In the Age of Explorations

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Fear and Trembling: The Humanist Approaches the Computer

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In whatsoever way any come to Me, In that same way I grant them favor.
—Bhagavad Gita

This article is a plea for power—for a decision by humanists to use to our own best interests the technological advances of our day. Unfortunately, too often does the lack of “willingness to be cause” appear in the letters and articles we humanists write each other. Take, for example, the letter written by the chairman of the computer science department of a major university. In the letter, he expresses his concern about the future of the humanities in the face of the increasing influence of computers and television. He makes a case for the humanities by arguing that they are essential for the cultivation of critical thinking and creativity. However, his argument is weakened by his emphasis on the negative aspects of technology, such as the increased reliance on computers and television. Instead, he might have focused on the ways in which technology can be used to enhance humanistic endeavors. On the other hand, the writer of this letter unfairly lumps computers and television together in their production of passive citizens and students. On the contrary, the hallmark of interactive computing is the response—both intellectual and muscular—of the student to the computer’s words and the surrounding environment.

Figure 1. College Composition and Communication, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Oct., 1975), pp. 269-273 [in JSTOR]
FIGURE 2.
FIGURE 3.
Frederic Edwin Church, Moses Viewing the Promised Land (1846)
The animal kingdom, from Carl von Linné, *Systema naturae* (1735)

**Figure 4.** The animal kingdom, from Carl von Linné, *Systema naturae* (1735)
FIGURE 5. Bowden, B. V., ed. Faster than thought (1953)
FIGURE 6. Typical JSTOR result, a “dumb” search for emergent
FIGURE 7. Smith, Merrit Roe and Leo Marx, eds., Does Technology Drive History? (1994)