THE CRISIS OF THE SELF IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION
RAYMOND BARGLOW, 1994

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The Crisis of the Self in the Age of Information takes a psychoanalysis approach to uncover the concept of the self in crisis in post industrial societies. Barglow attempts to extend his imagery to that of information processing systems, dreams, and artistic representations, in order for the reader to visualize what he means by "crisis" of the self. Post industrial societies call for individuals to be autonomous, self-initiating, and self-determining agents, which have sufficed in the world of mechanics according to Barglow. He asserts that in the Age of Information individuals are reverting back to finding their 'self', which has been lost due to information processing systems and technology. He argues that "there is more obsessive, even desperate, quality about the search for the self" (11). Mechanical objects, such as automobiles, are of the external world, where individuals try to master and control its devices. Technologies and especially information processing systems, replace the self as subjective and functions as internal objects in our unconscious (6). The boundaries between the subject and object have now become blurred with the innovation of new technologies.

The book is divided into three parts: The Crisis of the Self; Technological Objects and Divided Subjects; Internal Colonization and Response. The first part, 'The Crisis of the Self', deals with the interpretation of dreams whereby his subjects are individuals employed as system analysts or programmers. Barglow's interpretation of contemporary dreams does not situate itself to that of Freudian interpretations, which is usually associated with sexual conquest, or oedipal symbolism. The analysis of the contemporary dreams, however, associates the individual with a feeling of detachment, isolation, and most importantly a loss of their own subjectivity. It is this dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity that places itself within the "crisis" of the self.

The second part, 'Technological Objects and Divided Subjects', sets forth five major premises as seen in Western individualists traditions: boundary, centered subjectivity, ethics, recognition, and identification.

Again, he reiterates the distinctions between the object and subject, inside and outside, are all but diminishing. The boundaries set between the subject and object have all but blurred. The gap between human beings grows, "but the distance between the thinker and the thinking instrument diminishes" (71-72).

The third part, 'Internal Colonization and Response', focuses on the dangers of technological innovation. He seems to imply that information processing systems and new technologies have replaced the notion of the self as subjective to that of being detached and isolated. But it is not technology's nature alone that creates this polarization, nor its nature to impose on the values of human beings. Human beings all have a unique world view or reality that is socially and historically constructed. It is the invention of and deployment of technology that when brought into a larger social context that can bring about danger, or perhaps just the opposite.

Historically, philosophers of ages and natural scientists alike have organized human beings hierarchically, progress being the means to an end. Hierarchy allows social systems and information processing systems to function more efficiently (170). However, computer modules may require hierarchical processes to function efficiently, human beings, on the other hand, should never be equated to the likes of computer modules. Exploitation and domination of technology and the deployment of technology become the real issue. Technology and information processing systems in the larger social context have replaced workers, or they have exploited people in various ways. Social movements continue to address how we exploit our environment, laborers, minorities, children, and women, by becoming detached from our external world, whether emotionally or physically. Barglow offers that democracy can work to alleviate existing powers that continue to exploit and dominate the working class (182-188).

The problem lies with the polarization between the object and subject. The author offers some solutions, with regards that polarization between the two will stay intact, where technologies and information processing systems can benefit both traditional and innovated mechanisms. For example, Tibetan religious traditions can be preserved, while at the same time it can be shared throughout the world. However, there is also another perspective that must be addressed, and that is the idea of Tibetan religious traditions becoming exploited through the use of information processing systems. The author insinuates that information processing systems and technology will ultimately destroy traditional concepts of the self, but there need be a balance, or communication linking the subject and object.

Barglow's emphasis on the conflict between the subject and object caused by technological innovation and information processing systems is a common concern among a diverse set of people. I believe that the latter half of the book has much more to offer to students in anthropology. He does, however, provide for an interesting read, especially through the use of visual presentations, such as advertisements and art to state his case.

REFERENCES

Barglow, Raymond
1994   The Crisis of the Self in the Age of Information: Computers, Dolphins, and Dreams. Routledge: London and New York.