## Chapter III

# Feelings, Values, Ethics, and Skills

## Introduction

We began this book by acknowledging that the mere word "technology" provokes strong emotions or feelings from the heart. Advertisers play on these emotions by using technology and language to incite interest and action. For some people, design, skills, tools, and machines produce fear and feelings of insecurity. Others feel power and security. Some feel excitement and some dread and stress. Very few of us are unmoved by technology. While skills and technology generate strong reactions within us, we are *not* passively moved; technology does not merely act on us. We actively participate; we actively control, manipulate, resist, or negotiate technology. We bring our attitudes, fears, hopes, and values to bear on our skills and technologies. Our values are always present in our actions. We assert some and suppress other values when we act. We may value what technology can do for us or what we can do with our technologies. We may value what technology cannot do for us. The purpose of this chapter is to contradict the distinctions that we commonly draw among emotions, skills, and technologies. On one hand, technology provokes strong emotions and visceral responses. On the other hand, many technologists are committed to removing emotion, the most misunderstood of "human factors," from their work and technology.

As teachers, we are challenged to recognize the feelings and values that our students bring to technology studies and particular technologies. Our task is to validate, direct, and transform the emotion in our students' experiences. Ultimately, we want our students to feel empowered by skills. However, this does *not* mean that we or our students need to feel good or positive about all technologies or technology. Neither our students nor we need to celebrate or denigrate all technologies. Nor can we feign neutrality or encourage neutrality. Perhaps the last thing we want to do is inspire nihilism, or the feeling that life and values are pointless in a technological world. This can easily be the result, when we often insist that technology is accelerating and determining our destiny. We need to work with our students to pick and choose those types of technologies that they and we ought to favor and those that we ought to disregard. We ought to be able to work with hope and despair. This chapter provides a language and various techniques for making these choices. If in the previous chapter, we dealt with issues of the head, in this chapter we deal with the heart, hand, and feet. If we dealt with cognitive pluralism, we will now deal with emotional and kinesthetic pluralism.

# Technology and Emotions

Except for the technologies of advertising (images, sounds, etc.), most people argue that technology is devoid of feelings, emotions and values. Technology for most people is cold and incapable of the types of intimacy found in everyday human life. Some people tend to feel that technology is neutral and any emotions associated with particular technologies are dependent on the way they are used. Others feel that technology is inherently good or inherently bad, and trust or distrust particular technologies. Some of these people concede that certain technologies have emotions, such as anger or pleasure that are embedded in the technology itself. They acknowledge that some technologies are quite durable and impervious to uses other than which they are designed. The technologies retain the imprint of the early intentions of their designers. The initial fixing of technologies is a powerful determinant of their uses over time, similar to the initial defining of concepts and phrases. Other people who concede that technology has emotions or values admit that some technologies are quite pliable. These people suggest that technologies readily respond to various uses. So we arrive at a crucial question. Is it technologies or people that emote? Or is it both? We can also ask: If technology is so cold and devoid of emotion and values, then how can it generate such strong feelings and visceral responses?

"Watch yourself," my father would say, "that's a mean drill." It was a serious Milwaukee reciprocating drill and had caution and danger written all over it. My father warned me, nearly every time I used it, that the drill could break bones or crack teeth if I was not careful with it. Cased in an aluminum and steel housing, painted red

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