Like almost all the invitations I receive to meet with people, speak at conferences or contribute to books, the invitation to write this Foreword came through the internet. When I first began to use a computer for writing, almost 30 years ago, my relationship with the machine was a test of nerve and confidence; a struggle between my ambition to exploit the technology to my best advantage and my capacity to execute even the simplest of procedures. All these years later, I still struggle with new versions of software; with ‘disappearing’ files; and with taking the time to read the manual, before plunging in to the depths of some new program. I remain a wide-eyed tourist in techno-land, but my travels have changed me and the sense I make of life in general. Technology makes such changes effortlessly. This is what technology does, and has done ever since our hairy ancestors rolled that particular rock down that particular hill. In many ways I am still a Neanderthal: one part expectation and two parts bewilderment.

Technology is not, of course, just about cables and motherboards. Technology can be dismissed as a poor relation of science, but things that ‘work’ make a difference, even to people like me who might fail to appreciate the ‘whys’ of their operation. Technology is science for everyone, whether or not they can speak the language. In that sense, technology is about possibilities and actualities: what might we do and how might we do it? It is about making a difference and hoping that this is the kind of difference that will be worthwhile in the future.

Technology has changed my world and will doubtless carry on doing so. Not all of those changes were to my liking but I learned to live with them. As I said, we have a relationship with technology: we do not control or exploit it, any more than technology drives us. We need to reconcile ourselves to this restless, reflexive relationship – which will keep shifting its boundaries, subtly and exponentially – if we are to keep our heads. As with all long-term relationships, the trick is to keep paying attention; to avoid being trapped by routine and ritual. We need to hold ourselves open to what technology might be teaching us today; and open to making the necessary tweaks and modifications, when today’s lesson doesn’t fit with the bigger picture and the values that frame it.

This book is about nurses’ relationship with technology – in its widest possible sense. In what way does technology contribute to nursing theory; to nursing practice; to the management of nursing systems; to working out how nurses will know what to do when and how, even if they are not altogether sure ‘why’. Technology has always been the brightest kid on the block and informatics represents the kind of intelligence we all might use – or be influenced by – which will make us more effective; more efficient; and, hopefully, more satisfied with a good job well done.

Although the contributors to this book write very much from the ‘cutting edge’ of nursing informatics and the evidence-base that shapes it, hopefully even old hands like Nightingale would have appreciated the philosophy behind the technology. In one very important sense, nursing informatics is about
the ‘bigger picture’; transcending the needs of individual persons, without losing them in the process. Despite its ‘techno’ influences and processes, informatics is not devoid of creativity. Working out how to adapt technology, to suit the unexpected or the downright fickle is part of the challenge. I might have said – part of the fun – but I don’t want to be too presumptuous. This is serious work – often very demanding work. However, it is possible to have a lot of ‘fun’ without laughing, and many of the contributors to this book will, no doubt, have ‘enjoyed’ engaging with their subject; wrestling with concepts; wading knee-deep through systems; experiencing, ultimately, a shudder of excitement at the mere change of a single decimal point.

Technology has changed our world. Technology is changing our world. Technology will continue to change our world, for as long as we can stay at the helm of the Human Project. This book is about the myriad ways that nurses can experience a shift in their thinking about the multiple demands made of nurses in our high-tech societies. I doubt whether this book has anything approaching ‘all the answers’ but it certainly sparked my curiosity about where all this might be leading us; and what we should be doing to try to maintain a positive relationship with King Techno. If this book ‘works’ for an old Neanderthal like me, think what it might do for those who are natural members of the Myspace, Facebook, Youtube generation.

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