becomes its own end and has gone beyond human control. This view is almost invariably reactionary and the actions of the so called unabomber dramatically display the excesses to which such a view, in the hands of the unstable, can lead. A considerably more measured, ethically responsible and at many points insightful   example of this view is found in the writing of Jacques Ellul.

The second view of technology is called *instrumentalist.*   If the first view exaggerates the dangers of technology, the second view underestimates these dangers.   In the instrumentalist view, modern technology offers us simply more sophisticated tools and instruments of the kind

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[2] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*   (New York, 1977).

which have always been part of human civilization.   The emphasis is on an unbroken historical thread of development in the design and manufacture of tools.   Technology so conceived is value-neutral.   Analysis of technology in this view will focus not on the nature of technology itself but on the ends to which it is put.   Consider examples in medicine.   The analysis of medical technology does not generally focus on the way in which the technology itself shapes our world but rather on questions regarding its proper uses, e.g., the relationship between genetic engineering and eugenics.[4]   This view still assumes that the problem lies not with the technology but with the ends to which it is put. While this cannot be developed here, one can make the case that at least within my own tradition of Roman Catholicism, most treatments of technology in ecclesiastical documents adopt this perspective.

The third view, which Borgmann calls *pluralist*, tries to see technology as simply one part of a vast and complicated web of interacting social forces.   In this view it is not possible to find any determinative pattern to technology.   Borgmann rejects this despair at the possibility of arriving at an adequate theory of technology and, in the balance of his book, sets out his own theory. He insists that modern technology does display a characteristic pattern shaping contemporary life in recurring and predictable ways.   At the heart of this theory is what Borgmann calls the "device paradigm."

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[3]   Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984),   7-15.

[4]   There are important exceptions.   For example, Daniel Callahan has begun asking fundamental questions about the technological shape of medicine and health care policy.   Cf.   Daniel Callahan, *Setting Limits: Medical Goals in an Aging Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) and *What Kind of Life: The Limits of Medical Progress* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).

A.   The Device Paradigm

Borgmann's thesis is that Western society has adopted what he calls the "device paradigm," a way of employing technology which has fundamentally shaped our encounter with the world around us.   Modern technology was born out of the enlightenment with its preoccupation with the mastery and control of time and environment as a means to human emancipation.   The promise of technology was the promise of liberation from the constraints of common labor.   Triumph over famine, disease and servitude were thought to be the by-products of the successful domination of nature.[5]   This drive began with Bacon and Descartes and therefore is inseparable from the development of instrumental rationality.   Its promise first became apparent during the industrial revolution but it continues to offer the dominant pattern for considering humankind's relationship to its world.

At the core of modern technology lies the technological "device."   What separates the modern "device" from the pre-modern "instrument" or "tool" is the radical separation between the device or machine itself, and the commodity it produces.   Thus Borgmann   distinguishes between "things" (drawing on Heidegger's use of the German, *Dinge*)[6] which function like pre-modern tools, and "devices."   A "thing is inseparable from its context, namely its world, and from our commerce with the thing and its world, namely, engagement."[7]   Because "things" are characterized by our engagement with them they produce more than one commodity.

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[5] Borgmann, *Technology*, 36.

[6] Cf.   Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 163-82.

[7] Borgmann, *Technology*, 41.

For example, Borgmann offers the wood burning stove or fireplace. This stove or fireplace certainly produces a commodity, heat, but it also provides a focus; it offers a hearth, a place to gather. The fireplace remains in view and requires numerous tasks and skills for its proper use. There is the task of obtaining firewood, knowing which kinds of wood burn best, learning how to properly start and stoke the fire. These skills and practices inevitably bring one into contact with the larger world of nature and other persons and require the extended human interaction and relationships necessary to pass on the requisite skills to another. Since the warmth produced by the fire is localized it encourages gathering. When it is the sole heat source in the home, the fireplace also creates the rhythm for the life of the home. Its requirement of regular maintenance helps determine family chores, the timing of meals, the gathering of family and friends. All of these things constitute the "world" of the fireplace and effect what Borgmann calls "manifold engagement." A little reflection on these various modes of engagement suggests how the world surrounding the "focal thing" can be seen in ever richer ways. For the skills demanded by the thing (e.g., the fireplace) provide the opportunity for a certain quality of relationships as in the tutelary relationship between parent and child. The focus generated by the thing (e.g., a hearth) offers a particular manner of entertainment. The limits of the "thing" (e.g., fires eventually go out) shape our world. The more we reflect on this manifold engagement the more we can see a rich web of interactions and relationships that constitute one's daily way of life.

Like the "focal thing," a "device" also exists to provide a particular commodity, something that we desire for the enrichment of our lives. But that device functions best when it goes completely unnoticed; when it recedes into the background. One of the central characteristics of a device is its concealment. The concealment of a device is what disburdens us;

it ceases to "intrude" on our lives.   The invisibility of the technological device has been explored by Michael Heim in his consideration of computer technology.   He writes:

> Computer technology is so flexible and adaptable to our thought processes that we soon consider it less an external tool and more a second skin or mental prosthesis. Once acclimated to the technology, we play it much as a musician plays an instrument, identifying with it, becoming one with it.[8]

Yet its flexibility and adaptability may cause us to overlook the way in which that same computer technology in fact shapes the world of those who use it.[9]

Devices are intended to free us for other activities.   So, following the example above, a central heating system is a device that provides the same   commodity as the fireplace, heat, without intruding in our lives or placing demands on our time.   Central heating is placed out of sight and runs virtually on its own.   We need not understand how it works, it requires no skills, it makes no contribution to the rhythms of the day.   Indeed, its principal improvement over the fireplace is that it flattens out any rhythm;   central heating allows us to stay awake and warm at all hours of the day unlike a fire which, upon being extinguished, requires family members to seek the warmth of the bed.

Borgmann offers a second example, namely the difference between a home-prepared meal and a commercially pre-cooked meal heated in the microwave.   To prepare a "home-cooked" meal one must leave the confines of the home to purchase groceries and produce

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[8] Michael Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*   (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 64.

[9] This influence is due in large part to computer technology's intimate relationship with language itself through the twin tasks of information and word processing.   Walter Ong has identified the fundamental shift in mentality first inaugurated by technologies oriented toward the storage and manipulation of words and language.   Yet his analysis is couched in a rather optimistic appraisal of the potentialities of modern information processing technologies for unifying the human community.   Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*   (New York: Methuen, 1982);   See also Heim, 65-70 and Stephen D. O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*   59 (Fall, 1996):   781-808.

at the market.   To procure fresh produce or meat one must have certain skills.   The seasoned cook knows, for example,   how to recognize fresh fish by touch and smell from once-frozen or stale fish.   Upon returning home there follows the complex orchestration of the various parts of the meal so that everything is ready at once.   On special occasions the aesthetic dimension may be further enhanced by the addition of fresh cut flowers to the table and the presentation of the food itself.   There is also   the involvement of the whole family in food preparation, setting the table, serving the food, and cleanup afterwards.   Moreover, one of the inevitable by-products of a well-prepared meal is that the considerable time invested in its preparation argues for its leisurely communal enjoyment.[10]   In stark contrast to this is the microwave-prepared TV dinner which requires virtually no engagement with the outer world, consumes no time for   preparation and makes no argument for its leisurely consumption.   Consequently, the microwave dinner joins the myriad other devices which disburden us by providing   a singular commodity without significant manifold engagement: computer networks offer information, stereos offer music.[11]

What devices rob us of, Borgmann contends,   are a set of "focal practices," routine ways in which we engage the larger world in our daily lives.   These focal practices, building a fire, preparing a meal, are often boring and mundane, but they provide a consistent pattern of engagement with the world around us.   When heating or meals are reduced to mere commodities, the devices replace the "focal practices" that previously produced these commodities.

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[10]   For   beautiful meditations on feasting see both Robert Farrar Capon,   *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection*   (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), and the sensual film   *Babette's Feast.*

[11]   Borgmann, *Technology,* 42.

Devices also shape the life of leisure.   The preeminent symbol of leisure in a technological society is television.   It places no demands, offers constant availability, and with the advent of cable/satellite and VCR technologies, virtually unlimited choice in content.   The viewer sits on the couch, selecting at random any of an almost infinite variety of movies, shows or athletic events, allowing the action on the screen to entertain in a way which structurally guarantees the complete passivity of the viewer.   Borgmann insists that the introduction of the television into the living room of North Americans was not just the addition of another device or appliance;   the television radically reconstituted American life and leisure.   Neil Postman makes a similar point when he writes of the "ecological" character of technological change. [12] Borgmann cites a study of American leisure patterns which reveals that sixty percent of the leisure time of Americans is spent watching television. [13]   The dominance of television on American leisure patterns is reflected in the simple question voiced nightly in households throughout North America: "What are we going to watch tonight?"[14]

The ubiquitous presence of the television in Western culture highlights   a significant shift in the entertainment patterns of modern life.   The characteristic features of these patterns of entertainment are further illuminated by the burgeoning popularity of interactive video and computer games.   The interactivity of these games can easily be mistaken for authentic human engagement.   Interactive games allow the player to make choices which redefine the contours of

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[12] Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*   (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 18.

[13] Frank P. Stafford and Greg J. Duncan, "The Use of Time and Technology by Households in the United States," in *Time, Goods, and Well-Being,* edited by Thomas Juster and Frank P. Stafford (Ann Arbor, Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, 1985), 271, 274, cited in Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide,* 44.

[14] Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide,*   112.

the game itself.   In a sense, every game is completely different.   One gets the impression of being an actor, a participant in the particular game as it is programmed to react to and accommodate the player's choices.   But in the end it is an elaborate deception for whatever can be said for the quality of "interaction" offered by such games, it is not an encounter with another "self,"   another person possessing mysterious depths.   "Interaction" is no replacement for inter-personal, human engagement.

This then leads to those technologies which do appear to offer "real human engagement" through the new communicative mediums.   The emergence of the internet with its opportunities for human interaction by way of e-mail correspondence, newsgroups and commercial "chatrooms," allows people to offer "stylized versions of themselves for amorous or convivial entertainment."[15]   The troublesome aspect of this vision of electronic communication derives from the peculiarly disembodied character of   electronic interaction.

Embodied presence is vital to authentic human interaction because it is our embodiment that creates the conditions for both separateness from another and presence to another.   When I am bodily present to another there is an intrinsic vulnerability;   I am always communicating through innumerable verbal and non-verbal cues more and less than I intend.   But this embodiment is simply   "bracketed out" in both e-mail correspondence and "chatroom" participation which lack even the mitigated vulnerability of phone conversations in which the voice itself becomes a kind of embodied presence.   The electronic medium allows us to "reveal only as much of ourselves as we mentally wish to reveal."[16]   This lack of embodiment is less apparent in virtual reality technologies in which there is the employmentrecreation of digitized,

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[15] Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 92.

[16] Heim, 100.

electronic representations of the embodied self.   However, our electronic, corporeal surrogate is incapable of   mediating anything of   "the vulnerability and fragility of our primary identity." [17] Such technologies offer the participant a voyeuristic semblance of intimacy without the vulnerability.   It is easy to understand how Michael Heim can write of the "erotic ontology of cyberspace."[18]

The contrast between leisure patterns shaped by devices and leisure patterns shaped by enriching focal practices is brought into sharp relief in Norman Maclean's evocative account of two brothers who learned the art of fly-fishing from their minister-father.   In his novel,   *A River Runs Through It,*   Maclean reflects on the way in which grace and blessing come to us, not as some instantly accessible commodity but in the   exercise and discipline of focal practice, in this case the practice of fly-fishing.   It is an account worth quoting at length.

> In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing. We lived at the junction of great trout rivers in western Montana, and our father was a Presbyterian minister and a fly fisherman who tied his own flies and taught others.... [I]n a typical week of our childhood Paul and I probably received as many hours of instruction in fly fishing as we did in all other spiritual matters. After my brother and I became good fisherman, we realized that our father was not a great fly caster, but he was accurate and stylish and wore a glove on his casting hand. As he buttoned his glove in preparation to giving us a lesson, he would say, "It is an art that is performed on a four count rhythm between ten and two o'clock."   As a Scot and a Presbyterian, my father believed that man by nature was a mess and had fallen from an original state of grace. Somehow, I early developed the notion that he had done this by falling from a tree. As for my father, I never knew whether he believed God was a mathematician but he certainly believed God could count and that only by picking up God's rhythm's

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[17] Ibid, 100-1.

[18] Ibid, 83.

were we able to regain power and beauty. Unlike many Presbyterians, he often used the word "beautiful"....

My brother and I would have preferred to start learning how to fish by going out and catching a few, omitting entirely anything difficult or technical in the way of preparation that would take away from the fun. But it wasn't by way of fun that we were introduced to our father's art. If our father had had his say, nobody who did not know how to fish would be allowed to disgrace a fish by catching him....

....[U]ntil man is redeemed he will always take a fly rod too far back, just as natural man always overswings with an ax or golf club and loses all his power somewhere in the air; only with a rod it's worse, because the fly often comes so far back it gets caught behind in a bush or rock....

Then, since it is natural for man to try to attain power without recovering grace, he whips the line back and forth making it whistle each way, and sometimes even snapping off the fly from the leader, but the power that was going to transport the little fly across the river somehow gets diverted into building a bird's nest of line, leader, and fly that falls out of the air into the water about ten feet in front of the fisherman....

....Power comes not from power everywhere, but from knowing where to put it on. "Remember," as my father kept saying, "it is an art that is performed on a four-count rhythm between ten and two o'clock."

My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe. To him, all good things--trout as well as eternal salvation--come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.[19]

Maclean wonderfully depicts the central characteristics of a "leisure" activity as at the same time a focal practice. Fly-fishing demands discipline, attentiveness, and not the mastery of time but rather the submission to rhythms which at first seem foreign. Clearly the joys of fly-fishing, for Maclean, involve much more than the acquisition of fresh fish! "Grace" and "salvation" come "by art and art does not come easy."

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[19] Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 1-4.

What Borgmann's work displays is the way in which true human enjoyment is the by-product of richly textured focal practices which involve less the mastery of time than the disciplined submission to the flow of time and "God's rhythms." When goods are reduced to commodities procured for enjoyment during times of leisure in ways which do not demand or even allow for manifold engagement with our world, the paradoxical result, as Staffan Linder noted over twenty-five years ago, is a decreased capacity for enjoyment.[20] This basic dependence of authentic human fulfillment on a life characterized by multi-layered patterns of human engagement is further obscured by the modern emergence of what Borgmann calls, in his second book, "instrumental hyperreality."[21]

B. Hyperreality

Hyperreality is a kind of artificial reality, but an artificial reality which to all appearances is not an impoverishment of reality, some poor facsimile, but an enhancement of reality. Borgmann gives the example of the contemporary flight simulator used to train pilots.[22] Not only are contemporary, computerized flight simulators able to duplicate the actual flying experience in remarkable detail, they offer the advantage of "pliability." Twenty years ago airline pilot training would have included numerous training rides in which the pilot, accompanied by a trainer, would have taken a stripped down airliner to a small nearby airport and there practiced instrument approaches. In a two-hour training flight the pilot might have been able to make five or six extended instrument approaches. These approaches would have

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[20] See Staffan Linder, *The Harried Leisure Class* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

[21] Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 83.

[22] Ibid., 85.

been to the same airport however, with minimal opportunity to train under adverse conditions

such as poor weather or equipment malfunctions.   In that same two-hour period, with a flight

simulator, a pilot today can make twice as many approaches.   Moreover, in one session he or

she can practice approaches at O'Hare, LaGuardia, National and Dallas-Fort Worth airports.

These approaches can be conducted according to any of a number of scenarios   in which

dangerous malfunctions and hazardous weather conditions   can be created to prepare the pilot

for the unexpected.

The contrast between the world of the flight simulator and the "real world"   illuminates

the salient features of hyperreality in general.   While in "real time" flight training one must learn

to submit to the limits of time, "wasting" 30 minutes in travel to and from the local airport, in the

"hyper-real time" of the flight simulator time itself becomes subject to control and "wasted"

travel time is eliminated.   What "real time" offers in a set span of time will always be limited.

In "hyper-real time" however that which is "uneventful" or "boring" can be extracted and

replaced with more productive planned experiences.   While "real time" blends in subtle and

often ambiguous ways the significant and the insignificant, in "hyper-real time" that which is

valued as significant is displayed in full brilliance. [23]   Hyperreality sharpens the contrast between

time in which "things are happening" and dead time in which "nothing is happening."   Indeed

hyperreality constitutes the technological mastery of time itself.

Hans Bernard Meyer claims that the clock may be the most important machine of modern

technology.   With the advent of the clock, which became a mass-produced article only in the

19th century, time became radically separated from both the internal (e.g., heartbeat, breathing,

hunger patterns) and external (e.g., the cycle of day and night, the annual seasons) rhythms to

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[23] Ibid.

which the pre-modern person had to align themselves.[24]   Once time can be measured in

independent units apart from the consideration of internal or external rhythms, time begins to

appear "under our control."   We are encouraged to "make the most of our time," or to "use our

time wisely" as if it were one more commodity.   As a commodity, time becomes something

which must be managed and not wasted.   Activities are measured by their time-efficiency.[25]   In

computer parlance, we become preoccupied with "multi-tasking," the ability to juggle numerous

tasks simultaneously   with the aid of a computer.   Multi-tasking allows us to effectively

"toggle" back and forth between tasks while the computer keeps the task not being attended to in

continuous operation.   What it does not do is force us to consider the real relationships which

obtain among the various tasks being undertaken.   In multi-tasking we become better "jugglers"

but we do not achieve the wisdom that comes from a grasp of the whole.   Consequently, the real

demand of our era is not for multi-tasking, but for multi-dimensional or organic thinking, the

capacity to see the complex set of interrelationships which constitute the whole over time.[26]

The world of computer technology encourages multi-tasking, the cramming of greater

productivity into discrete units of time,   but it blinds us to the possibility of

multi-dimensionality, the capacity to experience the flow of time as yielding some only gradually

emerging, cumulative insight into the nature of our world.

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[24]   Hans Bernard Meyer, "Time and the Liturgy: Anthropological Notes on Liturgical Time," *Studia Liturgica*   14 (1982):   4-22 at 4-7.

[25]   For a perceptive treatment of the impact of the mechanical clock on modern civilization see Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*   (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 1963).

[26]   I am indebted to my friend Richard Nimz, computer programmer by profession, philosopher by avocation, for the significance of this distinction.

Already we can recognize other aspects of daily life in which the hyperreal has become so taken for granted that the distinction between the real and hyperreal is blurred or erased altogether.   Music offers a good example.   We have become so accustomed to the unique musical perfections provided for us by digitally pre-recorded music that it ceases to even occur to many of us that   real music might be a matter of   "living persons gathering here and now with their tangible instruments, playing together as well as the grace of the hour has it..."[27]

One might ask whether this jeremiad against hyperreality is not in the end little more than a kind of nostalgia for what is ultimately a less satisfying body of human goods?   Why insist on the significance of this distinction between the real and the hyperreal when the sensory input of the real can be perfectly emulated and even enhanced by hyperreality (as is the case with recorded music)?   Why not simply take advantage of hyperreality's promise to provide more accessible and convenient enjoyment of those things which we most value?

By way of answer, I would like to conclude this section with a thought experiment proposed by Borgmann.   Imagine a professional living in western Montana who loves the outdoors and has a set of treasured trails which she regularly runs.   She is offered a lucrative position in the Midwest.   Knowing that she loves to run outdoors, in order to sweeten the deal the employer offers her a membership in a special health club that provides   treadmills in which the person can run while viewing a video.   Borgmann admits that this artificial environment would be a poor facsimile of the real thing.   A glance in either direction reveals other health club members not wilderness, and the smells and sounds would be that of the gym not of wildlife.   But what if modern technology allowed us to greatly improve the facsimile?   What if we could use a state of the art projection screen, add temperature controlled blowers and the

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[27] Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 92-3.

appropriate sounds and scents?   Now the professional might find this enhanced hyperreal encounter truly captivating, a novelty to share with friends.

> Consider once more the case with which we began.   The professional woman, after a most stressful morning, is running in her favorite winter landscape.   New snow is sparkling in the sun, yet the footing is perfect.   Snow geese are vigorously rising from the river.   Then it is quiet but for the scolding of the Steller's jays.   A snowshoe hare up ahead is hopping along the trail.   There, suddenly, is a crashing in the brush, a gigantic leaping and pouncing;   a mountain lion has taken the hare and is loping back up the slope.   Quiet once more settles on the valley.   A herd of elk is browsing in the distance.   the trail is rising.   The runner is extending herself;   she reaches the crest of the incline;   another quarter mile and the trailhead comes into view.[28]

Borgmann asks if it really matters whether this run took place in the real setting or in a hyperreal facsimile.   We might be tempted to dismiss the difference as long as the sensory experience was exactly reproduced.   But this would be a mistake.

> Assume the woman is coming to the end of her run.   She walks past the trailhead to the parking lot, gets in her car and drives down the snowy valley to her office. She is elated.   People spend years in the mountains without ever seeing a lion. To see one at the height of a hunt is a rare blessing.   And she feels blessed also to live in a region wide and wild enough to support mountain lions, and on a continent hospitable enough for geese to nest in the North and winter in the South. She revels in the severity of the early winter that has driven the snow geese south from Canada and the elk down from the high country.   The snow must already be ten feet deep on the peaks and ridges.   There will likely be a heavy runoff in the spring and strong river flows throughout the summer.   This is where she wants to be.

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[28] Ibid., 94.

Assume once more the woman is coming to the end of her run. The vista is dimming, the running surface is slowing down, the ceiling lights are coming on. She goes to the locker room, showers, changes, and steps into a muggy, hazy afternoon in the high-rise canyon of a big city. All that was true of the real run would now be false. The hyperreal run would have revealed nothing about her surroundings, would have bestowed no blessings on her, and would not have been an occasion for her to affirm her world.[29]

In this provocative thought experiment, Borgmann has brought into sharp relief the full moral force of his analysis of technology and the hyperreality that it generates. Sensory input may be perfectly recreated, but in that "perfect" recreation what is lost is the mysterious lure of the unknown and the unpredictable which appears as we abandon any attempt to master time and instead wade into the flow of time and submit to its current. It is the very brilliance and complete accessibility of modern technology that actually undermines our experience of the ordinary world. For a discovery of the ordinary world includes not only epiphanies and revelations but the apprehension of ambiguities, distances and hidden horizons which can never be immediately accessible to us. Within a totalized technological perspective human experience itself becomes truncated. The demand for imaginative engagement and a stance of receptivity, attentiveness and openness to the world as it alternatively displays and veils itself is superceded by the imaginatively brilliant construct of the software designer. But as Ian Barbour warns, "calculation and control exclude grace and surrender; only in humility are reverence and awe known."[30] In such a technological, hyperreal world, my capacity for grace is diminished; I can

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[29] Ibid., 95.

[30] Ian Barbour, *Science and Secularity: The Ethics of Technology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 68-9.

no longer be "surprised by joy." To sum up, as Max Frisch once remarked, "[t]echnology is the knack of so arranging the world that we do not experience it."[31]

This technological critique may be compelling but where does it leave us? It is quite romantic to evoke images of home-cooked meals, families gathered around the hearth listening to the story-telling of the elders, and long, leisurely runs in picturesque canyons. Yet for many modern families, particularly single-parent or two-income families just struggling to keep the family ship afloat, Borgmann's evocation may seem an unaffordable luxury. Many families are so overwhelmed by the daunting task of getting everyone fed, clothed and off to school on time that they have little opportunity to schedule in a weekly trip with the kids to the farmers' market to hand pick organically grown produce! Moreover, few people old enough to recall the harsh realities of knuckles rubbed raw washing clothes on a washboard would be willing to dispense with the modern washing machine. However, I believe Borgmann is less romantic than first appears.

The appeal of Borgmann's analysis lies in his refusal to follow in the steps of scholars like Ellul,[32] Ivan Illich,[33] E.F. Schumacher,[34] and to some extent, Neil Postman,[35] all of whom tend to view technology as the enemy and some of whom call for its radical repudiation. It is futile to try and completely dismantle the technological paradigm, he admits. Rather, what we

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[31] Quoted in Neil Postman, "Science and the Story that We Need," *First Things* 69 (January,, 1997): 31.

[32] Ellul, *The Technological Society*; idem, *The Technological System* (New York: Continuum, 1980); idem, *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

[33] Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

[34] E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

[35] Neil Postman, *Technopoly*; idem, *Conscientious Objections: Stirring Up Trouble About Language, Technology, and Education* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988); idem, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking, 1985)..

must seek is a realistic and measured reform of the paradigm. What is required is conscious reflection on one's life in which life-giving focal practices are identified and cultivated. The conscious preservation of focal practices will help restrain the device paradigm, keeping the employment of devices within their proper sphere; namely, the service of the focal practices that bring meaning and grace to our lives.[36] What we have lost, it appears is our capacity to differentiate between the central life practices which we wish to preserve because they bring meaning and grace (what Borgmann calls "eloquent" or "focal" reality), and those spheres of life for which efficiency and cost-benefit analysis ought to properly reign. If the use of a home computer for on-line banking, paying bills, family budgeting, trip-planning and pedestrian business transactions via e-mail frees me to engage in a weekend fishing trip with my children, or simply more time on my front porch socializing with neighbors or passers by (if I should be so fortunate to live in a house that still has a front porch!) the computer-as-device is being employed in service of focal practice. When, on the other hand, the computer opens out into a world of games and seductive entertainment, becoming in fact the principal means of family entertainment, and chatrooms the principal forum for human interaction, the device has inappropriately supplanted opportunities for vital human engagement. Similarly, while the re-creation of a scene from *Babette's Feast* at every family meal is unrealistic, it *is* possible for families to mark out regular meals which come to be out of shared family tasks and responsibilities that can sustain extended, intentional family interaction.

By focusing on the way in which technology shapes our experience of daily living Borgmann offers the kind of critique which has been too little explored in church preaching and pastoral ministry. If the church is to engage in an effective evangelization of culture and preach

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[36] Borgmann, *Technology,* 220.

a message which has some purchase on modern life, it must become more aware of the shape of daily life in a technological age.   For it is in the midst of the often frenetic rhythms of daily life that we most need to hear God's saving word.   If that word ceases to speak to the experience of daily life, while it may offer some exotic or esoteric appeal, it will not lay claim to precisely the areas of life that most demand conversion.   I do believe an effective evangelization of the technological culture in which we live is possible because the church itself possesses a set of focal practices which are capable of challenging the dominant patterns of technological living. Pre-eminent among these focal practices is the celebration of the liturgy.

II.   Christian Liturgy

As Nathan Mitchell once observed in an essay written a number of years ago, "At its deepest root, Christian liturgy is *parable*—a provocative assault on our customary way of viewing life, world, and others."[37]   The liturgy, when faithfully enacted, calls for the recovery of   a way of living, an attentiveness to the unpredictable eruptions of grace and blessing   which are eclipsed and defaced by sin—from a Christian perspective, it is the faithful celebration of the liturgy that opens us up to the possibility of   what Borgmann calls "eloquent reality."   At the same time, there is a real risk that the church's focal practices, including its liturgical life, may

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[37]   Nathan Mitchell, "The Sense of the Sacred," in *Parish: A Place for Worship,*   edited by Mark Searle (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981), 80.

themselves be "colonized" by the influence of the device paradigm and the version of

hyperreality which it encourages.[38]

A. "Holy Things" Engendering   Christian Focal Practices

Borgmann's treatment of focal things and practices, sketched out above, is highly

suggestive for an understanding of Christian liturgy.   In the liturgical life of the church there are

"holy things" which are essential.   As Gordon Lathrop has demonstrated so eloquently, the

liturgy is very much concerned with the juxtaposition of these "holy things" into "networks of

meaning."

> The primary theology of the liturgy...begins with things, with people gathered
> around certain central things, and these things, by their juxtapositions, speaking
> truly of God and suggesting a meaning for all things.[39]

These "holy things" are not merely objects for adoration, they are also "objects put to use."   The

holy things of the liturgy in turn engender ritual practices.   This interconnection of   focal things

and practices may offer an opening for a new interpretation of the text from Vatican II's

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy which holds that "the faithful should be led to take that full,

conscious, and active part in liturgical celebrations *which is demanded by the very nature of the*

liturgy…(#14)."   The council suggests, in this quite remarkable passage, that participation by

the assembly in the liturgy is not an aesthetic nicety but rather is essential to the doing of the rite

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[38]   I am borrowing this idea of colonization from Jürgen Habermas who wrote of   the "colonization of life-worlds" by instrumental rationality. For a developed articulation of Habermas's approach to technology and modern society see his *The Theory of Communicative Action*   (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).   For a consideration of   certain negative cultural dynamics which have affected the celebration of the liturgy in North American culture see M. Francis   Mannion, "Liturgy and the Present Crisis of Culture," in *Liturgy and Spirituality in Context: Perspectives on Prayer and Culture,*   edited by Eleanor Bernstein (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 1-26.

[39]   Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*   (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 90.

itself. Holy things demand human engagement; they must be "put to use." The power and meaning of these "things" is inseparable from the ritual practices they demand.

As focal practice, liturgical rituals demand "manifold engagement": in liturgy we are drawn into a richly variegated encounter with the worship environment (the actual shape or architecture, sights and sounds of the worship space), the presence of the assembly, our own bodiliness in the form of ritual postures and gestures (standing or kneeling, sign of the cross, kiss of peace), and the sacred symbols at the heart of the ritual action (water, oil, bread, wine). Liturgical ritual, like other focal practices, demands significant preparation and the transmission of a discrete set of skills for those who would exercise the various forms of liturgical ministry. While the commodities or goods procured through focal practices are inseparable from the practices themselves, so too we hold that the grace of sacramental action cannot be reduced to some supernatural "stuff" isolated from the ritual action of ministers and community.

Finally, liturgical ritual, like other focal practices, involves a special relationship to time. The liturgy invites participation in the paschal mystery, an immersion into the pattern of life-death-life disclosed by Jesus as the essential shape of the life of communion with God and one another.[40] It is not concerned with the mastery of time but rather with allowing the participant to be immersed in time under the pedagogy of the Spirit in which God's rhythms become one's own. This pedagogy is disclosed not only in the celebration of each eucharist

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[40] See Irmgard Pahl, "The Paschal Mystery in its Central Meaning for the Shape of Christian Liturgy," *Studia Liturgica* 26 (1996): 16-38.

itself, but in the liturgy of the hours and the pattern of the whole liturgical calendar. In the celebration of the liturgy and the liturgical year time itself is transformed.[41]

To conclude, as a constellation of holy (focal) things and ritual (focal) practices, the liturgy has the power to subvert the device paradigm. It *does* call attention to itself, it *does* create "burdens", it *does* call for manifold engagement, it *does* demand a set of skills and disciplines. As Aidan Kavanagh provocatively puts it, "liturgy is not fundamentally prayer but rite."[42] What he meant, I believe, is that liturgy is a complex system of ritual and symbol intended to sustain a "whole style of Christian life." The liturgy is concerned with the sustenance of a particular *ethos* or sensibility. This is the primary sense of Vatican II's claim in the liturgy constitution that the liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows (#10)."

B. Conclusion: The Danger of Colonization

If the liturgy is for the Christian community its paradigmatic focal practice,[43] then the general threat to contemporary society occasioned by the systematic substitution of the device for the focal "thing" and the consequent conquest of time itself stands likewise as a threat to the liturgical life of the church. Liturgy too can fall prey to the device and the temptations of hyperreality.

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[41] For a wonderful reflection on the liturgical transformation of time see Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World* (revised edition, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 48ff.

[42] Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 44.

[43] This of course does not mean that it is the *only* Christian focal practice. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, the focal character of the liturgy must open out into a new "mystagogy" and a new "asceticism" of ordinary life in which the Christian is able to discover the graced, paschal dimensions of daily life. Cf. Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Divine in Daily Life," *America* 175 (December 7, 1996): 7-12.

As but one example, let us consider the confusion engendered by the present pastoral necessity of Sunday communion services in the absence of a priest. Many priests and liturgists report that significant numbers of the faithful fail to grasp the differences between a communion service and the celebration of the mass. What is of preeminent importance for many is not the actual communal performance of the eucharistic action under the presidency of a priest but rather the reception of communion. We must consider the possibility that the failure to recognize the difference reflects the colonization of liturgical sensibilities by the device paradigm. It would appear that for many Catholics, eucharist has become a simple matter of the consumption of a sacramental "commodity" which is readily available (in the tabernacle, for example) without the "burdens" of a eucharistic action which demands the full participation (manifold engagement) of the whole people of God. It may even be tempting to view the growth of communion services as the logical next step following the multiplication of the number of Sunday masses offered at a given parish, the widespread (miss?)use of vigil masses, and the careful marketing of the liturgy to various segments of the population (e.g., youth masses, children's masses, young adult masses).[44] All of these pastoral developments seek to make the grace of the sacrament ever more conveniently accessible to the believer with a minimum of disruption in the rhythms of daily life. If there is a football game on at noon this Sunday, I simply choose to attend the Saturday evening vigil mass in order to minimize the disruption of my daily life by the burdens of liturgical obligation.

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[44] The salient characteristics of this liturgical tendency are disclosed in a more dramatic form in the rise in some Protestant churches of "seeker services" in which liturgical worship, the "summit and font" of Christian life, is transformed into a quasi-marketing tool for evangelical outreach to the newest generation of spiritual "seekers." For an analysis of the "seeker service" phenomenon and the related "church growth" movement see, Frank C. Senn, "'Worship Alive': An Analysis and Critique of 'Alternative Worship Services'," *Worship* 69 (May, 1995): 194-224; Lester Ruth, "*Lex Agendi, Lex Orandi*:

The possible influence of the device paradigm on sacramental practice suggests a certain irony.   One of the principal features of the ecclesial renewal brought about by Vatican II was the movement away from a sacramental theology largely indebted to Baroque Catholicism.[45]   That theology often presumed a notion of grace as the "thingification" of God's presence, now located in sacred objects and made present through the mechanical performance of sacramental rituals which radically separated active sacramental ministers and passive sacramental recipients. Many of the most avid proponents of the ecclesial renewal encouraged at the council are now disappointed that this theology still remains in certain spheres of church life.   Perhaps it is because they have underestimated the congeniality of this desiccated theology to modern technological society's tendency to turn human goods into commodities made ready at hand and divorced from meaningful human contexts.   The failure of post-conciliar sacramental theology to take hold in some corners of the church may not be a mark of bad theology, tepid liturgies or poor catechesis but a sign of the real difficulties the church faces in evangelizing western culture at its root, namely the daily pattern of modern existence profoundly shaped by the technological paradigm.

In this essay I have sketched out the critique of technology offered by Albert Borgmann as a helpful tool for analyzing the interplay of liturgy and contemporary culture. To the extent that the device paradigm does in fact dominate modern first world culture, it is bound to have an impact on the modern experience of liturgy in the church.   The ongoing   task of evangelization

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Toward an Understanding of Seeker Services as a New Kind of Liturgy," *Worship* 71 (September, 1996): 386-405.

which must take place within the church itself as well as in its engagement with modern culture, will be effective only to the extent that it attends to the technological shape of daily human life.

I would like to conclude with a quotation from an early essay by Karl Rahner in which he reflected on the practice of televising masses.   Rahner was opposed to this practice, and while certain aspects of his argument might appear quaint today, in other respects, he anticipated our contemporary situation and offered a vision of the church as a blessed haven from the "flatness" of modern technological existence.

> Once television becomes part of the ordinary person's ordinary furniture, once he is accustomed to looking at anything and everything between heaven and earth that strikes the eye of an indiscriminately curious camera, then it is going to become an extraordinarily exciting thing, for the ordinary man [sic] of the twenty-first century, that there do still exist things which cannot be looked at sitting in an armchair and nibbling a sandwich.   It is going to be an indescribable blessing to this man of the coming centuries, if there is still a place--the church, in fact--where he can still retain his full natural human size;   where he does not have to look at himself and his body as something archaic, a mere leftover in a world of machines with which he surrounds himself and almost tries to replace himself;   where he still has a place that will continue always to heal him of his own insignificance in the midst of technology--which is indeed his task and his destiny, but can avoid being his ruin only to the degree to which he manages to retain in his life a space too, as of old, for what is merely human, what is on a small scale, what is directed bodily.   There are many matters in which the Church could well be more modern than she is.   But the time is beginning already in

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45 Cf. Thomas F. O'Meara, "Leaving the Baroque: The Fallacy of Restoration in the Postconciliar Era," *America* 174 (February 3, 1996):   10-14, 25-8.

which having the courage to be old and human is going to be the most modern thing of all. [46]

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[46] Karl Rahner, "The Mass and Television," in *The Christian Commitment: Essays in Pastoral Theology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 217.