

Perspectives

Internet philosophy: a new virtual Zen world?



Matthew Rossi
columnist

told her that it simply ceases to exist. The question was an incredibly naive one, and my answer seemed to be the only one possible. But, the more I thought of it, the more I realized it wasn't such a simple question as it seemed, because the most obvious answer to it simply wasn't adequate to describe what happened. To say a file ceases to exist implies that it existed in the first place.

Which raises the question, "where was the file in the first place?" Was it sitting on the hard drive as a series of polarized ions? In a way, but the polarized ions are nothing that resemble what I call a file. The polarized ions are in what a Buddhist would call a state of *mu*. They aren't a file and, yet, they are a file because they have the potential to become a file. In a sense, the file doesn't exist, because I cannot say where it is. Yet, it does exist, because I can interact with the file and tell it to do things to my computer. I can use it (much like I'm doing now) to create words, modify

sounds and even talk to people miles and miles away. The virtual world of computers is an exceptionally Zen one, full of questions unanswerable.

Where does a file go when you delete it? It goes nowhere because it never was anywhere to begin with. It achieves a state of *Zen*.

Furthermore, technological bursts are helping us to understand the world around us, our universe, in incredible detail. No more than 50 years ago, it was verifiably impossible to think of a human being walking on another planet. Now we have not only envisioned it, but are working toward a realistic plan by which we can achieve this goal. And the whole reason we can do this is because our technology has advanced enough in these 50 years. Similarly, we can now send probes out to other planets in our solar system, and use those probes to study the way our neighbors are made. We have sent messages into the universe aboard small spacecraft and we have launched signals

out beyond the barrier of our sun, seeking other intelligent civilizations. Through our advances in technology, we are narrowing the gap of alienation. We are learning about how our system is like others, and how we are different. Through our advances, we're learning who we are, and who everyone else is.

When I started writing this series of columns, I initially said they were going to be a manifesto of sorts, and I think they have been. They are a manifesto of self-awareness. All of my columns (except my last one, which was done at the behest of a good friend) have been about the way in which we can use our minds to help or hurt ourselves.

I finished my first column saying that it is time we stop blundering ahead with our research and started seeking a way to make our lives better, not just more convenient. When I wrote about television, I made the point that if people demanded higher quality TV, the networks would be forced to respond. The work is ours. It is time we took an active part in the creation of its future.

The point of all of my columns, including this last one, is that we are not passive observers in our world, but active participants of it. If we sit around and complain about how bad things are, then they will be bad and continue to get worse. But if we instead decide to take control of it, the world will become what we want it to be. If you sit idly by and let the world of technology simply be what it is — digits, numbers, metal, circuits — then that's all it will be.

So dig deeper. You can choose to see that we are able to open our minds, to use the machines of our world to utilize more of our potential than ever before. Your computer could be a two thousand dollar solitary game, or it can be a tool through which you use the world in a way that you have never thought of seeing it. Thus ends my manifesto. Thus ends my four-month discourse on life in the confusion of a modern age.

The work is ours. It is time we took an active part in the creation of its future.

When I started out this series of columns, I wrote about something felt was important to mention. I had you about a computer scientist who had designs to implant a chip into himself and link himself to a computer. You may remember (or not — you know, whichever) that I was distinctly opposed to the idea, because the very notion of implanting a chip into a human and linking the human's mind to a computer was an inherently evil one. I'm summarizing, of course. I had much more rational reasons which

took me a whole column to express, so I won't go into them here. Just know that I wasn't for the idea of human chip implants.

But, you see, I'm no Luddite. I'm actually very fond of technology, of computers, electric lights, digital cameras and the like. In many ways, I think the technological age is a blessing. Technology can be used to explore all sorts of different venues, from information to philosophy. Yes, philosophy.

A friend once asked me what happens to a file when it's deleted. I

Letters to the Editor

Athlete appreciation

Dear Editor,
My first two years of college I was a student athlete here, and the last two I was just a student. In response to the numerous letters written about the UNCA athletic department, I would like to comment on my day. I want to say thanks.

Thanks to the Athletic Department administration (especially Mike Gote) and to the coaches, who give up days, weekends and evenings to encourage, inspire and push the limits of our current athletes as well as to attract prospective ones.

Thanks to the faculty who support UNCA athletics. Thanks to all the student-athletes who have had the pleasure of competing with and watching on the sidelines. Thanks for pounding volleyball until your hands hurt, smashing hundreds of tennis balls, connecting soccer drills until you're dizzy, shooting jump shots with strained fingers and ace-banded

Considering the roundabout

Dear Editor,
My sincerest congratulations to Candice Carr. I am so glad we have an environmental voice writing for *The Banner*. Her columns have always been right on.

This proposed roundabout is a ridiculous waste of tax money, and, more importantly, will destroy already dwindling green areas on our campus.

I never responded to the *Citizen-Times* article, where Tom Byers said, and I paraphrase, that we need a roundabout and new entrance so folks know when they've arrived.

If folks do not know when they've arrived at UNCA, they'll never know.

I'm sure every member of the campus community can think of at least one area within our university where this kind of money could be better spent. Scholarships, new student housing, new classrooms,

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child care, better pay for staff, renovated buildings, safer buildings, bike paths and shuttle service are a few places I would prefer this four-and-a-half million dollars be spent.

Well, the DOT is paying for this entrance — the faceless "they" rejoins. Yes, yes, the DOT.

With their excellent civil engineering skills, they may construct to that adjoining the Asheville Mall, or a potential deathtrap like the one where Interstate 240 combines with N.C. Highway 19-23, or that killer of mountain communities, the I-26 connector from Tennessee.

The first-most people heard of this entrance folly was the *Citizen-Times* article. I was never aware of a two year comment period. But now that it is out in the open, I hope that Carr and Active Students for a Healthy Environment help stop this latest proposed blunder from falling our campus.

Jay S. Gertz
Ramsey Library technical assistant

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