Stroupe|New Media Writing

**Alan Liu’s Thesis**

…To go to work today is to face the demand for a fearsome new rationalization: industrial efficiency and productivity plus postindustrial flexibility and decentralization. Such neorationalization, however, feels unreasonable, or “paradoxical,” because it is heedless of the “archaic” and/or “residual” biological, prehistorical, agrarian, craftsman, and even early twentieth-century industrial rationales of behavior codified in the habits of communities and individuals. (To give a concrete example intimately familiar to many knowledge workers: “lifelong learning” demands perpetual reeducation at “Internet speed,” but bodily, family, community, ethnic, gender, and other duties of everyday life pose an incalculably great counter-demand that makes it almost impossible, for instance, to study at night.) Therefore, there are only two equivocal ways that the archaic and unreasonable can protest their submission to the new rationalization. One is to quit and move to another job, which exactly reproduces the conditions of mobility, modularity, and random access that support the “flexibility” and “decentralization” of postindustrialism. The other way is just as conflicted: to express in lifestyle and, increasingly, in what I have called “workstyle,” the enormous reserve of petty kink that *Processed World* called “bad attitude” but that now appears with mind-numbing regularity in popular culture, the media, and the Web as “cool.”

Cool is the protest of our contemporary “society without politics.” It is the gesture that has no voice of its own and can only protest equivocally within the very voice of the new rationalization. It is the incest of information that secretly “nixes” the exchange of information. Structured as *information designed to resist information*, cool is the paradoxical gesture by which the ethos of the unknown—of the archaically and stubbornly unknowable⎯struggles to stand in the midst of knowledge work. (293-294)