

Tara Brabazon


ASHGATE

DIGITAL DIETING

**From
Information
Obesity to
Intellectual
Fitness**



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From Information Obesity to Intellectual Fitness

TARA BRABAZON

Charles Sturt University, Australia and Canada

ASHGATE

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Preface

9:20 am. Week eight of a thirteen week semester. A student enters my office. He asks for help with his assignment. ‘My pleasure,’ I respond. The first assignment instructs students to construct an academic diary/scrapbook presenting their journey through the first ten weeks of the course. The goal is to ensure that they complete the reading and are able to develop independent interpretations of key ideas in Communication Studies. This assessment is due in one week.

He asks what is required to complete the first assignment. I review the exercise again, pulling out the study guide to talk through the specifications of the question, the marking criteria and reminding him of the twenty minute podcast I constructed to guide them through the exercise.

He told me he had not seen this information before entering my office. He had not opened the study guide.

It is week eight.

Then he asked what reading is necessary to include in the academic diary/scrapbook. I stated that, as he knows, each week required students to complete both online and offline reading. His response was a look of white-eyed panic. Online reading? I showed him the links each week in the study guide under the heading ‘Compulsory Online Reading’.

Then he pulled out his reader. The binding was not creased. The booklet had not been opened. He asked what reading was required for each week’s topic. I showed him that each week’s reading commenced with a title page and titles like ‘Week One Reading’. He had not opened the book to find them.

He then flicked through the requirements for ‘Week One Reading’. It was 20 pages, made up of four truncated and distinct extracts. He stated, ‘That’s a lot of reading’.

I remained silent.

It gets worse.

He asked me to review each week’s topic because he did not remember what was discussed. He did not take any notes during class, so he had forgotten the meaning of terms like ‘media literacy’ and ‘multimodality’. I went through each week, providing the key definitions.

He let me finish, but was impatient. Instead he stated that he wanted to receive a copy of my lecture notes because he had a disability. I apologised to him because I had not been notified there was an issue to address. What is the impairment so I know how to help? The disability he reported was that, ‘when I get bored I just can’t concentrate. Reading bores me.’ I controlled my emotions

and drained all expressions from my face. I replied – simply – that I will send him the script from my 13 weeks of lectures. It is a document of 643 pages. He rolled his eyes. ‘Tara, just send me the PowerPoints of the lectures. That’s all I need.’ He then reported that in the previous semester, he had received three A grades and a B+ when teachers ‘helped’ him in this way.

Digital Dieting is dedicated to this young man and all the university students in our care. May they recognise the privilege of learning and the joys of scholarship.

Introduction

Digital Detox

We happen to live in a time of speeded-up information when we can have access to the past so easily that there really isn't a past. It's all present. The present has become so rich and so complex and terrifying that people do all they can to hide from it.¹

Marshall McLuhan

McLuhan is wrong. But – as always – he is productively wrong. The consequences of hiding (from) the past and de-activating history and historiography are that the present becomes saturatingly satisfying, a life of Skype chats, downloaded apps, cats on YouTube and the intravenous drip-drip-drip of Facebook's news feed. The past is honest. It is like our mother. She has seen us at our worst: humiliated, destroyed and broken. She knows that behind the shiny suit, posh shoes and big hair is a brutal honesty from childhood. The past is not easy to access because it is shaped, erased and corrupted by the present. Without the waxed gauze of the present, the past is harsh and candid.

It is convenient, particularly in an era of permanent war, to pick an expedient starting date to commence a compliant history that justifies current actions. We can pause, fast forward, rewind and stop at will. For example, it is convenient to start a narrative detailing the relationship between Iraq and the United States of America at September 11. It is useful to forget that the Soviet Union fought a twenty year war in Afghanistan without a 'victory'. It is inspirational to look to the election of Barack Obama as a statement of racial equality. It is convenient to forget about the history of slavery and the current incarceration rates of black men. Therefore any era (or person) satisfied with the present is both complacent and complicit in forgetting about injustice and prejudice. Anti-discrimination requires initiatives that acknowledge the past. A visage of equality requires either ignoring the past or minimising its influence.

The present is convenient, malleable and exciting. It is filled with possibilities. The past is boring, disconcerting or inconvenient. That is why McLuhan was wrong. The present is not terrifying, to be denied and hidden. It is as slippery as a Tweet: quirky and interesting for ten seconds before our eyes flick to the

1 M. McLuhan, 'Fordham University: First Lecture (1967),' from S. McLuhan and D. Staines (eds.), *Understanding Me: lectures and interviews*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), p. 141

next 140 characters. But McLuhan captures the consequences of a ‘rich’ and ‘complex’ present. To translate his statement for the purposes of this book, I investigate the impact of an information glut that is not only rich and complex, but repetitive and banal. When there is too much information in the present, how is it judged, sorted and sifted, to separate the basic and simple from the important and complex? Such a process is rendered more complex because of ‘The Google Effect’.² At its most basic, this phrase describes a culture of equivalence that renders all data equally rankable before a search engine, creating confusion between the popular and the important. The impact of this confusion is problematic for many institutions but is most serious for schools and universities. As Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa reported in their study of undergraduate education, ‘given that students are spending very little time studying or attending classes, in both absolute and relative terms, we should not be surprised that on average they are not learning very much’.³ Such a stark and startling indictment on and of our universities requires urgent attention. *Digital Dieting* mobilises Arum and Roksa’s concern and provides options and alternatives for learning more, learning better and learning through (and for) transformation. I experienced the consequences of their research first hand when assessing assignments for a first year course in North America that was taken as an ‘easy elective’ for third and fourth year students. When marking their papers, I could not tell the difference between the quality and standards of first and fourth years. The level was indistinguishable. There was no distinction in analysis, investigative depth, or interpretative complexity.

Digital Dieting is the result of fifteen years’ research in online learning. It is also the concluding book of a trilogy. In 2002, I published *Digital Hemlock: internet education and the poisoning of teaching*.⁴ It was an angry book, logging what happens when an ‘online revolution’ is administered by managers, rather than crafted by teachers and librarians. In the 1990s, managerialism propelled the desire to ‘get courses on the web’. We are still living with the errors, inconsistencies and flaws of that plan. The goal was economic efficiency rather than excellence in teaching and learning. Professional development of staff was neglected. Students were short-changed through bizarre decisions that were made by men and women completely disconnected from the contemporary classroom. While using the phrase ‘student-centred learning’, students were sandwiched into large theatres, squeezed into Moodle and Blackboard portals, denied appropriately sized

2 T. Brabazon, ‘The Google Effect,’ *Libri*, Vol. 56, No. 3, September 2006, pp. 157-167, <http://www.librijournal.org/pdf/2006-3pp157-167.pdf>

3 R. Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically adrift: limited learning on college campuses*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 98

4 T. Brabazon, *Digital Hemlock*, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002)

seminars and tutorials and assessed by quizzes marked by computer, rather than assignments evaluated by academics.

Two years before I published *Digital Hemlock*, Stanley Aronowitz wrote *The Knowledge Factory* and recognised that,

What are the consequences of administration as a career? First and perhaps foremost, career administrators tend to lose touch with the educational enterprise. Their allegiances and self-conception becomes increasingly corporate as they gradually surrender any pretense of doing consistent writing and teaching ... It doesn't take long before he views himself as a member of a separate social layer within the academic system and sees the faculty and students as adversaries or, at least, as a different stratum.⁵

Aronowitz logged a foundational reality of contemporary higher education. The best teachers are committed to teaching and continue to teach. The best researchers are immersed in long-term projects. Those who fail or are un(der)skilled or un(der)successful in teaching and research enter the third strand of academic life: administration. Therefore, this group of 'academics' are making decisions about those who achieve in the spheres where they underachieved. The result of such a structure is that Professional Development Reviews and promotional processes are conducted by administrator-academics who demand standards that are beyond their own academic knowledge and experience. Ironically, or perhaps not, they do not have the self-awareness to recognise the hypocrisy of their position.

When I wrote *Digital Hemlock* and Aronowitz published *The Knowledge Factory*, such a process of promotion to administration via underachievement was still visible and embarrassing. Administrator/manager/academics were challenged in meetings for their lack of personal academic profile. But over the last decade, the managerialism of higher education has increased. The disconnection between administrative functions and the daily life of students and teachers is complete. These 'managers' now conduct exam boards like annual shareholder meetings. Research is judged by the grants attained to complete it, rather than the calibre of the scholarship. The reason for this transformation is obvious. It is easier to manage grade point averages and budgets than understand the intricacies of curriculum and the subtleties of research.

Recognising this change and challenge, I wrote another book on online learning after *Digital Hemlock*. I wanted it to be less angry and more productive. Titled *The University of Google: Education in the (Post) Information Age*, it was still (too) angry, but logged productive strategies to shape digital information into useful knowledge. I was particularly concerned about the seeming (and now

5 S. Aronowitz, *The Knowledge Factory*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), p.164-165

actual) decline of the credibility and respect given to libraries and librarians. Open, free and publicly available information was declining. Corporately owned and aggregated articles started to dominate databases. Publicly-funded research was locked away from the public that funded it through the requirement to provide credit card details to publishers to gain permission to read it. In such a context, I wrote a book that showed the cost of Google's search engine in deskilling information literacy, with a loss of quality public institutions and professionals who can show us how to find the most accurate and important data, rather than simply being satisfied by the first page of Google returns.

These books split readers. Some found my anger – particularly from a woman – unsettling and offensive. I received and still receive bitter and nasty messages. Invariably these comments are anonymous and insult my nationality, gender, body shape or qualifications. The problem faced by such commentators is that I, to use the old cliché, put my money where my mouth is. I believe in education. I hold three bachelor degrees, three masters, a graduate diploma and a PhD. I do not simply talk about lifelong learning. I live it. Also, I do not talk about teaching and not do it. I have worked nearly double a full-time teaching load for over a decade. I have sustained a research career, with twelve books and over a hundred refereed academic articles, most published in publicly available open access journals. These statements are not offered as a boast. They are revealed to demonstrate I am not a hypocrite. It is easy to term my criticisms of online learning as the ramblings of a Luddite. It is harder to sustain such an attack through the recognition that I have been constructing and teaching online courses since 1997 and hold a qualification in internet studies.

Through the hostility, I have also been granted great gifts from these books. As I have filled academic posts around the world, I have met remarkable people, inspiring librarians, rigorous teachers and passionate lifelong learners. They arrive at speaking events with bags full of my books to sign. Most days – still – I receive an email telling me that they 'loved' *Digital Hemlock* or that they have tested a strategy in *The University of Google* that improved their professional practice. It is the greatest privilege of a writer to have the words typed on a chilly, silent and dark morning come to light and productivity in classrooms and libraries.

Five years after *The University of Google* was published, the situation in schools, universities and libraries was worse than when I wrote *Digital Hemlock*. The credit crunch has transformed public education and public libraries (along with public health) into targets for deep and destructive cuts. Each year of the 2000s, I have wondered how the seismic and strategic destruction of public education can be managed so that the students are not too badly affected. Like most academics I have tried to shield my students from the scale and depth of the cuts, buying the books, media and teaching materials from my salary when the institutions could not or would not provide the required information and platforms. I am not alone. Staff are teaching beyond what is possible. When

I wrote *Digital Hemlock*, I was teaching two large undergraduate courses, two specialist honours seminars and maintaining doctoral supervision. A decade later, I was teaching eight courses, six of which were offered both on campus and via distance education enrolment, alongside the supervisory responsibilities that also expanded exponentially as coursework masters became a key money making venture for universities. The impact of that load on my family and friends was deep. Every day – including Christmas and what is termed ‘annual leave’ – I (desperately) tried to keep up with student queries. Emails beeped into my inbox faster than I could type my responses..

Students ask even the smallest query without pausing to think of an answer for themselves. Instead of thinking, it is easier to leave a note on my Facebook wall. Instead of reading their study guide to find their assignment, they email me to explain it to them. I have tried to be efficient. I answer emails and enter Twitter, Facebook and Skype once a day rather than be interrupted by the relentless beeping of incoming messages.⁶ I am a touch typist, so each message can be processed with speed. But I am torn between two feelings. Firstly, I worry that students are not receiving the attention they deserve. The sheer number of queries is overwhelming. But secondly, I am resentful that instead of reading a study guide, attending the lecture or visiting an institutional learning management system, all of which take hundreds of hours in preparation from staff, they continually find that the easiest option is to contact me, rather than selecting the most appropriate means. While such tactics may not be serious at schools and universities, simply wasting time of teaching staff, the consequences of always using the easiest mode or platform for communication will reveal significant costs in their personal life and the workplace. An obvious example of this problem emerged just after the 2011 post-Stanley Cup ‘riots’ in Vancouver.⁷ When the Canucks lost the final and deciding seventh match, violence erupted in the downtown. Yet after destroying police cars, shops and pummelling Vancouver residents who tried to stop the damage, the perpetrators

6 Ian Price reported that ‘I compared those that used BlackBerry (or similar ‘smart’ devices with ‘push’ functionality) with those that checked email through other means ... Those with BlackBerrys or similar, had 13 per cent higher email volumes but spent two and a half times as long as the second group checking their emails outside of working hours’, *The Guardian*, 16 April, 2011, p. 3. What is so surprising by Price’s realisation is that a slightly higher volume of emails takes more than double the time to process. There are technical reasons for this, involving the size of the BlackBerry keyboard and screen, but also the answering of emails when they come in rather than when it is convenient for the receiver is allowing the push functionality to determine work behaviour and patterns.

7 M. Good, ‘Stanley Cup riot shames Vancouver’, *The Guardian*, 16 June, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/jun/16/stanley-cup-riots-vancouver-canucks>

went home to upload their actions (and photographs of their behaviour) on Facebook.⁸ The police, press and denizens who did not approve the destruction of the city merely took screen shots and sent them to law enforcement agencies. However employers, many of whom were ‘friends’ of the perpetrators, saw the updates and sacked them.⁹ Simply because Facebook updates and the uploading of photographs is easy to do does not mean it is appropriate.

The popularity of Facebook means that an oversharing culture has marinated higher education. Indeed, a student offering advice to her peers stated that the one piece of information she wished someone had told her was to delete her Facebook account.¹⁰ For those who do not follow such advice, they continue the practices of social networking in formal education. We now receive very upsetting and disturbing emails from students who endlessly threaten to leave the institution or ‘overshare’ with staff when they should spend some quiet time thinking through the decisions they are making in their lives.¹¹

From: Tina
Sent: Mon 01/11/2010 11:54
To: Brabazon Tara
Subject: assignment

Tara,

I got home, read the explanation of the assignment in the course handbook and now I'm even more stressed than I was before. I just don't think I can produce a decent piece of work. Ever since I got here I've felt completely out of my depth and with not enough time in a week to get everything (for all modules) read, processed and understood in enough depth.

8 M. Oliveira, ‘Facebook user becomes infamous after claiming role in Vancouver riot’, *Yahoo News Canada*, 16 June, 2011, <http://ca.news.yahoo.com/turn-stanley-cup-riot-photos-evidence-blogs-facebook-090234706.html>

9 ‘Vancouver rioters and bystanders losing their jobs’, *Saveland.ca*, 21 June, 2011, <http://www.saveland.ca/forum/General-Discussions/The-Coffee-Corner/Vancouver-rioters-and-bystanders-losing-their-jobs-80044-1.html>

10 ‘What advice do you wish you'd been given at the start of Year 12’, Murdoch University, April, 2012, http://www.murdoch.edu.au/Future-students/Domestic-students/Future-student-blog/VIDEO-What-advice-do-you-wish-you-had-been-given-at-the-start-of-year-12-/?post_id=899

11 Please note that all emails are presented as they arrived in my email's inbox. However on each occasion, the name of the student has been changed.

INTRODUCTION

I feel anxious about HOW MUCH I'm learning all the time and I just don't think I'm cut out for university, because I'm not enjoying it at all, due to the stress and anxiety it is all causing me. I don't want to throw in the towel because I do enjoy learning, and I understand what we talk about in the lectures/seminars and find it really relevant, exciting and engaging. I feel I have to work because I panic a lot about money, and I am reluctant to 'borrow' money from my parents (even though they would help me in an instant) because they work hard to earn it and it's not fair of me to just take, take, take from them for 18 years.

I think I am going to have to think long and hard about whether life would perhaps be easier if I wasn't attending university. Which breaks my heart in a way because I've worked hard for the past 5 or 6 years to be here in the first place. It's just too much for me right now.

Plus I'm still completely lost when it comes to this assignment. My mind is a complete blank when I try to think of any arguments for or against keeping creative industries in British policy.

sorry to be wasting your time.

As a one off, this message would demand immediate attention from a teacher. I gave that to her. I explained the assignment (again), provided a summary of a semester-long course in five sentences, helped her structure the paper and tried to give her confidence. But I should also provide some context. This same student sent me daily emails about the state of her life, work, family and finances. She lived in my office, tried to stop other students entering the room by stressing the scale of her problems, and jumped onto instant messaging whenever I entered Facebook. The question is, if the ever-present staff member was not available at the end of an email, would this student simply have to address her personal issues without oversharing with academics? She completed the course and achieved an A grade. Her work deserved it. She moved easily into second year and completed her degree. But I often wonder what will happen when she enters the workforce.

This student demonstrated a tendency to overshare and attempted to create a culture of guilt, blame and co-dependency. However such an attitude was extended by a – frankly – stunning request from another first year student.

DIGITAL DIETING

From: Mal
Subject: Request for help :)
Date Sent: November 16, 2011 10:03 PM
To: Brabazon, Tara ()

Hi Tara!

I would like to make a request. I am doing this essay for one of courses, which discusses the effects that the 9/11 attacks left on the Muslim community. I needed someone to edit my essay for me, and I thought no one can do a better job than you. Can you please edit my essay for me! I will finish it by tomorrow morning, and if you give me the consent, I'll send it to as soon as I can.

Thank You :)

This request was not (even) made for an essay submitted in one of my courses. So the student 'needed' someone to edit, a skill that must be learned by all undergraduates, and assumed I would do it. She did not consider – or perhaps she did – the impact of a professor editing (unacknowledged) a paper for another course. How could she deserve the mark she would receive? But she did not learn a key lesson: responsibility for her own work. Universities are special. Staff do care about students. We want them to learn, improve, create and thrive. The rest of life is not like higher education. An employer will not be as patient. Clearly, no one in her life has said to her that she has some issues to resolve: it is her degree and her assignment. Editing is part of the way in which her grade is determined.

The assumptions of staff constant availability are no longer questioned. The Christmas and New Year shut down of the campus has no effect on the availability of the digital institution for students.

From: Paul
Sent: Mon 03/01/2011 14:50
To: Brabazon Tara
Subject: worried about deadlines
hi tara

hope you had a good christmas and new years and 2011 will be a awesome year for you i'v been working really hard over the holidays but coupled with the amount of hours i'v had to work in the pub to get the money together for the fee payments for the course and to pay rent i wont be able to actually start writing it until the 6th.

This only leaves me 5 days, three of which i have to work double shifts in order to pay rent. i physically can't write an assignment this long in that amount of time without it being extremely poor. i was wondering if i could have a short extension to get it done properly in or if i needed to fill in an extension form (this isn't a problem as i can get short extensions for dyslexia). just thought id let you know the situation.. I went into uni today to see if you were about but its still closed until tomorrow (i cant believe how long how long its closed for, I feel really sorry for students that do not have access to their own computer) thanks for reading looking forward to the second semester and new things to learn about (worry about)

Staff can do nothing about the financial situation of students. Students know the deadlines for assignments at least three months before papers are due. Yet what is so interesting is that Paul attempted to visit me in my office while the University was still closed for the Christmas break. But the online university was open and an email was sent, received and (yes) answered.

Watching this type of student behaviour and managing (just) this proliferation of platforms made me realise a single truth: less is more. The read-write web has enabled a productive range of options to disseminate and interact with content, and communicate with staff and students. However, this post-Fordist, deskilled, oversharing student culture is not only highly dependent and extrinsically motivated, but treats academic staff like shop assistants. Education is being bought and consumed. Staff must serve their interests. Through this proliferation of social media, the service orientation of a university never clocks off. Through the last few years, I have started to feel hounded. Students send the same message to a work email, Blackboard or Moodle and Facebook email. They send Facebook wall posts and Tweets asking the same question. This is not a productive use of the new potentials of web 2.0. It is lazy behaviour that discourages learning. It configures a dependency culture that is actively blocking the creation of independent critical thinkers.

There is also the question of speed. Culturally and historically, that which is faster dominates that which is slower. Jason Taylor extended this hypothesis to both food and media, arguing that, 'fast refers to a culture of disconnection from the origin and to the real social costs, the costs to others or society at large, for the conduct of business'.¹² The impact of that argument to writing and thinking is that scrolling and skimming replaces reading. There is a movement to support 'slow reading', which shows similarities to the commitment to slow food.¹³

12 J. Taylor, *Fast food and fast media: the transformation of fast consumers to slow citizens*, (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert, 2011), p. 3

13 P. Kingsley, 'The Art of Slow Reading', *The Guardian*, 15 July, 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jul/15/slow-reading?CMP=tw_tgu

Academics report that we are becoming less attentive book-readers. Bath Spa University lecturer Greg Garrard recently revealed that he has had to shorten his students' reading list,¹⁴ while Keith Thomas, an Oxford historian, has written that he is bemused by junior colleagues who analyse sources with a search engine, instead of reading them in their entirety.¹⁵

This change is not caused by the students. Certainly they lack information and media literacy and these skills must be embedded into curriculum from the first year at University. Also, they have not been prepared to understand the difference in level and mode of teaching and learning between high school and university. They arrive with the mantra that 'we are paying for this degree'. This manifests disturbingly for staff. If they are paying to attend, do we have a responsibility to pass them? If they are paying for a degree, have they bought staff's time for three or four years? While I can answer all the on campus questions, emails, tweets and Facebook posts, a greater question remains unanswered. How much are these students learning through this oversharing and under-reading?

Such questions summon a jolt of pause and reflection. What if less is more? What if – even in a digital age of endless migration, repurposing and sharing of data – education and the learning experience was rendered precious and special, rather than spread around the web without considered selection of appropriate media platform? For some media to live, thrive and be rendered productive, dynamic and useful in education, other media must die. The problem, caused through the neoliberal managerial marinade of education, is that the difficult but necessary questions that frame best practice have been lost and digital business as usual has been encouraged. So while Skype, YouTube and Libsyn provide valuable services that can be organised and disseminated with flexibility and customisation through a Moodle-enabled Learning Management System, this option has been rejected. Instead the same systems I used in the late 1990s – Blackboard and WebCT – still dominate online learning in universities. The changes between 1997 and the system deployed today are minimal. Yes, there is the potential for wikis and to incorporate an unfortunately named 'mashup', which describes embedding a YouTube video into the discussion forum. Considering the array of opportunities that are available, too many universities have remained wedded to Blackboard. The reasons for this decision are many: fear of the unknown, ignorance, trepidation of change, underprepared staff through underfunded professional development programmes, and a desire to hold on to the apron strings of institutional technical support. The result of conservative choices of technology amid a radical neoliberal model of financial management is a corroded, sloppy and clunky 'learning management system'.

14 G. Garrard, 'A novel idea: slow reading', *Times Higher Education*, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=412075>

15 Kingsley, *op. cit.*

It takes staff between seven and ten days a year to prepare the portals for the (often minimal) student usage. Meanwhile, because of the flaws in the institutional system, staff must now maintain these sites and also use all the other web 2.0 functions outside of the portal that the students prefer. The cost is a deep loss of staff time. A more radical but useful managerial decision would be to consider the nature of online learning, determine its goals and aims, and configure a customised series of applications that fulfil those functions. A generic, clunky and slow system to deliver online learning was inadequate when I first published *Digital Hemlock* in 2002. It still does not work. Now that better options are available, the time is right to assemble these flexible platforms that feature the applications appropriate to a discipline, level of learning, assessment protocol and staff expertise.

For new media to be born, old media must die. At the moment, the fetish for the new has not involved the attendant emptying of the trash. So this means that staff continue to manage dead and live media. Let me provide two examples. Every year it takes me a week before the start of each semester to prepare the Blackboard portals for my courses. There are sonic sessions to record, films to edit, upload and embed, study guides to render web-ready and discussion fora to structure. It is mind-numbingly slow. Through the semester, I (efficiently) spend one hour per day and six hours on Saturdays answering students' questions on the discussion forum, offering feedback to their answers and setting up the next intellectual scaffold of questions for the following week.

That time is spent within the institutional learning management system. Student emails take up to ten hours a week to answer, extending to a full-time job in the week before the assignment is due. But then there are the new applications and platforms to create, edit and disseminate. Podcasts for and from my postgraduate students take three hours to record, edit and upload each week. Tweeted questions take only a few moments to answer. These functions, because of their asynchronous nature, can be completed around other tasks in my life. But Skype is different. It is synchronous. I originally proposed a two hour session for my MA students each week, from 3–5pm. This meant that students from the UK and on the east and west coast of the United States could meet and manage the time difference. Students 'dropped in' at any point of that session. But then, one of the students had to pick up her child from school at 3pm. So the session started at 2pm. Others arrived just before 5pm so the session carried on beyond the designated period. What started at an efficient two hours became four hours of individual contact that, while useful for some, was very inefficient for me. In *Digital Hemlock*, I made the statement that the best students use all the available facilities: lectures, seminars, office hours and online fora.¹⁶ As the platforms have increased in number, the maxim is still accurate.

16 T. Brabazon, *Digital Hemlock*, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002)

The already engaged students – those least in need of further assistance – use Facebook, Skype, Twitter, Academia.edu and an array of on and offline facilities. The disconnected students are rarely drawn into discussions as the opportunities for contact increase.

Quite rightly, critics might reply that this is my job. Those critics are correct. I am paid to teach students. But none of those functions that I outlined in the previous paragraphs existed when I started my first academic appointment in 1994. At that time, I lectured, ran seminars, saw students in my office and helped them with their assignments. Administration – including submission of grades, marketing and admission inquiries – were managed by administrators rather than academics. There were no emails, learning management systems, podcasts or Skype. The silent question must be written: did those students learn any less than our current cohort?

That question must remain unanswered and hanging because we will never know. Certainly, these extra options make no difference to some students. For others, they use some alternative media platforms very well and gain intellectual benefit. But more is not always more. For educational marketers to argue that more media generate more learning – and that software and hardware obsolescence is productive rather than wasteful – they have to reify, demean and simplify other modes of teaching and learning that may not involve the most recent platform of delivery. For example, in the statement that follows, Gregory Ferenstein affirmed the value of the iPad, creating artificial choices and a disrespect of other analogue modes of teaching and learning.

Educators are eager to break students free from of the nap-inducing prison of concrete lecture halls. Universities, such as Abu Dhabi, are integrating classrooms into mobile devices to keep procrastinating students alert on due dates, keep discussions alive after the bell rings, and promote serendipitous idea sharing. Apple's new front-facing camera will facilitate interaction between students and teachers as they roam campuses and cities.¹⁷

Mobile learning has advantages, as does the iPad. However, lectures are remarkable, inspirational events. The idea that they would be termed 'nap-inducing' and a 'prison' demonstrates how far the hyperbole must be stretched to validate an expensive and optional extra that few students possess – an iPad. But it is not digital platforms destroying the quality of lectures. It is dense, decaying and destructive managerialism of higher education. For example, when I commenced work at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology – a

17 G. Ferenstein, 'How the iPad 2 will revolutionize education', *Fast Company.com*, 3 March, 2011, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1733662/how-the-ipad-2-will-revolutionize-classroom-education>

INTRODUCTION

laptop university – I was surprised to find three hour lectures timetabled. I then asked the timetable officer when were the tutorials and seminars held. Pause. Answer: there are no tutorials or seminars. So the ideology of student-centred learning, when combined with technology-enabled (or enhanced) learning at a ‘laptop university’, has resulted in a three hour lecture and no tutorials. That is the current definition of student centred learning. It is little wonder that lectures may be considered to be ‘boring’. Anyone who has ever attempted to construct a three hour teaching session in a room for two hundred students understands that boredom is – indeed – the least of our problems.

There reaches a point of saturation where the same information is being presented in multiple media because students have not bothered to read their study guide. Every week, I answer 100+ emails with a statement like, ‘Courtney, if you look at page 6 of the study guide you will find the first assignment question and hints about how to answer it.’ Or, ‘Ben, as shown on page 7 of your study guide, the paper is due on 6 March.’ Then there are queries about reading.

From: Cath
Sent: Thu 07/10/2010 17:12
To: Brabazon Tara
Subject: question time!

Hi Tara, it's Cath here, just wondering if we have any reading to do for the lesson next Monday, as I missed the start of this week's lesson. Some people are saying we do and some that we don't so it's all very confusing! thanks, Cath

All students receive a full study guide, with each week's topics presented, including a list of ‘Required Reading’. All materials to be read before each session are photocopied for students and distributed for free. Each week's readings are separated by a coloured sheet and title page headed ‘Week One Reading’, and ‘Week Two Reading’, through to the end of the semester. But via an email, a student asked if it was necessary to complete any reading in preparation for a lecture and seminar. I took a large breath, looked to the heavens, and typed a polite reply email, explaining that ‘Week One’ reading was for week one and ‘Week Two’ reading was for – you are ahead of me – week two. I confirmed that preparation was required for lectures and seminars at university. If this student had spent five minutes reading her study guide, she may have realised that the materials had been photocopied for a reason and that I stated in that document that reading must be completed prior to the teaching sessions. The question is, what if an email had not been available for her to contact me? She may have had

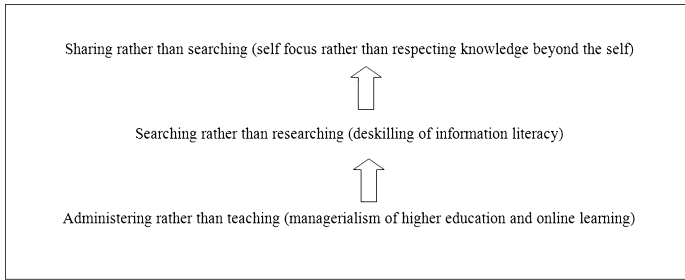
to work out for herself that a university course requires that she completes the preparation listed for each week in the semester. However there is a context for her behaviour, which provided the motivation for the bizarre managerialism in our universities that celebrates online learning.

In April 2010, and for the first time, Facebook received more independent visitors than Google. This moment is an important propulsion for this book. It is this one fact, as a metonymy of the 'rich and complex present' that McLuhan described at the start of this introduction, that has propelled this third volume of the *Digital Hemlock* Trilogy. To summon one of the greatest trilogies of popular culture, this is my *Return of the Jedi*. The disappointments and losses of the past are acknowledged and felt, rather than displaced and ignored. The potentials of the expansive present are mapped, channelled and shaped. But a deep power of challenge, transformation and critique is embraced, not from the Force, but from intellectual inversion, reflection, consciousness and counterintuitivity. While Google deskilled information literacy and Facebook deskilled interpersonal relationships, occasionally it is important to remember – even in a galaxy far, far away – that the Death Star was destroyed by Luke Skywalker in a lone cruiser and the Ewoks triumphed over a mighty empire. Even Darth Vader was redeemed. Therefore, this third book controls the anger, frustration and dense disappointments to find strategies that understand the past and use it to shape not only a better present but a more socially just future. It is an important time to provide some positive and powerful strategies. A survey of 8,231 teachers by the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers in 2011 reported that, 'Too many pupils arrive at school with mobile phones, iPods and MP3 players when teachers wish they could bring a pen'.¹⁸ Occasionally, less is more.

This third book in my online learning trilogy provides a history of the last decade, but asks what the shift from Google to Facebook signifies for higher education. It captures a movement from searching to sharing. Therefore each of my three books has hooked into a key moment of transition in the online learning discourse. *Digital Hemlock* showed the consequences of managers, rather than teachers, running online education for economic gain rather than to benefit learning. *The University of Google* mapped the costs of deskilling information literacy in a time of proliferating information and a decline in the profile and standing of libraries and librarians. This final book, *Digital Dieting*, combines both these dense challenges to higher education and locates a new and serious problem: the cultural shift from searching for (albeit superficial) information on Google through to an (over)sharing culture where recording individual and daily minutiae is as relevant and important as reading refereed scholarship or making the most of the intellectual time available in a university degree.

18 R. Garner, 'iPods replace pens in kids' kit for school', *The Independent on Sunday*, 24 April, 2011, p. 19

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Each stage has framed the context for the next. Managers made poor decisions about software, hardware, learning and teaching. Technology ‘justified’ removing seminars and tutorials from the timetable, with Blackboard supposedly providing a fitting replacement for personal contact and assistance from staff. Google seemed to ‘replace’ libraries and librarians, providing a cheaper option to manage information. Students preferred sharing their experiences rather than reading and thinking about the ideas of others. The cost of such a history is that students are learning less or, to cite one writer, it is now necessary to construct ‘eLearning design for a short attention span’.¹⁹ Students work the system and often ask how they can reduce their workload and lift their grade.

From: Lisa
Sent: 16 September 2011 22:16
To: Tara Brabazon
Subject: New student

Hello Tara (sorry for not typing professor because I read your powerpoint and you have asked to be called Tara or T)
I have just added this course today as I heard its a very interesting class and you learn alot .

I have missed only 1 lecture and would like to know if I can still answer the 2 questions in the discussion to get the mark and be involved I have read your powerpoint slides.

I'm taking 5 courses and they all require reading and writing and my gpa is low and would like to bring it up, do you think I should be in this course does it require alot of reading?

Let me know please if its the right course for me.

Thank you

¹⁹ R. Jimenez, ‘E-learning design for short attention span and overloaded learners’, *Vignettes Training*, 13 April, 2011, <http://vignettestraining.blogspot.com/2011/04/elearning-design-for-short-attention.html>

What is this student asking of me? Is it simply a case that she has under-achieved through her degree, wishes to lift her grade point average and yet does not wish to complete the work required to enable that improvement? Instead of asking me about whether the course is easy enough and requires little reading, other questions should be asked of her. What if more is demanded of students? What if they must read? What if they must write? What if they must learn how to self-manage rather than overshare? What if they have to differentiate between leisure and learning through the development of advanced media and information literacy skills early in their degree?

Marking change

I am not blaming students. Teachers and librarians – through curriculum, assessment and information literacy programmes – must intervene to commence the digital detox. I have been assisted in mapping and following this project through a range of outstanding, controversial, stropky, political and powerful books about higher education published since *The University of Google*. It takes great courage to question the standards of teaching and learning in universities. A remarkable book on this topic has already been mentioned in this introduction: Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa's *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*.²⁰ They state that the quality of undergraduate learning is no longer a silent fear amongst academics, but a public problem for policy makers, politicians and employers. They present a longitudinal study locating the barriers to learning in undergraduate degrees. The impact of students spending time on 'nonacademic activities' such as drinking and socialising results in a lack of preparation for academic study.

Many students come to college not only poorly prepared by prior schooling for highly demanding academic tasks that ideally lie in front of them, but – more troubling still – they enter college with attitudes, norms, values, and behaviours that are often at odds with academic commitment.²¹

Their research did not monitor or measure online 'diversions' but there is a reason why Facebook is nicknamed Crackbook. Instead, they summon the customary argument that students are underprepared on entry into universities and conduct little personal study once on campus. But the authors then enact

20 R. Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically adrift: limited learning on college campuses*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011)

21 *ibid.*, p. 3

a knight's move. It is a productive one. They state, 'If one is to cast aspersions on student cultures that exist on college campuses today, one would do well to focus equal attention on the faculty cultures and orientations'.²² Blame for a lack of educational achievement is not loaded onto students. Instead, a spotlight is shone on academics: their expectations, preparation and (in)ability to lift students to the required scholarly standards. Arum and Roksa focus on the disconnection between staff and students, starting from the conventional (but correct) argument that doctoral programmes do not help academics become effective teachers. Subject expertise is only one requirement for creating a successful learning environment. The impact of a lack of specialist training in education and a focus on more pressing (or institutionally recognised) tasks is that the role of teachers in student learning is underplayed and undermined. Schools are blamed.²³ Students are blamed. These are easy targets. It is harder to verify if an academic's methods, strategies and preparatory work are adequate to create a context of intellectual excitement, motivation and rigour.

Arum and Roksa's fascinating and deeply disturbing study of disconnection between staff and students is placed in context by Benjamin Ginsberg's *The Fall of the Faculty: the rise of the all-administrative university and why it matters*. He investigates the profound cost to research, teaching and the development of ideas through the bureaucratisation of universities. It is a bitter book, but like an explosive espresso in the morning, his message rushes to its targets: both the brain and the heart.

A former assistant dean – or perhaps deanlet or deanling might be a better title – at my university explained that students need to learn more than academic skills. They also must be taught, 'the universal life skills that everyone needs to know'. And what might be an example of one of these all-important proficiencies? According to this deanling, a premier example is event planning. 'For many students', the biggest event they've ever planned is a dinner at home.' But, planning an event on campus might require, 'reserving the room, notifying Security, arranging transportation and lodging for out-of-town speakers, ordering food'. Armed with training in a subject as important and intellectually challenging as event planning, students would hardly need to know anything about physics, or calculus or literature or any of those other inconsequential topics taught by the stodgy faculty.²⁴

22 *ibid.*, p. 5

23 An example of blaming schools for this lack of preparation for universities is C. Cass, 'Poll: Some students say high school doesn't prepare them well enough for college, job', *York Daily Record*, 19 April, 2011, http://www.ydr.com/ci_17883609

24 B. Ginsberg, *The fall of the faculty: the rise of the all-administrative university and why it matters*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 11

I know that there are scholars who dislike polemics. Perhaps they have not suffered – or indeed been ‘managed by’ – deanlings. I have been administered by men and women who carry around titles longer than their names, and certainly longer than their qualifications: Acting Assistant to the Deputy Dean or Deputising Assistant to the Acting Dean. These roles are often bestowed without a clear appointment process. They gift power and vanity without a verification of qualifications and expertise. My favourite example of deanling was a man charged as the head of a faculty committee to develop a PhD programme. He had never supervised a PhD student to completion, examined a PhD, gained any teaching qualifications or written any doctoral regulations in his entire career. Yet with a gall that would make Lady Gaga blush, leadership was granted, but not earned.

This corporatization and hypocrisy of universities has drawn considered, passionate and determined critique. Martha Nussbaum’s *Cultivating Humanity*²⁵ and *Not for Profit*²⁶ provide a powerful advocacy for liberal education. Anthony Kronman asks that university students continue to ask bigger questions than what will be their first job.²⁷ Similarly Ian Angus has published a – frankly – delightful book that every undergraduate (and their teachers) should read: *Love the Questions: University education and enlightenment*.²⁸ In the battle between a corporate and public university, Angus offered an evocative statement about the benefits of the latter. A larger and more expansive engagement with this topic is Christopher Newfield’s *Unmaking the public university*. A dense and productive book, he tracks what has happened to universities in a post-industrial age. He is motivated by what he has seen through his academic career: ‘intellectual and imaginative decline’.²⁹ Similarly, William Bowen, Matthew Chingos and Michael McPherson configured an intricate study that reveals what happened in the space between enrolling in a university and graduating from it in *Crossing the Finish Line*.³⁰ The failure rates, the lack of preparation for university and the disparities in degree completion on the basis of gender and race provide disturbing reading. The scale of their research and the interpretations of the

25 M. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997)

26 M. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010)

27 A. Kronman, *Education’s End: Why our colleges and universities have given up on the meaning of life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007)

28 I. Angus, *Love the questions: university education and enlightenment*, (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2009)

29 C. Newfield, *Unmaking the public university: the forty-year assault on the middle class*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 14

30 W. Bowen, M. Chingos and M. McPherson, *Crossing the finish line: completing college at America’s public universities*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)

data patterns offer a profound service in thinking about failure – in its many connotations – within higher education.

One other important book in this ‘Universities in crisis’ cluster is James Cote and Anton Allahar’s *Lowering Higher Education*. They continue the arguments of the books in this group, tracking the rise in corporate universities and the decline in liberal education. Yet their research also takes a moment to consider the role of technology in this narrative.

The enthusiasm about the application of the new technologies to the university setting has clearly outpaced the empirical evidence regarding their potential to enhance academic engagement and learning outcomes. It is clearly a curious development that so many people are willing to let technology drive the curriculum when it should be the other way around ... The public is being told that in the span of one generation, the wisdom of numerous centuries of higher education is to be overturned and young people will lead adults to the Promised Land of education with technological gadgets.³¹

Their argument is important: corporatisation and managerialism has manifested into a prioritisation of technology rather than teaching and learning. The consequences of this realisation provide the foundation relationship for the book in your hands.

These are books of anger. These are books of commitment. Such emotional energy is well placed in defending our universities. There is a reason for this investment. Our students deserve the best education we can give them. Too often – because online learning has been sold to institutional managers as a cheap option, it is introduced to cut down contact hours with staff and reduce the depth and breadth of a university degree. But learning is not convenient or efficient. It cannot be timetabled. It should not be reduced or limited ‘for short attention spans’. Being a teacher means that nights, weekends and everyday events are subsumed by the needs of students. But there reaches a point where more (technology) is simply more (technology). The project of this book is to work out which components of this online environment and information glut is of use to higher education, which platforms are dead media, and how to develop models and strategies to enable learning. This is digital dieting. But as always, before the diet, one last dip into the digital cookie jar is required.

31 J. Cote and A. Allahar, *Lowering higher education: the rise of corporate universities and the fall of liberal education*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 173

Digital binge

The behaviour of students in such an age of digital binging is absolutely understandable. They are framed by a culture that equates the new with the useful and transitory celebrity and fame as the height of success. A recent study by University of California San Francisco (UCSF) explored the cost of multitasking on citizens. They monitored compulsive, repetitive actions with no external trigger such as checking and rechecking a mobile phone, revealing addiction-like tendencies with profound off-line consequences. When reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the consequences were obvious.

There's growing concern among scientists that indulging in these ceaseless disruptions isn't good for our brains, in much the way that excessive sugar or fat – other things we evolved to crave when they were in shorter supply – isn't good for our bodies.³²

The report was written by Adam Gazzaley, Michael Rubens and Jasdeep Sabharwal and demonstrated that multitasking had an impact, not so much on memory, but the relationship between attention and memory. Gazzaley noted that,

The impact of distractions and interruptions reveals the fragility of working memory ... This is an important fact to consider, given that we increasingly live in a more demanding, high-interference environment, with a dramatic increase in the accessibility and variety of electronic media and the devices that deliver them, many of which are portable.³³

The consequences of such research for students and education are profound. We live in a distraction factory.³⁴ Reading academic materials is incredibly difficult. Most refereed articles are complex, intricate and densely worded. However Facebook updates and text messages are easy, delivered directly to a mobile telephone. The language is basic. Spelling and grammar are optional. References are rare or random. It is completely logical that students would choose to access the easy rather than the challenging. Therefore, this book

32 J. Temple, 'All those tweets, apps and updates may drain the brain', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 April, 2011, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/04/16/BUTO1J0S2P.DTL#ixzz1Jq9BzwBM>

33 A. Gazzaley, 'The Impact of Distractions and Interruptions reveals the fragility of working memory', *Medical News Today*, 12 April, 2011, <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/222047.php>

34 A. Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992)

instigates a digital dieting plan, but also shows the consequences on learning if a digital detox does not take place.

The links in this book between technology and food are not accidental. Neither are they (only) metaphoric. For many nations in the world, there is a food glut. Matched by sedentary lives where leisure is dominated by screen-enabled activities, obesity results.³⁵ However there are also nations – ironically the same nations – that also suffer from an information glut. This results in information obesity, where too much low quality data is consumed, with consequences to interpretative skills, social engagement and world view. A way to manage food-enabled obesity is to restrict calories and increase exercise. The way to manage information obesity outlined in this book is to restrict media platforms and increase information literacy.

Imagine if scholars spent as much time managing information as magazines, talk shows, blogs and breakfast television chatters about dieting? Yet while too much food may be the basis of a folk devil or moral panic,³⁶ too much information is rarely discussed as a problem. Obviously, plentiful and high quality food is not a problem, if eating is balanced with exercise. But without the skills of media and information literacy, students and citizens revel in low quality online information that fills their day and are not even aware that other types of information are available. The task of this book is to firstly create consciousness of the social, political and scholarly costs of a high quantity of low quality information and then to provide strategies to medicate it, offering – if I continue the metaphor – a gastric band for the brain.

Sometimes it will not matter what a teacher does. A student may decide that academic learning is less important than drinking. They move through a degree doing as little work as possible hoping they will pass. I understand the frustration of teachers. It is deeply upsetting when staff have worked hard, provided hours of individual attention, offered encouragement, generated innovative and creative assessment and students simply cannot be bothered to care, read their own work or respect the gifts of a university education. For example, in one assignment I asked students to write their own version of George Orwell's powerful essay 'Why I Write'.³⁷ There were remarkable

35 R. Albritton, *Let them eat junk*, (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2009)

36 Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay's edited collection, *The Fat Studies Reader*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009) demonstrated the impact of medicalising differently shaped bodies. Particularly they demonstrate the value of the size acceptance movement through such organizations as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, which began in 1969. They demonstrate how the assumptions encircling the word obesity facilitate discrimination.

37 G. Orwell, 'Why I write', *Essays*, (London: Everyman, 2003)

responses and courageous attempts. Then I received this. The errors presented here are from the original.

I know Orwell was no Shakespeare or he was a natural master of the English language. I found some of his early work painfully bad. but yet his work like *Animal Farm* and *1854* is perfectly composed which inspires me and my own work. By any mean am a 'good' writer or a 'bad' writer but simply a writer I feel like we are all here for specific purposes, to be great at something and to provide something unique that makes each one of us exceptional. Life is not a race. Only we, as people, make it so. It's not a race, but rather a journey to be enjoyed. Slow down. Listen to your inner voice.³⁸

More Oprah than Orwell, this student (and the entire class), was given a 300+ page collection of readings, a fifty page study guide, a discussion forum and sonic sessions to scaffold both the content and their assessment. When reading this assignment I was horrified. This student failed this paper. I was so amazed by the mention of '1854' in the same paragraph that abuses Orwell's early work suggesting that *Down and Out in Paris and London*³⁹ is 'painfully bad', that it will take me some time to consider how to teach such students so that these errors do not repeat. But the ten papers that matched this low level out of the eighty submitted in the first year course all had two characteristics: a lack of reading and no drafting or editing of their prose. Here is another example.

The reason that I have never had a very good relationship with words is probably due to the fact that I do not read. I really struggle not because I am a bad reader but because I find it hard to get involved in a book and struggle to keep in focus with the words I am reading. As I am speaking or looking at the words I constantly think of other things and am never really able to reflect on them. They have been quite a few times that I have attempted to read books, even just popular fictional ones such as Harry Potter but I was still unable to read further then the third or fourth page. I would love to be able to sit down and enjoy a book but am still yet to find the ideal one.⁴⁰

The extract from which this paper was submitted was written by a university student. How did she make it to university without reading beyond the third or fourth page of a book? As a teacher, I wonder how I can help university

38 First year student, 'Why I write', *Thinking Pop*, University of Brighton, 18 March, 2011

39 G. Orwell, *Down and out in Paris and London*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1933)

40 First year student, 'Why I write', *Thinking Pop*, University of Brighton, 18 March, 2011

students who do not read the ideas of others and – actually – do not even read their own words. But I do wonder how she made it to a university and how she was hoping to achieve high grades in a degree for which she completed no reading or drafting. Such a comment shows that this era is not the death of the book, but a wound to reading.

These first year students are inexperienced. Yet it is possible to track what is happening to reading, writing and thinking through observing the patterns from experienced readers. Malcolm Knox was the literary editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Through the 2000s, he noticed something shifting in his own behaviour, motivations and concentration.

The heart of a literary editor's job is reading new books, assigning them to reviewers, reading and editing those reviews and placing them on the page. To perform this job effectively, a quantum of peace is required. The contemporary reality is, however, far from tranquil. Email, digital news alerts, SMS, phone calls, attention-grabbing stunts, even letters and faxes (and, since my time, RSS feeds, tweets, blogs, social networking pokes) pour in so torrentially that the requisite isolation becomes impossible. As my attention was being filleted, I became restless and anxious and wondered if I was suffering from some form of attention disorder ... As I struggled to recover my powers of concentration, the most telling analysis came from the author Mandy Sayer. She said that writer's block didn't originate in a lack of inspiration. It wasn't a lack of anything, she said. The problem was an excess of connectedness ... I use the net as a research tool but factoids picked up from the screen don't really stick. When I research in books, from which I could pilfer some directly relevant material, I often find myself swept into the recreated past and am soon reading the entire book. Inefficient, yes – but my feel for histories, my immersion in another place or time, is immeasurably enhanced by reading whole books rather than strip-mining them for quotes. As the racing driver Jackie Stewart used to say, to go faster, you have to go slower.⁴¹

Knox had a great advantage. He learnt to read and write in an analogue age. He gained a wide vocabulary and context for reading. He could self correct. While there was a transitional liminality as he gained experience in managing the digital interventions into his life and work, he was able to construct a new stability and normality by remembering the best of prior practices of reading and writing and creating productive new strategies to negotiate the speed, accessibility and convenience of digital materials and dissemination processes. John Miedema argues that 'slow reading is about reading as a reflective practice. The idea of reading more slowly may seem odd in a time of increasing demand for speed

41 M. Knox, "Driven by distraction," *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 2, 2011, p. 6

reading of volumes of information'.⁴² Actually, the key literacy is neither fast reading nor slow reading, but the intellectual capacity to recognise the genre of the text, evaluate its difficulty, the context in which it is being read and the outcome or outputs required from that reading. There is a parallel to driving. Drivers do not keep to the same pace in a school zone and a freeway. Reading the environment means that we can moderate our speed to suit the conditions. Reading a cereal box requires a different set of priorities and skills to reading Althusser's reflections on Marxism.

Instead of focusing on such literacies, the imperative to widen access to higher education has meant that other issues, such as the academic expectations of students when they arrive at university, have been underplayed. Arum and Roksa argue that the focus on access to an institution rather than expectations once they arrived on campus, results in students drifting through university without a sense of why they are participating in learning. Occasionally, I see this problem. At Murdoch University, a student asked whether she should complete a degree in cultural studies or move to a career in real estate. At the University of Brighton, a young man asked if he should finish his degree in media or move to plumbing. I would understand if a student was enrolled in engineering and considering a change to mathematics, or enrolled in History and questioning whether English was of greater interest. But the gap between the degree chosen and the career aspiration suggests a lack of advice before applying to a university. Access is not the only barrier to learning. Expectations of higher education pose more complex challenges. This is best captured by the case of Trish

From: Trish
 Sent: 09 January 2012 09:18
 To: Tara Brabazon
 Subject: Communication for Social Change

Hi Tara,

It's great to e-meet you. I haven't previously taken a course which you have taught so I wanted to touch base with you before tomorrow's first class. I am enrolled in your 4th year class Communication for Social Change. Now I've read through the course syllabus and have taken note of your requirement for attendance for the course as I've included in the email below.

42 J. Miedema, *Slow reading*, (Duluth: Litwin Books, 2009), p. 1

INTRODUCTION

My personal circumstances are much different than that of other students as I am an adult student and work full time in order to support a household. That being said I've managed to make arrangements with professors in the past to continue to participate in the course from a distance. I am able to attend class once in a while, but not each week. I know this is a huge inconvenience but it is something I have no choice over.

I was hoping to discuss this with you either in person or through email to see if there is a way that we can make me attending this course work.

I've reviewed the readings/media sources as well as the assignments and feel that I am able to complete the course successfully under my circumstances. I do have a close relationship with one of your students who is able to attend class and am able to discuss course material, etc. with her on a regular basis.

Please let me know how you feel or any thoughts you have on my situation.

Thank you,

After investigating this situation, it became clear that Trish had not attended much of her degree programme at all over the four years. The justification why she behaved in this way is through the commitment to paid work and the necessity to 'support a household'. Obviously there were students in the class who were also the key worker in their family and supporting children. However what makes this story so startling is not simply the attitude that passing is possible without attendance. Through the semester, and exhibited in the discussion forum, her true attitude toward education emerged. I was teaching the function of education in facilitating social change. Trish once more did not attend the lecture. But she did contribute to the forum.

From: Trish

Date: February 6, 2012 3:53 PM

As someone who already works in the field of communications and has experienced the type of work and knowledge needed I find what we are learning for the most part extremely useless and completely unrelated to the working world, no offense TB! But it's funny because unless you've experienced the working world in your field, you really have no clue.

Phil has had the opportunity to work in the same field and even company as I have and completely understands where I'm coming from when I say what we are learning is completely unrelated. At first

when I had talked to him about the differences he agreed but not whole heartedly. When he started working and experiencing the day to day functions of the job as well as the demands and requirements, he came to me and said "you were soooo right". It made me laugh because someone else understood my point of view first hand.

Tania, someone who I've worked with on numerous projects always talked to me about the differences between work and what we were learning. She hadn't experienced them first hand but it became clear when working on an assignment for a specific class during 3rd year that the differences were huge. We were given an assignment that we weren't even given background on, simply told to perform as the assignment requested. I had the firsthand experience of doing similar assignments on a daily basis for work so I knew what I needed to go into the project without needed research and background. Tania on the other hand felt lost. I couldn't blame her because from sitting in the classes myself I would have felt unprepared had I not been working in the field.

Sure that is only one example, and yes a lot of the course names could make a lot of sense towards the field, courses like Business Communications and Public Relations. However, the lessons actually being taught in these classes have no relevance what so ever to the tasks and experiences that occur within the working world.

With the greatest respects to my colleagues in public relations, I do not teach three- and four-year undergraduate degrees, alongside postgraduate qualifications, so that a student can write a public relations campaign. The question is why this student did not enrol in a Diploma course at a technical and further education college. The idea that the complexity, diversity, power, depth, confusion and passion of a university degree should be reduced to the expertise to work in a public relations office is not only ridiculous but offensive. Such a statement is made worse because this is a student that has attended so little of her degree that the entire process is close to pointless. Obviously the irony escaped her: she did not attend her university classes but then complained that she did not learn anything from her degree. Therefore such attendance practices and attitudes to learning are having a profound effect on the scale of teaching, reading, writing and assessment that we can instigate in a semester and a degree.

Unfortunately, Trish's story does not end here.

INTRODUCTION

From: Trish
Sent: 14 March 2012 12:14
To: Tara Brabazon
Subject: Re: Topic for Social Change

Hi TB,
I

feel like you are going to hate me by the end of this.

I have a bunch of questions about some of the sources we need. Here they are:

- How do you find a scholarly monograph? I get that you don't want a textbook, but how do I go about finding that?
- For the ebook, it has to be strictly online? That's a hard hard find
- What in the world is a refereed article? And of course how do you find those and know that they are refereed?
- what is the difference between a vodcast and a youtube video (could be a stupid questions)
- for the music item, could i use their theme jingle?

I think that might be it..

I feel horrible because I never leave things last minute and I just realized it was due on the 20th when i thought it was due at the end of the month and now

I'm scared!!!! HELP

So this student who found higher education pointless, even though she had attended very little of it, and within four weeks of graduation needed help in finding a book and a refereed article. Trish's example offers a horrifying but important example for our time. We must make a commitment: not another student must be within a breath of graduation and be unable to find high quality materials, or follow the most basic of instructions.

Arum and Roksa ask a key question and then answer it: 'How much are students actually learning in contemporary higher education?' The answer for many undergraduates, we have concluded, is not much.⁴³ Instead of blaming students, their research looks to the scholarly expectations of academics. They found that fifty per cent of students in their sample had not enrolled in a single course that required more than twenty pages of writing in a semester and forty pages of reading per week. It is easy to censure students for a lack of reading and writing, but was reading and writing required in the first place? If students are not asked to read widely and write expansively, then how is improvement

43 Arum and Roksa, *op. cit.*, p. 34

to be initiated? Arum and Roksa offer a clear maxim: ‘when faculty have high expectations, students learn more’.⁴⁴

It is also important to listen to students and understand the tone, texture and type of writing they are submitting for staff. A student provided some explanation for this mediocrity when responding to Orwell’s ‘Why I write’

I was, and I guess I still am, a completely average writer. I was always receiving the average grade at a school and was always told that I was doing well. But instead of this making me want to do better the next time it just lead me to think that at school and college I could get away with doing the bare minimum of what was expected of me. I could get away with doing work a few hours before it being handed in because I was just about good enough for that not to show. I remember at college I chose to do a EPQ, a 5000 word essay on whatever we chose. I started it three days before handing it in. Now, that would seem like a bad idea, but being under pressure when I write somehow it sometimes better for me. Even after starting it at such a late date, I was still able to receive a fairly high grade. I could get away with not being organized with my writing. And, at point this year, I still do ... I want to change though; I can’t be like this with my writing anymore especially now I am doing a degree. I might have taken the place of someone else that could have been fantastic to be here, so I should feel lucky that I am having this chance.⁴⁵

The student should receive marks for honesty and insight. Yet for all her desire for change, this assignment was submitted with no references, no cited reading and no bibliography. Most sentences revealed errors, flaws and problems. This student was provided with the criteria by which it would be marked, of which two involved evaluating references and interpretations of research. She was also granted seven weeks to complete the task and given all the readings to use at the start of the semester. They were supplied for free. My expectations are high. The student failed this paper. Yet the truth she has conveyed here is important to understand and remember. She is self aware. But this consciousness has not transformed her behaviour. At university, it is not good enough to be an ‘average writer’, even one showing this degree of reflection on her mediocrity.

The issue is how academics understand and activate these expectations, motivations and standards particularly in an environment of information obesity. It is easy and understandable when students do not complete the reading for a course, submit substandard papers and disconnect from learning that staff reduce their expectations in a hope of helping these scholars. If

44 *ibid.*, p. 93

45 First year student, ‘Why I write’, 18 March, 2011

students complain that the reading is ‘too hard’, then one response is to make it easier. If students complain that the assignments are too difficult, then one way to manage that critique is to make the assignments simpler. Both are incorrect responses and are damaging to the calibre of education and universities in the long term. Instead, as Arum and Roksa reveal, maintaining high expectations is the key goal. The question is how they are maintained when low level reading and writing flood the environment via social media.

Arum and Roksa offer a reminder: ‘What students do in higher education matters. But what faculty members do matters too.’⁴⁶ Only when academics lift the expectations of themselves can student learning become a core function of higher education, rather than an accidental and inconvenient bi-product of (or distraction from) research. Therefore Digital Dieting is a key project for academic staff and librarians. We are the intellectual equivalent of a coach and nutritionist. Our role is to improve the standard and quality of the reading students are conducting and enhance the level and benchmark required from their research and assessment. Complicity and complacency about information obesity is not an option.

The Diet

This book presents two intertwined premises to consider.

1. **Too many decisions about teaching and learning have been automated,** blocking reflection of what, how and why particular ideas are being taught in particular ways. If a speech is being delivered, it is structured via PowerPoint. If information is required, then a few words are entered into the Google search engine. There has been a shortening of both the time and expertise activated in making decisions about the value of curriculum, assessment, standards and literacy. Therefore, it is necessary to bring the consciousness and carefulness back to media and information selection.
2. **Fewer media create more meaning.** One way to return the consciousness and reflection to education is to not only reduce the automation but question the assumption that more media, platforms, software, hardware and applications always improves teaching and learning. Re-empowering teachers and librarians in the construction of teaching, learning, media and assessment choices will stop software and hardware, managers and bureaucrats making decisions about information and media literacies. If a consultant is paid for introducing new technology into schools and universities, to supposedly make education economically efficient rather than intellectually rigorous, then their judgments and views should be questioned, not implemented.

46 Arum and Roksa, *op. cit.*, p. 117

From these premises, this book offers two actions to commence a digital diet. Firstly, staff and students should consider reducing the automated choices made within templates, applications and search engines. Simply because software or hardware was invented does not mean it should be used. Further, it does not mean it should be used automatically, without a pause to consider the better options and uses of time. The internet is a mechanism to engage, construct and connect with information. It is not a library or a fount of knowledge. Google is just a search engine. It is not tabernacle for prayer. PowerPoint is software. It does not replace professional development for teachers. It does not replace note taking skills for students. By asking that staff and students reduce their available media, we can insert consciousness and reflection – the thinking – back to the online environment. Reducing the media and notifications being pushed to an email inbox increases the decision making of users.

Secondly, it is necessary to recognise that the internet has created resources beyond what any of us could have imagined in a local library, but that the provision of information and media literacy required to manage this complexity and proliferation have not increased to a similar scale. As more media and information are made available, the skills to manage this diversity have either remained static or declined. In an analogue age, media and information were limited to what was available at local libraries. Therefore the economic standing, available space, expertise of librarians or geographical isolation of a library instigated a sharp selection and reduction in the available information. Interlibrary loans were possible, but they were slow and inconvenient. The strength of this system was that staff and students had to use the available resources respectfully and well. Now that ‘everything’ is online, the capacity to choose the relevant and important is frequently managed by an individual who – if they ignore the advice of teachers and librarians – has no guiding methods, strategies or structures to sift the relevant and important from the banal and basic.⁴⁷ They rely on ‘information’ being pushed from social media which is of both variable and indeterminate value.

This problem has been made more serious because of the assumptions that follow discussions about web 2.0, suggesting that ‘everyone is online.’ Clay Shirky’s *Here Comes Everybody*⁴⁸ is part of this common ideology. John Thompson, in his article ‘Don’t be afraid to explore web 2.0’, stated that,

47 There are many outstanding strategies and interventions from librarians in creating a consciousness for information literacy. As one example, please refer to C. Nelson, ‘Ten reasons a school librarian is vital’, *Cathy Nelson’s Professional Thoughts*, 16 April, 2011, <http://blog.cathyjonelson.com/?p=1837>

48 C. Shirky, *Here comes every-body: the power of organizing without organizations*, (London: Penguin, 2008)

INTRODUCTION

web 2.0 sites allow anyone to contribute content and to participate with other users in editing and even combining or remixing existing content with other material to repurpose it for additional uses. Thus content on the Internet is no longer static; it is changing and dynamic. A distinguishing web 2.0 feature is the increasing significance of the individual user, as anybody can create and upload text, as well as audio and video to the internet.⁴⁹

The unasked question is whether ‘anybody’ should create and upload text, audio and video, and the consequences of this explosion of individual views on citizenship, education and information literacy. Also, the focus is on the capacities of the hardware and software, rather than the social environment (the context) in which users are placed. The emphasis is on content not context. Talk of ‘anybody’ and ‘anyone’ means that there is no discussion of how skills, access and literacy are developed or underdeveloped. Deep inequalities survive on the basis of colonialism, race, migration, gender and age. Continuing to use nouns like ‘anybody’ and ‘everybody’ is intellectually lazy at best and deeply politically dangerous at worst.

From such generalisations, the two arguments to be applied in this book are: fewer media create more meaning and information literacy is more important than information availability. Such statements are not the words of a Luddite. It is easy to label and judge those who have not taken the money and consultancies from hardware and software firms and governmental agencies to become cheerleaders for new media. For over a decade, millions of dollars, pounds and Euros have been spent confirming the value of every next ‘big thing’ that has been thrust into the corporatised online environment: Second Life, YouTube, text messaging, Facebook, Twitter or geosocial networking sites such as FourSquare and Groupon.⁵⁰ There is rarely money available to re-assess, re-purpose and re-value already existing practice for its effectiveness. The new is exciting. The new is better. But such statements reinforce an ideology from the industrial revolution – and indeed the renaissance – that technological change equates with progress. So much money has been spent in universities on the promises of technology. Money is removed from core services in teaching and learning, on these promises. At its most basic, this techno-siren’s call to managers is a desire to replace teachers with software and hardware and substitute education and knowledge with skill development and information.

49 J. Thompson, ‘Don’t be afraid to explore web 2.0’, *The Education Digest*, December 2008, p. 19

50 The deployment of smartphones is particularly celebrated. Indeed Simon Salt described the smartphone as ‘the weapon of the information age’, *Social Location Marketing*, (Indianapolis: Que, 2011), p. 2

Using YouTube is easy, quick and cheap. Creating a culture of knowledge, critique and questioning is expensive.

My professional goal that I present for readers' consideration is to use a few media platforms well and ensure that information and media literacy is embedded into curriculum and assessment.⁵¹ The imperative is to create a teaching and learning culture of planning, consciousness, choice and reflection. There is also a higher purpose: to remove the focus from technology and instead recognise quality teaching and the cost when (over)sharing displaces learning. Such crucial arguments – and the spaces to debate them – are being closed down by those who have an investment in superficial ideas substituting for scholarship. Therefore, the next section of this introduction shows the personal and social cost of questioning the investment in the new rather than the useful.

Freedom from choice

What we need is freedom from choice.⁵²

Irvine Welsh

One of the best disguised escapes from anxiety is the escape into information.⁵³

Hugh Mackay

There are many ways to restrict money, food, time, movement and forms of self expression. These limitations can involve legal restriction, social censure, credit ratings, surveillance, timetables, fences and the fear of unpopularity. But the myth of abundance – the myth of choice – dominates the narratives of both liberal democracy and capitalism.⁵⁴ Both ideologies are punctuated by words like freedom and choice. Shopping becomes a proxy for thinking and searching substitutes for reading. Restrictions are in place, but while 'we' are

51 Renee Hobbs' influential work in this area must be logged. The *Journal of Media Literacy Education* is the embodiment of this quality research and Hobbs' notes the growth in media literacy in her article 'What a difference ten years can make: research possibilities for the future of media literacy education', *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2011, <http://jml.org/index.php/JMLE/article/view/177/136>

52 I. Welsh from S. Redhead, 'Post-punk junk', *Repetitive Beat Generation*, (Glasgow: Rebel Inc, 2000), pp. 145-6

53 H. Mackay, *Reinventing Australia*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1993), p. 226

54 Chris Harmon, in *Zombie Capitalism: global crisis and the relevance of Marx*, (London: Bookmarks, 2009), argued that such narratives do not provide the ability to explain radical events such as the credit crunch or credit crash.

looking down at our smart phone rather than up at the world, freedom to blog becomes an acceptable substitute for freedom to learn.

Transforming our freedoms may be beneficial. Instead of the freedom to access information, there is the right to learn information literacy. There have been some remarkable critiques in the last decade of information excess, user generated content, web 2.0 and the read-write web. Many have been staunch, shrill and opinionated. Others have been concerned or worried about the cultural movements for which the read-write web is the channel, conduit or platform. One of the earliest and shrillest reviews was from Andrew Keen. His *Cult of the Amateur*⁵⁵ affirmed the rights of artists, journalists, writers and academics to protect their intellectual property. He was critical of the loss of expertise from a blog-infused culture. He was not 'against' the internet or the web, but wanted to return quality control to digital environments.

My critique is different from Keen's arguments. It is not the end of civilisation if 'the audience' becomes 'the author'. Keen did not like bloggers or people taking pictures with their mobile phones. This proliferation of content does not worry me. But it must be attended by a necessity to improve our information literacy – improve our interpretative capacity – to sort and sift this material. An explosion of blogs, updates, comments, photographs and footage is not a concern. But experiencing a glut of information without the capacity to sort and shape it is a disaster for education. Simply because there is a lot of nonsense online does not mean it has to be read. The more serious question is whether – through this explosion of low quality data – the capacity to judge, interpret and evaluate is being worn down by the scale and scope of basic material. Put another way, if citizens and students read a large amount of low quality material, is their capacity reduced to read and write at a higher level?

There are many methods to structurally create barriers to block the sending or receiving of low quality information.⁵⁶ For example, selecting delivery systems is a form of information management. When a platform is selected, producers are making a series of decisions about who they will not reach and the type of information they will not convey. It is not efficient to choose Twitter to convey complex ideas. However as a pointer to richer information sources, it is excellent. If a producer wants information that can be scanned at speed,

55 A. Keen, *The cult of the amateur*, (New York: Doubleday, 2007)

56 T. Koltay, introduced a range of mechanisms to manage a proliferation of content creators and creation in 'New media and literacies: amateurs vs. professionals', *First Monday*, Vol. 16, No. 1 – 3, January 2011, <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/3206/2748>, pp. 2-7. Koltay realised that, 'Despite differences and similarities among information literacy, media literacy and digital literacy, all of them have to differentiate between amateur and professional contents produced in new media', p. 2.

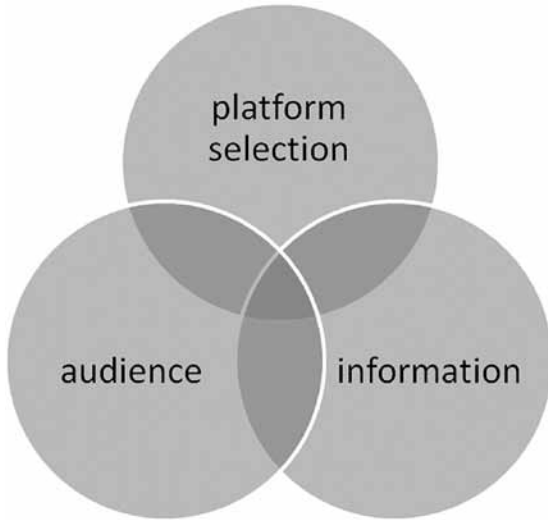
sonic media is a mistake. Scanning print on paper or screens is a faster way to glean information. For abstract ideas that slow down users and defamiliarise the relationship with information, then sound-based platforms are ideal. Marshall McLuhan argued that ‘any technology creates a new environment. It creates a total numbness in our senses’.⁵⁷ However, by withdrawing some sensory experiences, numbness reduces. Consciousness and choice returns.

Platform selection is the key moment in the survival and effectiveness of information.⁵⁸ When a platform is chosen, so is an audience. Configuring a careful relationship between content and context, medium and audience, requires selection and reflection. It is important, particularly now, not to reify McLuhan’s brilliant – yet flawed – maxim that the medium is the message. Instead, a more subtle re-evaluation is required, recognising that choosing a medium is the first stage in information management. In an era of proliferating platforms, which platform is the best carrier for data and – more importantly – which of our senses are best activated to engage with this information is a key decision in terms of preservation, confidentiality and transparency. The medium is the first step in creating the message. When selecting a platform, decisions are made about who will not receive the data and what type of information will not be conveyed. Jack Koumi stated that ‘each medium has its distinctive presentational attributes, its own strengths and its weaknesses. These distinctions must be fully exploited by choosing different treatments of the topic for different media’.⁵⁹ Therefore, strategic decisions about information, media and audience must be made.

57 M. McLuhan, ‘Fordham University: First Lecture (1967)’, from S. McLuhan and D. Staines (eds.), *Marshall McLuhan Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, p. 145

58 Nicholas Carr stated that, ‘the medium does matter. It matters greatly. The experience of reading words on a networked computer, whether it’s a PC, an iPhone, or a Kindle, is very different from the experience of reading those same words in a book. As a technology, a book focuses our attention, isolates us from the myriad distractions that fill our lives. A networked computer does precisely the opposite. It is designed to scatter our attention. It doesn’t shield us from environmental distractions; it adds to them’, from N. Carr, ‘The bookless library’, in J. Brockman (ed.), *Is the internet changing the way you think? The net’s impact on our minds and future*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), p. 2

59 J. Koumi, *Designing video and multimedia for open and flexible learning*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 1230



The difficulty with the read-write web is that it is based on fragmentation and individuality. Choices about audience, information and media platform selection are automated. We choose to talk with people like ourselves. They are our ‘friends’ on Facebook. We ‘follow’ them on Twitter. Similarly, communities become increasingly specialised in content as they geographically disperse. Nicholas Carr, in *The Big Switch*,⁶⁰ probes the movement from offline to online environments. Carr argues that we are all drawn to people like ourselves. Fans of *Dr Who* talk with other fans of *Dr Who*.⁶¹ *Star Trek* fans chat to *Star Trek* fans. More concerningly, citizens with extreme ideas bond closely with those also holding extreme ideas. In some disciplinary fields, this behaviour is explained through subcultural theory.⁶² A goth wears black clothes and whitened makeup, but this appearance is naturalised when communing with other Goths. But beyond this naturalisation of community behaviour, Carr confirms that when extreme views are shared by a community they become more extreme. Through the deterritorialised connectivity of the Web, an individual who holds highly marginal views in Galway, Cape Town or Dunedin can find a geographically dispersed community sharing their beliefs. Before the internet, there were citizens with extreme views. But they were isolated, managed and controlled by legal and social restrictions. Now deterritorialised communities with extreme views can find each other and bond. This normalises behaviour, language and ideologies. When extreme ideas are shared, they become more extreme.

60 N. Carr, *The Big Switch: rewiring the world, from Edison to Google*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008)

61 *ibid.*, p. 165

62 D. Hebdige, *Subculture* (London: Routledge, 1989: 1979)

Whenever a phrase is used like ‘everyone does this,’ a technique of neutralisation⁶³ has been activated. ‘Everyone’ does not smoke marijuana, watch pornography or download music illegally. Such a technique of neutralisation is a mode of justification that has been enhanced and extended in the online environment. Further, these views can become more pervasive and far more extreme. This tendency can be seen in Pro (anorexia) Ana⁶⁴ and cutter⁶⁵ communities. It is also the reason why odd or extreme ideas have become tolerated and often encouraged through the ‘comment culture’ on blogs. Certain levels of personal abuse and disrespect, often from anonymous writers, are now accepted as part of online life.⁶⁶ Intriguingly, when the PEW Internet and American Life project conducted a survey, young women aged 12–13 and black teenagers reported a greater experience of ‘unkindness’ through social media than other groups.⁶⁷

In our daily lives, it is easy to seek out environments that make us comfortable. We enjoy mixing with friends and family, people who know and understand us. Audiences, consumers and citizens seek out environments in which they are comfortable and are literate: they understand the language, signs and codes. Such behaviour is not limited to our analogue and corporeal lives. Rarely do we move towards those images and ideas that make us uncomfortable or that we do not understand. It is difficult to change personal worldviews, to even consider that the ideas offered by our family, friends, teachers, religious leaders and politicians may be wrong and not in our best interests. ‘We’ want to believe that there are people in our lives who care for us and are correct in their views. It is an aching dark moment in life to realise that we emerge into the world alone, we leave the world alone and the years in between require that we trust others to share enough of ourselves to build relationships. It is safer to talk to people who share our ideas, reinforce our identity and protect us from the excesses of cruelty, ignorance, inequality and prejudice. Google has serviced this desire. On 4 December, 2009 the corporation stated on its blog that Google would use 57 signals to offers assumptions about the type of sites

63 G. Sykes and D. Matza, ‘Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency’, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 22, No. 6, 1957, pp. 664-670

64 ‘Pro-Ana’, <http://community.livejournal.com/proanorexia>

65 ‘Self-injury webring’, <http://t.webring.com/hub?ring=selfinjury>

66 Jimmy Wales and Tim O’Reilly proposed guidelines for bloggers in 2007 and confronted a remarkable backlash. Please refer to ‘Web gurus want blog etiquette despite backlash’, *Reuters.com*, 11 April, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/gc08/idUSN1042471620070411> and Ed Pilkington, ‘Howls of protest as web gurus attempt to banish bad behaviour from blogosphere’, *The Guardian*, 10 April, 2007, p. 17

67 Amanda Lenhart, Mary Madden, Aaron Smith, Kristen Purcell, Kathryn Zickuhr, Lee Rainie, ‘Teens, kindness and cruelty on social network sites, PEW Internet and American Life, 9 Nov, 2011, <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Teens-and-social-media/Part-2/Section-1.aspx>

that would suit the user. From December 2009 searching was personalised. This post-Fordist strategy may seem welcome. However, the personal information ‘targets’ information and enables a narrow range of goods and services to be accessed. As Eli Pariser realised,

The basic code at the heart of the new internet is pretty simple. The new generation of internet filters looks at the things you seem to like – the actual things you’ve done, or the things people like you like – and tries to extrapolate. They are prediction engines, constantly creating and refining a theory of who you are and what you’ll do and want next. Together, these engines create a unique universe of information for each of us – what I’ve come to call a filter bubble – which fundamentally alters the way we encounter ideas and information.⁶⁸

This strategy may shape powerful and targeted marketing. For educators, it is profoundly serious. Students and scholars are continually directed to information that is ‘at their level’ and unchallenging. It is safe data that cannot lead to threatening knowledge.

Such an arc of argument explains Graeme Turner’s long term and courageous critique of the supposed democratisation of new media. Indeed he terms it ‘demoticisation’.⁶⁹ The interplay between digitisation and popular culture is powerful, evocative, fascinating and brilliant. Online culture enables thousands of people to tell their stories, express their enthusiasm and passion, and build new forms of community. But formal education is different. Education – teaching and learning – is not meant to reinforce the decisions we make in our lives. It is meant to raise questions, trouble us and challenge our views. As Socrates, via Plato, realised, the task is to ‘Know Thyself’. Living in consumerist self satisfaction, uploading, editing and commenting, is not the basis of education, particularly higher education. Leisure is different from learning.

In his follow up book to *The Big Switch*, titled *The Shallows: how the internet is changing the way we think, read and remember*, Carr tracked his online behaviour and the consequences of searching, clicking and commenting. He noted a reduction in concentration and time management.

What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation ... The more they use the Web, the more they have to fight to stay focused on long pieces of writing.⁷⁰

68 E. Pariser, ‘Should we be scared of the made-to-measure internet?’ *The Observer*, 12 June, 2011, p. 20-21

69 G. Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, (London: SAGE, 2004)

70 N. Carr, *The shallows: how the internet is changing the way we think, read and remember*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2010), p. 6-7

My critique of Carr is that he conflated automated decision making about web usage with the transformation in his brain. He *chose* to click and link his way around the online environment. This was not his brain changing. This new environment required making a choice between surfing and reading. He chose surfing.

Sometime in 2007, a serpent of doubt slithered into my info-paradise. I began to notice that the Net was exerting a much stronger and broader influence over me than my old stand-alone PC ever had. It wasn't just that I was spending so much time staring into a computer screen. It wasn't just that so many of my habits and routines were changing as I became more accustomed to and dependent on the sites and services of the Net. The very way my brain worked seemed to be changing.⁷¹

He is suggesting that this is natural or inevitable. Carr – like all of us – can make distinct choices, deploy different platforms and activate different literacies. More intricate relationships can be configured between communication systems, information systems and memory systems.⁷² Older models of literacy and learning are not destroyed. They are overlaid. Therefore, it is only necessary to scratch below the simple and the superficial to reveal more complex ways of learning, reading and writing.

Just because you disagree with me does not make me Hitler⁷³

I've never gotten a piece of hate e-mail. I've never been seriously harassed or threatened by e-mail. I don't understand why not, and in fact I fully expect it to happen someday. In the meantime, as with the rarity of e-forgery, I marvel at the winsome goodwill of the online community.⁷⁴

Bruce Sterling

Pardon my unreconstructed feminism dear reader, but perhaps only a digitally literate white man can 'marvel at the winsome goodwill of the online community.' It is a worthy aspirational goal to transform online discussions

71 *ibid.*, p. 16

72 Helen White and Christina Evans confirmed that 'listening and attention are learnt behaviours', from *Learning to listen to learn: using multi-sensory teaching for effective listening*, (London: Lucky Duck, 2005), p. 3

73 This statement is derived from Jon Stewart's slogan for the Rally to Restore Sanity.

74 B. Sterling, 'Electronic text', *Catscan*, 13, 2002, http://w2.eff.org/Misc/Publications/Bruce_Sterling/Catscan_columns/catscan.13

into democracy in action, a deterritorialised agora where the issues of the day are discussed with passion and commitment, but kindness and respect. Instead, the proliferation of information and the circulation of data creates a glut that is not only difficult to sort, shift and shape, but is (too often) anonymous and ignorant. The easiest way to cut through the banality of information obesity is to be offensive, intimidatory and angry. Consideration, respect and care take time. Abuse is quick and easy. Therefore one of the consequences of information obesity is that abuse and attack become strategies to block thought and respect of others.

Then there is the case of Kathy Sierra. Due to speak at the O'Reilly ETech conference in San Diego in March 2007, she suddenly and startlingly cancelled her appearance.⁷⁵ The cause was death threats, delivered by comments in response to blogs, including an uploaded picture featuring a noose.⁷⁶ She stated,

I wouldn't have believed this would ever happen. I have never experienced that in my entire life – when you start feeling you are part of someone's sexual fantasies that might involve death. That is very scary. It is a very easy way to intimidate a woman. Just trot out the gender .. I am going to not do anything for a little while ... I am not going to go anywhere publicly. Every time I speak at a conference I get a lot more nastiness. I don't want to inflame them more. Until I find out exactly who was involved, to what degree and how stable they really are .. I am going to lay low no matter what just so I become less of a target.⁷⁷

The story gets worse. After these threats gained profile and traction in newspapers and television, they increased. Her address and Social Security number were published online.⁷⁸ Her reputation was damaged by incorrect information being reblogged.

Disagreement is fine. Death threats are not. Debate is productive. Comparing another person to Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Osama Bin Laden, Gaddafi or the current flavour of tyrant used to demean and ridicule others is not acceptable. Blogs in particular seem to attract trolls with little desire except to offend, frighten, hurt

75 M. Wagner, 'Death Threats', *Information Week*, 26 March, 2007, http://www.informationweek.com/blog/main/archives/2007/03/death_threats_f.html

76 'Blog death threats spark debate', *BBC News*, 27 March, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/technology/6499095.stm>

77 H. Havenstein, 'Death Threats Force Blogger to Sidelines', *Computerworld*, 27 March, 2007, http://www.computerworld.com/action/article.do?command=viewArticleBasic&articleId=9014647&intsrc=hm_list.

78 J. Valenti, 'How the Web became a sexist paradise', *The Guardian*, Friday 6 April 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/apr/06/gender.bloggging>

and ridicule.⁷⁹ One of the strengths of analogue publication processes is not only that they require refereeing and review, but that responses are slower. The speed at which both blogs and their responses can be uploaded spreads hot and extreme views, rather than creating space for quiet reflection. But the Sierra case in particular – which was so clearly a case of a woman being attacked for being a woman – instigated a wider movement for a Blogger’s Code of Conduct.⁸⁰ However even this request created aggressive attacks. The new media site 910am stated that “controlling what people say and do on blogs can only be a recipe for the decline of the medium and the introduction of totalitarianism online.”⁸¹ The confusion of civilisation with totalitarianism signifies the loss of the former and a victory for those whose ‘freedom of speech’ drowns out the views of others. Anonymity prevailed, abuse continued and the right to write (and write and write) became more important than the necessity to be silent, not reply and read material of higher quality.⁸² Robert Scoble in particular, offers a view of the wider culture that framed the Sierra case. He stated,

It’s this culture of attacking women that has especially got to stop ... Whenever I post a video of a female technologist there invariably are snide remarks about body parts and other things that simply wouldn’t happen if the interviewee were a man.⁸³

While much is made of free speech, protected speech and unprotected speech, with irregular and inconsistent applications of national defamation and slander laws, the question for those of us who have the privilege to be digitally literate is this: is it ever right, justifiable, valid to threaten someone’s life, reputation, relationships or livelihood, under the mask of an anonymous posting? Gender is only one variable of abuse: race, sexuality, body diversity and impairments all disable enabling media and demonstrate the cost of information obesity.

79 A fine discussion of the relationship between robust and offensive online dialogue is M. Schwartz, ‘The Trolls Among Us’, *New York Times Magazine*, 3 August, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/magazine/03trolls-t.html?pagewanted=all>

80 T. O’Reilly, ‘Call for a Blogger’s Code of Conduct’, O’Reilly Radar, 21 March, 2007, <http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2007/03/call-for-a-blog-1.html>

81 E. Pilkington, ‘Howls of protest as web gurus attempt to banish bad behaviour from blogosphere’, *The Guardian*, 10 April 10, 2007 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2007/apr/10/news.newmedia3>

82 As one example, please refer to D. Mulley, ‘Blogger code of Conduct’, *Mulley.net*, 27 March, 2007, <http://www.mulley.net/2007/03/27/blogger-code-of-conduct-two-words-fuck-off/>

83 R. Scoble, ‘Taking the week off’, *Scobleizer*, 26 March, 2007, <http://scobleizer.com/2007/03/26/taking-the-week-off/>

What is the impact of this culture of hostility, anger, ignorance, xenophobia, sexism and fear on education? The answer is found in the aspirations – rather than the actuality – of learning. Speed reduces the time for critical thought. Google deskills the information literacy required to source high quality information. Social media confuse leisure with learning. A culture of league tables and world rankings for schools and universities has created a generation taught for a test, rather than taught to think. Obviously people with prejudice, hatred and time on their hands have always existed. But in the analogue age, they would have taken their medication, kicked a dog, screamed at their spouse, gone for a walk, gone to the pub or written to a newspaper which would rarely publish their diatribe. Now there are millions of opportunities to express an opinion. With the decline in public library and education services, there are now far fewer opportunities to read a book, talk to a teacher or a librarian or substitute a superficial commentary in a blog with a silent, slower and deeper engagement with the quality scholarly literature. Information is cheap. Comment is cheap. Knowledge is not only expensive, but increasingly out of reach.

Certainly I have seen my share of weird behaviour, both on and offline. A man decided to photograph my shoes while I was speaking in South Africa.⁸⁴ While I do not maintain a blog, I have written journalism for the *Times Higher Education*, but never bothered reading the comments. One consequence of never being concerned with bloggers or online comments is that – after a while – the commentators realised that I was not offended and did not respond to them because I did not read their words. Many then moved platform, emailing me at my work address so that I would be forced to read their views. This is the equivalent of a woman rebuffing a man in a club and in response he later blocks her from getting into her car. On one occasion, a very poor journalist in a very local paper published an article that he thought would get him noticed in the national press. As most of us expect from tabloid journalism, there were not so much mis-quotations, but complete fabrications. Academics agree to such interviews at the request of our Universities. They are neither convenient nor interesting. If public relations staff err by involving an incompetent journalist and agreeing to an inappropriate media request, then invariably it is the academics who suffer the cost of the mistake.

In response to this tabloid article, a very odd email appeared in my office in box. As a word of warning, please note the time it was sent. I do not know this man. Call me old fashioned, but it would never enter my mind to send an email like this. Obviously, he missed the irony. He reinforced my position by showing the consequences to citizens of using low quality sources of information. He quoted a statement as a truth that was invented by a journalist from a minor and

84 A. Buhrmann, 'Union Jack Shoe', Flickr, 30 August, 2010, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/snapeeverything/4941053811/>

local newspaper from a small city, situated in a former colonial power. It did not cross his mind at 1:10am that perhaps it was time to go to bed. He also did not look too closely at my profile. I have never been a Ms.

From: Ken
Sent: Mon 17/03/2008 01:10
To: Brabazon Tara
Subject: Banning students from using google

Dear Ms Brabazon,

I am emailing you after I came across the article "Lecturer bans students from using Google and Wikipedia" on The Argus. http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/generalnews/display.var.1961862.0.lecturer_bans_students_from_using_google_and_wikipedia.php

I have to say, your stance on the issue of students using the internet for research really irked me. From the tone of the article, it would appear that your approach is an outright ban. Indeed you were quoted as saying, "I ban my students from using Google, Wikipedia and other websites like that. I give them a reading list to work from and expect them to cite a good number of them in any work they produce." So let me ask you something: if a student follows your reading list, and, in addition to this, decided to go ahead and do some research on Google or the like, and proceeds to use this (as a diligent student would, by reading, digesting, and developing their own opinion on the matter) – would you still penalize them?

I browsed your personal profile on the Brighton University website. You come across as a reasonably intelligent, well-educated individual. I don't think I need to tell you that there are several dark pages in mankind's history concerned with the banning of works, or for that matter, restricting access to them.

How are you any different from these vile individuals ridiculed today? Your teaching methods conjure an image to mind which, were I to share it with someone else, would be borderline defamatory. Cue thick, non-specific European accent: "You vill read ziss and only ziss!"

Whatever happened to doing your own bloody work and thinking for yourself? While I sense that this was perhaps your intention in the first place, i.e.; to encourage a better 'quality' of a student, as it were, I have to say your manner of execution is seriously misguided. An outright ban on Google and the like, to me, reflects poorly on your own skills as an educator. I would suggest, at the danger of being incorrect seeing as how we haven't had the pleasure of each other's company, that you are, in fact, just plain power hungry. If its plagiarism you are out to snuff,

you and I both know there are several tools available at your disposal, and you would merely have to ask students to hand in a softcopy of their work to implement such a plan of action.

Fifty years ago, we used to hand in our assignments in ink, by hand. We didn't have spell checking, no Shift + F7 thesaurus in Word, nada. But we've moved on since then haven't we? Or is that your next plan? To commit all your students to hand in hand written work? Well why not? I mean, that way, you'll manage to weed out those with bad spelling wouldn't you?

I don't suffer fools gladly. Alas, boundaries of courtesy prevent me from calling you a fool. Ah, but you see, you can't stop me from thinking you are a fool, can you? So let me just state, for the record:

I THINK YOU ARE A FOOL.

I wish your students well, under your tyranny,

Ken

Ken was responding to one strategy I deploy to commence information literacy. It is a simple plan for my first year students that applies one of the first steps in Digital Dieting. I provide them with a detailed study guide, listing the key offline and online readings. I buy the key books, photocopy the key extracts and bind these important readings for students, giving these 'Readers' to them for free. No textbook is required. Thousands of pounds and dollars from my salary buys these books so that students do not have to do so. But my rule is clear. First year students, drawn from a diversity of schooling systems and achievement levels, deserve the best support, innovative and high quality materials and to be challenged intellectually and in terms of time management. I demand that they lift themselves to read the best and most important material in the field. They are not going to find these quality journal articles and books through Google, because they are difficult and complex, rather than popular and simple. They also lack specialist disciplinary knowledge and information literacy in their first year. That is why they enrolled in a university. They do not know the key authors in the discipline to improve their searches on Google Scholar. After their first year at university, having read the quality materials written at the standard required, they are better able to select the most important sources, rather than the easiest.

As to Ken's other concern about Wikipedia, I have always stopped the use of encyclopaedia at university level. If I see encyclopaedia in a bibliography, I cross the reference out and provide a list of alternative, higher quality materials. The reason is clear. All encyclopaedias present general(ised), 'neutral'

data. Interpretation is lacking. A modality of objectivity masks subjectivity in terms of fact selection and presentation. Most importantly, they are written at too low a level for students at a university. It does not worry me whether the encyclopaedia is on or off line. I stopped the use of Encyclopaedia Britannica, then Encarta, then Wikipedia. A restatement of this type of basic information may be adequate at school. It is not appropriate in higher education. Therefore, I have removed these sources from students. They must lift the level of their intellectual engagement. Wikipedia is the information equivalent of ice cream. It tastes sweet, but holds little nutritional content.

As to the Google ‘ban,’ my rationale comes from a similar source. Students are coming to university to learn. If they are not, then they should not enrol. The point is, *they do not know what they do not know*. If they require expertise in chemistry, civil engineering, geography, nursing or history, then they will have to move from where they are to a new way of reading, writing, thinking and interpreting. Their prior knowledge is not sufficient. That is why they are at university. Therefore in the first year, it is necessary to establish the required level of vocabulary, modality and type of sources. They must learn how to learn and to understand the difference between searching and researching. The nature of literacy – indeed the nature of life – is all of us stay in situations where we are comfortable. Reading difficult scholarship is challenging. That is the point. If everyone could complete a university degree, they would do so. So therefore, a sharp intervention is required to move students out of basic language, commonsensical knowledge systems and prior modes of seeking information.

Returning to the metaphor of this book, consider the nature of fitness and exercise. I wrote much of this book while living in Eastbourne, the south eastern tip of the United Kingdom. I would go for daily walks along the coast. The terrain was flat and well paved. It was easy. But there is a moment each day where I would make a choice between continuing on the flat surface on the promenade or turning right and commencing a 25 degree incline up to the summit of Beachy Head that folded around to the famous white cliffs of Dover. Going up the incline for 15 minutes is difficult. I inhale air in gulps. My calves and shins ache through the effort. But once at the top of Beachy Head, I view a landscape that was not revealed from the coast. Without the effort, the extraordinary vista would remain obscured.

Learning is the same. Unless pushed – either from intrinsic or extrinsic motivation – we read and write at the same level. Learning new words is difficult. Applying them correctly is harder. Reading complex sources that – on first view – appear obscure, dense and difficult is not pleasant. It is frustrating. But through motivation and a desire to learn, students push through the ignorance and disquiet to gain new knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Creating such an environment of learning has become much more difficult in the last decade. The reason is that much more low quality material is available for students to read. Previously, when students entered a university library, academic staff and librarians had carefully – over generations – selected the material that appeared on the shelves. In bypassing academic expertise and information literacy, students are now confronted by a diversity of scholarly levels and materials that would not have been recommended, allocated or assessed. Certainly, there is also much more high quality online material available. However, unless students possess information literacy, then they will be unable to find this data. If they do not know the Directory of Open Access Journals or even Google Scholar, then they do not possess the foundational building blocks to locate this higher quality material. They lack the specialist vocabulary and do not know the key authors to insert into search engine.

That is why – for first year students – I collect the most innovative, current, interesting material for them to read. I vary the level, so that the weakest students can find a pathway through the topic, but ensure that everyone is tested by the most complex articles. In this process, students learn the key names the field, the most important theories and models and – if assessment is correctly configured – an information scaffold is embedded into their assignments so that they acquire learning skills while they study physics, geography, media, biology or black letter law. Such a strategy works with great effect. Indeed, the impact of my ‘tyranny’ was revealed in a message I received on Facebook after delivering my last lecture and workshop in the United Kingdom. A remarkable first year student, challenged and challenging, innovative and imaginative, took the time to express the passion for learning.

Dear Tara,

I wish I could say whatever I wanted to say in fewer words but I just can't. You simply can't expect that from a Media, Writing and Production student. Being an outcast in pretty much every educational institution before this one, it would be unfair to both me and you if I didn't write this. I don't take experiences like the ones you designed for our class for granted. I have never learned more from a class before – it's also something I mentioned in a video diary I did for my second Scholarship assignment – the things you injected into my brain had this funny effect of making me think of so much more than the course and the course material. It's so easy to start talking about changing the world – for me, this is a developmental stage of my life and for once, I'm not under the pressure of being in the wrong country and the wrong environment. Weeks one to twelve was a truly unique experience. Every week, you joked with us with a 'so this course

does make sense' but to be completely honest, there was never a period of time where it didn't make sense – it just unfolded really beautifully.

We all know that teaching is a noble profession but with this bizarre generation, it's nothing less than heroic. On a more personal note, I have always appreciated honesty and try to be as genuine as possible (irrespective of how much that annoys people) – that's pretty much what I want to thank you for the most – you let us into both great and terrible, unfortunate moments when you were here. Maybe in the strangest way possible, that vulnerability was comforting.

You told us about how multimodality will connect the whole course. It did. And writing about it for my second assignment was ridiculously difficult. To be completely honest, I'm not happy with my week twelve assignment. There was only so much I could do with 285 words. Special platforms for information for different audiences – your class was an example of that. I used to hate being around people and I'm very glad to say that that's slowly changing. I'm not sure if I would have been in front of a camera for any other class.

I told you on the last day that I wish our arguments were more heated – bizarre wish, I know. I genuinely felt that that would have been a healthy addition to the learning process. Also, I really didn't think they were arguments: it was me trying to find myself in the Scholarship program. I was relating everything you taught me with myself and movies. How do I incorporate academia into the absurd art that I've always wanted to create? It's something I couldn't figure out in twelve weeks. I hope I will sometime.

And finally, the book. To be awarded with that in a class full of people who deserved it equally if not more than I did was truly overwhelming. As you may know in our twelve weeks together, I'm not happy with anything I say. The words I write are a lot more honest. So I'll tell you here: thank you for recognizing me. Like I told you, I hate folded pages so there's no need to worry: that book is in safe, over-cautious hands.

I'm not one for reading and writing stuff too many times – I will not make edits or check if anything sounds wrong – first drafts are genuine. So I'll end the letter with this:

There's a lot of 'me' in this letter but that's just a way I can express my appreciation and gratitude. This is about you, not me.

Tara, this is Varun. I'm 17 years old, in a new country and living and studying alone for the first time in my life. Thanks for being amazing, hearing what I had to say and making me feel at home.

This letter left me speechless and humble, but so grateful that an extraordinary young man had shared a small shard of his life and learning journey with me. He has captured what all of us hope our students will feel from university. Such an experience is beyond what correspondents like Ken will ever understand. Instead, Ken argued that I was ‘against the internet’. That is like being against motherhood. It may be possible, but it is pointless. I am not against any media. Actually, I believe in the great value of media platforms and information literacy. I demand that students use all sources – off and online – with interpretation, intelligence and care. Digital or analogue material is not the problem. Quality is the concern. Without intervention, all of us continue to read at the level at which we are satisfied, happy and contented. We search using the vocabulary we already possess. As I show in the first chapter of this book, we cannot put a word into Google that we do not know. So for one year, I guide students through their reading, showing them the level and scale of scholarship that is required at university. If Ken and others wish to use Google and Wikipedia to attain information, I wish them well. But my responsibility as a teacher in higher education is distinct. I have to – for the sake of university regulations and future employers – guarantee that a student who has attained a degree deserves it and is prepared to manage the information glut that will attend them through their professional lives.

This is Digital Dieting. In this book, I present a series of models to shape, frame, limit, organise and improve our engagements with the on and offline moment. There has never been more information than in our present. What is required are some powerful strategies to manage it. Ken may wish to offer, in his own words, a ‘borderline defamatory’ comparison between my andragogical strategies for Digital Dieting and the genocide instigated by the Nazis during the Second World War. Indeed, I may be a fool. But if Ken reads Shakespeare’s *King Lear* as well as his local paper, then he may remember that occasionally fools have views of value.

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Section One

Context

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Chapter One

From Information Obesity to Digital Dieting

The problem to be solved in the twenty-first century is not how to move information, not the engineering of information. We solved that problem long ago. The problem is how to transform information into knowledge, and how to transform knowledge into wisdom. If we can solve that problem, all the rest will take care of itself.¹

Neil Postman

The prescient and intellectually courageous Neil Postman, in his 1993 book *Technopoly*,² argued that celebration of technological change blinds enthusiasts with the belief that – inevitably – benefits will spread throughout the world.³ That has not happened. The speed and scale of information architecture in some European and North American regions and nations encourages binge searching, media gluttony and information obesity. There is a cost of this excess for the rest of the world,⁴ creating assumptions that more media summon greater meaning and that information availability is synonymous with knowledge creation.

Postman did not doubt the efficiency of the computer in education. He remained worried about how the computer ‘is altering our conception of learning’.⁵ Twenty years on from the publication of *Technopoly*, the outcomes of Postman’s assumptions are emerging. Unless information literacy scaffolds learning, consumers will shop online but ignore, displace and forget the costs and losses to learning and citizenship. Peter Morville is right: ‘information

1 N. Postman, *Building a bridge to the 18th century*, (New York: Vintage, 1999), p. 98

2 N. Postman, *Technopoly*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993)

3 *ibid.*, p. 11

4 Alex Wright probes the long-term history of ‘Europe’s information infrastructure’, A. Wright, *Glut: mastering information through the ages*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 100

5 Postman, *op. cit.*, p. 19

literacy helps individuals succeed'.⁶ But it also enables dynamic questioning of collective injustice and inequality.

To show how a consumerist anaesthetic is masking the pain of crumbling public education, health and libraries, it is necessary to intervene in the narratives of hyper-individualism, personal choice and the digital divide. By taking postcolonialism seriously, I probe the consequences of the information glut and the fetishisation of the new rather than the useful. This first chapter in *Digital Dieting* is a statement of advocacy and argument, exploring how our language, models and metaphors for the online environment have become descriptive rather than analytical, innovative and interventionist.

Information obesity

We are living in the middle of the largest increase in expressive capability in the history of the human race. More people can communicate more things to more people than has ever been possible in the past.⁷

Clay Shirky

There is almost no disincentive to unconstrained spinning, trafficking in poor information, and downright lying.⁸

Brian Eno

A new menace is threatening to overwhelm our cities and towns. It is not the percentage of women wearing a dress larger than size fourteen. It is not the beer gut protruding over the belt of contemporary masculinity. It is not the loss of fitness in young people through playing on a Wii rather than with a football. Instead, the problem – so clearly revealed by Kate Moss – is that our culture ridicules extra flesh but not excessive ignorance. If ‘nothing tastes as good as skinny feels’,⁹ then why does ignorance taste better than thinking before she speaks? To put it another way, why is eating more important than reading?

6 P. Morville, *Ambient Findability*, (Beijing: O’Reilly, 2005), p. 8

7 C. Shirky, *Here comes every-body: the power of organizing without organizations*, (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 106

8 B. Eno, ‘Introduction’, from J. Brockman’s *What have you changed your mind about? Today’s leading minds rethink everything*, (New York: Harper, 2009), p. xxiii

9 K. Moss, in M. Wardrop, ‘Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels’, 19 November, 2009, *Daily Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/celebritynews/6602430/Kate-Moss-Nothing-tastes-as-good-as-skinny-feels.html>

Answering this question requires thinking about the consequences of information obesity. I am interested in two concurrent, yet oppositional movements. The proliferation of information for the digitally literate has emerged at the same time as information literacy is more difficult to attain because of a decline in funding for schools, universities and libraries. To understand this starvation of information literacy in an environment of information glut, I summon and reconfigure an unusual model to understand and manage this paradox.

One of the causes for obesity is the proliferation of food around us. A study of eating habits from Brian Wansink's Food and Brand Lab at Cornell revealed that his subjects made over two hundred choices about food each day.¹⁰ We could be thinking about climate change or the pile of dishes in the sink. Instead, Wansink shows that our thoughts are filled with food. Do we pop into Subway for a sandwich? Do we march into the corner deli for a healthy three bean salad wrap or – what the hell – order a home delivery of an extra-large pepperoni pizza with a stuffed crust and garlic bread? And, why not open a cheeky chardonnay to accompany the calorific blowout?

The energy and time spent making these food choices is enormous.¹¹ Even when not eating, we are thinking about eating. Only the truly determined and disciplined can avoid being overweight in such an environment. We eat because there is food around us. This is 'mindless eating'.¹² We eat more than we think. We think about food more than we consciously know. Wansink argues that most are on 'see food' diet. When we see it, we eat it. He suggests if foods are removed from the environment, then choices are reduced and there is a greater chance to lose weight.¹³ One factor is common to all successful diet plans. They restrict the number of choices that the person makes about food during the day. While nutritionists criticise the Atkins Diet, the South Beach Diet or the Cabbage Soup Diet, these eating plans are successful, at least in the short term. Another way to limit these choices was proposed by Michael Pollan: 'Eat food. Not too much.

10 B. Wansink, *Mindless Eating: why we eat more than we think*, (London: Hay, 2009), p. 1

11 Wansink confirms that, 'if the candy dish sits on your desk, you consistently have to make that heroic decision whether you will resist the chocolate that has been giving you the eye all day. The easy solution is to lose the dish, move the dish, or replace the candy with something you personally don't like', *ibid.*, p. 81

12 B. Wansink, *Mindless Eating*, <http://www.mindlesseating.org/>

13 In this discussion of bodily – rather than information – obesity, I do not wish to contribute to the pressures and oppressions confronted by those with a weight beyond the currently configured norm. I am applying a model of food control to information management. I want to log however the powerful critique of the weight management 'industry' by Paul Campos of *The obesity myth*, (New York: Gotham Books, 2004)

Mostly plants.¹⁴ Success is not only created by restricting the amount of calories, but also by reducing the number of choices made about food.

I am arguing that Wansink's ideas can be applied more widely. It is a powerful metaphor and model. We not only live in an environment of abundant food, but an excess of information. Hundreds of choices are made each day about which book to select from the shelf, website to visit, magazine to buy in the supermarket aisle or podcast to download for a train trip. The scale of these choices explains Google's success. Google is the Atkins Diet of search engines. Through the application of the PageRank algorithm, websites are ranked, organised and delivered.¹⁵ Choices – and thinking about those choices – decrease. A word or phrase is typed into a friendly box. Even if it is spelt incorrectly, the algorithms will return information to the user. It is not quality data, but is the informational equivalent of a Big Mac, Fries and a Coke.

Here is an example of this process. I want to find some source material about postcolonialism. I type 'postcolonialism' into Google.¹⁶ The first return is Wikipedia, a generalised, collectively written and edited, unreferenced presentation on the topic.¹⁷ This type of source is adequate if the searcher requires a quick definition for personal interest, but it is not the specialist knowledge required for formal education. Intriguingly, a small amount of knowledge and information literacy can make a great difference. This time, when entering the Google search box, I not only type 'postcolonialism', but also nominate three of the major theorists in the field: 'Bhabha', 'Balibar' and 'Spivak'.¹⁸ The list is completely different. Suddenly the universities appear in the rankings, along with the specialist writers. Wikipedia disappears.

This very simple experiment with keywords confirms that the consequences of information obesity are not derived from Google, but sourced from a searcher's lack of expertise. One structural way for educators to ensure that students are aware of the limitations in their knowledge and learn how to analyse and judge the type of materials they are receiving is to create assessment and curriculum that blocks easy data mining. Removing the reliance on Wikipedia, widening search

14 M. Pollan, *Food Rules*, (London: Penguin, 2010) p. xv

15 S. Brin and L. Page, 'The anatomy of a large-scale hypertextual Web search engine', *Computer Networks and ISDN Systems*, Vol. 30, No. 1–7, April 1998, pp. 107–117.

16 'Postcolonialism', http://www.google.co.uk/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4TSEH_en___GB360&q=Postcolonialism

17 Jaron Lanier argued that, 'Wikipedia provides search engines with a way to be lazy', *You are not a gadget: a manifesto*, (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 143

18 'Postcolonialism Bhabha Balibar Spivak', http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=postcolonialism+Bhabha+Balibar+Spivak&hl=en&rlz=1T4TSEH_en___GB360&sa=2

terms and increasing specialist knowledge in academic disciplines means that students do not rely on shortcuts (and scholarly satiation) from simple sources.

Andrew Whitworth's investigation of information obesity confirmed that all forms of obesity – with food or media – require more than a culture of blame on individuals to shift patterns of behaviour.¹⁹ It is necessary to organise information and production. To enact change, there must be a movement beyond personal guilt and into collective and corporate responsibility. If a fast food restaurant did not exist, then it could not be visited. If Wikipedia did not exist, then it could not be used in schools and universities. More practically, if high quality food was both accessible and reasonably priced – or online and offline books and articles were freely available for students to use – then the temptation to snack on the cheap, quick and easy would be less compelling. Instead of blaming individuals for their body shape, an alternative strategy is to open public recreation centres or parks rather than another fast food restaurant, or improving public libraries, rather than perpetuating the ideology that 'everything' is online and 'we' are born with the skills to interpret, analyse and rank.

The strength and the weakness of Google is that those with internet access and basic digital literacy can find a little bit of information, using already existing knowledge. It creates a culture of satisfaction. We are hungry for an answer. Google provides it, just like when we are hungry for food and a McDonalds' drive through provides an easy option for calories. We do not think about the other choices we could have made. We are satisfied. However the point of education, the point of learning, is to move from what we know to what we do not know. The goal of education is not to satisfy, but to challenge, confuse, irritate and unsettle, to agitate truths we have accepted in our lives. The problem with Google is that a searcher can only enter vocabulary and terms they already understand. If a student does not know who Etienne Balibar is, then he or she cannot add his name to a search for postcolonialism. Therefore, Google will always make the searcher comfortable, finding what is already known, in a basic language. For teachers, such a realisation presents profound consequences. It is necessary to understand what brings students to learning, including their motivation and previous experiences of education. This is a challenging process, as Diana Laurillard confirms, 'it is not easy to penetrate the private world of someone coming to an understanding of an idea'.²⁰ Similarly, it is difficult to pierce and research the space between a searcher and a search engine.

We cannot put words into a search engine that we do not know. Therefore attention is required on the entirety of the educational context, experience and history that leads into that moment of typing words into a search engine.

19 A. Whitworth, *Information Obesity*, (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2009)

20 D. Laurillard, *Rethinking university teaching: a framework for the effective use of learning technologies*, (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), p. 41

Because information literacy, vocabulary and knowledge is lacking, Google restricts, reduces and limits the source material that is found and we are not even aware that it does so. It both deskills and automates information literacy. Therefore intervention is required. Teachers and librarians must slice and probe the intimate and hyper-personal space between Google and the Googler. One way to defamiliarise this encounter is through carefully configured assessment.

As an example, I asked my MA students to complete an annotated bibliography on a research method. They could choose oral history, ethnography,²¹ practice-led research, photographic-led research, semiotics or unobtrusive research methods. I asked that they find me twenty sources for their annotated bibliography, but with emphasis on particular categories. They had to find conventional scholarly monographs, but locating other types of sources was more difficult for them. The pattern has been the same in the last few years. They arrived in my office with a question: ‘Tara how do I find refereed articles? There are no refereed articles for oral history.’ I ask them to repeat the method of their search on my office computer. They typed oral history into Google, and did not have the patience to sift the results.

I suggested typing two additional words into Google: ‘Oral history refereed articles’. The results improved. I then proposed they move to Google Scholar. The results again improved. I suggested they move to the Directory of Open Access Journals or Open J-Gate. The results improved. Source after source, the pattern continued. They could not find any podcasts appropriate to their chosen research methods. I added the word ‘podcasts’ into their search terms. Podcasts appeared in the list. But I also suggested that they may consider going to iTunes or Libsyn. Again the results improved when moving to more specialist sites. Seemingly simple interventions – that require vocabulary, research experience and reflection – created rapid and remarkable improvements.

Karin de Jager and Mary Nassimbeni, in their evaluation of information literacy programmes in South Africa, confirmed that they are best delivered when integrated into the subject curricula.²² They showed that the generic models for information literacy through stand-alone training are seen by librarians to be less satisfactory. However their research also confirmed what I had discovered in my teaching:

21 It was particularly important to incorporate ethnography in a fresh and innovative way, recognising Sarah Pink’s research in such monographs as *Doing sensory ethnography*, (London: SAGE, 2009)

22 K. De Jager and Mary Nassimbeni, ‘Institutionalizing information literacy in tertiary education: lessons learned from South African Programs’, *Library Trends*, Vol. 51, No. 2, Fall 2002, p. 179

There seems to be a measurable discrepancy between students' perceptions about their own information literacy skills, and abilities acquired after interventions, and their actual skills as measured by answers to practical questions.²³

The crucial recognition logged by de Jager and Nassimbeni was that not only were students deficient in information literacy skills, but they were lacking consciousness about their inadequate information literacy skills. Their study confirmed the cliché that we do not know what we do not know. An integrated and expansive scholarly intervention is required to activate both consciousness and increased skill in information management. In addition, they argue that it must be reinforced through concrete applications in a disciplinary area.

Google has not caused this gap between confidence and ability, consciousness and capacity. Google has not blocked the application of logical and dynamic tools to the management of an information environment. What Google has facilitated is the ability to deploy simple vocabulary to return some results. When receiving these links, the novice searcher does not hold the competence to recognise the gaps and absences, nor evaluate the quality of the materials. *They do not know what they do not know*, lacking information literacy in an age of information obesity. That is why the unproblematised and almost evangelical commitment to Google or any hardware or software must be questioned. Commitment without consciousness encourages sloppy thinking. It facilitates a culture of equivalence: blogs are equal to a refereed scholarly article. Food is just food. Information is just food. Actually that is not the case. There is better food. There is better information.

Algorithms like Google's PageRank were bathed in ideologies of logic and rigour. The decision to validate an algorithm to automate and simplify information literacy choices had social consequences. Information systems that start in (and are justified by) empiricism and positivism build structures of social exclusion and differentiation based on 'fact.' An example of this pattern and problem emerged on November 25, 2009 as a series of blogs (re)presented photographs of Michelle Obama with the face of an ape. A well-educated woman was reconstructed through physiognomic categories that would have made Lombroso blush. Because many bloggers linked to the site with horror or racism, the image rose to be the top-ranked return in Google Images for Obama as supplied by PageRank. The Corporation received indignant requests for the week prior to 25 November, to remove the disturbingly doctored photograph.²⁴

23 *ibid.*, p. 180

24 Crix, 'Why is the first image result of First Lady Michelle Obama in a Google image search a horribly racist caricature?' Google Web Search Help Forum, 12 November, 2009 <http://www.google.com/support/forum/p/Web%20Search/thread?tid=348c3e78fa6cd9e1&hl=en>,

Google Public Relations staff deflected criticism, describing themselves as a search engine and not responsible for content. They contended that it was not the Corporation's fault when someone racially abuses the First Lady. They simply delivered search results on the basis of (supposedly) neutral algorithms. Inevitably, by the end of the day, the image was removed with an attendant apology.²⁵

From one perspective, the Corporation was right to blame 'us' – web users – for either blatant racism or rubbernecking at blatant racism. 'We' searched for the image. 'We' linked to it. 'We' viewed it. 'We' are to blame. If 'we' did not look for it, link to it and bounce it around the blogosphere, then it would never have appeared in Google Images. On closer assessment though, this justification is like blaming a child who accidentally wanders into an adult entertainment centre and does not close their eyes when confronted by pornography.

Such a moment shows the cost of information obesity. Google did not create the racism. Their algorithmic calculations simply confirmed how popular racism can be. But Google is not banal or benevolent. Search engines are not the end of the rainbow of human progress. Instead, the area of my interest is the willingness of (re)searchers to allow an algorithm to replace personal and collective responsibility to gain sufficient media and information literacies to enable independent, conscious choices. This is intellectual laziness and flabbiness. Google is the start of an information journey. It is not the end. The key is to critique and question a series of damaging assumptions.

Information obesity: The assumptions

1. If something is new, then it is useful.
2. If something is faster, then it is better.
3. If something is easy, then it useful.
4. Portals, platforms and media used for leisure are intrinsically beneficial in education and the workplace.
5. Searching is the same as researching. Clicking is the same as thinking.
6. Information is the same as knowledge.
7. Cutting and pasting is the same as note-taking.
8. Using a search engine is a replacement for expertise in information literacy.
9. More media are better media.
10. 'Progress' in the United States or the United Kingdom will 'inevitably' trickle down to the rest of the world.

25 'Google apologizes over the racist image of Michelle Obama', *Novinite.com*, 25 November, 2009, http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=110371

To find better information necessitates movement between search engines, widening vocabulary and knowing the innovative writers in a discipline or subject. It is also crucial to locate and recognise the gaps in digital migration. For example, there is one E.P. Thompson book available to download to a Kindle and – through the Kindle application – onto an iPad.²⁶ There is nothing in the iBookstore to purchase from Thompson. Conversely, there are many texts from Richard Florida.²⁷ Such access does not convey educational relevance or excellence, but simply confirms availability and popularity.

The pivotal lesson in transforming environments of information obesity is that a few key decisions from the user/researcher can make such a difference. To encourage making such decisions is similar to trying to convince a friend about the convenience of eating an apple or yoghurt, rather than a home delivered pizza. The pizza tastes better than fruit. The information from Google satisfies the inexperienced searcher because they lack expertise in finding and interpreting anything more complex.²⁸ Therefore to question and probe not only information obesity but the assumptions used to mask its consequences, it is time to enter a phase of digital dieting.

Digital dieting

There is now an almost total disconnection between the validity of a story and its media success.²⁹

Brian Eno

Ponder the metaphors used to describe the engagement with the web: scrolling, surfing and linking. Each describes superficial movement through

26 ‘EPThompson’ search in the Kindle Shop, http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Ddigital-text&field-keywords=E.P.+Thompson&fsc=-1&x=17&y=13

27 ‘Richard Florida’ search in the Kindle Shop, http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Ddigital-text&field-keywords=Richard+Florida&ih=11_4_0_0_0_0_0_0_1.49_190&fsc=-1

28 Another key element of this argument is that the focus is on content creation rather than content understanding. Nicholas Carr stated that, ‘as user-generated content continues to be commercialised, it seems likely that the largest threat posed by social production won’t be to big corporations but to individual professionals – to the journalists, editors, photographers, researchers, analysts, librarians, and other information workers who can be replaced by, as Horowitz put it, “people not on the payroll”’, *The Big Switch: rewiring the world, from Edison to Google*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), p. 142.

29 Eno, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii

material. The question is how to stop snacking on the crust of knowledge and to develop advanced interpretative skills. Using the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) is like eating organic chicken. Google Scholar is the fruit and vegetable section of the information environment. Google is an international information smorgasbord. We could choose to eat salad. However, it is easier and tastier to keep returning to the dessert table for another piece of chocolate cake. It is easier to read blogs than an academic article. It is simpler to watch a YouTube video of another drunken bride falling over at a wedding than watching an important lecture recorded with a static camera. It is more difficult and requires concentration and effort. It is easier to suck in the equivalent of an information sugar rush, than the slow release of profound ideas, carefully constituted.³⁰ As Linda Behan confirmed in her discussion of the role of the school librarian, ‘students want instant gratification, and there are not enough hours in the day to teach them otherwise’.³¹ Yet one way to circumvent or challenge the desire for immediate and automated results is to put intellectual obstacles in the way, to defamiliarise their encounter with ideas.³² One strategy I have used is to restrict Wikipedia and Google use from first year students. I am not against Wikipedia for general(ised) information, although it has structural limitations.³³ This is not a stance against wiki-enabled media. The problem is not (only) the anonymity of wiki-enabled collective authorship. Instead, all encyclopaedias are too generalised for the specialist knowledge required at university. By removing simple and introductory sources – including textbooks – from students, the crutch is gone. By blocking default intellectual options, consciousness develops in differentiating between general and scholarly information. My imperative to ‘ban’ Google is a challenge to students to find better information in different ways. When they know the key authors in the field and have widened their vocabulary, Google becomes much more useful. To enact this intervention, I supply a detailed study guide and a free collection of readings. While this has been a common practice in many universities in the last twenty years, these supplied materials from academic staff are now

30 It is important to log the consequences of the Amazon effect: the more ‘we’ click, the more the type of information, goods and services we see is limited. Similarly, by 2007, the personalised search became the default for those with a gmail address and Google account. This personalisation means that we keep finding people like ourselves and information that keeps us satisfied rather than challenged.

31 L. Behan, *Using pop culture to teach information literacy: methods to engage a new generation*, (Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2006), p. 5

32 J. Lanier called this ‘contrarianism’, with the goal of constructing “an alternative mental environment,” *You are not a gadget: a manifesto*, (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 23

33 T. Brabazon, “Where fans put Franz before the archduke,” *Times Higher Education*, 20 March, 2008, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=401163>

even more important. The retraction of library budgets for monographs and journals, along with commercial publishers buying and aggregating journals into expensive packages beyond the reach of many universities,³⁴ means that academic staff must purchase and supply the overwhelming majority of course materials used in their courses. Extracts are then photocopied within copyright parameters and distributed to students. Similarly open access articles can be selected and listed in study guides and embedded into learning management systems. The changes to publishing, with a retraction of scholarly monographs and an increase in textbooks, have further reduced the quality of available material for students. Therefore, academics – to guarantee the quality of student readings from any socio-economic background – are assuming personal (and economic) responsibility as public institutions and university libraries that used to fulfil this function have been bled of funding. Either academics supply this high quality material to their students, or it is not available for them to read.

When students use these specially prepared materials rather than wandering through Google, Wikipedia or textbooks, they learn about the subject and gain security and expectations in a new environment. It is digital dieting. Less searching creates more learning. Students arrive at university with little specialist knowledge, uncertain of the level of reading and writing required of them. They are often frightened, away from home for the first time and – understandably – will revert to prior habits and patterns.³⁵ The decision to excise Wikipedia and Google from their information seeking patterns is not an anti-technological act. Indeed, my goal is to show the value of quality online materials. My imperative is to help new students, rather than to celebrate new media.

The cost of choice in an age of information obesity – which is actually a denial of choice – is that we stay in intellectual environments where we feel happy, understood, satiated, literate and untroubled by ‘foreign’ ideas. The starting point of learning is to have the courage to read defiantly and courageously, jumping into ideas that confuse, unsettle and upset our values and experience. Challenge builds learning. Conformity enables ignorance. The (supposed) advantage of Google constructing a pathway through information

34 This retraction of budgets is serious considering the great potential of digital reference. Scott La Counte recognised in *Digital reference in the information age* (Tobit Books, 2004) that ‘over the past 20 years, digital reference has evolved from being a slow, at times impractical, form of reference, and has been transformed into an electronic tool that is redefining the role of the librarian. While other internet-based services have failed, digital reference has rapidly grown, and will continue to grow as the technology and the demand for online reference services increases’, Kindle edition, location 13–20

35 Behan confirmed that, ‘one unsuccessful research session breeds more Googling. When attempting new methods and slowing down to evaluate material results, students turn in frustration to what they know best and with what they are comfortable. Don’t we all?’ *op. cit.*, p. 7

is that it prevents inexperienced students and citizens becoming frozen and overwhelmed when selecting relevant sources. They do not have to choose. The clean interface of Google automates their search patterns, giving them a rank of websites so that they are never troubled to think about the way in which such a list was assembled. The key in enacting digital dieting is to gently move students from ‘selecting’ Google as a default option. Even instigating a single change – from Google to Google Scholar – makes an incredible difference. It is also possible to demonstrate the value of alternative search engines that deliver fewer – but more specialist – outcomes.

Name of search engine	URL	Specialist function
Dogpile	http://www.dogpile.com	Aggregates Google, Yahoo!, Bing and Ask through a metasearch.*
Ask Jeeves	http://uk.ask.com/	Maintains a question and answer function, but also a capacity to return precise requests for video and images. It is also possible to view other users’ answers to a question.
Soundcat.ch	http://www.soundcat.ch/	A specialist search engine for MP3s.
Files Tube	www.filestube.com	Searches filesharing and uploading sites
Scirus	http://www.scirus.com/	A specialist science search engine
Njouba	http://www.njouba.com/	Searches FTP, Torrent and RapidShare
Ebook search	http://www.ebook-search-engine.com/	Searches ebooks and electronic publications more generally
Sweet Search	http://www.sweetsearch.com/	A specialist search engine for both students and librarians, with mechanisms for human review.
Ms Freckles	http://www.msreckles.com/	Separates searches by media and type of information

FROM INFORMATION OBESITY TO DIGITAL DIETING

Name of search engine	URL	Specialist function
Mamma	http://www.mamma.com/	Metasearch engine, with the capacity to select by the category of results
Picsearch	http://www.picsearch.com/	Specialist picture searcher
Google Code University	http://code.google.com/edu/curriculumsearch/	Searches curriculum materials from international computer science departments
Open Library	www.openlibrary.org	A wiki-enabled search engine that aims to record every book and author.
Quotations Pageki	http://www.quotationspage.com/search.php3	Searches for significant statements and quotations
Lazarum.com	http://www.lazarum.com/2/en/	Search for specialist information on disabilities. It is also tailored to be read with screen readers.
Infomine	http://infomine.ucr.edu/	Built by librarians, it searches some of the deep web.
Zhift	http://www.zhift.com/	Searches web fora
Wink	http://wink.com/	Specialist search engine for people, with emerging focus on social networking.

Note: * Please refer to their study in collaboration with Queensland University of Technology and Pennsylvania State University, *Different Engines, Different Results Web Searchers Not Always Finding What They're Looking for Online*, April 2007, <http://www.infospaceinc.com/onlineprod/Overlap-DifferentEnginesDifferentResults.pdf>.

All search engines automate the search process, but the database of materials from which the selection is made is configured differently for more specific tasks. For example, Bing describes itself, not as a search engine, but a 'decision engine'. The 'improvement' beyond Google is to further automate the searcher's results. The one advantage of Google Scholar is that students can maintain familiarity with a brand that they know, but the algorithm connects users to higher quality refereed materials. The removal of Google as a default

is like removing ice cream from the home freezer. If it is not readily available, then it will not be eaten. Alternatives may be considered.

My goal as a teacher, particularly as a teacher of first year students, is to slow their movement through ideas. I block data mining and cutting and pasting through the careful construction of assessments. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to create an awareness of the different types and modes of information and provide a scaffold to information literacy. I also assemble a checklist for them. Every source they use in University requires asking ten key questions.

1. Who authored the information?
2. What expertise does the writer have to comment?
3. What evidence is used? Are there citations in the piece?
4. What genre is the document: journalism, academic paper, blog, polemic?
5. Is the site/document/report funded by an institution?
6. What argument is being made?
7. When was the text produced?
8. Why did this information emerge at this point in history?
9. Who is the audience for this information?
10. What is not being discussed and what are the political consequences of that absence?

This is the list I give my first year students on the day they commence class. Such questions ask that they stop and think before they cut and paste. If I allow the students to use Google and Wikipedia without thinking, snacking on low quality information because it is available, cheap and easy to find, then they never make the realisation about the limitation of their knowledge. They never reach the moment of realisation and consciousness that they have little idea how to find information.

The issue is not only a lack of reading or a replacement of reading for clicking. Another problem is a dearth of note taking. Students are not taking notes from what they read. Instead, they highlight text. Without note taking, it means that they endlessly return to the original source, choosing over and over

again what may (or may not) be relevant. Taking notes is a moment of decision making, selecting important information that is appropriate to a discipline, level of education or assessment. Without notes, these students are locked into information obesity. They do not read a book or article, make a choice about what is important, take notes and put away the original text, being able to use the notes for assignments. They are not in control of the information environment. This problem can begin to be solved by working on how students select information in the first place.

Education – learning – is slow, gradual and incremental. Google is fast. That is why Google's algorithm seems to have more value than librarians or teachers: not because the Corporation is benevolent or correct, but because it simplifies choices and appears to reduce the cost of staff. Instead of working hard(er) to find complex references and emerging scholarship, it is easier to follow the crowd, follow the algorithm and access the links on the first page of Google. Food choices are similar. At the end of a long day, we can either prepare a vegetarian risotto or dial up for a pizza. But simply because an action or behaviour is easy does not mean that it is beneficial. Those of us interested in education and libraries, information and knowledge, need to start with simple interventions and tactics for digital dieting and then instigate more complex information scaffolding. In my case, I supply quality materials to students and a long further reading list, cutting away the reliance on Google and Wikipedia, while configuring assessment that embeds information literacy.

These thoughts on information obesity and the necessity for digital dieting crystallised during an MA seminar for Media Literacies at the University of Brighton. In the last session of the module, one of my students described her intellectual paralysis when confronted by information choices every day. Each morning when waking up, she is frozen with the scale of choices. Will she read her course guide? Will she search online? Will she go to the library? Instead, she checks her telephone for messages, answers emails and returns to her Facebook profile, which she 'accidentally' leaves open most of her working day.

After working through her patterns, we realised that she makes choices by not making choices, living in Brian Wansink's 'mindless margin'.³⁶ She worries about the hours spent messaging, commenting and updating and asks me to help her with time management. Actually, time management is not her problem. Information management is her challenge. If she closed Facebook after a designated thirty minutes a day, constructed daily learning goals and followed the recommendations of teachers and librarians while monitoring citations of important authors via Google Scholar, then her information environment becomes less threatening and chaotic. There would be no metaphoric Mars Bar calling her name. By not checking Facebook updates every five minutes,

36 B. Wansink, *Mindless Eating*, <http://www.mindlesseating.org/>

forcing herself not to leave one task until it is completed and checking for information that she does not need, *she is making choices not to make choices*. She develops experience in planning and organising her intellectual environment, understanding the consequences of refereeing and learning about quality assurance models in education, differentiating between leisure and learning, time passing and time management. This is a pivotal realisation for schools and universities. We have now reached a layer of maturity in the web environment where one size search engine does not fit all. The information literacy skills used to find shoes may not be appropriate to find scholarly resources.

Strategies to move from Information Obesity to Digital Dieting

1. Reduce the media involved in achieving a learning outcome. Use fewer media to create more meaning.
2. Reduce the dependency on learning materials (like PowerPoint slides) that can move through time and space. Make information choices in real time and space. Do not delay decision making.
3. Increase thinking. Reduce cutting and pasting.
4. Use scaffolding assessment such as research plans and annotative bibliographies.
5. Introduce a few significant assessments, rather than multiple small assessments.
6. Ensure that the key readings are international, current and model excellence for the students.
7. Demand interpretation of important scholars, rather than paraphrasing of key ideas.
8. Update assessment each year, ensuring student feedback on assessment from previous years is embedded into current practice.
9. If a mode of teaching and learning is not working, then change it by reducing the number of assessments or alter the media of delivery.
10. Develop a community of learners who care about each other's progress. Reduce competition, increase community. Use social media to build social relationships.

The imperative is teaching students the differences between scholarly and general information and naturalising information literacy processes for evaluating sources. This encourages students to stretch and try new strategies, new search engines and new methods. It involves all of us – as learners and readers – to extend ourselves to seek out new ideas and intellectual opportunities. The implementation of digital dieting enables the skills required to handle the proliferation of information. But this intervention in personal search practices of students is not enough. Besides moderating information obesity and initiating digital dieting, it is necessary to activate social skills to not only shape

information into knowledge, but to see the other side of the argument and position all truths into the context from which they emerge.³⁷

Digital Justice

Although there is a real threat that the computerisation of society will intensify the current inequalities in relations of class, race, and gender power, there is also the possibility that a democratised and computerised public sphere might provide opportunities to overcome these injustices.³⁸

Douglas Kellner

Changing our minds is our hope for the future.³⁹

Brian Eno

It is completely understandable that students (and citizens) are confronting difficulty in their searching and learning processes. The digitisation that we are witnessing is arguably of a scale of the movement from scroll to codex. By increasing the opportunities to read refereed scholarship and write evocative assignments from it, students improve their marks and decrease stress. By reducing dependency on the crack pipe of social networking, higher quality information becomes the foundation of the intellectual diet. Deciding to avoid the information equivalent of chocolate cake and ice cream ensures that space is available for the fruits of scholarship.

Reducing the information choices being made reorients the focus to the quality, rather than the speed and scale, of returns. Less is more. Such a principle can also apply to the configuration of the sensory experience for learning. As the Open University has shown through their history, sound-only teaching resources defamiliarise the way in which students think about ideas.⁴⁰ With the

37 The role of librarians in this process is crucial. As John Budd confirmed, ‘among the numerous concerns related to librarianship is the goal of informing people, of providing shape and form to their thoughts and questions’, *Self-examination: the present and future of librarianship*, (Westport: Beta Phi Mu Monographic Series, 2008), Kindle edition, locations 38–42

38 D. Kellner, ‘Globalization, technopolitics and revolution’, *Theoria*, December 2001, p. 18

39 Eno, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii

40 A.W. Bates demonstrated the importance of media choice and selection in distance education, including the history of audio cassettes for OU courses. He stated that, ‘Audio cassettes are low costs; all students already have facilities at home; they are

eyes at rest, easy visual literacy is not an option. For difficult intellectual work that is abstract, sonic media platforms are often an option,⁴¹ slowing students' decision making and interpretation of information, encouraging alternative modes and patterns of thought.⁴²

Instead of recognising this specificity and value – using fewer senses to initiate greater learning – podcasts became vodcasts. Show notes accompanied the sound. Supposedly the addition of visual and print-based resources increased the relevance and quality of sonic media. But what if we gain more meaning from fewer media? Could there be positive consequences in using our senses in different ways to create unusual environments for listening, learning and thinking that are distinct from the patterns and processes of our daily lives? Even if there is debate about my assumption that fewer media creates more meaning, there is no doubt that fewer media – less sensory information – creates different types of learning. Even more importantly, by reducing the senses and media in operation, a consciousness develops about platform selection and the building of knowledge.⁴³

Searching for information is a quest for meaning and understanding.⁴⁴ Much of the history of education is based on the selection of ideas, research and media to create a curriculum for students that extends and tests them, rather than leaving them satiated, satisfied and compliant.⁴⁵ Media platform selection is the crucial moment in learning. A powerful and important consequence

easy for academics to produce, and cheap and simple to distribute; students find them convenient to use; and, when designed properly, they encourage student activity. (UK OU audio-cassettes are rarely lectures)', Bates, 'Technology for distance education: A 10-year perspective', in A. Tait, (ed.) *Key issues in open learning – a reader: An anthology from the journal 'Open learning' 1986–1992*, (Harlow: Longman, 1993), p. 242.

41 Please refer to T. Brabazon, 'Socrates in earpods: the ipodification of education', *Fast Capitalism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2006, http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/2_1/brabazon.htm

42 My valuing of sonic media in education here extends beyond Stephen Abram and Judy Luther who argued, 'many of us in the information profession are great text-based learners. For most of the rest of the world, reading is not a primary learning behaviour', from 'Born with the chip', *Library Journal*, 1 May, 2004, p. 36

43 An example of this reflexive work is G. Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age*, (London: Routledge, 2003). Kress asks how - in the era of multimodality - the forms and functions of writing transform. Will this multimodal screen culture transform – and return – writing into a transcription of speech or become more iconographic?

44 This meta-function of the search was brilliantly explored in Sharon Markless (ed.), *The innovative school librarian: thinking outside the box*, (London: Facet, 2009)

45 Robin Mason and Frank Rennie stressed the importance of 'selecting the media palette', from *E-learning and social networking handbook: resources for higher education*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 43

of distance education – that is enhanced through media platforms that shift content temporally and geographically – is that it removes students from the campus and slots learning into the rhythms of personal and professional responsibilities. There are many more citizens who have a chance to participate in education who could never commit to classes in a conventional university environment. But then there are social and economic costs when physically separating teacher and learner, library and learning. Media proxies can build relationships and manage the loss of face to face teaching and learning.⁴⁶ To ensure that these proxies are successful requires planning, deep understanding of available educational options and opportunities, curricula expertise and a powerful feedback mechanism to ensure the careful alignment between learner, curriculum and community. Media choices and literacies should be determined by the environment of the student, not the staff.

Distance education, through its history, has been mediated by the dominant popular cultural platform of its time.

- Correspondence courses (paper and post).
- Radio and television (schools of the air).
- Open Universities (integrated print, radio, television and summer school packages).
- Video and teleconferencing (synchronous media elements added to asynchronous education).
- Internet and web (integrating portal, delivery system, information and communication hub)⁴⁷

Media transformations have been woven through the history of schools and universities, widening participation in higher education. The paradox with such a media-led model for building social justice in education is that the very

46 A fascinating study of distance education course for teachers in rural areas in South Africa – based on a study of programmes from the University of Pretoria, is Jill Fresen and Johan Hendrikz, ‘Designing to Promote Access, Quality, and Student Support in an Advanced Certificate Programme for Rural Teachers in South Africa’, *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2009, <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/631/1322>

47 These five modes of education technology are based on D. Kember, *Reconsidering open & distance learning in the developing world: meeting students’ learning needs*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 124

groups that were excluded from higher education are often the groups without the disposable income for the hardware and software to overcome this injustice. Therefore, the best of distance and open education is able to carry forward elements of old media into new education. Such a strategy not only ensures that a larger number of potential students holds the literacies to commence study and be welcomed into the online environment, but that the best media are chosen for a learning moment, rather than simply assuming that the newest media will be appropriate.

The great gift of social media, like Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter and FourSquare, to education is that they are *social*, forming networks of communication and connection between students and staff. Distance education – in its paper-led mode where collections of readings and study guides were sent to student by post – was individualised learning, with occasional weekends or summer schools where scholars would travel to a venue for intensive lecture and seminar sessions. Through social media, distance education is enhanced, allowing students to create much more natural relationships throughout the academic year. Students are friends on Facebook and meet in asynchronous and synchronous virtual learning environments. Such platforms and portals may not enhance the attainment of learning outcomes, but they do enable learning to be a part of living.

The challenge is to ensure that such strategies are implemented globally. While globalisation (and globalism) remains a contentious term, often aligned with westernisation and free trade, it carries hope for diversity, modernity⁴⁸ and innovative trans-local relationships. Amartya Sen confirmed that,

We cannot reverse the economic predicament of the poor across the world by withholding from them the great advantages of contemporary technology, the well-established efficiency of international trade and exchange, and the social as well as economic merits of living in an open society.⁴⁹

The central issue of contention is not globalisation itself, nor is it the use of the market as an institution, but the inequity in the overall balance of institutional arrangements – which produces very unequal sharing of the benefits of globalisation.⁵⁰

48 I wanted to note some of the troubling anti-modern(ist) tendencies of writers about social media. For example, Clay Shirky stated that, ‘our social tools are not an improvement to modern society; they are a challenge to it’, *op. cit.*, p. 107

49 A. Sen, ‘How to judge globalism’, from F. Lechner and J. Boli (eds.), *The Globalization Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 18

50 *ibid.*, p. 20

Globalisation is a statement of interdependency that has particular applicability to international teaching and learning. There is a gap in higher education provision between developed and developing nations.⁵¹ But information architecture and information literacy can be improved.

Digital justice must be a priority. One of the great problems emerging from the phrase the 'digital divide' is that it is a passive description, encouraging complacency. It conveys an inevitability to inequality, whether discussing the disparity between nations, regions, urban and rural environments, races, classes, genders or age. It encourages descriptions of difference, rather than initiating action to listen, understand and intervene. The digital divide was tethered to phrases like the information society and the information revolution. Mobile media and mobile telephony agitated such categories.⁵² However the digital divide is based on the assumption that access to technology is a proxy for learning how to use it.

An example of this slippage between access and literacy is the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) project,⁵³ which is part of the laudable philanthropic goal that every child in the world should have access to the XO laptop. However it is based on the premise that access to a computer will inevitably develop information literacy. The OLPC confirmed this confusion: 'we do not focus on computer literacy, as that is a by-product of the fluency children will gain through use of the laptop for learning'.⁵⁴ There is an unfortunate overlap and confusion between access and information, technology and learning, worsened

51 I follow Kember's determination of the difference between developed and developing nations, because it is dynamic: 'I will interpret a developed country as one which has levels of participation in higher education close to half of an age-group and has therefore achieved mass higher education. Developing countries are those which have not', *op. cit.*, p. 61

52 I note Emlyn Hagen's study, *The digital divide in Africa: cross-sectional time series analysis of the African Digital Divide factors*, (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2007). In this short book, he notes that 'half of the world's population has never made or received a phone call and (perhaps the same) half of the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day. If this is not just a statistical coincidence, is there causality between the lack of telecommunication and poverty?', p. ii. However through his study he realised that there are some statistical coincidences in such a statement with mobile telephony being the agent of change. However the slow transformation in the period from the early 1990s through to the early 2000s, the period of movement between web 1.0 and web 2.0, has had an impact in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Although forming 11 per cent of the world's population, this group only held 0.9 per cent of the global telephone lines in the early 1990s. By 2002, it had lifted to 1.5 per cent, p. 5.

53 One national manifestation of this project is One Laptop Per Child Australia, www.olpc.org.au

54 'About OLPC', www.olpc.org.au/vision/about

through the complex contemporary colonial relationships. Or, as Python language author Guido van Rossum stated, 'I've thought for a while that sending laptops to developing countries is simply the 21st century equivalent of sending bibles to the colonies'.⁵⁵ Access is the preliminary stage in the project of learning. Intervention does not end at this point, with attention required on far less fashionable topics such as professional development for staff, careful configurations of curriculum, lifelong learning and shaping source material that is both internationally relevant and locally appropriate.

The challenge for policy makers and educators for the next moment in internet history is no longer about tracking early adopters but universal access intertwined with universal programmes for information literacy. Finland has taken the first step. On 1 July, 2010, Finland became the first nation in the world to transform broadband access into a right of citizenship. The reason for such a decision is that broadband is no longer only an enabler of entertainment and leisure, but the basis of social justice and equality. The aspiration to provide the entire population with a 100 megabit per second connection by 2015 meant that telecommunications companies had to ensure all residents have access to broadband connections with a legally enforceable minimum speed. Suvi Linden, Finland's responsible communication minister, confirmed to the BBC that, 'We consider the role of the internet in Finns' everyday life. Internet services are no longer just for entertainment.'⁵⁶ It is neither special nor an option extra. It is a public service.⁵⁷ Computers are simply terminals. Their usefulness is determined not only by the network into which it is connected, but the information literacy of the user. This decision by the Finnish government is one way to guarantee regional equality. In Finland's case, the great benefits are to both education and small to medium-sized businesses in regional areas.⁵⁸ It also facilitates more isolated areas participating in trans-local and trans-national trade.

For large nations such as South Africa, Canada, Sudan, Nigeria, Indonesia and my home of Australia, such a universal service obligation must be the goal. It will require persistence and commitment. Australia has instigated waves of political strategies and visions for broadband rollouts by governmental

55 G. van Rossum, *EeeUser forum*, 14 May, 2008, <http://forum.eeeuser.com/viewtopic.php?id=56874>

56 'Finland makes broadband a "legal right"', *BBC News*, 1 July, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10461048>

57 The ubiquity of information technology as a service or utility is the basis of arguments in Nicholas Carr, *The Big Switch: rewiring the world, from Edison to Google*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), pp. 2–17.

58 Suvi Linden referred to it as a 'one of the governments most significant triumphs in regional policy', in Tracie McDaniel, 'Finland makes broadband a legal right for every citizen', *Daily Tech*, 1 July, 2010 <http://www.dailytech.com/Finland+Makes+Broadband+a+Legal+Right+for+Every+Citizen/article18910.htm>.

organisations, nongovernmental organisations, businesses and charities. None has met expectations. At its most basic, these schemes have failed because it is not economically viable to connect many remote and regional areas of the nation. Simply because it is not economically viable, does that mean that the investment in infrastructure is not important? In Australia, the broadband black spots are really broadband blackouts in northern and central Australia. While the regional differentiation in South Africa is more difficult to determine because of the proliferation of mobile telephony,⁵⁹ Kholadi Tlabela, Joan Roodt and Andrew Paterson's important *Mapping ICT Access in South Africa* demonstrates the value of this developmental objective in implementing national ICT infrastructure. This is the goal of the Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa.⁶⁰ The USAASA recognises the necessity, both socially and economically, of this scheme and has instigated a suite of indicators to and for access that offer a global template. Their indicators of ICT access and rollout are configured in four tiers.

- Access to telecommunications, computers and the internet in a household.
- Access to public telecommunication service centres
- Access to telecommunications services in areas seen as under-serviced
- Support for under-serviced areas with regard to telecommunications⁶¹

Most significantly, Tlabela, Roodt and Paterson created an integrated modelling for information management, stating that,

many of the information-management skills that are particularly necessary in a digital environment can be learned using books and other sources of printed matter.⁶²

This is a crucial and far-reaching realisation. As explored in the first part of this chapter, attention to vocabulary, disciplinary knowledge and understanding the impact of refereeing are skills to be learnt in printed and analogue environments

59 One proxy to track this differentiation is through the percentage of households with access to landlines, with the Western Cape being the highest and Limpopo being the lowest. Please refer to K. Tlabela, J. Roodt and A. Paterson (with G. Weir-Smith), *Mapping ICT access in South Africa*, (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), p. 9.

60 Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa, <http://www.usa.org.za/>

61 *ibid.*, p. 6.

62 Tlabela, Roodt and Paterson, *op. cit.*, p. 124

and can be transferred online. This argument is verified by Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis's discussion of the movement through on and offline texts.

The idea that books are linear and the Internet is multilateral is based on the assumption that readers of books necessarily read in a linear way. In fact, the devices of contents, indexing and referencing were designed precisely for alternative lateral readings – hypertextual readings, if you like. And the idea that the book is a text with a neat beginning and a neat end – unlike the Internet, which is an endless, seamless web of cross-linkages – is to judge the book by its covers. A book does not begin and end at its covers, despite the deceptive appearances of its physical manifestation. It sits in a precise place in the world of other books, literally when shelved in a library, located in multiple ways by sophisticated subject cataloguing systems, and intertextually positioned by the apparatuses of attribution (referencing) and subject definition (contents and indexes).⁶³

There is money to be made in celebrating and selling new media. However the costs of occasionally bizarre obsolescence practices have created a culture of waste. I call this 'the iPad effect' and it will be investigated in greater detail in a later chapter in this book. However what the concept captures is how Apple created an artificial wedge between the smartphone and the laptop, opening a market. The process worked so well that the purchasers of a product like the iPad then create a series of articles,⁶⁴ books,⁶⁵ blogs,⁶⁶ podcasts⁶⁷ and vodcasts⁶⁸ where consumers try to discover reasons why they bought it. This is information obesity. Instead, digital dieting commences by asking what do I want to achieve, rather than how I can use this hardware or software. Old media are not obsolescent, but provide scaffolding into the current media environment. Put another way:

Old Media + New Media = Now Media

63 B. Cope and Mary Kalantzis, 'New Media, New Learning', in D. Cole and D. Pullen, *Multiliteracies in motion: current theory and practice*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 89

64 T. Brabazon, 'iPad and the academy', *Times Higher Education*, 14 July, 2010, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=412505>

65 J.D. Biersdorfer, *iPad: The Missing Manual*, (O'Reilly Media, 2010)

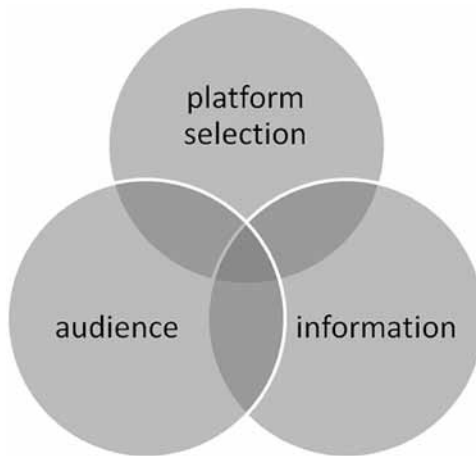
66 'Just another iPad blog', <http://justanotheripadblog.com/>

67 'The iPad possibilities', *iTunes*, <http://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-ipad-possibilities-podcast/id354085981>

68 'Daily App Shows', *iTunes*, <http://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/dailyappshow-ipad-edition/id366674023>

Recognising the benefits of digital dieting, spending more time in planning and developing information literacy and less money on software and hardware with no clear purpose, will not only create efficiency and consciousness but a greater chance of addressing inequality.

Digital justice requires reflection, intervention, commitment and respect, asking how already existing media can be used to activate information literacy and media literacy. These are overlapping fields and literatures, particularly in the management of ‘new media’, but the key distinction is that media literacy is particularly focused on platform selection, or the relationship between form and content, signifier and signified. Information literacy is propelled by not only the search for data, but by ensuring a scaffold is in place for evaluation and assessment. Digital justice necessitates understanding exactly who is – and could be – using media and information to improve their learning and lives. Therefore, it is time to offer a Venn diagram that aligns media, audience and information.



To build digital justice necessitates clarity about the type of information to be expressed, which can then be shaped for the required audience. Only when specifying the information and audience can the best media platform be selected. Such a process activates a sociology of the web. There is a match between the audience for a particular platform, in terms of age, region and gender, and the target for the information. One study from Pingdom.com aggregated Google Ad Planner data to reveal the mean age of social networking users.

Estimated average age of users on social networking sites

Name of site	Average age of users
Classmates.com	44.9
LinkedIn	44.3
Delicious	41.3
Slashdot	40.4
Twitter	39.1
Digg	38.5
Stumbled Upon	38.5
Facebook	38.4
FriendFeed	38.4
Ning	37.8
Reddit	37.4
LastFM	35.8
LiveJournal	35.2
Tagged	34.4
Hi5	33.5
Friendster	33.4
Xanga	32.3
MySpace	31.8
Bebo	28.4

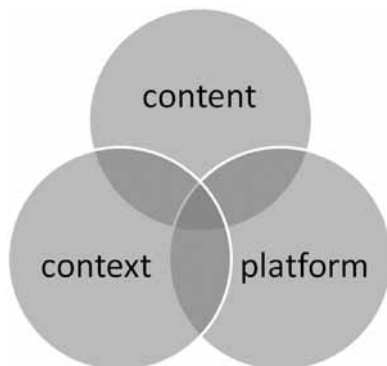
Source: Pingdom.com, <http://royal.pingdom.com/2010/02/16/study-ages-of-social-network-users/>, 16 February, 2010

Further, the average age of Second Life users is 32.⁶⁹ Assuming that ‘the young people’ are populating social networking sites is incorrect. Therefore the reason for schools and universities buying an island on Second Life for the

69 T. Walsh, ‘Second Life stats expanded’, *Clickable Culture*, 7 March. 2007, http://www.secretlair.com/index.php?/clickableculture/entry/second_life_stats_expanded_early_2006/

purposes of teaching and learning must be questioned,⁷⁰ unless attracting older students is the goal.

The imperative is therefore not the celebration of user generated content, but understanding a user's generative context.



Put another way, policy makers, librarians and teachers configure a careful relationship between audience, context and goal. This goal can be selling a product or developing a learning outcome. However the greater the clarity in determining the detailed outcome and goal, audience and context, the more effective and trackable the results will be.



If such relationships become the first step in developing education, consumption, production and citizenship, then waste is reduced. If the investment continues to be in a platform, rather than the literacy required in its use, then confusion will continue between tools and applications, information and knowledge. All technological decisions are tempered by the issue of relevance. As Nancy MacKay realised, 'patiently waiting for a technology to mature does

70 'Second Life Universities and Private Islands', *Simteach.com*, http://www.simteach.com/wiki/index.php?title=Second_Life:_Universities_and_Private_Islands

not make you a Luddite. It makes you technologically responsible.⁷¹ The best focus is on what can be used or produced, rather than the new or ‘the next big thing’. Such a process requires (1) the acknowledgement and recognition of information obesity and media obsolescence, and (2) applying strategies for digital dieting. Together, these two moments of consciousness and intervention enable strategies for digital justice.



This process requires planning and commitment, rather than allowing a search engine or any hardware or software development to automate media choices. Without this intervention, the consequences of information obesity will be waste for some and starvation for others. Both states will be normalised as inevitable. The responsibility remains on teachers and librarians to claim a position of leadership in challenging inequalities and normalising assumptions about progress, technology, learning and living.⁷²

The digital divide has been present through the internet, the web, e-commerce and the migration of public services online. The digital divide surfs other inequalities created through colonialism, ageism, class, regionality, gender and education. But in a web 2.0 age, the consequences of the digital divide are greater than in the earlier moment of digital history. When public libraries are threatened, information obesity must increase. To extend the metaphor,

71 N. MacKay, *Curating oral histories: from interview to archive*, (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007)

72 Gretchen Schwarz manages this professional development issue through media literacy. She states, ‘today’s teachers deal with diversity at every level. Many seem unprepared. Media literacy incorporated into teacher education and professional development may benefit teachers by helping them understand the “other”, by helping them challenge media notions about gender, race, class, etc.; by introducing them to alternative pedagogies; and by offering them resources and techniques to empower their own students ... media literacy integrated into teacher education and development may specifically offer a means of improving teaching for diversity’, from ‘Media literacy prepares teachers for diversity’, *Academic Exchange*, Spring 2004, p. 224

Gary Thompson stated that ‘the campus library should be the “gymnasium for the mind”’.⁷³ Without a library, googling literacies become flabby. When scholars and citizens are intellectually extended by specialist search engines,⁷⁴ Open Access environments,⁷⁵ the Public Knowledge project⁷⁶ and experienced librarians,⁷⁷ then intellectual fitness is sustained and enhanced.

The strength of the read-write web means that some communities and individuals have never had more platforms, media or opportunities to communicate and express themselves. Pippa Norris noted at the start of the 2000s, before the proliferation of the read-write web, that gains in productivity through the leaps in information technology increased the inequality between affluent nations and those still developing infrastructure, skills and literacies.⁷⁸ The most obvious examples of this productivity gap in the last ten years are not only the penetration of internet and broadband,⁷⁹ but plug in and play hardware⁸⁰ and WordPress, Drupal and simple content management systems to enable website building for those with little knowledge of html coding.⁸¹

For those who were excluded from web 1.0, the costs of being excluded from the read-write web are even greater. Not only because new devices are being created,⁸² but because these new devices are being accompanied

73 G. Thompson, ‘Information literacy accreditation mandates: what they mean for faculty and librarians’, *Library Trends*, Vol. 51, No. 2, Fall 2002, p. 229

74 Infomine, <http://infomine.ucr.edu/>

75 Directory of Open Access Journals, <http://www.doaj.org/> and Open J-Gate, <http://www.openj-gate.com/Search/QuickSearch.aspx>

76 Public Knowledge Project, <http://pkp.sfu.ca/>

77 LION, <http://liontv.blip.tv/>

78 P. Norris, *Digital divide: civic engagement, information poverty and the internet worldwide*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 5

79 Internet World Statistics, 2010, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>. The impact of fibre bandwidth by submarine cables in Africa through 2009 and 2010 is discussed in the *Africa, Internet Broadband and Digital Media Statistics Tables*, May 2010, <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Africa-Internet-Broadband-and-Digital-Media-Statistics-tables-only.html?r=51>

80 R. Michelle Green published a fascinating study of users and resisters in ‘Unpacking “I don’t want it” — Why novices and non-users don’t use the Internet’, *First Monday*, Vol. 11, No. 9, September 2006, http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_9/green/index.html. Green confirmed that already existing users were able to deploy the enhancements of the online environment that actually made it easier to use.

81 G. Berger, ‘From “now” to “next” in African newsroom’s use of ICT: the case of Nika’, paper delivered at the SPI-KAF conference, Kampala, 22 May 2008, <http://guyberger.ru.ac.za/fulltext/now%20to%20next.doc>.

82 Jaron Lanier recommended care and caution in the selection of both new platforms and new ideas. He stated, ‘some of the so-called web 2.0 ideas are stinkers,

by a programme of destruction of analogue books, journals, sounds and visions.⁸³ There is a sleight of hand – a social amnesia – that ensures those heavily connected in the online environment simply forget about those without the technology, desire or capacity to participate in this participatory culture. This is not a question of access. This is not a question of broadband black spots, but literacy black spots. Clay Shirky's book title is a metonymy of this problem: *Here comes every-body: the power of organizing without organizations*. The issue is: who is part of Shirky's 'every-body?'⁸⁴ Starting the book with the 'movement' that emerged to return a stolen mobile phone that had been lost in the back of a New York City cab,⁸⁵ the argument focuses on the 'sharing' rather than the doing. Absent in his critique of 'traditional managerial oversight'⁸⁶ is traditional colonial relationships. While focusing on how information flows through hierarchies, the presence of colonialism as a powerful and present injustice remains invisible in his analysis.

Even for those (of us) empowered by colonial history, Shirky's ladder of sharing, cooperation and collective action does not explain the concurrent hyper personal consumption, credit card debt and the credit crunch. If 'every-body' is an anarchist communitarian, then why is so much of identity, work and leisure meshed with personal spending? Christmass realised this paradox.

We live in a culture where we are encouraged to shop, shop, shop, and buy, buy, buy. When we're in boom times, we flaunt our conspicuous consumption, free of guilt. When the economy is in the doldrums, we are still encouraged to keep the economy – and our credit cards – 'stimulated.' Every day I get at least 10 emails from online stores and boutiques announcing, 'SALE! SALE! SALE!' ... I was a kind of Shopping Borg, filling up any spare time I had with browsing and buying, until it began to constitute my major social activity.⁸⁷

Not only is leisure facilitated and extended online, but it is merged with consumerism. The assumptions about 'every-body' being online or everyone shopping are a misreading of social networks. The analogue blinkers –

so we ought to reject them while we still can', *You are not a gadget: a manifesto*, (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 3

83 John Berry confirmed that there is never an easy transition between the old to new. There is a necessity to create a continuous learning environment. However his question remained how to manage such a transition through an environment of budget cuts, from 'Arizona's new model', *Library Journal*, 1 November, 2002, pp. 40–42

84 C. Shirky, *Here comes every-body: the power of organizing without organizations*, (London: Penguin, 2008)

85 *ibid.*, p. 1–10

86 *ibid.*, p. 39

87 P. Christmass, 'Confessions of a shopaholic', *West Weekend*, 31 July, 2010, p. 21

the blinkers to poverty – are damaging. By celebrating the online sharers, communities and networks, the difficult questions about the (mis)alignment of social communitarianism and individual consumerism remain unasked.

I remain inspired by students, citizens and scholars who – on a daily basis – do not choose the easy, automated and default option, but select the difficult, challenging and complex. Information obesity allows us to wallow in online gluttony. It is necessary to take action and be active in addressing digital injustice. This is a living and exciting process. I have the privilege of teaching students from all over the world, including from many formerly colonised nations. These scholars are courageous, leaving what they know to become what they can be. One of my former MA students, Maggie Wouapi, in her dissertation, offered a corrective to the past and a pathway to the future.

Through the history of feminism, too many white women have spoken on the behalf of women of colour. Podcasting provides an opportunity to change these power relationships and tell a different story. Enough. The time has come for Cameroonian women to hold a microphone. The time has come for Cameroonian women to speak into it. The time has come for Cameroonian women to be incorporated into iTunes.⁸⁸

In finding research to assist and scaffold the next generation of the academy through their teaching and learning beyond the cheerleading of Clay Shirky, Malcolm Gladwell and Chris Anderson, I returned to one of the most inspirational researchers it has been my privilege to read. His words, views and writing are the foundation for my thoughts on identity, race, nation and the media.

Eric Michaels is known for many research projects, but is best remembered for his studies of the Warlpiri community in central Australia.⁸⁹ In the 1980s, he investigated the role and function of television in Yuendumu, at the edge of the Tanami Desert. Michaels did not enact a conventional anthropological case study. Bringing forward the Canadian tradition of communications through Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, he created a fresh and bright strategy for thinking about difference and justice. He attacked readers for lazy and compliant thinking, demanding that they revise assumptions about race, modernity and information. At its most basic, Michaels' scholarship questioned whether 'we' have a right to know. Decades before controversies about Facebook's privacy settings, he warned that there is no right to photograph. There is no right to

88 M. Wouapi, *The subaltern can podcast: is podcasting the future of radio in Cameroon?*, MA Creative Media thesis, University of Brighton, 2010, p. 33

89 Many of these studies are included in E. Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, media and technological horizons*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)

record. There is no right to broadcast. Instead, the Warlpiri, and the rest of us, have the entitlement to hide our images, voices, views and ideas. He validated information restriction, arguing that profound lessons must be learned not only from first peoples, but also from the first information economy. The point of postcolonialism is not to impose modes of information on others, but to listen, learn and create more just ways of thinking about knowledge, information and the economy.

In the long term, the outstanding analysis from Pippa Norris that digitised infrastructure and architecture increases inequalities between developed and developing nations may be incorrect.⁹⁰ Certainly, there is a temporary spurt of productivity that emerges from significant software and hardware innovations. But actually, there is a huge amount of waste and failures in hardware and software development. This is the iPad effect. This pattern repeats the history of the industrial revolution.⁹¹ Britain, as the first industrial nation,⁹² fuelled an empire, proliferated a language and became an engine for economic development. But the second industrial revolution in the 1880s and 1890s saw France, Germany and many other nations catch up to Britain's ascendancy.⁹³ These nations were able to select the processes that had been tested and proven to be successful. The first industrial nation had conducted research and development that subsequent manufacturers could apply.

Similarly, developing nations can use developed nations as a laboratory, to test the useful and disappointing technologies. The benefits of early adoption are reducing.⁹⁴ We are reaching an age, not of new media, but now media. Not of new technology, but useful technology. Not of access but literacy. Eric Michaels realised this pattern. The Warlpiri waited until the urban white population tested out television, video and video cameras. They waited until the start-up price for equipment reduced and the quality of domestic hardware improved. Then they commenced their media productions and television station without the burden of waste.

There is some colonial justice to be found in such a pattern. This is not an imposition of ideas, values and media from the empowered to the

90 P. Norris, *Digital divide: civic engagement, information poverty and the internet worldwide*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

91 Leslie Sklair stated that 'the main difference between the First World of advanced industrial societies and the Third World of less developed societies commonly revolves around the issues of the level of industrialization and its consequences', from *Globalization: Capitalism and its alternatives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 12

92 P. Mathias, *The first industrial nation*, (London: Methuen, 1969)

93 W.O. Henderson, *The Industrial Revolution on the Continent: Germany, France, Russia 1800-1914*, (Quadrangle Books, 1961)

94 G. Gimenez, 'Investment in new technology: Modelling the decision process', *Technovation*, Vol. 26, No. 3, March 2006, Pages 345–350

disempowered. This is learning from the mistakes of the early adopters and ensuring an authentic alignment of community, culture, history and technology. In re-reading Michaels' research amid an online environment where there is a 'right' to edit, a 'right' to upload, a 'right' to tag, a 'right' to comment and a 'right' to abuse, his corrective that information should be controlled and restricted is powerful. In a Facebook age, such an argument is an intellectual car alarm reminding us to read rather than comment, listen rather than talk and think rather than upload. Michaels showed that difference should be respected, but it is also a font of learning for the colonising, the lazy and the self-entitled. The strategy to manage information obesity is not only digital dieting, but recognising that digital justice is no longer an aspirational dream for early adopters, but integral to economic development and high quality learning throughout the world.

The phrase 'digital divide' created the expectation that a group of haves would 'give' technology to the have-nots. However the pattern of development for information and communication technologies in Africa is revealing different patterns, strategies and successes. Florence Ebam Etta and Sheila Parvyn-Wamahiu's study of community telecentres⁹⁵ triggered Richard Fuch's statement that 'Africa is now creating its own Information Society'.⁹⁶ SchoolNet South Africa⁹⁷ is a clear example of this strategy. The capacity of telecentres to integrate old and new media, with the goal of sharing information and communication, has created profound successes. This is not a question of developed and developing nations, or colonisers and colonised. As Michaels showed in the Warlpiri use of television in the 1980s, there is no singular path to progress and development. There is no specific configuration of modernity. There are mobilities and modernities. There are also internets and webs. The set pieces about digital democracy, participatory culture, social media, social networking,⁹⁸ the digital divide and citizen journalism are looking not only tired but naïve. As Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu argue, 'information does not, in

95 F. Ebam Etta and S. Parvyn-Wamahiu (eds.), *Information and communication technologies for development in Africa Volume 2: The experience with community telecentres*, (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2003)

96 R. Fuchs, 'Preface', *ibid.*, p. xiv.

97 SchoolNet South Africa, <http://www.schoolnet.org.za/>

98 As a fascinating side issue, the complex sociology of social networking requires much further study. Some early qualitative studies and statistics are incorporated in this book. However geosocial networking, of with Groupon, Gowalla and FourSquare are important examples, are presenting their own patterns. Early studies show that geosocial networking attracted twice as many men as women. Why this result is odd is that women are – supposedly – heavier users of social media more generally. Please refer to E.G., 'The secret sexism of social media', *The Economist*, 3 June, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/babbage/2011/06/geosocial-networking>

fact, want to be free. It wants to be labelled, organised, and filtered so it can be discovered, cross-referenced, and consumed'.⁹⁹

The goal is to create knowledge dissemination that enables new and specific examples, models and modalities from African nations to move beyond the continent. The emergence and proliferation of open access, online refereed journals based in Africa are increasing. South Africa is the home of many of these journals, but other nations both contribute and share editorial duties. Fine examples include *African Nebula*,¹⁰⁰ based in Osun State University in Osogbo, Nigeria, *Global Media Journal African Edition*¹⁰¹ from Stellenbosch University in South Africa, the *International NGO Journal*¹⁰² and the *Pan African Medical Journal* from Uganda,¹⁰³ the *South African Journal of Information Management*¹⁰⁴ and the *South African Journal of Education*.¹⁰⁵ All show both rich content and quality scholarship. More research and publishing is required, based in Africa but disseminated throughout the world.

Besides these emerging scholarly journals, sonic media is an area where Africa can lead the world. Because of the proliferation of not only radio in Africa,¹⁰⁶ but also of high level auditory literacies, the capacity of podcasts for education and business will be an area for expansion. Podcasts have not reached their full potential in Europe, the Americas, Oceania or South East Asia. Yet the capacity to time and space shift sonic media, produced on accessible hardware and software, ensures that voices and views can be moved around the world in a way that suits both the producer and consumer. Maggie Wouapi showed in her research how podcasting can be a carrier of information about the web,

99 J. Goldsmith and T. Wu, *Who controls the internet: illusions of a borderless world*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 51

100 *African Nebula*, <http://www.nobleworld.biz/africannebula.html>

101 *Journal Media Journal Africa Edition*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2010, <http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Arts/Departemente1/Joernalistiek/Global%20Media%20Journal/Global%20Media%20Journal%20-%20Home>

102 *International NGO Journal*, <http://www.academicjournals.org/INGOJ/index.htm>

103 *Pan African Media Journal*, <http://www.panafrican-med-journal.com/>

104 *South African Journal of Information Management*, <http://general.rau.ac.za/infosci/raujournal/>

105 *South African Journal of Education*, http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_serial&pid=0256-0100&lng=en&nrm=iso

106 Thomas Friedman wrote an early article on the role of radio in West Africa. He stated that 'the four most democratic countries in West Africa today – Benin, Ghana, Mali, and Senegal – all have private, flourishing FM talk radio stations', from 'Low-tech democracy', *The New York Times*, 1 May, 2001, A23

scaffolding the movement of citizens to other platforms.¹⁰⁷ Podcasts, because of the size of the sonic files, can operate in and through existing infrastructure in regional and remote areas.

Social inequality matters. We are entering the environmental end-game in the war over resources. Digitisation has not and will not create a web-housed agora creating global democracy.¹⁰⁸ As Siva Vaidhyanathan asked, ‘How did we get from “liberty, equality, fraternity” to “rip, mix, burn?”’¹⁰⁹ Digitisation makes the hyper-connected feel like they are part of a democracy. Yet it also makes users politically deaf and blind, not aware of the voices and views that are not part of the conversation. The screen is a barrier, blocking consciousness of those who are not uploading and downloaded.¹¹⁰ The disengaged remain disconnected and the disconnected disengaged. The digital divide creates a normalisation of European and North American ‘development’ but such an ideology does not even function in Europe.¹¹¹ The infrastructural and information literacy gulf between Finland and Greece or Sweden and Spain shows the deception in this generalisation.

By committing to digital justice rather than lamenting the digital divide, citizens of the world can avoid a global monoculture, celebrate, preserve and encourage local languages in and through ICTs and acknowledge how colonialism changed, shifted and warped the developmental structures of African nations. These legacies are linguistic, cultural, religious and educational.

107 To listen to her sonic notes on this project, please refer to ‘Tara Brabazon talks to Maggie Wouapi about her MA Creative Media Dissertation’ <http://www.archive.org/details/TaraBrabazonTalksToMaggieWouapiAboutHerMaCreativeMediaDissertation>, ‘Tara Brabazon talks to Maggie Wouapi about the development of her Cameroon podcasting project’ <http://www.archive.org/details/Tara-BrabazonTalksToMaggieWouapiAboutTheDevelopmentOfHerCameroon>, ‘Tara Brabazon talks to Maggie Wouapi about the strengths and weaknesses of podcasting in Cameroon’ <http://www.archive.org/details/TaraBrabazonDiscussesWithMaggieWouapiTheStrengthsAndWeaknessesOf>, ‘What is the role of the artefact in practice-led research?’ <http://www.archive.org/details/WhatIsTheRoleOfTheArtefactInPractice-ledResearch>, ‘Tara Brabazon talks with Maggie Wouapi for her final MA Creative Media Podcast’ <http://www.archive.org/details/MaggieWouapiTheFinalMaCreativeMediaDissertationPodcast>

108 Pippa Norris stated that, ‘the optimistic claims that the interactive capacities of digital technologies will facilitate a new era of direct democracy, characterised by widespread citizen deliberation in affairs of state, like a virtual Agora, while attractive as a normative ideal, is ultimately implausible in practice as soon as we understand who becomes involved in digital politics’, *op. cit.*, p. 18

109 S. Vaidhyanathan, *The anarchist in the library*, (New York: Basic, 2004), p. 15

110 M. Kent, ‘Digital Divide 2.0 and the Digital Subaltern’, *Nebula*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2008, <http://www.nobleworld.biz/images/Kent3.pdf>

111 Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 73

They are a reminder that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are over. It is time to remove the electronic tags.

The commitments to moving from the digital divide to digital justice

1. All citizens hold the right to access high quality information.
2. All citizens hold the right to be literate, including both information and media literacies.
3. Open access materials are better materials.
4. The postcolonial internet creates networks of dialogue, improvement, challenge and reflection about technological choices, rather than the imposition of media, ideas and attitudes throughout the regions of the world.
5. Educate do not discriminate.
6. Ask do not answer.
7. Listen do not talk.
8. Think do not assume.
9. What matters in San Francisco may not be of relevance to the rest of the world.
10. Ensure that multiculturalism is a foundation of all research about the online environment.

A commitment to this checklist is one strategy to commence Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland's goal in, 'rethinking the internet as international'.¹¹² They confirmed that it is important to recognise 'a range of different histories and experiences',¹¹³ avoiding generalisations and studying difference rather than assuming sameness.

This chapter commenced with Neil Postman's *Technopoly*. It seems appropriate to return to his inspirational words. He knew that naive enthusiasm for technological change creates unfounded assumptions that the efficiencies and productivities of new media will 'inevitably' spread throughout the world. That has not happened and without intervention will not. Indeed, Postman recognised the confusion between the simplicity of moving information through space and the ability to build knowledge from it. Once we – as citizens of the world – can differentiate information on the basis of quality, value and relevance, then the enthusiasm for the new, shallow and banal will dissipate. The unproductive and simplistic confluence between online access and social justice

112 G. Goggin and M. McLelland, 'Internationalizing internet studies: beyond Anglophone paradigms' from G. Goggin and M. McLelland (eds.), *Internationalizing internet studies: beyond Anglophone paradigms*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 4.

113 *ibid.*, p. 10

means that those who are not online and 'participating' in Facebook updates, LinkedIn connections and uploading mobile phone footage to YouTube remain invisible, decentred and ignored. The disengaged and disconnected are invisible. This is not democracy. This is colonialism with a hard drive.

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Chapter Two

Take the red pill: A new matrix of literacy

You've felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad.¹

Morpheus

Examining PhDs is one of the great privileges in being a scholar. The examination process contains a potent mix of intellectual generosity and scholarly rigour, respect for the student and responsibilities to the international academic community. This is the era when the first cohort of post-Google scholars is submitting their doctorates. This group has had to manage a time of change: when the read-write web started to both frame and permeate popular culture. As my academic clock ticked from 2009 to 2010, the first doctorate I examined in the New Year revealed the impact of the Google Effect,² the flattening of expertise and a marginalisation of refereeing.³ For the first time in a PhD, I could see the consequences of enabling, through a proliferation of platforms and a lack of concurrent training in information, a culture of equivalence between refereed and non-refereed materials. In this doctorate, there was no recognition of the difference between primary or secondary sources. Instead, the bibliography was dominated by three types of sources: on and offline newspaper articles, blogs and textbooks.

1 Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburne, *The Matrix*, (Warner Bros., 1999)

2 T. Brabazon, 'The Google Effect', *Libri*, Vol. 56, No. 3, September 2006, pp. 157–167, <http://www.librijournal.org/pdf/2006-3pp157-167.pdf>

3 This culture of equivalence created through 'the Google effect' resonates with Baudrillard's argument that, 'Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principles of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the revision and death sentence of every reference', J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 6. Once the simulation has disconnected from the real, then depth models of interpretation – or narratives of causality – are cut away. Instead, images circulate in the simulacra that are equivalent in purpose, aim and importance, because the origins and history have been lost. That is why an event in the life of Lady Gaga or the death of Michael Jackson, as examples, are given more attention than civilian deaths at a time of war.

In the introduction, the doctoral candidate stated that Ferdinand de Saussure,⁴ Charles Peirce,⁵ Antonio Gramsci,⁶ Michel Foucault⁷ and Louis Althusser⁸ were ‘key theorists’ in this dissertation. Upon moving to the bibliography, not one book, book chapter or even an interview with these scholars was listed. There were no *Prison Notebooks*, no *Archaeology of Knowledge*,⁹ no *Lenin and Philosophy, and other essays*.¹⁰ Instead, the occasional secondary source was used to describe and represent the ‘key theorist’.

This doctorate is a pivot, a symbol and a node of both challenge and change. It demonstrates the impact of information obesity and a need for digital dieting strategies, even in our doctoral programmes. The consequences of major publishers like Routledge and Sage focusing on textbooks rather than risky scholarly monographs was evident in the bibliography. The postgraduate ‘chose’ – either intentionally or through a lack of research expertise – to use the much more readable sources aimed at undergraduates to introduce a theorist, rather than to read the theorist themselves. My rule has always been clear: by the third year of an undergraduate degree, students should be reading a scholar in the original form. If they wish to cite Marx, then read Marx. If they want to cite Gramsci, then read Gramsci. That does not mean researchers cannot use Stuart Hall’s explorations on Marx or Gramsci, but they must demonstrate the research expertise to differentiate between primary and secondary sources and should use other scholar’s footnotes as an inspiration and reading list rather than a shortcut.

The capacity to recognise that refereed sources are of a different type and mode to a blog bypassed this student. Significantly, while about half the postgraduate’s sources were derived from the online environment, there were very few online refereed journals cited. Considering the calibre of journals such as *Fast Capitalism*,¹¹ *Nebula*,¹² *First Monday*,¹³ the *History of Intellectual Culture*¹⁴ and

4 F. De Saussure, *Écrits de linguistique générale*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2002). The English language translation is *Writings in General Linguistics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

5 C. Peirce, *Writing on Semiotic*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1991)

6 A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986)

7 M. Foucault, *The order of things*, (London: Routledge, 2002)

8 L. Althusser, *For Marx*, (London: Verso, 2005)

9 M. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, (London: Tavistock, 1972)

10 L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and other essays*, (London: Monthly Review Press, 2001)

11 *Fast Capitalism*, <http://fastcapitalism.com/>

12 *Nebula*, <http://www.nobleworld.biz/>

13 *First Monday*, <http://firstmonday.org/>

14 *History of Intellectual Culture*, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/hic/>

The Journal of Media Literacy Education,¹⁵ such an absence and unawareness is no longer acceptable.

This second chapter in *Digital Dieting* applies the arguments offered in the first. The goal is to take this doctorate, marked in the dark, cold and quiet English days between Christmas Day and the reopening of university campuses in 2010 as not only a marker of danger, but a trigger to intervene, improve and stretch. The spine of improvement must be information literacy. I present my past models and inspirations for using information literacy to scaffold curriculum, but configure what may be a different model for our future. My goal is to introduce a horizontal model of literacy, a vertical model of literacy and then to align these approaches to create a matrix of literacy. This matrix captures an aura – in intent if not ideology – from the famous filmic trilogy. The blue pill enables us to be satisfied with scrolling, cutting and pasting. The red pill reveals the costs of feeding on the crust of knowledge.

Horizontal modelling of literacy

Perhaps we are asking the wrong questions.¹⁶

Agent Brown

The last twenty years has seen a transformation of capitalism and modernity, resulting in complex new dialogues between work and leisure, production and consumption, information and knowledge, experience and expertise, living and shopping, living and literacy.¹⁷ Transformations in media platforms have woven through these individual and societal conversations. The last decade has been propelled by waves of celebration for mixed media, multimedia, the web, the read web, the read-write web and Web 3.0, or the semantic web. Through this chronological narrative, change has been collapsed into progress and shopping – rather than learning – has offered the metaphors and models of our time. There is an unproductive assumption that if a media or platform is used in a

15 *The Journal of Media Literacy Education*, <http://jmlc.org/index.php/JMLE/index>

16 Agent Brown, played by Hugo Weaving, *The Matrix*, *op. cit.*

17 A fine literature tracks these transformations, from a range of perspectives. The scholarship of Stanley Aronowitz and post-work culture is particularly influential. However Jo Littler's *Radical consumption: shopping for change in contemporary culture*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2009) and Richard Florida's *The great reset: how new ways of living and working drive post-crash prosperity*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2010) are provocative – and differing – examples.

leisure-based context then it will be intrinsically useful and beneficial in a work or educational environment.¹⁸ At its most reified, this ‘movement’ is captured by deploying text messaging in classroom practice.¹⁹

Social networking may be useful to education, teaching, learning and librarianship. It may not be. But the assumption from which I have worked in my career is that if platforms and media are to be moved from leisure and into education then they will operate differently. Facebook, text messaging, Flickr and YouTube are basic platforms and portals. They feature a lot of play, prattle, pretension and performativity. They also capture a lot of value, intrigue and interest. What is required is a strong curriculum, with carefully scaffolded topics, tropes and theories, considered assessment and a series of peer-reviewed and validated reflexive loops to ensure a tight alignment between learning goals and outcomes. In other words, do not approach a technology by logging its ubiquity amongst students and then considering how it can be used. Commence with a learning aim for a session and determine the appropriate media choice. At its most basic, the blinking cursor of Google’s search box captures this problem and challenge. It is easy to type a few words into a box. It is difficult to possess the vocabulary and knowledge to know the most effective words to deploy to extract the best results. It is a great search engine to shop. It is a basic search engine to locate information within the context of formal education.

When teachers and librarians celebrate the signifier, celebrate the form, celebrate the media, they are decentering how they are used as a carrier of content to specific users. This is not only a denial of content, context, expertise and professionalism but a validation of the new, rather than the useful. Many academics and librarians have been rewarded with funding and research grants

18 D. Barton and M. Hamilton stated that ‘literacy is not the same in all contexts: rather there are different literacies’, from D. Barton, M. Hamilton and R. Ivanic, *Situated Literacies*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 10

19 C. Markett, I. Arnedillo Sa’nchez, S. Weber, B. Tagney, ‘Using short message service to encourage interactivity in the classroom’, *Computers & Education*, Vol. 46, 2006, pp. 280–293. The researchers ‘chose to introduce mobile phones and short message service (SMS) within the classroom due to the ubiquity of mobile phones among students and the interactive potential of SMS. SMS is a low-threshold application used widely by students to quickly send concise, text-based messages at any time. The research presented involved students sending SMS in real-time, in class, via their personal mobile phones. Using a modem interfacing with customised software to produce SMS files, the lecturer can view the messages and verbally develop the interactive loop with students during class. The SMS are available online after class, allowing interactive loops to further develop via threaded comments’, p. 280. Intriguingly, the researchers chose the mobile phone and SMS not because it offered a way to achieve learning outcomes, but because they were ubiquitous.

because they put ‘social networking’, ‘Twitter’ or ‘2.0’ in the project title.²⁰ I am not denying the value of these portals, platforms and descriptions. But educators must be honest. These platforms are easy to use but difficult to use well. Research questions must be reframed, moving from how they are used to why they are used.

The consequences of focusing on *how* rather than *why* are starting to be seen in curriculum, assessment and quality assurance protocols. For twenty years, professional development and training has been focused on using software and hardware. This has meant that curriculum production, assessment protocols and – at its most basic – content development (which could also be called reading and knowledge acquisition) has been neglected. Part of my intervention in such an ideology through the last decade has been to instigate and embed a horizontal model of literacy through the degree structure. My focus has been on creating movement between literacy modes. If a set of skills is used in daily life, then the goal is to ensure that the student has competency in these and then move them to higher order modes of literacy. If they hold expertise in text messaging, the imperative is to ensure that they can also deploy well configured sentences, paragraphs and arguments.

During the period of web 2.0 and with social media proliferating through higher education, I taught nine courses, spanning from first year through to doctoral supervision, including a MA in Creative Media that was offered on- and off-line. These courses became a laboratory for media education during a period of transformation, testing the use of a range of media, from asynchronous to synchronous discussion fora, email to sonic sessions to podcasts, Flickr and YouTube. Media making was part of their media understanding. Analogue media, history and historiography were always attendant to teaching and learning.

The model and inspiration I deployed for this work was a post-web but proto-web 2.0 table developed by Mary Macken-Horarik.²¹ It has been the inspiration for much of the research and teaching I have done in the last ten years. Her small chapter in a small book was written just as the web was reaching popular culture and before web 2.0 editing and collaborations. Yet ironically, this positioning helped her argument. She investigates continuities and not revolutions, movements between platforms and ideas, not an evangelical grasping onto one media, software or hardware innovation. She constructed a model of literacy that moves through education and life. It is configured

20 To view the Joint Information Systems (JISC) funding for projects around the phrase ‘web 2.0’, please refer to this link, <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/previousgrants.aspx?t=t&tag=41>

21 M. Macken-Horarik, ‘Exploring the requirements of critical school literacy: a view from two classrooms’, from F. Christie and R. Mission (ed.), *Literacy and Schooling*, (London: Routledge, 1998)

as a four tier model of literacy, moving from everyday literacy to applied, to theoretical to reflexive. The key in the model is movement, ensuring that all of us – as students of knowledge – keep moving, keep reading and keep thinking

Everyday	Applied	Theoretical	Reflexive
Diverse and open ended	Attaining a particular expertise	Gain disciplinary knowledge	Negotiation of social diversity
Confluent with spoken language	Use of spoken and written words to enable activity	Production and interpretation of epistemic texts	Probing assumed and specialised knowledge systems
Moving through roles and relationships in the family and community	Skill-based literacy	Situated in educational learning environments	Finding alternatives
Personal growth literacy		Specialised literacies	Challenging common sense
		Assimilating and reproducing knowledge	Meaning determined through diverse media
			Critical literacy

Source: Table based on Mary Macken-Horarik, 'Exploring the requirements of critical school literacy: a view from two classrooms', from F. Christie and Ray Mission (eds.), *Literacy and Schooling*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 78

Everyday literacies are attained in the home and family, confirming the importance of spoken language and oral culture. They activate personal growth and development. Applied literacies achieve particular expertise, often termed skill development. This is literacy with a purpose. Written and spoken words are used to enable activity. Vocationalism is part of applied literacies. Theoretical literacy is inserted into an academic discipline and a knowledge community. It involves both the production and interpretation of texts and the development of epistemology. Theoretical literacy is located in formal learning environments and specialised literacies. The theoretical tier is therefore where most of the work conducted at schools and universities takes place. Finally there is reflexive literacy, which is a form of critical literacy. It involves understanding and negotiating social diversity, questioning epistemology, probing the limits and

applications of specialised knowledge systems, challenging common sense and understanding how meaning is determined through disparate media, thinking about when particular media should be used in particular contexts and for particular tasks. There is no suggestion that content should move between platforms, simply because it is technologically possible. A cut and paste culture needs to be replaced with a click, pause and think culture.

In practice – and at their best – universities move students through to the fourth tier of literacy. But there needs to be a continual and careful recognition of how the other three slices operate. Social media remain important to the foundational movement between these tiers. This Facebook message I received from a graduating student captures how all these stages align into a learning culture:

Tara!! It was a pleasure to see your comment!! I hope you are well. It would be great to get to chat with you again sometime soon even though i know i have officially finished uni now. I feel abit lost now?! i think you might understand what i mean? It's kind of scary now I've officially finished and kind of not sure how to go about things. but I Just want to say a massive thank you for all of your support whilst i was at uni and for just being completely honest and keeping it real!! I can honestly say that when I think of my experience at Brighton uni that you stand out. I know this sounds cheesy but everything you have done has really made things seem so much more worth while. I went through a really hard time towards the last few months and now I have time to reflect on things I appreciate your whole attitude and perspective towards things even more. Thank you again Tara,. Whilst getting my degree was an achievement which I am proud of, if I'm honest I far value greater the conversations and personal journey that I have been through whilst I have been at uni much more. You were a big part of this. Thank You Tara. all the best. Xxxxxxx

Source: Hello!!' Facebook Message, 4 August, 2010

The alignment of conversation and scholarship, personal and professional commitments to students, not only make the degree ‘worthwhile’ but enable students to finish their qualifications, even when confronting challenges and obstacles. Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand these stages of literacy and – if a student is confronting difficulties working at the higher levels – return to everyday literacies of support and conversation to ensure that they can be scaffolded through their learning.

Some provocative hypotheses emerging from this table of literacies are that critical literacy is not an ‘add on’ to literacy debates, but does require the initial development of instrumental modes. In other words, it is a horizontal model of literacy: everyday familiarity with spoken language does not inevitably lead

to the development of academic knowledge. However a new mode of learning is based on earlier competencies. There must be an intervention, a conscious desire and action to move students and citizens through the stages of literacy. Without these interventions – particularly by librarians and teachers – much of the population will stay in applied literacies, using Google to shop, not even aware of refereeing, or the difference between blogs and online academic articles. Macken-Horarik argues that there is a linear and progressive relationship between literacy modes, disagreeing with those who argue that students can simultaneously learn to read *and* challenge what they read. Significantly, in her model there is no division between analogue and digital media. There is no mention of digitisation or technology. The focus is horizontal movement, from easier skills to harder skills, whatever the platform.

The problem is that most web 2.0 platforms stop at applied literacies. They develop certain skills, but are not able to arch into disciplinary or post-disciplinary knowledge. The dishonesty of web 2.0 is that all valuable information is freely available and that the user of a search engine possesses – through the use of basic skills in software and hardware – the literacy to judge, assess and use this material critically. Instead, through the proliferations of blogs and Wikipedia, a large quantity of low quality material has emerged, without refereeing or peer review. While I am a steadfast supporter of open access journals, commercial aggregators are buying and restricting large areas of disciplinary knowledge. In this vacuum, blogs and wiki-enabled media have proliferated.

The concern from Mary Macken-Horarik's model, which she does not address and contemporary educators need to, is how to move learners and citizens from one stage of literacy to the next. Further, if any of us are trapped in a lower stage, do we even know about the other literacies that are available? Without intervention, generations of citizens are locked in applied literacy and skill development, not even aware of the higher order models for thinking that are available. The goal for teachers and librarians is to create strategies through curriculum to create firstly a consciousness of diverse literacy models and knowledge systems and secondly a capacity to move between them.

Here is one example of how I used this model in my assessment protocols. A mandatory module in the MA Creative Media was *Practising Media Research*. Students came from countries all over the world, from Angola to Australia, Cameroon to Cyprus and Saudi Arabia to Singapore. They were artists, film makers, journalists, public relations consultants and policy makers. Their age varied from 24 to 65. Therefore, I needed to find a way in this single mandatory module to ensure that wherever they were on Macken-Horarik's table, they could be moved through stage three and hopefully to stage four by the end of the semester. Their first assignment in the MA asked them to compile an annotated bibliography on a research method. It was annotated so students learn how to move a description and summary into an analysis. They needed to

show disciplinary knowledge – Macken-Horarik’s stage three – but then move to reflexive commentary, stage four.

STAGE ONE

Select a research method. Define and discuss this method and justify your choice in the introduction to this paper. Why were you drawn to explore this method of research?

This section will be no more than 200 words in length. Write in full sentences and paragraphs. If I see a bullet point, then I will kill myself and/or the student responsible for this affront to scholarly writing.

STAGE TWO

The second stage for your first assignment focuses on students finding sources OUTSIDE THE READER. In other words, do not list and annotate sources already included in this study guide and reader. Instead, find new sources.

Students are required to locate TWENTY SOURCES on a particular research method and not presented in the module. They must write 70–100 words on each, explaining their relevance to the project of understanding a particular method.

Annotated Bibliography: students find the following types of sources on a research method:

- Two scholarly monographs
- Two print-based refereed articles.
- Two web-based refereed articles.
- One PhD
- One blog.
- One relevant social networking site.
- One scholarly lecture from YouTube.
- One podcast.
- One vodcast
- One official website from a professional organisation.
- One offline magazine or newspaper article.
- One track or album of music.
- One advertisement.
- An item of material culture.
- One television programme.
- One photograph from Flickr with a Creative Commons Licence.
- One film.

This is an information scaffold. Once students selected a research method, they found twenty sources of different types as determined by media, portal, platform and refereeing. This assignment moved them between refereed and unrefereed,

on and offline, and made sure that they had experience with podcasts, scholarly monographs, refereed articles and websites of professional organisations. A key theory activated through this exercise was multimodality.²² I slowed students down so that they did not bounce from text to text, but actively considered the best platform and media to convey information most effectively.²³ Information literacy integrates documents, media, form, content, literacy and learning.²⁴ It is a scaffold that enables movement between literacy models.

The imperative in formal teaching and learning is to move students from applied literacies to theoretical literacies. This migration has been rendered more difficult through web 2.0. While Macken-Horarik's horizontal model of literacy is incredibly useful and creates a space for thinking about form and content, content in context, the read-write web is offering new challenges. It is enabling content creation from those who have not read much quality content in the first place. It is generating an environment that validates creativity and creation, rather than intellectual generosity and referencing. The assumption of mash up and remix culture is that current texts can be improved easily and quickly. Perhaps – just perhaps – reading and thinking do not intrinsically lead to creation. Therefore, the second stage of this chapter explores the vertical model of literacy that is easier to situate in a read-write web environment. To make this argument, I add media literacy theory on top of Macken-Horarik's horizontal model.

22 I log Gunther Kress's leadership in this field, exemplified by *Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*, (London: Routledge, 2010). Kress realised that, 'there are times – perhaps many times – when communication isn't really the issue, and power is. That is the crucial point to bear in mind in thinking, theorising and writing about meaning, communication and social matters', p. 3. He confirmed that, 'my interest is in developing precise tools for understanding the interrelation of resources of representation and forms of knowledge; of the effects of both in shaping environment; and these in relation to the facilities, affordances, potentials and limitations of contemporary technologies of representation/production/communication', p. 96.

23 Understanding the best use of media platforms to convey information to a targeted audience is distinct from what Mark Donovan described as a 'digital omnivore'. Through this phrase, he recognised that content moves, and marketers have to move material through these platforms. My strategy is distinct. I wish to reduce the repetition and redundancy of the same material on different platforms. Please refer to M. Donovan, 'Are you a "digital omnivore?" How tables and smartphones change digital media consumption habits', *Future of Journalism Lab*, 12 October, 2011, <http://www.nextlevelofnews.com/2011/10/are-you-a-digital-omnivore-how-tables-and-smartphones-change-digital-media-consumption-habits.html>

24 M. Eisenberg, 'Information literacy: essential skills for the information age', *Journal of Library and Information Technology*, Vol. 28, No. 2, March 2008

Vertical modelling of literacy

Throughout human history, we have been dependent on machines to survive. Fate, it seems, is not without a sense of irony.²⁵

Morpheus

The movement to a read-write web – web 2.0 – used Google as its midwife. The domestication of computers, software, hardware, cameras, recording equipment and the proliferation of the multi-function (smart) mobile phone created an explosion of content searched through Google. Concurrent with this movement was a range of post-Dreamweaver software applications that lowered the entry level for the construction of websites. These content management systems, of which Drupal and WordPress are the best known examples, became the frame for blogs which exploded in number and scale after 2001. This was matched by the iPodification of popular music which not only built on the file sharing communities, but used the first generation of iPod and Belkin microphone attachments in 2001, initiating the first attempts at podcasting. The new cameras enabled the capturing of both jpeg and tif photographs and some low resolution film footage could be moved around the web.

At this point, the read-write web became a reality for a few. This ‘few’ extended to many throughout the decade. If the last ten years are mapped, then the key policy and media literacy moment of change was when the readers of websites became the writers of websites. Consumers became producers. Content became mobile, searchable, remixable and mashable. The part of this narrative relevant to new modes of literacy is how web 2.0 creates information literacy 2.0, propelled through the relationship between disintermediation and reintermediation.

Disintermediation was the characteristic of peer to peer networks. Links were removed from the traditional supply and distribution chain. Content originators and businesses could deal with their customers directly without the need for wholesalers or retailers. Transparency of pricing resulted. Indeed, Chris Anderson’s *Free: the future of radical price* showed the value of freemium services and products.²⁶ Such a business model works well in software, hardware, book and music selling, and e-share trading. It has not worked well in real estate with agents (of reintermediation) still used. It also appears that students as consumers are still committed to universities as ‘middlemen’ for education, although MOOCs may be changing and challenging this reintermediation.

25 Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburne, *The Matrix*, *op. cit.*

26 C. Anderson, *Free: the future of radical price*, (New York: Hyperion, 2009)

Online education certainly deploys elements of disintermediation. Using 2.0 tools, librarians and academics deal directly with students. Managers and administrators, supporting re-intermediated virtual learning environments such as Blackboard, are attempting to control and limit their redundancy. With synchronous and asynchronous communication modes for learning available from a range of social networking sites, university portals are often clumsy, unresponsive and isolated from the wider web environment. Therefore, disintermediation has been declining. Web 2.0 enacted reintermediation via a portal. After disintermediation had taken place, new middlemen arrived offering new services such as product evaluation through a 2.0 comment culture, a ranking of search results like Google or search engine optimisation via metadata, as deployed by Wikipedia. Both Google and Wikipedia are new gatekeepers, taking traffic away from specialist sites and information sources. The 2.0 dream was that a specialist would construct a blog, offering expert and free interpretations of law, human rights or gardening. Instead, through reintermediation via Wikipedia and Google, inexperienced searchers are directed to basic and generalist information sources.

There is potential to use reintermediation in different ways, to return 'thought leadership' to 2.0 environments. This type of reintermediation is necessary for learning to occur and is activated through the provisions of media literacy. If consumers slam into the glut of information, products and ideas, that is disintermediation. This is a flattening of the web. If teachers and librarians create a scaffold to frame, shape and structure the engagement with production, ideas and information, then that is reintermediation. When creating height and depth, a vertical model of literacy is configured.

Significantly, media literacy used to be a very small part of media studies and education degrees. In the last few years though, media literacy has been discovered by media regulators and policy makers. In a post-national media and information system with millions of creators, it is difficult (perhaps impossible) to control, censor and cajole citizens into consuming quality content. A top down regulatory mechanism uses the blunt instruments of time-based thresholds in broadcasting and censorship of film and television programming. There are new bottom up strategies that deploy multi-modal, multi-platform, trans-local, trans-regional and trans-national initiatives, addressing social problems of access and disability and initiating economic developments to enable the creative industries, increasing access and literacy to a range of media platforms.

Media literacy is important, bringing together media studies, education studies, communication and cultural studies. But if the last twenty years of media policy has taught researchers anything, then it is that top down regulation is slower than social and media movements. Regulation will be retrospective. This problem is worsened in an environment of a read-write web, of mobile and accelerated content generation and dissemination. In a time of accelerated

media and lagging media policy, self-regulation of content is required as much – and perhaps more – than national regulation.

From the foundation of the British Office of Communication (OfCom),²⁷ the development of media literacy was part of its brief and present in the enabling 2003 legislation.²⁸ The range of their definitions is instructive:

- Media literacy will provide some of the tools they need to make full use of the opportunities offered, to manage their expectations and to protect themselves and their families from the risks involved.²⁹
- Media literacy is the ability to ‘read’ and ‘write’ audio visual content rather than text.³⁰
- Someone who is media literate may also be able to produce communication in electronic form, such as the writing of emails and the creation of web pages or video materials.³¹
- Awareness, access and control of content.³²

There are some key areas to be gleaned from these statements, and some problems. Firstly, the separation of ‘audio visual content’ and ‘text’ ignores the reality that text is visual content.³³ It also ignores the theory that all new skills are based on prior skills. There is an important relationship between information literacy and media literacy,³⁴ but also a necessity to ‘protect’ families

27 Office of Communications, <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/>

28 Communications Act 2003, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/21/> contents

29 Ofcom’s Strategy and Priorities for the promotion of Media Literacy, Ofcom, Office of Communication, 2 November, 2004, <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/strategymedialit/strategymedialit/>, p. 2

30 *ibid.*, p. 3

31 *ibid.*

32 *ibid.*, p. 8

33 P. Duncum investigated the complexity of visuality in ‘Visual cultural isn’t just visual: multiliteracy, multimodality and meaning’, *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2004, http://vassarliteracy.pbworks.com/f/Duncum_visual_cultural.pdf, pp. 252–257

34 Marcus Leaning argued that ‘information literacy and media literacy are of course distinct areas of academic enquiry and practice with their own traditions, modes of enquiry and paradigms. One of the intentions I wanted to achieve with this project was to illustrate how there are perhaps more similarities than differences between the two. Media literacy has a long tradition of developing defensive, coping and empowering

from particular sorts of content. Finally – and importantly for this chapter – producing audio visual materials is part of media literacy. Reading and analysis is not enough. There is learning through doing.

Since 2002, The European Commission has realised that Media Literacy matters to all members because it creates better and more efficient regulation and operates much more effectively in and with national subsidiary rights.³⁵ Article 26 of the Audio Visual Services Directive³⁶ introduced a reporting obligation for the Commission on media literacy in all member states. The 2007 Report of the European Commission into Media Literacy³⁷ created a commitment to ‘European Media Literacy’.³⁸

Through these wider European discussions, the BBC created a Media Literacy Unit and a charter for media literacy.³⁹ How they defined media literacy is the key to the vertical model of literacy developed in this chapter. The BBC focused on three parts of media literacy: use, understand, create.⁴⁰ Out of a much wider environment of both media literacy and information, only particular parts of the paradigm were selected by the BBC. The attention was almost completely on social media, with children a particular focus. There was no discussion of multiculturalism, multiliteracy or digital exclusion. There was no trace of the horizontal movements from easier to more difficult skills,

attitudes in students. Information literacy differs in that the techniques taught are more concerned with enabling students to find, analyse and produce information. However, as technologies evolve and content becomes less and less tied to specific formats and the volume of media and information channels multiple (sic), this distinction between being skilled users of media and skilled users of information become increasingly arbitrary’, M. Leaning, ‘Preface’, from M. Leaning (ed.), *Issues in Information and Media Literacy*, (Santa Rosa: Information Science Press, 2009), p. ix

35 Media Literacy, European Commission, http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/literacy/index_en.htm

36 Audio Visual Services Directive, http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/reg/avms/index_en.htm

37 Report of the European Commission into Media Literacy, 2007, http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/literacy/docs/report_on_ml_2007.pdf

38 European Media Literacy, <http://www.euromedialiteracy.eu/allnews.php>

39 Charter for Media Literacy – BBC, <http://www.medialiteracy.org.uk/taskforce/bbc/>

40 As discussed later in this chapter, the BBC’s Media Literacy Unit was quietly shelved between its launch in October 2009 and 2010. It was replaced by ‘Connect’. In other words, literacy once more was displaced for access. There are a few residues of the ‘use, understand, create’ mantra in BBC documents. For example, please refer to *Get Connected*, BBC Radio 2, 2010, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/radio2/getconnected/r2learning_final.pdf. Notice the automated change to the link on page six, from ‘media literacy’ to ‘connect’.

as tracked in the first part of this chapter. There was no sense of how older literacies enable the development of new skills. Developmental processes and practices were absent. A third area of absence was analogue ways of thinking, or how preservation, forgetting, obsolescence, or what Bruce Sterling termed ‘dead media’⁴¹ operate in the present. The fascinating final absence is multimodality. This area will become content management 2.0. More precisely, a recognition of multimodality demonstrates that the key knowledge for media education teachers, librarians, policy makers and analysts is context, not content. Who we are determines how we read and interpret the world.⁴² The issue is not that content can move, but it is helping students and citizens construct a process that evaluates when a particular platform is appropriate to present a particular slice of content for a specific audience. It takes the arguments and scholarship of Gunther Kress seriously, thinking about form and content. The issue is not that content can move between media, but what is the most effective media platform for this content and the audience/consumers/citizens that are the target of the information packet.

Something odd happened to the BBC’s Media Literacy Unit. As 2009 clicked over to 2010, the URL for Media Literacy morphed into ‘Connect’. The ‘use, understand, create’ mantra only survives in the peripheral documents produced during this period. Therefore, the public educational service of the BBC is *connection* rather than literacy education. Such a transformation increases the confusion between access and literacy. The ‘connection’ with technology – or more precisely social media – is the new imperative.⁴³ It is also easier for governments and citizens to obtain. Ignored from such a project is how inequality in social relationships manifests in literacy behaviours and practices.⁴⁴

41 B. Sterling, ‘The Life and Death of Media’ Speech at Sixth International Symposium on Electronic Art ISEA ‘95 Montreal 19 September 1995, http://www.alamut.com/subj/artiface/deadMedia/dM_Address.html

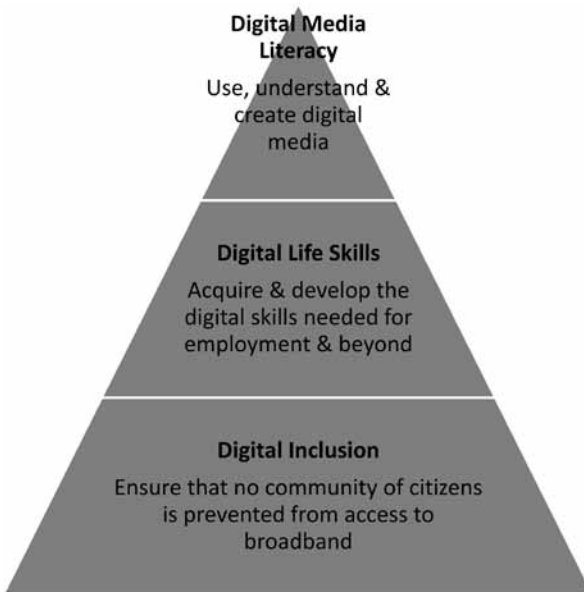
42 While community literacy has a distinct policy, agenda and imperative to media literacy, there are nodes of confluence. Particularly, community literacy demonstrates a respect for difference, location and specificity that can be instructive for media literacy theorists. Please refer to the Community Literacy Journal, <http://www.communityliteracy.org>. An incisive article that offers definitions of and for the field is L. Higgins, E. Long and L. Flower, ‘Community Literacy: A rhetorical model for personal and public inquiry’, *Community Literacy Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 2006. These scholars discuss ‘carefully situated analysis’, p. 26, which develops ‘alternative texts and practices’, p. 29. Their desire – which is distinct from media literacy scholars, is to deploy community literacy to activate ‘a transformative counterpublic’, p. 30.

43 Connect, BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/connect/>

44 David Barton argued that ‘if literacy is often located in unequal social relationships, this inequality is most apparent in the access to literacy resources which people have’, *Local literacies*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 17

All citizens – let alone students – have a right to be scaffolded through digitised environments. The greater challenge is to consider how analogue injustices are acknowledged and addressed online. Put another way, is platform migration accompanied by people migration, or are ‘we’ prepared to lose analogue-enabled citizens and literacies in the new environment?

While creation has dissolved from the BBC’s agenda, it remains in the portfolio of media literacy for OfCom and the European Commission. While this created content does move through cross-media platforms, determining the best use of a platform – or presenting appropriate content to a targeted audience – remains crucial. What is odd – but integral to this chapter – is that formal education is absent from the media literacy policies of OfCom, the EU and the BBC. There is an assumption that ‘we’ learn about the media from using the media. Those three words from the BBC were an important choice: use, understand and create. Significantly, read, listen and think were not the words selected. This choice was to influence the Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Group. They assembled a vertical model – a triangle – starting with access, moving through life skills and then to use, understand and create.



Source: Diagram based on the model from Digital Britain, http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/media_lit_digital_britain/digitalbritain.pdf

Critical and reflexive literacy are not part of this model. Formal education is not part of this model. It stresses basic encoding and decoding.⁴⁵ If teachers and librarians needed any confirmation of how commodification is shaping education, then this is a prime example.⁴⁶ To explain how reading and thinking could be left out of a media literacy model from a national broadcaster, I must demonstrate how models of literacy, indeed models of culture, have been flattened.

To explain how this shrinkage emerged, I use the Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*.⁴⁷ This book, published in 1981, is often cited as the key text in theorising postmodernity,⁴⁸ by displacing the often inaccurately labelled economic determinism of Marxist thought. Most importantly, this book analyses knowledge, truth and falsehood. It opens with a quote from Ecclesiastes that is a fake. Generations of naïve scholars have restated it as a truth. The quote from Ecclesiastes/Baudrillard provides the basis of this new model for literacy: 'The simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.'⁴⁹ He confirmed that 'something has disappeared'⁵⁰ and 'the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials'.⁵¹ He located a system of signs composed of 'a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences'.⁵²

45 *Digital Britain*, (London: OfCom, 2009), http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/media_lit_digital_britain/digitalbritain.pdf, p. 14

46 Robert Samuels confirmed that 'learning and scholarship do require some independence from society', from R. Samuels, 'The new literacy agenda for higher education: composition, computers, and academic labor at US research universities', from J. Lockard and M. Pegrum (ed.), *Brave New Classrooms*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 107.

47 It is important to note that the first references of and to the simulacra by Baudrillard was in J. Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, (London: Sage, 1993). The French edition of this work was published in 1976, leading into *Simulations* in 1983.

48 Further, theorists of *The Matrix* film series transfer the 'postmodern' label from Baudrillard to the films. For example, Dino Felluga states that, 'Morpheus invites the viewer to see *The Matrix* as itself an allegory for our own current postmodern condition, for according to Baudrillard we in the audience are already living in a "reality" generated by codes and models; we have already lost all touch with even a memory of the real', D. Felluga, 'The Matrix: Paradigm of Postmodernism or Intellectual Poseur?' from G. Yeffeth (ed.), *Taking the Red Pill*, (Chichester: Summersdale Publishers, 2003), p. 87.

49 J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 1. Within *In Fragments: Conversations With François L'Yvonne*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 11, Baudrillard describes this 'invention' as 'Borges-like'.

50 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, *ibid.*, p. 2

51 *ibid.*

52 *ibid.*

Therefore, the simulacrum is not an illusion, mask or disguise. Instead, it is the loss of the real.

The intellectual task emerging from Baudrillard's hypotheses and arguments is to conceptualise the abstraction, which seems an appropriate use of Ecclesiastes/Baudrillard. For Baudrillard, there is a three-layered way to think about life: the real, the representation and the simulacra.⁵³

Simulacrum

Representation

Real

Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum

This means that an action, event or text is not only immediately represented through media, but is inevitably and rapidly re-represented. It circulates as a dis-anchored signifier (form). That means that information – content – is disconnected from context and temporarily hooks into ephemeral media to only unhook and continue moving.

The consequences of such decontextualisation are that celebrities, magazines and consumerism become a proxy for the real.⁵⁴ The news is not real. It is a representation of the real. Yet most of us are spending more and more time in the simulacrum, the representation of the representation. Life is real. But tabloidised media confirm that most of us, most of the time are living through and with other people's representations. These signifiers without anchorage to a context circulate through the simulacrum. These texts bounce around the digitised, convergent, web 2.0 environment.

The web 2.0 age is based on the pretence that there is wisdom to crowds, that 'we' are empowered because 'we' can edit wiki files. To blog is to have a say in the world. That was the ideology restated by the BBC: use, understand,

53 I have built this three layered model from Baudrillard's four stage process between the original and the copy. Those four stages are: (1) the copy is a reflection of the original, (2) the copy masks/transforms/perverts the original, (3) the copy masks the absence/loss of reality, (4) the copy has no relationship with reality and operates – with authenticity – in the simulacrum. The first three stages all operate in my 'representation,' each formulating a different strategy for disconnection from the real and the original. The fourth stage is the simulacrum. My model – which shows a complete separation of 'the real' and 'the simulacrum' – confirms that there is no relationship between these states. There is a disconnection. Please refer to J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 11

54 I note the influence of both Fred Inglis's *A short history of celebrity*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010) and Graeme Turner's *Ordinary People and the Media*, (London: Sage, 2010)

create, or its BBC Media Literacy 2.0 form: ‘connect’. Ironically, the BBC has followed Baudrillard’s cascading model.

Connect
Use, Understand, Create
Media Literacy

This model tracks a loss of complex modes of information literacy that are necessary to sift data, ideologies and discourses. They must add depth, narratives and history to literacy. It is important to move beyond communication, participation and creation, which are presentist and individualised concepts, particularly when located in the simulacrum. But there are more serious consequences of this flattening of debate and confusions of experience (with media) and expertise (in knowledge).

In recognising such a pattern, the internet offers alternative sources and ideas, but also greater space for ideologues to perpetuate their message, to re-represent views disconnected from the original context. It allows fast, frequently unchecked rumour to gain value over verified and credible journalism. There are consequences for relying on research shortcuts for news and information. This sound bite culture has a major impact on the calibre of political debate and education. Ponder ‘War on Terror’, ‘Coalition of the Willing’ and ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’. The speed at which ideas are expressed through the development of truncated vocabulary makes it difficult to encourage researched, theorised interpretations and intellectual rigour.

Clichés replace informed commentary. The reduction in time between information availability and the creation of news narrative triggers a ‘rip and read’ mentality and a cut and paste culture. This simulacrum environment is the impetus for the ‘textbookification’ of publishing, ‘encyclopedification’ of information and ‘wikification’ of the web. All bubble on the surface of culture.



The goal is to gather simple ideas – and a lot of them – rather than learn about a specialised knowledge or discipline. Simple ideas are taught and circulated in schools and universities facilitated by the disintermediation – the flattening – of media and knowledge.

This celebration of the superficial was not caused by technology, but a displacement of funding away from education, teachers and librarians. This is the impact of assuming that the internet is a library and the basis of education. The removal of expertise and the flattening of literacy into creation, communication and participation undermines the professionalism of librarianship, teachers and referees, summoning a culture of equivalence between the creation of a blog and the creation of a refereed article. It flattens the relationship between text and reader, producer and consumer.

But this Baudrillan model does not stop at this point. On the first page of *Simulation*, he argued that the simulacrum creates and implements its own referential system: the hyperreal.⁵⁵ This hyperreality is constituted within the simulacra and does not require anything external or contextual to provide meaning and authenticity.⁵⁶ In other words, the re-representations appeal to other re-representations for credibility and verification. If it is on Twitter, then it must be true. What the hyperreal configures is a system whereby representations talk amongst themselves,⁵⁷ disconnecting further from any notion of the real.

The simulacrum becomes the real for the next cycle of significations. It is a cascading model. The simulacrum in one era becomes the real in the next. This means that transitory and ephemeral celebrity culture becomes the anchor – the real – for the next representation and simulacrum. Twitter is the great signifier of the simulacrum. An event happens. It is reported online. It is then commented on via Twitter and blogs. The comment culture – and the linkage of social networking sites – captures this ‘connect’ model of media literacy, without ever anchoring to earlier knowledge, references or history. Instead, the mash up uses other re-representations as textual fodder to create something new. This vertical tumbling of real, representation and simulacrum is accomplished at great speed. This movement and change was described by Baudrillard as the process of ‘replacing’.

Nazism, the concentration camps or Hiroshima ... did all those things really exist? The question is perhaps an intolerable one, but the interesting thing here

55 J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p.1.

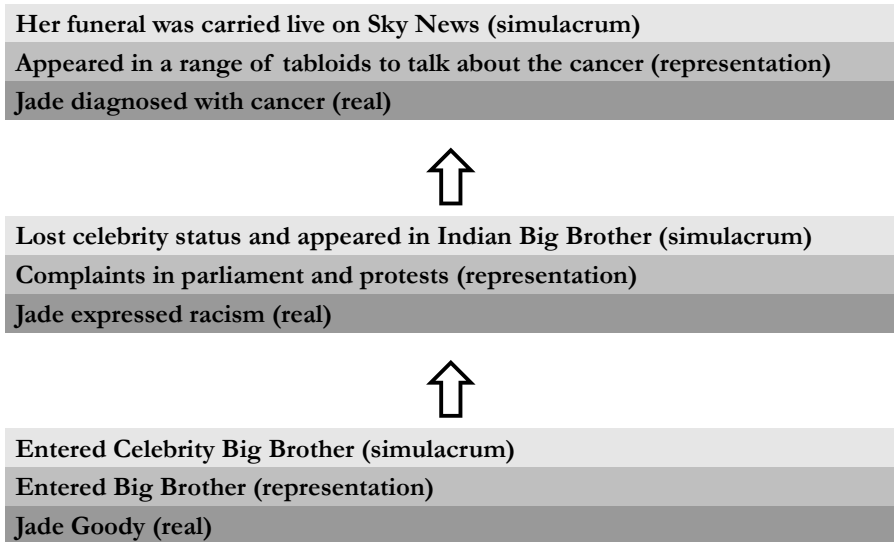
56 Gary Genosko captured this argument well: ‘In Baudrillard’s terms, every time there is signification, there is lying, for the reason that what is real is an effect of the sign, and thus, every referent is an alibi: signification simulates reference to a real state because no real state corresponds to the sign’, from G. Genosko, *Baudrillard and Signs*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 41.

57 My statement here also aligns with what Baudrillard described as ‘the fractal’ in *Fatal Strategies*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990)

is what makes it logically possible. And in fact what makes it possible is the media's way of replacing any event, any idea, any history with any other.⁵⁸

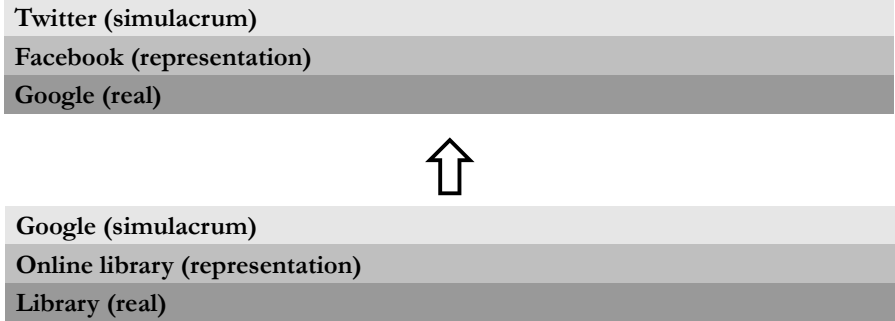
This remains a controversial and disturbing passage from Baudrillard. In the wrong hands, he could appear a holocaust denier, but his argument is much more complex. He explains how and why holocaust deniers are possible, or indeed Charles Darwin deniers. Baudrillard describes this process as being based on the media 'replacing' – or as I would prefer to rewrite it 're-placing' – events, ideas and history. Therefore it is the reorganisation of images that creates the culture of equivalence, enabling the process where any set of facts is as important as any other.

One example of this re-placing and tumbling is the strange story of Jade Goody. Starting at the base of these three tethered and cascading simulacra models, Jade Goody was a person (real), who went into the Big Brother house (representation) and then into the Celebrity Big Brother house (simulacrum). She expressed racism against Shilpa Shetty (real), leading to comments in parliament and protests (representation) and her losing celebrity status and appearing in the Indian Big Brother (simulacrum). Once in the house, she was diagnosed with cancer (real), and soon appeared in a range of tabloids to discuss it (representation) and then died with the entire funeral carried on Sky News (simulacrum).



58 J. Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, (London: Verso. 1993), p. 91

To translate this principle into information literacy, the library is real, the online library is the representation, Google is the simulacrum. Then Google is the new real, Facebook is a representation and Twitter is the simulacrum.

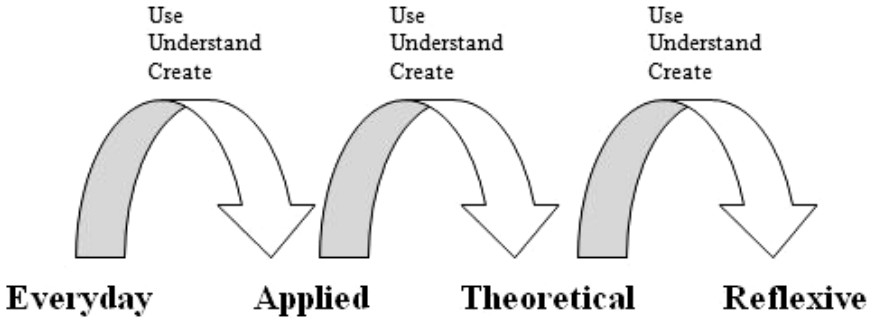


Through this cascading model,⁵⁹ the simulacrum itself is layered and textured. It appears to replicate the fabric of life and experience. Actually, signifiers float and bounce. Simulacra reintermediation takes place via social networking, while the disintermediation instigated by web 2.0 and ‘the Google effect’ has displaced expertise. Put another way, if we want to buy a new computer, then we look at blogs, YouTube demonstrations and Amazon reviews. Within the simulacrum, reintermediation is activated from within the comment culture. It creates the impression (the re-representation) of depth, plurality and diversity. This reintermediation via social networking constructs layers in the simulacrum rather than reconnecting with ‘the real’.

The key is to find a way to hook media literacy located in the simulacrum – with its hyper-vertical and accelerated tumbling of ideas unanchored to history or context – into the horizontal model introduced at the start of this chapter. There is a way to do it. Macken-Horarik neglected creation of texts in her model. Platform selection was highlighted as part of her reflexive or critical literacy. But height can be added to each stage of her model. That height is created through the early version of the BBC’s media literacy triumvirate: use, understand and create. School and university teachers deploy examples, applications and experiences in their learning environment. The basis of the tutorial and seminar system was communication and participation. It is part of active learning and student-centred models.

59 This cascading model also enables the application of Baudrillard’s realisation that the simulacrum is leaky. He stated, ‘perfect extermination [of the real] could only be achieved if the process of virtualisation were fully realized. This is not the case’, J. Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 63.

Use and understanding are located at the easier end of Macken-Horarik's literacy model. But via 'creation,' this media literacy model can move through to critical literacy. The way to enact this connection is through careful construction of both curriculum and assessment. For example, students are given the opportunity to construct artefacts. But the creation of a film, wiki or podcast is not enough. To be part of formal education, the creation must be tethered to scholarly knowledge via an exegesis.



The mantra of 'use, understand and create' becomes a method to test student and citizen literacy levels and move them (horizontally) through the next vertical slice. This creation of new knowledge by building on older knowledge is confirmed through the delivery of a print-based exegesis. Every act of creation must be embedded into knowledge, rather than disconnected from scholarship. This improves the horizontal model of literacy by tracking and moving between platforms through both creation and reflecting on the process.

I have applied this process in a Masters-level module titled (appropriately) Media Literacies. In their second assignment, students were asked to choose from three different ways of achieving the learning outcomes.

2. Media Literacy Project (50%)
 Word Length:5,000-6,000 words

Students have three choices for the form of this project. Firstly, students may elect to construct a segment of curriculum, applying a media literacy model and then reflect upon the process. Students choose a method or model introduced by a writer in the module and then writes a single or weekly lesson plan that applies it. The lesson plan requires no formal or definitive structure, but must include headings for aims, media literacy philosophy, learning outcomes, readings, resources, assessment philosophy and assessment. Remember to include a section on the reflection of this process.

OR

Secondly, students can choose to write an extended interpretative paper on the challenges of deploying media literacy in the contemporary classroom OR a leisure-based context OR governmental setting OR working environment. For example, how could media literacy be used by community organisations or governmental departments to manage a social problem? Does it have value in discussions of health for senior citizens, or presenting the dangers of binge drinking or drug use? Can it critique celebrity culture? Can it reduce the fear of terrorism, or the threat of terrorism? The student is encouraged to make an innovative choice. The key in starting this assignment is to evaluate the current social environment: is there an issue that is understood by some groups and not others? How could media literacy assist in building that understanding?

OR

Students may elect to produce a sonic or visual artefact that embodies some part of media/literacy, offering a short exegesis (1000 words as a guide, but negotiated between staff and students) on the cultural production. Students can produce a podcast, soundscape, photographic series, short film or design artefact. Then, they must show how their artefact comments on, questions or probes notions of media literacy.

Students are asked to construct their own project so that they may gain experience in the formulation of a topic, research schedule, thesis and argument. These skills are of great use in further postgraduate studies and post-university research, writing and analysis.

It is not the fault of a public broadcaster or governmental regulator that they pick and mix literacy to focus on the easy and fashionable elements of remix culture, rather than the harder work that is required to scaffold students to the point where they actually have something to write in their blog. However teachers and students do not have to replicate such a definition or the limitations configured within it. Students will use Wikipedia if they do not know how to find higher quality material or indeed understand that there is a hierarchy of information. The key is to use student enthusiasm for communication, participation and creation to motivate and enable their desire for reading, learning and thinking. Put another way, the goal is to align vertical models of literacy from the simulacrum of social networking with the horizontal models that move from the encoding and decoding of words to reflexive literacy. An enthusiasm for social media can be mobilised to suit learning outcomes. By using web 2.0 platforms as a way to motivate, inspire and track the movement between literacy modes, students may see knowledge beyond a designation of 1.0, 2.0 or 3.0.

I frequently critique students because they do not read, or do not read enough. But they do read. They simply read in a way based on their prior reading: of texts in the simulacrum. They do write, but they write based on their prior experiences of writing, of texts in the simulacrum.⁶⁰ While the Google algorithm delivers results, it does not deliver the literacy to use them well. The lack of editing and drafting from first year students is to be expected. The lack of note-taking from their reading is not. Currently, taking notes from the lectures and seminar has replaced reading and note taking from more complex sources. Some highlight the occasional phrase on a photocopy. Some give a few of the extracts a quick read. Some do no reading at all.

Author: Sarah

Date: Wednesday, 17 February 2010 20:33:09

To be honest, my memory of reading as a youngster was never a favorable. I used to smile a pretend i read a book to go up on to harder 'colours', aka 'levels'. To this day reading still makes my top lip curl in disappointment, never find is interesting, i just about manage to scan read the readers you give us. but, writing i love. love poetry, love expressing myself on paper and creating wild stories.

yes i am complicated lol
xxx

Author: Adam

Date: Monday, 22 February 2010 17:07:44

I just don't have this urge to read. I'd rather listen and sing along to some music or chat to my friends. Now, as for university reading. it is a new concept to me. When one of the lecturers from semester one suggested that I would have to read each essay about 4 times before I would expect it to sink in, an expression of sheer horror was my only reply. Whilst I respect it, and understand that it is interesting, it's nothing id read if I had the choice. I'm a simple folk, and find it really hard to read such complex text. I often find i'm re-reading the same sentence over and over and trying to work out what each word means! I'm really hoping I adapt to it though!

60 A significant change in this simulacrum writing is the shift to screen-based platforms. As Gunther Kress argued, 'in the era of the screen and of multimodality some fundamental changes are inevitable as far as forms, functions and uses of writing are concerned', from G. Kress, *Literacy in the new media age*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 61

These are university students, enrolled in a humanities course. I realised they had never learnt the meta-skill to select, filter, interpret and question. In *Rethinking university teaching: a framework for the effective use of learning technologies*, Diana Laurillard asked, was it, ‘their stupidity or mine? Who has the greater responsibility for that situation?’⁶¹ While we can focus on blame, shame and responsibility of parents, teachers, librarians, schools and universities, it is more productive to diagnose what students bring to a learning environment, how it is changing and how we can create new literacy models to use innovative methods and media to maintain older standards. Perhaps the key realisation in managing horizontal and vertical literacy modes and models is following the lead of David Barton, who argued that literacy is ‘an activity’ that operates in the space between ‘thought and text’.⁶² This reflexive movement between strategies, standards and literacies leads to the final stage of this chapter, using the most famous deployment of Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation*, in the filmic series of *The Matrix*.

The Matrix Reloaded

Neo:What truth?

Morpheus:That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Into a prison that you cannot taste or see or touch. A prison for your mind.⁶³

The Matrix series has attracted committed fans and focused scholars because it is a pastiche of genres, flitting across the filmic surface, while accessing a range of sources and ideas from popular culture and philosophy. It is also a model for literacy, offering rich and productive surfaces to motivate and tantalise, along with powerful ideas for those who choose to explore them. Most importantly, *The Matrix* is a film that values consciousness. If the choice is knowledge or ignorance, thinking or shopping, then the films valued the former.

The problem – particularly for theorists – is that Andy and Larry Wachowski re-represented Baudrillard. The pivotal moment when Morpheus asks Neo to choose between the red pill (of consciousness) and the blue pill (of ignorance and compliance) is powerful cinema but an incorrect application of *Simulacra and Simulations*. Rather than a postmodern critique of humanity, *The Matrix* is

61 D. Laurillard, *Rethinking university teaching: a framework for the effective use of learning technologies*, (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), p. 1.

62 D. Barton, *Local Literacies*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 3

63 Neo, played by Keanu Reeves and Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburne, *The Matrix*, *op. cit.*

actually a relatively unreconstructed Marxist application of the consequences of false consciousness.⁶⁴ An exploration of the relationship between signifiatory systems and agency actually appears much earlier, in 1970, in Baudrillard's *The Consumer Society*.⁶⁵

Baudrillard shows through his work that the consequence of the simulacra is the formulation of a hyperreal. There is no moment of consciousness or choice between the real or the representation, the representation or the simulacrum, the real or the simulacrum. Instead, there is confusion, disgust, and an awkward clumping and bundling of images and ideas.⁶⁶ Living in the hyperreal, the 'really real' drops away.⁶⁷ The same year that *The Matrix* was released, Baudrillard commented on this loss of the real and the infusion of the hyperreal in its place.

64 It is also important to note the influence of Marx (and indeed Freud) on Baudrillard and other French intellectuals writing around and through the events of May 1968. To explore the wider links between Baudrillard's work and the manifestations of Marxism in 1960s France, please refer to M. Gane, *Jean Baudrillard: In Radical Uncertainty*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000) and R. Lane, *Jean Baudrillard*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). Even more precisely, Richard Smith argued that, 'the point of the Matrix trilogy is to tell the story of the revolutionary struggle to unmask the dominant ideology or Matrix and so liberate humankind. In other words, the aim of the film's revolutionaries is just like that of the Parisian students of May 1968 shouting their famous slogan; 'Under the paving stones lies the beach', from 'Lights, Camera, Action: Baudrillard and the performance of representations', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2005, http://www.ubishops.ca/BaudrillardStudies/vol2_1/smith.htm.

65 J. Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, (London: Sage, 1998: 1970), p. 9.

66 This is the reason why *The Matrix* is not actually a postmodern or poststructuralist film. Actually, it is a structuralist film, in keeping with Charles Peirce, Roland Barthes and Louis Althusser. The plot is propelled by the notion that there is reality – a truth – that exists below the illusion. Baudrillard was post-structural and post-modern because the grand narratives – the big explanations – of identity, change and consciousness were cut away. There was no 'real' to unveil.

67 Another confirmation of this interpretation is Baudrillard's interpretation of Borges' story of a map that was so detailed that it became the same size as the territory it represented. He stated that, 'We live as if inside Borges' fable of the map and the territory; in this story nothing is left but pieces of the map scattered throughout the empty space of the territory. Except that we must turn the tale upside down: today there is nothing left but a map (the virtual abstraction of the territory), and on this map some fragments of the real are still floating and drifting,' J. Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 63. It is also important to note the influence of Borges on Baudrillard's modeling of the simulacrum. Baudrillard references *Del Rigor en la Ciencia (Of Exactitude in Science)*, which explores how representations reconfigure, marginalise and – in the end – displace the real.

We don't need digital gloves or a digital suit ... We are moving around in the world as in a synthetic image. We have swallowed our microphones and headsets, producing intense interference effects, due to the short-circuit of life and its technical diffusion.⁶⁸

While there are theoretical inaccuracies in the filmic application of the philosopher, it was not the Wachowskis' task to run a Baudrillard master class for graduate students. The crucial argument they took from his book was the notion of the veil, the separation, a blockage between life and living. Through a cinematic laboratory, they were able to test his argument that, 'there is no place for both the world and its double'.⁶⁹

However the power of the film to bring together high and popular culture, old and new ideas, and to situate Baudrillard's book as a prop – an empty shell devoid of content to hide the agents for social change – was extraordinary. Significantly, the films became re-representational agents for pushing viewers into the simulacrum. Soon after the first film was released, Nokia re-represented the re-representation.

Nokia's mobile phones create the vital link between the dream world and the reality in *The Matrix*. The heroes of the movie could not do their job and save the world without the seamless connectivity provided by Nokia's mobile phones. Even though our everyday tasks and duties may be less important than those of the heroes of *The Matrix*, today we can all appreciate the new dimension of life enabled by mobile telephony.⁷⁰

So a heroic, fictional filmic struggle becomes the real for a tumbling simulacra enabling Nokia marketing. Yet the film can also activate a less corporate goal. In an age of technological change where funding is bled from public institutions, it is a necessity to create a matrix of information literacy that is not clunky, but embedded into curriculum and daily practices of teaching and learning. Such an approach recognises the plural contexts in which learning takes place. As David Barton confirmed,

Within the field of education there is a new willingness to look across the boundaries of formal educational institutions, schools and colleges, to understand informal learning strategies and the resources which people draw

68 J. Baudrillard, 'Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality', in N. Zurbrugg (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard – Art and Artefact*, (London: Sage, 1999), p. 19.

69 *ibid.*, p. 7.

70 'Nokia slots itself into *The Matrix*', Nokia Press Release, 7 May, 1999, http://press.nokia.com/PR/199905/777023_5.html

on in their lives outside of education, recognising that schools are just one specialised context in which literacy is used and learned.⁷¹

Teaching and learning must create a continuum between 1.0 and 2.0, offline and online, analogue and digital, historical and simulacrum. Such a model can use the great potentials of the new media environment, while monitoring and addressing the consequences of information excess and expedited decision-making about quality research. Certainly, textbookification, encyclopedification and wikification are creating an ideas-thick climate rather than a rich environment, but they are culturally counterflowing movements.

There are great opportunities and potentials in the new information environment. Print on Demand publishing is increasing the range of publications available. While the big publishers continue to publish textbooks, the smaller publishers can produce cost efficient smaller runs that can then gain international distribution through the Amazonification of books. The iPad, iPad mini, Kindle and other eBook readers can allow close to instant engagement with new books beyond the *New York Times* best seller range. Courageous academics are assuming editorship of open access journals and the Directory of Open Access Journals and Open J-Gate increases their usability. iTunes U and the podcasting environment returns depth and professionalism to the sonic environment. Scholars, using PoD (Print on Demand) and podcasts, are offering a different form of reintermediation, providing a model for a distinctive way of using the read-write web.

This is what *The Matrix*, the film series, taught us. Andy and Larry Wachowski probably offered one of the great inspirations of what smart popular culture and intelligent media can be. *The Matrix* is also an inspiration for the new model of learning. The Wachowskis had influences, spanning from comics to Baudrillard, action movies and European philosophy. The resultant combination of the simulacrum and the real, vertical and horizontal literacy, forms a consciousness and reflexivity about the veil, the barriers to education, understanding and interpretation. It has also become a rich source – on its own – for theorists to think in, through and around Baudrillard, image and reality.⁷²

71 D. Barton, *Local literacies*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 21

72 A fine suite of articles and books have taken the film as an inspiration. These include, William Irwin's edited collection *The Matrix and Philosophy*, (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), Matt Lawrence's *Like a Splinter in your Mind*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), Eddie Zacapa's *Matrix Reflections*, (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2005), C. Constable, 'Baudrillard reloaded', *Screen*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2006, J. Coulter, 'Jean Baudrillard and Cinema: The Problems of Technology, Realism and History', *Film-Philosophy*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2010, <http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p/article/viewFile/106/287>, M. Chan, 'Virtually Real and Really Virtual: Baudrillard's Procession of Simulacrum

Being aware of how the veil – 2.0 platforms – leads to a decay of meaning and a denial of history creates both an awareness of the power of the simulacra along with a desire for the real, for the connection. Our current school and university system are in a matrix. The goal is to create consciousness to enable the movement between modes of thinking and living. When we enter the matrix – when we go into the simulacrum and the vertical models of literacy – we know that there is another side of veil, another model of literacy. Such a consciousness enables us to ask the key questions:

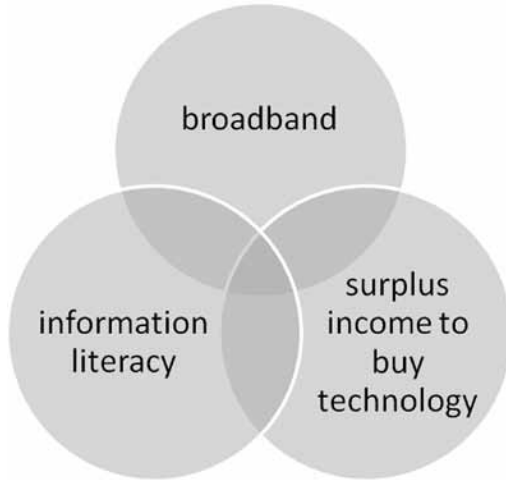
- How should content move between the diverse screens of our lives?
- How should content be changed for the small screen of mobile telephony versus a high definition 55 inch screen?
- How should vocabulary, sentence construction and referencing be changed for a blog in comparison to an assignment submitted at a university?

Knowing that a range of these functions and modes is required, media education is required to tailor and manage content on diverse platforms. This imperative has never been as urgent. The recognition of differences and context means that the doctoral student I examined would have known what was required to translate ideas between platforms and institutional requirement.

The media literacy challenge is not only one of moving content between media spaces, but also through time. The question is how to balance the speed of microblogging services like Twitter while enabling reflection and interpretation of more complex ideas. In *The Matrix*, Morpheus freezes the training programme. Teachers and learners need to do the same. Our task is to deploy the ‘use, understand and create’ model of vertical, simulacrum literacy to create a better quality of reflection on information and promote better models of literacy via reintermediation. The BBC’s current mode of media literacy – Connect – is not enough.

and *The Matrix*’, *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, July 2008, http://www.ubishops.ca/BaudrillardStudies/vol-5_2/v5-2-melanie-chan.html#_edn2, P. Geyh, ‘Assembling Postmodernism: Experience, Meaning, and the Space In-Between’, *College Literature*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Spring 2003, J. Haslam, ‘Coded discourse’, *College Literature*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Summer 2005, R. Smith, ‘Lights, Camera, *Action*: Baudrillard and the Performance of Representations’, *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2005, http://www.ubishops.ca/BaudrillardStudies/vol2_1/smith.htm and R. Kilbourn, ‘Re-writing ‘Reality’: Reading *The Matrix*’, *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol. 9, No.2, Fall 2000.

Eno described the brain as ‘a brilliant machine but with a few occasionally troublesome work-arounds’.⁷³ Teachers and learners interested in information literacy need to create those workarounds. There has never been a better time to be digitally literate. The combination of broadband, surplus income to buy the ever expanding range of platforms and information literacy has given researchers more quality material, in a diversity of forms, than we ever could have imagined.



If ‘we’ lack any of these three elements, then ‘access’ does not enable the development of expertise in the online environment. Access does not equal literacy. To build a consciousness of this difference, I offer two key arguments to propel the developing project of *Digital Dieting* in this book:

1. Researchers need to understand and apply the difference in quality between refereed and non -refereed publications.
2. Teachers, students, librarians and citizens must place attention on platform selection. We must consider the relationship between form and content, platform and information, with greater consciousness than ever before in the history of media.

There has never been more choice of media and platforms than in our present. It has never been easier to move information between these platforms. But simply because the information can move, does not mean that it should be

73 B. Eno, ‘Introduction’, from J. Brockman (ed.), *What have you changed your mind about? Today’s leading minds rethink everything*, (New York: Harper, 2009), p. xxv

moved. Before data sets are rendered mobile by users and researchers, a series of mitigating steps and stages are required. Three questions are required, that build upon the arguments of the first chapter

1. Who is the audience?
2. What is the context for the information?
3. What is the goal for the information? What are we trying to achieve?



Answering these questions requires creating a consciousness that the information necessary for shopping is distinct from that enabling formal education. The context or environment of the information – a supermarket or a university – shapes the requirements and approach to the data in different ways. Finally the targeted audience, whether it be first year university students, doctoral candidates, journalists or curious searchers looking for the top of the music charts in January 1964, will transform both the goal and context for information.

This relationship between audience, context and goal for information transforms the key tasks for university teaching and learning. There are two key moments of consciousness and consideration for teachers.

1. Choose the correct platform or media to present the information
2. Translate, shape and transform this platform intellectually and andragogically for an educational environment.

In other words, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr can occupy a profound and important role in education. But it is necessary to mould and shape these

platforms that are used for leisure and render them appropriate for a school and university context. These two stages are dynamic and require constant revision. When Duke University distributed iPods to first year students in 2002, they contained orientation material, maps and support information. This data is now better delivered through apps, which also have an orientation function and capacity for rapid updates.

The cliché of our era is ‘there’s an app for that’. It is a great cliché and slogan to suggest that an easy and downloadable option exists to solve a social problem, no matter how difficult it may seem. There is not an app for university learning, but what does the popularity of apps tell us about information, knowledge and literacy? The truncation and automation of decision making and digital convergence is having an effect on teaching, learning and literacy. Learning is not downloading. Teaching is not like saving to a hard drive. By using the metaphors and motifs from social networking and web 2.0, a matrix of old and new literacies can create innovative ways of thinking about old and new media. This means students not only recognise the Baudrillard in *The Matrix*, but can also discern and acknowledge the joke of Baudrillard creating fake references to build new knowledge.

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Section Two Intervention

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Chapter Three

Mayhem, magic, movement and methods: teaching and learning about hearing and listening

Teaching and learning must offer more than compliance with educational policies from a particular government, funding model or management structure. It is important to challenge the unsubstantiated tabloid clichés of dumbing down and declining standards. Occasionally in a teaching career, it is important to intervene, change, shift and shape. The aim is to interrupt and reflect on ideas rather than displace knowledge development for technological development. In response, this chapter takes a very small event and creates a moment of change and intervention. This chapter is about a course, but shadows a much wider history of online education, media literacies and sonic media.¹ Teaching research methods is difficult.² Students hate it. Staff tolerate it. Occasionally, there is a comrade or sister who demonstrates as much commitment to Marxist and feminist research methods as Paris Hilton does to shopping, but most of the time it is hard to summon enthusiasm. Students approach these often mandatory courses with the excitement of a dental appointment. Similarly, staff justify such courses as being good for them, like regular flossing.

I had a problem. I had to develop a Masters-level methods module in Media Studies that could be taught throughout the world to students fluent in many languages and derived from myriad disciplines and professional experiences. It had to be applicable and rigorous, flexible and committed, motivating and stimulating. I had few staff, fewer resources and no technical support. It was me, a microphone, an overstuffed hard drive and a slow, standardised and generic university portal. Therefore, this chapter in *Digital Dieting* explores what happened from this mayhem with methods. It is a truth of education

1 Sonic media, as a phrase, has been used intentionally through this chapter as it moves fluidly between the categories of high and popular culture. It maintains relationships with acoustic studies, digital and internet studies and audio and auditory cultures. This preliminary work will be enhanced in the final section of this book investigating the iPad.

2 C. Bluestone, 'Infusing active learning into the research methods unit.' *College Teaching*, Vol. 55, No. 3, 2007, pp. 91–95.

that we teach the surprises. Through this process, I learnt how to transform hearing into listening³ and surprise into an opportunity. From this teaching-led research project, I suggest how teachers can use the dynamic and emerging literature on sonic media, auditory cultures and media literacy to not only rescue a method from mayhem, but create magic through the movement in ideas and application. By slicing away visual culture, instigating digital dieting through the management of the senses, new ways of learning and thinking emerge.

The mayhem

Scholarly discussions about social networking sites and the convenience of mobile media exhibit the enthusiasm of a labrador confronted by an open refrigerator door. What is required is a careful study of how university teaching and learning models operate in specific historical moments of digitisation. Such an investigation is wider and deeper than what David Gauntlett described as a ‘vague recognition of the internet and new digital media, as an “add on” to the traditional media’.⁴ Forming a considered, mappable and trackable relationship between form and content – user generated contexts and user generated content – is a foundational task of curriculum design. It is much easier and financially rewarding with research councils and teaching and learning committees to isolate a change in educational technology and overlay a learning ‘crisis’ or ‘revolution’ from it. My concern is that teachers, theorists and educational managers place too much attention on technology in education, rather than education in technology. While William Merrin confirmed with a flourish that ‘the revolution has already taken place’,⁵ it is increasingly difficult to pinpoint if or when the moment of change (revolution?) in educational media ‘happened’.

These debates about web 1.0 and 2.0, interactivity and participatory media, quality and standards, haunt most teachers as we construct curriculum. It is particularly the case in my field of media, communication and cultural studies. Indeed, Robyn Quin reported that ‘the history of media education has been characterised by defensiveness’.⁶ There is often a reason for this hyper-reflexivity

3 M. Smith, *Hearing History: A Reader*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004)

4 D. Gauntlett, ‘Media Studies 2.0’, *Theory.org.uk*, 24 February, 2007, <http://www.theory.org.uk/mediastudies2.htm>

5 W. Merrin, ‘The Revolution has already taken place’, *Media Studies 2.0 Forum*, 3 March, 2007, <http://twopointzeroforum.blogspot.com/2007/03/revolution-has-already-taken-place.html>

6 R. Quin, ‘A genealogy of Media Studies’, *The Australian Educational Researcher*, Vol. 30, 2003, pp. 101–122

and conservatism. Not only is Media Studies labelled a ‘Mickey Mouse’ subject in the United Kingdom,⁷ but I had a more localised and immediate problem. There had never been a successful Media Masters-level course at the University of Brighton. There were many reasons for the failure to connect aspiration, intent and delivery. A former Polytechnic, it celebrated creativity rather than creative industries and high art rather than popular culture. I (just) managed to guide a new course, a Master of Arts in Creative Media, through validation, assembling a range of courses at the edge of the media studies paradigm, ensuring that the distance education and on-campus modes of learning were rigorous and integrated.

Twenty students joined the first enrolment of the course from Angola, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Slovak Republic, Greece, Cyprus, the United States, Belgium, Australia, Brazil and throughout the United Kingdom. The students were challenging, committed, inspirational and aspirational. The group spoke six different languages and came from a range of professions, including print and radio journalism, computer science, pharmacy, publishing, photography, education and public relations.

It was a fascinating course to teach but it faced many challenges after the validation battles were fought. The goal was to ensure that it could be offered on campus and off campus, both part time and full time and that it would weave into the diverse lives and aspirations of a multicultural, international, creative media community. As it was new and not amending or updating older models and modes of learning, all the transformations in hardware and software in the last few years were embedded into the methods and modes of teaching from the first day it was offered. We had the great gift of building something different and productive. Participatory media platforms were not an ‘add on’, but a central element in both curriculum design and assessment.

Educational technologies possess four functions: to provide an apparatus for the presentation of learning materials, to construct a matrix of interaction between the learner and the information environment, to configure a communicative space between learners and teachers, and an engaging matrix for innovative dialogues between learners. While it is easy in an era of digital convergence to align and conflate these roles – to combine presentation, engagement and communication into an asynchronous bundle – there are advantages in the development of literacy and the building of an information scaffold to slow and differentiate these functions.⁸

7 J. Shepherd, ‘Stop funding Mickey Mouse degrees says top scientist’, *The Guardian*, 10 February, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/feb/10/stop-funding-mickey-mouse-degrees>

8 Asynchronous media platforms were chosen to ensure that students could fit the modules into their work and family commitments. Also, distance education students were

Practising Media Research, the mandatory methods module, was a particular focus in considering how to configure and align media production, media dissemination and the activation of media literacy theories into an effective and innovative learning package.⁹ Teaching research methods, particularly in media and cultural studies, is complex. Invariably there is a conflict between humanities and social scientific models. The qualitative sociologists titter at the semioticians. Those wedded to focus groups cannot fathom the unrepresentative nature of oral history. Fieldwork researchers cannot grasp the intricacies of the archive and unobtrusive research methods. In a radically interdisciplinary environment, it is difficult to overcome intellectual inertia to move outside a very narrow palette of research methods from a home discipline.

This problem had surfaced in the undergraduate research methods module. In the first year of my arrival at Brighton, I was present at the once-a-semester student feedback session, called a course board. The student representatives savaged the mandatory methods module. The critiques varied from the usual boredom and questionable relevance to a mismatch between learning methods and applying them in a dissertation. The complaints continued at length. It became much more than uncomfortable and could not be dismissed as students having an extended whine at their teachers. The key at moments like this is to listen. As a representative sample, three undergraduate students told me about their experiences. Alice was a second year student and had just completed the methods module when she spoke to me. Jan was a former student and student representative who had been in the workforce for a year. Tina was a colleague of Jan's who went straight into the MA programme upon the completion of

considered at the start of course development. They were not an inconvenient addition to the on campus mode. The full course was available in both on and off campus modes from the launch of its programme. Therefore there was a different motivation to distance education when compared to Matthew Roberts, who stated that 'it all started with a scheduling conflict ... one student let me know that she would need to miss our research methods class the coming week. As hands popped up around the room I realised I would be missing almost a third of my class. Unfortunately, they were going to miss crucial lectures on measures of significant and measures of association, without which they could be considerably lost when it came to the semester research paper', from 'Adventures in podcasting', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 41, No.3, July 2008.

9 I particularly want to note the literacies series that, although resident at Routledge, was commenced by the Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis edited collection, *Multiliteracies*, (Melbourne: Macmillan, 2000). Influential texts in Routledge's series include Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, *Global Literacies and the World-Wide Web* (London: Routledge, 2000), Gunther Kress's *Literacy in the New Media Age*, (London: Routledge, 2003), Ilana Snyder (ed.) *Silicon Literacies*, (London: Routledge, 2002) and David Barton, Mary Hamilton and Roz Ivanic edited collection, *Situated Literacies*, (London: Routledge, 2000)

her degree. These comments about the undergraduate method module were startling in their honesty.

Alice: Perhaps it is not as explanatory and in depth as it should be. While the recommended readings are helpful, it would good to have things clarified a tad better in the lectures and have a wider range of lectures rather than very similar lectures. Just, you know, the lecturers being there to be available and answering questions rather than expecting everyone to know what they're talking about.

Jan: From what I remember it was kind of rushed. Um. Very rushed – not as in depth as I wanted it to be ... It was almost as if the lecturer thought that we were meant to know it already, which we didn't. Obviously like the lecturer had more experience than we did ... I know we had trouble with seminars and stuff where people didn't turn up.

Tina: I found it very poorly constructed ... People got to thinking that they could assume what it was about so they didn't bother turning up because it was very dry and very sort of – it was hard to learn. You felt you could read it in a textbook but really you could be taught it and understand it better and use it. I think to put your own examples through it to apply it to your research. It was just like boring and you felt like you were back at school and it was just just awful, if I'm honest.

Teachers manage and negotiate phrases like the student experience for validation procedures and quality assurance. Many of these voices and views are poured into already existing mechanisms that suit university branding and advertising as much as improving the learning experience. As the list of problems in the methods module progressed, I listened with my mouth open. Fortunately, my mind was open as well. As I approached the MA Creative Media, I was determined to find a method to teach methods that would note their critiques and help them to learn.

I buried myself in three distinct research literatures: teaching research methods, media literacy theory and sonic media.¹⁰ I had worked in these areas for a decade, but wanted to create new links between these paradigms, settling

10 Many of these influential materials are referenced throughout this chapter, but I would particularly like to note Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson's 'Podcasting in the school library, part 2: creating powerful podcasts with your students', *Teacher Librarian*, Vol. 34, No. 4, April 2007. In this article, they stressed the ease of construction as a way 'to promote technology to reluctant teachers', p. 61. They also stressed the importance of a standard format, particularly using music. Their advice was followed. They also argued for the diversity of possible genres, including book reviews, collaborative projects, promotion of events, interviews and original sonic productions. I have

on a fully online mode of teaching and learning for methods. This would enable the programme to move through space and time. Asynchronous media was an obvious choice, so students could return to the sessions when they needed them, beyond the conclusion of the module and through the writing of their dissertation. Distance education and on-campus students could liaise and communicate early in the semester, reducing the isolation of both groups.¹¹ It became important that this one module would be more than a module, but the start of a teaching-led research project to experiment with new strategies and methods for postgraduate education. Colleen Murrell realised that not only was there an important role for podcasting in ‘interactive journalism training’, but that ‘there has still been very little serious research into its uses – both in industry and in academia’.¹² Part of my role was to contribute to that research literature by testing new links between sonic media and education. It was also the first chance to generate a teaching-led research project, activating my assumptions about digital dieting. Could fewer media create more meaning, and solve some teaching and learning challenges through the process?

My plan started to form. I would use a sound-only platform. I would question the hypothesis that more media and sensory information improves learning. These premises were an attempt to correct the tendency logged by Anthony Chan and Catherine McLoughlin: ‘Audio has traditionally been neglected and underused as a teaching and learning medium.’¹³ Individual staff members would introduce their research method and show students how it works in application rather than in abstraction.¹⁴ The idea was that staff would

experimented with this diversity of material for future use in teaching and learning. Please refer to www.brabazon.net/soniclab.

11 My experience through the MA Creative Media in terms of distance learning was also confirmed in Muhammad Imran Yousuf’s ‘Effectiveness of mobile learning in distance education’, *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, Vol. 8, No. 4, October 2007, http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/tojde28/pdf/article_9.pdf

12 C. Murrell, ‘Interactive student podcasting: the emerging technology of choice’ in A. Oosterman, A. Cocker (eds.), *Journalism Downunder: the future of the media in the digital age. Proceedings of the 2nd joint JEANZ/JEA Conference*, School of Communication Studies, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand, 2006, http://artsweb.aut.ac.nz/journalism_conference/docs/paper-Murrell.doc, p. 1

13 Anthony Chan and Catherine McLoughlin, ‘Everyone’s learning with podcasting: a Charles Sturt University experience’, *Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Ascilite Conference*, p. 111

14 While application was a focus, it was not an example of problem-based instruction or problem-based learning as was introduced by Margaret Greenwald in teaching graduate research methods. I certainly note her corrective that ‘a problem-based approach to teaching research methods allows the instructor to build directly on the students’ current level of knowledge in clinical diagnosis and treatment and to help

present readings on a method, including an example of their own research using that method. This was a way to address the critique of the undergraduate methods module in terms of its relevance and applicability. It would close the gap between understanding a research method and being able to move and apply it to a new project. Attendance would not be required. I would not extol or vilify podcasting, but think about new options and alternatives that emerge from a much longer history of sound in education. As Helen White and Christina Evans realised, ‘effective listening may appear to be common sense, but in reality it is a complex activity, which benefits from direct teaching’.¹⁵ I would focus on the development of media literacy, which requires neither a designation nor an imperative for platform migration.¹⁶ Jack Maness stated that ‘web 2.0, essentially, is not a web of textual publication, but a web of multi-sensory communication’.¹⁷ Obviously Life 1.0 and Education 1.0 are also based on multi-sensory communication. However my goal was to shape a pathway through difficult and abstract material. This was enacted by limiting the available sensory material, finding a match between learning outcomes, mode of delivery and student interactivity. The goal was not interactivity for its own sake or to activate a banal comment culture. The imperative was the development of media literacy in a way that was contiguous, gradual, contemporary, passionate and planned.

All seemed to be going well. All the other modules and courses in the MA had their study guides and readings were ready to distribute. Staff were organised for the year and I just started to relax and enjoy the idea of teaching this extraordinary group of people. However my confidence was short lived. While the course had proven its worth and success to even the most neoliberal of managers, a problem exploded three days before the start of the Orientation Week. Unfortunately, the first year that the course ran was during a period of the restructuring of Media Studies at the University of Brighton. ‘Restructuring’ is managerial shorthand for randomised change or an inverted Trotskyite vision of permanent revolution. This institutional instability was to unsettle the foundation of the MA.

students to extend clinical questions into research questions’, from ‘Teaching research methods in communication disorders’, *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 32, 2006, p. 179.

15 H. White and C. Evans, *Learning to listen to learn: using multi-sensory teaching for effective listening*, (London: Lucky Duck, 2005), p. 1

16 Such a project is outlined in G. Gaden, ‘Podcasting: Thinking about new opportunities for pedagogy and activism’, *Third Space*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2009, <http://www.thirdspace.ca/journal/article/viewArticle/291/296>

17 P. Miller, ‘Coming together around Library 2.0’, *D-Lib Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 4, April 2006, <http://dlib.org/dlib/april06/miller/04miller.html>

Prior to the Orientation Week, at the very moment that students were arriving at Heathrow and Gatwick Airports from around the world, the person who was meant to be running this mandatory methods module in the MA was assigned another teaching responsibility. The following email was received at 5:38pm on Thursday afternoon, before all the materials were due to be distributed the following Monday morning.

From:
Sent: Thu 25/09/2008 17:38
To: Brabazon Tara
Subject: Can I ask your advice please?

hi Tara,

I have (as ever) some staffing issues to resolve – **** is still off sick and one of her modules is now without a module leader. It's a module **** has some involvement with and has been module leader for in the past. He's willing to take it on again, but he'll need to 'lose' one of his other modules and the only one anyone else can realistically take on is the Research methods on the Media Masters. I was thinking that **** would be ideal for this as he already liaises closely with colleagues for the undergraduate research methods – and that maybe he could do so with your support and guidance as I know you've already been involved in getting contributions from people and helping with the sonic sessions (and no, I haven't forgotten that I owe you a session myself!) – what's your opinion as Course Leader?

thanks

This was a complete and utter nightmare. The person suggested by the manager was the academic who taught the undergraduate methods module that had caused the problems that I was trying to correct. He had also never taught via distance or online education in his career. The only solution was that I would have to take over coordinatorship of the module. The best courses take months and often years of preparation. In this situation, I had Thursday night, Friday, Saturday and Sunday to write the study guide, find reading materials, record the sonic sessions, create the portal, upload the materials, photocopy the study guide and collection of readings for distribution on Monday morning to the students and post them via courier to the distance education scholars. With few staff and less time, I called in some favours from former PhD students who hastily produced three sessions. In a matter of days, I recorded four sessions with academic staff in Media Studies, recorded my sessions, mixed them and photocopied from 5:45am through to 8:55am on the Monday morning to – just – finish the materials in time for the students to collect. I had to work

thirty six hours without a break over the weekend, with two printers churning out materials. The module was ready. While this managerial hiccup just before semester resulted in rushed and last-minute preparation,¹⁸ I was buoyed by the year-long research I had conducted to ensure that the framing, platform selection and theoretical basis for the module were well considered. The key was to determine how the execution of this plan was to be assessed.

The method

Although the final execution and delivery of materials was not ideal, I had been thinking about, theorising and planning the form of this module for some time, taking on board the critique of the way methods had been taught in the past and how to improve this delivery for not only the current cohort but a new community of international learners.¹⁹ *Practising Media Research*, as the module was called, would be flexible in delivery, personal, intimate and applicable. It would implement the lessons from the historic use of sound in education. Podcasts of lectures would not be the chosen option. As early as 1984, Durbridge stated that ‘As compared with a written text, the spoken word can influence both cognition (adding clarity and meaning) and motivation (by conveying directly a sense of the person creating those words).’²⁰ The complexity of tone and voice is captured in new ways.²¹ Daniel Power realised that, ‘The ability to adjust or modulate frequencies allows us to communicate in a correct and artistic way with words and sounds [through] ... the ability to adjust intonation, inflexion, phrasing,

18 I am not undermining the seriousness of this rushed preparation. Frank Troha is absolutely correct: ‘A successful-learning or blended learning initiative requires careful project planning, solid instructional design, the development of all instructional components based on an approved design document, ongoing attention to project management issues ... varies formative evaluations prior to launch, deployment of the learning and ongoing evaluation and maintenance of the learning system’, from ‘Ensuring e-learning success: six simple tips for initiative leaders’, *USDLA Journal*, December 2002, p. 15

19 S. Junaidu and J. Al-Ghamdi realised that ‘before beginning course development, online course developers should have a clear understanding of their target audience, the learners’, from ‘Tips for developing media-rich online courses’, *USDLA Journal*, December 2002, p. 18. Junaidu and Al-Ghamdi particularly placed attention to motivation, knowledge, language level and computer literacy.

20 N. Durbridge ‘Media in course design’ No. 9 – audio cassettes, in *The role of technology in distance education*, (Kent: Croom Helm, 1984)

21 Mladen Dolar argued that ‘the voice appears to be the most familiar thing’, but it remains a platform to create unheard and often uncomfortable meanings, *A voice and nothing more*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), p. 13

pace, volume, loudness and timbre.²² Similarly Mark Lee and Anthony Chan in 2007 argued that, ‘while audio is certainly not new as a teaching and learning medium, it has been neglected and underused in recent times’.²³ Most portals and platforms still emphasise text rather than sound. Twitter is only the most recent example. But if there is a moment of and for audio-only media in education, then it is now. Sonic media is a low cost mode of delivery that enables staff and students to know each other in a new way. Innovative low cost recorders and mixing software offer great potential. It is often infrastructural glueware that lags behind and reduces the effectiveness of sound. For example, the University of Brighton, like many institutions around the world, deploys a standard Blackboard interface. Therefore, it was a slow process to both upload and download sonic files, even for those with broadband. This slowness of construction and delivery is a problem, particularly with students in Gambia as well as Greater London. The (temporary) solution for those with unstable and dial up connections is to send the sonic files on disc with their other print-based materials.

Through these challenges, sound has great capacity for education. It personalises content, capturing all the advantages of radio, along with learner control of the place and time for engagement. Sonic media and auditory cultures also unsettle subjective geographies. New relationships are formed between participants through the shared intimacy of sonic media. However, the best use of podcasts or sonic sessions (my description of audio files without an RSS feed)²⁴ emerges if they are short, diverse, entertaining and contemplative. A diversity of media can summon a diversity of learning styles. For distance education students, there is an opportunity for a different mode of academic delivery, with asynchronous learning being suitable for students separated by geography and time zones. They then share a sound and discussion portal which enables mixed media presentations and collaborative discussions.

Sonic media has been my platform of choice for over a decade. The Open University has always been a beacon. They always resisted recording and distributing lectures. Remembering their experience, I wanted to ensure that as media has become more portable and permeable in daily life that this

22 D.J. Power, ‘The use of audio in distance education’, in S. Timmers (ed.) *Training needs in the use of media for distance education*, (Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, 1990)

23 M. Lee and A. Chan, ‘Reducing the effects of isolation and promoting inclusivity for distance learners through podcasting’, *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January 2007, p. 87

24 I use the phrase ‘sonic sessions’ to signify a difference from both podcasts and online lectures. By deploying a distinctive nomenclature, I am attempting to show that a sonic session is written, recorded and structured differently from a lecture that has been recorded.

educational history is neither compressed nor forgotten. Sound-only media are intimate and immediate, literally whispering into the ear of the listener. They can slot into – and accompany – daily life on a car stereo while taking children to school, exercising at the gym, or completing a daily commute. They are flexible, permeable and can integrate into the available time of our students, whether they are part-time or full-time. However sonic media create a series of further problems in a cultural environment that – to cite Douglas Kahn – ‘pervasively privileges the eye over the ear’.²⁵ Would the students bother listening? The undergraduates had not attended the media methods lecture and seminar. Would the postgraduate bother downloading the file and taking notes from the session? Would they post messages and upload images and sounds?

To improve the chances of success, I tracked earlier experiments in sound, sonic media and auditory cultures. It is, as Klaus Bruhn Jensen confirmed, ‘significantly under researched as a form of communication, as a modality of experience, and as a resource for cultural expression and social action’.²⁶ I started using ‘sonic sessions’ in 1995, with analogue cassettes as a platform for sound and education. My goal was to create mobile learning experiences that could assist in the understanding of abstract or complex ideas. With the eyes at rest, sonic literacies could enable new relationship between form and content, signifier and signified. Like most of us, I have experimented with analogue and digital recorders, a range of microphones and put my faith for a few years in the iPod as both a recorder as much as a player of sound. However that was a transitory commitment. Like me, in the early 2000s, Brittain, Glowacki, Van Ittersum and Johnson attempted to use the iPod to record their sessions at Michigan’s School of Dentistry.

From the beginning, we attempted to contain costs. Because the iPod would be a low-cost solution, we explored it first as an audio capture device. Students reported using iPods to record lectures, and a few students placed iPods with supplementary microphones on their desks in the front row of the lecture halls. This method produced unsatisfactory audio quality and was highly dependent on lecturer position.²⁷

Students found the audio quality poor. At Michigan, they started to use an Apple PowerBooks G4. The quality improved, but the technician’s time was expensive. As with Michigan’s case study, this early iPod experience – for most of us – was hampered not by portability and convenience, but by the quality

25 D. Kahn, *Wireless Imagination*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 4

26 K. Jensen, ‘Sounding the media’, *Nordicom Review*, Vol. 27, 2006, p. 7

27 S. Brittain, P. Glowacki, J. Van Ittersum, L. Johnson, ‘Podcasting lectures’, *Educause Quarterly*, Number 3, 2006, p. 28

of the recording. Since they wrote this important piece, the quality of portable recorders has increased enormously and the skill to use them has reduced. I understand the attempt to use the iPod as player and recorder. Mobile popular music players have been integral to the public acceptance and consumption of particular platforms. The attraction of the iPod and MP3 players are clear: they integrate screen and sound. The ease of scrolling through a personal music collection means that hours can be spent satiated in an individual's greatest hits collection. Yet their use in education is more uneven and ambivalent.

There are many assumptions about students and their use of technology. Most of these assumptions are incorrect or unproven. For example, Carie Windham reported her attraction to the iPod and podcasting, while noting a lack of experience in more complex uses of the platform.

When you ask most students what they think of their iPods, they immediately mention the benefits of mobility and small size. But when you ask them how they might incorporate podcasting into a course, they draw a blank. The most common answer is the most obvious: offering course lectures or instructors' notes as an audio or video download. The problem for most students is that downloading a course lecture is often their first foray into the technology ... Just because a student totes an iPod on campus doesn't mean that the student is podcast-savvy.²⁸

Use of a platform does not guarantee that it is deployed well. There are always issues to balance when teachers favour particular platforms, hardware and software. These decisions must be responsive to the learning outcomes of a curriculum. My interest is what happens to education when we make it location independent, a digi-space of i-lectures, iPods and PowerPoint slides. To cut away sensory complexity and focus on sound and aural literacies through podcasts requires pedagogical expertise and experience in sonic media.²⁹ Norquay confirmed that 'writing for talk is different from the writing you do for print'.³⁰ There must be attention to voice, intonation, pauses, pitch and pace. The goal is to enact vocal variety and dynamism through rate, pace, volume,

28 C. Windham, 'Confessions of a podcast junkie: a student perspective'. *Educause*, May/June 2007, <http://connect.educause.edu/Library/EDUCAUSE+Review/ConfessionsofaPodcastJunk/39405>

29 V. Erlmann focused on the movement between reason and resonance in understanding aurality. Erlmann wished to break the sender-medium-receiver model, arguing that hearing moves between society and nature. Please refer to *Reason and resonance: a history of modern aurality*, (New York: Zone Books, 2010)

30 M. Norquay, 'Writing for the ear', in L. Burge, M. Norquay and J. Roberts (eds.), *Listening to learn*, (Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in education, 1987), p. 11.

pitch, inflection and pause. The skill set to create sonic media is different from lecturing, particularly the ‘technique’ tethered to reading headings off PowerPoint slides. Good audio-only presentations are highly scripted. A recorded voice is distinct from the vocal sounds heard in daily life. Effective lecturers have different skills to good broadcasters and effective podcasters. Good materials for the ear rarely emerge from a lecture theatre. Part of the ease with which lectures have been plucked from analogue delivery and moved to audio streaming and RSS feeds is a misunderstanding of the value of a lecture as an analogue educational location and the specific characteristics, benefits and weaknesses of sonic media.

The Open University is an innovator in the history of media education and the reasons for this success were realised by Gary Berg who stressed three nodes of innovation: high quality content, student support and a strong research base.³¹ As a result of this nexus, media choices were made in relation to learning goals. The OU were international leaders in the development of a proto-digital sonic literacy. A.W. Bates, in reviewing the successes of the Open University,³² showed the importance of media choice and selection in distance education, including the history of audio cassettes for OU courses. He stated that, ‘Audio cassettes are low costs; all students already have facilities at home; they are easy for academics to produce, and cheap and simple to distribute; students find them convenient to use; and, when designed properly, they encourage student activity.’³³ This review of the analogue environment has relevance when ascertaining the applicability of digital platform choices. The Open University selected audio cassettes because they were low cost, accessible, able to be produced by academics without intervention from technicians, and convenient to use. In terms of educational design, lectures were noted as inappropriate in developing effective sound-based OU educational strategies. The key realisation – then and now – is that the media selected for curriculum delivery must be determined by the student’s home environment. Audio cassettes were cheap. Broadband, iPods and computers are not. But all three are reaching a point where assumptions of greater student ownership and use can be made.

Careful thought is required when writing any curriculum, particularly when considering how to align diverse student cohorts with digitally convergent media to attain learning outcomes. Bates constructed a checklist to assist this process.

31 G. Berg, ‘The British Invasion.’ *WebNet Journal*, January–March, 2001, 5–6

32 A.W. Bates, ‘Technology for distance education: A 10-year perspective’, from A. Tait (ed.) *Key issues in open learning – a reader: An anthology from the journal ‘Open learning’ 1986–1992*, (Harlow: Longman, 1993), pp. 241–265

33 *ibid.*, p. 242

Assessment of Educational Technology

- Cost
- Learning effectiveness
- Availability to students
- User friendliness
- Place in the organisational environment
- Recognition of international technological inequalities

Source: A.W. Bates, 'Technology for distance education: A 10-year perspective', from A. Tait (ed.) *Key issues in open learning – a reader: An anthology from the journal 'Open learning' 1986–1992*, (Harlow: Longman, 1993), 243

The goal in thinking about web-based education is to ensure that a mechanism for quality control and evaluation is present. The division between 'new' and 'old' media is deceptive. The deployment of web 1.0 and 2.0 is part of this problem in universalising the availability and applicability of the online environment in all its multiplicity, diversity and scale for a plurality of social groups. The educational imperative must not be the celebration of the new but the selection of effective media that is relevant to its environment. The key choice for teachers configuring curriculum is not analogue versus digital, but synchronous versus asynchronous media. For distance education learners, time-shifting enhances the effectiveness of educational platforms.

Sharing audio and video texts has been part of the post-war history of educational technology.³⁴ Often this sharing was in real time and space. Sharing digital audio and video files online has been possible for a decade. But it is the symbolic power of the iPod specifically, rather than MP3 players more generally, that has brought not only sonic media but podcasting more centrally into the educational portfolio.³⁵ Important educational opportunities are available

34 Allison Cavanagh realized how rarely this point is actualised. She stated that 'the idea of a radical schism between new media, in particular the internet, and prior forms of media is a common trope of the field', from 'Contesting Media History', *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2007, p. 6

35 'Podcasting: a teaching with technology white paper', Office of Technology for Education & Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence, Carnegie Mellon University, 4 June, 2007

through the iPod. Podcasts are simple to produce and receive, and suitable for distance education. They also offer an intellectual opportunity for reflection on sonic media. The most effectively branded platform for educational podcasts is iTunes U. The arrival of the iPod Video, iPod touch, iPhone and iPad also created the potential for video podcasts or vodcasts. However – and even with the prevalence of web cameras – they are more difficult to create than an audio podcast. Their added value for education is debateable. Future research in this area, assembling the best use of podcasts and vodcasts for distinct learning goals, is important.³⁶

Initial leadership in iTunes U-framed podcasting was provided by elite universities, including Duke, Stanford and the University of Michigan, but smaller campuses have increased their international corporate visibility through this relationship. As an example, Stanford's podcasts are professionally introduced and while some of the sonic quality is variable in the presentations themselves, the tracks are introduced, advertised and mixed in a standardised and effective way. Stanford had a model to follow and improve, building on the high profile deployment of iPods by Duke University. Famously, in August 2004, Duke distributed 20 GB iPods to 1600 first year students. With enough space to store five thousand songs, it was preloaded with orientation content in both spoken and written form, alongside information about Duke's academic environment and student activities. It was a US\$500,000 investment from the University. The key element of the Duke story that is underplayed in the retelling is that the University also provided a Belkin bar microphone to attach to the iPod. From this early programme, students used the microphone to record lectures and interviews for oral history and community media. Academics used this platform to disseminate class content, record class-based discussion and for file storage and transfer. The iPod was enfolded into curriculum as a fieldwork recording tool.

At the end of the first year, Duke released its evaluative report of the iPod experiment.

Initial planning for academic iPod use focused on audio playback; however, digital recording capabilities ultimately generated the highest level of student and faculty interest. Recording was the most widely used feature for academic

36 At the University of Bolton, I experimented with this difference between podcasts and vodcasts. Teaching first year Media Production students, the capacity to express complex scholarly ideas 'front of camera' was an important skill. To view some of these visual experiments, please refer to *Tara Brabazon's YouTube Channel*, <http://www.youtube.com/user/TaraBrabazon>

purposes, with 60 percent of first-year students reporting using the iPod's recording ability for academic purposes.³⁷

The significance of 'the Duke moment' in the history of sonic media in education was to recognise that much of the value of the unit was derived from the Belkin voice recorder. It meant that listening could – with technical ease – transform into recording. The 'what if' scenario is an intriguing one. If Duke had distributed the iPods without the microphone, then student behaviour may have drifted into listening to music. Instead, there was a more malleable and integrated relationship between listening and recording, the iPod and curriculum. If Duke's 2004 and 2005 'experiment' is assessed in terms of the wider iPod-owning constituency, then it is clear that most users mobilise the platform for listening rather than the production of material. Duke's story is different because from the start of the unit's distribution with a microphone there was an assumption of interactive production.

After two years of experimentation, the University moved away from providing iPods to students.³⁸ The iPod was treated, not as a branding or marketing device, not as a web 2.0 platform and the basis of social networking and collaboration, but 'as a course supply, much like a textbook'.³⁹ In the space of two years, iPods went from the forefront of educational innovation to the basic kit of an undergraduate student. In reviewing this short history, three strategies emerged for the iPod's deployment in education:

- distribution of lectures for review
- delivery of new educational materials (which may be termed 'supplemental materials')
- use for student assignments.⁴⁰

37 Y. Belanger, *Duke iPod first year final evaluation Report*, (Durham: Duke University, 2006), http://cit.duke.edu/pdf/ipod_initiative_04_05.pdf

38 B. Read, 'Lectures on the go', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 52, No. 10, 2005, <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i10/10a03901.htm>

39 S. Earp, Y. Belanger, L. O'Brien, Duke digital initiative end of year report. Durham: Duke University, 2006, http://www.duke.edu/ddi/pdf/ddi_exec_report_overview_o5_06.pdf

40 Office of Technology for Education & Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence, *Podcasting: a teaching with technology white paper*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University, June 4, 2007, http://connect.educause.edu/files/CMU_Podcasting_Jun07.pdf

A diversity of materials is distributed through podcasts, even though the lecture dominates. Lecture recording is the simplest and least time consuming way to create sonic material. It may not be the most useful in terms of attaining learning outcomes.

In general, it is safe to say that most students do not listen to each and every lecture podcast. Only 20 of the students in the UW study listened to more than 75 of recorded lectures. In addition to picking and choosing which lectures to review, many students also scan the lectures, fast-forwarding to specific points or sections, and listening to particular portions multiple times.⁴¹

Simply because lectures are syndicated to a student does not mean they are heard. Such a practice may also encourage a disconnection from curriculum. This problem was a concern through the preparation of my MA methods module, and may have repeated some of the issue emerging in the undergraduate degree. Students did not attend sessions and then complained that they did not have the knowledge they needed for their dissertation. Similarly, if students did not listen to the sonic session on each method, they would have few guides through the research. Still, in international education, a series of surprises have emerged in how students work with podcasts. Most significantly, up to 80 per cent listen to podcasts at their computer rather than deploying the mobility of the MP3 player and iPod.⁴² The potential of mobile education – delivering content anywhere and anytime – is not part of the lived learning experience of students.

The advantages in persisting with these experiments through the challenges and surprises are enormous, as sonic media provide a reflexive space for the teaching of abstract ideas.⁴³ But not every subject is best taught or learnt through digitised, mobile sound. When written and targeted for particular courses, approaches and student communities, the effects of sound in and on learning are powerful. For *Practising Media Research*, I wanted to both understand and differentiate between the longer sonic sessions I was producing and simply recording a lecture. I assembled a checklist of distinctions.

41 *ibid.*

42 *ibid.*, p. 3

43 T. Brabazon, 'Socrates in earpods: the ipodification of education'. *Fast Capitalism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2006, http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/2_1/brabazon.htm

Characteristics of a Recorded Lecture	Characteristics of a Sonic Session
Written for multi-sensory delivery	Written for a sound-only delivery
Written for multi-textual literacy engagement	Written to use auditory literacies in isolation
Length of session determined by the timetable	Length of session determined by content
Sound quality variable	Control over sound quality and standardised production
Lecturer concentrating on the many variables in a classroom	Academic presenter concentrating on the singular aspect of delivering high quality sonic content
Students must attend the session in the mode prescribed by the timetable	Students can insert the session into their timetable

In my earlier research on the iPod and/in education I stressed the ease with which staff could use the iPod's microphone attachment and record material of reasonable quality.⁴⁴ 'Reasonable' was probably an accurate description in 2006 when I wrote my first article on the iPodification of education, but sonic media platforms and editing software have improved and evaluative mechanisms (particularly from the corporate branding of podcasts) have also sharpened, demanding a higher quality of sound. Students can still deploy the iPod as a listening platform and use it to complete assessments, but better recording and editing is possible and necessary from staff. If Media Studies is to offer an intervention and interrogation of web 2.0, then it is through the recognition that a domestication of media production rarely produces professional results.⁴⁵ In the early to mid-2000s, the iPod was able to create recordings that were quick and easy to disseminate, but now it is possible – at reasonable cost – for academics to develop and record higher quality materials.

It is now the post-iPod moment for sonic media.⁴⁶ As early as 2006, Meng tracked the problems in the educational use of this convenient – if domestic – recorder.

44 *ibid.*

45 I note David Millard and Martin Ross's corrective that 'web 2.0 is not a system, nor even a class of systems', from 'web 2.0: hypertext by any other name', HT'06, 22–26 August 2006, Odense Denmark, p. 28

46 Jean Burgess tracked amateur photography and the domestication of personal computing as a form of 'Vernacular creativity and new media', from her PhD thesis at the Queensland University of Technology, 2007.

Higher quality audio or video generally require a higher level of technical expertise. Currently many podcasts are known for their ‘scratchy’ or homemade personalities. As the popularity of podcasting grows we will see ever more sophisticated broadcasts with increasing production values and higher levels of required technical skills. The School of Journalism at The University of Missouri has already committed to producing all future podcast and vodcasts using ‘best practices’ – a professional quality level for their podcasts and vodcasts which they are currently defining.⁴⁷

While Meng was clear in 2006 that sonic quality was re-entering the discussion, some theorists argue that the sound quality of podcasts was not important. For example, Anthony Chan and Catherine McLoughlin in the same year as Meng stated that,

The ability to produce high fidelity sound does not appear to be critical to the success of educational podcasts. Students tend to be quite tolerant in this regard, so long as the speech is sufficiently audible and clear. With this in mind, there is no need for sophisticated, studio-grade sound recording/editing hardware and software. To date, the project has relied solely on inexpensive, handheld computer microphones and free/open source software.⁴⁸

It would be informative to ask if Chan and McLoughlin’s students are still ‘tolerant’. Others have been less satisfied. Significantly, one equated a lack of quality in the technical output with a lack of commitment to teaching.

A novice podcast listener can tell the difference between poor sound and sound that reflects even a small amount of attention to detail and quality. For students to value a podcast, they need to believe that the professor values it as well. Part of that comes from demonstrating a commitment to quality in recording.⁴⁹

47 P. Meng, *Podcasting gains an important foothold among US adult online population, according to Nielsen//Netratings*, 2006, <http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/news.jsp>

48 A. Chan and C. McLoughlin, Everyone’s learning with podcasting: a Charles Sturt University experience. In: *Proceedings of the 23rd annual Ascilite conference Sydney, Australia*, 2006, http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/sydney06/proceeding/pdf_papers/p219.pdf

49 C. Windham, Confessions of a podcast junkie: a student perspective. *Educase*, May/June 2007, <http://connect.educause.edu/Library/EDUCAUSE+Review/ConfessionsofaPodcastJunk/39405>

Podcasts do not have to sound like the opening to Rick Wakeman's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. However technical and pedagogical expertise must be aligned.

Through the celebrations of social networking and user-generated content, quality, professionalism and technical expertise are re-entering the evaluative criteria. It is here that scholars can offer international leadership, not through celebrating the iPod but recognising the significant moment of disruption that the platform caused, providing an opportunity to reconsider the role of sound in education.⁵⁰ As Colleen Murrell realised,

Academics may also balk at the technological demands on their time. Preparing interesting and relevant podcasts does eat up the hours and so may not appeal to all lecturers as they juggle heavy workloads and the competing demands of teaching, research and administration. However media lecturers may see the equation differently as they tend to be more interested than most in keeping up with technological change.⁵¹

While the first decade of the 2000s in educational technology may be termed an 'iPod moment', students did not use it as a listening platform and academics moved away from the iPod as a recording device. The iPod is the symbol and activator of change, not the platform for change.

The iPod's use as a mobile platform is clear. But its role as a recorder is limited. Its quality is reasonable for student work and software can clean up the sound, but reasonably cheap and powerful stereo recorders are now available. A flexible and useful recorder for a diversity of environments is the Zoom H2

50 A. Kelman, in 'Rethinking the soundscapes: a critical genealogy of a key term in Sound Studies', *Senses and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2010, http://mediaarchaeologyofplace.org/downloads/readings/Kelman_RethinkingtheSoundscape2010.pdf, pp. 212–234, showed the complexity and specialness of sound studies. He argued that "“Sound studies” is an emergent field of scholarly research that has coalesced around two critical questions. The first asks, what does sound mean? This question can be approached in any number of ways and can evoke any number of conclusions about how, where, and why sound is produced, reproduced, circulated, imagined, transmitted, and understood. The second question is methodological: How do we, as scholars and students of sound, attend to meanings? How do we gather data and collect information? What frameworks or theories guide us? What models exist for studying sound?“, p. 213

51 C. Murrell, Interactive student podcasting: the emerging technology of choice. In Allison Oosterman, Dr Alan Cocker (eds.), *Journalism Downunder: the future of the media in the digital age. Proceedings of the 2nd joint JEANZ/JEA Conference*, School of Communication Studies, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand, 2006, http://artsweb.aut.ac.nz/journalism_conference/docs/paper-Murrell.doc

Recorder and its subsequent model the Zoom H4n. The Zoom H2 weighs 120 grams, has a power adapter and can use two AA standard batteries. It deploys a USB interface, permitting high quality recording with control over sound capture with four separate microphone capsules. Both models are inexpensive, intuitive and mobile. Yet even with the permeation of such hardware, the quality of material being released publically is still mixed. There is confusion between the availability of better hardware and software and the literacy and technical competency to deploy them well.

Clearly, editing software has also improved for podcasts and the construction of sonic files. While Audacity is a free, open source software, it requires the installation of a LAME MP3 encoder to overcome software patents. It is not as intuitive as other recording and editing programmes. While Adobe Audition – which now enfolds the Cool Edit Pro editing suite – is arguably the best software on the market, its complexity and scale is beyond what is required for many educational productions. A more appropriate and available software at one tenth the price is Acoustica's Mixcraft 5, which is an intuitive multi-track audio recorder and remixer. Magix Music Maker, along with their Soundpool collection, is another low cost option. While useful for musicians and remixers, it is also ideal for constructing podcasts and sonic material, composed of perhaps two or three sound tracks. It allows a simple mix down into MP3 files. There are also new opportunities for convergence of both sound and vision, beyond the static vodcast.⁵² These are only a few examples of hardware and software that are contributing to an expanding and dynamic space for sound-only platforms in education.

Sound is a mode of communication that slows the interpretation of words and ideas, heightens awareness of an environment and encourages quiet interiority. It punctuates buildings, workplaces, leisure complexes and family life. The visual bias in theories of truth and authenticity means that sounds are often decentred or silenced in empowered knowledge systems. Education rarely manages this sonic sophistication. Formal educational structures are geared to developing literacies in managing print. Too often, teachers cheapen soundscapes with a monotonic verbal delivery of lectures, interspersed with stammering and confusion, and do not open our ears to the other rhythms, melodies, intonations and textures in the sonic palette. But it is also important to remember that lecturing well is incredibly difficult. Inexperienced or nervous

52 For example Magix PhotoStory can allow the importing of MP3s such as oral history testimonies or voiceovers to accompany a series of captioned images. This simple programme permits not only a considered discussion of the relationship between sound and vision but a significant archive of photography with either existing or created sound. Digital storytelling and the creation of rich digital data is also possible through deploying Flip cameras and Magix's Movie Maker.

lecturers both perpetuate and increase their problems by students recognizing their fears or worries.

From: Cathy
Sent: 31 July 2010 13:31
To: Brabazon Tara
Subject: Socrates in Earpods?: The Ipodification of Education

Hello Tara,

I am a first year (mature age) student at the University of Western Australia. I have only just started a course in Landscape Architecture.

We were encouraged to read your paper titled: Socrates in Earpods?: The Ipodification of Education

I just wanted to let you know that I really enjoyed reading your paper and appreciated your point of view. I completed only one year of University over 10 years ago and what a difference those years have made! I have only attended three lectures in my first week at Uni and was shocked at the disrespect shown by some of the students (particularly in one of the larger lectures). Some students were working on graphic assignments on their computers, which were obviously for other units, others sent texts, and as the time came for the end of lecture, students began rustling papers, bags, phones, computers etc. to get out as soon as they had chance!

I felt devastated for the lecturer who seemed a little nervous and obviously disheartened to finish his last minute of lecture and in the end gave in!

It is depressing to think that technology is actually making people more disrespectful towards our instructors who have put in all that effort and preparation. I actually wish that these students had chosen to use iletecture (lectopia) and allowed those of us who are inspired by our lecturers to enjoy them. Perhaps if they didn't have the alternative, they would be more inspired to take in every word!

Rest assured that there are students who do appreciate all the hard work and overtime you put in!

Thanks again

Students returning to study are always a joy to have in a classroom. They are enthusiastic, motivated and have sacrificed a great deal to study. Cathy revealed all of those characteristics and indeed offered a digital dieting strategy of her own: 'Perhaps if they didn't have an alternative, they would be more inspired to

take in every word.’ What Cathy is suggesting is that students are disengaged (not new), bored in lectures (not new), disrespectful of the teacher (not new), but that they can now lose themselves in digital excesses while an analogue lecture is progressing because of the assumption that they can watch the lecture again via Lectopia. The statistics show that most students do not watch most of the lectures. In other words, Lectopia provides a digital safety net that disrupts the development of analogue skills in time management, note taking and respect for the expertise of others.

The i-lecture, which was subsequently rebranded as Lectopia, was an example of how the urgent yet undertheorised need to gather ‘online materials’ from academic staff resulted in low quality resources. The system was developed so that it could be automated and not reliant on academics ‘ruining’ the recording and distribution. This desire for standardisation rather than standards marginalised the complex relationship between media and education, but created a pattern that has naturalized the recording of lectures.

There are alternatives. The first form of sonic sessions I used from 1995 on analogue cassette was a short introduction to a week’s teaching. It was a way to orient students into the material. The goal, particularly for first years, was to use a sound-only platform to interrupt their everyday auditory and visual experiences to prepare them for more formal, disciplinary literacies involving the encoding and decoding of text. In MA teaching, I use sound in more diverse ways. Firstly, it has a role in orienting students into postgraduate education, making them aware of expectations and levels and standards of reading and writing.⁵³ Secondly, sonic media provide alternative platforms to express information, defamiliarising the relationship between signifier and signifieds, to provide assistance for students facing print-based challenges or who are working in diverse languages.

An imperative of my use of sound for fifteen years has been to avoid replicating either analogue lectures or seminars. I believe in the physicality of education, the importance of a group of people gathering in real time and space. I believe in the importance of gestures, expressions and non-verbal communication that are not deployed in sound-only media. Obviously sonic media have disadvantages, and the key is to use them selectively to boost strengths and also to minimise the consequences of blindness. Throughout my work with online education, I have rarely recorded – or believed in recording – lectures.⁵⁴ Writing text for the ear and text for a multi-sensory synchronous

53 T. Brabazon and M. Winter, Dissertation Orientation Session, Tara Brabazon’s Podcast, *Libsyn*, February 2011, <http://tarabrazon.libsyn.com/dissertation-orientation-session>

54 There are occasions when time-shifting lectures can be valuable. In my career, the one occasion I recorded a lecture albeit with high quality sound and mixing was

lecture and seminar are two different modes of expression. Therefore the challenge was to find a way to configure and extend the sonic session I had used for over a decade. I required a larger sonic space – between 18–30 minutes in length – for a long session that was not a lecture. Much of the success of this process and learning outcomes was due to the research in the history of sound in education.

None of the staff involved in *Practising Media Research* had conducted any online learning or distance education before recording or delivering this course. Therefore, professional development for staff – through one to one discussion and modelling – was a priority.⁵⁵

Julie Doyle: I currently teach an MA module *Mediating the Environment* which is presented, it's not online. And now I feel not only more confident but I see the benefits of being able to deliver teaching through an online medium because it means more people can take part in this learning and teaching process. So, I would, it's definitely had an impact on my teaching in terms of thinking about turning one of my existing modules which is on-site into distance learning. And also just thinking about, in my own research as well, talking about criticising the visual, actually using a sonic medium, an online medium, made me think about ways in which I can actually use that medium in my own research and also my own teaching a lot more.⁵⁶

This method of professional development was important for research active and inactive staff to gain assistance in reconnecting teaching and research, and aligning

through an institutional timetabling error. In one of my first year courses, Thinking Pop, a three week mid-semester break was followed by the two final weeks of semester that each featured Monday public holidays. Therefore, students would miss out on the final two weeks of their teaching and receive no lectures for five weeks. Therefore I recorded the last two lectures and released them to the students before their mid-semester break. This meant that students were not held back in completing their assessment. It was not ideal. But the capacity to time-shift the last two lectures meant that students at least had access to this material. To hear these sessions, please refer to 'Too much goose fat' and 'You can't be neutral on a moving train', <http://tarabrazon.libsyn.com/webpage>.

55 Y. Zhao and G. Cziko found three conditions to be met for staff to enact professional development to use new platforms. Firstly, staff must believe it can meet higher level goals than other methods. Secondly, they must believe that it will not affect other higher learning goals. Finally, they must feel confident that they hold the ability and resources to use it. Please refer to Y. Zhao and G. Cziko, 'Teacher adoption of technology: a perceptual control theory perspective', *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2001.

56 'Tara Brabazon talks with Julie Doyle about using sonic media to teach visuality', *Internet Archive*, <http://www.archive.org/details/TaraBrabazonTalksToJulieDoyleAboutUsingSonicMediaToTeachVisuality>

research with the international scholarly community. While bringing research inactive and early career researchers to increased productivity were incidental benefits of creating this new module, *Practising Media Research* became a portal for teaching-led research and professional development for staff. It brought them to the early stages of writing and moved them into research activity. Significantly, staff only had to offer one week on their specialism. Therefore, they did not have the burden of delivering a new, full, online Masters module, but could attempt a combination of a known area of research interest on an unknown platform and in a new teaching mode. Innovative modes of thinking emerged from this model of learning, promoting the theorisation of alternatives.

The other key principle besides not replicating a lecture structure was to slow the learning experience. Obviously, accelerated, expedited, contracted, applied and work-led learning has dominated our universities. As early as 1990, Alvin Toffler realised that ‘the metabolism of knowledge is moving faster’.⁵⁷ John Tomlinson confirmed that ‘acceleration rather than deceleration has been the constant leitmotiv of cultural modernity’.⁵⁸ Indeed, it now appears that Virilio’s ‘city of the instant’⁵⁹ houses our universities. My intention through this sonic mode of teaching methods was to intervene in the speed of data extraction and just-in-time learning to ensure that students slowed their engagement with ideas. If they did not listen to the session, then they could not gather enough information to understand the readings or participate in the online forum,⁶⁰ which became the spine of social and intellectual engagements for the first semester of the course. Over 800 posts on the forum were made through the semester in which the course first operated. By releasing the content more

57 A. Toffler, *Powershift*, (New York: Bantam, 1991), <http://www.scribd.com/doc/7000495/Alvin-Toffler-Power-Shift>

58 J. Tomlinson, *The culture of speed: the coming of immediacy*, (London: Sage, 2007), p. 1

59 P. Virilio, *Pure war*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p.28

60 The forum was an integral part of this module. It is the component that I will work on in future years. The participation was strong – but uneven. There were – as always – lurkers and uneven participation from week to week. But through the semester, over 800 posts were recorded from the students in response to the structured questions I asked them. It also provided a great opportunity for students to engage other scholars regardless of their enrolled mode. However I do note Fei Gao and David Wong’s fascinating work in ‘Student engagement in distance learning environments; a comparison of threaded discussion forums and text-focused Wikis’ *First Monday*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 2008, <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2018/1921>. Their discussion of threaded discussion fora, text-based wikis generally and seedwikis in particular (www.seedwiki.com) is important. The direct engagement with particular portions of text is useful and I will investigate this potential in future offerings.

slowly, at a pace directed by the student, the module's presentation of methods started to weave through their other modules and interests.

Speed is integral to how we understand industrialisation, globalisation, modernity and knowledge. Much of education is based on taking ideas and moving them around space and through time. The dominant media of an era is often the channel and metaphor for this moving knowledge, with participatory media platforms like Twitter and YouTube being recent examples. Scrolls, books, newspapers and television were earlier modes. Perhaps the most significant sensibility of modernity is movement: of goods services, money, information and people. An arc beyond the local creates formal and informal pathways linking spaces. Transportation systems and technology increase not only the speed at which change takes place, but also the consciousness of change. If digital dieting was to occur for these research methods students, then the first intervention was to remove the eyes from learning, reduce the senses involved in teaching and defamiliarise their engagement with ideas. The result of this platform selection was not only digital dieting – less information was available – but that it was presented and revealed more slowly.

In thinking about time and learning, I made the decision to not make these method sessions into podcasts. I continue to use my phrase 'sonic sessions' to describe the genre. There was no RSS feed for a reason.⁶¹ Podcasting is like a sonic direct debit: we set it and it arrives without too much thought.⁶² I did not want the learning object to be pushed to students unconsciously, lying dormant and unheard on their hard drive. I wanted them to choose the time and place they listened to the session. It also ensured an independently timed progression through the course. However, I mobilised many of the attractions of podcasting, including the use of a plurality of voices, views, accents and programme lengths.

I also wanted the content to be mobile. As shown earlier in this chapter, research is revealing that students who are accessing podcasts are not listening

61 I was inspired by George Lorenzo, Diana Oblinger and Charles Dziuban's argument that 'With all these choices, do we really know what we are doing, whether the information is valid, or how best to use it?' in 'How choice, co-creation, and culture are changing what it means to be net savvy', *Educause Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2007, <http://www.educause.edu/apps/eq/eqm07/eqm0711.asp?bhcp=1>. Therefore, my goal was to ensure that some choice, pauses and stops were introduced into the process of both finding learning materials and engaging with them.

62 A paper from the Office of Technology for Education & Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence at Carnegie Mellon University confirmed that 'Only 20 per cent of students in the UW study listened to more than 75 per cent of recorded lectures', from 'Podcasting: a teaching with technology white paper', Office of Technology for Education & Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence, Carnegie Mellon University, 4 June, 2007

on the move, but at home and on their computers.⁶³ However my students did enjoy the time shifting capacities of learning. Mobility has been studied in methodical and innovative ways by John Urry⁶⁴ and his research colleagues at CeMoRe, the Centre for Mobility Research at the University of Lancaster. Their paradigmatic investigations have tempered mobile connectivity with mobile failure, and aligned transportation and communication systems. When placing attention on how people, money and ideas move, mobility becomes a new marker of class and power. Those who hold power have a choice to move. Those who lack power are immobile. Therefore an easy acceptance of mobile learning needs to be questioned. For part time, distance education students, it was a valuable service to create mobile content and they did use it.

Ironically, this capacity to slow learning is based on the speed of technological change – in both hardware and software. There has never been a better time to experiment with sound, education and research methods. Yet through all this planning and research into sound and education, the question is how students engaged with this way of teaching and learning.

The movement

There were some difficult transitions for the students to negotiate. As Henry Jenkins has stated, ‘Every risk you take comes with a price’.⁶⁵ Moving into this new way of teaching methods, some of the scholars who had enrolled directly from the undergraduate to postgraduate programme were inexperienced in online education and had to be scaffolded into participation. I took Amanda Berry’s advice.

As teacher educators begin to move away from traditional models of teaching about teaching to explore new ways of working with their students, many begin to experience feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty about how to proceed in this task.⁶⁶

63 ‘Podcasting: a teaching with technology white paper’, Office of Technology for Education & Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence, Carnegie Mellon University, 4 June, 2007, p. 6

64 An example of this research includes John Urry’s ‘The complexities of the global’, published by the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster UK, 2 July, 2004, <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/urry-complexities-global.pdf>

65 H. Jenkins, ‘The war between effects and meaning’, MIT, <http://web.mit.edu/cms/faculty/WarEffectMeaning.htm>

66 A. Berry, ‘Confidence and uncertainty in teaching about teaching’, *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2004, p. 152

When challenges emerge, it is important to remember the calibre of the preparation undertaken and the reasons for choosing this alternative mode of teaching and learning. While confidence is important, it is also necessary to watch, listen and hear what students are telling us.⁶⁷ I addressed problems early in the programme directly with the students. To assist staff in modelling the new method of teaching, I conducted the first two sessions, providing the introduction and the session on Unobtrusive Research Methods. The response was superb. However there were lurkers and I wanted to prompt them into a more active engagement with the materials.

From: T.M.Brabazon@brighton.ac.uk [mailto:T.M.Brabazon@brighton.ac.uk]
 Sent: Sat 18/10/2008 07:16
 To: "MJM01"
 Subject: Welcome to Week Three!!: MJM01

Good Morning Practising Media Researchers!

Now guys – we're about to enter WEEK THREE of practising media research. Make sure that you've heard the first two sonic sessions – done that reading – left a few comments and posts (big shout out to the guys who have been keeping me company!) and are READY TO GO into Visual Research Methods with Julie Doyle!

I'll be still lurking – so if you are catching up and leaving messages – we'll keep those parts of the course alive. That's the advantage of asynchronous methods.

I'll also be guiding you through the assignments in the next couple of weeks :) NO STRESS. I've been getting worried emails. NO STRESS – PROMISE. Really easy – and I'll guide you through them.

But remember guys – the great advantage of teaching methods in this way is that we don't have these dry and boring (!!!) discussions about methods (zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz). You will have access to these sonic sessions throughout the year(s), including during the writing of your dissertation. So you can keep returning to the ideas. All cool. You can work out what you think in stages – and apply what is useful.

67 Elizabeth Van Es and Miriam Gamoran Sherin argued that 'teaching is a complex activity. In any given lesson, teachers need to attend to what students are doing and saying, how they are thinking about the subject matter, what analogies or representations to use to best convey important ideas, and what experiences to provide students to engage them in learning', from 'Learning to notice: scaffolding new teachers' interpretations of classroom interactions', *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2002, p. 572

Therefore (and some of you have worked it out) the great advantage of this busy discussion forum is that we're creating a collective journal as we engage with each method. So you're helping each other to work out the strengths, weakness and problems of each method. I re-read the messages yesterday, and your insights are AMAZING. So remember to look back on what we've said about these methods when you come to write up assignments and do your dissertation. Paul and Lisa – you are doing some amazing work with URM and how you create a research question. Amazing.

But all of you are brilliant and really innovative people. And you're sharing great insights with each other. So if you haven't quite left your mark on the discussion forum – don't think it's too late and don't be frightened. Just have a go. It's a very supportive environment. So we'll all work together to create a great collective journal (and journey) through methods! Your ideas matter – a lot.

Have a lovely weekend. Drop me an email and say hi.

T

I also worked with individual students, particularly those who moved from the undergraduate to the postgraduate degree and needed a more detailed explanation for the transformation in how methods were taught.

From: Brabazon Tara
Sent: Fri 17/10/2008 03:45
To:
Subject: Checking in!!

Hey Jane -

Just doing my two weekly check in :) Hope you are well. It's given me so much happiness to see you every week – I cannot tell you. You are a real light in the darkness :)

The quick conversation I was going to have with you was over methods! I know for you – and Carol – the new way of teaching is a bit 'hoollleeee hehlllll' what's going on here. I realized yesterday – while doing our reading for Media Literacies by the way!!! – that I never explained to you WHY it is being taught this way. So this may help to explain and show what's going on – and why it won't bite ya!

The teaching of methods in this way – my idea originally came from Jan. We were in one of those course boards a couple of years ago. Jan

reported a series of problems with how methods were taught for the undergraduates. The things I remember were

1. students didn't come to the class
2. when students needed the methods for their dissertation – they couldn't remember them (!!) / or weren't there in the first place
3. the discussions were dry – they couldn't see how the methods were actually used
4. students didn't have much choice in methods – either discourse analysis or focus groups ;)
5. students were seriously bored by methods. Not a pleasant class.

So darl – when I came to think about how to construct the programme, I wanted to solve these problems in a fresh and new way. My priority – as you can see by the title – is to show students how to practise media research. I didn't want to create a disconnection between methods and applications. But for the masters – I wanted to create a series of seamless relationships. Students would see how the methods operate – and apply them to their own work RIGHT AT THE START.

Also, I wanted to widen the range of approaches. Particularly from a humanities side, you guys didn't see some of the most common methods in terms of action research, interdisciplinary popular cultural approaches, oral history, Unobtrusive Research Methods – so I wanted to make sure that they were there as well.

And the key – I wanted the students to be able to return to the sessions on methods throughout the masters. Whenever they needed them – I wanted them there. Also – I wanted a record of students' engagement with them – like a collective journal through the method. When students needed an approach – they could re-hear a session and look at the response from other students.

That's why I struck upon using the sonic sessions. Sound is an intimate medium. It can create a connection between ideas, and an intimacy between speaker and listener. Podcasts are called the medium of the whisper, which I like. But students could pause, rewind, fast forward and have a think. Then the guided questions through the forum would help them through the key issues of applying these ideas.

Hope that helps a bit. It just struck me yesterday that I never explained to you WHY I was using this method. And poor Carol was thinking – this is weird. Why is this all online???? So I thought I'd give you the rationale – so you can see what we're doing and why :)

Now let me know if I can do anything at all. I'm hearing that you're doing fabulously well :) And obviously the other students love ya like we all do. Let me know if I can do anything – and don't be worried about the

new teaching environment. It is like a collective journal. Everyone goes through the methods and helps each other. That's all. No marks on it – nothing decided – just people from all over the world working together :)

Bit better???

T

The reply suggested that the explanation did work. The goal was to be overt and clear in the rationale for this mode of teaching and learning. In future presentations of this module, I explained the reasons for this way of teaching in greater depth, rather than allowing the rationale to be assumed rather than expressed.

From: Jane
Sent: Sat 18/10/2008 10:13
To: Brabazon Tara
Subject: Re: Checking in!!

Helloooooo,

Aw thanks for emailing me about this – I really appreciate it! The reasoning behind it makes much more sense now I've read through it and had a think about it, and I think that doing the module online is actually a good idea, even though I'm finding it a bit freaky! You're totally right about the fact that students didn't go to the lessons last year, and the discussion board/sonic sessions (which I really like) will be a brill resource come assignment time.

Sorry that I've not been more active on the discussion board. I won't bore you with my excuses, but hopefully from next week onwards I'll have a bigger input! Although I am still a bit intimidated by some peoples' wonderfully intelligent answers – everyone is very eloquent in their responses (I wish I was!).

Anyway, all is good. Really enjoying things so far, and loving our Monday sessions! :-)

See you soon,

Through these early teething problems, advantages emerged very quickly. The on and off campus students had an opportunity to converse and debate with others. English as second language scholars could orient themselves into the university community by repeatedly hearing sessions rather than being locked into a single lecture and seminar in real time. However, for continuing

students who had experienced the other version of the undergraduate methods module, the difference in our mode was not only productive, but revelatory.

Tina: At first I thought woow it's online. Technology. But I found it made you learn more, made you interact more, and be more active, I think, learning. I learnt more for it being on the internet because I had to actively – I could do it any time of the day cause doing it at 9am in the morning, when we used to do it before, it was quite hard to motivate yourself at that time of the morning to learn that stuff. Just being able to sit at home and do it at your own pace and sort of ... it just made it clearer, I think. You have to be more active. Active learning, eh?

The other advantage of asynchronous delivery that I was not expecting is that a few students fell behind the teaching schedule in the first couple of weeks. While we did run an orientation session, we probably needed to ensure that the students were more organised in their work patterns. They were enjoying their new programme, new friends and new city too much. However the advantage of the asynchronous delivery is that when I became aware that they needed to engage in greater depth from the first two weeks, they were able to catch up to the more disciplined scholars and continue their work. Also, hearing actually existing case studies of how research methods operate in scholarly life was as appropriate as I hoped it would be, introducing students to a range of staff and giving them a stream of contacts. For journalism and public relations students in particular, the applications of research methods connected their past experiences *in* the media with their current projects *with* the media.

Students started to enjoy and understand the diverse ways in which sound was being used in the Masters. I still deployed short sonic sessions in the other modules, but with diverse goals. The use of sound in discussing assignments seemed to help as students heard the same information from a study guide in a different way. Many students put the sonic sessions on a loop while they were writing or drafting their papers and projects, to keep themselves on track. Their movement in thinking was also a movement in staff thinking. We all started to consider with much more reflection and consideration which medium suited a research project and learning moment. The staff did well, considering the newness of the mode of teaching. For research inactive staff, it formed a pivotal moment to reconnect them with thinking, reading and writing. However it was amongst the students that the magic started.

The magic

After the first week of teaching, it became clear that something extraordinary was happening amongst the students. Firstly, they started to independently record all their seminars and logged them into a private portal.

Our site is ready!

To members of MA Creative Media

Hey everyone! Just a quick note to let you know that the site is ready and up. You can start using it immediately but you will have to register first. I am slowly uploading the recordings from the seminar as I type this so everything I have should be up by tomorrow. I need some volunteers to record the seminars I do not attend. Anyone? Please? So far I have recruited the lovely Jane for Mediating the Environment (if I remember well) but I need more so we can cover everything.

I have a recorder we can all use and maybe Tara can lend us hers too if there is a clash or the exchange of the recorder failed somewhere along the way (shit happens, ya know!).

Anyway, head over to www.macreativemedia.co.uk and register yourself (there is a link to register under the login box) so you can access the site. I will make sure to upgrade your account to "Editor" so you can post anything you want also. Feel free to grab the RSS feed if you are into the whole RSS scene but you may have problems with it since the site is password protected. I am looking into a notification feature so we can all be emailed when there's fresh content added on the site.

That's all I can think of right now.

Take care!

The other students started to record everything. We added library sessions and comments to the portal. Everyone gained from this commitment but the distance education students became the biggest beneficiaries of his work.

DIGITAL DIETING

From: Lisa
Sent: Thu 23/10/2008 00:07
To: Brabazon Tara
Subject: RE: bloggity blog

Bugger. ok. Sorry, I got sucked into a little vortex of analysis with mX there (I do it in life also :)

Next post going up today. Thanks for your help and guidance. I really don't want to be the special needs student!
Am poking around the site – HURRRRRRAH for hearing you all!!!!

Remarkably, they continued to record sessions all year, right until the final week of seminars.

From: Paul

Sent: Fri 15/05/2009 22:00
Subject: Approaching the end of term!
Hello to everyone!

Right, there are a couple of rough weeks ahead filled with deadlines and general (sometimes weather induced) insanity so I thought I'd try to see if I can keep/put things in place for you to help out. I keep asking myself when will the weather realise that it's mid-May and act appropriately. Of course, when the sun finally comes out I start sneezing and generally become an overflowing snot machine and curse all the Gods of Olympus as I try to wheeze some oxygen into my system and up to my brain. Hurrah for hay fever.

Anyway, back to the point. This is a notification email to let you all know that I finally had some time today to convert and upload this week's seminar recordings. With the exception of Julia's module for which we have one last seminar next week, these are the last recorded sessions for this semester. I am sending this update to all of you so you know everything is up to date on the website (<http://maccreativemedia.co.uk>) and you can have a listen before completing your assignments. Keep in mind that all the recordings from the first semester are still online as well. I will keep those up until at least the end of September so we all have access to them. They might be useful when working on your dissertations.

That's all from me for now. Best of luck to all of you on your assignments! Keep it together and see you soon!

The distance education students appreciated everyone's work and again thanked Paul for all his efforts.

From: Lisa
 Sent: Sat 16/05/2009 05:32
 To:
 Subject: RE: Approaching the end of term!

I'd just like to second that sentiment. Your efforts have really made the difference for this distance student. I listen to you all on my daily commute, and really feel a part of the action.

w00t!
 x

This idea was completely derived from the students, aligning the computer science expertise from one student with the design experience and educational interests of others. The students also started to independently experiment with sound and recording devices. Basically, they started to record everything. They asked me to teach them how to use a range of mixing software before and after seminars.

There were other surprises and moments of magic. Oral history, which I thought would be a minor research area, became the method most specialised on for their research. Significantly, and startlingly, the conventional problems of creative-led or practice-led research, captured best through the disconnection of artefact and exegesis, never appeared in any of the student's research. They seemed to – naturally it appeared – understand how to align creative work, method and the configuration of an exegesis. There are probably many causes for this ease of movement between platforms but one reason must be that they were taught methods in a way that was applicable, challenging, malleable and living, rather than dry, abstract and unused. There was no gap between theory and production, analysis and practice.

On the basis of our experimentation with methods, the entire group aligned sonic media and education. The year became punctuated by sound, aurality and orality. What Francisco Lopez described as “blind” listening⁶⁸ started to emerge. The assignments from the methods module were remarkable. As an example, one of my students offered an experiment in oral history methods, recording the same testimony in three ways – sound only, sound and vision, vision only with close-captioning – to investigate the different type of evidence and interpretation that could be gained from the diverse sources. Another

68 F. Lopez, 'Profound listening and environment sound matter', in C. Cox and D. Warner (eds.), *Audio Culture*, (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 82

aligned form and content by interviewing the manager of the North-West sound archive. Form and content aligned through oral history and sonic media.

Our academic culture became more audible and created slow and conscious spaces for interpretation, silence, abstraction and analysis. While Paul Carter stated that 'listening becomes a cultural work where the ground rules are not established',⁶⁹ he also realised that active listening is situated in cultural, historical and social environments. It provides an opportunity to create 'new symbols and word senses'.⁷⁰ The student innovations triggered a feedback loop for staff who also became inspired by the diversity, range and quality of assignments. While I had always used popular music, oral history and recorded speeches as punctuation in both my teaching and research, we were able to extend far beyond these conventional usages. Our project commenced with a desire to solve problems in the way in which we taught research methods. The teaching-led research literature and media literacy theory provided the foundation, as did models for transferable learning object and open educational resources.

Through the year, and inspired by the students' enthusiasm for diverse sounds and voices in our Masters, I continued to work with them, asking how I could help them by developing time- and space-shifting genres for sonic education. I started to conduct specialist micro-interviews on particular topics that can be used for a specific goal in a lecture theatre or the more intimate environment of a seminar room and then transferred through the Web to wider and different international usage.⁷¹ Students listened to these micro-teaching moments and then commenced their seminar discussion. They could then return to this micro-interview outside the seminar. This new genre was based on a simple idea, asking one question and receiving one answer. Of less than two minutes in duration, they introduce new voices into teaching spaces and generate sonic learning objects to augment print-based texts and direct students to alternative learning experiences. While I started to use this mode in all my undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, it had great success in the Masters. Students were reading Steve Redhead's 'The Art of the Accident'⁷² to understand the relationship between terrorism and cities. It was incredibly useful for students to hear how ideas can be transposed into publications and research deployed in

69 P. Carter, 'Ambiguous traces, mishearing, and auditory space', in V. Erlmann (ed.), *Hearing Cultures*, (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 44

70 *ibid.*, p. 45

71 While many of these sessions were recorded, two examples from Steve Redhead are 'Art of the Accident', Internet Archive, <http://www.archive.org/details/ArtOfTheAccident> and 'Cities and Popular Music', <http://www.archive.org/details/CitiesAndPopularMusic>

72 S. Redhead, 'The art of the accident', *Fast Capitalism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2006, http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/2_1/redhead.html

new contexts. Through the mobility of sonic media, expertise could be brought into the teaching and learning space, while also enlarging the genres of online learning objects and online learning resources

Again, this innovation in the use of sonic media provided another opportunity for staff development. Staff who may have been apprehensive or fearful of constructing a full *Practising Media Research* session could be scaffolded into this longer recording. The informality of one question and one answer, taking less than two minutes, is a way to lift the confidence of staff in deploying new media platforms, while also increasing the resources available to students. It is another way to enable research inactive staff to express an idea or disseminate works in progress.

I also developed a liminal length of presentation between the short sonic sessions and the longer offering for *Practising Media Research*. Being of less than ten minutes, they formed a series of public education sonic sessions, held on the Internet Archive with the wraparound from my website and an RSS feed for a podcast series. The topics included education, libraries, popular culture and social justice.⁷³ The Sonic Lab from my website⁷⁴ created an opportunity to share these experiments. During this period, I was a regular columnist for the *Times Higher Education*. For readers with print challenges, I recorded the fortnightly columns so that a more appropriate platform for delivery was available. While screen readers are available, when the writer of the text reads it, greater meaning was added to the process. From these examples, students also started to use sound for their dissertation supervisions, dissemination of their research and providing an insight into the process of supervision for early career scholars.

A book by Jeff Jarvis asked a provocative question in its title ‘What would Google do?’ Probably, my method of teaching research methods would suit the supercorporation. It solved a problem. It opened students to a range of voices, views and resources. It also inspired them to think that they could take their voice, views and resources and create independent research. It was mayhem. The timescale of development, the lack of equipment and the clunky portal did not bode well. Yet we survived. The students thrived and succeeded and we built on this first experiment in new and fascinating ways. This mayhem with methods embodied Frauke Behrendt’s reading of our moment in educational history.

It is not only the old technology of the computer and the Internet moving to new social and geographic context by becoming mobile. Something new is

73 Examples include T. Brabazon, ‘Analogue ways of thinking’, *Internet Archive*, <http://www.archive.org/details/AnalogueWaysOfThinking> and ‘Dust bowl democracy’, *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/DustBowlDemocracy>

74 Sonic Lab, Brabazon.net, <http://www.brabazon.net/soniclab>

emerging from this, for which a lot of new terminology has been tried out, but only little appropriate metaphors have been found so far.⁷⁵

Perhaps attention to the dynamism of sonic platforms, rather than similes and metaphors of the internet, may be more productive in tracking the changing relationships between media and education. Staff and students transformed universities into sonic laboratories for hearing, listening and thinking. While the experiments continue, this first moment summoned consciousness and reflection, change and success.

75 F. Behrendt, 'From calling a cloud to finding the missing track', *Mobile Music Workshop*, 2005, http://www.viktoria.se/fal/events/mobilemusic/papers/Behrendt_mmt05.pdf

Chapter Four

Learning to leisure? When social media becomes educational media

Education has always inspired fear among those who want to keep the existing distributions of power and wealth as they are.¹

Howard Zinn

Many narratives have attended the rise of the read-write web and social media. Finance capitalism, the credit crunch and crash demonstrated (again) the volatility of the market and the consequences on the public sphere of private (and corporate) behaviour. Creative industries strategies and policies attempted to inject entrepreneurialism and urban regeneration into post-manufacturing cities and nations. Such policies and contexts blur and transform the relationship between work and leisure. The economic focus on fashion and music, sport and tourism creates a culture where one group's work enables another group's leisure. Through using a mobile telephone such as an iPhone or BlackBerry, work is displaced into leisure time. Indeed, the confluence of consumerism and non-working time means that leisure is now traded for the more ambivalently constituted label of 'lifestyle'.²

This chapter in *Digital Dieting* explores what happens when social media conflate with educational media.³ Social media sites – like Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, FourSquare and Twitter – create a tapestry of friendship, humour and community between digitally literate citizens around the world. But the role and value of these platforms and portals for education, teaching and learning

1 H. Zinn, *On democratic education*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), p. 87

2 For a remarkable history of the word 'lifestyle' (and indeed 'life style'), please refer to N. Maycroft, 'Cultural consumption and the myth of life-style', *Capital and Class*, No. 84, Winter 2004

3 David Buckingham, in *Beyond technology: children's learning in the age of digital culture*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), realised that 'Advocates of educational technology have frequently looked to children's leisure-time experiences as a source of new approaches to learning', p. 99

is neither self-evident nor obvious.⁴ Therefore, I return to a key early text in the sociology of education: Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour*. Willis addressed the injustices within and beyond school. He probed how teaching practices and the 'resistive' behaviours of young men ensured that they are prevented from – and indeed prevent themselves – from gaining social mobility. Everyday practices such as smoking, drinking, truancy and swearing undermined their capacity to improve economic and social status. It is appropriate to return to Willis's argument and explore the new strategies for avoidance, resistance and denial. I track the movement from learning to labour to learning to leisure.

Facebook matters to this chapter, as it matters to schools and universities. By 2011, it was reported that one in every eight minutes spent online is on Facebook. Students could be listening to an online lecture or reading a refereed article through Google Scholar. Instead, they are choosing to visit Facebook, which is replacing both Google and Yahoo in total time spent online.⁵ Being on Facebook has become a default behaviour for millions of citizens around world and a default sign in option for myriad websites. Facebook is not the problem, but assuming that anything is intrinsically educational on the site is a concern. It is possible to use it in ways that are beneficial for education. However social media are not intrinsically or inevitably educational media. The difference between these formations is the focus of this chapter.

4 This chapter, like much of this book, attempts to create a moment of consciousness in platform selection. Simply because content can be digitally migrated between platforms does not mean that it should be. Besides acknowledging the scholarship of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan in this chapter, I wished to log the importance of Gunther Kress's research in many of the arguments made, particularly his conceptualization of multimodality. Kress outlined the use of multimodality as, it 'can tell us what modes are used: it cannot tell us about this different style; it has no means to tell us what the difference might mean', from G. Kress, *Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*, (London: Routledge, 2010), p. xiii. The aim of this book is to start to configure how these different modes and style can be used in a way that enables learning and information literacy.

5 M. Kagan, '12 Essential Facebooks Stats', *Hubspot Blog*, May 31, 2011, <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/14715/12-Essential-Facebook-Stats-Data.aspx>

Facing off

In my teaching I never concealed my political views: my detestation of war and militarism, my anger at radical inequality, my belief in a democratic socialism and in a rational and just distribution of the world's wealth . I would scrupulously uphold their right to disagree with me.⁶

Howard Zinn

Time Magazine's person of the year is always an intriguing if confrontational decision. Most years, different versions of our collective histories and identities are offered, represented by one person. It is often an unsatisfying selection. The choice for 2010 was no exception. There were two men who each captured a particular refrain and rhythm of that time. Mark Zuckerberg became the 2010 Time Person of the Year, capturing the rise and rise of Facebook and how it has punctuated the life and relationships of – by conservative estimates – 500 million people who are active users. But Facebook as the most popular end of social media also signifies a blurring of work and leisure, formality and informality, seriousness and triviality. Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell referred to this formation as *The Narcissism Epidemic*.

Over the last few years, technology has allowed Americans to take self-expression to new heights with personal websites, Facebook pages, videos, and blogging. The media has also shifted towards self-expression because opinion is a lot cheaper to obtain than actual news. All this self-expression would be fine if what was expressed had some value, but that is often not the case.⁷

A large section of the global population has chosen not to manage data, but to photograph it, tag it, link it, comment on it and circulate it to friends, friends of friends, and friends of friends of friends. In other words, our information circulates to people we do not know.

The reason why some controversy accompanied the awarding of Zuckerberg with Person of the Year is that a majority of voters opted for another man: Julian Assange. Although charged with – depending on the report – refusing to wear a condom during sex, complaining about wearing a condom during sex or wearing a condom that broke during sex, the urgency of the extradition to Sweden and publicity that surrounded this case was not about a prophylactic.

6 Zinn, *On democratic education*, p. 89

7 J. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, (New York: Free Press, 2009), p. 64

In a way though, perhaps it is. The concern and fear is a lack of barriers – to information rather than sexual pleasure.

Like Facebook, the Wikileaks scandal demonstrates the cost of merging work and leisure, with consequences for how citizens commit to and manage digitally-enabled mobile information, particularly when confidential. The accused leaker – Bradley Manning – arrived at work with (supposedly) a Lady Gaga compact disc to listen to while on the job.⁸ Instead, the disc was blank and at least 260,000 pages of confidential diplomatic and military documents and a disturbing video of United States soldiers killing Iraqi civilians were allegedly burnt onto a CD Rom and walked out of the building under the cover of Gaga.

Zuckerberg and Assange capture our relationship with data, information and knowledge. They also carry the enthusiasms of right wing and left wing libertarians in the last twenty years. For libertarians of various political persuasions, information and money can, should and must move freely between borders, even though people do not. Border management is easier than data management. The key question to ask is simply because digital information can move between platforms, should it? It is important to think about the decisions made before collecting, shaping, aggregating and disseminating. If the goal is information that is consistent, rigorous, useful and verified through quality assurance protocols, then there must be recognition of the barriers and blockages that create inconsistent data streams. As the social web has proliferated, the capacity to manage information and prevent inconsistency and disintegration of data is more complex. It is also more difficult to judge and evaluate valuable information. Therefore, in understanding the proliferation of ‘the social’ through working and educational environments, embodied by Facebook, it is first necessary to consider the relationship between form and content, medium and information.

Content is king in the information age. Phrases proliferate such as user generated content, content providers and content management. This means that the form, the platform and the medium have been neglected, with the fallback cliché to McLuhan’s ‘the medium is the message’.⁹

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any

8 ‘Bradley Manning in his own words’, *The Guardian*, 1 December, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/01/us-leaks-bradley-manning-logs>

9 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The extensions of man*, (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994), p. 7

extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.¹⁰

His argument worked well in the investigation of the electric light. It has no content. It only is ‘noticed as a medium’ when deployed in radio and television, telegraph and telephone.¹¹ From such examples, form is content. The slippage in this argument is aggravated because it is so easy to move data across digital platforms. It literally bounces around social media. Retweeting is an effective metaphor for this practice. Indeed, when delving more deeply into McLuhan’s *Understanding Media* beyond the rightly famous first chapter,¹² a fascinating argument is offered that contributes much to the development of new strategies for digital dieting. In chapter six, McLuhan explores ‘Media as translators’. He argues that ‘technologies are ways of translating one kind of knowledge into another mode’.¹³ In other words, a metaphor (medium is the message) has been tempered by the verb ‘translate’. The medium is not the message. Media translate meaning. Experience is translated and this translation process enables ‘explicitness’.¹⁴ Extending this argument, content migration between platforms ensures that the ideologies become overt through the movement.

While McLuhan provides a model of translation for social media environments, he had a senior colleague whose research is even more appropriate in providing inspiration for digital dieting models in an era of information glut.¹⁵ Publishing his last book more than sixty years ago, Harold Innis embodied a particular moment in Canadian history, thinking about cities, regions and the nation in a way that balanced the double squeeze from Britain and the United States.¹⁶ It is no coincidence that he wrote about the Greek and Roman Empires,¹⁷ exploring how oral communication sustains cultural

10 *ibid.*, p. 7

11 *ibid.*, p. 9

12 Nicholas Carr, in *The shallows: how the internet is changing the way we think, read and remember* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010), offered a re-assessment of McLuhan in the early stages of the book. He described *Understanding Media* as ‘oracular, gnomic, and mindbending, the book was a perfect product of the sixties, that now distant decade of acid trips and moon shots, inner and outer voyaging’, p. 1

13 McLuhan, *op. cit.*, p. 56

14 *ibid.*, p. 57

15 R. Babe, ‘Innis and the emergence of Canadian Communication/Media Studies’, *Global Media Journal Canadian Edition*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2008, http://www.gmj.uottawa.ca/0801/inaugural_babe.pdf, pp. 9-23,

16 D. Creighton, *Harold Adams Innis: Portrait of a Scholar*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978)

17 H. Innis, *Empire & Communications*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972)

practices, while written communication sustains power and respect.¹⁸ Offering ‘a plea for time’ and ‘the problem of space’, Innis took risks. He had – to summon Edward Said – a late style.¹⁹

A distinguished Canadian historian and political economist,²⁰ in the last decade of his life, he moved from the debates and subjects where he held credibility and a reputation and entered a new field: the study of communication.²¹ At its most basic, he investigated the relationship between the medium of communication and the configuration of identity. When reviewing his career, there is an early Innis and a late Innis. His PhD investigated the building of the Canadian railway system. His other major projects explored the fur trade and cod fisheries. Innis linked transportation and communication. He was interested in how products and people move. The ‘later Innis’ focused on the consequences of that movement. The scale of his achievements is often undervalued²² through a precursory paragraph leading into the main man: Marshall McLuhan.²³ But Innis is much more than an academic John the Baptist to McLuhan’s Jesus.²⁴

18 Please refer to Paul Heyer’s, *Harold Innis*, (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 2003), particularly the fifth chapter, ‘Time, Space, and the Oral Tradition’.

19 E. Said, *On late style*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2007)

20 H. Innis, *Essays in Canadian Economic History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956)

21 W. Christian, ‘Preface’, from *The idea file of Harold Adams Innis*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980)

22 Alexander Watson referred to Harold Innis as *Marginal Man*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006)

23 One statement demonstrates the tissue of connectivity between Innis and McLuhan. At the start of *The Medium is the Massage* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), McLuhan stated that ‘societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the medium by which media communicate than by the content of the communication’, p. 7. The relationship between Innis’s ‘bias’ of communication and McLuhan’s ‘shaping’ is clear.

24 Very few scholars dominate their disciplines. Even fewer are able to impact as many disciplines as Innis: economics, history, communication, cultural studies, media studies and Canadian studies. *The Bias of Communication* is unarguably one of the most influential books to have been published in Canada. Two others, *Changing Concepts of Time* and *Empire and Communications* are still in print. In 1951, McLuhan wrote to Innis and stated that his work was so important that it would be the basis for ‘organizing an entire school of studies’. He was right. One year after Innis’s death, McLuhan affirmed that, ‘If one were asked to state briefly the basic change which occurred in the thought of Innis in his last decade it could be said that he shifted his attention from the trade-routes of the external world to the trade-routes of the mind’, M. McLuhan, ‘The Later Innis’, *Queen’s Quarterly*, Vol. 60, 1953, p. 385

Innis was more careful than McLuhan, and more conservative.²⁵ Instead of McLuhan's clichéd – and brilliant – phrase 'the medium is the message', Innis affirmed that each communication medium has a 'bias'.²⁶ McLuhan was intellectually generous to Innis and wrote an evocative and powerful introduction to *The Bias of Communication*.

Innis takes much time to read if he is read on his own terms. That he deserves to be read on his own terms becomes obvious as soon as that experiment is tried even once. So read, he takes time but he also saves time. Each sentence is a compressed monograph. He includes a small library on each page, and often incorporates a small library of references on the same page in addition. If the business of the teacher is to save the student's time, Innis is one of the greatest teachers on record.²⁷

McLuhan is accurate in his judgment. Innis is not easy to read. His prose is dense and he constructs intricate and understated arguments, verified by dense footnotage and examples. But there is slice of a clear and brilliant thesis that cuts through his latter works. Whether a society has a bias to space or time – geography or history – is enabled through the dominant medium of communication. A space bias, like ancient Rome, moves information through space via the written word. The Ancient Greeks were an example of an oral society, maintaining knowledge in a community through storytelling, song and conversation.²⁸ They demonstrated a time bias.

The dominant media of a time influences the type of empire constructed. It was McLuhan who overlaid technological determinism on this relationship. Instead, Innis was interested in the senses: what happens when a culture is organised for the ear rather than the eye? Innis believed that the best practice was a mix of space and time-binding media (parchment and papyrus, writing and talking). This combination was a way to ensure that the biases were balanced. The dominance of the web in today's culture would worry him, but the way in which oral and aural cultures are surviving online would be of

25 For a discussion of the relationship between Innis and McLuhan, and the legacy of both, please refer to G. Patterson, *History and Communications: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, the interpretation of history*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990)

26 Gunther Kress developed a similar concept: 'modal ensembles', from *Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*, (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 28

27 M. McLuhan, 'Introduction to the Bias of Communication', *Unbound*, Volume Eight, (Ginkgo Press), p. 8

28 H. Innis, *Changing concepts of time*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004)

interest.²⁹ For example, Google Maori was released on 23 July, 2008, creating a digital Aotearoa that was distinct from e-New Zealand. The Maori language has since been added to the Google Translator toolkit. Such space-biased media can enable the survival of oral culture of formerly colonised people. There is not – yet – an Inuit Google. But Nunavut names are being added to Google Earth. Places are gaining a(n oral) history.

The embedding of time-biased sound, stories and memories into space-biased media may provide Innis's balance. For him, oral traditions blocked monopolies of knowledge. He realised, 'we have no history of conversation or of the oral tradition except as they are revealed darkly through the written or the printed word'.³⁰ This body of research, revealing the biases of communication, emerged from Canada and specifically Toronto.³¹ The specific problem of being Canadian in the early twentieth century, pulled between the Empires of Britain and the United States, was intensified in Toronto, which was so close to New York but distant from London. Above Toronto was a huge country with a small population. It was difficult and expensive to move goods, services and information through the nation. There was discontent between East and West, North and South and Quebec and the rest.³²

29 Tom Wolfe's 'Foreword' from Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, (MIT Press, 2005), asked how McLuhan would engage with the Web. He stated, 'Dear God – if only Marshall had been alive during the 1990s! What heaven those ten years would have been for him! How he would have loved the Web! What a shimmering Oz he would have turned his global village into! Behold! The fulfilment of prophecies made thirty years before! The dream of the mystical unity of all mankind – made real!' p. xxii

30 H. Innis, *The bias of communication*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006: 1951), p. 9

31 To see the importance of Canada and Toronto in international communication studies, please refer to D. Robinson (ed.), *Communication history in Canada*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

32 Toronto mattered to Innis's research. He had a gift that most of us will never experience. He was professor at the same institution for decades, remaining at the University of Toronto from 1920 until his death in 1952. He fulfilled the roles of Head of the Department of Political Economy and Dean of Graduate Studies. His career emerged at the time that British-born and educated academics held senior posts in Canadian universities because they were supposedly superior. Yet Innis committed to his nation and city. He was an undergraduate at McMaster when it was based in Toronto, only leaving the city for two years to complete a doctorate in Chicago. This stability of employment matters to academics. There is a continuity of students, library facilities, transportation and home life. That ability to develop projects through decades may never return. Innis's long-term contribution remains a part of the University, with a College named in his honour. Toronto became a centre for studying the social effects of media technologies.

The *Bias of Communication* is an influential and incisive book to manage information obesity and configure strategies for digital dieting. One profound consequence of the read-write web is that sound and vision are embedded into space-biased media. A different way of thinking and hearing may emerge. For the management and shaping of information, his bias of communication is instructive. The read-write web requires a balance between space and time shifting media. Innis helps scholars and citizens understand what happens when conversational media are used for more than conversation. There are great benefits in the productive use of social media for branding, marketing and advertising. But there are extraordinary risks in information management for citizens without information literacy and without personal experience in protocols for data sharing derived from analogue and oral modes of communication. Serious mistakes are made. What happens when social media are used in education by students who do not understand the bias of communication? To provide some nested examples of what happens when the bias of communication is ignored, it is beneficial to enter Facebook. Here are some examples.

I maintain a Facebook profile. It lets me stay in touch with my family and friends in Australia and the thousands of students I have taught throughout the world. I made a single rule with regard to my students and Facebook. I never approach them to be a 'friend'. Teachers are not a student's friend. We are their teacher. However, I follow the advice of Howard Zinn. It is important that the students know us as people, with our own family, friends, interests, laughter and life. We have many roles beyond 'teacher' and education is improved by placing learning in a wider context of life. Therefore if students approach me to be a 'friend', then I accept. However it is important to recognise the bias of this communication system. McClard and Anderson offer a warning.

On Facebook life is a game. Although participants can open chat windows or belong to special interest groups of a more serious nature, the daily drivers of Facebook exchanges are games and quizzes. As technology mediates more and more of our daily social exchanges, the forms of our interaction change. Gaming—light, breezy and fun interactions with friends near and far—keeps ties alive without being burdensome.³³

Communication in our daily life has light and shade, humour and seriousness. The issue is how – without oral and visual cues – the negotiation of diverse modalities is instigated. The confusion between learning and leisure is

33 A. McClard and K. Anderson, 'Focus on Facebook: Who Are We Anyway?', *Anthropology News*, 2008, <http://www.aaanet.org/issues/anthronews/upload/49-3-McClard-and-Anderson-In-Focus.pdf>, p. 10

difficult, but necessary, to mediate and manage. As Christmas 2010 approached, something strange started to happen in the Facebook discourse.

As is common during the Christmas break, my university was closed, but my Facebook wall was open for business. Students – quite rightly – wanted help with their assignments. But they chose not to see me during my office hours on campus before the break, not to use my virtual office hours on Skype that continued through the break, not to send an email to my work address, not to use the specifically configured online discussion forum for the course, not to send an email to Academia.edu, LinkedIn or even Facebook. Instead, they left messages about their assignments on my wall.

Under a month before Christmas 2010, Pam wrote a message on my wall.

Hi Tara, I am sorry to leave this sort of message on your fb, but I did try to email you and I am not sure if it worked!

I am just stuck on the 2nd creative industries assignment, I have no idea where to even start! I wanted to get some kind of a plan going but now I am getting a bit worried about it. :-X

Needless to say, no email had been sent to my work address. Intriguingly she chose not to use the cloak of email, even on Facebook. Pam then moved exclusively to using the Facebook wall. By 10 December, 2010 Pam confused ‘cheating’ with inappropriate use of media platforms.

Hey Tara, just a quick thing regarding the second assignment for Creative Industries. :-D I have decided I want to write as a person who is working to organise the 2012 Olympics, but I am having trouble thinking of a specific role! Do you have any ideas? (Sorry, I know it's kind of cheating!) X

Intriguingly, not only I helped Pam but other students responded to her – again on my wall – offering advice. It was becoming a public notice board. Finally in the week before Christmas, Pam stated that she had only reached 1200 words on her assignment, rather than the required 2000 words, and would that be enough?

As gently as I could, I replied that the word length is an indicator of depth of analysis, and being short of words often signifies a superficial engagement with ideas. I would have preferred this correspondence to be in private. But it was also necessary to nudge Pam to the realisation that conducting her education in public may not be a great option. She did stop using the wall. Other students

did not follow her example. One of the most extraordinary was a wall post from Katrina.

Good morning! I thought I would write to you on here because then it will come straight through to my phone as I forget to check my e-mails after I send them! Anyway, I was wondering for our second assignment if we are planning on making a video how long does the video need to be?! I am really looking forward to this assignment, it should be fun!!! Have a brilliant Christmas and I am going to try to learn how to use Skype © XXX

Katrina did not question the inconvenience to staff in sending an email, then forgetting to read its reply. Instead of addressing her personal matter in information and time management, she exhibited an inability to manage Facebook as well. Katrina did not realise that if she posted on my wall – rather than her own – she would not necessarily receive notification of the reply. It was on my wall, not her wall. Because it was a ‘hanging’ message – I replied. If I did not, it would appear to the other students that I was neglecting Katrina. It was a mistake.

Hi Katrina. Lovely to hear from you. Right – the length is variable. The key is to make sure that all the criteria are managed. So – the challenge with the video is to make sure that you find a way to access the key document from the Work Foundation and an array of materials from the module. So before you start this one – think really clearly about your role. Think clearly about how you are going to present the research. Then the length might take care of itself. Hope that helps – keep in touch if I can do anything else.

She then replied, after having replicated her request where it should have been in the first place – on the course’s online discussion forum in the University’s learning management system.

I didn't see you had commented on this so ignore the post on the forum! Thanks Tara. Not 100% sure if I am going to be able to pull of what I want to do in the video but I have lots of ideas. Have a lovely Christmas! x ssignment, it should be fun! Have a brilliant Christmas and I am going to try to learn how to use Skype :) x x x

Matters finally became serious when an MA student left a message on the wall. This was from a student who sends me three or four emails a day and uses all the office hours and virtual office hours on Skype.

Hi Tara need suggest,could i write in "assignment 2" in practicing media about How to use the image in the security works,Explained at the outset the importance of visual method in general, the kinds of pictures, then go to the pictures in the security works and how important image is not only a kind of art, but in other way. (Grammar and spelling errors in the original)

I had no idea what this post meant. At this point I replied – on Boxing Day.

Pop me a message on the Brighton email – I can probably answer in more depth than FB will let me here! The key with the second assignment for PMR is that you demonstrate that you can use the method. That is the key. Not sure what you meant about 'security issues' But the key is to make sure that you've got all the key reading from the course and your further reading. Have a look in the course discussion forum. I posted a paper from one of our former students, Venessa Paech who got her work published. Even though it was based on ethnography – use that as a guide. And contact me via email so I can give you advice in further depth!

This appeared to stop the wall posts. But this bizarre interlude demonstrates a confusion of leisure and education, leaving messages on a platform that is easy rather than appropriate and increasing the scale, replication and plurality of information available and in circulation. These students – like so many workers and citizens – do not recognise the biases of communication and the confusion of leisure and education.

This is not merely a generational issue that involves students and teachers. Another inappropriate use of Facebook rendered this confusion of work and leisure even more bizarre. A woman who I do not know – is not a friend, 'Facebook friend' or even an acquaintance – used Facebook in an inappropriate way. On 1 July, 2010, Diana Simmonds³⁴ sent me an email through Facebook.

Hi Tara – intrigued to know whether you actually read this book as, having ploughed through it myself, I don't recognise it as being the same one you spruiked on the dustjacket. Or am I missing something?

Regards
Diana Simmonds

³⁴ In this case, I have deployed Ms Simmonds real name as she is a public figure and published an article on this topic in the public domain.

The book to which she was referring was Professor Fred Inglis's *A short history of celebrity*, published by Princeton University Press. I was one of the academic reviewers for Princeton on this project and recognised, as the other referees must have, that it was a strong and productive monograph to understand celebrity. Princeton had used a sentence of my review – and a sentence from four other reviews – on the back flap of the book. It was odd to receive a message on Facebook from a woman I did not know who questioned my professionalism about whether or not I had read a book. This message also undermined not only Professor Inglis's work, a man whose career spans forty years and has influenced generations of scholars in media and cultural studies,³⁵ but also has been acknowledged by distinguished awards for his contribution to the international academy. For a random emailer – via Facebook – to question his career and credibility is unfortunate. But Ms Simmonds also questioned the credibility of Princeton University Press, that they would present the words of an academic who had not read the book.

Mostly, I ignore such messages. My inbox – like many female writers – is a magnet for dissatisfied, radically conservative men who never quite became accustomed to women in the workplace or being allowed to vote, and the extreme left who believe that I am not doing enough to promote the revolution or unmask the supposedly conspiracy of September 11. But something seemed odd in this message, so I (thankfully) replied. I waited a week, and on 7 July, replied to her message on Facebook.

Hi Diana – Lovely to hear from you. Hope you are well.

Actually Diana, I take the refereeing process for books and articles really seriously. I make sure I go through the manuscripts at least three times. So I'm assuming that you simply mis-configured this message, because you seem to be suggesting that I didn't read it! Obviously I take the professional refereeing role pretty seriously, as I am sure you do.

I think it is a terrific book. So much of the work on celebrity is so basic, so textual and so ahistorical, that this was a powerful corrective. Fred writes well and his scale of research I thought was outstanding. I used some of the manuscript version with my MA students and they found it great as well!

My apologies if you did not like it – but that's the nature of reading and academic life me thinks!

Take care and I hope all is well with you. T

35 Fred Inglis, <http://www.fredinglis.org.uk/>

I tried to keep the tone friendly, but with an understated warning that it may not be useful or appropriate to send a random email to a person that she did not know questioning their professionalism. There was no reply to this message. But then the actual reason for her message became clear, not via Facebook but through more traditional media.

Diana Simmonds went on to write a review of Inglis's book for *The Australian* newspaper. She did not mention this fact in the supposedly random message she sent via Facebook. However it was fortunate that I replied to her email, because her attack in print moved to another of the academic reviewers whose words appeared on the dust cover.

BEWARE the fulsome praise of the dust jacket spruiker who is also thanked profusely by the author in his acknowledgements page. In this instance it means that Richard D. Brown, professor emeritus, University of Connecticut, who says Inglis's prose is 'vivacious', is either myopic or doesn't have a problem with 70-word sentences of porridge-like density.³⁶

Because I answered her message and critiqued her questioning of academic professionalism, she moved targets to Richard Brown. The rest of her article is similarly scathing. But what is interesting is that she never questions her own intelligence or inability to understand Inglis's arguments. When reading the review, it is clear that Simmonds did not understand the book. The problems are not in the monograph. The problem is a reviewer cannot understand high quality academic-level writing. To provide two more 'highlights' from the review.

While this book might be seen as wide-ranging, the overall effect is superficial and inconsequential; ironically, a study of celebrity should, and could, be anything but. In the end this is a maddening book: It's not so much a short history as an interminable PhD thesis with flashes of insight and wit.

But these are overwhelmed by turgid prose, excess verbiage and a bizarre, scattergun approach that misses more than it hits. So it's back to Hello! which at least knows what it's doing and why.³⁷

Critiquing an academic for being academic is like undermining a refuse removal specialist who knows how to handle rubbish or a furniture remover who understands how to negotiate a lounge suite out of a room. The notion that *Hello!* magazine is offered as a positive comparison to a monograph that has passed through an array of scholarly readers, was published by one of the

36 D. Simmonds, 'The gadfly approach', *The Australian*, 31 July, 2010, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/the-gadfly-approach/story-e6fgr8nf-1225897566571>

37 *ibid.*

most distinguished university presses in the world and was written by one of the most important academics in the field is not only insulting, but naïve, ignorant and foolish. She does not understand the vocabulary or the complexity of the argument, terming it ‘turgid’ and ‘scattergun’.

I had a lucky escape. If I had not replied to an unknown person on Facebook, probing their right to question an academic’s integrity and commitment to refereeing, then my name may have been featured in the first paragraph of the review. Diana Simmonds is not an academic, but edits an alumni magazine for Sydney University and runs an Australian-based arts website, www.stagenoise.com. She has authored two books on Princess Diana, published in 1984 and 1995. What is intriguing in this story is not that someone wrote a bad review, but that Facebook was used to question – not even the author – but the referees. Therefore, I returned to social media on 13 December, 2010 and asked her why she had contacted me on Facebook to write her review.

Hello Tara – you must be doing an end-of-year tidy up! I was asked to review the book and as I said originally, was curious to know whether you'd read it. (I meant *this* book, ie the published version, rather than implying that you might not have read it before commenting – absolutely not!)

The Facebook contact came about because, having Googled you, that's what came up first and, again, I was curious to contact you quickly.

Speaking to Prof Inglis wasn't on my agenda: I don't contact authors of books when I'm reviewing their work, unless I have a specific question I suppose (rare.)

Anyway, I hope that answers your questions – Merry Christmas and a happy 2011.

Diana

Again, there was something odd here. Ms Simmonds googled me. At its highest ranking, my Facebook profile is on the fourth page of returns, following my website, my university’s website, journalism, journal articles, photographs, videos and academia.edu. Facebook is not the first in any ranking involving any part of my name. I therefore contacted her again and asked if she normally contacts referees of books when she is writing a review.

Hi Tara – no, I don't (and didn't) contact 'the referees and writers of the dust jacket comments' – only you, in this one instance. And that was because I was so puzzled by the book, which I found truly dreadful, but that's me and obviously not you, and I was curious about 'Tara Brabazon'. It actually crossed my mind that such a glorious name might be a figment of the author's imagination: she sounds like a Bond heroine, or someone out of a Waugh country house weekend. I'm sorry, but at that point I was unaware of your work and its seriousness. When I did discover that I was even more curious because, as already said, I think the book is a mess of missed opportunities. And it is not unknown for authors to nick nice-sounding quotes from unaware authorities – I was checking. Diana

Oh dear. So Facebook, a hyper-personal networking site, has been deployed for fact checking. That she does not know who I am is no surprise. But what is curious is that I was the only woman and the only Australian whose comments featured on the book cover, and I was the only person she contacted before submitting her review in *The Australian* newspaper. The comments about Bond and Waugh are irrelevant. What is most sad is that Diana Simmonds has doubted the professionalism and integrity of Professor Fred Inglis and Princeton University Press, suggesting that they might 'nick' quotations. The speed at which she could contact me via Facebook has blocked a consciousness and reflection on her decision making about her capacity to either understand the book or desire to question the integrity of authors, publishers and referees.

At that point, I stopped the correspondence. A woman who was completing a review of a book that she did not like contacted a referee of the monograph via Facebook to check if the statement was real. She offered the excuse that Facebook was the first mention of my name via the Google search engine. That is incorrect, and has been incorrect for six years. It is still incorrect. But what Facebook has enabled is an inappropriate judgment – about a distinguished scholar and important international publisher – to be activated at speed to a person that she does not know. If Facebook did not exist, Simmonds would have to think about why a range of international scholars considered this work of quality and importance, while she had difficulty with the sentence construction. Simmonds mismanaged communication systems, conflating the bias of orality with the permanence of print, delivered at speed via social media.

Clay Shirky stated that 'the social use of our new media tools have been a big surprise, in part because the possibility of those uses wasn't implicit in the tools themselves'.³⁸ There is nothing 'in' Facebook that suggested that students would leave questions on academics' walls or that a book reviewer would contact

38 C. Shirky, *Cognitive surplus: creativity and generosity in a connected age*, (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 14

one of the referees to probe their professionalism and/or existence. David Buckingham, while focusing on children, stated that ‘advocates of educational technology have frequently looked to children’s leisure-time experiences as a source of new approaches to learning’.³⁹ But as shown by the examples in this chapter, there are consequences for all education when blurring learning and leisure and work and leisure. It is a seemingly easy way to motivate and scaffold literacy from commonsensical to specialist strategies for encoding and decoding, yet the cost I am seeing is a lack of reflection and consciousness in platform selection, modality and professional appropriateness. The problem is not the platform but the lack of information literacy to use it. The speed and ease of contact between people who are active in social media reduces the time to think about how and why it is necessary to post, comment or message.

This confusion of purpose and compression of time creates little except more work for academics, embarrassment for students and demonstrates a widening absence in information literacy and an inability to manage Innis’s bias of communication. I have 800 friends on Facebook: from students I taught in Wellington in 1994 through to my 85 year old father. I actually know all my friends. But even with this provision in place, it is important to remember that if any teacher or educational institution enters social media then there are public relations risks. There will always be someone calling a teacher Hitler, a slapper or crack head, just because they happen to disagree with their views. But when inexperienced users – who may be young and without any sense of the consequences of their behaviour – leave messages that require a response for public relations purposes as much as personal care, the pressure of moving what should be confidential and private information into the public domain is embarrassing at the very least and destructive at worst. Similarly – and disturbingly – the consequences need to be addressed when choosing not to reply to a message from a woman who did not declare she was writing a review, yet asked direct questions of my professionalism, but was supposedly confirming whether I was an imaginary figure from an Evelyn Waugh novel.

This is not a generational issue. All of us work with men and women who insist on clicking ‘reply all’ to emails because they think it shows their wit and power. It demonstrates the exact opposite. Therefore, the medium is not the message,⁴⁰ but such a slogan blocks a consciousness of the complex decisions made both before and after platform selection. From this confusion of leisure and learning, and recognising the value of Harold Innis to contemporary

39 D. Buckingham, *Beyond technology: children’s learning in the age of digital culture*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007)

40 Anneloes van Gaalen edited a book titled *The medium is the message and 50 other ridiculous advertising rules*, (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2009), pp. 10-13

discussions of platform selection, the next stage of this chapter unfolds Paul Willis's research into this project of digital dieting and information literacy.

How working class kids still get working class jobs

The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves.⁴¹

Paul Willis

Willis's argument is seductive. Deploying ethnographic research methods, he entered the culture of young men at school and demonstrated how their 'resistance' to teachers and education was effective in the short term, but blocked their chances for learning and social mobility. Specifically, Willis asked how leisure behaviours like smoking, truanting and swearing undermined learning possibilities. To update and digitally migrate his argument, students are now texting, updating and commenting on social networking sites. Instead of swearing and back-chatting the teacher, they are silent and chatting back to their friends on mobile phones in classrooms. Digital leisure, like analogue leisure, obstructs the structures of learning. In his original study, Willis explored how 'resistance' to school ensures that young working class men are 'prepared' (through a lack of other options) to enter manual work.⁴²

In a post-industrial society, the Willis 2.0 question is how education is used to prepare students for underemployment and a capping of expectations. In other words, how do social media create spaces for resistance for students that – by wasting time commenting and updating on issues that do not assist their learning – block their chance and opportunity to learn? To give readers one example from my classroom, I rarely have problems with mobile phones in lectures and seminars. I often make a joke about the first ring or beep in the lecture or seminar, mentioning the owner's necessity to take the call to complete a drug deal. The laughter and touch of embarrassment is enough to stop the phones during formal teaching hours. If the problem persists, I start to answer the phone and talk to the person – frequently their mother – in front of one hundred of their peers. Perhaps not surprisingly, the phones are switched to silent at the start of each session. However there is one student where I failed to curb this inopportune connectivity during formal learning. I just managed – by some serious nagging and pushing – to help Lily pass my module in the

41 P. Willis, *Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*, (Westmead: Saxon House, 1997), p. 1

42 *ibid.*, p. 2.

first semester of her first year. She failed her two other courses. This threat of expulsion may seem to provide sufficient motivation to concentrate in the second semester. Unfortunately not. By the end of the second semester, Lily was even texting in my class. Her first assignment showed she had no real idea about the question or the course and had conducted no reading. She failed. While the distraction of the mobile phone was not the cause of her failure, it was clear she had lost the ability to differentiate between education and leisure, important and trivial, concentration and distraction. In this case, social networking during university teaching and learning sessions blocked Lily from completing her degree. Marc Prensky, when considering such failures, justified them as a product of intelligence and wisdom, rather than a lack of motivation and concentration.

More and more young people are now deeply and permanently technologically enhanced, connected to their peers and the world in ways no generation has ever been before. Streams of information come at them 24/7 ... Do such kids need school? More and more of them (almost a third nationally and half in the cities) think not, and drop out.⁴³

Lily did not drop out. She was formally excluded for failure. Her connectivity and lack of concentration, study and reading cost her a degree. This is not 'technologically enhanced', but intellectually deluded.

While social media and connectivity can provide distraction, there are more serious applications of the read-write web in undermining the credibility granted to both education and teachers. Just as Willis's lads abused teachers behind their backs, Facebook enables this practice to continue, and with a much wider audience.

Have you ever had a professor who you actually wanted to do some harm to?!? I'm talkin (sic) stuck up, stank-breath, talk about everything except the damn subject, strait (sic) don't give a F*&K about you professors/advisors! If so, please warn-a-brotha/sista!⁴⁴

Other sites describe 'the worst teacher ever'.⁴⁵ Often, these groups are given the Facebook category of 'Just for Fun'. The blogosphere is also used

43 M. Prensky, *Teaching digital natives: partnering for real learning*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2010), p. 2

44 'Dammit! The worst professor is -', *Facebook*, <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2202503213>

45 "Worst Teacher Ever, Miss, Nielson," *Facebook*, <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Worst-teacher-ever-miss-Nielson/114301328639569?v=wall>,

to collectivise and vent rage about the ‘Worst Professor’.⁴⁶ A more organised, ordered and searchable version of this opinionated and misguided ranking system is ‘Rate my professors’.⁴⁷ In this case, anonymous students rank and judge their teachers. The criteria by which they judge academics raise questions, even from other students. Steiner probed the value of ‘Rate my professor’.

In theory, it does serve a purpose; it helps uninformed students find the best professors and avoid the worst ... What does it say about the student population if we pick and choose professors by relying on anonymous reviews that often favour ‘easy’ courses? And how reliable can these reviews actually be? ... Furthermore, the reviews are limited to a few dozen words and categories including ‘easiness’, whether attendance is required, and, for Rate My Professors, ‘attractiveness,’ all of which doesn’t afford the opportunity for a very complete evaluation.⁴⁸

The systemic consequences of such a rating strategy were revealed by a Kaplan survey.⁴⁹ The data revealed that such review systems penalise the harder and more challenging markers, with student reviews being the basis for course selection. Kaplan even argues that such socially networked course selection has created grade inflation, with large groups of students using Rate My Professor and choosing a course on the basis of easy marking. The confluence of ‘popularity’ of a staff member and ‘easy’ marking is damaging to accountability and rigour in all higher education institutions. When mediated and circulated through Facebook, popularity and easiness are then confused with quality learning and intellectually challenging scholarship. Actually, university is not meant to be easy. High grades must be earned. If they are not, then the calibre and quality of the degree must be questioned. Students do know this. Liza sent me a message in February 2011 in response to her grades.

‘Mrs Coppock – Worst Teacher Ever’, Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/MrsCoppock-WORST-TEACHER-EVER/314336197443>, ‘Mr Meder is the worst teacher ever’, <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Mr-Meder-Is-The-Worst-Teacher-Ever/176195962401390>, ‘Mr Brown is the worst teacher ever’, <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/mr-brown-is-the-worst-teacher-ever/127354430614539> and ‘Mrs Connelly is the worst teacher ever ☺’, <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=204643879832>

46 ‘Worst Professor’, *mgoblog*, <http://mgoblog.com/mgoboard/worst-professor>

47 Rate my Professors, <http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/>

48 A. Steiner, ‘Rate My Professors: Student Evaluations and Modern Course Selection’, *Politics Daily*, 13 April, 2010, <http://www.politicsdaily.com/2010/04/13/rate-my-professors-student-evaluations-and-modern-course-select/>

49 ‘Teacher ratings press release’, Kaplan, 2 March, 2010, http://www.kaptest.com/Custom_Service/Company_Information/Press-Media/grade-inflation.html

hey tara!

thanks for giving me a pass! i'm very happy, but at to same time it gave me a kick in the arse and now i want to do better. i haven't really been in touch with you before, because i'm a bit shy to speak in front of the whole class. i just want to say that i really enjoy your classes and i'm so happy to know you. You are fabulous! love, liza

Source: Liza, 'Thank you', Facebook message, 28 February, 2011

Liza has both consciousness and reflection about her level of achievement. She did not want an easy option or held me responsible for her mark.

Paul Willis's research asks deep questions about 'agency' and 'choice' in formal educational environments. But Willis's work is also a reminder that education is difficult. To succeed requires reading, focus, care and respect. It is based on foundational recognition that teachers know more than students. Obviously clichés of student-centred learning and digital natives attempt to mask this truth. I am not suggesting that students do not arrive in a classroom with valuable experiences and expertise. However I am arguing that teachers know more than students. That is why they are teachers. If they do not, then they should be removed from the classroom. Students being 'Born Digital' is not the point.⁵⁰ In making this statement, there is an attendant realisation that time is the most precious resource in not only learning, but life. The imperative is to use the time well, particularly in the formal learning environment because the enrolled moment of our lives is transitional and short. Yet social media can transform crowd sourced information about quality teaching into crowd bullying of staff (and other students).

Willis provides the arguments to explain the ridiculing of staff. He demonstrated that such 'resistance' is trivial, flippant and carnivalesque.

This opposition is expressed mainly as a style. It is lived out in countless small ways which are special to the school institution, instantly recognised by the teachers, and an almost ritualistic part of the daily fabric of life for the kids.⁵¹

Willis showed that the 'caged resentment' of the lads always stopped 'just short of outright confrontation'.⁵² The online environment provides an even safer and often anonymous environment to express rage, hatred and blame.

50 J. Palfrey and U. Gasser, *Born Digital: understanding the first generation of digital natives*, (New York: Basic Books, 2008)

51 Willis, *Learning to Labour*, p. 12

52 *ibid.*, p. 12-13

Outright confrontation is blocked by the screen. Such sites raise key question about learning: who is responsible for success and failure? If a student does not attend a class or completes the reading and therefore fails the assessment, then should the measures of achievement be lowered and changed or is personal accountability to be activated? Willis was clear: truancy was ‘a very imprecise – even meaningless – measure of rejection of school’.⁵³ In the online university ratings, such as Rate My Professor, the desire to find an easy course where attendance is not mandatory and a high grade can be attained, is validated with a high score. Supposedly an ‘easy’ semester where PowerPoint slides are available and very little reading or writing is required is a ‘good’ course as evaluated through students’ version of user generated content.

By students not participating in lectures, tutorials and seminars, they may receive an adequate grade. But their learning – let alone the meta-learning about intellectual discipline and rigour – is not achieved. Willis discovered that particular behaviours constructed a ‘space won from school’.⁵⁴ Similarly, a space is ‘won’ from university through social media resistance. But working class children continue to gain working class jobs. Middle class web-enabled students continue to suffer degree inflation, underemployment and disappointment in attaining their aspirations. The ironic tragedy is that students who cruise through university completing the minimal reading and demonstrating irregular attendance are often the first to complain when unable to gain a job at the conclusion of their degree. Formal learning is woven by a truth: the harder the student works, the more they learn. If they mobilise academic shortcuts, they harm themselves. Easy education is intellectually bereft education.

There is a human face to educational success and failure. The widening participation agenda in further and higher education is both socially just and economically important. However the legacy of undereducated earlier generations still has an effect. As Fran Abrams realised, ‘time after time, studies had shown the pupils whose parents had the most education did best at school’.⁵⁵ Injustice is perpetuated through the continuance of educational inequality. There has been insufficient intervention in literacy, reading, writing, aspiration and motivation to overcome earlier injustice. The maxim that propelled my research in *The University of Google* was that students who are the first generation in their family to enrol in higher education require *more* attention from teachers, not less. They require more assistance, scaffolded assessment and an overt discussion of the expectations of university. Geoff Pugh, Gwen Coates and Nick Adnett argued that ‘students from under-represented groups

53 *ibid.*, p. 27

54 *ibid.* p. 29

55 F. Abrams, *Learning to fail: how society lets young people down*, (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 45

may require more extensive support or more radical changes in teaching and learning strategies if they are to approach completion rate norms ... a priority should be to find ways of ensuring more students succeed in completing their course and qualification rather than intensifying the marketing effort to expand recruitment.⁵⁶ Yet the widening participation agenda has been concurrent with the proliferation of online learning and – even more seriously – the managerialisation of our institutions. This means that the group that requires the most assistance has enrolled at the point that the least direct (face-to-face) teaching is actually available. Certainly Skype, Academia.edu, Facebook, Twitter and FourSquare are useful when embedded into curriculum, but they are supplementary processes rather than learning outcomes in themselves. The new managerial tier in universities has used online learning as an excuse to reduce the number of academics, reduce teaching time, reduce support structures and reduce the corporeal, real time relationships formed between staff and students. Certainly there are fine uses of the social web in information literacy, media literacy and creating extra forms of support for struggling students. But the medium is not the message. Social media are not intrinsically or inevitably learning media. Form is not content.

The more complex question to consider is the role of the social web in either addressing or reinforcing this demarcation of aspiration and achievement. Applying Willis's influential study to an education system framed by the read-write web requires that teachers ask if social media are assisting students in their learning or merely offering distractions or transitory and ineffectual 'resistance'. The internet and web provides access to an extraordinary array of information that, when matched with information literacy, is intensely searchable and provides profound benefits and opportunities. Social media increase the connectivity, community and communication potential of the web. When integrated with care into a teaching and learning portfolio, it enables an immediacy of feedback, individualised attention and mobility of information and support.⁵⁷ To provide one example, Skype enables students to 'meet' the authors, researchers and academics they are reading, enabling them to ask questions and provide a context around their learning beyond a single institution or classroom.⁵⁸

56 G. Pugh, G. Coates and N. Adnett, 'Performance indicators and widening participation in UK higher education', *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 1, January 2005, p. 33. The entire article (pages 19–39) is a fine study of what is required for a successful strategy to 'widen participation.'

57 These functions were well discussed by J.P. Shim, J. Shropshire, S. Park, H. Harris and N. Campbell, 'Podcasting for e-learning, communication, and delivery', *Industrial Management and Data Systems*, Vol. 107, No. 4, pp. 587-60

58 '50 Awesome Ways to Use Skype in the Classroom', *Teaching Degree*, 30 June, 2009, <http://www.teachingdegree.org/2009/06/30/50-awesome-ways-to-use-skype->

Willis asked how middle class kids continue to attain middle class jobs. One provocative answer is that ‘we’ let them, through a neglect of all the strategies and imperatives that are possible to activate through education to address social and economic inequality and oppression. To update his argument, some of these strategies to intervene in class-based discrimination and inequality involve moving beyond our educational media and arching into social media, ensuring a series of options in curriculum and assessment to activate multiliteracies⁵⁹ and scaffold information literacy between everyday reading and writing and the level of achievement required for a degree. Without intervention through curriculum and literacy programmes, assumptions about ‘young people’ (and ‘old people’) will ensure that those currently in power remain in power. With thought and care, media configured for leisure can be deployed in learning. But it will be used in a different way.

Willis’s arguments agitate with great resilience in our present. As Stanley Aronowitz argued, Willis’s lads were ‘exercising “agency” by choosing to “fail”’.⁶⁰ The consequences of that failure are now much more serious, with ‘the factory jobs that were still available in the early 1970s ... now gone’.⁶¹ Software and hardware have increased the productivity and efficiency of work, but reduced the size of the labour force. Education is implicated in such changes, offering the pretence of status and mobility.

The new working-class jobs – coded as forms of ‘professional’ labour – bring with them neither good wages and benefits, nor do they reproduce working-class culture. As the first generation to have earned a post-secondary credential, many working-class kids have been inducted into the value systems and expectations of the salaried middle class, but without acquiring the accoutrements.⁶²

For the ‘failing’ students recorded in Willis’s research, unskilled work was still available. Academic success was not the only path to economic stability. Such jobs and options have now reduced. The phrase ‘labour saving device’ describes labour reducing devices.

in-the-classroom/

59 F. Giampapa, ‘Multiliteracies, pedagogy and identities: teacher and student voices from a Toronto elementary school’, *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2010, <http://www.csse-scee.ca/CJE/Articles/FullText/CJE33-2/CJE33-2-Giampapa.pdf>, pp. 407–411

60 S. Aronowitz, ‘Foreword’, from N. Dolby and G. Dimitriadis (with P. Willis), *Learning to Labor in New Times*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. ix

61 *ibid.*, p. x

62 *ibid.*, p. xi

When Willis returned to *Learning to Labour* twenty five years after its publication, he recognised his ‘lads’ had the safety net of manual labour. Like Aronowitz, he confirmed that a change has taken place.

The new high-tech jobs and the higher level training and educational programs designed to fill them are irrelevant to most of the displaced and to be displaced manual industrial workers. In many ways we are now entering an epochal and possibly catastrophic social void. We are seeing in the current ‘postindustrial revolution’ a shake out of especially male industrial labour on a scale similar to that of the shake out of agricultural labour in the first industrial revolution.⁶³

Many jobs now require not only the completion of high school, but a university degree. This ‘reality’ designates not only degree inflation, but labour surplus. With plenty of workers prepared to move to accept a job, work split and reduced shifts, take mobile telephone calls in their leisure time, answer emails and be prepared to be called into work at short notice, higher levels of education become one more strategy to manage – or manipulate – labour surplus.

Technology has not caused such a change. But the industrial revolution ensured that a smaller workforce could become more efficient and productive through the aid of machines. The proliferation of the internet has enabled information, ideas and money to travel through national borders, increasing efficiency and reducing the need for local workforces. Off shore outsourcing enables a range of tasks to be completed by the worker drawing the lowest wages anywhere in the world.

The ideological confusion between technological change, efficiency and progress has dominated the history of many nations in the last two hundred years. The idea that technological change may reduce efficiency and productivity seems not only counterintuitive, but anti-historical. Yet this hypothesis is worth consideration. Does there reach a point where over-automating spelling checking and information searching creates a deskilled student as much as Henry Ford’s assembly line created the deskilled worker?⁶⁴ If software and hardware are proxies for developing skills in thinking, reading, writing, searching and learning, then does this loss of literacies really matter?

63 P. Willis, ‘Twenty-five years on: old books, new times’, from Dolby and Dimitriadis with Willis (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 182-183

64 David Lee asked, for the BBC, ‘How good software makes us stupid’, BBC News, 12 September, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-11263559>. Nicholas Carr was cited in the article, arguing that ‘as computer software becomes easier to use, making complicated tasks easier, we risk losing the ability to properly learn something – in effect “short-circuiting” the brain’.

Such a question is the key moment of *Digital Dieting*. If students do not learn to spell because a spelling checker is housed in the word processor, do not learn grammatical rules because errors are corrected in a word processor and do not have to remember facts because they can look them up at speed via Google, then is this progress? Is there value in holding these analogue skills in reading, writing and remembering? Such questions are made more serious because of the ageism that accompanies technological change. Indeed, it is a form of reverse ageism, suggesting that a particular group of young people have intrinsic skills and abilities, thereby not requiring the benefits and commitment of formal education. The extreme end of Paul Willis's argument of how young people disenfranchise themselves from education is found in the debates encircling the phrase 'digital natives'.

Digital natives and analogue underemployment

There is a reason why Paul Willis is the analytical spine of this chapter. It is important to log that students in the analogue age complained, challenged teachers and enacted behaviour that was rarely in their best academic interests. But the imperative of Paul Willis's research was that such 'resistance' and 'rebellion' was pointless. Working class children continued to attain working class jobs, like their parents. Yet age and generation were not the key variables in his study. Class was much more significant. Therefore, it is inaccurate to over-emphasise a particular age or generation as 'inventing' resistance to teachers and institutions of learning. When aligning age and technology into a simple package, the reification of research variables creates generalisations and inaccuracies.

Reading about current university students in newspapers cuts away this history and resembles a zombie movie. In *Return of the Brain Changers*, Digital Natives are the new undead, lurching through schools and universities plugged into their iPhone, disconnected from their environment and frightening parents and teachers. The journalistic narrative moves through a familiar pattern. A generation started to use social networking sites. After three years of accessing Facebook, the human brain transformed into a comatosed, bored, listless and illiterate mash of meat. Supposedly – as this zombie movie progresses – students are now incapable of grasping complex ideas because they are dragged through life by white earphones. Mark Bauerlein discovered 'the dumbest generation', formulated through a lack of analogue reading and literacy skills. Yet his argument is more subtle than such a book title suggests. He acknowledges the great potential of the online environment for learning.

Never have opportunities for education, learning, political action, and cultural activity been greater. All the ingredients for making an informed and intelligent citizen are in place.⁶⁵

Yet from this potential, Bauerlein locates problems in, with and through social media that particularly inhibits young people.

It isn't enough to say that these young people are uninterested in world realities. They are actively cut off from them. Or a better way to put it is to say that they are encased in more immediate realities that shut out conditions beyond – friends, work, clothes, cars, pop music, sitcoms, Facebook.⁶⁶

This is a more subtle argument, about socialisation rather than brain changing. Conversely, there is an alternative discourse where, instead of these Brain Changers being the worst students in the history of education, they are actually the best. Don Trescott and Marc Prensky lead the way in such an interpretation. Seemingly forgotten is that new media become old media (or the less ageist description, mature media) very quickly. Skills with software and hardware are easy to attain. Understanding how to use these skills in context and evaluate their results is a more complex process. However once more, as if transposing ageism from people and to technology, new is better. Old is a problem. It is important to remember the equation introduced in this book:

$$\text{New Media} + \text{Old Media} = \text{Now Media.}$$

An alternative slogan could be

$$\text{New Media} + \text{Old Media} = \text{Appropriate Media}$$

Such talk about youth and media is not new. Assumptions are always made about youth, particularly when the people making the assumptions are not young.⁶⁷ From the 1960s, the market economy required the invention of new target markets to enlarge and differentiate consumption. The 'generation gap' was invented to express a loss of faith in traditional authority structures. Clothes, rock music and long hair⁶⁸ were connoted as not only different or

65 M. Bauerlein, *The dumbest generation*, (New York: Penguin, 2009), p. 10

66 *ibid.*, 13

67 S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and moral panics*, (London: MacGibbon, 1972)

68 D. Jones, *Haircuts: fifty years of styles and cuts*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990)

radical, but the building blocks of revolution.⁶⁹ Since the 1960s, this sweeping statement of difference on the basis of age has had many consequences. Firstly, and perhaps most significantly, the focus on age has meant that other social variables – particularly race, class,⁷⁰ gender,⁷¹ and religion – have been under-discussed. Secondly, alongside this simplification of identity is an absence of history. A single cultural formation – music, fashion, hair, the web – is rendered much larger and more significant than it actually is. Thirdly, the writers extolling youthful difference invariably read young people as a force of change, defiance, crisis and threat.⁷² This revolution through youth continues until the moment they enter adulthood.⁷³ Then the next group of 13–19 year olds – Generation X,⁷⁴ Generation Y, the Nintendo Generation and the Google Generation – is scanned for their threat, promise, challenge and transformation.

Ideologies of youth prevent and often block actual research into behaviour, history and context, enacting profound damage to schools, universities and libraries⁷⁵ and flattening conceptualisations of literacy. This simplification through generation has existed since the 1960s with the mods and their amphetamines and scooters, the skinheads with their boots, violence and racism and the punks with safety pins, slashed clothes and mohawks.⁷⁶ Interestingly,

69 S. Hall and T. Jefferson, *Resistance through rituals*, (London: Hutchinson, 1976)

70 M. Savage, *Class analysis and social transformation*, (Maidenhead: OUP, 2000)

71 A. McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth culture*, (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991), A. McRobbie and M. Nava, *Gender and Generation*, (London: Macmillan, 1984)

72 G. Pearson, *Hooligan: a history of respectable fears*, (London: Macmillan, 1983)

73 D. Rimmer, *Like Punk never happened*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1985)

74 S. Redhead (ed.), *Rave off*, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1993), S. Redhead, *Subculture to Clubcultures*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), S. Redhead, *The end-of-the-century party: youth and pop towards 2000*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990)

75 The 2000s has been difficult for libraries and librarians. To track these challenges, please refer to N. Baker, *Double Fold: libraries and the assault on paper*, (New York: Random House 2001), J. Conaway, *America's library: the story of the library of congress 1800-2000*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), J. Hamilton, *Casanova was a book lover*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), E. Shreeves, 'The acquisitions culture wars', *Library Trends*, Vol. 48, No. 4, Spring 2001, pp. 877–890 and M. Wilson, 'Understanding the needs of tomorrow's library user: rethinking library services for the new age', *APLIS*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2000, pp. 81–90. I instigated a short study of the effect of this attitude towards 'new media' on librarians. Some results of this study were published in 'We can't let schools become book-free zones', *Times Higher Education*, 29 May, 2008, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=402219>

76 J. Savage, *England's Dreaming*, (London: Faber, 1991)

now that music and fashion are no longer battlegrounds between generations,⁷⁷ the talk of radical change and threat has moved to technology.

Instead of mods, skins, rockers, punks and goths, the new group of threat and opportunity has been labelled as Digital Natives. This phrase was first used in 2001 by Marc Prensky, a management consultant. He used the term to demonstrate that, 'today's students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors'.⁷⁸ Once more the young ones are restless and the older generation does not understand them. But true to the pattern, Prensky has:

1. diagnosed a moment of revolutionary change,
2. invented a social crisis and failure in education resulting from it, and
3. transformed himself into the consultant to fix it.

Actually, generation is too blunt a sociological instrument to understand social, economic and political change. It always has been. It is far too vague a description to understand an age group and how 'they' deploy 'technology'. But in his affirmation of modernity, it is not surprising that Prensky deploys reified, positivist science: 'it is very likely that our students' brains have physically changed – and are different from ours – as a result of how they grew up'.⁷⁹ Besides simplifying how 'a generation' engages with information, he has also hypothesised a physiological transformation of the human brain. It is significant to note that he has confused anatomy and socialisation to make this case.

His argument becomes more damning when describing those 'older people' who doubt the scale of this change (and his hypothesis and rationale) as Digital Immigrants. Appropriately in a post-multicultural era, being an immigrant is a problem because they keep a 'foot in the past'.⁸⁰ This group is a technological inhibitor because they use the internet after other media when searching for information and supposedly print out emails. No ethnography or participant observation data is cited to verify these claims. Instead, natives are skateboarding through Web-two-point-zeroland while those pesky immigrants are slowing progress because they are weighed down by those redundant books.

Forgotten by Prensky is that the platforms, data and information being processed at multi-tasking speed by the 'natives' were actually invented by

77 D. Hebdige, *Subculture* (London: Routledge, 1989: 1979)

78 M. Prensky, 'Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants', *On the Horizon*, Vol. 9 No. 5, October 2001, <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>

79 *ibid.*

80 *ibid.*

‘immigrants’ like Bill Gates, Serge Brin and Chad Hurley. A reality overlooked by Prensky is that ‘immigrants’ know more than ‘natives’. In less xenophobic times, such a statement would be self-evident, even at the level of analogy or metaphor. Immigrants have lived in different ways, in at least two places and must manage the trauma of movement, translation and change. Immigrants are flexible because they have to be. Digital immigrants know that drafting on the screen and drafting on paper are both valuable and often locate different types of errors. They know how to engage with information quickly or slowly, understanding when superficial reading and data mining will suffice and when a line by line, page by page, chapter by chapter deep involvement with an intricate text is required. But statements about continuity, stability and considered reflection do not sell books, win grants or fuel consultancies. Prensky therefore must preach crisis and endless change:

If Digital Immigrant educators really want to reach Digital Natives – i.e. all their students – they will have to change. It’s high time for them to stop their grouching and, as the Nike motto of the Digital Native generation says, ‘Just do it!’⁸¹

Marc Prensky started much of this brain-changing discourse, constructing a generational crisis where none existed. Significantly too – and for those committed to widening participation and lifelong learning – an obvious corrective must be made. ‘All our students’ are not unified by age or any other social variable. Students are a diverse group, socially, economically and culturally. While Prensky saw this generational revolution as an opportunity to develop his consultancy business, other commentators summoned fully fledged moral panics. A desire to invent each generation as a folk devil or saviour may have seemed modern in the 1960s but is now as tired as Lulu singing ‘Shout’.

The *Daily Mail*, a Conservative British newspaper, pounces on particular topics to promulgate fear: of young people, technological change or declining literacy. When these three panics combine, the resultant article is a horror movie that makes Michael Jackson’s video for ‘Thriller’ look like an advertisement for L’Oréal anti-ageing products. The front page of the *Daily Mail* on 24 February, 2009 warned that ‘Social Websites “harm a child’s brain”’.⁸² That quotation came from ‘neuroscientist Susan Greenfield’.⁸³ While she is acknowledged as ‘an eminent scientist’, in this matter, she has not displayed her expertise in research methods. The basis for her arguments (buried on page six of the paper) lacked

81 *ibid.*

82 D. Derbyshire, ‘Social websites “harm a child’s brain”’, *The Daily Mail*, 24 February, 2009, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1153583/Social-websites-harm-childrens-brains-Chilling-warning-parents-neuroscientist.html>

83 *ibid.*

triangulation of data. The paper reported that Baroness Greenfield ‘told the House of Lords that a teacher of 30 years had told her she had noticed a sharp decline in the ability of her pupils to understand others. “It is hard to see how living this way on a daily basis will not result in brains, or rather minds, different from those of previous generations.”’⁸⁴ The combination of ‘Chinese-whisper’ referencing (informing parliamentarians what a teacher had told her) and a misinterpretation of the words from her informant resulted in an odd lurch between personal opinion, scientific observation and the inferences made from the views of others. Apparently the teacher reported a decline in ‘understanding’ others. In other words, there has been a shift in communication skills. How oral and aural literacies align or disconnect from digital literacies is an intricate and complicated topic. Multiliteracy theorists have taken such a disengagement or convergence as a primary research focus. None of this material is cited by the Baroness or the *Daily Mail*.

Such an absence is no surprise. Historically, the *Daily Mail* has shown a propensity to endorse science above the humanities and neuroscience over media studies. Therefore, to verify the statements they cited from the Baroness, I returned to the Lords’ Hansard entry for the day, assuming she had been misquoted. I found that her arguments became even more disturbing than those reported in the newspaper.

We do not know whether the current increase in autism is due more to increased awareness and diagnosis of autism, or whether it can—if there is a true increase—be in any way linked to an increased prevalence among people of spending time in screen relationships. Surely it is a point worth considering.⁸⁵

She also compares social networking and screen cultures to ‘the thrill of compulsive gambling or compulsive eating’ and ‘being linked to similar chemical systems in the brain that may also play a part in drug addiction’.⁸⁶

This biologically determinist discourse is a mode of neo-Lombrosian thinking. Instead of measuring the size of the cranium and offering hypotheses about intelligence, these neo-Lombrosians jump straight to the brain itself without experimentation or scientific observation to make their case. At least Lombroso used a tape measure to provide some ‘evidence’ for his arguments. These current brain changers offer their opinions as ‘worth considering’ with multiple caveats. Yet the cost and consequences of their untheorised clash of social and technological variables is unfortunate for educational policy. When

84 *ibid.*

85 S. Greenfield, Lords Hansard, 2 February, 2009, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/text/90212-0010.htm>

86 *ibid.*

the biological bases for actions are promoted, whether this mode of argument is used to locate criminogenic tendencies, laziness, stupidity, brilliance, intelligence or anti-social behaviour, positivism predominates. The brain becomes the cause of behaviour. Such an argument blocks any responsibility (or necessity) for a teacher to intervene in learning strategies. It would not make the front page of the *Daily Mail* to argue that students are not any better or worse than they have ever been.

There is now a counter flow of evidence critiquing the neo-Lombrosians. Research probing online participation is showing data in direct opposition to the brain changers. The *Generations Online in 2009 Report* from the Pew Internet and American Life Project found a declining variance between different groups' web use. Sydney Jones and Susannah Fox found that 'larger percentages of older generations are online now than in the past, and they are doing more activities online'. Their hypothesis from the gathered data is that 'we can probably expect to see these bars [measuring age-based differences] become more level as time goes on'.⁸⁷ While the young have dominated digital environments, this online profile is shifting. The integration of mobile and digital platforms in daily life is building literacy in online platforms far beyond a 'Google Generation' or 'Digital Natives'.

Similar results were logged in January 2008, in JISC's 'Information Behaviour of the researcher of the future', better known as the Google Generation Report. It had a short-term run in the daily press that focused on the phrase Google Generation, rather than the findings of the Report. Behind the headlines and clichés, the outcomes of the Report were startling. There was a profound realisation that computer literacy was masking other educational problems. The conversational phrasing deployed in the Google Search engine did not facilitate the movement to other search engines and directories such as Google Scholar or the Directory of Open Access Journals. Significantly, they confirmed that information literacy concerns were rarely generational but were pervasive throughout all age cohorts.

- 'There are very very few controlled studies that account for age and information seeking behaviour systematically: as a result there is much mis-information and much speculation about how young people supposedly behave in cyberspace'⁸⁸
- Not only is the 'Google Generation' reading less, but academics more generally are reading less. The 'Google Generation' is not dumbing down, 'society' is

87 S. Jones and S. Fox, 'Generations Online in 2009', PEW Internet and American Life, January 2009, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1093/generations-online>

88 JISC, Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future, January 2008, p.14

dumbing down.

- The Report noted a wide tendency to skim read, particular the abstract, and to not progress further into the paper. This tendency was not only found in ‘young people’ – but all researchers.
- ‘The information literacy of young people, has not improved with the widening access to technology: in fact, their apparent facility with computers disguises some worrying problems’.⁸⁹
- ‘Young scholars are using tools that require little skill: they appear satisfied with a very simple or basic form of searching’.⁹⁰
- ‘Digital literacies and information literacies do not go hand in hand.’⁹¹

Assumptions about young people and technology have blocked the consideration of literacy development. Instead, a low skill base facilitated through conversational phrasing in Google has decentred debate and research into information seeking skills. The lack of research about online behaviours, particularly over the last decade, has had an impact. Policy and funding decisions about education have been made on the basis of ‘mis-information’.

Most significantly, this Report confirmed that assumptions about the online environment and students threaten to damage the researcher of the future. Simply because a media platform is owned, does not mean that it is used or used well. Statements can be made about ‘the Google Generation’, ‘digital natives’ and ‘young people’ and their use of technology. Many of these assumptions are incorrect or unproven. That probably does not matter too much. But when decisions about schools, universities, curricula and libraries are made on the basis of these assumptions then we are heading into dangerous terrain.

This tabloid-fuelled biological determinism and ageism about computer use will hurt schools and universities. Certainly, social conditions impact on behaviour and learning styles. How students occupy their leisure time influences their demeanour in the classroom and workplace. But simply because students in the 1960s listened to rock music did not change their brains to such an extent that every lesson required a drummer to keep the beat and a guitarist to strum a riff. Hendrix-led teaching never activated a paradigm shift in learning styles. Similarly, my generation had its scares about MTV and Nintendo, which were supposedly leading to the decline of western civilisation. Generation X

89 *ibid.*, p. 12

90 *ibid.*, p.14

91 *ibid.*, p. 20

would (supposedly) be unable to concentrate and watch films because they had become accustomed to a three minute micro-narratives of music videos. This group went on to become the audience for *Titanic*, *Braveheart*, *The English Patient* and *Dances with Wolves*. Visual literacies were not undermined. Innovative relationships between film and popular music were forged for all cinema attendees through music video, not simply one age group.

Certainly, student aspirations, environments and literacies should be monitored and studied. But if concentration is lacking, then it is not a sign of autism but reveals the need to develop tasks for building interpretative skills. A lack of reading is not caused by an addiction to pleasure, satiation, gambling and drug taking. Instead, teachers must mobilise a range of assessment options – workbooks, journals, reflective papers or creative-led exegeses – to encourage and enable the deployment of motivated research in student assignments. We as teachers can be staunch in our interventionist strategies rather than remaining silent and compliant with the brain changers. For my first year students, I state that they should not even think about submitting a paper with less than ten sources. My pass mark starts at that point. They grumble. They complain that I am a bha-ich. But they read: first to receive the grades and then because they – grudgingly – start to enjoy the challenges of scholarship, writing and thinking. Whenever the focus is on brains and not literacies, we miss opportunities for teaching, thinking and scholarship.

Talk of brain changers stops debate. If the argument that students' brains have changed continues, then there is nothing that can be done and no possibility for intervention or transformation. As shown in the other chapters of this book, the sociology of web platforms is not self-evident or commonsensical, particularly with regard to age. Distraction and disconnection is not the characteristic of one generation or age group. Bauerlein did however offer a provocative hypothesis about screen culture and the development of multiliteracies.

Visual culture improves the abstract spatialization and problem solving, but it doesn't complement other intelligence-building activities ... The relationship between screens and books isn't benign.⁹²

Even more significantly, and aligned with Willis's *Learning to Labour*, Bauerlein was concerned about the loss of time when deploying social media rather than educational media.

Every hour on MySpace, then, means an hour not practicing a musical instrument or learning a foreign language or watching C-SPAN. Every cell-

92 *ibid.*, p. 96

phone call interrupts a chapter of Harry Potter or a look at the local paper. These are mind-maturing activities, and they don't have to involve Great Books and Big Ideas. They have only to cultivate habits of analysis and reflection, and implant knowledge of the world beyond.⁹³

These 'choices' of behaviour are not generational or age-specific. But these are decisions that matter. When an email interrupts writing, when a text message disturbs reading a complex argument, then the development of deeper and more complex ideas and interpretations is more difficult. Therefore, the relationship between information, media, learning and literacy must be considered with care and reflection. A balance is required between education and technology, rather than enabling the new to configure the important. Time is a precious and valuable resource. It is finite and can be chewed up by the banalities of social media, which perpetuate easy skill development rather than complex configurations of knowledge. This issue is not a question for neuroscientists to assess. For education, teaching and learning to function, there must be much more attention on making conscious and reflexive choices about time and behaviour that are beneficial to intellectual development, rather than encouraging sloppy thinking that a particular generation are 'digital natives' and therefore – seemingly 'naturally' – understand how to use web-enabled platforms in intellectually rigorous ways. Less attention should be placed on multi-tasking and more focus on strategies to develop multiliteracy.

An increasingly complex discussion needs to be held about the relationship between access to digital media and the literacies required to use them with rigour and efficiency. The assumption that one particular age group holds specific gifts and abilities simply because of their birth date is not only inaccurate but inhibitory for skill development programmes.⁹⁴ Instead, more intricate studies, theories and models are required that probe the relationship between basic literacy (the encoding and decoding of text or reading and writing) with higher order information literacy. Also, by focusing on 'young people', the technology discussed is present in the home and carried on a mobile phone, rather than the workplace, school or university. Leisure slips awkwardly into both labour and education. There are better and more complex ways to understand online injustice and inequality. For example, Mossberger, Tolbert

93 *ibid.*, xi

94 Karen Mossberger, Caroline Tolbert and Mary Stansbury stated that 'having access to a computer is insufficient if individuals lack the skills they need to take advantage of technology', *Virtual inequality: beyond the digital divide*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003), p. 1-2

and Stansbury located four ‘digital divides’: access, skills, economic opportunity and democratic participation.⁹⁵

Instead of activating these complex investigations, the managerialism of education is built on an incorrect premise: that teaching and learning is economically efficient. Online education rarely slots into a balanced budget. Under-reported in the literature – often because studies are funded by organisations that want good news stories about new technology – is the high drop out rates from online courses.⁹⁶ Similarly under-researched is ‘gaming behaviour’ from normally civilised students who flame their colleagues with racist, sexist or homophobic abuse,⁹⁷ low levels of reading on or off screen, and depleted editing and drafting skills. It is much easier to celebrate mobile(phone) learning,⁹⁸ or Wikipedia’s ‘history’ page to critical thinking,⁹⁹ than to actually consider – beyond a tabloidised shriek – why widening participation agendas have failed¹⁰⁰ and why there is a high drop out from first year students.¹⁰¹

There are two crucial points to remember in such a strange age. Both have a convincing and long-term literature behind them. The first is that motivation is integral to education. When some of us enrolled in teacher education programmes in the analogue age, the goal was to move students from – summoning an older lexicon – extrinsic to intrinsic learners and from surface to deep learning. To enact this process, strong attention and comprehension was necessary in students’ lived context, aspirations and expectations. To fetishise tools and platforms is to ignore why citizens are drawn to formal education. Students do not enter schools and universities to change a wiki. They want to change their lives.

The second point, which has influenced every part of my teaching, learning and curriculum development, is that students from ‘non standard’ backgrounds

95 *ibid.*

96 T. Oblender, ‘A hybrid course model: one solution to the high online drop-out rate’, *Learning and Leading with Technology*, Vol. 29, No. 6, 2002

97 N. Turan, O. Polat, M. Karapirli, C. Uysal, and S. Turan, ‘The new violence type of the era: Cyber bullying among university students: Violence among university students’, *Neurology, Psychiatry and Brain Research*, Volume 17, Issue 1, March 2011, pp. 21–26

98 P. Thornton and Chris Houser, ‘Using mobile phones in English education in Japan’, *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, Vol. 21, 2005, pp. 217–228

99 R. Rosenzweig, ‘Can History Be Open Source? *Wikipedia* and the Future of the Past’, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 93, No. 1, 2006, pp. 117–146

100 L. Thomas, ‘Power, assumptions and prescriptions: a critique of widening participation policy-making’, *Higher Education Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2001, pp. 361–376

101 M. Chemers, L. Hu, B. Garcia, ‘Academic self-efficacy and first year college student performance and adjustment’, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 93, No. 1, 2001, pp. 55–64

– including citizens of colour, mature-aged scholars and those from the first generation in their family to attend University – require more teaching, not less. Yet at the very moment that we need to deepen our commitment to these students, giving them more care, more respect, more leadership and more understanding, we have absolved our responsibility for developing authentic, deep, challenging and compassionate education by hiding behind words and phrases like ‘digital natives’, ‘interactivity’, ‘office hours’ and ‘student-centred learning’.¹⁰² The assumption behind ‘digital natives’ is that younger people know more (about technology) than older people. This is incorrect. Age is an unpredictable variable in understanding teaching and learning.

How did we end up here, confusing ‘the new’ with ‘the effective’? Not surprisingly, Margaret Thatcher – or more precisely the ‘revolution’ made in her name – must shoulder some blame. During the 1980s, the Conservatives became the radical party, the party of change. The attacks on ‘the state’ and public institutions resulted in the market transforming into a postmodern secular religion, delivering liberation from the supposedly deadening forces of industrialisation, Fordism, the union movement and ‘the sixties,’ with all those troublesome socially progressive movements. Neo-liberalism was fuelled by this ideological engine from both Thatcher and Reagan for endless transformation, taking their message of small government and big business to the world in a militarily-fuelled evangelical crusade. David Cameron’s ‘big society’ continues Thatcher’s project.¹⁰³

Since the 1980s, forces on the right have been radical initiators of change, instigating an historical reversal of traditional conservative affirmations of the status quo and continuity with establishment values. Left and progressivist social movements in such an historical moment had – and have – two choices. Either they move to the right to reconnect with debates about change, as seen in Bill Clinton and Tony Blair’s Third Way agendas, or they cling to a desperate (and ironically conservative) act of preserving institutions, like public health and public schools, that remain from a kinder age for capitalism. That means progressive political forces support an anti-change agenda.

102 While the film *Waiting for Superman: How We Can Save America’s Failing Public Schools* is controversial and does offer a bleak presentation of teachers and teaching, in the book supporting the film, edited by Karl Weber, it was argued that, ‘Recent research into teacher effectiveness demonstrates that the performance gap between the best teachers and the worst teachers is far greater than commonly supposed’, (New York: Public Affairs, 2010), p. 7

103 S. Evans, ‘Consigning its Past to History? David Cameron and the Conservative Party’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 2, 2008, pp. 291–314.

The consequences of this political debate on discussions of educational technology are clear. Technological progressivism weaves through neoliberalism, resulting in a state of permanent techno revolution that would make unreconstructed Trotskyites blush. The goal is endless change, endless instability, a perpetual unsettling of the status quo using the agitated web environment as a model, method and siren's song. The justification for this techno-educational bundle is convincing. It is both convenient and cheap to undervalue the role of teachers and formal education in citizenship, the workplace and democracy, to suggest that very basic software and hardware are the foundation for the 'new economy'. Similarly, it is cheaper to affirm the value of student-centred learning and deny the expertise of teachers. But the knowledge held by teachers and students is not equivalent. Teachers know more. They write and read expansively. They write and interpret curriculum. They set assignments. They moderate and examine. They study, think and translate complex ideas into the stepping stones of lesson plans. Students can enact none of these tasks. Two distinct forces have decentred awareness of these distinctions between teachers and students. Progressivist and liberal politics have celebrated the value of the students' voice in a form of mock-1960s libertarianism, building on the work of Ivan Illich.¹⁰⁴ Concurrently, neo-liberal forces have added the inflective of the market to the educational mix. As Mark Pegrum confirms,

Western education has become increasingly subject to the economics of the market and the creed of neoliberalism, where the state's overwhelming object is to supply the standardized workforce – that is, human capital with transferable skills – necessary to compete in the ever more globalized knowledge-based economy.¹⁰⁵

The user-generated content 'movement' – gathering together Flickr, wikimedia, blogs, podcasting, Facebook and YouTube – when aligned with student centred learning and the market orientation that transformed students into consumers has provided a channel and venue for the emotive excesses of grievance, hostility and insolence against teachers and education. The student voice has turned shrill and brittle, empowered by managers and politicians through the transformation of universities into supermarkets and scholars into shoppers.

More attention must be placed on 'situated literacies'. Hamilton describes this concept as a 'time-bounded interaction between people and texts or other literacy-related artefacts is taking place'.¹⁰⁶ The blurring of leisure and learning

104 I. Illich, *Deschooling society*, <http://ees.net.nz/info/DeschoolingSociety.pdf>

105 M. Pegrum, 'Socrates and Plato Meet Neoliberalism in the Virtual Agora', J. Lockard, and M. Pegrum, (eds.), *Brave New Classrooms*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 16

106 M. Hamilton, 'Expanding the new literacy studies', in D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivancic (eds.), *Situated literacies*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 28

has transformed the respect that is necessary to commence a scholarly journey. A survey by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and the Teachers' Support Network reported that one in six teachers had been cyber-bullied.¹⁰⁷ Harassment of instructors has emerged and digital mauling by groups of students is common.¹⁰⁸ What is stunning when reading the harassment and ridicule of teachers on Facebook is how few teachers have replied to the abuse. Perhaps it is a mark of their self-respect that they do not scan and upload the corrected papers of these students who attack them for their peer group to see and therefore disclose the real rationale for their abuse.

The small space that remains for the left and progressivist forces is an unpopular, underfunded and marginalised commitment to 'the public', through the preservation of public health, public education, public libraries and an affirmation of independent decision making, disconnected from corporations, public relations and marketing consultants. It is from this context that the 'digital natives' discourse propelled a deep commitment to change for its own sake. Once more – as if commemorating May 1968, the young ones are restless and the older generation does not understand. Such critiques of Prensky and other e-learning consultants are obvious. But there is a final more troubling problem. This talk of 'natives' and 'immigrants' is meant to operate as a metaphor or analogy. Significantly, Prensky in later work not only recognised that such phrases as 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' reified and generalised but offended. He describes this terminology as 'humorous but useful constructs'.¹⁰⁹ They are not. Intriguingly, very few of the supporters or critics of Prensky question the profound inappropriateness of the word 'native'. In a (post) colonial era, such a term activates histories of injustice, violence and inequality. Similarly, it is condescending and xenophobic to select 'immigrant' as a term to signify weakness, redundancy and incompetence.

Seemingly, management consultants have replaced anthropologists, leading civilised peoples into a 'new world' of online discovery and riches. The internet has replaced India and Africa. Wandering into deep, dark Web-two-point-zeroland, we find alienated, text messaging, multiply pierced, pod-wearing, pink-haired people. They are different – exotic – compared to the rest of 'us'.

107 J. Meikle, Teachers urge web firms to act against cyber-bullying. *The Guardian*, 2007, 4 April, p. 5

108 J. Pepitone, 'Freshmen claim Judicial Affairs threatened expulsion for creation of Facebook group critical of TA', *The Daily Orange*, 2 August, 2006, <http://dailyorange.com/media/paper522/news/2006/02/08/News/Kicked.In.The.Face.Freshmen.Claim.Judicial-1603618.shtml>

109 M. Prensky, 'Overcoming Educators' Digital Immigrant Accents: A Rebuttal', *The Technology Source Archive*, May/June 2003, http://technologysource.org/article/overcoming_educators_digital_immigrant_accents/

To describe a group as ‘native’ was acceptable through the nineteenth century. Through the survival and courage of indigenous peoples throughout the world, the conversational labelling of ‘natives’ by empowered colonial masters started to drip away, along with the assumptions of colonial ‘masters’ ‘natives’ became citizens. A similar critique can be offered of the phrase ‘digital immigrants’. In a terrorised globe, the movement through space is patrolled, regulated and blocked. Migrants are dangerous, to be restricted, refused entry and monitored. ‘They’ speak a ‘foreign’ language, eat different food, and will not fit in with ‘us’.

There is one identity missing from the duelling puppets of digital natives and digital migrants. We are missing the puppeteer. The e-learning consultants using these labels with no consciousness of the histories of injustice carried with and through ‘natives’ and ‘migrants’ must face a label of their own. These consultants, trying to explain to teachers how to teach, librarians how to manage information and students how to learn, are the new Digital Raj. Whenever managers, journalists or policy makers mention ‘digital natives’ and ‘digital immigrants’, it is important that we start to tether the Digital Raj to these other glib phrases. Put more forthrightly, who gains through the phrase ‘digital natives’? Who gains from the idea that – seemingly organically from the environment – ‘young people’ hold ‘skills’ in ‘technology’? One answer to that question is that the group that gains is the paid consultants who create an environment of crisis and revolution, rather than literacy and learning. In the balance sheet of education, the permanent revolution only benefits those who perpetually invent a crisis, to which they become well paid consultants, riding to the rescue on a white charger. Therefore, the next component of this chapter combines the insights of Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labour* and the odd discussions about digital natives to configure a new model for learning in an environment where social media – rather than educational media – is celebrated.

From Prensky to Vygotsky

The journey of this chapter has explored and probed the consequences of assuming that the media deployed in leisure environments is intrinsically valuable in formal education. One reason for my disquiet and concern about ‘Digital Natives’ in a ‘learning to leisure’ age is derived from an early and intense exploration of the theories of Vygotsky. His Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD) has had many subsequent readings and interpretations.¹¹⁰ The premise

110 Alex Kozulin, Boris Gindis, Vladimir S. Ageyev, and Suzanne M. Miller confirmed the complexity and multiple uses of ZPD, even in Vygotsky’s research. In ‘Sociocultural theory and education: students, teachers, and knowledge’, within Kozulin, Gindis and Ageyev and Miller’s edited collection *Vygotsky’s educational theory in cultural*

of his model is that staying within the limits of the information, vocabulary and knowledge in which we already hold expertise does not create a context or impetus for learning. To refract this argument in the context of this current chapter, it is necessary to move beyond leisure-based languages and platforms to stretch and draw students into more complex knowledge housed within schools and universities.

There are many definitions, theories and methods of embedding technology into education. There are even some that consider the relationship between technology and learning. One of the best emerged in 1977 through the prescient analysis by Jerome Bruner in *The process of education*.

There exist devices to aid the teacher in extending the student's range of experience, in helping him to understand the underlying structure of the material he is learning, and in dramatizing the significance of what he is learning.¹¹¹

This simple sentence is revelatory and explains why the Digital Natives paradigm is not only politically retrograde in the context of postcolonial theory, but deceptive about the nature of learning. If technology has a purpose, then it is to move learners beyond their personal experience and toward expertise via exposure and interpretation of a diversity of information sources and perspectives. It is of value to remember John Dewey's maxim.

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative.¹¹²

Educational media – analogue or digital – can create an ‘underlying structure’ (an information scaffold) to move a scholar from experience to expertise.

context, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), they stated that, ‘Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) became the most popular of Vygotskian concepts used in contemporary educational theory, and yet it remains rather poorly understood. The problematic nature of ZPD can be explained by the fact that Vygotsky used this concept in three different contexts. In the developmental context ZPD is used for explaining the emerging psychological functions of the child. In the applied context ZPD explains the difference between the child's individual and aided performances, both in situations of assessment and in classroom learning. Finally, ZPD is used as a metaphoric “space” where everyday concepts of the child meet ‘scientific’ concepts provided by teachers or other mediators of learning’, p. 3

111 J. Bruner, *The process of education*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 84

112 J. Dewey, *Experience & Education*, (New York: Touchstone, 1938), p. 25

Prensky does not recognise his errors in confusing leisure and learning, experience and expertise. This is the error made by Prensky:

students in our classrooms are changing – largely as a result of their outside-of-school experiences with technology – and are no longer satisfied with an education that doesn't immediately address the real world in which they live.¹¹³

There are obviously many concerns with such a statement. Firstly, the assumption is perpetuated that education must address 'the real world'. Vocationalism, as an ideology, has weaknesses.¹¹⁴ To place such an argument in context, I teach students in a degree programme – depending on the country – for three or four years. If I taught the 'real world' to first years, this information would be redundant and obsolete at the point of their graduation. Education must be better, greater and more prescient than the real world allows. Secondly, there is an assumption that the 'out of school experience' is intrinsically relevant and indeed of a higher standard to formal education. This is incorrect. Being on Facebook validates experience and sharing rather than expertise and challenging knowledge. It would be a fascinating imaginary scenario to consider what would happen to workplaces if Facebook was the feeder college rather than universities. The management of privacy, time, (over)sharing and the mobilisation of evidence to configure an argument would be configured very differently.

The principle of teaching and learning is to create an environment for students to stretch and challenge assumed truths. Learning does not emerge when we are satisfied. Confusion and challenge are required to create learning. Even if we disagree with the knowledge being read, heard or discussed, the act of reviewing and reflecting upon prior knowledge in light of new ideas is productive. Such a model of learning, teaching and living has a distinguished heritage.

Learning requires motivation but also recognising – with precision – the current level of knowledge and ability and the mechanism and trajectory to commence a learning moment. As Jerome Bruner stated, 'Somewhere between apathy and wild excitement, there is an optimum level of aroused attention that is

113 M. Prensky, *Teaching digital natives: partnering for real learning*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2010), p. xv

114 There is a cluster of arguments about economic efficiency, competitiveness and a simplistic relationship about 'skills' in education 'transferring' to the workplace. Stephen Ball, in *The education debate*, (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2008) stated that, 'the social and economic purposes of education have been collapsed into a single, overriding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness and an increasing neglect or sidelining (other than in rhetoric) of the social purposes of education', p. 12

ideal for classroom activity. What is that level?¹¹⁵ To ascertain that level is complex. One educational researcher gave us a shape and strategy to configure that match between motivation and learning, prior knowledge and future knowledge.

Lev Vygotsky, like many theorists deployed through this book, reached fame and influence before the arrival of the internet. His stature in American psychology was secured after the publication of *Thought and Language* in 1962. He used the term pedology to distinguish his research from pedagogy. He did not agree with testing. Instead he was interested in creating barriers to learning and defamiliarising acceptable practices and ideas. By disrupting everyday patterns of thinking, new strategies for problem solving and learning emerge.¹¹⁶

While studying literature in his early academic career, he moved to psychology in his late twenties. His interest remained consciousness, arguing that it is not intrinsic or internally constituted. Instead, consciousness is developed through the building of external relationships. Significantly – and importantly for this chapter and book – Vygotsky created a sharp distinction between lower or ‘natural’ mental functions such as memory and attention and ‘higher’ functionality. He argued that when developed, these higher functions transform the lower functions. Indeed, he deployed the Hegelian concept of *aufgehoben*¹¹⁷ to suggest that lower functions were superseded by higher functions. Then ‘natural’ functions became cultural functions. His example was to explore how the development of language was transformed when deployed within organised structures for learning.¹¹⁸ By probing the (literal) dialogue

115 J. Bruner, *The process of education*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 72

116 Kieran Egan and Natalia Gajdamaschko, in ‘Some cognitive tools of literacy’, in A. Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. Ageyev and S. Miller (eds.), *Vygotsky’s educational theory in cultural context*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), offered the crucial connection between ZPD and more current theorisations of literacy. They stated that, ‘The invention of writing transformed the educator’s task. Increasingly, as literacy developed, significant amounts of knowledge were stored in coded form. Access to this store was attained only through becoming skilled in literacy. Consequently, all literate cultures invented some formal system of education into coding and decoding knowledge’, p. 83–4.

117 Literally meaning to replace or supersede, the interpretation of this word is granted greater connotative power when positioned in Hegel’s model of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The resultant synthesis still contains (or preserves) elements of the original, but it is transcended into something new. For a fine – and precision – discussion of the use of *aufgehoben* in the thought of Hegel, please refer to ‘Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’, English Department, University of Hawaii, <http://www.english.hawaii.edu/criticalink/lacan/terms/hegel.html>

118 L. Vygotsky, in *Thought and Language*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), stated that, ‘We began our study with an attempt to discover the relation between thought and

between the interactional and the social, Vygotsky created a productive space – through disconnection – between a student’s actual and potential development. Innovative assessment is a way to both enable this development and a consciousness of it.

The relationship between Vygotsky’s experiments, Willis’s ethnography, Prensky’s management consultancy and Innis’s *Bias of Communication* begins to emerge. Willis showed ‘the lads’ disrupted school systems with leisure-led practices of resistance such as truancy, smoking and swearing. They deployed an easy knowledge system in which they were literate, derived from their home and friends. Therefore, they blocked more complex learning by not enabling or managing the barriers and difficulties that are necessary to create learning. Instead, they stay within their lived experiences. Similarly Prensky assumes that ‘the young people’ use ‘technology’ in a way that – within his argument – is intrinsically beneficial to learning. Actually, staying within the basic daily experiences of technology, without barriers to develop consciousness through curriculum, complex reading and challenging assessment, ensures that students never move from personal experience and into academic expertise. Learning does not emerge. Instead, complacency and unjustified confidence is the result. Therefore, a balance in Innis’s *Bias of Communication* is required.

Vygotsky’s arguments and experiments are even more intricately applied in an environment of multiple platforms, where the same information can be presented in different ways. He was well aware of the value of ‘external aids’.¹¹⁹ As an example, instead of presenting materials in printed text, the movement to sonic media creates barriers to understanding, slowing down the encounter between concept and interpretation. To avoid cutting and pasting, or reading and grabbing, sonic-only platforms create barriers. The aim is not efficiency or speed, but barriers to learning that require students to construct new pathways of thinking.

In my career of learning about teaching, and learning about learning, Vygotsky’s ideas remained with me, not only when constructing curriculum but considering assessment.¹²⁰ That is why I block student use of Google

speech at the earliest stages of phylogenetic and ontogenetic development. We found no specific interdependence between the genetic roots of thought and word. It became plain that the inner relations we were looking for were not a prerequisite for, but rather a product of, the historical development of human consciousness’, p. 210

119 Carolyn P. Panofsky, explores Vygotsky’s three forms of mediation: tools, signs and symbols (semiosis) and social interaction. Please refer to ‘The Relations of Learning and Student Social Class: Toward Re-“Socializing” Sociocultural Learning Theory’, <http://lchc.ucsd.edu/mca/Paper/Panofsky.pdf>

120 J. Allan Cheyne and Donato Tarulli, in ‘Dialogue, difference and voice in the zone of proximal development’ in H. Daniels (ed.), *An introduction to Vygotsky*, (London:

and Wikipedia while they are still learning how to learn. If I let them revert to easy material and prior patterns of gathering information, then they learn very little. When introducing obstacles into assessment task, such as removing the opportunity to use Google, they are forced to move around this barrier and discover new strategies to locate information. Such a strategy also emerges when assigning reading for students that is (just) beyond their current ability. Each week I provide between four and eight extracts from key scholarly materials. There is always one straight forward reading for the students who may be struggling. But each week's readings include a diversity of levels and abilities, including one very difficult article. This artificial and intentional insertion of barriers in student learning, so that they confront confusion and uncertainty, is one of the reasons I do not use textbooks. They may not only be pitched too low, but are written at a unified level of difficulty. Actually, to enable learning, it is important that students do not understand a sizeable proportion of their reading each week. They must develop and widen their vocabulary, familiarise themselves with the key researchers in the discipline and acknowledge the quite frightening realisation that there are many tropes, theories, concepts and paradigms that they do not know and will require them to develop their knowledge.

Another strategy discussed throughout this book is configuring distinct modes of assessment that address the same learning outcomes. One example asks students to construct a podcast or use a mobile phone camera and then write an exegesis to explain how the different media forms generate distinct research and knowledge. It is a way to understand and activate Harold Innis's *Bias of Communication* through practice-led research. By its nature, practice-led research is participatory and situated in a very precise context requiring an active negotiation between past and present knowledge. Another option may be asking students to construct a tweet: to present an academic argument within 140 characters. Such a barrier (of letters) develops other skills such as writing thesis statements and topic sentences.

Vygotsky believed that the hub of 'development', in the many meanings of that word, requires consideration of the relationship between humans and their environment. This process is situated in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He asks educators to consider the realisation that all learning is based on prior learning. Therefore learning should be linked with a developmental level rather than – how it exists in schools – linked to age level. At its most basic, the Zone of Proximal Development suggests that an activity that students require

Routledge, 2005), stated that 'Scaffolded instruction within the ZPD is informed by the tutor's constant appraisal of, and sensitivity to, the learner's level of functioning. More specifically, the successful scaffolding of instruction requires that the teacher perform a number of functions, among which are the selection, organisation and presentation of suitable tasks', p. 135.

assistance to complete today will be finished independently tomorrow. As Vygotsky realised, 'A full understanding of the concept of the zone of proximal development must result in re-evaluation of the role of imitation in learning'.¹²¹ With all the talk of facilitation and student-centred learning, Vygotsky reminds us that leadership and modelling are required. Put in the language of the first section of this book, we do not know what we do not know. Therefore external stimulation, information, structure and knowledge are required to move students from the unknown to the known. Teachers, through considered methods and curriculum, can provide that pathway. The ZPD provides a model and inspiration to align learning and teaching zones.

Whenever the focus is on technology rather than teaching, there is a displacement and denial of the difficulty of learning. When the focus is on tools or platforms, there is no understanding of how to activate the Zone of Proximal Development. Kay Pscencik confirmed that,

Research consistently reinforces that the most important factor in a student's learning is the quality of teaching experienced each day. That quality is influenced not only by the qualifications of the teacher, but the content of the lesson, and the strategies applied by the teacher to facilitate student learning.¹²²

In creating cycles of movement from the concrete to the abstract,¹²³ the key connection and communication alignment is between students and staff. Social media provide an array of opportunities for those connections and building relationships of trust. John Murphy realised that, 'students learn quickly if a teacher is insincere or if the teaching behaviours they witness fail to meet their needs for responsive teaching'.¹²⁴ Therefore, this chapter is not against the use of social media in education. It can build a complex and personal connection between staff and students. When confronting difficult work, that relationship is important.

To use a more public example of such trust, Gunther Kress thanked his former co-author Bob Hodge, demonstrating the relationship between risk and learning.

121 L.S. Vygotsky, *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 86

122 K. Pscencik, *Accelerating student and staff learning*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009), p. vii

123 John Dewey recognised the importance of this movement in *How we think*, (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co. Publishers, 1910).

124 J. Murphy, *Essentials of teaching academic oral communication*, (Boston: Thomson Heinle, 2006), p. 21

With him it felt safe being ignorant. Ideas that I had never had the courage to say out aloud even to myself became the ordinary stuff of our talk, of disagreement and agreement, of discussion. That gave me the confidence to say things; to try to publish them even.¹²⁵

This moment of intellectual generosity is inspirational. It is important for all of us to remain students and continue to test, trial, question, probe and risk. But this is why higher education is so precious and valuable. It is one of the few times in our lives where students can be selfish, where a range of very bright and often inspirational people will teach, help, support and care. For me, such an argument manifests in my desire to make every lecture and seminar special. I do not want learning to be like leisure. I do not want learning to be like everyday life. I want students to enter an expansive, disturbing, compassionate, multicultural, troubling and courageous space where differences are respected and risks are rewarded. One example of my desire to create a distinct space between learning and life is the use of music. Five minutes before a lecture commences, I have always played a song that is a sonic comment on the topic of the day. It becomes a soundtrack for learning and gives students five minutes to change intellectual gears. This was my intent, but it is interesting that – even fifteen years after a lecture – a student remembered the music and the rationale for it in learning. Intriguingly in the context of this chapter, a former student contacted me via Facebook.

Hi Tara,

Thank you for your fb friendship. You are one of the most memorable and inspirational lecturers I have ever had the pleasure of learning from and every time I hear that welcome to the fun house song I think of you and it makes me laugh. As a child I was diagnosed with ADHD so I truly appreciate your effort to make lectures engaging.

Thank you :)

This was an unnecessary but very kind message. To see ‘pleasure’ and ‘learning’ in the same sentence was welcome. But to see that my former student remembered the music and recognised that these sounds made the session ‘engaging’ demonstrated that thoughtful deployments of media can move students from leisure to learning. In the final part of this chapter, the cost of

125 G. Kress, *Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*, (London: Routledge, 2010), p. xiii

aligning the rationale for education technologies with the imperatives of the workplace can be seen.

Learning to learn

Insofar as education/training becomes ever more subordinated to technical instrumentalism and to the ‘needs’ of industry, it will be seen as a necessary evil to be tolerated in order to obtain access to the wage in order to obtain access to leisure and consumption and their cultural energies ... We need an altogether new approach to education.¹²⁶

Paul Willis

There is a well-established historical trend of projecting great optimism or intense pessimism onto information and communication technologies. The Internet and its associated platforms have not been immune from this ideological shaping and have alternately been heralded as ushering in a ‘brave new world’ of democratic education, without the irony attached to Huxley’s title, or the corrosion of teaching and learning.

Consistent with trends in projecting utopian or dystopian qualities onto the Internet more generally, the characteristics have been used to argue that computer-mediated communication is more democratic and egalitarian than face-to-face (F2F) as it allows greater and more equal participation.¹²⁷ Communicators are deprived of visual clues that bring with them attendant biases about social status or conversely that it encourages greater anti-social or anti-normative behaviour leading to flaming.¹²⁸

Clichés of web 2.0, social networking, user-generated content and user-generated contexts presuppose that citizens who are literate in the digital environment will also be able to move these skills from leisure to an educational context. Yet significant studies reveal a more complex story. Heather Hopkins suggested that web 2.0 users are ‘voyeurs rather than creators’. She confirms that active participation through the generation of content is incredibly low.

126 P. Willis, *Common Culture*, (Boulder: Westview, 1990)

127 J. Tiffin, and L. Rajasingham, *The global virtual university*, (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003)

128 P. Bordia, ‘Face-to-Face Versus Computer-Mediated Communication: A Synthesis of the Experimental Literature’, *The Journal of Business Communication*, Vol. 34, No. 1, Jan 1997. 99–120.

The 1 rule (1 make content, 10 add, 89 just view) overstates it. Of US internet visits to YouTube, only 0.16 were to upload videos; 0.2 of Flickr visits were to load photos. Wikipedia bucks the trend: 4.59 of visits are to edit or create entries. Those tend to be older than the average Wikipedia visitor (over 35) and more likely to be male.¹²⁹

Too often social networking's mode of self-expression spills over into self-absorption, and libertarianism in the name of democracy¹³⁰ or – at its most excessive – individualised flaming. Phrases, words and descriptions that would never be deployed to the face of a teacher or another student are freely exchanged from behind a pixilated screen. The consequences to universities, teachers and learners of aligning student-centred learning, facilitation, collaboration and team teaching in an environment of web 2.0 are underwritten projects.

John Hartley stated that, 'Universities will ignore the lesson of consumer-led, distributive, iterative and multi-sourced learning at their peril.'¹³¹ Ignorance is not an option, but confusing social media and educational media because one is 'consumer-led' and 'distributive' should not be part of the default rationale for deploying user-generated content, social networking sites, or even an affirmation of University 2.0. Too often pseudo-democracy is valued over leadership and skills over knowledge. Such a slippage feeds into the phrase 'participatory culture'. Follow Henry Jenkins' argument and assumptions in this project.

These skills and competencies represent the heart of what we are calling the new media literacies. These skills come not from textbooks but are acquired through young peoples' involvement in various forms of participatory culture. I use this term to describe the new kinds of social and creative activities that have emerged in a networked society. A participatory culture has relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby the most experienced members pass along knowledge to novices. A participatory culture also is one in which members believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another. Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from individual expression to community involvement ... today's new media platforms represent important sites of information learning, and that the skills young people acquire there can inform classroom practices in ways that empower them to take greater responsibility over their own learning.

129 H. Hopkins, 'Siteseeing', *The Guardian*, 26 April, 2007, p. 4

130 K. Kelly, 'We are the web', *Wired*, August 2005, p. 099

131 J. Hartley, 'There are other ways of being in the truth: the uses of multimedia literacy', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2007, p. 144

The time young people spend outside the classroom engaging with these new forms of cultural experience helps them master the core social skills and cultural competencies (the new media literacies) they will use for years to come.¹³²

There are missing stages in such an argument. If students are lacking the capacity to write and read – the encoding and decoding of text – then they cannot comment in the comment culture. They cannot write blogs and they cannot read them. Further, there is the assumption that skills are the same as expertise. The problem of the Jenkins argument is that the media platforms that facilitate the read write web, including content management systems such as Drupal, mobile phone cameras, the iPad and Zoom microphones, are very easy to use. They require very low level technical skills. They are basic. At university, students and teachers do not develop skills. We develop knowledge. It is necessary to work at a systemically higher level. These tools can be used in curriculum and assessment. That is obvious. But assuming that ‘participation’ is ‘learning’ is not only flawed, but dooms generations of students to work at a very low level, ‘mastering’ very basic skills. In such a context, the phrase ‘digital literacy’ is a chimera, describing the use of very basic platforms, software applications and sites for uploading and downloading. Importantly, assuming participation leads (inevitably) to learning and (even more bizarrely) to democracy is not only utopic but it undermines the structured, planned and deep engagements required for university education.

Paul Willis – from a research project based in a working class school in the analogue age – showed that ‘the lads’ challenged the hierarchy and power structure of a school but were then disenfranchised from social mobility via education. Such a tactic meant that working class boys became working class men. While, as students, they probed the ideologies of schooling, the greatest cost was to their future, not ‘the system’. In social media, the rules and normative behaviours may be much less clear in online environments due to the relative newness of their existence within higher education. Further, Willis’s critique signifies how education is justified and framed in a post-Fordist environment of lifestyle and post-work.¹³³

Without clear guidelines in place about group behaviour, students will shift leisure-based language and practices into an educational environment because they hold a higher level of competency and literacy. The key – which is even more significant through the rhetoric of web 2.0 – is that intervention is required so that students disconnect web-based behaviour for leisure from the web-framed behaviour in teaching and learning. While the literature from Terry Flew and others has valued the positioning of education in life and work

132 H. Jenkins, “‘Geeking out’ on democracy”, *Threshold*, Spring 2009, p. 5

133 S. Aronowitz, *The politics of identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1992)

– exemplified through his phrase ‘learner-earner’,¹³⁴ there are consequences of blurring moments of teaching and learning into consumerism, life and lifestyle.

In anti-intellectual times, experts have replaced expertise. Freedom of speech for the few has suffocated the rights of the many. But teachers are also to blame. We have gone too far in valuing the student ‘experience’ over the scholarly responsibilities to knowledge. We have ‘facilitated’ an unproductive confusion between valuing student views and validating ignorance, discrimination and oppression. Certainly, the arguments in favour of student-centred learning are convincing and effective. It is important every day to value our students, their experience, their histories and their voices. But they enter university – a voluntary level of education – to become better than they are, rather than remaining locked in their complacency. New technologies cannot intrinsically make new democracies. They can reify and reinforce already existing oppressions and inequalities. Instead, teachers need to bring the revelation, consciousness and the transcendence back to scholarship and learning. This process may not involve new technologies at all, but could use older platforms to question older modes of prejudice and discrimination.

David Buckingham affirmed that, ‘we need to be teaching about technologies, not just with or through them’.¹³⁵ He is right: form, media or platform do not speak. They are not the message. But content is mediated, framed and shaped by the platform selection to channel data. To take Buckingham’s argument seriously, technology should not be used as a neutral platform for leisure, shopping or learning. Instead, the technology must be taught and the communication system explored.

Without intervention, without being forced to improve and engage with complex materials, most of us will stay in environments where we are content, with our friends and families. Like Paul Willis’s lads, we will mock those we do not understand, rather than take the risk to learn from them. Social media makes such a problem worse as we are surrounded by ‘friends’ who comment, chat, reinforce, ‘like’, and support. Learning comes from moving outside of our comfortable context. Only by learning to learn – rather than learning to leisure or learning to labour – can information and media literacy becoming the foundation for scholarship.

134 T. Flew, ‘Educational media in transition: Broadcasting, digital media and lifelong learning in the knowledge economy’, *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 2002, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 47–60.

135 D. Buckingham, *Beyond technology: children’s learning in the age of digital culture*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. viii

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Section Three
From Social Media to
Media Literacies

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Chapter Five

The iPad Effect: Conspicuous consumption and wasted learning

Game's over losers!
I have an iPad
Compare your lives to mine &
kill yourselves

T shirt slogan¹

Many sources, sites, platforms and theories assist the understanding of the read-write web. One of the strangest is the iPad. Launched on 3 April, 2010, it continued the (imagined and heavily marketed) desire to create a successful tablet for computing,² while also extending the use of touch screens successfully trialled with the iPhone.³ Books could be read on the screen, building on Amazon's Kindle and Barnes and Noble's Nook. Three models, iPad, iPad 2 and the (bizarrely named) new iPad, were released in less than two years. A fourth model and an iPad mini tumbled into production and consumption the following year. It was a product – indeed a series of products – searching for an audience, and found one through the persistent release of new models. It was the nagging wife of technology. Yet not all users, let alone bloggers, were convinced. Website upon website questioned its market and purpose. As Sue Halpern from *The New York Review of Books* stated, 'here was a device that, sight unseen, large numbers of people wanted and believed they had to have, even without knowing precisely what it was or what it did'.⁴ But the iPad was not 'about' functionality. It was and is an irrational purchase for an economic environment that had been described as a crunch and a crash,

1 RDAcorp, 'I have an iPad T Shirt', Zazzle.co.uk, http://www.zazzle.com/i_have_an_ipad_tshirt-235815352546854318

2 Apple's first tablet computer was the Newton MessagePad 100 in 1993.

3 Juhani Pallasmaa, in *The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2007) stated that 'touch is the sensory mode that integrates our experience of the world with that of ourselves', p. 11

4 S. Halpern, 'The iPad revolution', *The New York Review of Books*, May 2010, p. 1

requiring what Richard Florida described as *The Great Reset*.⁵ Clearly, in an era of another new economy (a new new economy?), much of the old economy – of unemployment, underemployment, insider trading and the profound imbalance between finance capitalism and other modes of economic development – still survives. This product is not a symbolic critique or an emblem of an age. The labour conditions under which the iPad and other Apple products have been made have faced serious questions.⁶ Wisman and Baker, when comparing the market ‘corrections’ of the 1920s and the 2000s, recognised that,

inequality increased dramatically in the decades leading up to the financial crises of both 1929 and 2008. Yet students of both crises have largely ignored any role that rising inequality might have played in rendering the financial sector more vulnerable to systemic dysfunction.⁷

This is a powerful argument suggesting that inequality, besides creating personal, familial and social injustice, also triggers panic capitalism. In this moment of the new (new) economy, an old (old) economic theorist increases in value. Thorstein Veblen’s theories of consumer behaviour, particularly when read through a post-Baudrillard gauze, reveal that in times when social mobility is not possible, it can be simulated through credit cards and risky behaviour. This simulation of affluence, so clearly embodied and promulgated by Bernie Madoff, can be criminal. However it is rarely rational.

This is the context in which to frame the iPad. Although each model was released in a slightly different economic environment, it remains portable, intuitive, mobile and features a large, dynamic and comfortable touch screen. When first removed from the box it appears to be not very useful, but the application development community have extended its functionality. There were odd accessories such as a keyboard and a camera connection kit, which remind users that it can be like the laptop computer and smart phone that they

5 R. Florida, *The Great Reset: how new ways of living and working drive post-crash prosperity*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2010)

6 Lucy Siegle asks about the labour conditions of the ‘techno-serf’ in the international supply chain in ‘Were humans harmed in the marking of your shiny gadget’, *The Observer*, 1 May, 2011, p. 34. She stated, ‘I used to advocate going through a sort of consumerist catechism before making any consumer purchasing decision. Who made this product? Why did they make it? Why do I need it? I feel as if I urgently need to return to this way of buying. An understanding of the provenance of the product is key’, p. 34

7 J. Wisman and B. Baker, ‘Rising inequality and the financial crises of 1929 and 2008’, 2 August, 2010, <http://www.american.edu/cas/economics/pdf/upload/2010-10.pdf>, p. 1–2

already own.⁸ This camera kit was rapidly rendered redundant when the second model was released within a year. The camera kit provided the function that should have been installed as a default feature in the first model. Shoppers bought this, only to have two cameras included as standard in the next version. Yet the memory capacity remained small. But it was – supposedly – corrected by the use of Dropbox and the iCloud. As usual, software solves the errors and problems manifesting through hardware.

However the iPad's hardware offers one conspicuous gift. The remarkable screen gives the iPad particular strengths in both managing and viewing photographs. The iPad is wasteful as a music player, because the screen is not well deployed, although it does enable engagement with both music videos and old album and single covers. While the iPod returned sound and the ears to culture, the iPad returns the eyes and visual literacy, with an individually targeted, high quality screen available to watch tailored content.

Recognising this moment of change, this chapter probes the iPad as an object of digital excess. It investigates the iPad's innovation, exploring its potentials and uses in education. However the third stage of this analysis is the most important, investigating 'the iPad effect', and the lessons to be learned about consumption, production, class and waste. The movement is from a focus on the iPad's use in education and towards Thorstein Veblen's theories, offering a new context and rationale for digital excess in the midst of a global recession. After exploring conspicuous consumption as a key concept when theorising digital dieting, the final part activates the iPad effect: how this object is a moment of change in the recent history of the read-write web and how it can be managed. The goal of this chapter in *Digital Dieting* is not to critique the iPad, but to show the cost and consequences of obsolescence, and what happens when marketing gains greater importance than teaching and learning. The imperative is to unravel the spin of writers such as Gregory Ferenstein who affirm 'how the iPad 2 will revolutionise education', and state that 'the iPad 2's wealth of new features is a boon for tech-hungry classrooms'.⁹ As someone who works in contemporary higher education, there are many descriptions I would acknowledge of my professional context: 'tech hungry' is not the phrase I would choose.

8 The product was reviewed in *The Wall Street Journal* as a 'laptop killer.' Please see, 'Apple iPad Review: Laptop Killer? Pretty Close', *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 March, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304252704575155982711410678.html>

9 G. Ferenstein, 'How the iPad 2 will revolutionise education', *Fast Company*.com, 3 March, 2011, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1733662/how-the-ipad-2-will-revolutionise-classroom-education>

Aca-Pad: the academic uses of iPad literacy

Chances are you'll
 hide your iPad
 in a drawer
 and take it
 out once
 a month
 So the name is PERFECT¹⁰

iPad t-shirt

The question percolating through the reviews and advertisements for the product is whether the iPad changes how 'we' do 'things'. This chapter probes the identity of the 'we', but firstly it is necessary to consider what those 'things' may be. There are problems with the iPad. The iBookstore is limited. Web browsing is flawed because Flash is not enabled. There is no USB slot, so easy printing and movement of files is not possible. Dropbox and iCloud helps, but it should not be necessary. Only by iPad 2 were cameras included in the package. To validate this change in model is like celebrating the quality of the bandage, ignoring the wound. All these errors, inconsistencies and problems are supposedly moderated by downloading apps that solve these issues. Such solutions transform the Apple iTunes Store into, not the World Wide Web, but a triage unit that addresses problems inherent in the iPad's design. These flaws inhibit usefulness. But before addressing the costs and problems of the iPad, it is important to also recognise its strengths.

Design matters. Dieter Rams, amongst his ten rules for design, listed usefulness as a key attribute of success.¹¹ Other characteristics within Rams' rules include consistency, simplicity, honesty, understandability, unobtrusiveness and innovation. In the documentary *Objectified*, Rams anointed Apple as the Corporation perpetuating his legacy.¹² Rams made these comments before the release of the iPad, but still provided an evaluative mechanism for it. This product divided critics. Occupying the space between the smart phone and laptop computer, the iPad probes the limits of consumer tolerance of technological obsolescence, waste, viral marketing excesses, public relations and the usefulness of design.¹³

10 'iPad is perfectly named', Zazzle.co.uk, http://www.zazzle.co.uk/ipad_is_perfectly_named_tshirt-235178118674748470

11 D. Rams, *Objectified*, (Plexifilm: 2009)

12 *ibid.*

13 The iPad 1, 2 and 'the new iPad' were the start of a sizeable backlash against the forced obsolescence of Apple products through their iTunes lock in. Rupert Jones

While Stephen Fry¹⁴ and the usual Apple advocates and enthusiasts express their ‘love’ and ‘intimacy’ with the platform,¹⁵ I am not convinced. Certainly in education, there are specific functions that students and academics may extract from the iPad. There are apps in metaphoric academic gowns. Two characteristics make it distinctive and special in the overcrowded technology market: the screen and its mobility. Recognising these two features, students, teachers and researchers can create new ways of reading, writing, watching and thinking. There are uses that my household, filled with two academics, two iPads, two teaching timetables, multiple research projects and time poverty, have discovered. There are also other functions employed by our students. I have labelled such specific purposes with the phrase ‘aca-Pad’. These functions demonstrate that the object has a use greater than a paperweight with an on/off switch. Before entering the deeper critique of the iPad and its popularity, it is important to validate how it can be deployed and the functions it can enable. In other words, before presenting the iPad effect, it is important to probe the iPad in the context of digital dieting, focusing not on what it can do, but its purpose in teaching and learning.

Photographic-led research

One feature that drew me to the iPad – and makes it distinctive in comparison to laptops, netbooks and the iPhone – is its presentation of photographs. There are many benefits of digital photography including accessibility, reduction in printing costs, and the ease and speed of editing and distribution. One loss in the movement from analogue to digital photography through the 1990s and 2000s is the way these images are presented and shared. Enthusiasts have hard drives filled with hundreds/thousands of rarely seen digital photographs. They

stated that ‘a pricey but stylist MacBook laptop, a variety of iPods and now a wallet-busting iPhone 4 ... I’ve bought them all. So why is Apple now penalising me and thousands of other loyal customers by effectively declaring that our computers are obsolete? If you go out and buy an iPhone 4 or the latest iPod shuffle, iPod nano or iPod touch, you won’t be able to use it unless you have the latest version of iTunes (iTunes 10) on your computer. No problem, you think – it’s simply a case of downloading it from Apple’s website. But I’ve just made a rather unpleasant discovery: ‘older’ Mac computers are unable to run the latest version of iTunes. And I’m not alone; it’s a problem that has sparked fury among Apple users across the world’, from ‘When Apple sticks in your throat’, *The Guardian*, 21 May, 2011, p. 3

14 ‘Fry unpacks the iPad’, Stephen Fry.com, 1 April, 2010, <http://www.stephenfry.com/2010/04/01/unpacking-my-ipad/>

15 H. Jobling, ‘How I learnt to stop worrying and love the iPad’, *Trusted Reviews.com*, 30 May, 2010, <http://www.trustedreviews.com/editorial/2010/05/30/How-I-Learned-To-Stop-Worrying-And-Love-The-iPad/p1>

are taken and stored, but not visible for use.¹⁶ The iPad enables not only the presentation of photographs, but the cataloguing and bundling of images for research. For visual ethnographers, semioticians, scholars of tourism, design and marketing researchers, the iPad is an accessible and appropriate platform to display, analyse, disseminate, catalogue and carry photographs and images into the classroom and around the myriad locations of research and writing.

Teaching with screen-based media

The tethering of the iPad to iTunes ties the user to Apple in a way that would make Microsoft blush, or at least put anti competition lawyers on speed dial. One of the advantages of this dependency is that screen-based media – including film, televisual programming and vodcasts – can be downloaded, played and viewed. The capacity of the iPad to operate as a self-standing screen for time-shifting and space-shifting media makes it ideal for small group teaching. It is unobtrusive and mobile. The YouTube application resident on the platform ensures that popular culture and user generated content are deployed in appropriate and thoughtful ways throughout a seminar or tutorial. The iPad 2 – finally – allowed a mirroring of the iPad's screen on other surfaces enabled with a HDMI slot and cable. Therefore, the fine screen can be used as both a monitor and a remote control for other screen-based media in teaching.

Researching with screen-based media

A portable screen encasing downloaded visual media enables staff to conduct research as they move around the world. A difficulty when relying on DVDs for this work was the restrictive region codes. If a British-based scholar wishes to work with a DVD in the United States or Singapore, the film will not operate in local hardware. Although often more expensive to download films and television programmes to the iPod, iPhone and iPad, one advantage is that the material is mobile. It can travel with the researcher. As an example, I commenced the research for this chapter when on annual leave in Australia. The interview with Dieter Rams mentioned at the start of this section was part of the 2009 film *Objectified*. I own it on both DVD and iTunes download. Writing this article while in Australia, the Zone 2 DVD would not operate. The iTunes version was as mobile as its owner.

16 The burgeoning market for digital photoframes, deploying an SD card and enabling the continual movement between images, shows that there is a desire to display photographs.

iTunes U, vodcasts and archived lectures

My husband Steve Redhead promptly recognised an innovative use for the iPad. He immediately started to download seminars and sessions from iTunes U and positioned the iPad alongside his laptop computer. He has been watching lectures with Sylvere Lotringer and Paul Virilio for new research projects, taking notes on his computer while viewing the footage. Originally, it seemed he was treating the iPad as a small television in his office, but he has actually been using it as a specialist visual archive for his writing. He could have viewed these videos on his computer, but found it more effective and efficient to separate watching, note taking and writing.



This is an actual shot of his desk. No, he did not tidy it first. Even though Steve is much more organised than his wife, with my office resembling an obstacle course rather than something from an Ikea catalogue, I have followed his lead in the use of the iPad, if not the commitment to cleaning fluid. Before the iPad, I favoured podcasts and audio-only lectures and presentations from iTunes U. Most days in the last few years I have listened to sonic sessions delivered by great scholars. While the iPad will not replace this function, there is no doubt that the smaller screens of the iPhone and iPod were not conducive to viewing visual presentations. The iPad has enhanced the usability of university vodcasts in research and teaching. When watching lectures recorded with a static camera, the iPad adds intimacy and closeness to the speaker. For sessions in diverse languages where subtitles are used, the small screens of the iPhone and iPod were not assisting viewers. Now subtitles are of an appropriate size to the screen and enhance the archival use of materials spoken in diverse languages.

Music video research

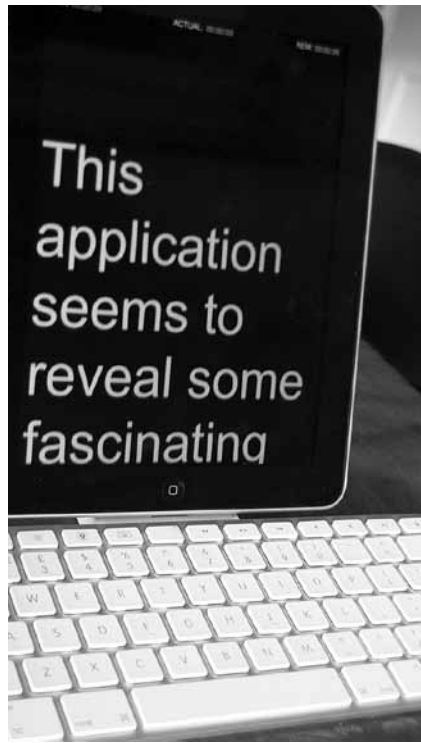
The iPodification of culture has transformed the music video into a self-standing object and commodity for the music industry. Through the 1980s, the music video was an advertisement for a song. This meant that close studies of this exploratory mode of short film-making were marginalised. iTunes not only ensured that the music video gained an independent commercial role in the industry, but also granted scholars access to a rich and underutilised popular cultural database. Although the screen is wasted for the playing of music on the iPad, music videos and album covers are given renewed attention. While the iPod decentred visuality, the iPad has returned visual history to popular music. As many music videos have the quality of short films, they are of an ideal length for use in seminars and tutorials.

Marketing and promotion

Like most academics, I have been involved in marketing, promotion and selling university programmes. Such events require the movement of brochures and media display units. The lightness of the iPad permits staff to carry a high resolution screen with a built in speaker to show looped advertisements, university web pages, staff and student profiles and student work.

Assistance in the construction and delivery of lectures, public speeches and media presentations

Much iPad functionality emerges through the applications developed and released by third parties. For artists, designers, musicians and gamers, their needs are well served. Academics are a small community and a minimal market for any media. The iPad is no exception. There is an application that was developed for delivering media presentations, but there are new and unexpected uses for academics. The Teleprompt+ is, as the name suggests, a teleprompter for speakers. Used well by Obama and poorly by Bush the Younger, the iPad version provides a great opportunity for podcasters, vodcasters and lecturers to import a script into the iPad and speak to scrolling text.



This application also holds great uses for the construction of mobile studios in classrooms, opening students to alternative modes of dissemination for their research and the development of new skills and relationships between print and oral cultures.

Specialist note-taking facility with attendant sonic recording.

One of the most innovative applications, with profound uses for both academics and administrators, is SoundNote (formerly known as SoundPaper). It enables the user to take notes from a meeting or event. Concurrently, the session is recorded. The user can review the typed notes and – when hovering the cursor over a phrase – the synchronous soundtrack is activated to hear the actual words used. Such an application has multiple uses, including MPhil/PhD upgrade meetings, professional development sessions with staff or interview assistance and training for students. Any event where an accurate record of an event is required and where sound can add to notes is enhanced through this remarkable application.

Besides this synchronised sound and text function, an array of recorders are also available for the iPad. I still use the Zoom range of microphones to capture oral testimony and podcasting. But I recently conducted a workshop where I

needed to guarantee that staff views were recorded. The iPad provided a backup for my specialist equipment. Using the Voice Recorder for iPad application, I set the iPad as an unobtrusive recorder before the seminar commenced, ensuring that the session was captured.

Student portfolios

Many functions of the iPad improve access to already existing media. It also has a great capacity to store and disseminate student work. One of my former MA students, Arturas Gudavicius, upon seeing the iPad, realised that it offered a way for artists and media practitioners to carry and present their films, photographs, digital storytelling narratives, community media projects and soundscapes in interviews and consultancies. It is a powerful and appropriate visual and sonic portfolio and an ideal way to convey digital materials to new audiences.

iPad books

Perhaps the most contentious use of the iPad is its relationship to books, newspapers and magazines. From Steve Jobs' launch of the product, he stressed its ability to transform publishing. Certainly, a new type of reading is promoted on a screen when compared to paper. Embedded sound and vision enhance the encircling text. There have been remarkable new 'books' formed using the strengths of the iPad. Kerouac's *On the Road*, including interviews, photographs and archival materials, is superb. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is extraordinary to read, hear and view.

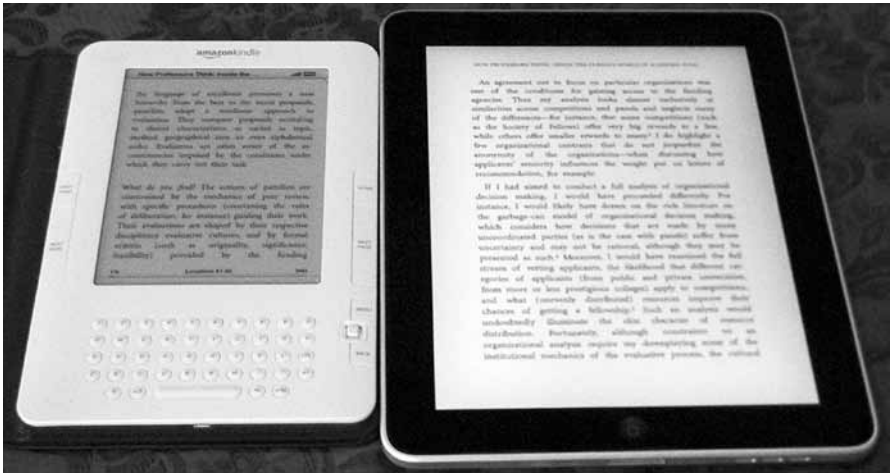
These success stories are remarkable, particularly considering that the late Steve Jobs was not the ideal person to summon a future for publishing. He marginalised the Kindle, telling the *New York Times* in 2008 that, 'It doesn't matter how good or bad the product is, the fact is that people don't read anymore. Forty percent of the people in the US read one book or less last year. The whole conception is flawed at the top because people don't read anymore.'¹⁷ Jobs was wrong. He made one crucial mistake. The millions that do read are voraciously committed, visible, affluent and important to other creative industries. To ignore this market restricts iTunes products but also blocks new reading opportunities for underserved communities. By 2010, there were a higher number of book apps in comparison to games for the iPhone and iTouch.¹⁸

There have been many e-readers. Amazon's Kindle was the game changer in e-publishing. The inability of the Kindle models before Fire to display colour

17 S. Halpern, 'The iPad revolution', *The New York Review of Books*, May 2010, p. 1

18 *ibid.*

and embedded video remains a weakness of the product, as does the design. I have used the Kindle since its release in the United Kingdom. E-ink generated a parity of experience with print on paper. While the rapid downloading of books has been beneficial and convenient, for long research days it has not been a comfortable reading experience. The iPad is offering a different service and distinct type of reading. The screen is back-lit, but is a better experience than with the Kindle. Amazon appears to have admitted this loss to a competitor by creating a Kindle application for the iPad. All the Kindle books can now be read on the iPad. This also means that the same books can be viewed on both platforms for a direct comparison. The iPad is superior. It is easier to negotiate through the pages and read the content.



The gimmick of the iBook application resident on the iPad is the capacity to turn virtual pages. A design stunt, it is also a seamless way of reading, particularly in comparison to clicking onto the next page of the Kindle. Also, Apple opted for ePub for the iPad, the free and open book standard from the International Digital Publishing Forum.¹⁹ The Kindle used proprietary formats and that – in the long term – limited usefulness. The other great advantage is that the iPad can incorporate video and interactivity through the touch interface.²⁰ This difference is particularly useful for the magazine industry. *Wired*, *People*, *Time* and *Popular*

19 E. Castro, *EPub: straight to the point*, (Berkeley: Peachpit Press, 2011)

20 Jens Teichert, Marc Herrlich, Benjamin Walther-Franks, Lasse Schwarten, Sebastian Feige, Markus Krause, and Rainer Malaka explore the functionality of the new touch screen in, 'Advancing large interactive surfaces for use in the real world', *Advances in Human-Computer Interaction*, 2010.

Science have particularly targeted iPad users.²¹ The challenge remain that the digital versions are often more expensive than the paper-based format.

The key challenge for the iPad will be the relationships formed with publishers for not only electronic versions of print-based books but new types of materials. Compared to Amazon's Kindle, there is currently not a wide array of books available to download or purchase in iTunes. The iBookstore has potential, but is yet to reach its full capacity. Over half of the iBookstore books are free and supplied from Project Gutenberg. The purchasable publications are dominated by mainstream fiction and self help. The academic range of materials is limited. Certainly, some leading publishers have committed to the iPad, including Penguin, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins, Macmillan and Hachette. Random House enabled their publications to be read after the iPad 2 launch.²² Penguin is using its relationship with Apple to reconsider the meaning of a book in an iPad environment. Specialist new publishers such as Alvercom have offered services to writers for the iPhone and iPod touch and are entering the iPad market.

The iPad is also an ideal avenue to display academic articles, papers and journals. One of my US-based MA students, Mick Winter, initially bought the iPad to reduce the printing of web-housed refereed scholarship. He was right: there are benefits in using the iPad to read open access journals. While Steve (Redhead rather than Jobs) used the iPad to view video, I am using the iPad as a display device for digital documents. I do not cut and paste materials from the online environment, preferring to take independent notes from all sources, on and offline. Therefore, the capacity to use the high quality screen to display scholarship not only reduces printing but creates a portability of content for scholars as they travel. Questia has created an application and a range of article-bundling services are available. Obviously, Google Scholar and the Directory of Open Access Journals remain gateways to scholarship to be read on the iPad.

It was important in the first section of this chapter, before unfolding Veblen's theorisation of conspicuous consumption and adding complexity to the discussion of information obesity and the need for digital dieting, that the experience of using the iPad be expressed, including some of its functions most appropriate to education. The iPad was introduced by Steve Jobs as a universal encoder and decoder of digital material. It is not. It does not replace existing

21 C. Foresman, 'Figuring out magazine subscriptions in the iPad age', *Arx Technica*, 21 August, 2010, <http://arstechnica.com/apple/news/2010/08/figuring-out-magazine-subscriptions-in-the-ipad-age.ars>

22 E. Nawotka, '100 Million Books Downloaded to iPad, Random House Adds 17,000 Titles to iBookstore', *Publishing Perspectives*, 2 March, 2011, <http://publishingperspectives.com/2011/03/100-million-books-downloaded-to-ipad-random-house-adds-17000-titles-to-ibookstore/>

functions, hardware or software. While Keynote, Pages and Numbers have iPad versions, typing, formatting and the transferability of text is easier and much more efficient between conventional computers. While Dropbox can be used and applications downloaded to enable wireless printing, the point is that a laptop computer not much larger than the iPad can adequately complete these tasks.

Kenneth Kendall asked the key question: ‘Will the iPad really change the way we live and work?’²³ He found it ‘unique’ and was altering his engagement with news. However he argued that Pages held limitations beyond the writing of a short journalistic article. He valued the screen and mobility, but recognised the incremental – rather than revolutionary – improvements it offered to email, web browsing and gaming. Word processing is an area where the high quality screen and mobility – the two great attributes of the iPad – are not sufficient to replace the functionality of other devices. The iPad does not feature enough storage to contain the contents of my iPod, let alone a laptop.²⁴ There is no doubt that the iPad will take on the Kindle and win this corporate battle. But it is still necessary for the consumer to carry a computer, iPhone and – in my case – an iPod with the much larger capacity for music, podcasts and iTunes U material.

The iPad is another gadget. It offers new ways of thinking, seeing, reading and downloading. It has potential to display and consume media. The tight integration with the iTunes store is convenient and the constantly developed applications enhance its functionality. But I have continued to use the iPod for listening to sonic media presentations and music, the Zoom H4n for recording sound, and a laptop for writing and word processing. I have moved from the Kindle to the iPad for ebook reading. The iPad – or more precisely its applications – function as my appointment diary and note taker in meetings. Of most interest are the new uses that emerge from this object. Innovative ways of downloading, working with, displaying and sharing visual media will enhance the research and teaching experiences of academics and students. Matt Brooke-Smith, CEO of the application development company Future Workshops, stated that ‘you can rely on having the user’s attention for a longer period of time. This naturally lends itself to apps that have very rich content – think interactive magazines or book.’²⁵ From this realisation, the academic-iPad has potential. The screen, internal speakers and photographic management system offer great opportunities. The accessories, including the keyboard dock, view stands and stylus, add to the capacity of the platform.

23 K. Kendall, ‘Continually emerging technologies: will the iPad really change the way we live and work’ *Decision Line*, July 2010, [http://www.decisionsciences.org/decisionline/Vol41/41_4/dl41\(4\)ecomm.pdf](http://www.decisionsciences.org/decisionline/Vol41/41_4/dl41(4)ecomm.pdf)

24 There is no option for external storage except to install Dropbox and deploy cloud computing.

25 M. Brooke-Smith, in Halperin, *op. cit.*, p. 2

It is clear though that this is not a platform of production but of consumption. It is not ‘magic’.²⁶ It is an object for the expansion of corporate power, rather than the consumer. *The Daily*, the partnership between Apple and News Corp, was the first iPad ‘newspaper’ that was only available as a paid application.²⁷ It was described as combining ‘a tabloid sensibility with a broadsheet intelligence’.²⁸ The function for NewsCorp was clear.

Sources say Murdoch is committed to the project in part because he believes that the Daily, properly executed, will demonstrate that consumers are willing to pay for high quality, original content online. Murdoch believes the iPad is going to be a ‘game changer’.²⁹

The leverage that Apple wishes to attain is to create a subscription model for newspapers as they have enacted with music in iTunes. Apple then not only gains a profit as an intermediary but can control pricing. It is an agent for the continuance of those holding power to continue it. But it is also a demonstration that old media are grasping (at) new media. Peter Preston realised that,

where Rupert Murdoch really the supreme master of the media world, he’d just snap his fingers and make the Times paywall work. But he isn’t, and he can’t. Equally, he’d take his once mighty MySpace and blow Facebook out of the water. Forget that too; it’s a waste of Space! And, rather than hint of selling, he’d want to push Sky News to a market share beyond 7%. But even Richard Desmond wants to cancel Sky’s news contract with Channel Five. For world domination read local retreat.³⁰

This partnership between Apple and News Corp demonstrates that this is not a bottom up, community-oriented platform. John Naughton’s reading was prescient: ‘the essence of the iPad is that it’s a good device for passive

26 During the launch of the first iPad, Steve Jobs described it as ‘magical’. Such a description worried technology journalists. For example, please refer to Eliot Van Buskirk’s article, ‘The Key to Apple’s iPad? Uh-Oh, It’s Magic’, *Wired*, 5 March, 2010, <http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2010/03/the-key-to-apples-ipad-uh-oh-its-magic/>

27 The success – and failure – of *The Daily* has been recorded in the comments section in response to the application at the iTunes store. Please refer to ‘The Daily’, *iTunes*, <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/the-daily/id411516732?mt=8>

28 E. Helmore, ‘Murdoch and Jobs unite to create first iPad “newspaper”’, *The Observer*, 21 November, 2010, p. 19

29 *ibid.*

30 P. Preston, ‘Murdoch’s iPad paper is mutton dressed up as lamb’, *The Observer*, 28 November, 2010, p. 51

“consumption” of prepared multimedia content’.³¹ This is a narrowing of the read-write web. It is a form of digital dieting, where searching is limited by a paywall and the limitations of hardware are mitigated by paid applications. Instead of digital dieting by the development of information literacy, it is a reduction of data available via the financial capacity to purchase it.

As a consumer-academic, I do not regret the acquisition of iPads for the Redhead/Brabazon household. But this is not an object of digital convergence. Instead, it is (just) another platform of digital divergence (and indulgence). Smart phones will continue to be used for telephony and laptops for computer-based functions. The iPad remains a new way to consume content. The methods for creating content – such as through the iWork suite – are not as successful. The first iPad did not even include a camera. The second included two. This was crucial, particularly to increase the functionality for tasks like academic virtual office hours via Skype. Therefore, with the obvious functions absent or released via the drip feed of premeditated obsolescence, the second part of this chapter asks why the iPad was developed and why it was bought. It enfoldes Thorstein Veblen into the iPad debate.

Veblen does the iPad

iBroke³²

iPad T-shirt slogan

There are certain academics that are famous beyond the walls of their university. For some reason their ideas have gained traction and momentum in government, business and popular culture. Richard Florida and Robert Putnam are current examples, as are Marshall McLuhan and Noam Chomsky. But Thorstein Veblen can be safely added to this group of special academics who not only changed knowledge for other scholars, but altered our way of thinking about the world. Veblen wrote on business,³³ including the business

31 J. Naughton, ‘What do I think of the iPad? Well, it’s not quite the Apple of my eye’, *The Observer*, 6 June, 2010, p. 25

32 iBroke t-shirt, Zazzle.co.uk, http://www.zazzle.co.uk/ibroke_ipad_tshirt-235819665951178072

33 T. Veblen, *The theory of business enterprise*, (New York: Cosimo, 2005)

of education,³⁴ and technology, industry and power.³⁵ Known as an economist and social commentator,³⁶ his work has been underplayed in both sociology and cultural studies.³⁷ While a fascinating, diverse, complex and paradoxical scholar, he remains a distinctive voice in understanding agency, modernity, industrialisation and consciousness. In the context of this iPad project, it is his theories of waste that are most relevant.

Veblen + Technology = iPad.

The iPad's touch screen adds technological tactility to his earlier argument about fashion. Fashion curves around the body. It becomes a second skin to confirm waste and affluence. For Veblen, the connection – the closeness – to the body made fashion particularly noteworthy in his theories. While the iPods are worn, the iPads and iPhones are carried. While swiping, tapping, flicking and pinching may seem part of a sadomasochistic ritual, these odd verbs capture the interface engagement with the screen. But the touch screen adds connectivity and intimacy. The iPad screen enables tapping, pinching, sliding and scrolling. It is poor for typing: the virtual keyboard deskills typists. Flat glass is not the fastest of surfaces to manage touch typing. Yet, as Wang suggested, 'if you're a hunt-and-peck typist, you may find the iPad's keyboard perfectly suited to your typing style'.³⁸ Even with the larger screen, touch typists are not well served by the virtual keyboard. That is why – at point of release – a separate keyboard was an accessory. Significantly, it was applauded by the audience at the product launch by Steve Jobs. Even to the Apple faithful, it was clear that a proper keyboard is required to render the iPad functional. Yet as an object of waste, the screen alone signifies affluence through dysfunctionality.

Such 'necessary' accessories for a product that is not required is an effective example for Thorsten Veblen's best known concept. Conspicuous consumption³⁹ is derived from his wider *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Investigating how the distinctions between classes are configured and observed, he showed that 'the upper classes are by custom exempt or excluded from industrial

34 Veblen stated that, 'there is also a large resort to business methods in the conduct of the schools; with the result that a system of scholastic accountancy is enforced both as regards the work of the teachers and the progress of the pupils; whence follows a mechanical routine, with mechanical tests of competency in all directions. This lowers the value of the instruction for the purposes of intellectual initiative and a reasoned grasp of the subject-matter', *ibid.*, p. 182

35 T. Veblen, *The vested interests*, (Charleston: Bibliolife, 2010)

36 S. Mestrovic, *Thorstein Veblen: on culture and society*, (London: Sage, 2003), p. 1

37 *ibid.*

38 W. Wang, *My new iPad: a user's guide*, (San Francisco: No Starch Press, 2010), p. 44

39 T. Veblen, *Conspicuous Consumption*, (London: Penguin, 2005: 1899)

occupations'.⁴⁰ However, 'conspicuous consumption has gained more and more on conspicuous leisure as a means of repute'.⁴¹ While the waste of conspicuous consumption was not in itself important, Veblen probed how it is used so that the wasteful consumer is liked and esteemed by others. Probably, in understanding the history of the Apple brand after the iPod, Veblen is the best theorist. As a sociologist of affluence, he showed that fashion is narcissistic. But it was the waste of fashion that summons a desire for admiration and envy. Now, instead of fashion, the leisure class wear technology. The iPad confirms waste, showing that the consumer has so much money that they can afford to waste it. What makes Veblen so appropriate for understanding Apple's products is that he unpicked the assumption that capitalism and progress are synonymous and that capitalism is efficient, productive and – most significantly – rational.⁴² The iPad has gathered many interpretations, views and comments. Most importantly, it confirms the irrationality of consumption. Or, to cite one enthusiast, 'I immediately knew I wanted one; I just didn't know why.'⁴³

While Veblen published his concept of 'conspicuous consumption' in 1899, it has entered the realm of cliché that now must be reclaimed and refreshed for its unique and important positioning in relation to the iPad. His argument was more complex than the phrase suggests. He showed that not only is status confirmed through waste, but that both the rich and poor deploy excessive consumerism to confirm superiority.⁴⁴ Therefore ostentatious behaviour, which currently manifests in the purchase of technological platforms even when their use is uncertain, is a way to prove superiority over others.

Veblen's theories have resonated through many disciplines and research projects. One is economic price theory.⁴⁵ His ideas have also had extraordinary currency in wine research.⁴⁶ In one of the greatest acts of either irony or ignorance, a wine consultancy firm even assumed Veblen's name as a branding device.⁴⁷ Like Veblen and the iPad, Veblen and wine are an ideal fit. There is little

40 *ibid.*, p. 1

41 *ibid.*, p. 99

42 While making these hot, powerful and devastating critiques, his writing was cold. He seemed to detach ideas from adjectives. This capacity explains John Diggins' clear point that, 'Veblen seems to delight everyone and satisfy no one', from *Thorstein Veblen: theorist of the leisure class*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. xii

43 A. Hess, *iPad: fully loaded*, (Indianapolis: Wiley, 2011), p. xvii

44 Veblen, in *Conspicuous Consumption*, stated that 'no class of society, not even the most abjectly poor, foregoes all customary conspicuous consumption', p. 85

45 Harvey Leibenstein, 'Bandwagon, snob and Veblen Effects in the theory of conspicuous demand', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 64, 1950, pp. 183–207

46 Beth Benjamin and Joel Podolny, 'Status, quality and social order in the California Wine Industry', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 44, 1999

47 Veblen Wines, www.veblenwines.com

that separates a £4 and £10 bottle of wine. The drinker becomes intoxicated. But the rituals of wine drinkers, such as the masking of the label so that imbibers can identify the grape variety, location and wine maker, add passion and emotion to the unnecessary consumerism. The waste of excessively priced wine has nothing to do with the wine, but rather enforces the status connoted to the purchaser. Cournot argued – sixty years earlier than Veblen – that,

there are, in fact, some objects of whim and luxury which are only desirable on account of their rarity and of the high price which is the consequence thereof. If anyone should succeed in carrying out cheaply the crystallization of carbon, and in producing for one franc the diamond which to-day is worth a thousand, it would not be astonishing if diamonds should cease to be used in sets of jewellery, and should disappear as articles of commerce. In this case a great fall in price would almost annihilate the demand.⁴⁸

Wine is similar. During a year of frost or little rainfall, that particular vintage of wine becomes even more valuable. The rarity connotes the value.

From this example of wine, it can be seen why the iPad's price is important. It was overpriced. It was not functional. That was the point. It held a crucial role in the branding history of Apple. The iPod became ubiquitous, mainly through the nano, the cheaper model. The exclusivity of the Apple brand, the alternative to the supposedly corporate Microsoft, was dented and it became mainstream popular culture. Therefore, an elite, overpriced and under-utilised object – a platform looking for a purpose – was the way to freshen up the Apple brand. To cite Marx, 'let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut'.⁴⁹ Even though Veblen rallied against Marx through his career, Veblen did continue to develop his theory of the positional good:

the motive that lies at the root of ownership is emulation; and the same motive of emulation continues active in the further development of the institution to which it has given rise and in the development of all those features of the social structure which the institution of ownership touches. The possession of wealth confers honour; it is an invidious distinction.⁵⁰

Therefore, buying expensive goods is not enough. It is necessary that the expensive goods are visible and noted by others. That is why wine labels are

48 A. Cournot, *The mathematical principles in the theory of wealth*, (New York, Macmillan, 1927: 1838), p. 38

49 K. Marx, 'Wage labour and capital', in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, Vol. 9, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977: 1849), p. 216

50 Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class*, p. 25–6

so important. Mobile goods – on bodies or that can be carried – are integral to connoting status. Wine can be taken to a dinner party or restaurant. These bottles do not confirm taste, but waste. The drinker has so much money that they can – literally – afford to swallow it. These mobile signifiers of waste are important. An expensive house cannot move. A car is mobile. Unfortunately it has to be parked. Technology that can be carried in a handbag and pulled out of a briefcase at a meeting is the most intimate and precise application of Veblen's ideas.

There is a reason why Veblen's theories travel effectively through the twentieth and twenty first century. Although published in 1899, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* showed how many pre-industrial formations of leisure survived through the industrial revolution.

The basis on which good repute in any highly organized industrial community ultimately rests is pecuniary strength; and the means of showing pecuniary strength, and so of gaining or retaining a good name, are leisure and a conspicuous consumption of goods.⁵¹

The key trope in the argument is waste: the individual or family has so much money that it is possible to be wasteful. One example that survives to our present is the use of silver cutlery with meals. It confirms wealth and waste, because – by the criterion of functionality – stainless steel makes better cutlery. Silver tarnishes and is a soft metal, and therefore not effective for the slicing of steak. But selecting silver over steel is not 'about' usefulness, but conspicuous consumption. This wastefulness of conspicuous consumption can hurt people's lives, buying goods and services that they cannot afford and do not need. Indeed, the complex relationship between work and leisure in post-Fordism only increases the relevance of Veblen's argument. The problem with part time, casual and contract work is that it creates the illusion of leisure, rather than unemployment or underemployment. In post-Fordism, the division between work and leisure is not precisely drawn. Indeed, mobile platforms – such as phones – enable the rapid movement and intrusion of work into 'private' life.

The ideology of consumerism – the fun of shopping – is a lie. Credit cards are part of that lie. Stress is created through the gulf between expectations and aspirations, experiences and reality. Suddenly buying particular clothes, music, food or technology suggests who we are. It is very easy to conflate lifestyle choices with economic and cultural development. Veblen's research is a reminder that class-based injustice and inequality introduces waste into the system. Since his most famous work was published, the proliferation of goods has meant that the differentiation *between* goods has become even more important. Brands are

51 Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class*, p. 51

the variable of differentiation in consumerism. Anyone can have a bag, Chanel is distinct. Brands configure the taxonomy of consumers.⁵² What the study of technology adds to this discussion is an algorithm of speed to changing fashions. Andreas Chai, Peter Earl and Jason Potts stated that, ‘the theory of fashion has a curious but definite pariah status in modern microeconomics’.⁵³ Its ephemerality makes it seem trivial. When fashion moves from fabric to technology, it is connoted with seriousness, progress and social transformation.

It is fascinating how many celebrators of the iPad attempt to argue for a level of functionality. Wallace Wang’s dedication to *My new iPad* provides a taste of this mode of argument.

To all those who shied away from ‘normal’ computers for years, yet instantly recognized the potential of the iPad to make computing easy and intuitive at last; to all those experienced computer users who have grown tired of computers that require constant maintenance with endless amounts of anti-virus, anti-spyware, registry optimizing, and disk defragmentation programs, and have finally recognized a computer that just works; to all those early enthusiasts who embraced the new computing paradigm of the iPad and threw themselves headlong into its unique features long before everyone else understood what the iPad could really do; to all those who eagerly embraced change and were unafraid to toss aside the mental boundaries and limitations of their old way of thinking: this book is dedicated to you.⁵⁴

In such a passage, there is an assumption that this new product is solving old problems. What those problems might actually be – beyond viruses, complex interfaces, boredom with computing as usual – is unclear. Certainly the iPad is a post-Fordist product: flexible, customised and personal. It is an ebook reader, video player, music player, internet browser, slide show creator and presenter. Applications, to provide a few examples, include a day planner, personal fitness trainer, game player and musical instrument. The obsolescence of the product is justified as inevitable and welcoming: ‘like all batteries, your iPad’s battery will eventually wear out, but by then you’ll probably have a new iPad model anyway’.⁵⁵ Similarly, while Wang stressed the object’s newness and

52 Y. Han, J. Nunes and X. Dreze, ‘Signalling status with luxury goods: the role of brand prominence’, *Journal of Marketing*, July 2010, <http://www.marshall.usc.edu/assets/125/21653.pdf>

53 A. Chai, P. Earl and J. Potts, ‘Liquid lifestyles and business cycles: an evolutionary theory of fashion’, *Advances in Austrian Economics*, Vol. 8, 2005, http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/eserv/UQ:8878/ChaiEarlPotts_Li.pdf

54 W. Wang, *My new iPad: a user’s guide*, (San Francisco: No Starch Press, 2010), p. V.

55 *ibid.*, p. 11

innovation, by page 141 of his book, he admitted that ‘you can think of your iPad as an independent computer, but it’s really an extension of a desktop or laptop computer’.⁵⁶ Within the same book, the iPad moved from self standing revolution to the handmaiden of more powerful hardware.

In an age of excessive consumption, Dieter Rams believed that, ‘we have too many unnecessary things everywhere’.⁵⁷ The iPad has been released in a difficult economic environment. Therefore the importance of waste as a marker of affluence has actually increased. Obsolescence is a necessary part of capitalist exchange. Thorstein Veblen’s conceptualisation of conspicuous consumption confirms that wastefulness signifies class and status. If a shopper can waste money on extravagant goods and services, then they perform affluence. The iPad is an object of desire and opportunity. It is also an example of waste. For academics, it enhances daily teaching and research. But in an age where core functions of universities are under threat, the iPad offers a vision disconnected from the crumbling teaching and learning experiences in our libraries and classrooms.

Most hardware and software balance cost, value, risk and innovation. In the case of the iPad, the focus was on the lightness, design and its ‘magic’. Instead of ‘magic’, it is the mobility that is most important to connoting status. Mobility is a new marker of class. Those in power can move. Those lacking power cannot. But further, those in power can move information through mobile platforms and cloud computing. Those lacking power are locked into space-specific and time-specific media and communication systems. Rich Ling’s monograph captured this distinction. His book *New tech, new ties: how mobile communication is reshaping communication*,⁵⁸ shows how mobile communication enables a range of social interactions disconnected from physicality. This e-living creates layers of performance, projection and mediations in life. Facebook friends can be ‘edited’. The status updates on LinkedIn may be tailored differently from Academia.edu.

A key analytical challenge is to align Veblen’s conspicuous consumption with the new theorisations of mobility. Objects that move signify status to a range of audiences. Flat screen televisions do not serve that purpose. But the Apple suite of products is ideal. They substituted mobility for quality. The MP3 is enabled by file compression that has allowed thousands of songs to be loaded into an object the size of a cigarette packet. But this has meant, as Joseph Plambeck realised, ‘a generation of fans has happily traded fidelity for portability and

56 *ibid.*, p. 141

57 Rams, *op. cit.*

58 R. Ling, *New tech, new ties: how mobile communication is reshaping communication*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008)

convenience'.⁵⁹ In other words, it is a music player that does not play quality music. It held other functions: conspicuous consumption and waste. However once the iPod became part of popular culture, this role was dented, requiring another product to replicate the function.

This complexity with regard to power, mobility, class and technology is often reified into simple stories about age and media. John Palfrey and Urs Gasser provide a clear example of this tendency.

Today, most young people in many societies around the world carry mobile devices – cell phones, Sidekicks, iPhones – at all times, and these devices don't just make phone calls; they also send text messages, surf the Internet, and download music.⁶⁰

These sentences were only published in 2008. But these words now seem antiquated, simple, self-evident, generalised and wrong. The iPad has proven the lie of the Google Generation and Digital Natives. 'The young people' did not buy an iPad. The supposed conflation of youth and new technology is incorrect and the iPad exemplifies that error.

The sociology of technology use can no longer be ignored. The assumptions about 'young people' must be critiqued. For example, *The Australian* reviewed the trend under the heading of 'Young learning to love their iPads'.⁶¹ The youngest person cited in the article is 25 year old Kayla Santoso, who explains, 'Now I take my iPad everywhere, and I can use it anywhere ... You can do most things on it that I can do on my laptop, so it's great. I play games and check Facebook ... I'll set my email up on it soon.'⁶² Rebecca Watson, with the puzzling job title from the Queensland University of Technology as 'user experience specialist', confirmed that 'it's much, much easier to use. It fits anywhere and is much less cumbersome ... Anything you want to do that's off the cuff, or on the fly, you've got it right there.'⁶³ Again, the nature of this 'anything' is unclear. Further, are university academics – rather than 'user experience specialists' – training students to do 'anything' 'off the cuff' and 'on the fly'? I would remove these phrases from a first year assignment, let alone encourage the actions that they are meant to signify. The unqualified enthusiasms – through the use of such

59 J. Plambeck, 'In age of mobile music, sound quality falls off', *The Observer*, 23 May, 2010, p. 8

60 J. Palfrey and U. Gasser, *Born Digital: understanding the first generation of digital natives*, (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. 3

61 'Young learning to love their iPads', *The Australian*, 14 July, 2010, p. 2

62 K. Santoso, *ibid.*

63 R. Watson, *ibid.*

expansive generalisations as ‘everywhere’ and ‘anywhere’ – block a concrete statement of the detailed deployment in education.

As specified in the first part of this chapter, there are some uses of the platform in teaching and learning. Nathaniel Ostashewski and Doug Reid have also probed the potential of mobile multimedia access to teaching and learning materials. It is ‘a delivery tool’ enhanced by a large touch screen with built in speakers and some data collection capacities.⁶⁴ Similarly, as a point of delivery platform for information management, the iPad has value. The mobility of information in the health professions is particularly important. Christopher Cannon reported the value of the platform in cardiology.⁶⁵ It also presents opportunities for roving reference support by librarians.

These are very specific professions and communities. These functions are not generalisable. Therefore, it is important to log the actual users of the iPad. While there are no representative figures, a series of surveys have shown that the assumptions about ‘the young people’ are flawed. On the Apple iPad Forum, 354 participants logged their age. Needless to say, these are the enthusiasts. There is no sense of how they were selected. It seems they discovered a link within the Forum and placed themselves in categories.

15 and under	9	2.54%
16–24	27	7.63%
25–35	60	16.95%
36–45	89	25.14%
46–55	81	22.88%
Over 55	88	24.86%

iPad owners average age’, *Apple iPad forum*, 7 June, 2010, <http://www.ipadforums.net/apple-ipad-polls/4749-ipad-owners-average-age.html>

There are problems with the categories, with the most obvious being that ‘over 55’ is a huge designation. The life and experience of a 55 year old man is distinct from an 80 year old woman. But the research is showing that iPads are

64 N. Ostashewski and D. Reid, ‘iPod, iPhone, and now iPad: The evolution of multimedia access in a mobile teaching context’, *World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia and Telecommunications*, Toronto, 2010, http://www.editlib.org/?fuseaction=Reader.PrintAbstract&paper_id=35046

65 C. Cannon, ‘Cardiology’s move online – and onto my iPad’, *The Lancet*, Vol. 376, No. 9740, August 2010, <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS014067361061238X/fulltext?rss=yes>

owned by more men than women, particularly in the 35–44 age group.⁶⁶ This is the conventional early adopter profile. Similarly men dominate all age profiles of users.⁶⁷ Particular social media usage was also high. Not surprisingly, when considering the capacity of the iPad's screen to present photographs, Flickr use was 143 per cent higher than the overall average of online users.⁶⁸ However most interesting in terms of Veblen's iPad is Ginny Hung's hunch: 'Given the economy, people with higher earning power were probably the first to buy the iPad.'⁶⁹ This statement was verified by a Yahoo survey that reported, 'The first Yahoo! iPad users were 94 per cent more likely to be affluent consumers with solid wealth and strong incomes than typical U.S. Yahoo! Users.'⁷⁰ This tentative realisation is important. During the launch presentation by Steve Jobs, the iPad appeared in a social and economic vacuum. There was no sense that such a product was unusual and even inappropriate for a post-credit crunch America. The comments written in response to this story about the affluence of consumers were not so reticent. KTBII was surprised at the gender bias, but recognised that class is also gendered as a category.

Was surprised to see the 2:1 gender skew, especially considering that the stats on Apple products in general are pretty balanced between men and women. Is this because men generally have higher incomes, i.e. more purchasing power for luxury items? Let's face it, at this point the iPad is a luxury item – i.e. no one's getting this to REPLACE their computer. Or at least not yet.⁷¹

Verndale extended this argument, recognising not only income and age, but consumption patterns.

I agree, my first thought was income has to be a key factor with these stats. The age group with the highest percentage of usage is 35–44, which are most likely individuals with higher incomes because they are more established in their careers. But do you think it has anything to do with how this age group interacts and consumes media?⁷²

66 'iPad user stats show mostly male buyers, strength overseas', *MacNN*, 6 May, 2010, <http://www.macnn.com/articles/10/05/06/early.adopters.mostly.middle.age.men/>

67 *ibid.*

68 *ibid.*

69 G. Hung, 'Apple iPad user analysis', *Y! Mobile Blog*, 6 May, 2010, <http://ymobileblog.com/blog/2010/05/06/apple-ipad-user-analysis/>

70 *ibid.*

71 KTBII, *ibid.*, 6 May, 2010

72 Verndale, *ibid.*, 7 May 2010

While this commentary about the consumption of media holds relevance, it is the conspicuous consumption of hardware, software and applications that denotes class. The size of the iPad also matters here. It is visible. While the iPod is ubiquitous, the iPad is yet to reach saturation through popular culture. Mark Walsh realised that there is pattern in Apple consumers. Forty per cent of iPad users also own an iPhone and earn more than US\$100,000.⁷³ The key difference that designates this iPad cohort from iPod owners is price. Walsh stated that, ‘while the iPad has been described as a big iPod, its minimum \$500 price means that most kids will have to rely on a parent buying one to get their hands on the tablet. So the iPad will definitely skew older than the iPod touch audience.’⁷⁴ Even more fascinating – and even less rigorous – were the surveys that asked online contributors to discuss the typical iPad owner. Answers included ‘selfish’ and ‘unkind’.⁷⁵ Clearly, even through these unrepresentative surveys, the iPad and its owners are being marked as distinct from the owners of other Apple products.

The sociology of the iPad that was tentatively offered through these surveys was distinct from the evangelical commitments from many technology journalists. Mike Elgan termed this moment in history the ‘iPad Era’. Yet from his hyperbole, a significant realisation emerges.

I think the iPad is the most important launch in Apple’s history – bigger than the Mac, iPod or iPhone. More than that, I think it’s the most important cultural phenomenon of this generation. It’s bigger than technology ... The success of a consumer electronics product depends not on how powerful, functional or fully equipped something is, but entirely on the answer to a simple question: how many people will buy it? And how many individuals buy something depends on how many types of people buy it .. I’m predicting that old people, toddlers, baby boomers, teenagers, twentysomethings – OK, that all age groups will use the iPad in significant numbers. It will be the first consumer electronics product in recent decades to match the age demographic of the TV.⁷⁶

Elgan is wrong, but his flaws are productive. The iPad could not, has not and will not replicate the audience of television. It is an expensive, niche product. However he realised that functionality has little to do with the success of

73 M. Walsh, ‘More than 40% of iPad users own iPhone, earn more than \$100,000’, Media Post Publications, 13 April, 2010, http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art_aid=126051

74 *ibid.*

75 T. Ingram, iPad owners are ‘selfish’ and ‘unkind’, *Computer and Video Games.com*, 30 June, 2010, <http://www.computerandvideogames.com/article.php?id=257887>

76 M. Elgan, ‘The “iPad Era” dawns’, *Computer World*, 27 March, 2010, http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9174239/The_iPad_Era_dawns

consumer economics. The question is not ‘how many’, but who. This is where Veblen offers significant correctives and explanations to technology journalists. While Veblen reveals an integrated matrix of consumption and class, technology journalists pick one variable, such as age and render it over-significant.⁷⁷

Actually, the iPad is about control: of money, status, power, space, technology and – most importantly – information. In an age of information obesity, there are many strategies for digital dieting. One is to buy a platform that enables users to buy applications that limit the way in which information is stored, delivered and used. Dan Colman termed this relationship ‘The iPad and information’s third age’.⁷⁸ He realised that this platform and the applications available to purchase are a strategy – through hardware and software – to create a proxy for information literacy.

It has become virtually impossible for a person to assess the quality, relevance, and usefulness of more information than she can process in a lifetime. And this is the problem that will only get worse as information continues to proliferate. But a quick look at popular technologies shows some of the ways people are working to address it. Social networking leverages selected communities to recommend books, restaurants, and movies. Contexts – and location-aware applications help focus search results and eliminate extraneous complexity. And customisation and personalisation allow people to create informational spaces that limit the intrusion of informational chaos.⁷⁹

The iPad is a post-Fordist product. It controls, limits and customises, rather than enabling diverse open content to be delivered to a user who holds advanced information literacy to sort, sift and manage data on the basis of their information needs rather than income. Or, as reified in blogs: ‘a gadget for rich, thirty-something males’⁸⁰ and ‘Who loves iPad? Old men, says Yahoo’.⁸¹

Such a group that has money and status but lacks information literacy captures Thorstein Veblen’s conception of ‘trained incapacity’⁸² in his 1914 monograph,

77 J. Wilcox, ‘Who should buy the iPad? Hint: People of a certain age (and that’s not you)’, *Betanews*, 8 March, 2010, <http://www.betanews.com/joewilcox/article/Who-should-buy-the-iPad-Hint-People-of-a-certain-age-and-thats-not-you/1268067325>

78 D. Colman, ‘The iPad and information’s third age’, *Open Culture*, 28 January, 2010, http://www.openculture.com/2010/01/the_ipad_and_informations_third_age.html

79 *ibid.*

80 P. Lamkin, ‘iPad: a gadget for rich, thirty-something males?’ *Pocket-lint*, 7 May, 2010, <http://www.pocket-lint.com/news/32966/ipad-male-users-most-common>

81 J. G. Mason, ‘Who loves iPad: Old men, says Yahoo!’ *Gadgetell*, 10 May, 2010, <http://www.gadgetell.com/tech/comment/who-loves-ipad-old-men-says-yahoo/>

82 T. Veblen, *The Instinct of Workmanship in the Industrial Arts*, p. 347

The Instinct of Workmanship in the Industrial Arts.⁸³ This conceptualisation investigated the difficulty in moving people beyond the parameters of their knowledge. Google encourages searchers to enter words and phrases into the search engine that they already know, but as shown in the last chapter exploring Willis's *Learning to Labour* and Vygotsky's Zones of Proximal Development, the development of information literacy requires considered interventions to create learning and intellectual movement. These models of learning confirm that it is also difficult to enable citizens and workers to extend their skills and attempt new tasks. The iPad operates well in this environment. It is customised, personal, non-threatening and operated through touch, rather than more complex modes of mediation such as touch typing.

The iPad effect: conspicuous consumption after the credit crunch

iPad
u can buy happiness.⁸⁴

iPad T-shirt slogan

There is the pretence that consumption can be radical, ethical or political. However the iPad shows the lie of such assumptions. Certainly, there have been attacks on brands. Documentaries such as *No Logo*, *Supersize me* and *The Corporation* have taken such a task as their focus. Jo Littler realised that 'ethical consumption', fair trade campaigns, green consumption and corporate responsibility are merely another form of branding. Without citing Veblen, she proclaimed that 'the problems of contemporary consumerism have perhaps never been so conspicuous'.⁸⁵

The era of accelerated modernity is upon us. Speed of change is palpable. There is no longer a capitalism or modernity, but capitalisms and modernities. Therefore, it is not surprising that the flush and intensity of love for the iPad has passed, and quite quickly. Even amongst the devoted and often obsessional Apple 'fans', the ardour waned. Rik Myslewski described his relationship as similar to a short-lived and intense affair at college.

83 An outstanding article probing this concept is Erin Wais's 'Trained incapacity: Thorstein Veblen and Kenneth Burke', *K.B. Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2010, <http://www.kbjournal.org/wais>

84 'iPad u can buy happiness', Zazzle, http://www.zazzle.co.uk/ipad_u_can_buy_happiness_tshirt-235713751769055534

85 J. Littler, *Radical consumption*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2009), p. 1

My fading relationship with my iPad reminds me of a long-ago college fling with a young lovely. High anticipation, fervent consummation, growing familiarisation, decreasing fascination, and the inevitable: ‘No, hon, it’s not you. It’s me.’ Which is the line you use even when you’re pretty damn sure that it is indeed her .. So it has been with the iPad. I’ve taken it on business trips for note-taking and email, have had no problems with its much-maligned keyboard, and even play the occasional game. But I’m spending less and less time with it. As a fanboi, I’d like to say that the jury is still out, but I’m afraid that the most important evidence — that I’m less frequently using the li’l guy for either business or pleasure — is in. My iPad is clearly moving into Newtonian territory.⁸⁶

There have been and will be other iPads. There is now an iPad effect: an object that is branded, promoted, spun and sold. Yet fundamental questions about its usefulness remain. The current rendering of capitalism is excessive. Few citizens need another dress, mascara or lipstick. Few need a new car, drill or widescreen television to get through their day. Capitalism is not logical or rational. It is ridiculous, foolish and replaces shopping with feeling. Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Zygmunt Bauman and Martin Jacques have all written powerful scholarly works confirming the irrationality of capitalism. However it is the iPad that captures their arguments with power, potency and with the coldness of glass and chrome. Every function that can be undertaken can be performed better on another platform. This reality was masked by the late Steve Jobs, as he continually referred to the object in the presentations for iPads one and two as ‘magical’. Magic – like religion – is the retreat of the desperate, the unthinking and the ignorant. Why does the sun rise in the morning? Instead of understanding the rotation of the earth, it is easier to reply ‘magic’. To explain why students who complete all the research and (magically) do well in their assignments, their classmates describe them as ‘lucky’. Luck and magic block reason, argument and thought.

Apple has summoned plenty of luck and magic. As a corporation, they have mobilised a hippy alternative ideology against the monolithic Microsoft. Now Apple is bigger than Microsoft. The antibrand is now the brand. Released on 14 October, 2001, the iPod pushed an edgy corporation into mainstream popular culture. There is nothing wrong with popular culture, but it is impossible to be popular, unpopular, mainstream, edgy, defiant and subcultural at the same time. As David Smith stated in *The Observer*, ‘the iPod is losing its cool’ and ‘the device is now too common to be cutting edge’.⁸⁷ Throughout its history,

86 R. Myslewski, ‘Fanboi’s lament – falling out of love with the iPad’, *The Register*, 28 May, 2010, http://www.theregister.co.uk/2010/05/28/ipad_love_affair_goes_sour/

87 D. Smith, ‘Why the iPod is losing its cool’, *The Observer*, 10 September, 2006, p. 3

Apple certainly popularised particular platforms and features, including colour screens, the mouse, drop down menus and variable fonts. But it was the iPod that transformed the company from edgy innovator to mainstream business.

The iPad, like the iPod, entered popular culture through its leisure-based applications. Therefore, significant institutional translations are required to move it from leisure to work and leisure to education. It is important not to confuse these functions. When the iPod Video was released, it did not have a great impact on educational delivery. Henry Jenkins valued it, affirming that it,

Seems emblematic of the new convergence culture – not because everyone believes the small screen of the iPod is the ideal vehicle for watching broadcast content but because the ability to download reruns on demand represents a major shift in the relationship between consumers and media content.⁸⁸

The important corrective to Jenkins' analysis is that students are not consumers and educational materials are much more intricate and complex than 'media content'. Certainly the communication that flows around teaching spaces are transforming, but considered decisions need to be made about media selection in education. Simply because a technological platform can permit the time shifting of a teaching moment does not mean that it should occur. The advantage of analogue media is that it is not repeatable. It is distinctive and ephemeral. In terms of developing discipline and motivation in students, analogue media can often be most effective because once the hour has passed, that educational moment has gone and cannot be repeated. To actualise content on demand is to suggest that teaching and learning can be distilled to content. The relationship between teachers, students, curriculum and educational media is much more complex and intricate than a content-on-demand model suggests.

The 'iPad effect' is an expression which recognises that particular products are redundant at the point of release. The iPad is not a computer. It is not a smart phone. It does not have a USB slot to enable an increase in its storage. It is tethered to iTunes for delivering the content resident on the platform. While, in a period of accelerated modernity, there has been a precious window of enthusiasm for a new product, the iPad confirms that they are released with Veblen's conspicuous consumption, obsolescence and waste packaged in with the product. Reviews of the iPad, confirming this waste and status, showed that it was flawed, limited, soon to be upgraded, and yet purchased anyway. As each model arrived, news teams were dispatched to film and interview the consumers sleeping overnight in front of an Apple Store to buy a product that they did not need. As Veblen realised,

⁸⁸ H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: where old and new media collide*, (New York: New York UP, 2006), p. 253

to sustain one's dignity – and to sustain one's self-respect – under the eyes of people who are not socially one's immediate neighbours, it is necessary to display the token of economic worth, which practically coincides pretty closely with economic success.⁸⁹

In an age of the read-write web, prosumer and participatory culture, the iPad is a platform to consume media, rather than to produce it.⁹⁰ Lonzell Watson described it as 'a digital media player and is packed with entertainment possibilities'.⁹¹ There are a range of corporations that need an iPad style of platform to operate. Content generators have been hurt by the age of the amateur. As confirmed earlier in this chapter, Rupert Murdoch described the iPad as a 'game changer'.⁹² He needs it to be. With newspaper sales declining, he required a marketing model to glean profit from remote screen reading of his journalists' content. The open and free web harmed media corporations. But the capacity to feed semi-closed and controllable content (through iTunes) is ideal for traditional media corporations.⁹³ These applications – from *The Times*, *The Sun* or *The New York Times*, run on top of the web. In other words, applications are a form of reintermediation. They filter, frame, shape and organise content by a gatekeeper for an audience. As the web has become so large and information literacy so scarce, applications bundle and limit available data. In other words, apps are a form of digital dieting. Tom Chatfield stated that,

Small screens plus limited time and concentration means that users are in urgent need of well-crafted, convenient programs: self-contained internet applications known as apps that bypass conventional browsing to offer everything from restaurant recommendations to instructions on making the perfect cappuccino, from mobile spreadsheets to interactive maps, games, dictionaries, recipe books, language guides, birdsong interpreters, exercise routines and even pocket torches.⁹⁴

So instead of users/consumers/students/citizens gaining the knowledge, information and expertise to manage their information environment or even

89 T. Veblen, 'Some neglected points in the theory of socialism', from *The place of science in modern civilization*, (New York: B.W. Huesbsch, 1919), p. 393

90 Nancy Muir's *iPad for seniors for dummies*, (New Jersey: Wiley, 2010) states that the purpose of the object is 'having fun and consuming media', p. 3

91 L. Watson, *Teach yourself visually iPad*, (Indianapolis: Wiley, 2010), p. 4

92 R. Wray, 'Everyone wants to grab a piece of the Apple iPad action', *The Guardian*, 11 August, 2010, p. 23

93 J. Naughton, 'Has the web really had its day? It depends who you ask', *The Observer*, 22 August, 2010, p.23

94 T. Chatfield, 'Are phone apps killing the web's original spirit of fresh discovery?', *The Observer*, 22 August, 2010, p. 20

their delivery systems, Apple has become Google 2.0. Instead of search engine algorithms limiting the results, Apple has corporatised this desperation to control information, not by an algorithm but a credit card. This has created what Chatfield described as ‘a life full of smart devices’.⁹⁵ What has happened to a life full of smart people?

Significantly, none of the refereed articles released at the point of writing this sentence for *Digital Dieting* have linked Veblen’s theories and the iPad. Instead, the iPad literature is filled with ‘how to’ guides. They are descriptive, rather than theoretical. The iPad has not been used to question capitalism, but reinforce it. Michael E. Cohen, Dennis Cohen and Lisa Spangenberg’s *The iPad Project Book: Stuff you can do with your iPad*⁹⁶ is an archetype. They reveal ‘the stuff’ early on in the book.

What is the iPad for? It’s for fun. It’s for work. It’s for convenience. It’s for doing whatever a legion of app developers can make a sleek, bright, big-screen, handheld, touch-driven device do – reading books, playing games, looking at photos, looking up at the stars, doing budgets, sending and receiving email, browsing the Web, reserving plane tickets, watching movies or TV, listening to music, writing novels or sonnets, drawing pictures and so on.⁹⁷

The waste and excess of iPad owners are also logged: ‘If you have an iPad ... chances are very good that you have another computer – if not two, or three, or more – knocking about your home or office.’⁹⁸ Similarly the dysfunction and clunky nature of the hardware is justified: ‘Yes, we know – things like contact lists, appointment books, and browser bookmarks aren’t songs, so it does seem a little odd (OK, more than a little odd) to use iTunes to move them back and forth between your computer and your iPad. Don’t question. That’s just the way it is. Embrace it.’⁹⁹ Through such descriptions, justifications and hyperbole, Veblen’s work is ideal and indeed integral to the study of the iPad.

Veblen’s role in American sociology was to combine Darwinism with institutional economics, developing new ways of thinking about the wastefulness of consumption for the purpose of developing status. His ‘evolutionary’ economics developed, as Thomas Sowell confirmed, ‘a theory as to why

95 Chatfield, p. 20

96 Michael E. Cohen, Dennis Cohen and Lisa Spangenberg, *The iPad Project Book: Stuff you can do with your iPad*, (Berkeley: Peachpit Press, 2011)

97 *ibid.*, p. x

98 *ibid.*, p. 1

99 *ibid.*, p. 2

innovations take place'.¹⁰⁰ Yet such a theory was not only describing wealth by the wealthy, but the wastefulness and vanity from the poor as an act of emulation.

With conspicuous leisure no longer sufficient, economic systems were required that were not driven by utility, but by an array of pre-industrial social forces. Therefore, the credit crunch, the proliferation of foreclosures and job insecurity has only increased the value of Veblen's (metaphoric) iPad. The desire and social value of commodities increase when the price increases, inverting the law of demand.¹⁰¹ Such trends are seen with wine, shoes, clothes and the iPad. A high price signifies exclusivity. The struggle for status has become even stronger after the crash and crunch. As Zygmunt Bauman realised,

Consumer freedom was originally a compensation for the loss of the freedom and autonomy of the producer. Having been evicted from production and communal self-rule, the individual drive to self-assertion found its outlet in the market game. One can suppose that at least in part the continuing popularity of the market game derives from its virtual monopoly as the vehicle of self-construction and individual autonomy. The less freedom exists in the other spheres of life, the stronger is the popular pressure on the further extension of consumer freedom – whatever its cost.¹⁰²

Affluenza¹⁰³ creates further desires for goods, rather than fulfilment. While such microeconomic moments cause pseudo-spiritual journeys for meaning and purpose, it is the macroeconomic explanation that is most important.

In the space between employee income and the purchase of consumer goods is positioned the credit card.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the capacity to read status on the basis of goods is increasingly mediated through unsubstantiated credit. Ross Mitchell extended the argument to state that, 'all modern materialism can be reduced to waste by non-productive consumption of time and visible

100 T. Sowell, 'The 'evolutionary' economics of Thorstein Veblen', *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 19, No. 2, July 1967, pp. 178

101 A study of this effect in wine confirmed that even when the wine being consumed was actually the same product, the notion of its quality was framed by a public statement of its price. 'Price tag can change the way people experience wine, study shows', *Stanford News Service*, January 15, 2008, <http://news.stanford.edu/pr/2008/pr-wine-011608.html>

102 Z. Bauman, *Freedom*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 95

103 C. Hamilton, *Affluenza*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005)

104 H. Sherman, 'Toward a progressive macroeconomic explanation of the recession', *Challenge*, July-August 2010, p. 75

displays of wealth'.¹⁰⁵ Technology is particularly susceptible to this maxim, and Veblen's theories are particularly appropriate. The original goal of technological change was to create new tools and processes to formulate efficiencies and a better use of natural resources. Yet Veblen argued in his 1923 book *Absentee ownership and business enterprise in recent times*, that technology was being applied irrationally and inefficiently, with greed both generating ineffectual uses and a waste of natural resources.¹⁰⁶

When even *Wired* readers indicate that they will not buy a product then there must be some issues with it. Priya Ganapati reported a poll for the magazine featuring the views of 1,114 readers. Sixty per cent reported that they would not buy it. One respondent, captmemo commented,

A 'game changer,' according to *Wired* magazine editor in Chief Chris Anderson.' Ummmm .. Not until the iPad is redesigned to actually do something half-way useful. And it's going to have to do something way-more useful than simply sitting around making a fashion statement. Until that time rolls around, I'll be at work over here in the corner, getting some useful work out of my \$200 Asus Netbook. ;)¹⁰⁷

Another contributor, finkland, continued: 'The iPad lies between a laptop and the smart phone. It's a poor substitute for either one. I can't find any practical use for it. I don't want one.'¹⁰⁸ These contributors have realised that there are better and more 'practical' platforms for 'useful work'.

Veblen died in August 1929, before the Great Depression. The consequences and costs of conspicuous consumption suddenly provided a disastrous example of his theory. Veblen was somewhat misplaced and misunderstood in his time, but in our era he seems appropriate and remarkably relevant. Like a Jon Stewart of economic theory, he believed in rationality, yet made capitalism look bizarre, illogical and strange. He did value agency – that humans could make different choices. But because of his attention to institutional economics, he offered a great method to track, theorise and understand technology.

Veblen argued that technological change created institutional change. But this is not the deterministic relationship it appears. Instead, at the moment that

105 R. Mitchell, 'Thorstein Veblen: Pioneer in environmental sociology?', *Organization & Environment*, Vol. 14, No. 4, December 2001, p. 389

106 T. Veblen, *Absentee ownership and business enterprise in recent times*, (Boston: Beacon, 1967)

107 captmemo, in P. Ganapati, 'Would you buy an iPad? Wired readers weigh in', *Wired*, 27 January, 2010, <http://www.wired.com/gadgetlab/2010/01/apples-ipad-muted-response/>

108 finkland, *ibid.*

a new technology is released, there are no rules, practices or behaviours that govern how it is to be used. The institutional and instructional discourses are not in place. So the automobile was invented before road rules. MP3s were exchanged before copyright law was tightened. Such an argument is extended to its (illogical) extreme by the iPad. It was released with no purpose. There were no instructions and few features pre-loaded. It was marketed as 'magic', and intentionally omitted some features that would have increased its use, so that new models would rapidly replace it. Veblen's theory has found its ideal application. Veblen's iPad is the symbol of the credit crunch, the craziness of consumer spending during a time of economic collapse. Yet the iPad is a reminder that Apple is no longer just a computing firm. It is a mobile device company. The iPad is the peacock of its products. Just as the peacock's tail is both an adornment and part of the sexual display, so is the iPad lacking function but increasing status.

Chapter Six

Note to Self: Note taking and the control of information

As a society we should be mindful that PowerPoint, in concert with allied computer and Internet-based technology, is having a profound effect on higher education. PowerPoint is not merely a benign means of facilitating what educators have always done. Rather it is changing much (perhaps most) of how we engage with our students and the disciplines which we profess. We should be curious as to why this is so.¹

Russell Craig and Joel Amernic

After exam boards have been conducted, transcripts and letters signed and posted to students, the external examiner thanked and the supplementary assessments created, there is a moment – just a moment – where academics can breathe, reflect and consolidate. Just before I start rewriting, recreating and reconfiguring courses for the new academic year, I always take a week to think about the semester that has passed. I review teaching notes, think about student comments and locate the new literature that has emerged in the last few months while I have been marking, second marking, moderating and examining.

Each year of a teacher's professional life is special in its own way. But 2009–10, revealed an odd and new issue to resolve, alongside new joys and enthusiasms. There was Adrian, who saw every concept – from post Fordism through to information literacy – through the gauze of Lady Gaga. Phil never knew how extraordinary he was until the final seminar of the final year when his fellow students burst into spontaneous applause in response to one of his comments. Andrea thought deeply, read widely and arrived thirty minutes before each lecture to make sure she did not miss a minute. Alicia discovered Google Scholar early in the first semester and proceeded to give the entire class updates of the conference papers she had read during the week. They were a pleasure to work with, and for.

This group of students from 2009–10 helped me more than they can know. When handing back assignments, I bring students into the office for

1 R. Craig and J. Amernic, 'PowerPoint Presentation Technology and the Dynamics of Teaching', *Innovative Higher Education*, Vol. 31, 2006, p. 147

an individual discussion about the paper. It is important, particularly in first year education, that each student has a confirmation that we know their name, know that we care about them, and that we want to spend time helping them with reading, writing and thinking. Their improvement is our goal. One way to demonstrate that commitment is through sharing time.

The dialogue mattered this year, because an oddity emerged through many of the papers. The usual issues with drafting surfaced. Students write a paper, put a spelling checker through it and submit it. This problem is easy to solve. Teachers create a scaffold and structure to improve their writing through considered selection of assessment. I also show them that (at least) ten drafts are required before they even think of submitting a paper. To speed up their improvement, I give students a checklist so they learn an editing structure and give them a focus for their editing.

Draft one:	Correct all spelling and grammatical issues
Draft two:	Check that all references are complete
Draft three:	Verify that all quotations are accurate
Draft four:	Read the introduction. Does it explain the trajectory of the paper?
Draft five:	Read the conclusion. Is there an efficient and evocative ending to the assignment?
Draft six:	Check the first sentence (the topic sentence) of each paragraph. Does it convey the content of the paragraph that follows it?
Draft seven:	Check the last sentence of each paragraph. Does it create a transition to the next paragraph?
Draft eight:	Read each word and sentence for meaning and clarity. Is each word required? When in doubt – chop it out.
Draft nine:	Ensure there is no jump between sections of the argument.
Draft ten:	Do you answer the question? Return to the question and the marking criteria. Are you addressing all the required elements in the assignment? What mark would you give the paper?

These flaws with writing, drafting and editing are easy to address. But in 2009, a new scholarly problem emerged in the feedback sessions. Over half the cohort demonstrated no flow between ideas. It was as if each paragraph was written in isolation, disconnected from the surrounding sentences. To attempt to diagnose the origin of this new problem, I asked them to show me their notes from the module readings, thinking that perhaps one answer for the fragmentation of argument may be found there. I was right, but in ways I did not expect.

Each student, upon being asked to show me the notes they had taken from their readings, pulled out notes from the lecture and seminar. I replied that they looked fine, but where were their notes in response to their weekly readings?

Pause.

There were no notes. Some of them highlighted a few phrases. Some squiggled a few comments in the margins. Some gave the materials little except a cursory reading. This was a new problem. I still own my notebooks from my first year at university, so I was able to show them the long-term value of such a process. I showed them the thousands of pages of notes on my laptop organised by subject. If I need material on cities, popular culture, popular music, feminism, men's studies or online learning (to name only a few categories) there are notes on which to base my new research. The idea of taking notes from readings was foreign to these students. After a few days' thought and preparation, I came up with some solutions to teach them how to take notes and create a record of their readings and reflections.

1. Take notes from readings separate from the books and articles. Do not write 'notes' on photocopies or the books themselves
2. Stop highlighting text and underlining. Take notes. Do not colour in your photocopies.
3. Ensure that every module has a separate file. Insert notes from module readings on separate pages from the notes from lectures and seminars.
4. Ensure that an accurate reference is logged. This will save time later.
5. Either type or write your notes. Ensure they are legible for future use.
6. Write down the key argument of the writer/s in one sentence.
7. Look at the bibliography/reference list used by the writer, noting the quality and dates of the cited scholarship.
8. Copy important quotations accurately. Carefully differentiate between your notes, the paraphrasing of the author and direct quotations.
9. Ensure that your notes are sufficiently detailed so that you do not need to return to the original text when writing assignment.
10. Ensure that your notes are sufficiently brief that you have not paraphrased the entire article.

Implementing these simple principles, there were incredible improvements – of twenty and thirty per cent – between the two assignments. The intervention was successful. But I was left amazed, confused and bewildered how a large proportion of our students could enter a university unable to take notes from books and scholarly articles. Perhaps I should have felt fortunate that they had even taken notes from the lecture. A professor at Abilene Christian University, Bill Rankin, reported a more disturbing trend.

About five years ago, my students stopped taking notes ... I asked, 'Why are you not taking notes?' And they said, 'Why would we take notes on that?' ... I can go to Wikipedia or go to Google, and I can get all the information I need.²

The complex functionality of taking notes – to improve memory, trigger factual recall, shape the interpretation to data and provide a guide through disciplinary knowledge – is dismissed through such a statement. Further these students are not learning a range of other skills that are activated through note taking: such as auditory literacies, real-time interpretations of data and concentration in the management of complex ideas. Displacement culture, where a student can ignore the information in the present because it will supposedly be available at a later time, encourages inefficient scholarly practices. There is no way to justify reading Facebook updates during lectures on the basis that 'everything' in the lecture will be available on Wikipedia and Google. Such a statement is ignorant and wrong.

While I improved the basic academic skills for my students, for many months I pondered its cause. Then, while delivering a seminar to the Trinity Librarians Group in Portsmouth, the experienced librarians gave me the answer. Upon telling this story about note taking, they presented the answer almost immediately. The librarians told me that teaching staff in their schools deliver all their materials via PowerPoint. The teachers upload the slides to the virtual learning environment and print them out for the students to revise. There is a reason for this degree of attentiveness. So many schools are conscious of examination league tables that teachers can leave no ambiguity or risk that students may fail. So they not only teach (to) the exam, but give the students page after page (after page) of PowerPoint slides so that they do not miss anything in their notes. A 'good teacher' in such a system was one that constructed detailed, text-heavy PowerPoint slides and shared them with students

The unexpected consequences of their actions are that students do not learn how to take notes. A dependency culture is created on the teacher, facilitated by PowerPoint and its non-Microsoft equivalents, Apple's Keynote and the open source Open Office Impress application.³ Many academics, when these students reach university, perpetuate this problem. A lack of professional development, a lack of planning and a lack of preparation for a teaching session means that too many academics go into a lecture with PowerPoint slides. They have not written a lecture. They have written PowerPoint slides. Staff think they are the same activities, that preparing PowerPoint slides and lectures are the same

2 B. Rankin in B. Chen, *Always On*, (Cambridge: Da Capo, 2011), p. 49

3 Preezo is a simplified version of PowerPoint that enables the uploading of PowerPoint presentations. KinetiCast is another site that allows presentations to be created, including the addition of video and images.

process. They are not. We see similar problems in conferences. Staff are meant to present a research paper to colleagues. Instead they present PowerPoint slides.

Once the PowerPoint slides are produced, a new problem surfaces. Students want to receive the slides so that they do not have to bother ‘copying’ them. The opportunity to read the text and write individually appropriate notes that are derived from – but not the same as – their teacher’s slides does not appear to be an option. Students now expect to receive the slides, often before the lecture. The excuse for this practice is that the students can concentrate on authentic learning in the auditorium, rather than copying notes. That has not been the result. Because students believe – occasionally accurately – that they ‘have’ the lecture (content) because they have downloaded the PowerPoint slides, the time in the lecture theatre is not being used well. Jeremy Littau, Assistant Professor of Journalism and Communication at Lehigh University realised something strange was happening in his classroom.

Those who brought laptops with them, purportedly for note-taking, seemed to be performing less well than students who did not. And not only were they distracted; so were their nearby classmates ... ‘The conspiracy theorist in me assumed they were on Facebook.’ Apparently, some were. Or on Twitter or YouTube or eBay ...

When he started surreptitiously tracking the performance of the laptop users, Littau found out something else about them: they were getting lower grades.⁴

Littau made a decision to stop laptops being used in his classrooms. His justification, based on experience and expertise, is valid and important.

We fall in love with the idea of technology and don’t always think through what students are learning from it. Technology tools are just that: they are tools. Even when they become something that’s just there to waste time, that’s fine. But if it’s my time or your classmates’ time, that’s different ... We’ve had enough experience with the internet that it’s now time to sit back and look at what we’re getting from it.⁵

Such a realisation from academics has come after universities around the world have spent millions of dollars ensuring the campus buildings are enabled for wireless connectivity. The focus has been on tools, hardware and software, rather than information and media literacy and the careful development of

4 J. Marcus and J. Littau in J. Marcus, ‘US unplugged: manifold benefits of disconnected learning’, *Times Higher Education*, 2 June, 2011, p. 18

5 Littau, *ibid.*, p. 18

knowledge through a curriculum. Clifford Nass, Stanford's Professor of Communication, realised that,

We've reached a period where attention is no longer valued. There's been a cultural change where we've forgotten about the idea of paying attention.⁶

Lectures and tutorials are analogue. Note taking requires analogue decision making that may result in digitised notes. By pretending that lectures are only vessels to convey digital content – the PowerPoint effect – students then switch off from the analogue experience and play in a digital distraction factory. As argued in this book, social media may be transformed into educational media. But it requires curricula effort and attention to assessment to enact this shift. At the moment, students bring their bodies to lectures and fill their minds with Facebook, thinking that the PowerPoint slides will give them enough information to pass the course.

There is one further layer of problems. Students not only assume that a lecture can be captured by PowerPoint slides and that notes are not required, but there is confusion between students 'reading' slides and actually conducting their course readings.

From: Sharon
Sent: 09 November 2011 20:26
To: Tara Brabazon
Subject: Assingment 1

Hi Tara! :)

Hope you are doing well! I just wanted to clear some things up with my confusion towards assignment number one. I have been working on it for a while now and im not quite sure if i am meeting up to your standards. I have been composing an actual scrapbook with photos and some comments of topics from week 1-10 and also i have made a powerpoint with my commentary of the readings (i'm thinking by when you say readings you are talking about the actual readings you have posted that we are required to read? or are you talking about the readings off the powerpoints from class?) along with some songs i have chosen that fit the topics of week 1-10. Please let me know if im on the right track here?
Thanks so much!

Regards

6 C. Nass, *ibid.*, p. 19

Glancing at visual aids has been tangled with reading scholarly materials. In other words, students are confusing skills with knowledge, tools with literacies. To provide one example: Shahid Alvi has taught courses at a ‘laptop university’. He received two odd comments in the student reviews. Not surprisingly, they involve PowerPoint.

Since laptops take makes (sic) up a significant portion of our tuition fees, I expect that each and every lecture I go too (sic) utilises this resource, as I am paying over a \$1000 every year too use it, because of your lack of enthusiasm to post your lecture notes online, I feel that you have not fully utilized this resource. I believe it should be appropriate in a claimed ‘Laptop Based University’ all course material should be available online.

Since we do pay extraordinary amounts for the services of the laptop, we expect that at least the lecture slides be posted on WebCT or the professor make use of silicon chalk for the class discussion.⁷

If there is every any doubt about the complex problems confronting the contemporary classroom, then these two comments capture the situation with a ruthless bite. A laptop is a profoundly beneficial resource. It can move around the world travelling to archives and events. Work can be conducted in airports, on trains and in the ‘dead time’ of the day. Films and sonic presentations can be edited. Synchronous and asynchronous connectivity is possible and powerful. Yet students reduce the use of a laptop to downloading lecture slides. Indeed, they judged the value of their teaching, learning and education by the capacity to download slides.

This is an astonishing situation. Students want the slides so that they do not have to take notes during a lecture or seminar. They read these slides as a replacement for reading books and articles. At what point does such behaviour become whining, lazy and petulant? Students confuse their lack of ability in taking notes with an academic making legitimate and reflexive decisions to not upload lecture aids to a learning management system. It never occurred to the students that digital dieting – not providing a particular function even though it is possible and makes their lives easier – may be intellectually beneficial. Teaching with a particular technology – any technology – is not necessarily or intrinsically better, more effective or efficient. It is important to validate a diversity of student learning and teaching modes. Indeed much of this book is focused on multimodality, ensuring a reflexive match between form, content and audience. Yet this ‘match’ is not the easiest. In fact it may be the exact

7 Student reviews from S. Alvi, ‘Proceed with caution: technology fetishism and the millennial generation’, unpublished paper, 2011, p. 7

opposite. It is important that students reach beyond their use of leisure-based platforms and simple search engines that both deskill and automate learning. It is the barriers, the boundaries, the mis-understandings – the effort, the difficulty and the confusion – that create the learning. Teaching is not uploading. Learning is not downloading. The students are not ‘paying’ for PowerPoint. They are paying for a transformative educational experience that may or may not use digital technology but will challenge them to be the best scholars they can be.

All the talk of the Google Generation or the millennials has blocked a key understanding of the consequences of de-skilling teaching and learning. Downloading PowerPoint slides is not synergetic with constructing notes independently and carefully. Listening to an analogue lecture – understanding auditory cultures and sonic signifiers – is not the same as entering an auditorium and opening Facebook.com because the teacher is boring as he or she does not show pictures of last night’s party. As argued in this book, learning is not leisure. Education is not meant to be easy. Students are not paying for a laptop. They are paying for the tool that enables learning to take place.

Significantly, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa’s study in *Academically Adrift* tracked the ‘progress’ of thousands of students through universities. Their results were startling.

We found consistent evidence that many students were not being appropriately challenged. In a typical semester, 50% of students did not take a single course requiring more than 20 pages of writing, 32% did not have any classes that required reading more than 40 pages per week, and 36% reported studying alone five or fewer hours per week. Not surprisingly, given such a widespread lack of academic rigor, about a third of students failed to demonstrate significant gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing ability (as measured by the collegiate Learning Assessment) during their four years of college.⁸

While banning wifi-enabled laptops from lecture theatres is one way to enact digital dieting through hardware, part of the problem is also founded on the deployment of software. The poor use of PowerPoint means that students demand ‘notes’, thereby creating a series of profoundly anti-learning expectations and strategies from students. While digital dieting can be enacted through hardware – blocking laptops in lecture theatres – and via PowerPoint by refusing to provide slides to students, there are more complex options. Digital dieting is possible by restricting both hardware and software but also through

8 R. Arum and J. Roksa, ‘College, too easy for its own good’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June, 2011, <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-arum-college-20110602,0,1981136.story>

the urgent development of information and media literacy to connect teaching and learning.

There are other ways to use PowerPoint. Firstly, restrict the availability of the files. Use it as it was intended: as a presentational tool. It is not an educational tool. But I have used PowerPoint in a different way, assisted by the digital storytelling literature.⁹ If students expect a file to be delivered from staff before the lecture, then deploy that expectation to offer different modes of knowledge. What I have been developing is a package of online resources – journalism, YouTube clips, podcasts – and scaffolding Socratic questions that are delivered to students as *preparation* for the lecture, rather than a *replacement* for it. This strategy builds on a practice I have used for nearly twenty years: providing a sonic introduction to the week's teaching before the lecture and the seminar. This short presentation, first delivered on analogue cassette and now uploaded MP3 files in the learning management system, orients the students into the topic of the week. Under five minutes in length, they provide an introduction to the subject. Therefore, students arrive with a sense of the week's teaching and learning and a guide through the reading. I now use the capacity of PowerPoint to present mixed media content to provide a combination of digital scrapbook and digital story for the week. It is a series of resources, with an information scaffold providing the spine of navigation. So PowerPoint leads into the learning process, rather than replacing it. It creates more work and preparation for the students, rather than offering the possibilities of shortcuts, poor attendance or poor concentration and participation in an analogue lecture and seminar.

The other strategies to critique the PowerPointing of knowledge involve how lectures and seminars are structured. Since digital distractions have fed into our classrooms, I have increased both the speed of delivery and content covered in each class. My imperative is to leave students somewhat frantic and agitated. I pitch the content at a high level, activating their zones of proximal development, rather than teaching them what they could repeat from Wikipedia. I move between sound, vision, taste and touch, so that many literacies – including analogue literacies – are activated. I also move through material rapidly. Lectures and seminars are packed. There are no baggy moments. Each minute is scripted. While the preparation level for me is very high, the students are unable to become comfortable or bored in the lesson. Because I do not

9 Some of this fine literature includes J. Lambert, *Digital storytelling: capturing lives, creating community*, (Berkeley: Digital Diner Press, 2002), A. Field and K. Diaz, *Fostering community through digital storytelling: a guide for academic libraries*, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 2008), C. Handler Miller, *Digital storytelling: a creator's guide to interactive entertainment*, (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008), J. Ohler, 'The world of digital storytelling', *Learning in the Digital Age*, Vol. 63, No. 4, December 2005/January 2006, pp. 44-47 and K. Teehan, *Digital Storytelling in and out of the classroom*, (Kay Teehan, 2006)

distribute slides, they know that the moment an idea has passed, if they have talked through it or Facebooked through it, they cannot get it off PowerPoint. Each learning moment is precious. If they miss it, then it cannot be reclaimed. They can choose to be on Facebook. If they do, then there are consequences for their actions.

I know I am lucky. I had the privilege and opportunity to complete teaching qualifications early in my academic career. I enrolled in courses with titles like *Technologies for Learning and Teaching*. I was given rules, guidelines and research about the most effective use of ‘supplementary materials’ in a classroom. The rule is simple: write the teaching session first, building on the required learning outcomes. Only then make a decision about the media used to convey these ideas. Continually ask the question: what is the best media (form) to convey these ideas (content)? Unfortunately, this crucial stage in the preparation of a teaching and learning session is lost. Instead, the default setting for all media choices is PowerPoint.¹⁰

The ‘selection’ of PowerPoint is a decision *not to make a decision* and reduce preparation for teaching, learning and public speaking. Thinking about teaching and learning is not synonymous with the selection of a template. This PowerPoint culture creates a series of other problems. If staff do not spend the required time in preparation for a teaching session, then it has consequences in the long term. I have always said that 100 hours in teaching preparation saves the teacher 300 hundred hours during and after the semester, trying to create (or fudge) the professional experience that our students deserve. I recently was asked to review a case where a staff member had not written a curriculum before or during the semester. Every student complained and appealed their marks at the conclusion of the examination period. It was messy and awkward. It is more productive and efficient for teachers to spend time before the students arrive and the semester commences, ensuring that problems can be solved before they emerge. Instead, PowerPoint truncates preparation and thinking.

Inexperienced staff not only reduce their teaching preparation with an (over) reliance on the safety net of PowerPoint, but then break the first rule of media for teaching and learning. They read the slides. When I was taught educational media and technology and the rationale and method for constructing text-based supplementary materials, the first rule was that if teachers are showing the text, then do not read the text. Let visual literacies operate where they work best.

10 There are also examples of this lack of preparation from the business community. Nancy Duarte, in *Resonate: present visual stories that transform audiences*, (New Jersey: John Wiley, 2010), reported that, ‘A recent survey conducted by Distinction had some startling findings. Of the executives surveyed, over 86 percent said that communicating clearly impacts their careers and incomes yet only 25 percent put more than two hours into preparing for *very high-stakes* presentations. That’s a big gap’, p. xxi

Let auditory and oral literacies function at their most efficient. Do not waste student time by reading what they can see. Less text is better text.

Think about all the lectures, seminars and conferences we have attended in the last five years. Think about how many presenters used the PowerPoint slides as their notes for speaking. They either spent the entire session glued to the podium and their computer screen or they kept looking back to the auditorium's screen. Both systems perpetuated a single flaw: they read the text on the screen and use it as a prompt for their talk, rather than the talk predominating and the slides functioning as a visual wash or supplementary materials. Certainly it is important to activate a multiliterate environment for our students. But by reading what is already seen, the complexity of diverse sensory experiences and literacies are cheapened and undermined. Such an action is offensive to students and to those who have taken the time to 'listen' to a session. There is nothing gained from the session orally or aurally that was special, distinctive or different from what was seen on the screen.

This flaw in presentation and speaking leads to the final – and most serious – problem for our students. The presenter has written their entire script on PowerPoint slides. Students have recognised this strategy from teachers. Therefore, why should they attend the lecture or seminar when everything that is said is on the slides? That is not student laziness. It is a logical and rationale decision. If all the relevant information has already been prepared and presented on the PowerPoint slides which are uploaded to Blackboard, WebCT or Moodle, then there is no benefit in attending the class. These slides provide a crutch for learning, but also facilitate learned helplessness with regard to note taking.

The unfortunate consequence of this decision is that students lose – or do not gain – the ability to take notes from what they hear. The decision from school teachers to present not only the key ideas from the curriculum but notes from the textbooks via PowerPoint slides is having a major impact at universities. I am not demeaning or ridiculing the decisions made by school teachers. I understand the intense pressure they face from head teachers, parents and students to attain results that will lift schools up league tables. The long-term cost to students and education will be difficult to measure. But we currently have generations of students arriving at University unable to take notes from their readings or aural presentations.

There have always been academic staff who underprepare for lectures and seminars. PowerPoint did not cause this lack of care and respect for students. We all knew teachers throughout our career who had written a few headings on the back of a cigarette packet or played a video instead of enacting the preparation required for learning that our students deserve. But proto-PowerPoint, students managing staff laziness would have to work even harder in their note taking from relevant research because they attained so little from the academic in formal teaching sessions. Now, not only is the Powerpointed teaching and

learning experience lessened in real time and space, but the slides become a proxy for student note taking. Those of us who teach first year students can solve these problems as long as we diagnose these socialised dependencies early and can develop assessment and curriculum to not only medicate past gaps in learning strategies but also to ensure that the scholarly protocols are in place for students as they move through their degrees.

Teachers model behaviour for students. When teachers confuse writing with PowerPointing and preparation with constructing slides, it is no surprise that our students also start to skip stages in reading, writing and thinking. Indeed, this issue is not simply 'about' PowerPoint. The software combines with the use of low-level textbooks and a proliferation of underprepared teaching sessions to create a learning experience of conformity, standardisation, predictability and mediocrity, with little spark or imagination.

This focus on standardisation rather than standards has been building for some time. Cross-institutional marking and examination in the last few years has revealed some oddities. Some of these problems are caused by the bureaucratisation of quality assurance protocols from mandated national organisations, monitoring learning outcomes rather than learning. There are consequences for PowerPointed knowledge. For example, when moderating assignments, I read 120 papers that were all strangely the same. This is much more than the same teacher presenting a singular view to students. It was not a case of mass collusion. I asked to view the learning management portal for the course. When reviewing the teaching file, I matched the PowerPoint presentation to paragraphs in the assignment. The students restated, and rarely reordered, the bullet points on lecture slides. They attained their learning outcomes. Whether they actually learnt anything is more debatable.

The early research on PowerPoint predicted such an outcome. Robert Bartsch and Kristi Cobern compared the use of overheads and PowerPoint, not recognising the similarity between them. They are both text-based, visual media. One is analogue and the other digital. Yet the medium is not the message. PowerPoint can be used well or badly. Overheads can be used well or badly. The difference is with regard to the mobility of data. Students cannot cut and paste off a transparency. They are forced to take notes in real time. This can also be the case for PowerPoint if the lecturers do not make the slides available. The application of digital dieting 'encourages' independent student note taking and a reduction in the dependency on staff. It is important to acquire the skill to select important information and to rank and cut away the less relevant information. These distinctions and scaffolding strategies were rarely recognised in the research. 'Results' were based on the premise that PowerPoint and transparencies were radically different media, not recognising the similarities in terms of visual literacies but the differences in terms of mobility.

We investigated whether students liked and learned more from PowerPoint presentations than from overhead transparencies. Students were exposed to lectures supported by transparencies and two different types of PowerPoint presentations. At the end of the semester, students preferred PowerPoint presentations but this preference was not found on ratings taken immediately after the lectures. Students performed worse on quizzes when PowerPoint presentations included non-text items such as pictures and sound effects. A second study further examined these findings. In this study participants were shown PowerPoint slides that contained only text, contained text and a relevant picture, and contained text with a picture that was not relevant. Students performed worse on recall and recognition tasks and had greater dislike for slides with pictures that were not relevant. We conclude that PowerPoint can be beneficial, but material that is not pertinent to the presentation can be harmful to students' learning.¹¹

There are errors in research design, theories of social semiotics and media literacy here. Firstly, the 'success' of a lecture was determined by quizzes assessing factual recall. Obviously, text-based data that the students must restate in quizzes is best learnt in the simplest and most direct way possible. Remembering that the Second World War commenced on 3 September, 1939 is best learnt by rote and via unadorned text. Inserting a clip of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* would not assist this recall. However if interpretation and analysis is required, it is necessary to increase the gap between signifiers (form) and signifieds (content). Therefore a more complex discussion of the Second World War recognises the multiple theatres of war and the myriad entry and exit points of different nations. The French War against the Germans was of a different length and form when compared to the specific Second World War in Singapore, Australia or New Zealand. Quizzes could not assess the ability to manage this complexity. When students have to work harder in their learning, when they are not as comfortable and do not understand a reading or the content in a seminar or lecture, they enter Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Confusion creates challenge, which creates learning. If students understand all their readings and all the content in their lectures and seminars which can be repeated in a fact-led quiz, then the material is pitched too low. PowerPoint facilitates this reification and simplification. It is a form of digital dieting, but automates, displaces and deskills note taking.

The question is why including a picture on a slide that 'was not relevant' was actually incorporated into their learning packages. Sound-only media, as explored throughout this book, is not useful or appropriate for 'recall and recognition tasks'. Even on this limited 'outcome', the difference between

11 R. Bartsch and K. Cobern, *Computers & Education*, Vol. 41, 2003, p. 77

PowerPoint and transparencies was a mean of 0.03 marks.¹² But tasks for recall and recognition are not the foundation for university learning. Also, the early research that confirmed that students preferred PowerPoint to overhead transparencies¹³ rarely asked why. The key is that the slides could be moved out of the lecture theatre, onto the web and seem(ed) to provide an easy revision tool for students. Further, if students missed lectures, then the slides can mask their absence, with some content gained from the session. Erwin Mantei similarly, assessed the effectiveness of PowerPoint by examination results. His study in the Physical Geology classroom distributed PowerPoint slides before the lecture, told the students to print them out and add their notes to the sheets. They were then assessed on the contents of the PowerPoint slides and – is there a surprise here? – did better than the group that were not granted access to the slides.

The higher exam scores associated with the test group appear to result from the introduction of Internet notes and PowerPoint lecture presentations in the classroom. Students in the test group enjoyed the PowerPoint lecture presentations and felt the internet notes helped them to learn the material better than the traditional presentations used in other classes. These students performed better on exams than those in the control group, reinforcing Pearson et al.'s (1994) results that show students learn more when they enjoy the method of presentation.¹⁴

Motivation is a complex concept to either define or measure. But as explored in my chapter 'Learning to Leisure', online student rankings composed of numbers far greater than a test group, such as on sites such as Rate My Professor, value easy courses with little work that generate higher marks. Enjoying the mode in which a teacher presents ideas is important. Form matters, but the capacity to manage and handle complex content beyond a few bullet points matters more.

12 Bartsch and Cobern, p. 80

13 J.C. Cassady, 'Student and instructor perceptions of the efficacy of computer-aided lectures in undergraduate university courses', *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, Vol. 19, 1998, pp.17–189; T. Perry and L.A. Perry, 'University students' attitudes towards multimedia presentations', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, Vol. 29, 1998, pp. 375–377; J. Susskind and R. Gurien, 'Do computer-generated presentations influence psychology students' learning and motivation to succeed?' Poster presentation at the American Psychological Society, Denver, June 1999; R. West, 'Multimedia presentations in large classes: a field experiment', Paper at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Society, Washington, 1997.

14 E. Mantei, 'Using internet class notes and PowerPoint in the physical geology lecture', *Journal of College Science Teaching*, Vol. 29, No. 5, March/April 2000, 304–5

Alongside these studies of PowerPointed learning success, there have been long-term critiques of the software. Edward Tufte's article from *Wired* – 'PowerPoint is Evil'¹⁵ – is the most famous. He was clear in his view that, 'convenience for the speaker can be punishing to both content and audience. The standard PowerPoint presentation elevates format over content, betraying an attitude of commercialism that turns everything into a sales pitch.'¹⁶ He continued, stating that 'PowerPoint presentations too often resemble a school play – very loud, very slow, and very simple.'¹⁷ What should only be a slide manager for a presentation has become the presentation.

Extending Tufte, Clive Thompson moved beyond good and evil and stated that 'PowerPoint makes you dumb'.¹⁸ He commenced his argument with a tragic case study: the loss of the Columbia space shuttle. The Investigation Board at NASA not only blamed the ship's foam insulation but also argued that PowerPoint was a significant variable in the failure. Complex information was presented via the software programme rather than a technical report. The engineers had crammed information into bullet points rather than present the scale and danger of the situation.¹⁹ As a slide manager, the software's function is to simplify information, reinforcing the ideology that 'seeing is believing'. For example, Colin Powell in February 2003 made his presentation in the United Nations, arguing that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. The facts were believed because the visuals were put together in a way that created the assumption of causality and logic, simply through the artificial effect of slides presenting a narrative.

The consequences for students in collapsing form and content, medium and message, are vast. They are losing interpretative skills and the capacity to sort and sift what they hear into what they need to know. I remember the intense pressure of attending incredibly difficult lectures – two sessions on poststructuralism and psychoanalysis come first to my mind – and filling notebooks at speed while being completely exhausted at the end of the hour. Then I needed to spend two days chasing up the references and trying to understand each line delivered in that lecture. Students were put under pressure. That is the point. Lectures were precious, unrepeatable events. If we were not there, we would not only miss out on information for an assignment, but we would not be present at an event that could change the way we think about the world.

15 E. Tufte, 'PowerPoint is evil', *Wired*, No. 11, September 2003, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/pp2.html>

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 C. Thompson, 'PowerPoint makes you dumb', *The New York Times*, 14 December, 2003

19 *Ibid.*,

These days are gone. I know that. But we must not lie to ourselves and assume that a fixation on quality assurance is actually creating quality teaching and learning. If I am brutally honest, I have not seen an (even) adequate lecture in the last five years. Throughout my career as a student and teacher, I have gained great joy in attending lectures. Even as an undergraduate and (even) if I was not enrolled in the course, I would slip into the back of a lecture theatre and be inspired and amazed at the capacity to learn something and transform my ideas in the space of an hour. I attended anthropology and computer science lectures with such regularity at the University of Western Australia that teachers thought I was enrolled in the courses.

As an academic, I have been amazed and inspired by other scholars who are testing some of the most extraordinary ideas in the most complex and imaginative way. I have been privileged. As a young scholar, I worked with some of the finest thinkers in contemporary cultural and media studies. The characteristic of each of them was that they never complained about teaching and saw it not only as part of a job, but part of their responsibility to the discipline. While they wrote productively and prolifically, they always ensured that their lectures and seminars were inspiring, provocative, exciting and exhausting. They spent the time necessary to prepare. There was never a sense with these academics that they wanted to be anywhere else but with these students. If there is a characteristic of the last decade in universities, then the inverse equation has emerged. The less research a scholar writes, the more they complain about their teaching workload.

Too often I hear staff moan that teaching is pulling them away from their research and writing. Too often I hear staff deliver the same lecture, seminar and tutorial that they delivered the year before, and the year before that, justified because of their 'research commitments'. Yet when looking at the actual publications they have produced, such rhetoric is rarely supported. The best researchers I have known in my career have also been the best teachers. They never undermined the quality of their teaching and their care for students in the name of their personal research. The key for these men and women was that they were organised. These days, 'organised' means that the PowerPoint slides from last year have been pulled from the hard drive and a spelling error removed. However these proto-PowerPoint academics got up early, wrote on weekends and used the summer to pump out publications. One of my most inspirational teachers used to treat each book as a two year plan. In the first year, he would rise early to read, then travel to the archive during the summer. He would then write and edit the book during the semesters and summer of the second year. As a student, he was always there for us when needed. My memory, even as an undergraduate, is walking past his office on my way to the library at 8am. By the 9am lecture, he would be completely focused on us and deliver a lecture so riveting, so fascinating, that not only was the auditorium full, but the

friends of enrolled students would start their day with a coffee, a muffin and this lecture.

PowerPoint is not the problem. However its poor use is hurting staff and students. It is making staff believe that they have prepared for their teaching. It is making students think that they are taking notes, when they are simply printing slides. The best use of PowerPoint I have seen is by DJs who use it as the visual backdrop for their sets. David Byrne famously used it to integrate visuality with music, collecting them in his book and DVD *Envisioning Emotional Epistemological Information*.²⁰ One of my MA students, Saeed Al Amoudy, used PowerPoint as a hub for his designs, creating new alignments between visual artefacts and an exegesis. These are innovative uses. But PowerPoint is also hurting research. Before delivering a couple of Keynote addresses, the organisers asked me to provide the paper for delegates. I was happy to comply. Throughout the conference, participants came up to me and thanked me for my thoroughness and research. I was confused at their comments. At the end of the conference, I saw what they meant. Every other speaker had provided their talk in the form of PowerPoint slides. I was the only one that provided a thirty page, written, drafted and referenced paper. So the PowerPointing of teaching also has an impact on our research, truncating ideas and simplifying dissemination. SlideShare has value but it only provides an echo of research when compared to the footnoted complexity of refereed scholarship.

I understand the desire for PowerPoint. Public speaking initiates fear. At conferences, I have seen even experienced speakers shaking and sweating with such vigour that I wonder why they put themselves through it. There is no doubt that for such speakers, they can hide behind the slides. Clifford Nass, a professor at Stanford, expressed this strategy very effectively. He argued that PowerPoint 'lifts the floor' of public speaking and 'lowers the ceiling'.²¹ In other words, students do not see appalling lectures, but neither do they see the brilliant. Nass acknowledges that 'the classes I remember most, the professors I remember most, were the ones where you could watch how they thought.'²² Van Jole was even more definitive, describing PowerPoint as 'Viagra of the spoken word ... a wonder pill for flabby lectures.'²³

While the software is a crutch for nervous speakers and lecturers, something has also happened to 'the audience'. I recently delivered a speech and did not use PowerPoint. That caused enough disquiet. But when I insisted that the

20 D. Byrne, *Envisioning Emotional Epistemological Information*, <http://www.davidbyrne.com/art/eeei/>

21 C. Nass in I. Parker, 'Absolute PowerPoint', *The New Yorker*, 28 May, 2001, p. 76

22 *ibid.*

23 F. van Jole, 'Het PowerPoint denken', *FEM Ide Week*, 2000, <http://www.2525.com/archive2/020928.html>

lights not be dimmed in the auditorium, the technicians informed me that being in the dark is more comfortable for the audience'. I am not sure when lectures became about comfort and entertainment, rather than challenge, questioning and critique. But I fought for the use of a diversity of media and I fought to leave the lights on for 'the audience'. So many metaphors and descriptions of innovation involve light. From the Enlightenment to a light-bulb moment and shining a light on a complex problem, light signifies innovation, fresh thinking and new ideas. Darkness and shadows enable hiding and shielding from reality. It is more than a metaphor or symbol that many PowerPoint presentations are delivered in dim rooms to a passive audience.

Like Google's PageRank that automates information literacy, PowerPoint's AutoContent Wizard and a downloaded templates supplies a close to finished presentation. Ian Parker argued that PowerPoint,

Helps you make a case, but it also makes its own case: about how to organize information, how much information to organize, how to look at the world ... it's hard to shake off AutoContent's spirit: even the most easygoing PowerPoint template insists on a heading followed by bullet points, so that the user is shepherded toward a staccato, summarizing frame of mind.²⁴

Certainly PowerPoint slides can be beautifully presented. It has a powerful role in promotion, marketing and advertising. But, like so many software programmes and social media platforms, it confuses information and knowledge.²⁵ PowerPoint conveys information well. It may block the development of knowledge.

Storytelling and SlideShare

PowerPoint can simplify and automate digital story telling. SlideShare, launched in 2006, hosts some fine designs. It is the PowerPoint/Keynote equivalent of YouTube. Instead of 'Broadcast yourself', we now 'Present yourself'. But as with other social media, the key question is how social it actually is. Like YouTube, SlideShare has not only created channels, but 'branded spaces' for businesses to promote themselves, one PowerPoint presentation at a time. To cite the site: 'Want a custom microsite within the world's largest professional

24 I. Parker, 'Absolute PowerPoint: Can a software package edit our thoughts?' *The New Yorker*, 28 May, 2001, p. 76

25 A fascinating study of PowerPoint and how habits of mind are created is C. Adams, 'PowerPoint, habits of mind, and classroom culture', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 4, August 2006, pp. 389–411

sharing community? Showcase presentations, whitepapers and webinars to a professional audience. Get direct and measurable business results. You can capture customer leads and get targeted views of your content, along with channels for integrated social media campaigns. Each channel is a custom project. Let us know what customisation you are looking for and what your monthly budget is.²⁶

While the corporate element has consequences for the way in which teaching and learning materials are framed and distributed, there is no doubt that SlideShare may be the agent of change and honesty with PowerPoint. The slides are self-standing, a self-propelling narrative disconnected from a public speaking environment. These are visual presentations, without the pretence of any connection with a human, analogue, oral communication. John Thompson described this function.

In response to the numbers of educators and students using PowerPoint, SlideShare (www.slideshare.net) features storage of presentations online. This enables students to show their work to a larger audience, for example. Or administrators can upload presentations from professional development sessions so participants have access afterward. However, SlideShare is not just a place to upload a presentation. Your slideshows can be public or private. You can synchronize audio with your slides, and you can join a community of SlideShare groups who share your interests. The opportunity to participate in a community of users is a major attribute of web 2.0 applications.²⁷

Presentational platforms have a long history. The blackboard arrived in the early 1800s. It supported instruction. It did not deliver it. It organised information. It was not information. The ubiquity of PowerPoint has meant it has become the default presenter in classrooms, conferences and disseminating research. What is surprising is the lack of studies evaluating its effectiveness. The studies are small, mono-institutional and often based in one class, often the classroom of the instructor/article writer.²⁸ As shown earlier in this chapter, PowerPoint is compared with overhead transparencies. Student responses and attitude are assessed by an in-class questionnaire. The fascinating element of these studies is that a platform is compared to a platform. Form is compared with form. The assumption is that the content carried on the medium can be cleanly excluded and ignored from the empirical study.

26 'Why SlideShare Branded Channels?' Slideshare, <http://www.slideshare.net/channels>

27 J. Thompson, 'Don't be afraid to explore web 2.0', *The Education Digest*, December 2008, p. 21

28 R. Craig and J. Amernic, 'PowerPoint Presentation Technology and the dynamics of teaching', *Innovative Higher Education*, Vol. 31, 2006, p. 149

Bartsch and Cobern's study, in conducting a meta-review of the empirical research about PowerPoint, located the following trends.²⁹

1. Students prefer PowerPoint presentations³⁰
2. There are mixed results with regard to graphics and student memory. Some studies show an improvement.³¹ Others do not.³²
3. There is a study that shows a decrease in student performance in the movement from overhead transparencies to PowerPoint.³³

29 R. Bartsch and K. Cobern, 'Effectiveness of PowerPoint presentations in lectures', *Computers and Education*, Vol. 41, 2003, p. 78

30 Significantly, all of these studies are over a decade old. They were part of a movement that unproblematically aligned new technology with better teaching that I presented in *Digital Hemlock*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002). These studies that argue that students prefer PowerPoint are, J. Cassady, 'Student and instructor perceptions of the efficacy of computer-aided lectures in undergraduate university courses', *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, Vol. 18, 1998, pp. 175–189; T. Perry and L. Perry, 'University students' attitudes towards multimedia presentations', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, Vol. 29, 1998, pp. 375–377; J. Susskind and R. Gurien, 'Do computer-generated presentations influence psychology students' learning and motivation to succeed?' Poster at the *Annual Convention of the American Psychological Society*, Denver, 1999 and R. West, 'Multimedia presentations in large classes: a field experiment', paper presented at the *Annual Convention of the American Psychological Society*, Washington, 1997.

31 L. ChanLin, 'Animation to teach students of different knowledge levels', *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, Vol. 25, 1998, pp. 166–175; L. ChanLin, 'Attributions of animation for learning scientific knowledge', *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, Vol. 27, 2000, pp. 228–238; R. Lowry, 'Electronic presentation of lectures – effect upon student performance', *University Chemistry Education*, Vol. 3, 1999, pp. 18–1; A. Szabo and N. Hastings, 'Using IT in the undergraduate classroom: should we replace the blackboard with PowerPoint?' *Computers and Education*, Vol. 35, 2000, pp. 175–187

32 M. Stoloff, 'Teaching physiological psychology in a multimedia classroom', *Teaching of Psychology*, Vol. 22, 1995, pp. 138–141; J. Susskind and R. Gurien, 'Do computer-generated presentations influence psychology students' learning and motivation to succeed?' Poster, *Annual Convention of the American Psychological Society*, Denver, 1999; A. Szabo and N. Hastings, 'Using IT in the undergraduate classroom: should we replace the blackboard with PowerPoint?' *Computers and Education*, Vol. 35, 2000, pp. 175–187; R. West, 'Multimedia presentations in large classes: a field experiment', Paper presented at the *Annual Convention of the American Psychological Society*, Washington, 1997.

33 R. Bartlett, S. Cheng and J. Strough, 'Multimedia versus traditional course instruction in undergraduate introductory psychology', Poster, *Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association*, Washington, 2000

Significantly, a study by Szabo and Hastings, a project published at the tail end of the micro-flurry of empirical research about PowerPoint around the year 2000, offered quite definitive results.

PowerPoint lectures, at least in some circumstances, mainly add to the entertainment rather than to the education of the students ... Apart from possible benefits on recall, no significant advantages to PowerPoint lecturing were found ... students like PowerPoint as a lecturing method. Their preference for PowerPoint lectures, in contrast to their beliefs, is not accompanied by better academic performance.³⁴

Szabo and Hastings logged the flaws in the earlier studies. The quizzes were testing recall on the content presented on the PowerPoint slides. By most definitions of learning at University with which I am familiar, this would not be valued as a positive and long-term outcome. Disciplining knowledge is much more than can be encased in a single textbook or between the customary introductory slide of welcome and the redundant 'thank you' and email address at the end.

Significantly, none of this research mentions that PowerPoint slides create a mobility of notes, so that students do not develop and must learn to apply the skills to hear, interpret, select and write. Similarly the studies do not reveal the consequences to lecturer preparation, whereby the entirety of the lecture content is on the slides, meaning that students do not need to attend to gain the information.

For me, the greatest use of PowerPoint to students is to disconnect it from live, real-time lectures. Many universities (and their staff) deliver the slides before the live and analogue lecture, supposedly helping the students 'structure' their notes. A decade ago, I was asked to record lectures for a similar purpose, so students could 'review' the session. I refused such a strategy that both displaces student attention from the lived, real time experience of learning and provide a crutch that blocks the development of auditory literacies. Instead, before the entire semester started I recorded 13 short sonic sessions (of three to five minutes) for each lecture, providing orientation rather than 'review' or 'revision', so that students would know the topic and the key areas to think about before the formal lecture. Such a decision enhanced the lecture and seminar, did not replicate the function of live and analogue delivery and learning, but used digitisation to create something new, a time and space shifting option that

34 A. Szabo and N. Hastings, 'Using IT in the undergraduate classroom: should we replace the blackboard with PowerPoint?' *Computers and Education*, Vol. 35, 2000, p. 186

provided an abstract but productive learning environment. The lecture was not repeated, replicated or reproduced. Instead, it was enhanced.

A similar strategy can work well with PowerPoint. Instead of tethering the software to the live delivery, an automated and short slide presentation, with embedded sonic and visual content and lodged on SlideShare, can be given to students before the session commences. Part summary, part intellectual orientation, it uses the digital environment to produce and provide the data that is not well presented in analogue lectures. There are fine guides to assist the construction of these specialist and separate learning objects. The best is offered by Nancy Duarte. Known as the advisor to Al Gore in constructing his visuals for *An Inconvenient Truth*, she is interested in visual storytelling, using PowerPoint and Keynote not as notes but as a way to shape our engagement with the environment. Her methods – although not using this language – develop visual literacy. She recognised that there is a relationship between language and power. When visuality is employed, ambiguity enters the relationships between signifier and signified (form and content). Negotiating that ambiguity is a key moment in learning. Duarte realised that ‘the power lies in how much something stands out from its context’.³⁵ This was an intriguing statement. Learning occurs not when a medium or platform fits into its environment, but dislodges and agitates common sense.

The great gift of slide generating and organising software is that it shapes ideas. It can tell stories. There is a balancing of emotional connectivity and evidence. The greatest problem of PowerPoint is that it is used to present text. Presentation and communication are different. The problems emerge when PowerPoint users conflate them.

It’s becoming the cultural norm to write presentations as reports instead of stories. But presentations are not reports. Many people who create presentations are stuck in the mindset that if they use a presentation application, like PowerPoint, to create a report, the report is a presentation. It is not! Reports should be distributed; presentations should be presented. Documents masquerade as presentations, and these ‘slideuments’ have become the lingua franca of many organizations. While documents and reports are very valuable, they do not need to be projected for the purpose of hosting a ‘read-along’.³⁶

Such a corrective is not only important for businesses, but also for educational institutions. A stand-alone artefact using slides and sound can open students to course content by storytelling. When used well, it can provide a point of view and pathway through material, providing opportunities to take

35 Duarte, *Resonate*, *op. cit.*, p. 10

36 *ibid.*, p. 27

risks and move students from personal experience and into different views and ideas. Intriguingly, noted speakers like Steve Jobs used very little text on slides. Instead, video was deployed. Interviews with employees and the presentation of advertisements were common.³⁷

By configuring independent and separate learning objects using SlideShare as a portal and vehicle for storytelling and introducing an analogue learning experience, it demonstrates that some information is not meant to move between platforms and is not meant to be read quickly. PowerPoint can configure a difference between idea collection and idea creation, providing a way to move personal stories into knowledge. PowerPoint and other slide software encourages a linear presentation of material. The key is to use minimal text and maximal empty space to orient learners rather than drill content. Carmine Gallo realised that,

About 40 percent of us are visual learners, people who learn through seeing. This group retains information that is highly visual. To reach visual learners, avoid cramming too much text onto the screen. Build slides that have few words and plenty of pictures. Remember: individuals are more likely to act on information they have a connection with, but they cannot connect with anything that they have not internalized. Visual learners connect through seeing.³⁸

The key for teachers, even more than other modes and forms of presenters, is that verbal and visual modes of communication are distinct. Slides fail when there is confusion between written and spoken forms of language. There is a difference when expressing ideas sonically and visually. Listening and textual reading are different. Indeed, Nancy Duarte refers to them as ‘conflicting activities’.³⁹ She states that selecting the correct media is an act of respect for listeners, readers and viewers.⁴⁰ But students are a particular type of ‘audience’ and education is not entertainment or – indeed – a business. Duarte described slides as ‘glance media’.⁴¹ Glancing is not the basis of learning. It is the trigger for interest, curiosity and motivation.

PowerPoint is a graphics presentation programme. It is not the foundation for effective public speaking. As has been argued throughout this book, the default option for finding, organising and managing information requires consideration,

37 C. Gallo, *The presentation secrets of Steve Jobs*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010), p. 10

38 Gallo, p. 147

39 N. Duarte, *Slide:ology: the art and science of creating great presentations*, (Beijing: O’Reilly, 2008), p. 6

40 *ibid.*, p. 6

41 *ibid.*, p. 140

consciousness and reflection. Robin Williams was right: ‘not all information is best presented digitally’.⁴² The key is to make decisions about presentational options and course architecture on the basis of learning outcomes, rather than what other speakers and teachers are doing. Jane Bozarth realised that ‘there is so much more to e-learning, and to PowerPoint than bullets and animated text’.⁴³ Indeed, there is much more to learning than digital platforms.

(Post) Lecture again?

When I started writing *Digital Hemlock* in 2000, the lecture was supposedly living on fumes. Interactive, virtual, mobile, student-centred micromoments of content were the future. As has happened so often, this future has not eventuated. Instead, conventional lectures have been filmed and uploaded into Virtual Learning Environments or forward facing portals. While lectures have weaknesses, being economically efficient and content heavy, the analogue lecture has a great strength. At their best they are motivational, inspirational and model scholarly behaviour for students. Ironically, it is these best elements that have been crushed by PowerPoint. In the desire to make content mobile, context and commitment have been lost. In the desire to make presentations standardised and of even quality, excellence has been destroyed. Even most poignantly, a software application designed for business has infiltrated education and destroyed what makes teaching different from marketing. Perhaps that is the greatest irony digitisation has downloaded to education generally and universities specifically. The more the advocates and consultants celebrated interactivity, mobility, virtuality and student-centred learning, the more that carefully considered mixed media teaching and learning was replaced by one size fits all PowerPoint.⁴⁴ The assumption that templates and other forms of visual uniformity would enhance learning has ignored the arguments of

42 R. Williams, *The non-designer's presentation book*, (Berkeley: Peachpit Press, 2010), p. 4.

43 J. Bozarth, *Better than bullet point: creating engaging e-learning with PowerPoint*, (San Francisco: John Wiley, 2008)

44 Very early in the cycle of the read-write web Heather-Jane Robertson logged how research has failed to determine a positive correlation between educational technology and student achievement. Instead, ‘technopositivism’ has become ‘a marketed ideology’. Robertson stated that ‘the future requires no footnotes’, as marketing has replaced research into learning, teaching and education. This prescient article was titled, ‘Towards a theory of negativity’, *Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 54, No. 4, September/October 2003, pp. 280–296

Freire,⁴⁵ Postman,⁴⁶ Giroux⁴⁷ and Aronowitz.⁴⁸ Students do not learn when they understand all the words, ideas and concepts presented to them. Comfort does not create learning. It is when they have to reach and grasp for understanding, jump above their intellectual height for ideas, miss, stumble and have the support of teachers to try the jump again that true learning takes place.

Neil Postman – in the midst of this destructively PowerPointed age – needs to be read and re-read. Too many PowerPointers are reading McLuhan.⁴⁹ They need to switch their source. Postman's *Technopoly* has been the inspiration for this current book and remains my guide through a life of learning. Postman always stressed the importance of learning incorporating both orality and printing. Orality created communities, cooperation and collective responsibility, while the printed word activated individuality, autonomy and competition.⁵⁰ One is not better or greater than the other. Both are needed not only for learning, but for living. The challenge is to create the balance. The difficulty is that visuality washes away other sensory experiences, predominating and proliferating seeing over hearing, smelling, touching and tasting. PowerPoint transforms the human voice into a DJ (at best) and a commercial voiceover (at worst) in response to the visual wave of slides. Further, the type of visuality – bullet points, a lack of punctuation and pronouns – cheapens visual literacy. Printed language is a part – and a profoundly important part – of visual culture.

Lecturing well – as a sub-section of teaching well – is incredibly difficult. As Crang revealed, it is 'an accomplishment – bringing together a very particular constellation of speaker, space, technology, audience and attention'.⁵¹ It also requires a high level of expertise, deploying Antonio Gramsci's model of an organic intellectual, to not only be an expert but to hold so much expertise that it can be translated for new audiences. PowerPoint is Fordist lecturing. Without developing a deep knowledge of a subject, PowerPoint 'lends authority to the speaker'⁵² via software rather than scholarship.

45 One indicator of this influence can be gleaned from the Freire Institute, <http://www.freire.org/>.

46 N. Postman, *The end of education*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1996)

47 H. Giroux, *Disturbing Pleasures*, (New York: Routledge, 1994)

48 S. Aronowitz and H. Giroux, *Education under Siege*, (Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey, 1985)

49 On 18 July, 2011, a Google Scholar search revealed 1200 refereed academic articles on PowerPoint that mentioned Marshall McLuhan: http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?q=PowerPoint+McLuhan&hl=en&as_sdt=1%2C5&as_sdt=on.

50 N. Postman, *Technopoly*, p. 17

51 M. Crang, 'The hair in the gate: visuality and geographical knowledge', *Antipode*, Vol. 35, 2003, p. 242

52 F. Driver, 'On geography as a visual discipline', *Antipode*, Vol. 35, 2003, pp. 227–231

Russell Craig and Joel Amernic add a new layer of critique and analysis with regard to visuality. Although they do not use the phrase visual literacy, they apply an argument in this book that one of the consequences of perpetuating the screens of education through the early web and web 2.0 is that transgressive knowledge is folded back into common sense. Seeing becomes believing. Seeing involves taking ideas for granted. Seeing reinforces the truth effect of education. For inexperienced lecturers, PowerPoint allows their authority to be reinforced. They can hide behind the truth effect of print.⁵³ The seamless movement between slides is difficult to interrupt and difficult to unpick while the ‘show’ is in action. Indeed, I have noticed in presentations in the last few years that increasingly random ideas are being slammed together, assuming that the chronological propulsion of the slides will create the aura of logic, causality and connection.

Craig and Amernic have questioned how power operates in and through the PowerPointing lecturer. They offer the evocative description of their own practice, when they teach without the software and when they ‘subcontract our teaching to PowerPoint presentations’.⁵⁴ The literature is split. Creed has argued that ‘PowerPoint is teacher-centred’.⁵⁵ Conversely, Crang suggests that the lecturer is now a distraction from the slides, a ‘disembodied voice’.⁵⁶ Nunberg confirmed that the slides ‘have begun to take on a life of their own’.⁵⁷ As I argued in the last section, the ‘life of their own’ is probably their best use, as a self-standing preparation for a lived, live, analogue lecture.

Perhaps the most disturbing element of Craig and Amernic’s study is their dystopic question, ‘has the PowerPoint slideshow *become* the curriculum?’⁵⁸ The answer to their question is yes. Much to my horror, I have seen many inexperienced academic teachers assign and evaluate a PowerPoint ‘presentation’ as part of their assessment. When evaluating a teacher’s assessment mix, the presence of a student presentation is often the marker of wider problems in the curriculum. What happens is that staff who either do not want to prepare

53 While Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1991) is correctly cited as one of the key texts to understand the rise of nationalism, it is also profoundly important in understanding the emergence of print capitalism. This formation enabled the development of vernacular print languages, which was then taught to middle class readers in schools and universities as ‘literature’.

54 Craig and Amernic, *op. cit.*, p. 152

55 T. Creed, ‘PowerPoint, No! Cyberspace, Yes’, *The National Teaching and Learning Forum*, Vol. 6, No. 4, May 1997, http://www.ntlf.com/html/pi/9705/creed_1.htm

56 M. Crang, ‘The hair in the gate: visuality and geographical knowledge’, *Antipode*, Vol. 35, 2003, pp. 238–243

57 G. Nunberg, ‘The trouble with PowerPoint’, *Fortune*, 20 December, 1999, p. 330

58 Craig and Amernic, *op. cit.*, p. 152

a seminar or cannot prepare a seminar because of a lack of content-based expertise, assign students to present information on a topic. At the start of the semester, students form into groups and select a topic to present to the rest of the class. This is a disastrous strategy for many reasons. Firstly, the rest of the group become ‘the audience’ and therefore do not complete the reading for most of the semester. Also, attendance often suffers as students must sit through weeks of presentations delivered by nervous and inexperienced colleagues on a topic where they have conducted no substantive reading and hold no background knowledge. To make this situation worse, one criterion for assessing a successful presentation is (inhale of breath) the quality of the PowerPoint slides. In other words, poor lecturers, teachers and curriculum developers are perpetuating the problem caused by their use of PowerPoint by assessing students on form rather than content, basic technical competency in simple software, rather than confronting their own issue of why they lack the time, expertise or commitment to prepare an interactive, exciting and dynamic seminar where all students are involved rather than a few terrified PowerPointers. The other key question is why staff are not assigning and evaluating research papers or generating creative alignments of media such as configuring a matrix of interpretation between a digital or analogue object and an exegesis.

One of the greatest compliments my first year students ever gave me was to state that when they arrive for their Monday morning lecture, they never quite know what to expect. In choosing not to choose PowerPoint, or at least choosing to use it differently, learning becomes unsettling and disruptive of conventional or accepted patterns. One of my mantras that I apply in my daily life is to ‘teach the surprises’. My students – as always – have taught me. We need to learn from the surprises as well.

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Chapter Seven

Dead Media: know when to fold 'em – know when to run

I smell death.

No, it is not the rotting vegetables from an over-eager online order from a supermarket. It is not the permanent fog of ageing that comes from living in towns and cities that are the equivalent of an urban retirement village. Actually, it is the waste of redundant software and hardware, obsolete at the point of release, that now lumber around our homes and office. To activate digital dieting, it is necessary to track the life cycle of media and recognise the necessity of death, the economic and social consequences of increasing the speed of obsolescence through marketing rather than necessity, and the distraction of waste.

All media have a suicide pact. The pattern repeats. Excitement. Ownership. Decline. Denial. Decay. Disposal. Death. At the moment of release, media are dying. This death is masked by patches, updates and versions. It is hidden by the enthusiastic commitment to the new, rather than a backward glance at the objects, processes and services it is replacing. Yet occasionally, this celebration of the new is displaced by recognition that the useful may already be owned and in use. Radio is the great media survivor.¹ It is the vampire of the media world. It changes and shifts, becoming secondary to television, but gaining new life through internet streaming and podcasting. It fits into our lives, whispering its presence but never shouting its importance.

My favourite example of consumers clinging onto the life of dying software is Windows XP. Vista was a failure and so destructive to work patterns that old hardware was patched and repaired until the software was improved and it was superseded. It was such a dreadful operating system that a series of PC diehards finally jumped to Macintosh.² Computer shops – to ensure consumer sales through the failures of Vista – continued selling computers with either XP pre-installed, rather than its newer rival, or gave consumers the option of running either operating system. Similarly forgotten is the training cost of moving to new hardware and software. Plug in and play is rarely plug in and use. Put another way, Clyde Christofferson and Sarah Palmer at the Old Dominion

1 E. Jensen and B. LaBelle, *Radio Territories*, (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies, 2007)

2 J. Dvorak, 'Vista's 11 Pillars of Failure', *PC Magazine*, April 21, 2008, <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2286065,00.asp>

Bar Association (ODBA) Conference asked in response to new technological developments, ‘Do I have time for this?’³ They recognised the cost is not only hardware or software but wetware, the time humans spend in training and evaluation.⁴

So much of the study of media and technology revels in the new and exciting. We work in an accelerated academy. Yet for every new media, there are old media. Indeed, there are more old media than new media and fine scholarship from writers such as Carolyn Marvin,⁵ Charles Acland,⁶ Siegfried Zielinski,⁷ Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin⁸ have taken this topic as their focus. Yet this final chapter of *Digital Dieting* is not only interested in the old and the redundant. I want to take this study a step further. When the old is forgotten and slips out of footnotes, quirky anecdotes and obscure references, it becomes dead media.

The phrase ‘dead media’ reveals a high quality internet provenance. Science Fiction writer Bruce Sterling first used it in 1995, in a speech delivered at the Sixth International Symposium on Electronic Art in Montreal.⁹ He described lost, marginalised and obsolete media. It was part archive, part nostalgia, part requiem. He was interested in what he described as ‘the nervous system of the information society’¹⁰ and the ‘marketplace of the information economy’.¹¹ His motivation was similar to James Carey and Harold Innis, to provide a wider context for the communication ‘revolutions’ of his time, which was 1995. This was the blissful era excited by virtual reality and CD Roms. I was teaching (with) media at this time and he was right to offer a critique. The seminars I attended where CD Roms were the ‘answer’ to information storage problems are very similar to the current evangelical commitments to cloud computing. Sterling asked listeners and readers to investigate the ‘aspects of media that corporate public relations people are *afraid to look at* and deeply afraid to tell

3 C. Christofferson and S. Palmer, ‘Technology in the law office: a lifecycle approach’, ODBA Conference, 2006, <http://www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc/presentations/odba.pdf>, slide 7.

4 *ibid.*, slide 7.

5 C. Marvin, *When old technologies were new: thinking about electric communication in the late nineteenth century*, ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)

6 C. Acland, *Residual Media*, (Residual Media, 2007)

7 S. Zielinski, *Deep time in the media: toward an archaeology of hearing and seeing by technical means*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006)

8 J. Bolter and R. Grusin, *Remediation*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000)

9 B. Sterling, ‘The Life and Death of Media’, Speech at Sixth International Symposium on Electronic Art ISEA ’95, Montreal, 19 September 1995, <http://student.vfs.com/~deadmedia/speech.htm>

10 *ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

us about'.¹² This challenge for scholars has as much currency and relevance now as it did two decades ago.

Much to the chagrin of those who doubt the importance of studying media – or even media studies – Sterling presented a cyberpunk sermon on the mount about why the media requires attention. While knowing that 'media is a commodity', he realised that 'that's not what's interesting'.¹³ Instead, he gave ten reasons why media require our attention:

- Media is an extension of the senses.
- Media is a mode of consciousness.
- Media is extra-somatic memory. It's a crystallization of human thought that survives the death of the individual.
- Media generates simulacra. The mechanical reproduction of images is media.
- Media is a means of social interaction.
- Media is a means of command and control.
- Media is statistics, knowledge that is gathered and generated by the state.
- Media is economics, transactions, records, contracts, money and the records of money.
- Media is the means of civil society and public opinion.
- Media is means of debate and decision and agitpropaganda.¹⁴

In recognising the scale of this impact, Sterling granted the internet a history and ensured that it was part of a wider analysis of media, communication and identity. Sterling issued a challenge to write a Dead Media Handbook that catalogued the waste, failure, losses and errors in the history of technology. Sterling's speech, published as 'The Dead Media Project – A Modest Proposal and a Public Appeal', did trigger research and commentary. However, perhaps appropriately, the project dwindled, disappeared and – in the era of Apple

12 *ibid.*

13 *ibid.*

14 *ibid.*

product launches being reported as news – itself became obsolete. The Tom Jennings’ moderated mailing list died and the widespread interest in it decayed. The Dead Media Project still holds a URL (<http://www.deadmedia.org>), but has been hibernating for some time. Tragically, all the links capturing the research and comments from the mailing list are disabled or broken.

But like truly great dead ideas, they can be resurrected. Sterling’s handbook has been written, but it took fifteen years. Between his 1995 request and the 2009 publication, a series of individuals, organisations and websites has continued Sterling’s challenge to think about the life cycle of media. Most intriguingly, Garnet Hertz’s Concept Lab produced, publicised and housed some fascinating projects in his Dead Media Research Lab. A former doctoral student at the University of California, it was Hertz who realised Sterling’s vision. ‘In memory of the Dead Media Handbook’, he published *A Collection of Many Problems*. It was distributed by Lulu and provides what he describes as ‘a visual introduction to media archaeology’.¹⁵

Such a project could also be renamed Dead Media Studies. Increasingly, the study of a single media – television studies, film studies, photography or internet studies – creates bunkers, silos and blockages. It prevents a recognition of the reality that sound and vision moves through space and time. Indeed, perhaps the time has come to have two major spheres of Media Studies: sonic media and visual cultures. Such labelling recognises the consequences of convergence, disintermediation and reintermediation, but also creates a smooth movement between analogue and digital sources and ideas. By bringing Dead Media (Studies) back to a field that too often is hyper-presentist and post/anti historical, a smoother relationship between old and new, sound and vision, sustainability and obsolescence, can be constructed.

The Dead Media Research Lab is trying to find a way to repurpose dead media, while also using this initiative to rethink the damaging and planned obsolescence of consumer electronics. While Steve Jobs included an environmental section as part of his January 2010 iPad launch, showing the recyclable elements of the product,¹⁶ he did not include the key functions that would extend its life, such as a camera and USB slot.¹⁷ By intentionally leaving out useful and obvious elements from the hardware, Jobs created a demand for the next generation

15 G. Hertz, *A collection of many problems*, (Telharmonium Press, 2009), [http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/a-collection-of-many-problems-\(in-memory-of-the-dead-media-handbook\)/5486558](http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/a-collection-of-many-problems-(in-memory-of-the-dead-media-handbook)/5486558)

16 S. Jobs, ‘Apple announces the iPad’, iTunes, 27 January, 2010, <http://itunes.apple.com/ca/podcast/apple-keynotes/id275834665>

17 It is important to note that C.M. Christensen disagrees with my argument here. In *The innovator’s dilemma: when new technologies cause great firms to fail*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), Christensen argues that disruptive technologies are always

of iPad. This planned obsolescence is outstanding marketing. Whether such a decision can be justified economically or environmentally is a different question.

The key moment in our history which must attend the Digital Dieting project is to recognise the cost of loss, waste and obsolescence. A range of websites has provided a memory text, logging the loss of dead media. The same year as Bruce Sterling's speech, *old-computers.com* was launched.¹⁸ There are currently 991 computers in the museum. Each artefact features a description and an image, remembering the product's strength and weakness. *Instructables.com* ran a Dead Computer Contest, to see the best use of discarded technology. The results included making a cat bed, aquarium and MacPlanters.¹⁹ While such projects demonstrate creativity and humour, it is important to remember and consider the consequences of international rubbish tips for dead media. The *New York Times* in August 2010 reported that in Agbogbloshie in Accra Ghana, 'foreign' technology is dumped as garbage. Ghanaians pull apart the equipment for the valuable metals that may reside inside them.²⁰ Even without this export of dead media, estimates suggest that 40 per cent of the heavy metals in American landfill are caused by electronic equipment.²¹ The answer to such waste is not only for corporations to produce environmentally safer products, but for the life cycle of media technologies to slow and extend. Information literacy is required to use current products, platforms and portals well, rather than hoping that 'the next big thing' will solve problems that are invented rather than actual.

The question is how to reuse, recycle and re-purpose electronic materials beyond MacPlanters or sending waste to Africa as some disturbing form of neo-colonialism. E-waste regulations have emerged, but the scale of this obsolescence – printer cartridges, telephones, computers and televisions – necessitates more than governmental intervention. The seriousness of this problem now creates business opportunities that 'focus on eliminating the risks surrounding data security and environmental compliance, while maximising

labelled as overpriced and underpowered. In other words 'toys' make the successful technology.

18 Old Computers.com, <http://www.old-computers.com/news/default.asp>

19 Contest Robot, 'Dead Computer Contest Winners', *Instructables.com*, August 2010, <http://www.instructables.com/id/Dead-Computer-Contest-Winners/>

20 'A global graveyard for dead computers in Ghana', *New York Times*, 4 August, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2010/08/04/magazine/20100815-dump.html>

21 G. Hertz, 'Dead Media Research Lab', <http://www.conceptlab.com/deadmedia/>

value recovery on IT asset investment for businesses around the country'.²² In other words, where there is digital muck, there is money.

Sustainable media is catching up with Sterling's speech²³ and even the science fiction writer is trying to reduce the irony of his argument. He realised it was not rational 'travelling the world in airplanes to speak at sustainability events'.²⁴ Instead, he now makes a 20-minute talk on film, which is sent to the organisers, shown at the event and followed by a live conversation via Skype.²⁵

Sterling's inspiration and thoughtful reconsideration of earlier truths and practices are important. We should continue his interest in old and dead media. The arc of this book has tracked my maxim:

Old Media + New Media = Now Media

The goal of this slogan is to not only remember the role of history, but to ensure that any discussion of technology commences with its purpose and goal. New Media is a phrase that enables social, cultural and economic amnesia. It perpetuates an assumption that the new is useful. But new media summons an algorithm of waste with deep consequences for personal finances and the global environment. When I completed a qualification in internet studies in the late 1990s, the course was split by dual (and indeed duelling) commitments: an earnest desire for preservation alongside an excited and bubbling joy at the new. In that 1995 talk, Sterling captured both these desires: 'before leaping in postmodern ecstasy into the black hole of virtuality, we ought to make and store some back-ups of the system first'.²⁶ Galloping to the new can lead to the loss of the old. At some point, we will need those backups.

In the subsequent decade after Sterling's presentation, this paradox of mobile media and the waste of hardware redundancy has been supposedly resolved by focusing on data (content management) and ignoring the platform onto which it was placed (context management). Celebrations of cloud computing and mobile media are a way to displace the platforms and carriers of that information. With

22 'Technology exchange,' Electronic lifecycle solutions', <http://www.technology-exchange.net/>

23 'Code of best practice for sustainable film making', Centre for Social Media, <http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/making-your-media-matter/documents/best-practices/code-best-practices-sustainable-filmmaking>

24 B. Sterling, 'The latest doors of perception', *Wired*, September – October 2010, http://www.wired.com/beyond_the_beyond/2010/09/the-latest-doors-of-perception-3/

25 B. Sterling, 'Doors of Perception Report', *Beyond the Beyond*, 20 September, 2010, http://www.wired.com/beyond_the_beyond/

26 Sterling, 'The life and death of media', *op. cit.*

‘everything’ in the cloud, the objects on which the data is constructed, accessed and transformed, disseminated and uploaded, simply drop away. Migration of digital data requires more attention than Dropbox may suggest.

Sterling was not against the new. Neither am I. Instead, he asked for an understanding of the old. He asked that the evangelical promoters, sellers and hypers ‘ought to eat what you are killing ... Perhaps this realisation will free us from the hypnotism of our own PR’.²⁷ That is what made the gluttony and excess of information obesity and the hardware and software that services it so odd. It was hypnotic. After the credit crunch and the slow ‘recovery’ in many regions of the world, systems that operated so well in a boom seemed exhausted. Information was tired. Like all recoveries, there needed to be a mobilisation of experience to ensure that every innovation was tempered by accountability. As James Gleick diagnosed, ‘we have information fatigue, anxiety, and glut’.²⁸ Yet in an age that requires a balancing of cost, value and risk, doing more with less, the fast consumption, fast fashion and fast techno-obsolescence has continued.

There is a reason for loving media in its youth, rather than the ageing products and platforms in the dustbin. It is a similar reason why fashion boutiques continue to stock size six and eight, knowing that the size fourteens will sell. It is why intelligent women continue to spend £40 on a face cream. It gives them hope in a jar. Every new media offers the promise that it will make us smarter, more beautiful, more popular and richer, just like a woman believes that one day if she can just stay off the Mars Bars, she will fit into skinny jeans. It will not happen, but it is an aspiration that a new purchase will construct a best self rather than the tired, sagging, puffy, poor try-hard in the mirror.

Sterling asks that we be honest: ‘if you want to think seriously about the future, you have to think historically’.²⁹ Speed of change does not signify improvement. Instead, it confirms dissatisfaction with the present and a desire to forget the past. Sterling termed this ‘the Whig version of technological history’.³⁰ We – and information obesity – are the ‘product’ of history, the result of centuries of scholars, inventors, scientists and programmers believing that the new is better. Such an argument flatters us, but demeans those who preceded us. All great media are based on dead media. The reason for that death, like the reason for a human death, need to be understood. Sterling realised that there are many causes for media extinction: ‘some forms of media are rendered obsolescent, but others are murdered. Some innovations are pushed very hard by clever and

27 *ibid.*

28 J. Gleick, *The information: a history, a theory, a flood*, (London: fourth Estate, 2011), p. 11

29 B. Sterling, in T. Myer, ‘Chatting with Bruce Sterling at LoneStarCon’, 29 August, 1997, <http://www.sfsite.com/09a/bru16.htm>

30 *ibid.*

powerful people with lots of money, and yet they still fail..³¹ Researching such failures is productive. Death is what gives meaning to life and the reasons for death help to understand the conditions of living.

Certain religions contend that we do not die, rot and decay. They offer the promise of an afterlife, heaven or reincarnation. All these words displace the sharp, devastating reality that we will die. Calling obsolete technology dead media is honest. But what is intriguing, post-credit crunch, is that there is increasing interest in what is called the 'life cycle of technology'. Instead of dead media, the life cycle offers a re-surfacing of the dead skin of technology with youth serum. It is heaven for hardware.

Intriguingly, the first use of 'life cycle' in relation to technology dates back to 1957 and Iowa State College.³² The phrase was used to monitor the purchasing patterns of seed corn by farmers.³³ This report found that the well-educated and wealthy farmers on larger than average farms were the technological innovators. The laggards were the least educated and the oldest. From this early use in agricultural innovation, this modelling has been used to understand technological innovation and particularly the life cycle of hardware and software.

Firms like GTSI Corporation describe themselves as an 'information technology solutions provider offering a Technology Lifecycle Management (TLM) approach to IT infrastructure solutions'.³⁴ That is a new series of initials to throw into meetings: what is your position on TLM? GTSI can help businesses because they have a 'strategic methodology' to reach 'government-mandated performance metrics'.³⁵ GTSI recommends planning, design, acquisition, implementation and management.³⁶ Intriguingly 'lifecycle management' masks decline, obsolescence, replacement and death. The goal is a 'technology acquisition strategy'³⁷ rather than technology obsolescence strategy to manage dead media. The closest GTSI gets to death is a 'retirement strategy'³⁸ and an 'asset disposal strategy'.³⁹

31 Sterling, 'The life and death of media', *op. cit.*

32 *The Diffusion Process*, Special Report No. 18, North Central Rural Sociology Committee, Subcommittee for the Study of the Diffusion of Farm Practices, (Ames: Agriculture Extension Service Iowa State College, 1957).

33 'Historical perspective: the technology adoption lifecycle', *High Tech Strategies*, <http://www.hightechstrategies.com/profiles.html>

34 GTSI Corp, *Technology Lifecycle Management*, <http://www.gtsi.com/cms/documents/White-Papers/Technology-lifecycle-Mgmt.pdf>

35 *ibid.*

36 *ibid.*, p. 2

37 *ibid.*

38 *ibid.*, p. 3

39 *ibid.*, p. 4

This life cycle modelling of technology perpetuates the ageism that confronts people. It continues the ageism of that early study of agricultural innovation in Iowa. Jim Hertzfeld captured it best: ‘a lifecycle describes the progression of something from its very conception until it no longer has any value’.⁴⁰ Morse refers to ‘Proactive Asset Retirement’.⁴¹ So as a product (or person) ages, it loses value. A positive reading of ‘technology lifecycle management’ is that it increases the consciousness of users, so that decision-making has evidence behind it, rather than moving to the next big thing based on public relations or *Wired* magazine.

Software has a development lifecycle and another great acronym: SDLC. Death of software is called – quite poetically – ‘sunsetting’.⁴² For such consultants and their acronyms, the lifecycle of software products and specific corporate projects is often tethered. When the project is over, so is the software. Such a strategy was also used when university managers wanted staff to move their courses online. They were not prepared to invest in staff development and training, so they bought a software package that un(der)trained academics could use that would provide an ‘adequate’ learning virtual learning environment. Blackboard emerged as a content management system (that is often termed – with some Orwellian resonance – a learning management system) for undertrained online teachers. Numerous updates, upgrades and patches later, it is still a very basic way of conducting online learning. If ‘the project’ was to ‘get materials online’ then Blackboard was a software solution. When staff and students demand better than Blackboard, then a series of new solutions – of which the Moodle suite is an example – will signal sunseting.

From that first study of how farmers implemented change in their farms, a series of famous studies emerged. Everett Rogers created his bell curve that represented the take-up of new products, spanning from innovators to laggards.⁴³ G.A. Moore provided the explanation as to why Apple’s products and marketing were successful in the last decade. Moore argued that early and late adopters – innovators and laggards – require very different marketing techniques.⁴⁴ The aim, so successfully shown by Apple, was to move from a change in technology to a change in culture.

40 J. Hertzfeld, ‘What is a lifecycle anyway?’ Toolbox.com, 2 August, 2006, <http://it.toolbox.com/blogs/alm-blog/what-is-a-lifecycle-anyway-10870>

41 ‘Technology lifecycle management’, Morse, http://www.morse.com/solution_2.htm

42 Hertzfeld, op. cit.

43 E. Rogers, *Diffusion of innovations*, (New York: The Free Press, 1995)

44 G.A. Moore, *Crossing the chasm: marketing and selling high-tech goods to mainstream customers*, (New York: HarperBusiness, 1991)

Every life cycle – every movement of maturation – ends in death. Cracked.com used this inevitability as the basis of its humour about technology's life cycle.

1. Technology is what separates us from the Amish
2. Technology is no match for the power of the dark side.
3. Technology will eventually kill us.⁴⁵

While not humorous, Gartner cut through the marketing of 'life cycle' to describe the 'Hype Cycle'. They locate five key phases.

- Technology trigger
- Peak of inflated expectations
- Trough of disillusionment
- Slope of enlightenment
- Plateau of productivity⁴⁶

Only if a product can survive the brilliantly named 'trough of disillusionment', where the technology does not deliver on the promise marketed to the buyer, can it move to 'the slope of enlightenment' where the second and third generation products emerge.

Just as disillusionment leads to enlightenment, so did dead media lead to new projects. Bruce Sterling went on to found the Viridian Design Movement, offering new combinations of globalisation, citizenship, environmentalism, technology and progress.⁴⁷ From cyberpunk to futurist, he is currently Professor of Internet Studies and Science Fiction (a tremendous combination) at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee Switzerland. He has left researchers with so many progressively disruptive ideas to ponder and develop. And yet ...

45 'Just the facts', *Cracked.com*, <http://www.cracked.com/funny-37-technology/>

46 'Gartner hype cycle', Research Methodologies, Gartner, <http://www.gartner.com/technology/research/methodologies/hype-cycle.jsp>

47 Like most futurists, their predictions were not always accurate. Written before Google, Google Ads and the Murdoch Press shielding their newspapers behind credit cards, he stated in 1997, 'commercial websites are failing everywhere. Nobody pays to see anything on a website. No one will ever pay to see anything on a website. Ever, ever, ever. Sure, you could spool ads in front of people's eyeballs, and hope that it picks up some sales. But at best, all you have is a niche market', Sterling in Myer, *ibid*.

DEAD MEDIA

And yet ... Bruce Sterling made a commitment that the Dead Media Project would be public source knowledge, with scholars completing their research pro bono and all the information would be freely available. This was 1995, fifteen years before Chris Anderson wrote *Free*. But sadly, the website – www.deadmedia.org – is not functional. In its current state, all the links and research completed by the community on the mailing list is unavailable. If there is anything sadder than dead media, then it is dead links from a website on dead media.

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Conclusion

Digital Fitness

I don't understand it to be honest with you ... I don't know why anybody can be bothered with that kind of stuff. How do you find the time to do that? There are a million things you can do in your life without that. Get yourself down to the library and read a book. Seriously. It is a waste of time.¹

Sir Alex Ferguson

Funny how all the people who think Twitter is a waste of time, then admit they 'don't get it.' Go to a library?? Newsflash Alex, it's 2011.²

Catherine Lawler

Sir Alex Ferguson had a bad week in the lead up to winning Manchester United's 19th top flight football title. This bad week was infected by Twitter. Firstly, his striker Wayne Rooney threatened – in far less than 140 characters – to put a fellow Tweeter 'to sleep in ten seconds'.³ Secondly, a super-injunction involving Ryan Giggs that was meant to guarantee his anonymity in relation to a supposedly personal transgression was undermined by tweets naming him and his action.⁴

In the context of such twits, tweets and twittering, Ferguson reclaimed his inner Shankly and offered a potent commentary to the gathered journalists. He was bemused that anyone bothers with such triviality. He recognised time as a precious resource. There are – indeed – 'a million things you can do with your

1 A. Ferguson, in 'Sir Alex Ferguson's advice to Twitter users: 'Get yourself down to the library and read a book'', How Do, 20 May, 2011, <http://www.how-do.co.uk/north-west-media-news/north-west-digital-media/sir-alex-ferguson%92s-advice-to-twitter-users%3A-%91get-yourself-down-to-the-library-and-read-a-book%92-2011052011041/>

2 Catherine Lawler, 'Comment,' *ibid*, May 23, 2011

3 'I'll put you to sleep in 10 seconds! Rooney in violence threat to abusive fan on Twitter', *The Daily Mail*, 19 May, 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-1388566/Wayne-Rooney-threatens-abusive-fan-Twitter-Ill-sleep-10-seconds.html#ixzz1dtFkd1Br>

4 G. Rayner, 'Ryan Giggs named as Premier League footballer in gagging order row', *The Telegraph*, 23 May, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/twitter/8531175/Ryan-Giggs-named-as-Premier-League-footballer-in-gagging-order-row.html>

life'. The one he suggested was going to a library to read a book. What is not captured in my transcription of the press conference is the journalists' laughter that erupted after Ferguson suggestion that Tweeters may like to read a book. To make sure that his message was not misunderstood as being either funny or ironic, he stated that he was indeed being serious and stressed the imperative to use time productively, efficiently and well. Going to the library was one strategy to respect time. Sir Alex Ferguson was also being politically pointed. One of the few Labour supporting and voting football managers, he recognised that the deep public service cuts instigated by the Conservative-led government had targeted libraries, with numerous public libraries being closed through a lack of funding and support.⁵ His words offered a reminder that not only was digital dieting wise, avoiding unfortunate, accelerated commentaries that are either mistaken or illegal, but it is important to support the institutions that encourage citizens to think, care, reflect and learn.

The internet and online learning processes have contributed much to higher education. The availability of refereed articles, particularly via open access journals, has been transformative. As someone who completed their education in 'the most isolated capital city in the world', the availability of research from outstanding scholars in geographically dispersed locations has been both a gift and a privilege. The capacity to upload and time-shift rich educational materials in mixed media forms, with attention to multimodality and diverse multiliteracy, has been beneficial to staff and students. The speed and ease of finding high quality information on YouTube, SlideShare, iTunes U, Google Scholar and the Directory of Open Access Journals has contributed a great deal to students, teachers and learning. It has never been easier to locate, read, interpret and use outstanding scholarship.

The problem is that accompanying the high quality publications and materials is a glut of nonsense. But the burgeoning trash that clings to the quality data would not be a concern if there was attendant focus on information literacy and media literacy.⁶ Put another way, information obesity would not be a challenge if the principles and practices of digital dieting were followed. No one is born with the capacity to sort and sift important from irrelevant data. Some of the dieting strategies in the analogue age were structural: librarians selected the best books and made them available on the shelves. Rubbish rarely entered the collection. Librarians implemented methods to restrict and guide citizens and

5 J. Henley, 'Hands off our libraries', *The Guardian*, 3 February, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/feb/03/hands-off-our-libraries>

6 Howard Rheingold described this as 'crap detection', from H. Rheingold, 'Attention, crap detection, and network awareness', from J. Brockman (ed.), *Is the internet changing the way you think? The 'net' impact on our minds and future*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), p. 137

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students to better materials. Similarly teachers construct reading lists to guide often inexperienced students into not only quality information, but to learn the necessary information skills – via key authors, intellectual movements, concepts and theories – to locate similarly influential materials. Much of this work in the analogue age by teachers and librarians was implicit. This was our failing. Instead of stating overtly and clearly in study guides, syllabi and curricula that an assignment or topic is developing information literacy, ‘we’ assumed that our students knew the meta-lessons they were receiving. Assumptions about students and levels of reading and writing in education always trigger flawed decision making. In the movement from analogue to digital teaching and learning materials, those subtle and under-recognised lessons in information sorting and sifting were decentred, marginalised and forgotten. Search engines seemingly replaced the skills necessary to find quality information. Indeed, the capacity to differentiate – or even configure the criteria by which information can be ranked, judged and evaluated – was lost. Not surprisingly, governmental funding has been structurally removed from libraries and universities. Dead media, Veblen’s conspicuous consumption and accelerated obsolescence snuffed the scaffolding history and information literacies to enable citizens to apply older skills and ideas in new ways. Supposedly a search engine and the internet are more than adequate replacements. Jazeela Sherif and Rehan Khan convey the consequences of confusing technology and literacy.

If anything has lightened the rigour of academic life of students in recent times it is nothing else but the Internet. For students, especially for those at the university level, who face challenges while doing course assignments independently, nothing can be as exasperating as lack of information.⁷

This statement is both confusing and disturbing. Should rigour be ‘lightened’? Surely it should be enforced. But the greater concern is the focus on information, or a lack of it. Actually, *less* and *better* quality information can produce higher quality scholarship than a glut of nonsense. The confusions between information and knowledge, quantity and quality, access and literacy are now being revealed.

Advocacy is required alongside recognition of the profound gift that librarians and teachers have given millions of students around the world. This gift is not simply finding books or learning facts. It is gaining the meta-knowledge about how to evaluate information and build knowledge. The proliferation of low quality data online is not a problem if information and media literacy skills are

7 J. Sherif and Rehan Khan, ‘Role and relevance of web supported learning for first generation learners’, *Journal of American Academy of Business*, Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2005, p. 123

high. But they are not. In the widening participation agenda, motivation and foundational learning skills have been neglected. Instead, the word ‘plagiarism’ is thrown around orientation sessions and study guides. Yet if discussions of motivation and academic protocols were situated in the wider information and learning landscape, then plagiarism would emerge more rarely and be less of a scholarly bogey man. Addressing plagiarism requires more than simply frightening students. It necessitates attention to time management, information management, assessment processes and reading lists. If staff do not change their assessment each year and move beyond standard(ised) textbooks, then many modes of cheating are possible. If staff work harder – and smarter when assisted by professional development programmes – then the culture of blaming students for plagiarism will cease.

Too many of the attacks on plagiarising students are disconnected from the actions of academics. Two examples of poor assessment that facilitate – if not encourage – plagiarism will suffice. Both come from first year courses, but in different countries.⁸ One assignment in a first year university course asked students to write summaries of a film plot. Another asked students to write a weekly summary of a textbook chapter. Firstly, a summary is too low a task for university students to complete. But secondly, if staff are trying to assist students in understanding the difference between plagiarism, paraphrasing and quotation, then asking first years to construct a summary is not the best method to frame that knowledge. Not surprisingly in these two courses, cases of plagiarism proliferated. Students wrote summaries that – either intentionally or unintentionally – showed similarities to the summaries already available. While these inexperienced first years are blamed, the lack of skill exhibited by staff in configuring these low level and poor quality tasks requires much more attention. If the goal is information literacy and digital dieting, then every activity should encourage evaluative and interpretative skills, rather than banal description.

Sir Alex Ferguson is right. He is correct in his instructions for footballers and journalists, and for the rest of us. It is a better use of time to read a book than sending a tweet. Certainly – as argued in this book – Twitter can point to valuable resources. Yet it is rarely used for that purpose. Justin Bieber and Lady Gaga are not commenting on the quality of Stanford’s recently uploaded podcasts. To recap: the argument offered in this book is not an analogue versus digital debate. A range of high quality e-books are being produced. The enhanced versions of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* show the great capacity of books as applications. Rich data and original documents, along with evocative sonic and video material, are integrated parts

8 I will describe the assessment protocols in generalities so that the staff and the universities cannot be identified.

of the package. Similarly, outstanding electronic journal articles are available, often on highly specialised topics. The key is to read books and refereed articles and take notes, rather than read a tweet and re-tweet.

Time is precious. Each of us make choices each day. Will we flick around on Facebook, liking and commenting on our friends' lives, or read something that is transformative? If the choice is between a punchy, provocative, original article located via Google Scholar, why would we settle for a generalised, anonymous entry on Wikipedia? As argued in this book, the answer to these questions is that it is easier to find and read simple material. Our vocabularies, world view and literacies are not challenged. It is much harder to confront the realisation of what we do not know. As we move through the internet – and particularly social media – the bulk of writing is very basic. There are comments about daily practices, shopping, television and celebrities. We are drawn to these topics because they do not challenge us. It is pleasant to live in a world where we are literate, where we are never unsettled by ignorance. To activate the old cliché – without the Donald Rumsfeld corrective – we do not know what we do not know. There are known knowns, but there are also unknown unknowns. But because of the bulk of low quality social media that fills our time, we are anaesthetised to the fact that we are not challenged, critiqued or questioned in our world view. Instead, we comment, like and retweet.

I am not arguing against the strengths and benefits of social media. They can be used in teaching and learning with effectiveness, power and potency. But to generate an active, conscious and critical engagement with social media requires much more than deskilled and automated behaviour in response to information. Digital dieting must be enacted. Digital dieting can be conducted through hardware. Universities are now 'banning' laptops in lecture theatres so that students both concentrate and learn how to take notes rather than 'be' on Facebook and dwell in digitised distraction.⁹ Digital dieting can be enacted through software and restriction of particular websites.¹⁰ Some applications and sites can be recommended and others avoided. But the most effective way to enable digital dieting is through assembling overt, reflexive and powerful strategies to build an information scaffold so that students learn both information and media literacy. Such a process is not a quick solution to educational problems. It requires careful curricula planning over the entirety of a degree, well trained staff and committed students.

But there are problems in enacting this deeper and more intricate project. One consequence of budget cuts in higher education is an increase in managerialism.

9 J. Bone, 'American lecturers banning laptops from the classroom', *The Times*, 11 March, 2010, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article7057511.ece

10 Website Block, Ashkon Software, <http://www.ashkon.com/webblock.html>

In tough times, managers write strategic plans, invent new acronyms, create cultures of fear and intimidate staff. These tactics operate effectively in silencing academics. When managing students, a manager's challenge is to predict how many contact hours can be sliced from timetables before complaints impact on national teaching surveys. Less teaching is more money. More PowerPoint and portals reduce the salary burden on universities.

The digital dieting proposed in this book is different. It must be built on the vision and leadership of university management. For me, this is the great tragedy of the online learning 'revolution'. It has emerged at the same historical moment that neoliberal managerialism has saturated the 'project' of higher education. I have taught throughout this 'revolution' and seen the potential of digitisation in universities squandered because managers wanted to use 'the internet' to save money not improve the quality of education. Online courses were and are seen as a way to reduce staff numbers and contact time. Within this ideology, online education is cheap teaching and learning. However, the (unfunny) joke of such an agenda is that online learning is actually more expensive than its analogue counterpart. The cheapest educational model is an individual academic lecturing to three hundred students. Unfortunately managers never confronted this – most obvious – reality. Instead, they bought learning management systems and care packages, proto-redundant hardware and software, and neglected the 'training' of staff because the online learning revolution was meant to replace them. This supposed cost saving strategy became a funnel for money.

In the last two decades, 'middle managers' – including heads of schools/ departments and deans in particular – have become less qualified. They lack teaching experience and expertise and research recognition. While, nearly twenty years ago, the rare manager without a PhD was a hub of embarrassment for the individual and the institution, it now passes without question. The costs of managerialism in education are startlingly obvious. In many universities, three layers of management – the head of programme, the head of school and the dean – all lack PhDs and teaching qualifications. Such an absence is an embarrassment in an institution of higher learning. Obviously, a PhD is not the pinnacle of a scholarly career. It is the foundation for one. If staff lack even this most basic entry point into university life, then the question remains, what are they doing in our system? More seriously, these 'academics' without the most basic of qualifications hold power over staff and students with much more education than themselves. This gulf creates profound shame for all of us who have allowed and enabled this institutional managerial style to evolve. Dear Reader, this is why you are now reading the words of a Head of School. I believe that it is important to stop complaining and start changing. It is important to intervene in the standards and expectations of an 'academic manager.'

Universities must attract and enable the best and the brightest of a culture. Our students deserve our best every single day. But when high quality students

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and academic staff are managed by low quality managers, then vision, direction and leadership are lacking. Compliance, mediocrity and banality result. The managers do not hold the skill or knowledge to improve teaching and learning. Therefore, without expertise in education, it is no surprise that ‘technology’ becomes a saviour. If teaching and learning is not working – because the budgets for professional development, libraries, librarians and skill development sessions for students have been cut – then instead of addressing these expensive and structural concerns, software is a solution. As the higher education sector funding was cut in the United Kingdom after the credit crunch, once more the techno-panacea was summoned. For example, one Faculty Strategic Plan for 2010–15 confirmed

Electronic provision of all course materials including the possible use of smartphone Apps as a mechanism for providing handbooks ... Ensure all technical information and demonstrations are online and included in ‘Smartphone’ apps etc. ... Selectively introduce equipment requirements for applicants (eg. all enrolling students to have laptop/ipad, Skype facility, etc?) ...

Some modules for instance could be run entirely on Skype or through other digital means not only to make them effective and efficient but as an important learning experience and to develop skills in working creatively, remotely and at a distance.¹¹

None of the authors of this ‘Strategy’ held teaching qualifications. Most had not graduated from a doctoral programme and none held specialist research expertise in online learning. This lack of qualifications is obvious considering the naivety and platitudes within the document. The faith in smartphone applications assumes that most students own this platform. In 2010, when this report was written, only 22 per cent of all mobiles were ‘smartphones’.¹² If handbooks and timetabling information was to be provided in this way, then the overwhelming majority of students would not be able to access these materials. The options would then be – following Duke University’s initiative with the early iPods – to provide these platforms for students at a huge initial outlay. Yet the other recommendation of this document is that ‘equipment requirements for applicants’ would be introduced. Is it feasible, useful or socially just to ask students – many with competing family responsibilities of children and parents – to purchase this equipment along with their fees? The other obvious option is

11 ‘Strategy 2010–15’, Faculty of Arts, University of Brighton, October 2010

12 ‘Olswang Predicts Mobile’s Impact on TV: The Convergent Revolution’, tvgenius.net, 17 March, 2011, <http://www.tvgenius.net/blog/2011/03/17/mobile-tv-convergence/>

to keep these documents available in their original form. Significantly, the cost for app development was not factored into the budget.

Instead of activating these more complex discussions, web 2.0 is a seemingly easy option to ‘manage’ staff workloads, exchanging face time with screen time. Instead of lectures and seminars, Skype and iPhone apps are the cheap replacement. The flawed premise of such ‘innovations’ is that no staff time is required for synchronous and asynchronous content generation, content dissemination and content management. This is not an online learning revolution (again). These tools have been around for years. They are only ‘new’ because managers have discovered them. Once more there is confusion between revolution, innovation and change. I have used Skype to run a weekly tutorial for MA students and created virtual office hours since 2009. It increases the opportunity for student support, but is not a replacement for other modes of teaching. It has value. Skype enables virtual office hours. Distance and on-campus students meet and communicate. For undergraduates during the Christmas break, I can help with assignments while campus buildings are closed. But it adds to – rather than cuts – staff workload. Social media are productive supplements to core learning materials and practices, not a replacement for them. It is important to remember the adjective in the phrase ‘social media’. They are not ‘educational media’. Some social media tools and platforms create community and cohesion. They can also distract students and generate inefficiencies in a teaching day.

Managers do not know the real cost of using digital platforms in the classroom because they have not paid for them. Staff members have bought their equipment for both research and teaching because university budgets were reduced at the very point that the speed of obsolescence increased. As I look around the office in which I write these words, I see a laptop, iPad, iPod, portable speaker for the iPod, Zoom microphone, external hard drive, Sony and Flip cameras. All of these platforms have been used in both teaching and the preparation of learning materials. Digitally rich teaching and learning materials cannot be produced without them. None were sourced, evaluated or paid for by any university in which I have worked. None have been ‘gifts’ from benevolent corporations. All are used on a daily basis to keep my teaching and learning operational. Significantly, as the equipment budget for students declined, this equipment has been ‘borrowed’ by students as the cameras and microphones they need to complete assignments are either broken, using redundant tape formats or has never been purchased.

To justify online tools because they are economically efficient requires an attendant managerial investment in league tables and student surveys. When teaching is confused with technology, student satisfaction (or the ‘student experience’) is valued rather than student learning. The point is that deep, challenging, shocking, innovative and disturbing learning cannot be measured

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or assessed. Twenty years ago student surveys were flippantly dismissed as a popularity contest. Now they are part of the corporate engine of universities. I distribute student surveys because I am required to disseminate them. But the feedback of most value to me is the exit interviews with postgraduate students and the face-to-face commentary and messages from undergraduates that I log for later reflection. Most constructive of all is the inadvertent feedback carried by email, Facebook wall posts and the everyday correspondence of our teaching lives.

We need this information. The public protests in the United Kingdom about fees show that a large group of people want to attend university. These protesters raise questions about the purpose of higher education. Put another way, why do students want to enter a degree programme and – perhaps most importantly for our techno-enthused managers – what do they expect when they walk into campuses and classrooms? One fortuitous moment of feedback that answered this question juttred from a first year student email. I have taught first years for twenty years. Every Monday morning at 8am, 8:30am or 9am, anywhere between 60 and 380 first year students have gathered to learn, think, talk and consider. It is the best job in the world. First-year teaching is the pivotal moment that aligns student aspirations with the realities of education.

Nick, one of my first years, sent an email in the first week of semester asking whether he should read course material before or after the lecture and seminar. I answered his question and then received a fascinating reply. It was one of those productive accidents in our teaching lives that left me bemused, confused and wondering (again) what students want from both universities and academics.

I figured it out about 10 seconds after I'd asked. There is something you can do. Tell me how you've done so many exciting things?! That's right, I researched all my lecturers to see if they deserve wages from my fees! You definitely, DEFINITELY do. AND MORE. You're an inspiration!

What was interesting in his email was the remarkable – and disturbing – statement that he ‘researched all my lecturers to see if they deserve wages from my fees’. As the protests rolled throughout the United Kingdom about the rise in student fees and the cut in institutional funding, I kept returning to his email, wondering what he expects from us. This was a moment of feedback, so instead of trying to decode an end-of-module survey, I asked what he was looking for when he ‘researched all my lecturers’. His reply was extraordinary, instructive and inspirational. His message could be read as cocky and confident, but the rationale for his research on staff came from a very different source.

I went to a really under achieving school, so bad it's being shut down in Summer actually. There were quite a few times when I felt like I knew more than the teacher, or that I wasn't being challenged enough and I suppose that's kind of made me defensive about my education since. The college I went to was the complete opposite, supposedly one of the best in the country, so I'd say that because I'm getting into thousands and thousands of debt, I want to know what makes the staff at University worthy of my money and what makes them more deserving than the staff that weren't paid for at my really good college.

Instead of this student disrespecting academics, he holds so much admiration for school teachers that he wondered what made university educators any better than the staff of his former college. Students assess our qualifications against their former teachers. We can be found lacking.

It was not only qualifications that were of interest to Nick. He anticipated and hoped for a dialogue between staff and students.

I've always liked to break the student/teacher barrier, especially at school and college because I spent so much time with them, and it just seems right to me that that I learn about the person that's standing in front of me. I think it's just polite, I suppose. It's also got something to do with trust. From watching your videos on YouTube and reading your works, I know how to read you and a bit more about your style, therefore, I'm going to listen to you a lot more when you give me feedback and, I have to say Tara, your style of teaching definitely makes me and quite a few others want to try harder. I think your passion rubs off on us and gives us that spark back that reminds us why we chose to come to University in the first place.

For managers who are so eager to deliver lectures, tutorials and seminars via Skype and learning materials via iPhone and iPad applications, they need to remember why students like Nick were drawn to universities. He wants connection and respect, passion and commitment, trust and communication. That is how he justifies his fees. Students mention the cost of their education as a proxy for their expectations.

Academics are sometimes offended that the value of universities is reduced to the fees they pay. However, Nick's attention to fees is masking a much deeper desire and aspiration.

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A final thing I'd say is that on a personal level, coming to University is a massive deal. I'm the first one from my traditionally working class family and it's going to be a massive struggle trying to get by on the money I get given. My loan, grant and bursary combined isn't enough to pay for my rent alone and my family can't afford to support me so I'm stuck living out of my overdraft for at least this whole year. And that's the price you pay for wanting an education.

For Thatcher's grandchildren like Nick, fees prove their commitment and interest. While managers confuse technology and teaching, efficiency and education, students know that university is 'a massive deal'. Their language may appear abrupt and cold, exchanging money for learning. Behind this brittle surface is a yearning for connection and community and not Skype but scholarship.

The impact of an expansive and under qualified administrative bureaucracy in education has meant, to cite Stanley Aronowitz, that 'administration has become a separate career in academic life'.¹³ He argued that, 'career administrators tend to lose touch with the educational enterprise'.¹⁴ Certainly, there are remarkable heads of schools, deans, vice chancellors and presidents who do continue to teach and contribute to the research literature. But they are a rarity. This means that administrators disconnect from the patterns and behaviours of daily teaching and research. They look for economically efficient solutions rather than thoughtful, reflexive, expedient and empowering strategies for teaching and learning. That is why e-learning and online education has been promoted and propelled for nearly two decades. The decisions made about learning management systems and reductions in face to face teaching are offered without any awareness of the consequences. The greatest cost of the phenomenon recognised by Aronowitz is that this large group of administrators/managers never have to handle the consequences of their decisions. They never have to enter a 9am lecture theatre where all the students have laptops and yet have not been educated in the discipline of digital dieting to remove themselves from Facebook for an hour. They do not have to spend a frustrating week before each semester uploading materials into a clunky, dated and deadening slow course portal, knowing that the students will find it so pedantic and boring that the materials will not be used. They do not have to subsidise daily classroom and supervisory sessions with equipment because universities have introduced teaching and learning policies without the required attendant funding to make these directives operate.

13 S. Aronowitz, *The knowledge factory*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), p.164

14 *ibid.*, p. 165

Digital dieting requires choices about what is important. It also requires that we understand students where and how they are, rather than where ‘we’ want them to be. Managers may wish to reduce budgets by assuming that students will arrive with an iPad or a laptop. But the consequences of deploying these platforms in the classroom are not asked or explored. As universities start to ‘ban’ the use of computers in lecture theatres – digital dieting through hardware – managers are not recognizing the causes of these decisions. Instead, they merely wish to reduce costs by supplying administrative material on an iPad or smartphone.

Absent from all these discussions are the dreams, hopes and aspirations of our students. The talk of ‘the student experience’ and recognising ‘the student voice’ is a way to codify and market an artificial, reified and simplified view of education. Through this online educational ‘revolution,’ we lose the key question: what do our students want? There are many responses to this question, but very few involve technology. For students, the most basic of applications are used to create connection. First year students are vulnerable. They are moving through a major life transition with their family, friends and themselves. Yet the most basic of applications, email, Facebook chat, or personal conversations in corridors become incredibly important to the survival of their future hopes. This reality became clear in the life of one young man. Sam is a bright, engaged and engaging young man. His attendance was immaculate. His preparation was superb. Then in the second semester, there was a problem. One week he did not come to class. My emails checking that he was all right were unanswered. Then a message popped into my inbox.

From: Sam
Sent: 06 March 2011 17:38
To: Brabazon Tara
Subject:

Hi there Tara, hope you are well.

I’m sending a quick email to apologise for not being at thinking pop last week and also sorry that I haven’t emailed you to explain this yet. I’ll be honest with you, for the past few weeks I have not been myself and have been behaving ridiculously which has in turn affected how I’ve been acting in everyday life and also my work ethic with university.

I promise to you now though that I’m about to change this and turn it around. I know that you must have heard this hundreds of times from students for them only to not go through with it but I am truly determined to go back to the Sam from before, that is who I truly am after all and I don’t know how I managed to almost lose who I was.

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Once again sorry for this blip and hopefully I haven't left it too late to sort it out and do you proud. I can't wait to see you and hear your inspiring words again, it's only been a couple of weeks since I have heard them but it feels like a lifetime!

Thank you,
Sam x

I replied immediately, acknowledging his great courage and insight in recognising that he had confronted a few problems and was now addressing them. I offered to help in any way. My goal was to make sure that he was not embarrassed to see me, return to class or talk through any concerns. Students – particularly first years – can simply disappear when such unsettling events emerge. But intriguingly, the only technology that he used or mentioned was the most basic (email), and it was deployed to apologise for a lack of analogue attendance and connectivity. At the end of the year, when I left the University, a Facebook message appeared. Sam chose a(nother) basic application to express his deep and personal experience about education.

Hey Tara!!!

How are you? I just want to say a big thank you for all the help you have given me throughout the last year, you probably don't realise just how much of an inspiration you have been in the short amount of time I've known you, and I am certain I wouldn't have got anywhere near the results that I got if it wasn't for you. More importantly however you have managed to change the way I look at life, and also how I look at myself, for this I really can't express my gratitude enough.

I hope life is still treating you well and you're enjoying your new adventures, miss you lots!

Many many many thanks,

Sam

Sam gave me too much credit. But he does capture what the best of education should convey: inspiration, aspiration, motivation and achievement. For teachers, these are our imperatives, our initiatives and our goals. For young men like Sam, it is important to keep them connected, supported and nurtured to become their best selves. I often wonder – at that crucial moment in the second semester – if I had not replied, missed the email or was simply 'too busy', then a young man may have simply drifted away from his education.

Our job as educators is to ensure that the students we teach become better than we are, that they have more opportunities and options to become their best selves. Men and women like Sam are precious and their future is too important to be crushed by the mediocrity of learning outcomes rather than learning. When managers commence a discussion about education with the technology to be used rather than the students to be taught, and saving money rather than building lives, then the voices and aspirations from people like Sam become lost. Students do not attend university to use hardware and software. University should be different from their daily experiences of mobile phones, Facebook and text messaging. When academics attempt to mimic the behaviours and patterns of everyday life – like shopping – in our classroom, then we not only cheapen what we can do in universities but we unravel what we could be. Students do not want higher education to be like the rest of their life. They want it to be extraordinary, revelatory and transformative. Stanley Aronowitz expressed this desire and how it manifests in knowledge.

Real thinking entails marching to your own drummer, ignoring rules the thinker regards as arbitrary ... Thinking means questioning the nature and the content of approved knowledge.¹⁵

Since Aronowitz wrote these words, information obesity has proliferated. Further, the ‘rules’ for negotiating this data excess have been automated. Students as scholars and knowledge workers have been deskilled. Therefore, it is time to question the notion of Google-fed knowledge. It is time to probe the arbitrary rules of university administrators and managers that seek cheap, modular education carried by the newest (or the most promoted) software and hardware available. Most importantly, all citizens have the right to march to their own drummer, to learn information and media literacy skills, and find information and build knowledge appropriate to their time and place.

Digital Dieting has not offered easy answers to difficult questions. Phrases like Digital Natives and the Google Generation are problematic phrases floating through our present. I do not deploy descriptions that pepper books like John Palfrey and Urs Gasser’s *Born Digital*.

You see them everywhere. The teenage girl with the iPod, sitting across from you on the subway, frenetically typing messages into her cell phone. The whiz kid summer intern on our way to the office who knows what to do when your

15 S. Aronowitz, *The knowledge factory*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), p. 159

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e-mail client crashes. The eight-year-old who can beat you at any video game on the market – and types faster than you do, too.¹⁶

This representation of youth is not real. It is ageist. It is also damaging to education. It confuses the development of (very) basic technological skills with the advancement of knowledge. With software and hardware proliferating through our lives, and the sociology of online behaviour much more complex than is suggested by such statements, being ‘born’ digital is not important. Managing digitisation with rigour and reflection is the key.

This is Groundhog Day. When writing *Digital Hemlock* a decade ago, I was critical of the confusion between economic efficiency and technological change. We have returned to this bizarre debate where the use of software and hardware is a proxy for quality teaching. Technological change mitigates economic cuts, enabling both a reduction in staff and maintenance of student satisfaction. Those who teach in online environments, rather than ‘manage’ them, know that the considered integration of software and hardware into an educational portfolio is expensive in both time and money. Mistakes, obsolescence and redundancy attend all moments of technological transformation. Effective innovation in teaching and learning requires planning, cycles of reflection, understanding and – most importantly – recognising dead media and the lifecycle of information.

Most importantly, standards in scholarship must be maintained. The difficulty in executing this task is that the read-write web is framed by an incorrect ideological alignment of democracy and libertarianism. The confusion of micro-blogging with social justice undermines the work required to create social change. There is a difference between widening the participation of students and democracy. It is absolutely crucial that discrimination and prejudice on the basis of gender, race, age or religion not be perpetuated in the entry requirements into universities. For too long, universities have been the preserve of white men. Therefore, the sociology of the student body should be widened. However it is crucial that when these neglected students attend university they do not receive an education lower and poorer than those white men. Widening participation should not be used to justify a lowering of intellectual standards. All students deserve to read the best work of scholarship, learn to write the best and most evocative of research and be able to understand the highest level of ideas. Democracy must not be used as an excuse to lower standards of reading, writing and thinking. Universities are elite organisations. This elitism is constructed through intelligence. Entry to universities is granted to the best and brightest, as determined by a range of measures and assessment protocols. This mode of entry must not exclude on the basis of class, race, gender, religion or

16 J. Palfrey and U. Gasser, *Born Digital: understanding the first generation of digital natives*, (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 1

age. But it does exclude on the basis of intellectual ability. Universities are not democratic organisations. They are elitist institutions, ordered and organised on the basis of intelligence.

Stuart Hall, amidst the analogue age and under a conservative government, predicted one part of the ‘problem’ in conflating user generated content, participation, popular culture and democracy.

Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture – already fully formed – might be simple ‘expressed’. But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why ‘popular culture’ matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don’t give a damn about it.¹⁷

While there are arguments to be made against Hall’s configuration of hegemony, consent and resistance here, his analytical trajectory is important to consider. Simply because popular culture or user generated content exists, does not mean that it creates participation, communication, dialogue or social change. As each of us open our laptop or mobile phone, we type and upload in isolation. Uploading is not an act of participation. It is isolated, often ego-driven. Similarly those who comment on uploaded material are frequently anonymous. This ‘thuggish anonymity’¹⁸ enables the expression of support or abuse hidden behind both a screen and a non de plume. Elias Aboujaoude confirmed that, ‘the internet makes it easier to suspend ethical codes governing conduct and behavior. Gentleness, common courtesy, and the little niceties that announce us as well-mannered, civilised, and sociable members of the species are quickly stripped away to reveal a completely naked, often unpleasant human being.’¹⁹ The read-write web is not an environment where an ‘already formed’ democracy is expressed. It may be ‘constituted’. But consciousness, community, social movements and social change require that the atomised, individualised uploading of Facebook updates and YouTube videos be tempered by respect of other views and ideas, and a desire to move from our views and understand others, rather than simply lash out at difference, because it is challenging to our world view.

17 S. Hall, ‘Notes on deconstructing “the popular”’: from E. Samuel, *People’s History of Socialist Theory*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 239

18 L. Siegel, *Against the machine: being human in the age of the electronic mob*, (New York: Random House, 2008), p. 9

19 E. Aboujaoude, *Virtually you: the dangerous powers of the e-personality*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), p. 96

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The key word to bring forward from Hall's work is 'struggle'. Educators must not give up the fight to teach, learn, create and transform. Certainly, the lack of reading and research is a profound problem at Universities. Yet reducing the amount of reading because students supposedly will not do it anyway is not a solution. I have lost count of the number of academics who tell me to reduce my expectations of reading from students. But I maintain this level, configure assignments to assess it, and create a culture where reading, writing and thinking are expected not optional. Assigning a basic, connect the dots textbook is not a solution either. Students may deploy many excuses to justify a lack of reading. They always have. Student culture is an excuse culture. For example, this student sent the following message the day before an assignment was due in *week ten* of semester.

Dear Miss Tara

I am very ill and was not able to attend most of my classes this week. Because of enrolment issues, my start in this class was already late missing orientation made it harder for me to figure out the website and how to go about things in university. I started without my osap had no computer, no text book and had lots of catching up to do. Last Saturday, I became so overwhelmed, I couldn't breath, was very dizzy and this happened on and off. On Monday this feeling came back and still exist with headaches.

Please let me know how to proceed with the assignment when I feel better.

Thank you

Excuse upon excuse upon excuse is layered upon a simple truth about why a student has not completed an assignment in ten weeks and why he had not contacted me at any point to offer assistance. Our role as teachers is to gently and carefully unpick the displacements from personal responsibility so that students do not perpetuate them in the workplace. But my greater concern is a new tendency we are seeing in universities: not excuses for poor work, but a complete disconnection from what is required in higher education. I received the following message on Facebook in May 2011.

Tara please can I come and see you I'm really freaking out about everything. I thought that why I write essay was good and then I only got a C. I'm so worried. Would you be free for a chat this week?

This student submitted a paper with only two references. The referencing she did include was incorrect. Spelling and grammatical errors proliferated through the script. How could a paper with these errors and lack of research be ‘good’? My concern is not that students submit low quality assignments. These have always existed and will always exist. The worry is the lack of consciousness, the disconnection between expectations and outcomes, and an inability to lift to required level of university reading and writing.

This book asks readers to consider digital dieting as an option to manage information obesity. Selecting less information of a higher quality and avoiding the digitally convergent practice of spreading the same information through multiple platforms and applications is the equivalent of keeping chocolate out of the cupboard. If the easy, cheap and quick fix of information is not available, then it is necessary to learn information and media literacy skills. Such a practice is also a way to further social justice. Many corporations are making considerable money out of higher education. Software and hardware providers and textbook publishers are the worst culprits. Students must pay the cost for automating and modernising a university with technology that is under-tested and oversold. Yet if an academic has gained the skills in curricula design, embedding an information scaffold into assessment, and reads widely and deeply, then they can save both their institution and students money. The great gift of web 2.0 is that open access research materials are now much more accessible. Not only podcasts and vodcasts, but open access journals enable high quality refereed literature to be downloaded and/or read for free. It is easy for under-trained academic teachers to assign a textbook. Sales representatives from academic publishers contact academics constantly offering free copies of textbooks in the hope that they will be assigned to a large first year course. But it is not good enough. With effort, academics can locate free, high quality articles for students to read. They learn information literacy skills and the capacity to manage arguments, debate and difference.

Digital dieting – like the food-based equivalent – ends up costing less. Choosing information – like choosing food – reduces waste. Some quick strategies can be instigated to create a digital detox to transform information obesity into information management. The first stage is to stop ‘push media’. Stop the automatic notifications from businesses like Amazon, Apple and florists, online supermarket and clothing stores. Never tick the box that asks if a business can send emails with updates or newsletters. Further, stop the push notifications from Facebook, Twitter, Academia.edu, LinkedIn and YouTube. Enter the account information section and remove the default functions that notify users when a ‘friend’ comments, uploads, downloads or tags. Transform ‘push’ media into ‘pull’ media. That means that users can still be involved in community comments and discussions in social media, but instead of being continually disrupted by notifications, the user can choose when and how this

information is managed. These two strategies alone will reduce email traffic radically. The next stage is to create institutional change in email behaviour. Most of us have worked with people that endlessly click ‘reply all’ rather than ‘reply’ to every email and send unnecessary and banal calendar entries into students, teachers and workers’ systems, which then creates a system of reminders. By stopping – or at least reducing – the automation of information delivered to inboxes, digital clutter disappears and enables conscious and reflexive decisions to be made. Importantly, slow the acceleration of digital media. Simply because a message can be sent quickly does not mean that it should be composed and sent as rapidly. Nancy Duarte stated that,

We’ve become a first-draft culture. Write an e-mail. Send. Write a blog entry. Post. Write a presentation. Present. The art of crafting and then recrafting something well is disappearing in communications.²⁰

Another strategy to instigate digital dieting as a producer of content is to make a concerted effort to send fewer messages and ensure that they are carefully configured and considered. Very few emails require a response this minute, this hour or indeed this day. When mistakes are made, more messages, more responses and more ‘reply all’ are instigated. If fewer and more considered emails are sent, then the overall traffic of content reduces.

Digital dieting and information restriction is only the first stage. Intellectual fitness is developed through experience and expertise in information and media literacy. An equivalent to the gym and aerobics class is the library and information literacy programmes. The key is to create smooth movements between mature and new media, analogue and digital, older and newer literacies, experience and expertise. There are many justifications for the continuum approach to teaching and learning. It is a political and interventionist strategy. As Mark Bauerlein realised, ‘this is not a benign evolution of old media into new media, traditional literacy into e-literacy. It is a displacement.’²¹ He also argues that ‘young people have too much choice, too much discretion for educators and mentors to guide their usage. By the time they enter classrooms outfitted for e-learning, they’ve passed too many hours doing their own e-thing, grooving non-learning routines too firmly.’²² Where Bauerlein is incorrect is in the suggestion – an inference really – that such a pattern is inevitable and indeed terminal. Also, it is frequently not the students’ fault. Creating laptop schools and universities

20 N. Duarte, *Resonate: present visual stories that transform audiences*, (New Jersey: John Wiley, 2010), p. 182

21 M. Bauerlein, *The dumbest generation: how the digital age stupefies young Americans and jeopardizes our future*, (New York: Penguin, 2009), p. xii

22 *ibid.*, p. 156

placed the focus and attention on the hardware, as if ‘we’ learn intrinsically from technology. The assumption is that our brains simply have a USB slot or Bluetooth functionality where we can download information from a laptop’s hard drive. The problem is that inexperienced first year university students are given a laptop. First year is a difficult, upsetting and frightening experience. The best students confront the fear, create relationships with their fellow students and staff and listen, think and learn. But if any strategies are instigated that enable students to hide from their insecurities and not confront their social or academic problems, then failure and dropout rates will increase. If students do not gain the consciousness of what they do not know, then failure will be the result. Ken Coates and Bill Morrison captured the personal cost of inflated expectations without the development of the intellectual skills to meet them.

Many students – at some places perhaps nearly half of all of those who enter – do not graduate ... Think about that for a moment. Remember how much time and effort young Johnny devoted to picking a university, paying tuition and room and board, and launching his studies? Now imagine how he feels when he fails three or four mid-term exams, struggles with essays and lab reports, crashes during the final tests, and then gets the dreaded Dean’s letter requiring an extended academic holiday ... Greater honesty is needed here. A dismally large portion of the students going to a Canadian university in any academic year will not graduate. If incoming students knew this secret, some of the weaker ones might find a better training option elsewhere. Others might be more motivated and might work harder, knowing how many actually do fail and are asked to leave. This dirty little secret needs to be aired.²³

Coates and Morrison were discussing Canadian universities, but their argument is generalisable. As someone who has worked in the Canadian system though, I can also report that there are some specificities to that system. I particularly remember a young man who reported to me that he had been removed from one university for failure, moved to another, was asked to leave for a semester from the new institution because of failure, but had returned to my classroom. He was the young man whose story fills the preface of this book. In other words, he had already been removed from one university, forced to leave for a semester in another, and yet still completed no reading for his courses. We as teachers can be patient and try to help as much as we can in such cases. But the question remains, should this young man have attended university in the first place? Was this a good use of his time, his parent’s money and a university place? The answer must be no and – significantly in response

23 K. Coates and B. Morrison, *Campus Confidential: 100 startling things you don’t know about Canadian universities*, (Toronto: Lorimer, 2011), p. 62–63

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to Coates and Morrison – even after being aware of failure rates in Canadian universities through his personal experience – he kept returning to a campus.

Listening to lectures and participating in seminars at university is difficult. Completing high level scholarly reading is challenging. If students can hide behind anything – including a laptop – then they will. But because the focus of managers and administrators was on promoting a ‘laptop university’ and ‘online learning’, no one asked why these adjectives needed to be added to these already overstuffed nouns. Universities and learning must be the focus of our passionate commitment, rather than deflecting attention on process. In other words, we as teachers and learners must ask the more complex questions beginning with ‘why’ rather than the much easier discussions of ‘how.’

Bauerlein’s argument is understandable. It is easy to blame ‘the young people’ and/or ‘the internet’ for the troubles in education. It is much harder to locate the politicians, managers and administrators who have cut funding from libraries, sacked librarians, reduced teaching staff and cut the support to students. Students will do their own thing, make poor choices or choose not to make choices in education if they do not have alternatives, scaffolding and guidance. They will use Google if they do not know that Google Scholar exists. They will flit around Facebook rather than discover new scholars on Academia.edu. They will watch a bloke trip in the snow in YouTube rather than a lecture by Michel Foucault. Our goal as teachers is to move them from dependent to independent learners and thinkers. But giving a first year student a laptop and assuming that they have the information literacy and experience in time management, concentration and self-discipline the moment they step onto a university campus is naïve at best and negligent at worst.

The platform of distribution or dissemination is not my primary focus. Developing the capacity to interpret and understand complex ideas is my goal. A first stage in information literacy is access. The second is making informed choices through deploying both information and media literacy. The imperative is to develop consciousness about developing different choices. As Karl Marx realised from his own historical moment of seismic change, ‘consciousness does not determine life. Life determines consciousness.’²⁴ Our ambition as teachers is to introduce students to high quality information, not reduce our standards or expectations, but know that we may have to both explain and justify the information sources that we require that they read. The talk of digital natives and the Google generation became the fuel to justify cuts in libraries and education. After all, if ‘everything’ is on Google, why are libraries required? If ‘the young people’ know more about the online environment than ‘old people’, then teachers are no longer required to guide them through knowledge because

24 K. Marx, *The German Ideology*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm#5a4>

– supposedly – ‘everything’ is online. In such an ideology, access is synonymous with literacy. However just because a person can buy a book does not mean that it is read, or that they hold the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and context to understand what they have bought.

The almost religious faith in ‘new’ hardware, software and applications would be deeply funny if the cost was not so great on students and educational institutions. This is best embodied by a powerful, humorous but interpretative t-shirt slogan for our time.

God.

For the questions that Google can’t answer.²⁵

The conflation of technology and religion is significant. When the Google god fails, other deities may be summoned. But such a joke demonstrates how the disintermediation of education, facilitated by online learning, has now presented a cost. The options are not Google or God. Recognising the diversity of choices and a consciousness of their consequences is one important imperative of education.

We must become the master of our choices. To assist the development of both a method and strategy for this process, one area of research I have deployed in this book is food theory and consumption practices. The title *Digital Dieting* captures something of this interest. But a characteristic of supermarket consumers is that they ‘sleepwalk’ through their weekly shop, buying the same goods in the same order, with a few deviations for special offers or occasions. Marketers and retailers configure a range of strategies to stop this sleepwalking, including placing bread and milk at the back of the store, moving merchandise regularly and inserting ‘specials’ and ‘deals’ at the start and end of aisles.²⁶ The goal is to stop sleepwalking through the shopping and increase consciousness. A similar strategy can be used in education, but without the financial incentive. If barriers, challenges and unusual tasks are inserted into assessment processes, then sleepwalking through reading and writing is reduced. Prior behaviours, processes, practices and assumptions do not function. New strategies must be developed. The key is to increase consciousness and disrupt the often incorrect or too elementary processes and practices of past searches for information, inside and outside of education.

25 ‘God. For the questions that Google can’t answer’, Zazzle.co.uk, http://www.zazzle.co.uk/god_for_the_questions_google_can_t_answer_tshirt-235072155931137261

26 A. Dijksterhuis, P. Smith, R.B. van Baaren and D. Wigboldus, ‘The Unconscious Consumer: S Effects of Environment on Consumer Behavior’, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2005, pp. 193–202

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This book has applied an extended metaphor and transformed it into a theory, argument and agenda. Wansink's Brand and Food Lab argued that we all make 200 food choices a day. If we reduce choices and control our environment, then we lose weight. But there is a second stage. We must not only reduce the choices, but improve the choices. If we make only three food choices in a day, each of which involves eating a four litre bucket of ice cream, then weight will not be lost. The number of choices matter. So does understanding the consequences of those choices. The key for all students in higher education is to choose the right course, the right university and the right staff to move them through their lives. Here is my checklist for digital dieting in selecting the institution in which to enrol. It is the equivalent of Wansink's control of the environment of eating and living. Check the following features when considering a course and a university.

1. Verify that the overwhelming majority of academic staff have completed PhDs.
2. Check that most of the staff hold a graduate diploma or bachelor of education.
3. Check the qualifications of managers.
4. Ensure that the majority of staff are research active. If staff write then they read. Therefore their teaching will be framed by contemporary ideas.
5. Does the institution offer doctoral qualifications?
6. Have the staff a successful track record of supervising dissertation completions at MA and doctoral level?
7. Are the staff good teachers? Have they attained teaching awards? Are there external confirmations of that standard?
8. Ask to see a sample study guide or syllabi.
9. Ensure that the institution is not bureaucratized. If there is a confusion between administration and teaching, management and supervision, then staff (and students) will be completing redundant forms rather than teaching and learning.
10. Ensure professors are teaching. Students deserve the best. If part time and fractional teachers dominate the sessions, then avoid that particular university.

This book demonstrates that the choices by students, teachers and librarians matter, and matter deeply. Through choices in media platform, modality, vocabulary, reading difficulty and expectations of and for research, teachers can scaffold students to more complex ways of thinking, reading, writing and learning. The problem is that learning has been deskilled. Spelling checkers, grammatical checkers and search engines that accept conversational phrases and social media have had a major impact. Certainly the changes have been gradual. Yet the rise (and rise) of social media in the last four years has intensified the problem by confusing learning with leisure and information with knowledge.

Throughout the last two hundred years, the assumption that technological change creates progress and efficiency has dominated our homes, schools,

universities and workplaces. Indeed, the phrase ‘labour-saving devices’ signifies a relief from difficult, tiring physical work. I am not denying the benefits of the mechanised loom over the handloom to make cloth during the industrial revolution. I am not denying the benefits of domestic appliances such as the washing machine and vacuum cleaner in saving (mainly) women time and physical effort. I am not denying the speed and efficiency with which Henry Ford’s moving assembly line created cars. My argument in this book – and the two that preceded it – is not a Luddite position. It is not a binarial argument: turning the tap on or off to educational technology.

My proposal is different. I demand more of students and I demand more of teachers. With increased choices comes increased responsibility. There have never been more ways to present information. But those modes of presentation are not equivalent. Therefore, the skills and knowledge to make the best choices must be developed. Unfortunately, the last decade has been dominated by two forces that may destroy education and an array of learning cultures if they continue. Firstly there is a proliferation of information, much of which is of low quality and little relevance. Secondly, schools, universities and libraries have been stripped of money, staff and time so that information and media literacy do not accompany the explosion of information. This problem is made worse because of the explosion of social media: Facebook updates, Google+ circles, tweets, podcasts and YouTube videos. These media can be used well. Facebook posts can offer support for students facing emotional difficulties. Tweets can point staff and students to useful resources. Podcasts and YouTube videos can time and space shift remarkable presentations from the finest thinkers and scholars in the world. But this valuable data is overrun and overshadowed by nonsense: flames, banalities and boredom. Perhaps a useful analogy involves a car. A consumer may have the money to buy a top of the range Ferrari. But if they do not know how to drive – or how to drive well – then their Ferrari may not be on the road for long, if ever.

Media and information literacy can provide the metaphoric driving licence for the information age. Driving well requires a combination of expertise and experience. Passing the theory and practical test for a driving licence does not create a good driver. But neither does giving a ten year old the keys and hoping for the best. What is required is a structured, embedded media and information literacy programme in school and university curricula, creating thoughtful, innovative and imaginative assignments and activating Vygotsky’s Zones of Proximal Development at every opportunity. Students must feel slightly uncomfortable most of the time. This means, they have to grow. They have to read. They have to be confused. They have to grapple for understanding. If they remain in Google and Wikipedia, saturated by basic information, then they remain satiated and satisfied.

CONCLUSION

I demand more of our students. Our students should demand more of themselves. I am not impressed by the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers who – in their biographies and memoirs talk about how much they drank in university, how many people they had sex with and how little study they conducted. They are disrespecting higher education. They may have wasted the opportunity to read, think, create and transform. Do not pretend that such wasteful behaviour is normal. For every drinker missing class and not completing the reading, there is an undergraduate waiting outside the library before it opens, accessing the further reading list and asking intelligent questions of their teachers and providing informed answers that extends knowledge. Our students can be the brightest generation. They have more information than any preceding cohort of students. But they lack the skills to use it well. But these skills can be taught.

This book is my *Return of the Jedi* in the *Digital Hemlock* series. It is a book that has stared down Digital Darth Vader and realised he is just an old white guy in plastic headgear. The (new) hope for the future, after defeating the evil empire of managerial corrosion, comes from that special relationship between students and teachers. Online or offline, it is the dialogue, debate and dance between learners and teachers that provides the way out of the dark days of a credit crunched, collapsing university sector.

All of us remain students of life. Each day we move, read, think and learn. Each of us make decisions with consequences. As Alex Ferguson grumpily confirmed, time is precious. How – in a post-credit crunch culture – we utilise and expend resources is important. Often the issue is not only the choices that are made, but the distribution of those resources. While some eat too much, others eat too little. While some enjoy all the gifts of teaching, learning and education others – through a lack of opportunities or scaffolding assistance – do not utilise these chances. Similarly, governments make a decision about priorities in public services. The City of Toronto appointed KPMG to audit ‘expendable’ services. The list they offered included cuts to public libraries. While there was an outcry to such a decision,²⁷ Councillor Doug Ford, brother of Toronto’s then Mayor Rob Ford and representing Ward 2 in Toronto stated on the radio station Newstalk 1010 that,

We have more libraries per person than any other city in the world. I’ve got more libraries in my area than I have Tim Hortons.

For those not aware of the corporation, Tim Hortons is Canada’s largest fast food restaurant specialising in coffee and donuts. It outperforms McDonalds

27 P. Moloney, ‘Doughnuts vs books? In Ford’s Etobicoke, it’s 3-1’, *The Star*, 20 July, 2011, <http://www.thestar.com/news/torontocouncil/article/1027962--doughnuts-vs-books-in-ford-s-etobicoke-it-s-3-1?bn=1>

with ease but is still a fast food restaurant. However the idea that a politician would compare the value of fast food and libraries may seem inappropriate, bizarre and foolish, but is strangely appropriate for the conclusion of *Digital Dieting*. The fact that he was wrong in his comparison as a matter of fact, rather than opinion or interpretation, was later revealed through a range of websites that counted the libraries and the Tim Hortons. Not only were there more Tim Hortons in his district than libraries (39 to 13), but Toronto did not even have the most libraries per person in Canada, let alone the world.²⁸

This story offers the final warning and opportunity for *Digital Dieting*. All of us who believe in learning, believe in education, can follow Sir Alex Ferguson's advice, to use our life and time well, and read, think and explore ideas beyond the confines of our own life. We can create theories of knowing, considering how we know what we know and probe the most appropriate ways to transmit that knowledge. Education matters. As Robert Connell et. al. affirmed,

Education has fundamental connections with the idea of human emancipation, though it is constantly in danger of being captured for other interests. In a society disfigured by class exploitation, sexual and racial oppression, and in chronic danger of war and environmental destruction, the only education worth its name is one that forms people capable of taking part in their own liberation.²⁹

Libraries, schools and universities facilitate liberation. We can enable concentration, attention and focus on the important rather than the ordinary. Or we can be led by men who favour the closure of public libraries while supporting the benefits of fast food restaurants. But in the end, if each of us spends less time eating and more time reading, then we will not only gain the expertise to correct the errors in the statements of politicians such as Doug Ford, but we can fight for intelligence rather than ignorance, and wisdom rather than gluttony.

28 D. Flack, 'Tim Hortons vs. Toronto Public Libraries mashup', *BlogTo*, 20 July, 2011, http://www.blogto.com/city/2011/07/tim_hortons_vs_toronto_public_libraries_mashup/

29 R. Connell et. al. *Making the difference*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1982) p. 48

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