

This paper – my reflection on the discussion I set up on technology and cultural studies – will be a pastiche of interruptions of the document (in bold) that our class created during that discussion. Plenty is missing from this document. There were 5 readings; I created 5 questions on 2 of those readings, and 3 of those questions made it into this document, edited and re-edited. It's hard to tell what the original questions were, and I'm not going to try to re-create them here. A lot of things have been dropped in translation. That's ok; that's what happens. You're getting fragments here because that's all we can ever have. (*Note: I did a third level of annotation in comments on the Word doc to experiment further with formatting, but ironically, it doesn't print and so is lost in the pdf.*)

I started out by showing some snapshots of the collaborative world I come from, the universe of makers/hackers/open-source-free-software geeks. Massive group to-do lists; a feature-selection philosophy of asking people what they'll work on over the next 6 months rather than telling them what they will work on within the hierarchy. My first question stemmed from that:

1. How do these ideas translate into education? As you translate them and start going "but that can't work..." what assumptions does this help you realize you're making about education?

I'm pretty sure this text was mine (but can't be certain). It's deliberately hard to tell who wrote the rest – we talked in pairs and trios, but instead of reporting-out on questions at the end, we shared our ideas by typing into one collaborative document, with people constantly interrupting each other's sentences and thoughts in the text.

*** It makes us think the product is actually deliverable--we can actually produce students who can do x. (Ooh, this is interesting... the word "produce" implies a certain mentality, and the decision of what 'x' is does as well.)**

*** We are assuming that there is one solution to what problem?. (and what makes us use the "problem" "solution" framing?)**

And an assumption about the good of these types of communities and frameworks.

It was interesting to watch the relative ebb and flow of the in-person and text discussions – most of the writing happened during the second half of the conversation, accelerating as people started to jump into each other's texts.

We have a lot of assumptions about what good learning (and pedagogy) looks like, irrespective of the previous experiences of the child. Do we tend to self-select towards systems of education that fit the assumptions we want to make? (Or rather... how have we, as individuals, done that? I know I've spent a lot of time in the "hacker world" because people there share my philosophies of learning.)

One of the students, immediately after class, told me she'd never used a tool like this before. I replied that it was a risk I was taking – I didn't know if the software would crash, I didn't know if people would take to using it, it could have been a disaster – but that disaster itself would have been an interesting learning experience, and I was confident in my ability – or rather, our shared abilities – to turn it into one.

"My mom used to say that the purpose of education was the social." What are the different types of sociabilities inherent in these different conceptions of education? Both have a purpose. And a different type of performance.

There was a comment in the after-discussion about whether this environment of collaborative writing and discussion was an anything-goes world or not. I pointed out that we had constructed certain social boundaries in the document by our behaviors, without speaking – everyone wrote in English, and (most notably) nobody deleted anyone else's work. It had become an unspoken rule that everything would be additive. Had anyone else realized that?

Whether or not this is feasible in education settings

> Technological limitations, low SES and school resources; barrier; predicated on Two ways of looking at this: literally (technology) and metaphorically

Thinking about content in a different way; knowledge is a community project rather than "banking" -- situated cognition, situated knowledge (John Seely Brown, Lave, Wenger, Collins, et al have good stuff on this)

what if crowd-sourced education? (Jack needs to learn x, Stacie needs to learn y...)

I was fascinated by how quickly some comments jumped to a focus on the tools – it's the technology, everyone needs access to the technology – rather than looking at the underlying practices and paradigms the tools both supported and came from. The tools of mass collaboration were born within a certain paradigm that looks very different from the ways of thinking most of us in the classroom were brought up with. Of *course* we don't need central management – so based on that assumption that we won't have it, what can we use to stay atop each others' work, not as a compensation for being *deficient* in centralized management – but because we aren't even thinking about it in the first place?

Is this even a new idea in the context of education? Dewey, other student-centered pedagogy -- Probably not! A lot of this is recycling old stuff into new contexts.

anything goes? Who?

The document, admittedly (as well as this document) has some tradeoffs because of being collaboratively constructed in the way we made it; nobody ran herd as editor/organizer, so sometimes thoughts are fragmentary, the multivocality is tough to follow, the document contradicts itself (because it was written by multiple people who didn't always agree with each other).

2. "Is the internet making us dumber or smarter?" Is this binary a useful thing to think with?

This was my second question, drawn from the dumber/smarter question posed by one of our readings for the week.

both- Agreed. On one hand, there is a wealth of information available and we are required to learn the skills to sift through it, "think critically" about it, and compare competing narratives. But on the other, I know I spend a lot of time doing nothing online, thinking nothing, and basically not being productive. So maybe we need to think about our assumptions of the value of the internet.

The notions of productivity and distraction assume that there is something that should be done, should be paid-attention to – the definition of 'distracted' is, in effect, 'paying attention to something other than you should be.' But if we say that whatever you're paying attention to is what you *should* be paying attention to – that there's no such thing as distraction – how does that change and challenge our notions of schooling and education?

I'm a musician, so I'll throw this into jazz territory (as many who push past the post-positivism boundary are wont to do). In jazz, there are no notes you 'should' be playing in the sense of strict sheet music, but this doesn't mean the whole thing is chaos; there's still structure, there's still evaluations that can be made (people can say that one solo was better than another, and can debate about it grounded in particular ways of reasoning), but it does set up a different mindset in a musician playing. Instead of worrying about messing up and hitting the 'wrong' notes, you start thinking about how big you can go, how wild you can play, how present you can be in the notes you're about to hurl yourself headlong into, not knowing how they'll sound until they come from your fingers.

Questions about where we "store" our knowledge. Is it ok not to memorize if we can find it on Google? Knowing something vs knowing how to find something That's critical thinking. Can we make the "critical thinking" skills nice and neatly assessable learning objectives, or will there always be some sort of undefinable "messiness" that's important to preserve and acknowledge that we can't assess at scale in standard ways?

Does the internet degrade the aura of knowledge?

There were plenty of unanswered questions in the document – and that's okay.

3. See p. 34 of Bass for a very, very positive definition of "participatory culture." What's the flip-side like? Name and extol its inverse. (If "participatory culture" is "pro-life," what's "pro-choice" here?)

Some of these unanswered questions, in fact, were my original ones.

How can you have a culture that's NOT participatory? -Math education does have this culture. -- maybe some parts of it at the K-12 level, but how about math education of, say, math PhDs? That's pretty participatory, I'd say. Research. -- But who is doing the analysis. In PAR, analysis is often excluded from the participation.... I'm doing the reasearch with people in math department, and we are stuck in "engagement" - "participatory culture" part.

Some of these questions made me want to reach back through the screen and find the person who'd written them and have a conversation with just them about it, ask them more about what they meant – but the tools didn't afford me doing that. Tradeoffs.

I'm reminded slightly of George Orwell's "Animal Farm" -- all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others. There are some cultures in which some people's participation is more equal than others. (Participatory cultures aren't perfect, but maybe they have a particular sort of consciousness in general -- as a important cultural note, not just a "minority activism office" -- about the inequalities/equalities (there's a binary again) of participation? -- Deleuze writes about this -- nomadic distribution

We had some invocations of existing literature...

Technology is a symptom/attribute of culture, product. How could it not be participatory because it is culture? There seems to be the assumption that participatory culture is good, is open to everyone, and that everyone has equal access to shape culture-technology and voice within it. (it isn't necessarily; there's a dark side to open communities -- they think "we're open to everyone!" but there's still racism, sexism, classism, ablism, homophobia, etc...) The inverse may be that technology is more interactive than culture; it's more open than "C"ulture. What is the cost of opening big-c culture to everyone (seeing the opera through

movie or PBS)? Does it become a TV show rather than a spectacle? Do you lose the aura? Are you no longer "cultured" when "C"ulture is as interactive as technology? Privilege as part of who gets to participate in 'participatory' culture. Is participatory necessarily "shaping"? who benefits from products of "participatory" work? How is it open to exploitation? Who decides whether something is "exploitative"? the facilitator! sometimes. capitalism. I don't know who decides whether something is exploitative. Maybe the exploiters? Or the people being exploited?

participatory - not equal to equitabilty

...and some critical theory voices began to emerge. There's plenty of assumed shared context here – the writer(s) of the above bits are implicitly hoping we all know what PBS is, and what 'C'ulture as opposed to 'culture' means – and perhaps we do, because we've spent almost an entire semester in this classroom talking about these topics. But perhaps we don't, and this document doesn't tell us.

> are we coupling this style of working to technology? could it be done offline? what would a conference look like done this way? a classroom?

> would we lose something if we had the written online conversations in person, without computers? participatory culture of course is done offline! how is this discussion of education dismissing the other forms of teaching/education that are also disrupting top-down model? -- ooh, I think the "dismissing" is a good note. One of my (personal) frustrations with some hacker culture conversations is that people are closed-minded about other forms of teaching/education -- they think school is always 'bad' and 'stifling' and there are plenty of awesome things about it actually.

The lossiness of translation was evident in the room – clearly everyone had talked about so much more in their in-person pairs than they had written in the shared text document! But at the same time, the shared text-document gave them affordances to listen in on and modify the conversations of other pairs in a very intimate way – something the paired conversations or a large-group discussion wouldn't have afforded.

Every time I use this tool I am reminded of the telepathic conversations in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Demolished_Man.

who has the authority to legitimate knowledge? This was an interesting case. Not being familiar with the format of this type of discussion, and being told after the fact that we could delete, type in a word doc, etc. Perhaps it is the person with the most knowledge, who has established the initial framework, is the person who legitimates the knoweldge because they know how to subvert it.

The question of privilege also came up; these tools didn't make a level playing field, they just made different activities privileged within it. Some people talk more, some people type more. We show our different strengths in different performances on different grounds.

I choose to not wrap this up in a neat conclusion. I'm trying to keep some of the spirit of the madcap bricolage in this document – pulling out interesting threads and shiny bits, showing you what caught my eye. I'm not trying to answer questions; I'm trying to create more. This was a chaos I enjoyed being productively lost in, and felt confident navigating, and could pick up again if I needed to.

(it's really interesting to see people continuing to type in this document after the discussion is "over" -- or is it? is there a "final word" for this conversation?)

There's certainly a final word for this document. Here.