LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

The meaning of the term *technology* has changed over time. At one point in human history, fire would have been considered a technological breakthrough, not to mention the wheel. More recently, the typewriter, invented in the early 20th century, was considered too technologically advanced to be used by women; as a result, men were given all the new clerical jobs in the growing white collar economy. Many women since may have had occasion to regret the dawning comprehension that women could indeed type. The dramatic technological advance represented in the late 19th century by the telephone has been superceded by the cordless phone, then the cell phone, and now the digital phone, with its multi-task capacity.

After technological advances become commonplace their nature as boons to human productivity, knowledge and happiness becomes axiomatic. Yet the introduction of technological change has usually been met with resistance and sometimes downright terror. As with the Luddites in 19th century England who destroyed labor saving machines they feared would destroy their jobs, most of us can remember some anxiety and distaste at being shown something new that had to be mastered to accomplish more efficiently a task we had become used to doing in a more comfortable way. The computer comes to mind for many of us in the post World War II generation. While outright destruction of these and other technological innovations has been rare, the initial suspicion of new technology as introducing something difficult, unnecessary and suspiciously controlled by the arcane ability of experts seems to be hard wired, if you will, into many of us.

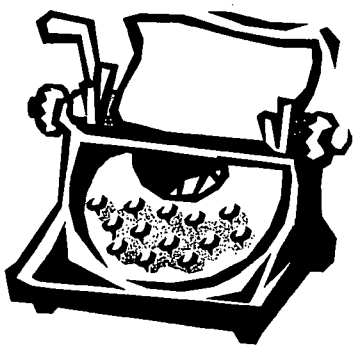
Technological change has clearly multiplied human knowledge and ultimately power (and this is nowhere more evident than in medicine, where technology has defeated previous interrupters of life in both miraculous and cruel ways); yet its welcome is not assured, even in the most technologically sophisticated environments. Resistance to use of technological advances has even been demonstrated by NASA's failure to utilize modern methods of testing the heat resistant panels that failed to protect the Columbia shuttle from the heat of reentry, causing the death of the seven shuttle astronauts. According to the government panel investigating the accident, NASA had relied on visual inspection and physical tapping by hand on the panels before space flights to determine whether these panels were firmly attached to the shuttle, in spite of the availability of lasers and high frequency sound devices to look inside the outer heat shields to inspect for damage.[1]

The suspicion of technology usually rests on the fear of our displacement by experts who will manage the new processes by means inaccessible to the rest of us. This anxiety is underlined by an often unspoken doubt about our ability to master the new lexicon. While technology has brought us ways of living that were previously unimagined, the edge of our

[1]John Schwartz and Matthew Wald, "Investigators Seek Changes Before Next Shuttle Flight," *New York Times*, April 18, 2003, p. A10.

imagination is apparently a frightening place to visit.

Those educators and practitioners in the helping professions who have embraced technology are pioneers not just in their adept use of new methods, but in the energy, self-confidence and optimism required to take the leap implicit in the technological embrace. This issue of Reflections tells the stories of some innovators in social work education and practice who have dwelt at edge of our imaginations and fashioned a safe place for the rest of us there.



Editor's Note

In the Winter 2003 issue ***Reflections*** published an interview with Brandeis professor David Gil. Many readers have written in inquire about his work. Gil, a professor at the Florence Heller School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, has published extensively during his academic career. His most notable works include:

Violence Against Children: Physical Child Abuse in the United States. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970

The Challenge of Social Equality: Essays on Social Policy, Social Development and Political Practice: Cambridge: MA: Schenkman, 1976

Beyond the Jungle: Essays on Human Possibilities, Social Alternatives and Radical Practice. Cambridge: MA: Schenkman and Boston, MA: GK. Hall, 1979;

Toward Social and Economic Justice, co-edited with Eva Gil. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1985.

The Future of Work, co-edited with Eva Gil. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1987

Unravelling Social Policy: Theory, Analysis and Political Action towards Social Equality. 5th rev. ed. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, 1992

Confronting Injustice and Oppression: Concepts and Strategies for Social Workers. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.