From: jeevacation@gmail.com
Subject: At the moment, the best way to
Date: Wed, 07 Aug 2013 03:25:11 +0000
Inline-Images: booknoise_stories.gif

At the moment, the best way to communicate with another person on the information highway is to exchange electronic mail: to write a message on a computer and send it through the telephone lines into someone else's computer. In the future, people will send each other sound and pictures as well as text, and do it in real time, and improved technology will make it possible to have rich, human electronic exchanges, but at present E-mail is the closest thing we have to that. Even now, E-mail allows you to meet and communicate with people in a way that would be impossible on the phone, through the regular mail, or face to face, as I discovered while I was working on this story. Sitting at my computer one day, I realized that I could try to communicate with Bill Gates, the chairman and co-founder of the software giant Microsoft, on the information highway. At least, I could send E-mail to his electronic address, which is widely available, not tell anyone at Microsoft I was doing it, and see what happened. I wrote:

> Dear Bill,
>
> I am the guy who is writing the article about you for *The New Yorker*. It occurs to me that we ought to be able to do some of the work through e-mail. Which raises this fascinating question--What kind of understanding of another person can e-mail give you? . . .
>
> You could begin by telling me what you think is unique about e-mail as a form of communication.
>
> John

I hit "return," and the computer said, "mail sent." I walked out to the kitchen to get a drink of water and played with the cat for a while, then came back and sat at my computer. Thinking that I was probably wasting money, I nevertheless logged on again and entered my password.

"You have mail," the computer said.

I typed "get mail," and the computer got the following:

> From: Bill Gates Ok, let me know if you get this email.

According to my computer, eighteen minutes had passed between the time I E-mailed Bill and he E-mailed me back. His message said:

> E-mail is a unique communication vehicle for a lot of reasons. However email is not a substitute for direct interaction. . . .
>
> There are people who I have corresponded with on email for months before actually meeting them--people at work and otherwise. If someone isn't saying something of interest its easier to not respond to their mail than it is not to answer the phone. In fact I give out my home phone number to almost no one but my email address is known very broadly. I am the only person who reads my email so no one has to worry about embarrassing themselves or going around people when they send a message. Our email is completely secure. . . .
>
> Email helps out with other types of communication. It allows you to exchange a lot of information in advance of a meeting and make the meeting far far more valuable. . .
>
> Email is not a good way to get mad at someone since you can't interact. You can send friendly messages very easily since those are harder to misinterpret.

We began to E-mail each other three or four times a week. I would have a question about something and say to myself, "I'm going to E-mail Bill about that," and I'd write him a message and get a one- or two-page message back within twenty-four hours, sometimes much sooner. At the beginning of our electronic relationship, I would wake up in the middle of the night and lie in bed wondering if I had E-mail from Bill. Generally, he seemed to write messages at night, sleep (maybe), then send them the next morning. We were intimate in a curious way, in the sense of being wired into each other's minds, but our contact was elaborately stylized, like ballroom dancing.

In some ways, my E-mail relationship with Bill was like an ongoing, monthlong conversation, except that there was a pause after each response to think; it was like football players huddling up after each play. There was no beginning or end to Gates' messages--no time wasted on stuff like "Dear" and "Yours"--and I quickly corrected this etiquette breach in my own messages. Nor were there any fifth-grade-composition-book standards like "It may have come to your attention that" and "Looking forward to hearing from you." Social niceties are not what Bill Gates is about. Good spelling is not what Bill Gates is about, either. He never signed his messages to me, but sometimes he put an "&" at the end, which, I learned, means "Write back" in E-mail language. After a while, he stopped putting the "&," but I wrote back anyway. He never addressed me by name. Instead of a letterhead, there was this:

> Sender: ████████████ Received: from ████████████ by dub-img-
> ████████ (5.67/5.930129sam) id AA03768; Wed, 6 Oct 93 14:00:51
> -0400 Received: by ████████████ (5.65/25-eef) id AA27745; Fri, 8 Oct
> 93 10:56:01 -0700 Message-Id: <9310081756.AA27745@
> ████████████ > X-Msmail-Message-Id: 15305A55 X-Msmail-
> Conversation-Id: 15305A55 From: Bill Gates To:
> ████████████

> For years after the telephone was invented, in 1876, people thought it was a device
> that would transmit news, drama, and music: the idea that the telephone was a way
> to talk to other people took about twenty years to sink in here, and about thirty
> years in Europe. Similarly, today one hears about shopping, banking, and renting
> movies on the information highway. These are all possible ways of making money,
> of course, but the point of the information highway, it seems to me, is that it offers
> a new way of talking to other people. The trouble people have understanding this
> simple point is the same trouble people in the nineteenth century had
> understanding the telephone.

Bill Gates, aged thirty-eight, is one of the richest men in the country--the richest in 1992, and the second richest, after the investor Warren Buffett, in 1993, with a fortune of six billion one hundred and sixty million dollars, according to Forbes. Last March, when he announced his engagement to Melinda French, a twenty-nine-year-old manager at Microsoft, the news made the front page of the Wall Street Journal. Gates controls the computer industry to an extent matched by no other person in any other major industry. The Justice Department is currently trying to determine whether his control constitutes a monopoly.

Microsoft now supplies eighty per cent of all the personal-computer operating-system software in the world--that is, the layer of software that translates your commands so that the computer can act on them--and fifty per cent of all the application software, which is the tools, like Microsoft Word (writing) and Excel (accounting), that run on top of the operating system. Microsoft uses its leverage in the operating-system market as a competitive advantage in the applications market--a practice that is not nice but is not necessarily illegal. "You could say, as I have said to Bill, that having achieved this much power you should turn your attention to being magnanimous," a rival software executive told me. "But Bill believes that now is not the time for statesmanship. Now is the time to conquer new foes, plunder new lands. He doesn't like being compared to John D. Rockefeller--he goes, 'Hey, I'm not a grasping monopolist, am I?'--but he doesn't know how to behave any other way. To hold war councils and to design strategies with the explicit aim of crushing an opponent--this is very American. You know, Mother Teresa is not going to build the broadband network of the future."

Recently, the wife of a software developer was listening to her husband describe for me what it was like to be in the same industry as Bill Gates: he was saying, in a pained but stoical way, that maybe Gates didn't have to be quite so competitive now that he had achieved great power, and that it might be better for the computer industry as a whole if he behaved in a more benevolent way, when his wife interrupted and said to me, "No. You don't understand. We talk about Bill Gates every night at home. We think about Bill Gates all the time. It's like Bill Gates lives with us." This enveloping sense of Bill Gates is hard for someone outside the computer industry to fathom. To people who are unfamiliar with computers, Gates is just a nerd, and if you try to get them to square the negative connotation of the word "nerd" with Gates' incredible success, and with the fact that, far from being on the margin of society, Gates is now in a position to determine what society is like, they're likely to say, "Well, I guess it really is the revenge of the nerds." Actually, Gates probably represents the end of word "nerd" as we know it.

But all Gates' influence and success are small potatoes compared with the influence he could have and with the opportunity that now lies before him. The computer, which in twenty-five years has evolved from a room-size mainframe into a laptop device, appears to be turning into a new kind of machine. The new machine will be a communications device that connects people to the information highway. It will penetrate far beyond the fifteen per cent of American households that now own a computer, and it will control, or absorb, other communications machines now in people's homes--the phone, the fax, the television. It will sit in the living room, not in the study. The problem of getting people to feel comfortable with such a powerful machine will be partly solved by putting it inside one of the most unobtrusive objects in the house--the set-top converter, which is the featureless black box on top of a cable-connected TV set (the one the cat likes to sit on if the VCR is occupied).

Gates would like to have his software inside that box. Microsoft's ambition is to supply the standard operating-system software for the information-highway machine, just as it now supplies the standard operating-system software, called Windows, for the personal computer. Microsoft has two billion dollars in cash, and no debt, and is spending a hundred million dollars a year developing software for the new machine, which is a lot more than anyone else is spending. The plan is first to supply the software that allows people to rent videos over the TV and makes home shopping more attractive, and then to use money from the video-rental and home-shopping businesses to pay for the development of the rest of the software. Therefore, Gates is now meeting with people like Mike Ovitz and Barry Diller to discuss better ways of delivering their products into people's homes. "I actually requested a meeting with him," Ovitz told me last October. "I flew up to Seattle and we had dinner together and spent three or four hours just talking about the future."

"Could you say specifically what you talked about?"

"It was just very deep stuff about the future."

"Well, for example, did you talk about information-highway software?"

"It goes much deeper than that."

At Microsoft's main office, in Redmond, a suburb of Seattle, I saw a demo of an early version of the company's operating software for the information-highway machine, in which the user points at the TV screen with a remote control, clicks onto icons, and selects from menus. I heard a lot about "intelligent agents," which will at first be animated characters that occasionally appear in the corner of your TV screen and inform you, for example, that President Aristide is on "Meet the Press," because they know you're interested in Haitian politics, but will eventually be out there on the information highway, filtering the torrent of information roaring along it, picking out books or articles or movies for you, or receiving messages from individuals. As the agents become steadily more intelligent, they will begin to replace more and more of the functions of human intelligent agents--stockbrokers, postal workers, travel agents, librarians, editors, reporters. While I was at Microsoft, I sometimes felt like prey.

Gates' greatest disadvantage in this new market is that Microsoft doesn't own any wires into people's homes, nor does it have the computers installed to handle all the switching

and billing that two-way communication requires. To solve this problem, Microsoft needs to make an alliance with a cable company or a telephone company, or both. Microsoft has an alliance with Intel Corporation, the world's leading manufacturer of microprocessors, and General Instrument, a maker of set-top converters, but it is not a very powerful alliance compared with Bell Atlantic's alliance with Tele-Communications, Inc., the largest cable company in the United States, or with U S West's alliance with Time Warner, the second-largest cable company. Gates is currently negotiating an alliance involving Time Warner and Tele-Communications, Inc.--a kind of granddaddy of all alliances, which would have the power to set the standard for the information--highway machine. A major issue in the negotiations will be the extent to which Microsoft would own the software in the machine. Gates would like to retain the rights to the software; Gerald Levin, the C.E.O. of Time Warner, and John Malone, the C.E.O. of T.C.I., will not want to give Gates those rights.

If Gates does succeed in providing the operating system for the new machine, he will have tremendous influence over the way people communicate with one another: he, more than anyone else, will determine what it is like to use the information highway. Another advantage Bill Gates has is that he already lives on the information highway.

New employees at Microsoft are likely to encounter Bill Gates electronically long before they meet him in person. Some get to thinking of him by his E-mail handle, which is "billg," rather than by his real name. You'll be chatting with a Microsoft employee in the employee's office, the computer will make a little belch or squeak, indicating an incoming piece of electronic mail, and it'll be E-mail from Bill. It is not unusual to hear a young employee say, "Hey, that's a good idea, I'm going to E-mail Bill about that." While I was attending a lunchtime cookout at Microsoft headquarters one day, I heard several people start conversations by asking about E-mail from Bill: "Did you get mail from Bill today?" "Did you see Bill's mail?" Bill and Melinda were in Africa at the time, touring the valley where the oldest human skeleton, Lucy, was discovered, but I had the sense that he was present, in the network, flying around the Microsoft campus and popping into people's computers.

The Microsoft campus looks like a college campus: there are playing fields, and employees in T-shirts and jeans who aren't much older than college students. Nowhere on earth do more millionaires and billionaires go to work every day than do so here-- about twenty-two hundred of the fifteen thousand employees own at least a million dollars' worth of Microsoft stock--but the campus is in no respect worldly. Workers spend much of their day staring into large computer monitors and occasionally exploding into a rapid fingering of keys. Empty soda cans and cardboard latte cups collect on their desks. Designing software--or "writing code," as people in the trade say--is a sort of intellectual handiwork. Operating systems, the most monumental of all software constructions, are like medieval cathedrals: thousands of laborers toil for years on small parts of them, each one working by hand, fashioning zeros and ones into patterns that control switches inside microprocessors, which constitute the brains of a computer. The platonic nature of software--it is invisible, weightless, and odorless; it doesn't exist in the physical world--determines much of the culture that surrounds it. At Microsoft, workers often describe each other as "smart" or "supersmart" or "one of the smartest people you'll meet around here," and it is almost an article of faith that Bill Gates, who co-founded the company with Paul Allen, a friend from his high-school days, in 1975, when he was nineteen years old, is the smartest person of all.

"Bill is just smarter than everyone else," Mike Maples, an executive vice-president of Microsoft, says. "There are probably more smart people per square foot right here than anywhere else in the world, but Bill is just smarter."

Gates' office is exactly twice as large as the offices of junior employees, and his carpeting is a little richer than the carpeting in other offices; otherwise, there is nothing fancy about the place. A large monitor sits on his desk, and on the wall behind the desk are pictures from important moments in Gates' career, many of which coincide with important moments in the history of the personal computer. There are also pictures of Gates' two sisters, and of his mother and father. (No picture of Melinda French is visible, partly because Gates wants to keep her job as normal as he can.) As in all the Microsoft offices, one rarely hears the sound of a ringing phone. The employees send a total of two

hundred million E-mail messages to each other every month. (Over at McCaw Cellular Communications, another prominent high-tech company, whose headquarters is a few miles from Microsoft's, phones ring all the time, and everyone wears a beeper.) Gates spends at least two hours a day at his desk staring into his monitor, reading and writing E-mail. E-mail allows Gates to run the company in his head, in a sense. While he is working, he rocks. Whether he is in business meetings, on airplanes, or listening to a speech, his upper body rocks down to an almost forty-five-degree angle, rocks back up, rocks down again. His elbows are often folded together, resting in his crotch. He rocks at different levels of intensity according to his mood. Sometimes people who are in the meetings begin to rock with him. "I think it's just excess energy," Gates said to me about his rocking. "I should stop, but I haven't yet. They claim I started at an extremely young age. I had a rocking horse and they used to put me to sleep on my rocking horse, and I think that addicted me."

Gates does not have the physical charisma of, say, Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple Computer. Like Lenin, Gates leads by sheer force of intellect. He looks like a teen-ager, but not because he actually looks younger than thirty-eight. In some ways, he looks older--a very old little boy. It is the oddly undeveloped quality in his pale, freckled face that makes him seem boyish. His hair is brown and is almost always uncombed. He has heavy lips, which contort into odd shapes when he talks. His characteristic pose when he is standing is pelvis pushed forward slightly, one arm wrapped around his body, the other arm occasionally going up into the air as he talks--kind of flying up, almost spastically, with the palm outstretched, then settling again somewhere on his chest. His voice is toneless, with a somewhat weary note of enthusiasm permanently etched into it, and his vocabulary is bland: "stuff" is "cool," "neat," "crummy," "super," "supercool."

When Gates was in his twenties, his mother color-coördinated his clothes--he had green days, beige days, blue days--and then the job was taken over by girlfriends, and now it will presumably fall to his wife, but so far no one has really handled the task successfully. "A lot of his friends have said, 'Bill, come on, let's go on a shopping spree, we'll buy you some clothes,' but it never works," Ann Winblad, who is now a highly respected venture capitalist in Silicon Valley, and was the woman in Bill's life for five years, told me. "Bill just doesn't think about clothes. And his hygiene is not good. And his glasses--how can he see out of them? But Bill's attitude is: I'm in this pure mind state, and clothes and hygiene are last on the list." Esther Dyson, who edits a computer-industry newletter called Release 1.0., says, "I'm told that within Microsoft certain people are allowed to take Bill's glasses off and wipe them, but I've never done it. You know, it's like--'Don't try this at home.' "

Gates is famously confrontational. If he strongly disagrees with what you're saying, he is in the habit of blurting out, "That's the stupidest fucking thing I've ever heard!" People tell stories of Gates spraying saliva into the face of some hapless employee as he yells, "This stuff isn't hard! I could do this stuff in a weekend!" What you're supposed to do in a situation like this, as in encounters with grizzly bears, is stand your ground: if you flee, the bear will think you're game and will pursue you, and you can't outrun a bear. I had a chance to try this approach one day in Gates' office, when I made a remark to him about Microsoft's antitrust problems, and he got mad at me. I had mentioned the theory that Anne Bingaman, who is the head of the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice, would not have taken the highly unusual and public action of requesting the Microsoft file from the Federal Trade Commission, which had pursued a three-year investigation of Microsoft, if she had not felt she could make a good case against the company. (In the end, the F.T.C. did not file any charges.) All the soft planes in Gates' face contorted into an expression of pure sarcasm. "I think you're a little confused," he said. "You're saying that before they read even a single piece of paper they judge what kind of case they have?" He choked slightly on his disgust for my stupidity. "I think you're confused," he said again. "The Justice Department chose to get the information to decide what to do. Saying they have a pretty good case before they've read anything--is that how these things work?" Going by the book, I answered that someone at the F.T.C. could have told someone in the Justice Department that the case against Microsoft was strong. This seemed to make the situation worse. "Look," Gates said. "The Department of Justice is looking at these files. You know? It's justice? You're supposed to have facts before you decide things?" I felt a trickle of sweat run down my back.

All the executives directly under Gates are male, and almost all are in their mid-thirties. Nathan Mhyrvold, thirty-four, who as a graduate student at Cambridge University interpreted for Stephen Hawking, is in charge of new technology. Steve Ballmer, thirty-seven, who is Gates' best friend, runs the numbers side of the business. He and Gates met during freshman year at Harvard, when they lived down the hall from each other. Cramming together for an advanced-economics exam was a determining event in their relationship. Ballmer acted this scene out for me, pacing around the room, waving his arms, the shirttail of his oxford shirt poking out of his khakis, as he cried, " 'Yes! We're golden! We're going to pass! No! Shit! We're screwed! We're going to fail! No! Yes! We're golden! We're screwed!' We'd get real up or real down, and it's still that way. We love to get up and down."

Ballmer is the reason Gates always flies coach when he is traveling on business. "If you're going to work for this company," Ballmer told me, "you're going to rent a certain kind of car and stay in a certain kind of hotel and fly coach, because that's business, and anything else is just aggrandizement." Gates once chartered a plane because he had to get somewhere in a hurry, but Ballmer gave him so much grief that Gates is still explaining why he did it. Experienced fliers into and out of Seattle know to scan the cabin for a man with a blanket over his head-that's Bill Gates, taking a nap.

Because Bill Gates was my first E-mail relationship, I wasn't always sure how to comport myself electronically, and occasionally I solicited advice from experienced E-mailers. Once, while I was questioning a media analyst named Mark Stahlman about a point of E-mail etiquette, he said to me, "Well, hey, you're not a digital guy!" This line often popped into my head when I was E-mailing Bill. Was I behaving like a digital guy? Is digital guyhood what nerds will molt into when the information highway reaches everyone's door? One evening, I was at home listening to some music, doing this geeky dance I do and, as usual, wondering whether the Wall Street types across the street were watching me, when I suddenly thought, Would Bill Gates care about those guys? I took this as a sign I was becoming a digital guy. Around the same time, I read an essay in *Wired* magazine by Paul Saffo, who is a director of the Institute for the Future, a think tank in Menlo Park, which argued that the information highway is going to cause a flowering of personal expression not seen in our society since the sixties, and that when this happens (maybe in five years) people whom we now think of as computer nerds will have the same hipness that in retrospect we now assign to beatniks.

I wrote Gates a message with the title "How does the future make you feel?" (Putting a title on messages is one of the different things about E-mail communication. It is a little like writing a publicity release for what you have to say. However, it does focus the message.)

> How does the rapid change in the power of microprocessors make you feel? The certainty that microprocessors will grow twice as fast every eighteen months and that nothing in Nature, no fire or earthquake or tidal wave, is powerful enough to stop this from happening. Are you thrilled by this? Do you think that this power is God, as you understand God? Is it possible this power could be bad?

Gates wrote back:

> Feelings are pretty personal. I love coming up with new ideas or seeing in advance what is going to count and then making it happen. I love working with smart people. . . . Our business is very very competitive-one or two false moves and you can fall behind in a way that would wipe you out. Market share does not give you the right to relax. IBM is the best example of this. This is very scary but also makes it very interesting.
>
> The digital revolution is all about facilitation--creating tools to make things easy. When I was a kid I was a lot more curious than I am today--perhaps I have lost less curiosity than the average adult but if I had had the information tools we are building today I would know a lot more and not have given up learning some things.

These tools will be really cool. Say today you want to meet someone with similar interests to talk or take a trip together or whatever? Its hard and somewhat random. Say you want to make sure you pick a good doctor or read a good book? We can make all of these things work so well--its empowering stuff. Enough for now.

I wrote a message titled "TV as the Opium of the People":

Some people are afraid of interactive TV. TV is a drug, goes the argument, and the technology that Microsoft and others are supplying is going to make the drug stronger. People will be inside more than ever, cut off from their neighbors, watching interactive monster truck contests. Or porno. They will pile up large cable and credit card charges. A "T. S. Eliot wasteland . . . a nation of housebound zombies," as Michael Eisner put it recently in a speech. Do you think this could happen? What difference does it make if you invent smart boxes to deliver dumb programming?

Gates wrote:

Interactive TV is probably a really bad name for the in-home device connected to the information highway.

Lets say I am sitting at home wondering about some new drug that was prescribed to me. Or wanting to ask a question to my children's teacher. Or curious about my social security status. Or wondering about crime in my neighborhood. Or wanting to exchange information with other people thinking about visiting Tanzania. Or wondering if the new lawn mower I want to buy works well and if its a good price. Or I want to ask people who read a book what they thought of it

before I take my time reading it. In all of these cases being able to reach out and communicate by using a messaging or bulletin board type system lets me do something I could never do before. Assume that the infrastructure and device to do this is easy to use and it was funded by the cable or phone company primarily because I like to watch movies and video-conference with my relatives.

All of the above is about how adults will use the system. Kids will use it in ways we can't even imagine.

The opportunity for people to reach out and share is amazing. This doesnt mean you will spend more time inside! It means you will use your time more effectively and get to do the things you like more than in the past as well as doing new things.

If you like to get outside you will find out a lot more about the places that are not crowded and find good companions to go with.

The bottom line is that 2 way communication is a very different beast than 1 way communication. In some ways a phone that has an unbelievable directory, lets you talk or send messages to lots of people, and works with text and pictures is a better analogy than TV. The phone did change the world by making it a smaller place. This will be even more dramatic. There will be some secondary effects that people will worry about but they won't be the same as TV. We are involved in creating a new media but it is not up to us to be the censors or referees of this media--it is up to public policy to make those decisions.

Because TV had very few channels the value of TV time was very high so only things of very broad interest could be aired on those few channels. The information highway will be the opposite of this--more like the library of congress but with an easy way to find things.

I sometimes felt that this correspondence was a game I was playing with Gates through the computer, or maybe a game I was playing against a computer. What is the right move? What question will get me past the dragon and into the wizard's star chamber, where the rich information is stored? I had no idea where Gates was when he wrote to me, except that once he told me he was on a "think week" at his family's summer place on Hood Canal. I could not tell whether he was impatient or bored with my questions and was merely answering them because it served his interest. Because we couldn't talk

at the same time, there was little chance for the conversation to move spontaneously. On the other hand, his answers meant more, in a certain way, being written, than answers I would have received on the phone. I worried that he might think I was being "random" (a big putdown at Microsoft) because I jumped from topic to topic. I sometimes wondered if I was actually communicating with Bill Gates. How hard would it be for an assistant to write these messages? Or for an intelligent agent to do it?

I wrote a message titled "What motivates you?":

> You love to compete, right? Is that where your energy comes from--love of the game? I wonder how it feels to win on your level. How much do you fear losing? How about immortality--being remembered for a thousand years after you're dead--does that excite you? How strong is your desire to improve people's lives (by providing them with better tools for thinking and communicating)? Some driven people are trying to heal a wound or to recover a loss. Is that the case with you?

Gates wrote back:

> Its easy to understand why I think I have the best job around because of day to day enjoyment rather than some grand long term deep psychological explanation. Its a lot of fun to work with very smart people in a competitive environment. . . . We get to hire the best people coming out of school and give them challenging jobs. We get to try and figure out how to sell software in every part of the world. Sometimes our ideas work very well and sometimes they work very poorly. As long as we stay in the feedback loop and keep trying its a lot of fun.

> It is pretty cool that the products we work on empower individuals and make their jobs more interesting. It helps a lot in inventing new software ideas that I will be one of the users of the software so I can model what's important. . . .

> Just thinking of things as winning is a terrible approach. Success comes from focusing in on what you really like and are good at--not challenging every random thing. My original vision of a personal computer on every desk and every home will take more than 15 years to achieve so there will have been more than 30 years since I first got excited about that goal. My work is not like sports where you actually win a game and its over after a short period of time.

> Besides a lot of luck, a high energy level and perhaps some IQ I think having an ability to deal with things at a very detailed level and a very broad level and synthesize between them is probably the thing that helps me the most. This allows someone to take deep technical understanding and figure out a business strategy that fits together with it.

> It's ridiculous to consider how things will be remembered after you are dead. The pioneers of personal computers including Jobs, Kapor, Lampson, Roberts, Kaye, are all great people but I don't think any of us will merit an entry in a history book.

> I don't remember being wounded or losing something big so I don't think that is driving me. I have wonderful parents and great siblings. I live in the same neighborhood I grew up in (although I will be moving across the lake when my new house is done). I can't remember any major disappointments. I did figure out at one point that if I pursued pure mathematics it would be hard to make a major contribution and there were a few girls who turned me down when I asked them out.

At the end of one message, I wrote:

> This reporting via e-mail is really fascinating and I think you are going to come across in an attractive way, in case you weren't sure of that.

Gates wrote:

> I comb my hair everytime before I send email hoping to appear attractive. I try and use punctuation in a friendly way also. I send :) and never :(.

I wrote a message asking Gates whether it was possible that the alliance with Time Warner and T.C.I. was on shaky ground because Gerald Levin and John Malone were afraid that Gates was too smart for them.

Gates wrote:

> Your mail is the first time I have ever heard anyone suggest that John Malone and Jerry Levin deserve sympathy. They are both great people. They are both smarter about deal making than I will ever be. John and Jerry and I share a vision of what the Information Highway can become. Its an incredible opportunity for all 3 companies and we have been spending time to discussing how we might help each other. We don't have anything concrete at this stage although we have developed a high level of trust for each other.

I sent a message asking how much of his money Gates was planning on giving away:

> Will there one day be a Gates Foundation, the way we have Rockefeller, Ford, Carnegie Foundations? When? How acutely do you feel a sense of social responsibility? What kinds of philanthropy would you like your money to perform? How do you feel about leaving a lot of money to your kids?

Gates replied:

> I think that giving money away takes a lot of effort. Not as much effort as making it but still a lot to do it properly. Therefore when I am old and have time I will put some effort into that. Assuming I still have a lot of money by the time I retire which is certainly no certain thing I will give away well over 90% of it since I dont believe in kids having too much money. I am like my friend Warren Buffett in this respect. I have already done some giving like to UW for a biotechnology department [Gate gave the University of Washington twelve million dollars] and some to Stanford for a computer science building [six million] and some to United Way which I really believe in. I do believe in funding great research so some of my philanthropy will relate to that. Some to humans service activities. Some to education. Some to population control efforts if it looks like donations can really help there.

I wrote mail about "The Great Gatsby," which is one of Gates' favorite books. ("The Catcher in the Rye" and "A Separate Peace" are other favorites.) Gates dressed as Gatsby for his thirtieth birthday, and again for an engagement party that friends and colleagues in Silicon Valley threw for him and Melinda in September. (Melinda dressed as Daisy Buchanan.)

Gates wrote:

> Gatsby had a dream and he pursued it not even really thinking he might fail or worse that what he dreamed of wasn't real. The green light is a symbol of his optimism--he had come so far he could hardly fail to grasp it. At the end Fitz is reinforcing what a romantic figure Gatsby is. Its also sort of about America but I think of it more in terms of the people.

Once, when I was composing E-mail to Gates on an airplane, I felt physically closer to him than when I was composing from home. Perhaps I was thinking of all the thousands of people who have encountered this remarkable person on airplanes, restlessly wandering the aisles with his shoes off, or sitting in a seat staring into the screen of his laptop computer, rocking, writing E-mail that will be fired into the network when the plane lands and send hundreds of people at Microsoft scurrying into action.

Many executives in the telegraph industry, which had enjoyed control of the communications field since about 1840, believed that the telephone did not present a threat to their business, because no one would want a communications machine that did not leave a written record of the conversation, as telegrams did. When William Orton, the president of Western Union, which was the Microsoft of its day, was offered the opportunity to buy Alexander Graham Bell's patent on the telephone for a hundred thousand dollars, he is said to have replied, "What use could this company make of an electric toy?" This remark seems less dim to me now.

Technological change is not democratic, but if we did have a choice would we vote for a man who sometimes behaves like a ten-year-old boy to be the principal architect of the way we communicate with each other in the future? Or is it Gates' gift that he isn't socialized in a way you'd expect a corporate executive to be. When I was ten, I would sit around with my friends watching it snow, and someone would say, "I wonder what the deepest snowfall ever was," or something like that, and someone else would say, "Yeah, it would be cool to know that." It seemed that there should be this giant, all-knowing brain, which could answer that kind of question. One of the lessons you learn in becoming an adult is that it doesn't always pay to be curious. Some people learn to avoid curiosity altogether. Gates appears to have completely failed to absorb this lesson. My impression is that he still has the fantasy of the giant, all-knowing brain, and that this is what the information highway means to him. It's a place where curiosity is rewarded.

Not long ago, Paul Saffo, of the Institute for the Future, said to me, "Bill Gates is an introvert. He is not the kind of person you want building the social network of the future." Ann Winblad, Gates' former girlfriend, told me, "People who know Bill know that you have to bring him into a group--say, 'Hey, Bill, tell us the story of such-and-such'--because he doesn't have the social skills to do it on his own. But that doesn't mean he isn't social. Bill is an open, emotional guy--very. He's actually more open with his feelings than most men I know. He is not afraid to express fear, or sadness, but hardly anyone sees that. You can't show that when you're in Bill's position, when everyone is watching your tiniest gesture. It's not good leadership to show weakness." An executive with a leading competitor of Microsoft's says of Gates, "Hey--I think the guy is truly dangerous. Bill is the most surprisingly conscience-free individual I've ever met, and that amount of power in the hands of a guy without a conscience is dangerous. Big Brother did not happen in 1984, but it could happen in 2004. Ask yourself, 'If there was to be a technology-oriented dictator by the year 2004, who would he be? Bill Gates?' "

Gates argues that Microsoft has to behave aggressively because of a principle called Moore's Law, which is named after Gordon Moore, one of the founders of the Intel Corporation. Moore's Law is the reason the computer industry is fundamentally different from any other industry in history. It states that microprocessors get twice as powerful, or twice as cheap, every eighteen months. This means that in twenty years what now takes a year of computing will take fifteen minutes. We have no idea what we are going to do with this power, but it will exist whether we want it to or not.

No natural calamity or political upheaval short of world-wide anarchy is powerful enough to stop it. Nathan Mhyrvold, of Microsoft, said to me, "Nature has already signed off on this stuff." Moore's Law is the primary reason that all the companies that dominated the computer industry in the nineteen-seventies are now struggling or gone, and the reason that Microsoft, for all its power, could disappear in a decade.

Scott McNealy, the head of Sun Microsystems, which is a leading manufacturer of computer workstations, told me, "I like Bill. Bill is a smart guy. But I think the problem is that Microsoft has caught the bunny. You know, when you go to the dog track they have that mechanical bunny that makes the dogs run? Well, sometimes a dog is so fast he catches the bunny and then the other dogs don't run anymore. That's the situation in the software business today: Bill has caught the bunny. I admire Bill for catching the bunny, but now we can't have a race. He ought to be loosed from the bunny, to give the other dogs a chance."

The argument that Microsoft is shaping up to be the Standard Oil of the Information Age and that the government ought to loose Bill from the bunny before this happens is now being heard within the Department of Justice. As the head of the Department's Antitrust Division, Anne Bingaman is an anti-monopolist, the sort of person who was common around the Justice Department in the nineteen-thirties and forties, and was thoroughly weeded out in the eighties, a period during which the laws on what constitutes a monopoly were relaxed, making it harder for people like Bingaman to operate. Now Bingaman is expected to regain some of the ground lost by the anti-monopolists, and she seems to be using Microsoft as her vehicle. Justice Department lawyers are currently studying the file that Bingaman requested from the Federal Trade Commission, and are said to be readying a case against Microsoft, though whether Bingaman will bring narrow antitrust charges, which would require the company to pay a fine it could easily

afford, or will bring a broad antitrust case, or will even attempt to break Microsoft up, has not been decided.

There is substantial political pressure not to prosecute Microsoft. Microsoft is the principal reason that the United States is by far the world leader in software production, an industry that has an unimaginable potential for growth. Also, the government's huge antitrust case against ▮▮▮▮., which was filed in 1969 and ended with the government's giving up on it in 1982, distracted and weakened that organization, and helped companies like Microsoft to get the better of it. Some people argue that the computer industry actually wants and needs a monopolistic presence like Microsoft, because such a presence can work to create a standard computer language that other companies can design products for and that the public can use in common. That is the role ▮▮▮▮. played, and now that ▮▮▮▮. has been dethroned, thanks partly to Microsoft, people expect Microsoft to perform it.

One big difference between Gates and other early software entrepreneurs is that, whereas the others were bright kids from middle-class homes who achieved success beyond their expectations, Gates was born to rule. His childhood was emphatically not the stuff of Horatio Alger novels. His father, Bill Gates, Jr., is a well-known corporate lawyer in Seattle and a former president of the Washington State Bar Association, and his mother, Mary Gates, is a former regent at the University of Washington and was on the national board of the United Way and of U S West. Washington State governors and senators were guests at the house when Bill was a boy. At dinner, the parents would lead the children--Bill and his sisters, Kristi and Libby--in discussions of current affairs. The family also played a lot of games and horsed around together. "I really like Bill's family, but it would be nice if you could talk to them once in a while when they weren't in a human pyramid," Ida Cole, a former Microsoft executive, has said. Water-skiing was and remains a passion of Gates': several Seattleites have described for me the experience of coming across the Evergreen Bridge early on a Sunday morning in the summer and seeing Gates' big powerboat on Lake Washington, with Gates' white, toneless body water-skiing behind it and throwing up a big coxcomb of spray. Young Bill was obsessive about improving aspects of himself he didn't like. "He was always upset about his little toe curling in, so ▮▮ work on it. ▮▮ spend time holding it out so ▮▮ have a straight toe," his sister Kristi told Stephen Manes and Paul Andrews, the co-authors of "Gates," a recently published biography. Gates used to try to impress his sisters by jumping out of a trash can, and he still occasionally jumps over his office chair from a standstill. Sometimes, on his way to a business meeting, he suddenly jumps up and tries to touch as high as he can on a wall, or to touch higher than the spot he touched last time, but he says, in "Gates," "I don't jump spontaneously the way I used to, in the early years of the company . . . or even in a meeting. . . . Now the jumping is not that common." However, he has planned a full-size trampoline for a house he is building. In Japan, a comic book about the adventures of a boy modeled on Bill Gates is called "Young Jump."

Gates attended Lakeside School, one of the best private schools in the Seattle area, and there he met Paul Allen, who was three years older. The two began spending a lot of time in the school's computer room. In 1971, when Gates was sixteen, he wrote a program that made it easier for cities to collect traffic statistics. That same year, he and Allen started a company called Traf-o-Data. In the Lakeside yearbook for 1973, Gates' senior year, there is a picture of Gates in the computer room with a stocking cap pulled over his head and lying on a table, over the caption "Who is this man?"

Joseph Weizenbaum, a computer scientist at ▮▮▮▮., perhaps overstating the case a little for effect, wrote, in "Computer Power and Human Reason," this early portrait of computer hackers: "Bright young men of disheveled appearance, often with sunken glowing eyes, [who] can be seen sitting at computer consoles . . . on which their attention seems to be as riveted as a gambler's on the rolling dice. . . . They work until they nearly drop, twenty, thirty hours at a time. Their food, if they arrange it, is brought to them: coffee, Cokes, sandwiches. . . . Their rumpled clothes, their unwashed and unshaven faces, and their uncombed hair all testify that they are oblivious to their bodies and to the world in which they move." This description matches Gates' outward appearance, but Gates was different from most hackers in one important respect: Hackers

were interested in computers as a hobby, mostly just for fun, whereas Gates always saw computers as a way of making money.

Gates and Allen sometimes talked about how cool it would be to design the software for the first personal computer, which appeared to be on the horizon, but this was not a serious career goal of Bill's. His father wanted him to become a lawyer. "When I was in college, it was really hard to pick a career, because everything seemed so attractive, and when you had to pick a specific one you had to say no to all the others," Gates told me. "I'd think, Well, if I went to that law firm some partner might not like me, and they might assign me to these crummy cases, and I'd think, Well, God, that could be really crummy." The question was settled in dramatic fashion in December, 1974, when Allen, who was working in Boston, passed a newsstand in Harvard Square and saw on the cover of Popular Electronics a computer called the Altair 8800. The Altair 8800 was the first computer that ordinary electronics hobbyists could afford to buy and that people with reasonable technical knowledge could assemble in their homes. Basically, it was the first personal computer. Allen bought the magazine, rushed over to Gates' dorm, and showed it to him. "Look!" Allen said. "It's going to happen! I told you this was going to happen! And we're going to miss it!"

They called Ed Roberts, the man who created the Altair, and told him that they had written a version of a programming language called basic for his computer. That wasn't true. It was an early use of a now common strategy in the computer industry, and at Microsoft in particular: announcing products that don't exist (known in the industry as "vaporware") in order to discourage possible competitors. After talking to Roberts, Bill and Paul went on an eight-week code-writing binge, with Gates writing most of the code, often falling asleep at the keyboard, dreaming in code, waking up, and immediately starting to write code again, with no real transition between dreaming and waking-just code. ("It was the coolest program I ever wrote," Gates later said.) At the end of the eight weeks, Allen flew out to Albuquerque, met with Roberts, loaded the software into the Altair, and typed "print 2 + 2." The Altair spat out "4." The program worked.

By the end of 1975, Gates and Allen had founded a company, Micro-soft, to sell their basic. (The hyphen was dropped a few years later.) Now came what is perhaps the pivotal moment in the early history of the software industry. Computer hobbyists who had bought the Altair were dismayed to find that it didn't come with the software to operate it, and were even more dismayed when they learned that they had to buy the software for four hundred and fifty dollars from Micro-soft.

At that time, no one thought of software as something you paid for. Software was just rolls of paper tape with little holes punched in it. A hacker would write a cool piece of software for fun, copy it, and give it away to his friends. Altair owners began to do the same thing with Micro-soft's basic. Then, in February of 1976, Gates published "An Open Letter to Hobbyists" in the Altair newsletter, and the letter now stands as a sort of Magna Carta of the software industry--the underpinning of the intellectual--property structure. It stated, "As the majority of hobbyists must be aware, most of you steal your software," and went on to argue that software was just as much a commodity as hardware, because it represented someone's intellectual work, and that the creators of the software should be compensated just as creators of hardware were.

Gates shuttled between Harvard and Albuquerque until the start of his senior year, when he dropped out for good. The business expanded, and he and Allen relocated it to Seattle in 1978. In 1980, ▮▮▮▮. approached Gates to write an operating system for the personal computer it was designing, the ▮▮▮▮. PC. Gates flew down to Florida to meet the ▮▮▮▮. executives working on the project, realized on the way that he had forgotten to bring a tie, and drove around looking for a place to buy one. The ▮▮▮▮. executives, who had never laid eyes on Gates, were stunned to see that their prospective partner looked exactly like one of the hackers they were beginning to read about in the press. They told Gates they needed an operating system in three months--an impossibly short time--and Gates accepted the job. Upon returning to Seattle, he bought an operating system called qdos, which was short for Quick and Dirty Operating System, from another software developer, Seattle Computer, for around seventy-five thousand dollars, renamed it ms-dos, and, in a three-month code-writing marathon, converted it to ▮▮▮▮.'s specifications.

Software is sometimes said to be to the age of information as oil was to the age of the machine. Software is what makes information systems operate. Software is like a natural resource, except that its source is not in the earth but in the human mind: people carry pools of software in their heads. Its lack of physical existence makes its importance easy to underestimate. ████., which was one of the great business organizations in history, and which was perfectly placed to own the personal-computer business, disastrously failed to appreciate the importance of the software Gates designed for it. Because ████. thought that the money was going to be in the hardware, in the computers themselves, it allowed Gates to retain the rights to ms-dos. During the nineteen-eighties, the PC was cloned by other American manufacturers and by the Japanese, who could make and sell the machines more cheaply than ████. could, but no one knew how to clone ms-dos, and Bill Gates collected a fee for every PC and every PC clone sold in the world.

Two books about the fall of ████. and Gates' role in it have recently appeared--"Big Blues," by Paul Carroll, and "Computer Wars," by Charles H. Ferguson and Charles R. Morris--and an occasional chill runs up the spine of anyone reading them at the ease with which Gates eviscerated men much older and more experienced than he was. "I kept wanting to say to Cannavino, 'We need a shorthand because these meetings are taking too long,' " Gates says in "Big Blues." James Cannavino was an ████. executive with whom Gates negotiated about operating systems. Cannavino would begin meetings by making small talk about, say, his new car, in a misguided effort to establish some sort of personal rapport with Gates. Also, like many other American corporate executives of his generation, Cannavino would spend a lot of time talking about his company's values. This would drive Gates mad. "Every time you say 'thirteen,' I'll know that what that means is that all you want to do is what the customer wants," Gates says he imagined himself saying to Cannavino.

"And for every one of these other gibberish slogans, we can also get little numbers. There are a lot of small integers available. We'll just tighten these meetings up. You know, Cannavino, if you want to talk about how you're going to save the U.S. educational system, okay, we've heard that story. That's a good fifteen-minute one. That can be number eleven." However, Gates managed to swallow these thoughts and let Cannavino talk. "I'm really very good at this stuff," he says. "I know how to be somebody's son. You know, 'Yes, Dad.' "

A prominent software executive told me, "████. thought they had Gates by the balls. He's just a hacker, they thought. A harmless nerd. What they actually had by the balls was an organism which has been bred for the accumulation of great power and maximum profit, the child of a lawyer, who knew the language of contracts, and who just ripped those ████. guys apart." Another leading executive in the software industry said, "Think of ████. and Microsoft as being a chess game, where Microsoft plays black. So they're at a disadvantage. So they have to set up a trap. Microsoft becomes the only supplier of a commodity that ████. could not produce itself. Having done that, it proceeds to market that asset to weaken its partner's position. It's brilliant!"

Now, thirteen years after that contract, Microsoft is by far the largest software company in the world. It has a market capitalization of twenty-three billion dollars--more than General Motors, Xerox, or ████. To what extent Gates is mainly a product of ████.'s blunder, and therefore a kind of historical accident, and to what extent he is the first person to imagine software as a shrink-wrapped commodity, and is therefore a visionary, is a good question to ask if you are seated next to a computer-industry executive at a dinner party. Although Microsoft continues to manufacture ms-dos, it has severed most of its ties with ████. The break came over the operating system Windows, which Gates introduced in 1985. (Paul Allen, who had a scary encounter with Hodgkin's disease in 1983, retired, cashed in some of his Microsoft stock, bought the Portland Trail Blazers basketball team, and built a house with a basketball court on the property, where the team could practice. He also provided the funds for a Jimi Hendrix museum in Seattle. Lately, Allen, whose Microsoft stock is now worth $2.9 billion, has been in the news for buying nearly twenty-five per cent of America Online, an information service, and, most recently, for buying eighty per cent of TicketMaster.)

Windows is a graphical user interface, or gui (computer people pronounce it "gooey"). Instead of operating the computer with keyboard commands, as you do in dos, in Windows you use a pointing device--a mouse--to access little folders and documents on

your electronic desktop. Xerox developed the desktop metaphor in the late seventies, and in the early eighties Apple Computer commercialized it. Gates saw that Apple's gui was an easier system to use than dos, and borrowed it. When Windows first appeared, it was widely viewed as a kludge (a dog): it was buggy (it had glitches) and was a memory pig (it used up a lot of space in the computer's hard drive), and it was generally less elegant than Apple's gui. But Gates stayed with Windows and kept improving it. Gates understood that it did not matter if the software used lots of space on the hard drive as long as hard drives kept getting twice as powerful every eighteen months. Also, whereas Apple chose to keep its software proprietary--it could run only on machines that Apple made--Gates licensed Windows to any computer manufacturer that wanted it, just as he had done with dos.

When Apple realized its mistake--its strategy limited Apple's share of the operating-system market to the number of computers Apple could sell--it sued Microsoft for copyright infringement, but a federal court ruled that "the look and feel" of the desktop metaphor was not covered under Apple's copyright.

It is often said by Gates' detractors that he has never invented anything, and this is true in a sense, but you could say the same thing about Henry Ford. When the Model T appeared, in 1908, it was by no means the best car on the road, but it worked well enough, and it was affordable and easy to produce, and Ford stayed with it. Even today, most users still find Apple's operating system more intuitive than Windows, but, because the market for Windows is so much larger, other software manufacturers are more inclined to make applications for Windows than for Apple's operating system. If there is to be a standard computer language--which from the point of view of the public is greatly desirable--it now appears that Windows will be the one. But Gates has to worry that someone will do to Microsoft what Microsoft did to Apple. Apple is designing a new operating system with ████.; it's code-named Pink, and is expected to appear sometime in 1995.

After a month of E-mail between Gates and me, my hour in his physical presence arrived. As we shook hands, he said, "Hello, I'm Bill Gates," and emitted a low, vaguely embarrassed chuckle. Is this the sound one E-mailer makes to another when they finally meet in real space? I was aware of a feeling of being discovered. In the front part of Gates' office, we sat down at right angles to each other. Gates had on normal-looking clothes--a green shirt with purple stripes, brown pants, black loafers. He rocked throughout our time together. He did not look at me very often but either looked down as he was talking or lifted his eyes above my head to look out the window in the direction of the campus. The angle of the light caused the purple stripes in his shirt to reflect in his glasses, which, in turn, threw an indigo tinge into the dark circles around his eyes.

The emotional boundaries of our encounter seemed to have been much expanded by the E-mail that preceded it: Gates would be angry one minute, almost goofily happy the next. I wondered if he was consciously using our present form of communication to express feelings that E-mail cannot convey. Maybe this is the way lots of people will communicate in the future: meet on the information highway, exchange messages, get to know the lining of each other's mind, then meet face to face.

In each other's physical presence, they will be able to eliminate a lot of the polite formalities that clutter people's encounters now, and say what they really mean. If this happens, it will be a good thing about the information highway: electronic communication won't reduce face-to-face communication; instead, it will focus it.

I had been told not to ask Gates about his marriage, because he didn't want to talk about it, but I was emboldened by the familiarity that E-mail had established between us and asked anyway. Gates was silent, rocking gently (I interpreted that as a good sign) and staring down at his shoes. "Well, it's a pretty conventional marriage," he said after a while. "I'm male, and I'm marrying a female. And there's just two of us. And we plan to have rings on our fingers. And there'll be a minister. Or, actually, a priest, I think. Since I'm marrying a Catholic." He giggled. "Pretty standard stuff. In most dimensions, including this one, I'm just like everybody else. I found a girl and fell in love with her. I'm kind of old." As he talked, he began to make a peculiar ahhh sound--a sort of rapturous vocalized pause, with a little shyness in it, as if he were confiding in me.

"Some of your competitors are hoping that marriage is going to make you spend less time in the office," I said.

"Yeah, I think . . . ahhh . . . that's a pretty strange thing. Being married I don't think is that big a change. It did take up a lot of energy and time being single. I think in a way it's more complicated than being married. I mean, marriage has its own complexities, but they're different . . . ahhh . . . and I don't think timewise they're much different. And I've been going out with this person off and on for a number of years, so it's not like the day I get married it will be, like, whoa, wait a minute, she uses curlers to curl her hair, my God!"

Gates and his bride are constructing a thirty-five-million-dollar house on the eastern slope of Lake Washington, just outside Seattle--a series of five pavilions connected by underground passageways, with display screens scattered throughout the rooms and linked to a central data base containing hundreds of thousands of famous works of art in digital form. Gates does not own the art; he owns the right to reproduce the art digitally, and he and his assistants continue to throw museum officials around the world into confusion by offering to buy the digital rights to works in their collections.

"Do you worry that your wealth is going to corrupt you?"

"Absolutely." Gates sat upright and raised his arms in the air. "Absolutely. Hey. Being in the spotlight is a corrupting thing. Being successful is a corrupting thing. Having lots of money is a corrupting thing. These are very dangerous things, to be guarded against carefully. And I think that's very, very hard to do."

"How do you do it?"

"I'm very close to my family. And that's important to me. It's a very centering thing. I live in the same neighborhood I grew up in. One of my sisters lives there. We get together as a family a lot. The woman I'm marrying wants when we have kids to have a normal environment for them. So we'll mutually brainstorm about how to do the best we can at that." Gates thought for a while, then said, "I am a person who is very conscious of, like, why don't I have a TV in my house? I think TV is great. When I'm in a hotel room, I sit there and try all these new channels and see what's going on. I probably stay up too late watching stuff. TV is neat. I don't have a TV at home, because I would probably watch it, and I prefer to spend that time thinking-or, mostly, reading. So I'm pretty conscious about not letting myself get used to certain things."

"So do you consider yourself a puritanical person?"

"Oh, no no no. I'm not a puritan," Gates said. "Hey, if I was a puritan--" He grinned, apparently mentally flipping through a sequence of unpuritanical acts he had committed. "O.K., it's a little bit like this. I go to a baseball game, and I'm having a good time, watching the game, but then I feel myself getting drawn in. I start wondering, Who are these guys? Who are the good ones? How much are they paid? How are the other teams compared to this one? How have the rules changed? How do these guys compare to the guys twenty years ago? It just gets so interesting. I know if I let myself go to ten games I'd be addicted, and I'd want to go more. And there's only so much time in the day. And, frankly, it's easy for me to get interested in anything. I think, Gosh, am I going to get good at tennis? Well, we got these kayaks recently. I think, you know, Are we going to get into that? I was just in Africa. I think, Should I do my next two or three trips there-- there's just so much there--but I'd sort of like to go to China, and actually I think I'll end up doing that for my next big trip, in two or three years. So there's all these choices, but time is this very scarce resource."

As we were saying goodbye, Gates said, "Well, you're welcome to keep sending me mail."

I walked out to my car, drove off the Microsoft campus, and headed back over the Evergreen Bridge to Seattle. When I got to my hotel, I logged on and saw I had E-mail from Bill. It had been written about two hours after I left his office. There was no reference to our having just met. He was responding to mail I had sent him several days earlier, asking what he thought of Henry Ford:

Ford is not that admirable--he did great things but he was very very narrow minded and was willing to use brute force power too much. His relationship with his family is tragic. His model of the world was plain wrong in a lot of ways. He decided he knew everything he needed to fairly early in his life.

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