



# All the world's a brothel: metaphysics of the text and cultural economy in the information age

Keyan G. Tomaselli and Arnold Shepperson†

## Abstract

A satirical genuflection to gurdodom is offered. Academic practice and the fads which dominate the post-LitCrit paradigm in the humanities are questioned. Problems in methodology, theoreticism and epistemology are revealed. The analogue era and ideas of McLuhan, who foresaw the aesthetics of the (not yet discovered) digital age are revisited, as is the relevance of cultural studies in the digital age, when the idea of culture is under question. Early theorists like Mill, Williams and Taylor are discussed within the new context.

**Keywords:** cultural studies, digital media, literature, McLuhan, Peirce, semiotics, virtual reality

## Introduction

In the beginning was the *Text*. 'Knowledge,' proclaimed an English professor at a local university in the late 1980s, 'only comes via the *Printed Word*'. She had objected to the academic support programme using Jakob Bronowski's *Civilisation* TV series as a means of inducting disadvantaged first-generation Zulu-speaking students into an academic ethos. As Tom Wolfe (1989: 159) argued, 'asserting the task of the Intellectual in a brutal age is the preservation of sacred values ... Intellectuals thus become a kind of clergy without ordination.' Marshall McLuhan was particularly savage, regarding literary intellectuals as irrelevant. In the early 1990s, however, in McLuhanesque vein, our literary colleagues scrambled to teach communication,

Keyan Tomaselli is Professor and Chair of Culture, Communication and Media Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. [tomasell@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:tomasell@ukzn.ac.za)



24 (1) 2010  
DOI: 10.1080/02560040903509200



ISSN 0256-0046/Online 1992-6049  
pp. 51-74  
© Critical Arts Projects & Unisa Press

journalism, film, comics, tourism, culture and anything ‘sexy’ that attracted students into the classroom (Tomaselli 2000b; Tomaselli & Shepperson 2000). Students in South Africa had fled teaching disciplines like English and literature in preference for job-oriented courses in a post-apartheid transitional economy, where the profession had been devalued by the new government. What literary departments were actually teaching was/is ‘visual culture’ (cf. Van Eeden & Du Preez 2005). These terms were first applied by Europeans and Americans (Mirzoeff 1999), while ‘culture studies’ neatly eliminated ‘media studies’ and political economy from the equation (Nuttall & Michael 2000). The plethora of ‘professional communication courses now offered reminds us of Joel Hildebrand’s Law: “The quality of a department is inversely proportional to the number of courses it lists in the catalogue” (in Martin 1973: 22). If ‘communication’ and ‘media’ can be incorporated, so much the better, whether or not what is taught has anything to do with the epistemological histories of these disciplines.

Academic fads come and go, the academy becomes complicit in such genuflection, and new gurus emerge and fade. The unproblematic adoption of decontextualised ahistorical post-structuralist, post-disciplinary, post-media theory by the formerly sceptical literary establishment often misses the most prominent visionary – Marshall McLuhan. Below is a homage to some seminal 1960s/70s names.

### **Let there be ...**

In the beginning, 1962<sup>1</sup> that is, a Canadian prophet baptised Marshall McLuhan was published. A literary scholar, he brought forth first the medium, and then the message. Then the medium became the *massage* (1967) due to a spelling error (*Wikipedia*). ‘I don’t explain – I explore’, he pronounced (Levinson 1999: 24). General Electric is not in the light-bulb business, argued McLuhan, ‘electric light is pure information’ (Wolfe 1989: 140), light is the message, it is tactile. As such, McLuhan is concerned ‘with the effect of the means of communication (the medium) in the central nervous system’ (ibid.: 149). In the digital age ‘you don’t feel anymore – you push a button and hope it works’, stated Mark Gordon of Siemens.<sup>2</sup> The tactile is lost, light becomes seamless, bits of information subject to invoicing.

McLuhan’s ‘probes’ permit the making of large truth claims without substantiation. Like some strands of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCS) – McLuhan was a colonialist of the humanities. Adventurers ‘explore’, explorers ‘discover’ and discoverers make TV programmes. What unites these wanderers is the assumption that they are the first ‘there’. The peoples ‘discovered’ by explorers and missionaries, however, knew exactly where they were, who they were, and who was first there, as did the readers of the hidden language of the ‘folklore of industrial man’ (ibid.: 146) who consumed popular media well before they were considered worthy of study by academics (see also Hoggart 1957).

Large corporations 'put McLuhan in a box. Valuable! Ours. Suppose he is what he sounds like, the most important thinker since Newton, Darwin, Freud' (Wolfe 1989: 138). McLuhan, however, was accused by Robert Merton of murdering scholarly procedure (Levinson 1999: 24). Some applications of post-theory are similarly as nominalist as is/was McLuhan. The visual imperialist thesis, for example, privileges the dominant ideology over audience agency. TV in this paradigm is the 'plug-in-drug'; soaps slide on the back of American imperialism, and advertising is a capitalist plot to redesign reality as patriarchy. This is the hypodermic needle theory in another guise. 'Spectrum scarcity', as one activist is claimed to have told a closed meeting of self-proposed directors to the new post-apartheid Board of the South African Broadcasting Corporation in the mid-1990s, 'is a capitalistic tactic to stop the People from broadcasting.' McLuhan, however, had the good sense to make distinctions between media channels, genres and their technological forms, with regard to their supposed effect on readers and audiences. If anything has become a 'plug-in-drug', it is Internet chatrooms, instant messaging programmes and social networking sites, where the classic symptoms of addiction are, according to pop psychologists, now clearly visible. These symptoms are also evident in the excessive indulgence of web blogs – especially that of 'MySpace' – as a sphere of multidirectional communication. Users of digital media can now make their own narratives, top-down communication is supposedly fractured by the new technologies, user expectations are both niched and flexible; individuals – like those who used crystal radio sets at the turn of the last century – have become both producers and consumers, but without the cacophony of spectrum confusion. Internet Protocol TV ensures the clean transmission and reception of blogs, chatrooms and other cyber fora. Since Blogger was launched in 1999, blogs have reshaped the web, impacted politics, shaken up journalism, and enabled millions of people to have a voice and connect with others ([http://www.Blogger Tour – What's a blog.html](http://www.BloggerTour-What'saBlog.html)).

'Facebook' (FanBox, Tagged, Bebo, etc), a 'friend' of 'MySpace' is the new kid on the blog/chat room/instant messaging block. Users become friends with friends of friends and their friends, daily generating new 'friends', concretising McLuhan's declaration of the 'global village' in 1962, where technology would put an end to the isolation and fragmentation of individuals, communities and even nations. MXit, an instant cell phone messaging service, is especially popular among South African teenagers. In 2008, the South African press reported that teens were compiling and circulating 'slut' and 'bastard lists' on MXit of supposed immoral 'friends'.<sup>3</sup> Reports followed of teens using cell phones to record each other's sexual exploits and then sending the images to others via multimedia platforms. Recorded evidence is seen as a 'trophy'; and some download porn and circulate these at R5 each (Campbell 2008: 9). The apparent trend for teenage girls to photograph themselves in suggestive poses and distribute the images via instant messaging networks has led parents to become concerned for their children's safety. Middle-aged men are reportedly paying up to

R1 000 for photographs of teenagers displaying full-frontal nudity. In some instances men offer to buy drugs for the adolescents. Parents and police fear that the men might want to meet the teenagers, putting them (the teenagers) in physical danger and at risk of rape and other forms of sexual abuse (Gounden 2009: 5). Young girls are also selling the photographs for more 'everyday' entities, such as airtime vouchers. Boys buy the girls airtime vouchers and send them the voucher code. In return, they receive nude pictures directly on their cell phones (Boomgaard 2009: 1). This informal integration of teens into the vice-capital sector is indicative of a virtual brothel, where children operate sans education, boundaries or consequences.

Despite his location in the pre-blog, pre-MXit, pre-Facebook era, McLuhan derived new sets of pseudo-scientific first principles: let there be 'a brothel without walls' (1964: 201) – and the photograph was accounted for. Let there be 'government by news leak' (1964: 217) – and the press was assigned its function. Money is 'the poor man's credit card' (1964: 142) and radio 'the tribal drum' (1964: 317). The medium came in both the hot (cinema) and cold (TV) variety – although not out of a faucet, as McLuhan might have called it. Blogging, however, has collapsed all these distinctions into each other, into the Ericsson interpellation of the user as an 'advanced multimedia being'.

As McLuhan grew in stature, he transmogrified himself into a religion – the 'Massagers', on the Routledge and Kegan Paul label. His experimental book (1967), co-authored by a graphic designer, presaged ARPNET by two years, and civilian use of the Internet by ten (*Wikipedia*). McLuhan was the Foucault, the Derrida, the Lyotard of his time. (Okay, for gender balance, the Spivak, hooks and min-Ha.) Getting published required quoting the gurus, fawning and accepting His/Her words at face value. Students who insist on massaging the gurus should be told: 'If you are going to use them then you need to abuse them, critique them, rearticulate them, rethink them and revise them. Don't just accept them.' They are not God, though with the discovery of the genome sequence 'man' now has the genetic code to make himself into a deity. Through the various extensions of 'man' the message became the medium in the global closed-circuit, and the earth, its software, imploded into a 'village'. McLuhan, always the humble teacher who ranked the grading of papers above highly paid engagements, was declared God Inc. by his handlers and encouraged to spread the 'flower of evil' (the spoken word) and 'an eye for an ear' (the printed word), becoming a full-blown enterprise by 1966. 'In the beginning was McLuhan ....' Critique, empirical substantiation and historical materialist analysis disappear when troublesome facts were eliminated from getting in the way of a good argument.

Advertisers incanted, intellectuals procrastinated ... and linguists shuddered. The world, now 'Spaceship Earth', thanks to two other mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century prophets, engineer Richard Buckminster (Geodesic Dome) Fuller (1969) and film theorist Gene (Expanded Cinema) Youngblood (1970), became a noospherically

nourished technological intermedia network and man – oh, and woman – entered the paleocybernetic age. This was made possible by mathematicians Norbert (Cybernetics) Wiener (1954), Warren Weaver, electrical engineer Claude Shannon (1949) and World War II presidential scientific adviser Vannevar Bush (1945; Goldberg 1988). Heaven relocated to earth through television and other synergetic teledynamic environments made conscious through electricity, electronics, photography, computers and sex – or cybersex, as it was known electronically speaking in the 1960s. In this intermedia experience the body was no longer moved to the experience: the experience was now moved to the body. ‘Mobilitis’ was the term coined by French-domiciled Swiss architect (New Spirit) Le Corbusier (1996), to describe the human disease required by the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century mechanised city. This state of perpetual motion was superseded by the ‘electric narcotic’, the media experiences which surfed on the tidal wave of electronicity. This cultural economy happened before anyone outside of the Xerox Palo Alto Research Centre (PARC) had dreamt of Graphic User Interfaces, the Internet or the World Wide Web, personal computers or digitisation. Indeed, Youngblood’s (1970) compelling Jungian-derived theory had preceded terms like ‘hypermedia’, though a group of semioticians located at Indiana University came up with a book series title, *The semiotic web*, which published national accounts of semiotics. Mathematician Mel Siff (1977) developed a bionic model of society, arguing that ‘Man’ modelled ‘his’ society on his ‘inner systems’ – a kind of neurological printed-circuit card (Mallows 1997).

Paleocybernetic and other forms of cinema were developed simultaneously, as were the mathematical derivations of the Internet being formulated in the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) respectively, known then as ARPANET (Hafner & Lyon 1996: 10). Arthur C. (*Space odyssey*) Clarke (1945) predicted the geostationary satellite, and many technologies now taken for granted. Clarke’s (1963) interpretation of techno-evangelism is that ‘any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic’. The Internet, like most communication technologies, developed out of a military imperative, though in this case, the ‘wizards’ who invented it were university-based creators who deny military connections (Hafner & Lyon 1996). ‘Virtual real estate’, made possible by convergence, is dominated by 1) device proliferation (*not* nukes, but iPods, cell phones, iPlayer3G, laptops); 2) on-demand programming; and 3) gaming consoles used as media receivers, all of which make the ‘unmissable unmissable’ (iPlayer Motto), and ‘drive live viewing’ (Fox).

Technological determinism grew and everything became an extension of man – oh, and woman – and the medium became the mass-age. (Now, the ‘mass’ has gone and multitasking hyper-individuated young individuals are the new consumer targets of the digitised cultural economy.)

And then it happened: ‘Technology Saves’ – the maxim appeared in academia, was quoted by architects of the new society, was seen as the ‘beginning of the end’ – and advertised on bumper stickers. With some theological help from an

evolutionary Jesuit named Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1959, 1966; see Medawar 1982: 242), the media prophets constructed the noosphere, made up of the biosphere, the technosphere and the videosphere – all of which endorse Galileo’s heresy that Earth is not flat. (The noosphere was quickly colonised by digital platform providers and turned into a seamless ‘technology agnostic’ consumersphere which conceals the nature of transmission technology – though early adopters are keenly aware of pricing structures.)

And so the massage prospered. Cars, called mechanical brides, became an extension of our feet; clothes our extended skin; and telephones, Walkmans and MP3 and even MP4 players exo-skeletons for our ears. Fixed lines are becoming prehistoric in an age of cellular/mobile telephony. New media are revolutionising aesthetics and consumption. Cameras which transmit pictures and text instantaneously enable news transmission with nearly the immediacy of a victim or eyewitness. Pictures of the London train bombings in 2005, for example, were predominately recorded by and distributed via cell phones (Noguchi 2005).<sup>4</sup>

Proclaimed Youngblood (1970: 78): ‘The world’s not a stage, it’s a TV documentary’ and Shakespeare’s Jacques was eclipsed in one semantic step. He could not have predicted how: Ericsson’s interpellation of its digital platforms as ‘Are you my televisionary?’ Mobile TV is the prime application wanted by consumers on their phones, due to the convenience of television on-the-move (Ericsson 2008b). Where Le Corbusier’s mobilitis had physical mobility in mind, convergence adds a hypermediated individuated dimension.

Technology was seen as the forerunner of happiness; this emotion was mathematically formulated (Irtem 1971), and ultimately an egalitarian Utopia nourished by technological ‘man’ and Buckminster Fuller was brought to life. The Internet provided electronic nirvana to the paleocybernetic disciples and hypermedia mystics who found in the Web a techno-cultural interface of harmonic mystical significance (see, for example, Aldridge 1997). (Stephen King’s *The lawnmower man* (1976), written a decade later, is the literary (cinematic) equivalent of this electronically altered state of consciousness.)

*Star Trek* got it wrong: holography failed to deliver on its early promise. So did Clarke, who postulated holographic memory modules for his HAL 2000 computer in *A Space Odyssey* (1968). Virtual reality machines eclipsed holography. As a commodity in the post-disciplinary era, communication, media and cultural studies are up for grabs by anyone who wants to engage in just-in-time capitalism. The product (the post-discipline) is available for postmodern relations of production in which anything goes and can be immediately changed. The Internet has killed history, discredited historiography, and students cannot conceive of life existing before the Web. ‘If it’s not online, it doesn’t exist.’ Thus, do scholars of the dot.com era reinvent conceptual wheels, developed since the time of Plato. The fact that

the authors' self-prosyletising information technology students have to be coerced to read the 'pre-history' of the new media in book form confirms this. Not only are they usually unaware of these studies, but they are also unaware of the social, political, aesthetic and cultural contexts within which the new media developed (see, for example, Schwartz 1973; Youngblood 1970).

Youngblood (1970) predicted that the noosphere would eventually deliver all information to the individual personally: as is now done via IPTV. Now, entire movies are shot on cell phones, and edited on even smaller Sony DVCAMs working off solar power, and transmitted immediately.

## McLuhan and digitisation

So self-assured are the McLuhanites that Paul Levinson's *Digital McLuhan* (1999) announced on its flyleaf that the book was already 'seminal'. The speed of this claim must have something to do with the digital age (or perhaps a hoped-for market) or, confirms Currey's caveat: 'Any good idea tends to institutionalise itself' (in Martin 1973: 113). The revitalised interest in McLuhan is indeed due to digitalisation, as is argued in the 'Revisiting McLuhan' issue of *Media International Australia* (Cohen 2000). His 'global village' thesis is certainly gaining renewed interest, as it provides a possible explanation for the networks which are forming worldwide thanks to the gradual globalising of communication. McLuhan, regrettably, died in 1980, on the threshold of the digital era.

Along with the geodesics/expanded/hot and cold cinema gurus came semiotics, with its own listed names: Thomas Sebeok (1991), Umberto Eco (1986) and CS Peirce (1998). Semiotics, like the massage, is regarded by the uninitiated as a contagious sickness and digitalisation which, like cancer, grows, and the more it grows, the less it is understood – let alone sufficiently *misunderstood*.

An industry was spawned constructing the semiosphere (popularly known since the mid-1990s as the World Wide Web) endorsing the psychoanalytic imaginary signifier (or cinema). Is this semiotic production but a new form of massage, or is it really the gate to new discursive sites? The Web has become an online brothel without walls, pornography in a mobile electronic suitcase (a kind of lap-top/cell phone dancer). For McLuhan, print technology enhanced the visual sense of Western 'man' at the expense of other senses; virtual pornography indicates the fragmentation of sex from love (see Wolfe 1989: 150), presenting sexual acts as webisodes.

Research on sex, sexuality and HIV/AIDS at universities in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, reveals that students search for pornography on Internet sites. These sites evade regulation, as innocent-looking URLs act as entries into cyberbrothels, evading the watchful eyes of Internet bouncers. As one 20-year-old female explained in response to students' sources of sexual information: 'We spend most of our time

watching terrible stuff on the Internet, you think we are studying but we are busy surfing; some stuff is dirty, I mean really dirty!’ This is disinterested sex without inter-subjective obligations.<sup>5</sup> This attitude seems not to end with mere Internet fantasy as it is in sync with unsafe sex practices, as one male student stated: ‘Seeking to die like a bee stuck in honey’ (Kunda 2008). These attitudes operate within the context of a high HIV threat espousing a postmodern fatalism undeterred by HIV/AIDS.

Misinformation, undigested information and academically sourced GIGO (garbage in, garbage out) predominate on the open information highway. In that section of the highway, with tantalising voyeuristic pit stops, pornography defines the dominant content of e-commerce in the neo-paleocybernetic age. Where Youngblood was looking for an electronic heaven, an expanded consciousness on Earth, most Web users are looking for socially alienating and individuated sexual release without commitment, without relationship, and without consequences – cybersex with a mouse. Indeed, light *is* information/voyeurism. Where Al Gore saw Athenian Democracy on the Web, many find Las Vegas. Cybersluts on video games provide exaggerated female shapes to order – they are the fast food in the ‘sex-to-go’ industry.

Video games provide opportunities for co-determined outcomes, argues John Keane (1996: 37–38). Some children learn how to use computers before learning to read and write. There is now a huge market for children’s computer programmes and games, often linking to the latest animated movie release. Does the advent of video games really constitute a kind of domestic ‘micro-public sphere’, as Keane suggests? Perhaps, but Tomaselli remembers his young son and his friends in the mid-1990s periodically erupting with uncontrolled rage, foul language and sometimes violence when their manipulations of electronic consoles failed. Yes, they learned coordination; yes, they pursued multiple layers of symbolic exploration on a TV screen, just as Tomaselli had during his days as a geographer exploring and mapping caves. Rage in the lounge, perhaps, is safer than getting lost underground and dying insane, dehydrated and starving in excruciating silence and total darkness. One can visualise it as the difference between Plato’s cave and the real thing, with the former permitting the shooting of symbolic characters on a screen, offering a much safer option than the latter, like firing at each other with air rifles in contrived war zones in the back yard, as many youngsters and their friends foolishly do as teenagers. Then there are US schools and universities, where disturbed killer kids massacre their classmates with automatic rifles. Blame the media. Blame video games. Blame Hollywood. Don’t blame the education system, which seems unable to teach students to distinguish between symbolic and real violence. Don’t blame the gun lobby, which thinks that people, not guns, kill people. In their distorted semiotic logic, guns seem to have some kind of power beyond the person who pulls the trigger – Clarke’s principle of magic in action?



## **Semiotics: what's your sign?**

Semiotics, like everything else, has multiple strains – here the Peirce prescription will be pursued. Returning to the beginning, a little earlier than McLuhan, the 1880s to be exact, something more than speculation shall be introduced. ‘All thought occurs in Signs and we can cognise nothing that was not previously cognised’ (see Houser & Kloesel 1992). Well, that was the end of Peirce: his concepts of semeiotic and logic meant that the great individualist dream was just that – a fantasy. He was booted out of the American academy for he had proclaimed himself God, which fuelled his detractors’ tendency to accuse him of wanting (like Zeus) to procreate with all his female students. Trashing the Harvard chemistry laboratory as an after-graduation prank didn’t help his relationship with the authorities. They suppressed his work, with more than just a little help behind the scenes from astronomer Simon Newcomb (see Brent 1993). On Peirce’s death in 1914, Harvard paid his widow \$250 for his papers, and bundled them into boxes where no one could find them, lest the significance of his work actually be realised. But his disciples, although 70 years later, returned with the triadic relatives (sign-object-interpretant; icon-index-symbol). Few scientists were led astray because few understood what this meant. This occurred despite the fact that in his lifetime Peirce published many articles and research reports on chemistry, metrology, mathematics and similar topics.

Peirce lives on ... thousands of scholars are now collating and examining his work, some actually owing their employment to him – in the Peirce Edition Project at Indiana State University, the Institute for the Study of Pragmaticism at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, the Interamerican Semiotic Centre Charles S. Peirce (CISPEC) in Brazil, and so on. His resurrection since the early 1990s has been phenomenal: a noospherical project in a webbed world which no longer values philosophy or philosophers, where the word ‘semiotics’ pops up in popular cartoons, as capital seeks out ever more opportunities for financial exploitation. The Web, however, is central to the re-semiotisation of the world.

Aside from the basic triadic relative, signs operate in threes: qualisign, sinsign, legisign; rheme, dicent, argument; tone, type, token; the list goes on. Because Peirce was more than just a philosopher with a thing about signs, this stress on triadicity was more than merely a fetishistic reduction. Peirce was a practising physical scientist and an anti-dualistic thinker. He conceived of ideas like signs, logical argumentation as having a threefold nature, because as early as 1867 (while in his late twenties) he had shown how it is possible to reduce the Aristotelean and Kantian category systems from more than ten to merely three, without losing anything in the process.

Individuals experience the sign as an interpretant, the idea stimulated by the sign. The interpretant, in turn, becomes the object of another (mental) sign, which interpreters in turn experience as another interpretant, which gives rise to another thought-sign ... which leads to what is a sort of explosion of potential signs from

any given sign. This is not a virus, but the way we experience the world around us and the way that digital platforms work. This explosion of signs does not entail some kind of mental balloon-effect, or snowballing of idealist constructions. The final or ultimate interpretant is always a habit, habit-change or the formation of a new habit – ever more consumption via ever more sites via ever more mobile platforms. The marketing-speak goes something like this: ‘Moving from lean-back, passive viewing towards lean-forward; combining traditional content “meal” with media “snacking”’ (Ericsson 2008b). Consumers personalise, control and interact with content, services and brands (ibid.: 4). Contemporary culture may, therefore, be disaggregated into semiotic units in the form of multimedia mobile habits. Each unit has a communicative potential. Everything is or has the potential to become a sign – clothes, cars, houses, perfumes, cigarettes etc. – because *what people do with them* means that all things communicate in some way. Whether things are semantically activated or not depends on the interpreter – and advertisers work hard at understanding the triggers. Persuading consumers to continue buying a product, or to stop buying a competitor’s, involves a very semiotic character. Marketing seeks to constitute the consumer as a sign, standing to the object of a kind of commodity in order to accelerate the habit of profit-making so that the advertisers can pick up the trend and get it all going again ... capital has never had it so good – never before has it had so many media channels.

Let’s take the example of what McLuhan calls the mechanical bride, the motor car. Technology establishes a link between man and machine, machine and nature and man and nature (Ellul 1984). Since human beings communicate through what they invent, the technical object is communication per se: the vehicle, for example, is not only a car (the iconic level). It’s an index of all sorts of things: comfort, prestige, wealth, independence, freedom, and of course, virility. When function doesn’t sell, maybe safety can, and if that is unsuccessful, well, the advertiser can extol the virtues of technology-makes-you-free. Indexically, the sign of the car provides a libidinous substitute gratification brought about by the massage – or the capitalist mode of production. Following the 1974 oil crisis, the virility content of motor car advertisements was sublimated and overlaid with signs standing for ‘economy’, ‘good taste’, ‘exclusivity’ and ‘ultra-individuality’. The object, the manufactured product – the car – through the exchange process, is transformed into a specific sign. It is the sign – virtual real estate – that advertisers are now selling consumers. Specifically, advertisers retail the content of the sign – its supposed psychic benefits. Cultural economy becomes the exchange of meanings. Consumption becomes the consumption of signs as well as objects, where objects obtain their qualities from their meanings. Consider the example of the obnoxious junior partner of an accounting firm who is not given a BMW by his company, but a Corolla instead. He is affronted, distressed, and angry for the Corolla, as qualisign<sup>6</sup> simply does not suit

his new role. As a sinsign, it detracts from his performance as employee – it becomes a consuming passion, because he is denied a BMW Z3. The legisign resides in the mystical benefit that tax consultants call a ‘salary sacrifice’. This junior partner will shop for this qualisign elsewhere, even if in obtaining it, it means a reduction in income. The sign now fits the performance and legitimises the social role or practice of ‘accountant’ – he has bought his nirvana – his virtual real estate – via consuming the signs of a technological product. He is finally able to conduct himself in the realm of automotive transportation habits (the interpretants that he and those who experience him) proper to the general sign ‘accountant’.

Objects are in themselves permeated with signs, and given their significance through advertising define the roles and practices which surround it. Media, particularly advertising, trade in signs in ways that encourage desired forms of reality in the form of consumer habits. For Peirce, reality is not something constructed at the arbitrary convenience of some individual or group, but is the total collection of habits that the sign-value of things (including habits themselves) bring into being. Signs are not deterministic in a sense of mechanical necessity, but are, instead, working to *persuade* people to adopt this or that habit, this and that media technology. Not for nothing did Peirce label his ‘semeiotic’ as *philosophical rhetoric*. Value judgements, attitudes, behaviour and emotions become tied to the way reality is mediated to individuals performing within the overall collection of social practices of their place and time. The implication of the Ericsson’s strategy, to paraphrase an earlier epithet, is that ‘Shift happens!’ One is able to ‘access any service, any device, anywhere and anytime’. If the analogue Youngblood thought that the world is a TV documentary, in the digital era consumers can watch what they want to watch, when they want to watch, from wherever and whenever they want to watch, however they want to watch, on any device they choose (see Ericsson 2008a: 6, 2008b).

The message is the symbol, the cultural and ideological meanings invested in the sign. McLuhan and his protégés rarely understood this relationship: that is, that the sign changes its meaning in terms of its *context*, and how it *becomes interpretant*. In other words, on the symbolic level, the car as advertised stands for a free-enterprise, industrial, footloose, urban society. The purchaser is rewarded with the benefits of the sign s/he can afford, but cedes ownership of the car to the bank via hire purchase, which creates the illusion of personal – or virtual (perhaps agnostic) ownership?

Depending on the individual’s class position, specific signs help him/her define life, roles and social relationships within the bounds of social expectation. If these signs are not adhered to by the individual performer, he/she may be seen as deviant, rebellious, dissident, self-centred, egotistical and threatening. Such non-conformers come to believe in the part they are playing and take on the signs associated with it. The ‘poor-on-purpose’ academic, for example, reproduces the signs of his/her material status. This individual perhaps feels uncomfortable when in a BMW and other

signs associated with the brash upwardly mobile wannabe dominant classes. Family relationships can be traumatic through a clash of roles and incompatible signs: the 'angst-ridden' arts academic, for instance, would be expected to conform to etiquette and good manners with his bourgeois parents and their friends. Their respective roles and conflicting fields of significations cause unease and the performances are made less antagonistic through 'fronts', the individual's expressive equipment which helps actors adjust their performance to more compromised behaviour. Under these circumstances the individual actor may adopt and incorporate in his/her performance those signs which are needed for social interaction and survival within the class system.

In short, everything we say or do is a communicative act, everything we wear is a communicative act, what we drive is a communicative act, every communication device is itself a communicative act, even if not switched on. Zulu cell phone users in remote areas lacking reception use handsets as status symbols over any functional use (Francis 2003).

The Individual Television Experience (Me-on-TV) caters to customers who live their lives online, on the PC, on their mobile devices, and on their TV. They are the viewers and the producers of terabytes of streaming content. We call them Prod-Sumers – producers and consumers of streaming digital content. (Ericsson 2008b: 7)

McLuhan was right: the medium is the message, but not for the reasons he gave; Youngblood was also correct: the world is not a stage but a television documentary; but not for the reasons he gave; and Buckminster Fuller's (1972) Utopia is attainable, but not in the manner he suggests. Shakespeare's Jacques still holds the key to it all; it's all pure (commoditised) performance (Goffman 1959):

All the world's a stage  
And all the men and women merely players.  
They have their exits and entrances.  
And one man in his time plays many parts.

And it's all due to the economic exchange process. Vulgar Marxism perhaps? Baudrillard's (1981) political economy of the sign accounts for this symbolic process in the economic realm. Consumption is the new form of hegemony (Holt 1998). Consumption massages the will, it distracts from the poor and homeless, and it affirms one's self-absorbed symbolic status in society. The economy is the stage; the props are the consumptive symbols, and people are the actors making their entrances and exits. Shakespeare preceded all the above – profits, prophets and profiteers. The only difference is that he wrote in verse. And, unlike Nostradamus, he wasn't trying to encrypt heresy.

## Now, back to basics

Knowledge embraces the *collected record* of reflected discussion about the nature of human practices in specific areas of activity. The contemporary record, however, is subject to an increasing half-life as new information digitally smothers previous knowledge. For cultural studies (CS), the issue necessarily involves the reflected discourse on media and journalism criteriologies, like truth, objectivity, reality, realism and so on. The conceptual language of these discussions and reflections may not always appear to confirm what one's experience suggests is the case. The need to inculcate a *reflective attitude* within the wider community of media practitioners is what is required by the global information revolution. What media theory ought to do, therefore, is to alert those who enter media in the realms of management rather than production that the knowledge they need in the hypermediated world with which they're dealing is much more complex than the next deadline. It isn't just about abstracted *Texts* (or, for that matter, whatever passes for a text on the Internet).

Decrying science as just another grand narrative is unhelpful when the task requires objective action to change the conditions of the poor majority. Change has to be met with resources that are ready to hand. Thus, when deciding what concept of culture is required to address poverty, something more measurable and observable than 'implicit ontology', 'narrative' and 'text' is needed. Rereading Williams (1958), Richard Hoggart (1973) and early papers from the Birmingham Centre confirms the need for empirical grounds for cultural research in a policy environment.

The post-LitCrit post-disciplinary paradigm being engaged with here is a successor to the intrinsically sociological model proffered by Birmingham. This early *interdisciplinary* approach integrated 1940s literary scholars into the same projects with economists, anthropologists, sociologists and cognate fields. They produced studies that engaged actual conditions of class and ethnicity. The fusion of 1960s human and social sciences gave way to a specialist humanities project that pretended to what Stephen Maras (1998) would call 'megadisciplinarity'.

Where does this development leave the CS project of radical social critique? Perhaps the crucial shift from an interdisciplinary *research* programme to a megadisciplinary *teaching* paradigm is the result of a too-enthusiastic embrace of literary theory as the single exemplary model of intellectual activity of the humanities (see, for example, Nuttall & Michael 2000). Certainly, the upsurge of interest in anthropology as the 'interpretation of cultures' (Geertz 1973), and the adoption of literary fashions in semiological philosophy (Kauppi 1993), shifted the contemporary humanities' methodological focus. Historically, the humanities embraced the study of philosophy, history and politics; literary studies are a relatively new addition, formally entering the British humanities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus the kinds of knowledge that once prepared humanities graduates for careers in law,

government, journalism and teaching have been submerged under a flood of literary theory. Power, once studied in relation to legislation, government and economic class factors, has transmogrified into a 'discourse' with its own 'narrative structure'. Instead of an issue to be challenged and contested on the grounds of its abuse, or of incumbents' dereliction of the responsibilities of power, cultural studies today 'deconstructs power' without the collateral responsibility for offering and justifying alternatives.<sup>7</sup> Power in the digital age is agnostic, as it is rooted in consumer culture, and is therefore seamless, shifting and situational; viral marketing comes without the symptoms of debit, debt and death. These come later, when the debt collectors call. The study of the electronic political economy of the networked society cannot be left to engineers alone.

For post-LitCrit, philosophy is merely a collection of 'tales' (Reé 1987) subject to the same critical methods as airport novels and pop-culture magazines. That the philosophers of the last three centuries had occasionally to engage with real problems (Toulmin 1990) is hardly the issue: 'reality' is little more than a 'social construction'. To speak of reality is purportedly to use a linguistic short-cut for those who don't have access to the theories that enable the enlightened to unravel the 'textuality' and 'imaginaries' of everyday life. Similarly, history is just another narrative subject to the same critical methods as was 1970s porn, where ethnographic and pornographic films are simply 'seen' as two sides of the same coin (see, for example, Hansen et al. 1991; Shepperson 1994). One should not, of course, ignore the relations between commercial publishing, the implicit censorship of the entertainment industry, and the emergence of specific kinds of 'deviant' entertainment products. However, the world carries on and people are still subject to political, economic and ideological impulses which can and do result in material outcomes like genocide, global poverty, and the displacement of millions – such people are *not* part of the virtual real estate.

It is just this kind of divorce between knowledge and experience that Keith Windschuttle (1997) identifies as the 'contempt' which third-generation CS displays to its audience. Yet in its very etymology the concept of culture entails a sense of generational succession, the outcome of all those things that people do so that they can, as Agnes Heller (1987: 312–315) puts it, develop their (grand) children's endowments into talents. Perhaps the real problem with CS is that it has forgotten that teaching and learning are methods and means directed toward developing endowments into talents. Understanding this requires a detour through Williams, who, although dead in the literal rather than the literary-theoretical sense, remains along with Hoggart the (reluctant) 'founding father' of the CS project. What follows is how Williams reviews the ways that the context of 'developing endowments into talents' defines the lives and works of three cardinal figures in his literary history of culture: John Stuart Mill, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and D.H. Lawrence.

## The cultural cardinals

*John Stuart Mill* (1806–1873) had been subject to a highly systematised home environment in which he had (so to speak) been ‘force fed’ mathematics, logic and philosophy. Although Mill took issue with the Utilitarianism of his father (and others like Jeremy Bentham), his specific way of conceiving the world brought to this criticism the same rationalistic, system-building methods he was criticising (Williams 1958: 71). This does not reduce the full force of Mill’s impact: where his elders had indeed exhibited little grasp (or made little real attempt to grasp) the needs of actual people in their thought, the younger Mill’s thinking reflected this in ways that had a different effect on the social and political issues of the time. Principally, Mills was taking up one of the great lessons of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: that where the previous century had valued *individual* ‘personal qualification for participation in polite society’, the context now demanded that ‘cultivation, or culture, became an explicit factor in society, and its recognition controlled the inquiry into institutions’ (ibid.: 77). Resulting from his own emotionally restricted ‘cultivation’, then, the younger Mill saw the need for social or institutional interventions in those fields of activity in which people became readied for life in changed and changing societies. Mill therefore represents an important conceptual break between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in that he laid the conceptual ground for the institutionalisation of those ideas about the social nature of politics and knowledge that came out of Germany as the 18<sup>th</sup> century turned into the 19<sup>th</sup>.

*Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1772–1834), who influenced Mill, brought these ideas of the social nature of knowledge and politics back with him after his brief stay in Göttingen (Germany) (1798–1799). Most crucial is the conception of a dedicated (if not professional) class or caste – the *clerisy* – the function of which is ‘dedicated to the preservation and extension of cultivation’ (ibid.) – academics as clergy without ordination, perhaps? (Wolfe 1989: 159). Only through such a class could ‘either the community or its elders fully comprehend, or rightly appreciate, the permanent distinction and the occasional contrast between cultivation and civilisation’ (Coleridge, in Williams 1958: 76). Cultivation, which later became ‘culture’ in the sense that early CS understood it, is for Coleridge a quality of human ‘inward’ experience, in contrast with ‘civilisation’ which is the mark or quality of human ‘outward’ experience. The ‘permanent distinction between’ culture and civilisation still entails a relation between these terms that determines some level of institutional intervention to uphold the former in the context of the latter (Williams 1958: 79–83).

Williams’ (ibid.: 83) point is that Coleridge ‘centres our attention, not on [the] rationale of a society, but, almost wholly, on the *relations* between personal instance and social institution’ (emphasis in the original). Thus the conception of ‘cultivation’ encompasses the development of that which the individual brings to his or her society,

as something with which she or he is endowed, into something *else* which has an impact of some kind on the relations between individual and institution in the ways that the personal affects the social. Such a conception can be highly normative, in the sense that it is implied that whatever it is that one considers proper to cultivation (culture) will be that which *ought to be proper* for entire generations, subject to such activity of cultivation. But, as Williams noted in connection with Mill, there may be many contexts of cultivation of the inner person within which a fine intellect can develop. The great tension between culture and society (Coleridge's cultivation and civilisation) must therefore be the tension between the institutions of developing endowments into talents, on the one hand, and the combined social and personal needs of the generation subject to this process on the other. This is the digital marketer's illusory promise: groups of users (e.g. MXit and slut lists) become 'mass' abusers; social atomisation replaces the global village atmosphere, as telecommunities sometimes replace physical social networks. Elders and intergenerational continuity become irrelevant. As Manuel Castells observes (2001: 116): 'The Internet is leading to a type of social isolation, a breakdown of social communication and family life. This appears where faceless individuals practice random virtual sociability. Such social exchanges are based solely on fake identities and role-playing.'

*D.H. Lawrence's* (1885–1930) transition from childhood to adulthood becomes for Williams (1958) the model for a combined realisation of Mill and Coleridge's reflections on culture and civilisation. Lawrence's maturation as a writer reflects a simultaneous rejection of the roles mapped out for him by the system, and an acceptance that his own role was shaped by the ways his family life had occurred within that system. Son of a collier father and schoolteacher mother, the children were raised without the parental privacy that servants allowed. Emotions were always in the open, with both quarrels and their resolution played out for all to see and hear (Williams 1958: 205). Equally important is the experience of Board Schooling with its 'base forcing' of attitudes of industrial compliance on working-class children (ibid.: 202–203). Little space existed for children to absorb knowledge of alternative possibilities between the average collier's household and the school; but with his peers, in the chapel and its literary society, Lawrence (influenced by his mother) developed the strength to break free (ibid.: 206). This came sooner than anticipated when his mother died, which Williams (ibid.) describes as having 'broken the family'. Williams' description of an average-but-exceptional childhood is exactly the environment within which one new person's endowments developed into the talents that matured into those of a great writer. For all that Lawrence, like Williams, decries the stultifying uniformity enforced by training for industrial society, Williams here demonstrates amply that the context of nurturing and looking after, and the closeness of early emotional attachment associated with these activities, is the basis of what either Mill or Coleridge would have appreciated as successful 'cultivation'.



Nurturing is what 'culture' still means: the accomplishment of the habits that people both employ and develop in raising a successor generation. Habits are both domestic and institutional, and involve not just the sum of activity in these two realms, but also the quality of the relationship between them. Much has been done (albeit unequally) globally to raise the profile of the institutional side of developing endowments into talents in the century following Lawrence's childhood; but the strength of the domestic side has remained very much subject to individual families' access to wealth, privilege and opportunity. The range of talents into which endowments can be developed is exploding, but the opportunities for using these talents are becoming ever more restricted through the digital divide, globalisation, the centralisation of power, and the mobility of capital. Technocratic training is preferred to problem-solving education.

Just what talent does cultural and media studies develop, and how does it help people both recognise and change the things that offend their moral sense in the world? How can it help them do these things without resort to the political and religious equivalents of the intellectual fundamentalism they received as 'interdisciplinary' undergraduate courses and majors? The latter is surely the likeliest outcome, if 'moral sense' is dismissed as a culturally determined construction that has no reality outside the space/place/sight/site/imaginary which is argued to exist between the subjective identity's ears. These curricula do not 'discipline' their students into habits that individuals could appropriate in ways that add value to whatever they might choose to do. The average cultural and media studies curriculum studiously *avoids* developing any kind of materially effective talents, precisely because the only objective of such study is to identify suitable PhD candidates who will in time replace existing faculty so that departments can reproduce themselves.<sup>8</sup>

If culture can be used as a concept relating to the practice and realms of developing endowment into talents, conversely, then surely it is time for cultural and media studies to define what it enables its graduates to do. Runaway technology has left professors gasping; some embrace postmodernism and the new media like a religion; others try to keep critique in mind. The modern world gives rise to a plurality of needs which only take form as people's talents become developed (Heller 1987). Thus there is no reason to exclude the *possibility* for a class of talents in which cultural and media studies would promote competence. The problem is, perhaps, that the field has become bogged down in an attempt to subsume *all talents* under its post-LitCrit practices. In effect, when the literary gurus proclaimed that the conceptions of culture and media are merely Text, they proclaimed also the reality of a Metaphysics of The Text – like mobile platforms, they become agnostic, their transmission and structuration is taken for granted, hidden, only evident when billed by suppliers. Receivers are turned into hyper-individuated consumers while they imagine that they are generating messages (filtered through endless grids of ads, marketing networks,

and signal payment mechanisms). Every interaction is mediatised, commoditised, mediated, individuated and atomised. The Net has provided the ‘free’ commons which is charged for at every level – it’s free as long as you pay – you pay, not when you watch but when you wash (the cost of the ad is added to the cost of the product); you pay not when you watch but when you download (the cost of the message is added to the cost of the signal); you pay not when you create but when you send (the created advert earns income for advertisers); you pay not when you consume but when you resume (the cost of consumption is added to the cost of software) (Hamelink & Gerbner 1999: 182).

Metaphysicality carries with it a responsibility to clarify for the wide-eyed undergraduate just what this means in terms of what they *do* with their lives and how they use media and the devices on which information is received, interpreted and consumed. To return to Peirce, to make a metaphysical claim is also to make prior logical, ethical, aesthetic and phenomenological claims. What, therefore, constitutes right and wrong inference in a metaphysics of Text? What constitutes right and wrong in acts of the will in regard to such a claim? Is there some conception of quality, such that right and wrongs act and inferences realise some conception of what is or is not admirable? Finally, what *is* Text? How does it subsume all other possible signs such that it is the meta-sign of all talents? If printed written Texts live in their own world, is this the analogue equivalent of online communities?

Stepping back from the claims for The Text, culture and media studies can avoid the pitfalls and seductions of megadisciplinarity, and provide the conceptual tools to understand issues of power, representation and struggle *as realities*. Maintaining the interdisciplinary impetus in the face of looming megadisciplines makes it imperative that the critical intellectual community draw on empirical studies. Rather than try to subsume all knowledge under some or other guru’s pronouncements in a single course, structure courses around disciplines; for example, let ethics specialists develop and present the relevant course material. Similarly, instead of dismissing news writing as ‘technicism’, let those experienced in teaching such writing develop modules that introduce students to the practical habits involved with creating stories around events. Let those who are experienced in the study of politics, society, economics and so on, all develop and present courses that equip students with the capacity and skill to distinguish between meaningful events and the hype of PR and spin-doctoring. Without the results and issues these bring to light, Media Theory as Megadiscipline is unable to suggest the categories and methods necessary to operationalise its theory practically within actual media institutions. Its practitioners have in any case become too involved with colonising other intellectual fields, or with negotiating greater shares of shrinking academic budgets. What this also means is that learning about media and culture includes students going into the research environment where they must interact with both qualitative and quantitative effects

outside the academy. Humanity consists of more than the convenient research sample; and engaging people who aren't already higher-education students reveals a far wider array of concerns.

Crucially, students will learn that if their inquiries are to become knowledge, they need to read more than just the latest guru. Knowledge comes through more than the printed word, but not because of anything degenerate or inauthentic about printing: the written word was, for centuries, more than just the 'preferred mode' of record-keeping – it was the *only* viable method of record-keeping. Other methods of record-keeping have become sufficiently convenient in their use, to have extended the capacity of the written record.

Beware also the guru who pronounces the printed word dead, that hypermedia is the Next Big Thing! Consider, for example, the quantity of writing – in journals, books, collections, dissertations, Internet list-serves, Internet chat rooms, web blogs, text messaging and elsewhere – on visual anthropology. Some of this writing has to do with the veracity or verisimilitude of the moving picture, and some of the discussion is actually in the form of moving pictures. The issue is not about whether visual anthropology supersedes written anthropology: it is about the capacity for the methods of the former to supplement and extend the capacity of the latter as a form of record-keeping about forms of life. Knowledge is indeed in the records, but learning the skills of research is about how to mobilise records to go into the world and record that which is not yet in the record. *Gurus do not constitute the record: they actually obscure it.* Think of the penchant of contemporary academics and students for privileging the 'author' – even those who proselytise about the 'death' of the author. The author's name, which starts sentences, paragraphs and even whole articles, has become more important than the history of ideas on which they are building, ideas derived from earlier authors, authors who are often not even cited. Thereby the 'author' is silenced, killed, and the new 'author' replaces him/her.<sup>9</sup> Levinson (1999: flyleaf), for example, is declared by his publisher to be 'the new McLuhan of our age' – thus is a kind of cyber-incarnation linked to marketing imperatives. The printed word is the author's ideas and the findings of his or her inquiries into something; the printed word is not the author in his or her self. If one moves away from gurudom and studies a term like 'semiotics', it becomes easier to connect the record with its ideas, while leaving the memory of their authors to be what they are. Thus the great advantage of Peirce's deceased status: nobody can 'do a McLuhan' with a dead person the way that McLuhan did with himself when alive. One of the meanings associated with the Greek word 'semeion', the root of 'semiotics', is that of a 'grave'. Specifically, it refers to a place that is *marked*, and marked so as to show what is to be *revealed* there. Culture, therefore, does not 'construct' the objects of languages: it is the tool that cultures develop in order to uncover – disinter, if you like – the realities of their worlds.

Imaginations-inflections-site-sight-reflection-sound-word-body-space-story. These headings for the sections found in Nuttall and Michael (2000) on 'South African studies of culture', as just one global example, introduce the student to metaphysicalised culture. This trend – involving holograms – was predicted by Youngblood (1970: 43) when he stated that the 'concept of reality will no longer exist. Beyond that the cinema will be one with the life of the mind and humanity's communications will become increasingly metaphysical.' But CS didn't need the false promise of holography to find a metaphysical direction. So removed from the conceptual origin of the term, culture, in nurture, looking after and developing people, the idea has become like the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave, and not that which the light of controlled and disciplined inquiry can disinter from the obfuscations of power and vested interest. Abstractions that themselves obfuscate and obscure, masking over the work of continuity that culture represents, reduce this work to the mere play of individual subjectivity, placated with a sop to 'the social construction of identity'. Cultural inquiry has set off on the slippery slope to providing modules in navel-gazing, one of the categories of critical discussion at the June 1999 Crossroads Conference on Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham.

Fortunately, the concerns expressed about the way that CS is being massaged primarily into a form of writing, are shared by others. Self-absorption, no matter how enlightened, has always been the despot's greatest intellectual ally, not by collaboration, but by default. The truth about subjective identity may speak the truth to one's own self-conceptions; as an intellectual enterprise, it can never, as Edward Said insists of the intellectual realm, speak the truth to power.

## Acknowledgement

Thanks to Anusha Govender, Alison Copley and Louise Bethlehem for their editorial assistance. This article is comprehensively developed from Tomaselli (2000a).

## Notes

1 McLuhan announced the idea of a 'global village' in his typescript 'Report on project in understanding new media' (1960: 129), and then to the world at large as a chapter title in *The Gutenberg galaxy* (1962).

2 This and other reported statements were made at the Visual Production Conference, organised by BusinessZone, Pretoria, 25–26 August 2008. I am indebted to BusinessZone for inviting me to chair the meeting.

3 'MXit's list of shame' published on 27 July 2008. [http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set\\_id=1&click\\_id=139&art\\_id=vn20080727090049371C935989](http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=139&art_id=vn20080727090049371C935989) (accessed 6 August 2008).

4 Camera phones, once a novelty, now outsell digital cameras by about 4:1. Dozens of personal blog sites and news organisations' websites, including those of the BBC,

CNN, London's *The Sun* and the World Picture Network, solicited pictures and video from bystanders caught in the carnage (Noguchi 2005).

5 Research done by John Kunda, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, in 2007, as part of his PhD.

6 'A *qualisign* is a quality which is a sign. It cannot actually act as a sign until it is embodied; but the embodiment has nothing to do with its character as a sign' (Short 2007: 209). Short provides an example of a colour within a cloth when describing the concept. The colour is present in addition to the cloth and may only embody meaning (possibility) if that meaning is realised elsewhere (ibid.: 208–214).

7 When reviewing this article, Louise Bethlehem felt the assertion that cultural studies 'deconstructs power' without 'collateral responsibility' to be radically out of sync with, for instance, her own experience of teaching cultural studies in a context of deep political saturation, where methodological attacks on the discipline that sound very much like the authors' critique at this point, operate as the flimsiest of masks screening a fear of the political consequences of our pedagogy. Failure to engage in situated analysis of the various histories of cultural studies in its various locations of formation flattens the argument, so that the reader is left with the binary option of agreement/disagreement on the basis of, once again, the kind of flat or aphoristic intervention by the author(s) that they decry elsewhere.

8 Louise Bethlehem contests our argument in this instance. She suggests that in the context of the shrinking university and the erosion of the humanities in general, some departments of cultural studies have turned away from the forms of narcissistic reproduction alluded to here. Promising PhD candidates can be assured that they will **not**, in time, replace existing faculty given the new conditions governing the corporate university. A recent response to this has been precisely to augment a capacity of materially effective talents that will see students emplaced, for instance, in interventionist forms of employment such as NGOs, so that here again, cultural studies in some of its derivations turns explicitly back to the social.

9 Consider this sentence in Nuttall and Michael (2000: 1–2): 'Cultural theorising in South Africa, with its emphasis on separation and segregation, has been based until recently on the following tendencies of over-determination of the political, the inflation of resistance, and the fixation on race ....' Just who – or which 'authors' are being referred to here? Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid perhaps? Or, the left, in a place/state of siege?

## References

- Aldridge, M. 1997. Evolution, consciousness and the new technologies: crisis in communication for the twenty-first century. *Communicatio* 23(2): 2–16.
- Baudrillard, J. 1981. *For a critique of the political economy of the sign*. St Louis, MO: Telos Press.
- Boomgaard, M. 2009. MXit kids strip for money. *Tribune Herald*, 15 March: 1.
- Brent, J. 1993. *Charles Sanders Peirce: a life*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bush, V. 1945. As we may think. *The Atlantic Monthly* (July): 101–108. Reprinted in *A history of personal workstations*, ed. A. Goldberg, 237–247. New York: ACM.
- Campbell, J. 2008. Pupils and the perils of porn. *Daily News*, 25 August: 9.

- Castells, M. 2001. *The Internet galaxy: reflections on the Internet, business and society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clarke, A.C. 1945. Extra-terrestrial relays: can rocket stations give world-wide radio coverage? *Wireless World* (October): 305–308.
- . 1963. *Profiles of the future: inquiries into the limits of the possible*. London: Pan Books.
- . 1968. *2001: a space odyssey*. London: Hutchinson.
- Cohen, H., ed. 2000. Revisiting McLuhan: the legacy of Marshall McLuhan. *Media International Australia* 94: 5–12.
- Eco, U. 1986. *Travels in hyper-reality*. London: Picador.
- Ellul, J. 1984. *The technological society*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Ericsson. 2008a. *Global trends in the new multi-screen TV world*. Mimeo.
- . 2008b. *The individual TV experience*. Mimeo.
- Francis, M. 2003. Interpretations of development. Master's thesis, University of Natal, Durban.
- Fuller B. 1969. *Operating manual for spaceship earth*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press.
- . 1972. *Utopia or oblivion*. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books.
- Geertz, C. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goffman, E. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Harmondsworth: Pelican.
- Goldberg, A., ed. 1988. *A history of personal workstations*. New York: ACM Press.
- Gounden, F. 2009. So this is what girls are doing to get high. *The Independent on Saturday*, 21 March: 5.
- Hafner, K. and M. Lyon. 1996. *Where the wizards stay up late: the origins of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Hamelink, C. and G. Gerbner. 1999. Founding documents. In *Liberating alternatives: the founding convention of the cultural environment movement*, ed. K. Duncan, 171–183. New Jersey: Hampton Press.
- Hansen, C., C. Needham and B. Nichols. 1991. Pornography, ethnography and the discourses of power. In *Representing reality*, ed. B. Nichols, 201–228. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heller, A. 1987. *Beyond justice*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hoggart, R. 1957. *The uses of literacy*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- . 1973. *Speaking to each other*. Harmondsworth: Pelican.
- Holt, A.R. 1998. An analysis of racial stereotyping in South African Broadcasting Corporation TV commercials. PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban.
- Houser, N. and C. Kloesel, eds. 1992. *The essential Peirce*, Vol. 1. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- <http://www.Blogger.Tour.What's.a.blog.html> (accessed 23 April 2008).
- Irtem, A. 1971. Happiness, amplified cybernetically. In *Cybernetics, art and ideas*, ed. J Reichardt, 72–74. London: Studio Vista.
- Kauppi, N. 1993. Elements for an analysis of semiology in France. In *On the borderlines of semiosis: Acta Fennica Semiotica II*, ed. E. Tarasti, 183–204. Imatra, Finland: International Semiotics Institute.

- Keane, J. 1996. Structural transformations of the public sphere. In *Media and democracy*, ed. M.B. Anderson, 25–52. Oslo: University of Oslo, IMK-Report No. 17.
- King, S. 1976. *The lawnmower man*. New York: Doubleday Publishing.
- Kunda, L. 2008. 'They have ears but they cannot hear'. Listening and talking as HIV prevention: a new approach to HIV and AIDS campaigns at three of the universities in KwaZulu-Natal. PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Le Corbusier. 1996. *Le Corbusier: complete works*. Germany: Birkhauser Verlag.
- Levinson, P. 1999. *Digital McLuhan: a guide to the information millennium*. London: Routledge.
- Mallows, E. 1997. The intra-metropolitan communication system. In *Media and change*, ed. J.A.F. van Zyl and K.G. Tomaselli, 110–120. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill.
- Maras, S. 1998. Philosophy in the age of megadisciplines. *Continuum* 12(2): 197–216.
- Martin, T.L. 1973. *Malice in blunderland*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McLuhan, M. 1960. *Report on project in understanding new media*. Washington: US Office of Education.
- . 1962. *The Gutenberg galaxy*. New York: Mentor.
- . 1964. *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- . 1967. *The medium is the message*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Medawar, P.B. 1982. *Plato's republic*. Oxford: OUP.
- Mirzoeff, N. 1999. *An introduction to visual culture*. London: Routledge.
- Noguchi, Y. 2005. Camera phones lend immediacy to images of disaster. *Washington Post*, Friday 8 July: A16.
- Nuttall, S. and C.A. Michael, eds. 2000. *Senses of culture: South African culture studies*. Cape Town: Oxford.
- Peirce Edition Project. 1998. *The essential Peirce*, Vol. 2. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Reé, J. 1987. *Philosophical tales: an essay on philosophy and literature*. London: Methuen.
- Schwartz, B.N., ed. 1973. *Human connection and the new media*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Sebeok, T.A. 1991. *Semiotics in the United States*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Shannon, C. and W. Weaver. 1949. *The mathematical theory of communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Shepperson, A. 1994. 'Tits 'n bums': film and the appropriation of the human body. *Visual Anthropology* 6(4): 359–400.
- Short, T.L. 2007. *Peirce's theory of signs*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Siff, M. 1977. A bionic model of society. In *Media and change*, eds. J.A.F. van Zyl and K.G. Tomaselli, 78–109. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill.
- Teilhard De Chardin, P. 1959. *The phenomenon of man*. London: Fontana.
- . 1966. *Man's place in nature: the human zoological group*. London: Collins.
- Tomaselli, K.G. 2000a. Let there be hypermedia ... Shakespeare, McLuhan and electronic consciousness. *scrutiny2: English Studies in Southern Africa* 5(2): 54–58.
- . 2000b. Policing the text: disciplinary texts and spin doctoring. *Communicatio* 26(2): 87–92.

- Tomaselli, K.G. and A. Shepperson. 2000. The Australian journalism vs. cultural studies debate: implications for South African media studies. *Communicatio* 26(1): 60–72.
- Toulmin, S. 1990. *Cosmopolis: the hidden agenda of modernity*. New York: The Free Press.
- Van Eeden, J. and A. du Preez, eds. 2005. *South African visual culture*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Wiener, N. 1954. *The human use of human beings*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.
- Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org> (accessed 31 August 2009).
- Williams, R. 1958. *Culture and society 1780–1950*. Harmondsworth: Pelican.
- Windschuttle, K. 1997. The poverty of media theory. *Quadrant* (March): 11–18.
- Wolfe, T. 1989. *The pump house gang*. London: Transworld.
- Youngblood, G. 1970. *Expanded cinema*. London: Studio Vista.



Copyright of Critical Arts: A South-North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.