



(../index.html)

▲ Home

(../index.html) ◀

Contents

(index.html)

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Surveillance, Big Data Analytics and the Death of Privacy

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“There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate, they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to.”

- George Orwell (1954, p. 6)

“At least 80% of fibre optic cables globally go via the US. This is no accident and allows the US to view all communications coming in. At least 80% of all audio calls, not just metadata, are recorded and stored in the US. The NSA lies about what it stores.”

- Former NSA officer William Binnie (quoted in Loewenstein, 2014)

“Yes, they are following us. All of us. And no, they don't plan to stop.”

- Thomas Walkom (2014)

The World Wide Web is aptly named, but the image is limited. Insofar as our imaginations can grasp the notion, the connections and patterns of electronic communication do resemble a spider's web, but it's far too simple. I am, of course, speaking of more than all the “www” sites available to the preternaturally curious and the terminally bored. I am also trying to “wrap my mind around” the enormous expanse of everything from the “social media” to the “cloud” and to the trolling, trawling and phishing devices which everything from the US National Security Agency to distributors of “loyalty” cards use to find out almost anything imaginable about almost everyone existing in cyberspace - which is, of course, just about everyone in any but the most desperate, destitute regions on the planet (and even they are remotely “surveilled,” though neither with their knowledge nor consent).

The virtual web is multidirectional, multidimensional and multilayered. Its seemingly immaterial strands are sometimes elastic and sometimes brittle. It is sometimes clear, sometimes opaque and sometimes invisible. No attempt to grasp and destroy it can be wholly successful, for it can almost instantaneously regenerate and any clumsy attempt to cut through it or to bring it down is likely to see its aggressor ensnared instead.

Better labels might exist. Analogies, for instance, might be drawn in the domains of black-hole cosmology or in the quarks and anti-neutrinos of particle physics, where almost inconceivable phenomena appear to play by entirely different material rules. The musings of Mandelbrot, I suppose, might come close as he imagined and created almost infinite fractal patterns, but even they were more intelligible for they obeyed complex but comprehensible geometric rules (1982). In our lifeworld, however, the only two biological metaphors that come easily to my mind as possible metaphors for still emerging Information Technology are the intricacies and patterns evident in a vast coral reef or the far-famed fungus *Annilaria bulbosa*, which, in one widely reported case, was a mushroom that managed to multiply until it covered thirty acres or, more precisely, crept mainly underground to inhabit that humongous territory (Gould, 1995). Yet even these extraordinarily expansive examples of creative complexity are not much more than LEGO constructions compared to extant devices activated by simple key strokes. It matters little whether we call it a “grid” or we call it the “ether,” it is perhaps best regarded (for now) as an inchoate “ecology of mind” (cf. Bateson, 1972).

This article draws on a paper prepared for the 2014 Annual Meeting of the College Association for Language and Literacy. It is part of an ongoing and potentially unending project that attempts to deal with changes in information technology as they affect us as citizens, as educators and as increasingly non-consenting yet simultaneously complicit participants in global, domestic and ultimately personal systems of data collection, storage and retrieval. Put in perhaps hyperbolic, but nonetheless defensible language reminiscent of the popular television series *Person of Interest*, we may be both victims and perpetrators, but we are also enablers and accessories of what is arguably one of the most astonishing and transformative changes in human communication since some anonymous Mesopotamian(s) came up with cuneiform writing, Gutenberg invented his movable type, Morse tapped out his code, Alexander Graham Bell telephoned Watson or Marconi sent a radio broadcast from Signal Hill in Newfoundland to Crookhaven, County Cork in Ireland a scant 112 years ago. Anyway, it’s all very complicated and it’s getting more so as we stumble through the portal of the transhuman condition.

Most of us don’t know the anything close to the full nature and extent of what we’re doing to ourselves and to others (or what’s being done to us by others) as we become more and more enmeshed in the seemingly infinite strands of the multiple electronic networks which we voluntarily join or which seek us out through the foot, hand and mind prints that we leave every time we use a credit card, file an income tax return, take out a library book, “google” Wikipedia, post a message on a social media site or e-mail former friends and future acquaintances a continent or two away.

What we *do* know is that our personal and professional lives are changing and that the changes are attributable to innovations in communications that involve anonymous, invasive, intrusive, ubiquitous and quite possibly iniquitous technological instruments. We are, moreover, seemingly past the limits of personal or even corporate responsibility for

these changes. We do not fully understand, much less do we acknowledge, that Nietzsche's "will to power" has become the "will to technology" and that, as Arthur Kroker (1993, p. 7) over twenty years ago presciently put it:

... the will to technology equals the will to virtuality. And the will to virtuality is about the decline of western civilization: a great shutting down of experience with a veneer of technological dynamism over an inner reality of inertia, exhaustion and disappearances.

We are becoming incorporeal. We are increasingly *no-thing*.

We therefore do not take technology seriously just as, we are told, fish do not bother contemplating the nature of water. Technology provides an all-encompassing environment that ceases to register. We are two-legged fish who do not recognize the informational water in which we swim—never mind the extant undertows, currents and massive tides that raise and lower us with ease. The totality of our being leaks into texts and tweets.

Our vision encompasses almost none of this, of course, for it is boxed in by the rectangular shape and two-dimensional falsehood of the screens into which we peer. We spend endless hours functioning as organic extensions of our keyboards, talk endlessly of "cutting-edge" this and "high-tech" that, and gather at conferences like this one to "celebrate" the (b)rave new world of our prosthetic infometric indulgences; but, we fail to appreciate and nervously reject discussion of the extent to which our devices alter and increasingly substitute for our body/minds, our sociality and our (a)morality; so, even our best intentions are deflected and located in sites and settings that are spectacularly and incongruously beside the point (as if it's possible to speak of points and singularities at all).

We may not have GPS chips surgically implanted in our skulls at birth (though they are now mandatory in our vehicles and mobile phones); we might not have our brains electronically fused with data banks to provide us with artificial, recombinant individual memories and collective histories; and we might not surrender ourselves wholly to external-drive decision-making systems ... *yet* (though I won't bet against those who insist that we soon will). We have, however, allowed and sometimes encouraged our thinking, feeling, sensing neurological systems to be treated in previously unimaginable ways.

"The medium is the message." – Marshall McLuhan, 1964
 "The medium is the massage." – Marshall McLuhan, 1967

We are, some say, entering the posthuman condition and many of us think this reconstitution of what it *is* and what it *means* to be human beings is inevitable; some even imagine think it is actually desirable. From homunculus to simulacrum, our species-transition is not, however, entirely what it seems.

Once upon a time, we could be shaken briskly and awakened to authentic questions of conscious existence, ethics and experience. So, when Walt Kelly's comic opossum, "Pogo," alluded, in regard to anthropogenic environmental degradation, to Commodore Perry's famous communication to General Harrison concerning his victory over the British on Lake Erie in 1813, everybody *got it*.

Perry said: "We have met the enemy and he is ours" and Pogo said: "We have met the enemy and he is us"; the joke was transparent. Some people could be embarrassed into recognizing our own culpability in noxious cultural trends and toxic natural processes and a few could learn an ecological lesson. We could discover that we were heading down the wrong path, but that we could and, perhaps, would choose to do otherwise. Today, the opportunity to choose, to engage in authentic *politics* is less clear. Now, less than half a century later, we continue wilfully to precipitate devastating climate change. Pogo's dictum was more accurate than he knew.

Today, under the crushing weightlessness of virtuality, citizens are less confident, more willing to retreat into the idiocy of private life. We are not so much oppressed, repressed, suppressed and depressed as we are befuddled and befogged.

Dormio ergo sum.

Problematizing Pedagogy?

The theme of this conference is "Problematizing Pedagogy." We are being invited to "challenge our approaches to teaching, reading and writing." I take no pleasure in suggesting that it may be too late to challenge anything. The ideology and pragmatics that are implicit in college curriculum designs, teaching methods, student assessments, faculty evaluations and so on have *already been* "problematized" and we are increasingly being correctly defined as the problem.

Banal slogans that I recall first hearing with alarm and a tinge of disgust in the late 1960s now form the core concepts in our degraded educational discourse. Among the worst of them was and remains the admonition that the teacher should cease to be a self-referential "sage on the stage" and should become instead a stupefied "guide on the side." Mindless injunctions to construct "student-centred" curricula continue at precisely the same time as the evident absence of "student motivation" has become a top priority for corporate pedagogues.

As faculty members, we are deemed disreputable and disruptive labour-intensive factors of ideological reproduction. We are routinely told that we will soon be declared surplus to requirements. Androids will presently substitute for lecturers and seminar leaders' Hyper-links will replace classrooms, libraries, common rooms and the once-popular "shady groves of academe." Allegedly tech-savvy, street-savvy and endlessly inquisitive students will, we are assured, navigate the Internet and acquire whatever information seems likely to negotiate a painless path to success, defined as obtaining a protean credential capable of winning them a

temporary job in the competitive world of constant change, total insecurity and a kind of Hobbesian labour market in which the only certainty will be uncertainty itself. Good luck with that. Good luck to them.

I am not here, however, to gripe about “technologically enhanced learning,” “online education,” “measurable learning objectives” and other tokens of the evolving education *business*. Those matters are important, but only as extensions of the foundational problem, which is partly the dark side of Marshall McLuhan’s “global village,” but which is potentially much, much worse. And, worse even than this as yet unspoken, unnamed, intertextual and almost universal informational miasma is the fact that it has so many facets and factors that it is all but invisible and certainly impossible to analyze by specifying particular components and addressing them individually.

We can’t see the forest, and without that complexity, we can’t really see the individual trees; and, since we can’t see the individual trees, we remain ignorant of the forest’s complexity.

Lacking a comprehensive vocabulary and a holistic “conceptual framework,” I will remain content, therefore, to identify, describe and hint at possible connections among a branch here, a root there and the trunk of a sapling elsewhere. Or, to extend an already inapt biological metaphor, I will not “cherry-pick” items that can selectively support my general argument; instead, I’ll allow natural mutation and random selection to work their will, for I am convinced that *any* even dreamily and distantly connected example that I or anyone else might select will display a similar association with the *pattern* of information management that, I believe, threatens to encompass, engulf and ultimately dissolve us all.

Promoting Paranoia?

My interest in these matters began in the mid-1960s when I first encountered in print and later in person, Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), the oracle of the age of electronic communication. I kept his mantra—“the medium is the message”—and the technological determinism it betokened at arm’s length, but always in sight for some time. At the time, it seemed possible to retain a sense of more-or-less individual personhood and, more importantly, a notion of society that included bits of decency, shards of charity, a measure of mutual regard, enforceable reciprocal commitment and overall collective responsibility. The idea of the polity as an aggregate of individual perceptions and wills retained credibility that muddled their way toward something akin to the common good was not exotic. Rousseau and J. S. Mill - never mind Marx, Weber and even a housebroken Nietzsche (Kariel, 1963) - were still “accessible.” Those ideas—necessary and seemingly sufficient to keep the concept of democracy alive—began, however, to be subverted, and not just by the practical issues of cultural hegemony and class domination that had been added to the vocabularies of the social sciences and humanities by the likes of Lukács and Gramsci.

As the millennium approached and the new century raised ever more difficult practical political problems, my attention turned toward what others from Martin Heidegger (1982) and Jacques Ellul (1964) to George Grant (1969) to Arthur Kroker (1984) had more or less collectively identified as a technological imperative. Of special interest to me was the rise of the “national security state,” not just as a set of domestic and international institutions eager to marginalize criticism and criminalize dissent, but as a much more subtly sinister approach to political control involving constant surveillance of citizens, unceasing monitoring of beliefs and behaviour, and the extension of these practices over timelessness and cyberspace. Phrases such as an “imminent police state” were held nervously at bay, but it was increasingly plain that *something* new was happening.

The authorities, of course, have interested themselves in dissension and discord in the past. Any number of spies, moles, infiltrators, fifth columnists, defectors, deserters, double agents, *Doppelgängers*, subversives and traitors have populated the world of competition and conflict since long before Quintus Fabius Maximus (280 BC-203 BC), hero of the second Punic War, sent his brother to scout enemy territory and charm local Umbrians to the Roman side. In time, the real Mata Hari (1876-1917) would engage in her various adventures. The fictional George Smiley (ca. 1910-ca. 1990) would be engaged in even larger adventures. And the hideously burgeoning secret police forces that have been responsible for the deaths and disappearances of millions of people from Argentina to Poland and from Iran to ... almost anywhere in the world during the wars (both cold and hot) of the twentieth century have sometimes functioned as a shadow state, missing out on the ceremonies but exercising actual political control. What had previously been done in tunics and trench coats and verified by reluctantly released documents and museums containing instruments of torture is now being made over and depends upon seemingly benign information stored in ostensibly inoffensive data banks operated by government agencies, hospitals, banks, pharmacies, airlines, public libraries and ... colleges.

A concrete example? I vividly recall March 30, 1981. It was the day that John Hinckley Jr. attempted to assassinate US President Ronald Reagan. Within minutes of the news breaking on network television, somewhere in Colorado, a patriotic librarian (we can call her Marion) called the nearest FBI office and offered—perhaps as a free contribution to whatever profile might be created—to provide a list of all the books that the disturbed young man had checked out of the local library since moving back in to his parents’ home about five years before he sought notoriety, achieved infamy and somehow missed out on attracting the attention and affection of actress Jodie Foster. I don’t know whether the field agent took advantage of Marion’s offer, but I do know that our history of book borrowing is just one of innumerable data collections from which licit and illicit organizations can and do retrieve information about each one of us.

As discomfiting as these breaches of privacy might be, what began as a concern with surveillance by national and international authorities, corporate snoops and random hackers—both well before and shortly after the events of September 11, 2001 (Doughty, 2005)—has ballooned as it has

become ever more clear that national and international governmental bureaucracies, quasi-governmental organizations and arms-length agencies as well as immense, interconnected networks of private corporations and entrepreneurial data dealers have expanded both their capabilities and their willingness to use them in almost dystopian proportions and for both munificent and nefarious purposes.

Most of us, of course, are only dimly aware of the extent to which electronic observation and record collection are capturing the narratives of our lives. Are we existentially aware, for example, that the electronic sensors in our automobiles record and can transmit data to our employers, our car dealerships and our insurance companies about our location, speed, acceleration and braking patterns?

Do we stop to think that such data is up for grabs? Driving data recorded in *our* cars is also potentially available to law enforcement and national security agencies. Said Jim Farley, one of Ford Motor Company's senior executives: "We know everyone who breaks the law. We know when you're doing it. We have GPS in your car ..." He is, of course, much less convincing when he adds with a smile that "By the way, we don't supply that data to anyone." (Sedgwick, 2014, March 17). In addition, General Motors explicitly states that it will "review the data for product safety or security ..." That includes shopping such data to third parties or parting with it to the authorities without warrant. And, to be sure, it is estimated that such equipment will be installed on 60% of all vehicles while the question of who owns the resulting data remains unanswered in law and untested in the courts.

Not only are our electronic communications (including this one) monitored with the intent both of selling us commercial products and also detecting dissenters from whatever dominant social, economic or political agenda is operative at any particular time and in any particular place; but, according to those who know it best (Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Glenn Greenwald and the rest of the usual suspects), the extent of this surveillance has made the entire concept of privacy obsolete, something our children or our children's children will never experience and will not be able to imagine (Greenwald, 2014).

What's more, anyone who complains too openly about the blatant threats to universal human rights, to national civil rights or even to the personal information freely given and collected on the social media by all those entities which admittedly warned us "terms and conditions may apply" can be predissmissed by the authorities or simply made to disappear. People who display concerns can be diagnosed by medical authorities as exhibiting the clinical signs of a mental disease or disorder such as delusions and paranoia while, at the same time, parallel political authorities can open a virtual file at some node of the intricately interconnected intelligence establishment identifying the complainant as a potential security risk.

Concretizing the Conundrum

Partly because the contemplation of what's *really* going on can make our heads hurt and partly because we are here to discuss our work and what poses as our profession at a more mundane level, I wish now to come down to what passes for Earth and to introduce some examples of my overarching concerns that do not rise (or sink) to the level of international "intelligence" services in the recently revealed National Security Agency's "*Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Operations*" including "*Gen-cyber*" camps for thirteen-year-olds where program director Steven LaFountain hopes to recruit to match the skills of an Edward Snowden.

Indeed, I am not (for the moment) even going to talk about risks to anyone's sense of national security, perceived terrorist plots or threats of harm to individuals who have rightly or wrongly been targeted by the MI-5, the CIA, CSEC, their Life Insurance companies or their employers' Human Resources departments by snooping into the emails that they may have sent through their college's computer system or the gambling or "adult entertainment" sites they may have accessed on their work computers.

I am generally happy to leave such matters to Wiki-leakers, whistle-blowers and people preoccupied with Internet bullying and trafficking in child pornography. College educators, I am pleased to say, are not apt to fall into any such categories and, besides, performing the requisite research is well above my pay grade. At the same time, I do not want us to lose sight of the idea that the overall issues of electronic information media and surveillance operate at four hierarchical levels and that, while categorically distinct, these levels are interconnected. What happens at the highest level (big data analytics) and what happens at the lowest level (commenting on a friend's Facebook page or making a credit card purchase at the local liquor store) cannot be separated. For our purposes, however, it is useful to introduce four conceptual distinctions that can be used to sort out our lives as educators:

- The *micro* level, which includes our work as educators in relation to students, classrooms, chat rooms, curriculum design, teaching "strategies" and "delivery systems," and the like;
- The *meso* level, which involves our institutional settings, focuses on our relationship to our immediate administrative arrangements and college management structures and involves our frontline supervisors, our CEOs and the people in the Payroll and Human Resources department who cut our paycheques and keep track of the number of sick days we've taken over the year;
- The *macro* level, which deals with our institution's organizational superiors, commonly in the form of some governmental ministry, local Board of Governors, Trustees, Regents or what you will, and whatever accrediting agency is authorized to take responsibility for the bulk of our funding and our academic legitimacy;
- The *meta* level, which connects us to broader cultural, social and economic patterns in compliance with which we describe, explain and justify our overall enterprise

and which subtly or stridently imposes its norms and practices upon us.

By sticking mainly to the *micro* level or, at most, to the *meso* level, the issues that I will reference are these:

- Employee rights and academic freedom;
- Student vigilantes;
- Social media interaction with students;
- Student tracking devices.

Moreover, since it is neither particularly prudent nor at all helpful to allow the novelty of information technology to overwhelm us, it is best to keep our immediate concerns “in-house.” While it is true that contemporary information gathering and storage devices have profoundly altered the depth and extent of surveillance, the retention and opportunity for revealing personal and perhaps embarrassing information and even for mendaciously producing distortive images and recombinant data that irredeemably alter our recorded history and have the power to destroy personal and professional reputations, most of the *motives* behind emerging practices are familiar. Without even addressing the problems of an ill-defined and eerily “science-fiction” future, there are ample examples of past, present and potential cases in the named categories of academic life to allow a useful conversation to begin. We might best think in terms of technological extensions of existing issues—undeniably terrifying and horrifying, but also no more than expansions and complications of what we already know and experience.

The evolution of postsecondary education has, for example witnessed no shortage of violations of academic freedom or instances of students reacting badly to some fact or opinion expressed by a teacher in or out of class. The fact that electronic media may replace print media in the preservation and dissemination of contentious topics need not *necessarily* change the basic parameters of debate. It is true that we are now confronting new circumstances in which old issues may take on new and possibly qualitatively different forms. Current and contemplated information technology intensifies and “broadcasts” what were once eccentricities and anomalies in ways that are uncontrolled and uncontrollable. A casual remark can now “go viral” and a glib comment, captured on a cell phone can destroy a career. These considerations, however, can be largely contained for our purposes though a dystopian future should not be discounted and could be upon us at almost any time.

To put the matter simply, there are some ways in which new information technology not only alters familiar topics of controversy, but also creates added layers to a problem or invents previously unforeseeable types of problems. As well, mere engagement with novel communications technologies will inevitably alter the culture in which scholarly, academic and pedagogical discussions will occur. After all, incessantly talking about something imbues it with power and importance regardless of its intrinsic warrant and weight. In doing so, change can be self-empowering. All it takes is a belief that something is profound and inevitable and it becomes

overpowering and inexorable. When, moreover, people get it into their heads that it is the very definition of “progress,” a self-fulfilling prophecy is loosed upon the land and the consequences of seemingly preordained transformations can be devastating.

Education, we must recall, is all about the retention of tradition *and* the production and dissemination of new knowledge. It is about the cultivation of established habits of thought *and* the promotion of creativity, imagination and criticism. Both the process and the content of education are *essentially* contested. Moreover, these contests are shaped by foundational technologies. It *matters* whether education is what happens when young people listen to the folk tales of tribal elders, read hand-written manuscripts by candlelight or download information from Wikipedia. Not only is the content apt to be different, but so is the context and so are both the neurological and the sociological processes involved in learning. Just as the change from oral to written language initiated a revolutionary transformation of understanding about what counted as knowledge and understanding, so also the printing press, the Internet and yet unfathomed intellectual prosthetics will inevitably transform both *what* and, more importantly, *how* we think.

Both technologically altered problems with long pedigrees and technologically created problems of the present and the future beg for our attention; they are pervasive, inclusive and determinative, though seldom fully apparent especially to those who are most deeply involved in their development and application.

Employee Rights and Academic Freedom in the Digital Age

Depending on the jurisdiction and the institution (the macro and meso levels of analysis), the college experience with academic freedom ranges from fair to poor to abject failure. Universities have a commendable but unfortunately inconsistent record and reputation for defending the principle that teachers and students alike should be at liberty to pursue the “truth” as it may be revealed in their chosen fields without fear of ideological intimidation on the part of administrative authorities, external agencies and public opinion. The record, of course, is far from unblemished and classic cases of repression punctuate the narrative of university life. Nonetheless, there is at least an appearance of concern. When under the tutelage of their better angels, established universities with academic integrity pay homage to the idea that education should connect *libris* (books) and *liber* (freedom). Rarely do advocates of academic freedom find better language than in the United States of America wherein the courts have increasingly upheld the principle of unrestrained inquiry when applied to academic life and justified it in eloquent terms forthcoming from such jurists as US Supreme Court Justice William Brennan (*Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 1967, quoted in Rice, 2012):

Academic freedom ... is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned. That freedom is therefore a special concern of the First Amendment, which does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom ... The classroom is peculiarly the marketplace of ideas. The nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth out of a multitude of tongues [rather] than through any kind of authoritative voice.

In colleges, no such clear commitment is available. In fact, in jurisdictions such as Ontario, Canada, where employer-employee relations are governed by a formal *Collective Agreement*, there is no mention of academic freedom and management has steadfastly refused to discuss the matter over many years of negotiation. Elsewhere, managerial practice has embraced what is informally known as the “produce clerk” theory of academic employment to punish teachers who publically express criticism of their institutions. So, just as grocery clerks can be dismissed by their employers for advising customers that the produce is better and/or cheaper at the market across the street, so also professors can be dismissed for criticizing college administration and policy. This has been standard procedure in the more draconian colleges for some time (Doughty, 1989; Doughty, 1995). More frequent concerns, however, are raised when threats to academic freedom arise internally and involve student complaints.

I Don't Believe in What You Say: Student Vigilantes on the Prowl

In colleges, the prospect having faculty determine their own curriculum, establish their own pedagogy, maintain their preferred academic standards and enjoy protection from administrative, political and religious criticism of their teaching, research and publication is generally constrained by the terms of employment which are conditions of academic appointment. In a few colleges, some internal policies have included mention of academic freedom. Such affirmations of the principle are, however, seriously compromised. In one instance, academic freedom is defined as “the right to enquire about and investigate without restriction, scholarly activities, some of which could be perceived as controversial without fear of impairment to position or other reprisal” (Algonquin College, 2013).

The worry about work that is “perceived as controversial” is then subjected to significant caveats. First, those possessing academic freedom “must [use it] ethically and in ways that fully respect human rights as defined in law ... and [are] expected to use their right of academic freedom responsibly, with respect for the rights of others and in a manner that is appropriate to, and consistent with, their college appointment and role, and in adherence with college policies.” This means that the subjective experience of *feeling uncomfortable* with the exercise of academic freedom can stand not only as the basis for accusations of discrimination and harassment, but can also be sufficient evidence on its own for the rendering of a verdict of guilty by any tribunal established to protect student

sensibilities. I am familiar with far too many cases in which students with “identity politics” issues have brought forth complaints against teachers that have resulted in suspension and, in some cases, termination.

All of this is typically done with little or no respect for the minimal standards of “due process” and “natural justice.” In my own case, I was once the object of a petition protesting my discussion of “evolution” in a Natural Science class by an otherwise undistinguished student and a few of her classmates. She insisted in her document that “thousands of people don’t believe in evolution” and claimed that affirming the truth of the theory makes those people “feel uncomfortable.” Therefore, since the accusation was the only evidence of professorial wrongdoing required at the time, I stood accused and would presumably have been convicted of religious discrimination and harassment. As it happened, I was able to summon up my considerable negotiations skills and the protest did not rise (or sink) to the level of a formal charge.

Others have not been as fortunate. In one particularly revealing case, a professor of Psychology (who had spent some years as a professional counsellor) was compelled to endure a course of “sensitivity training” from a supervisor as a result of her expressed criticism of “female circumcision” in a Women’s Studies course. Her treatment of the topic allegedly made some (Muslim) students “feel uncomfortable” and the allegation was sufficient to render a verdict of “guilty.” In another case, a teacher in British Columbia—also a Psychology professor—was accused of making some students “feel uncomfortable” during a class discussion of the theories of Sigmund Freud. Again the accusation was adequate proof and the professor was suspended for one semester.

The point here is *procedural*, not substantive, although the merits of such cases can be easily rebutted. The issue is that most colleges have neither a positive defence of academic freedom nor a minimal commitment to the right to an impartial disciplinary tribunal, to examine the evidence of the complainant and to confront the accuser. In a putatively academic institution, the complain of “I don’t believe what you are telling me” might be the beginning of a worthwhile debate; in practice, it can be the termination of a career.

It should be obvious that this kind of problem is longstanding. What is new are the many ways in which unobtrusive audio and video devices can be used to record lectures, seminar discussions, tutorials and to take even e-mails and text messages out of context, to edit and otherwise manipulate to entrap teachers. Perhaps the worst example of such activities concerns the former “extreme leftist” and currently “extreme rightist” crusader for educational reform, David Horowitz. According to sources, one of Horowitz’s associates offered students “a \$100 bounty for taped evidence of professors’ radical politics” (Goodman, 2006). When the method was revealed, Horowitz disavowed it; but, thanks to student “snitches,” he produced a book naming the 101 most dangerous academics in America (Horowitz, 2006). The tactics might have been extreme, but the strategy is not.

Let's Be Friends: Social Media Interaction with Students

Teachers are, of course, particularly at risk when we receive decidedly mixed messages about messaging from academic administration. In its enthusiasm to promote a “positive educational experience” for students, we are encouraged to go where the students live—not necessarily to their apartments or dormitory rooms—but to the social media. I have frequently been told by the authorities that today’s students expect their professors to be available “24/7” to answer their questions, help them with their studies and respond to whatever anxieties they are experiencing about their work. Simultaneously, these same authorities frown on any such communication when it is deemed to be insufficiently “professional.” This is a serious matter, for it is in the nature of the social media that lines of formality are reduced and the door is opened to casual language and a lowering of the bar for appropriate conversation. Since there are no articulated standards, every conversation with a student becomes a site of vulnerability. This is especially true when the line between study anxiety and personal psychology becomes blurred, as it almost must.

The main source of the problem should be obvious. Not only are we induced and sometimes instructed to relate to students as their “friends” and “mentors” (whatever that ill-defined and overused term is purported to mean); but, as Henry A. Giroux (2014) pointedly remarked, we have been “inured to data gathering and number crunching [to the extent that] the country’s slide into authoritarianism has become not only permissible, but participatory—bolstered by a general ignorance of how a market-driven culture induces all of us to sacrifice our secrets, private lives and very identities to social media, corporations and the surveillance state.” Put simply, swimming in cyberspace is not for the faint-hearted, but it is worse for the empty-headed. It’s bad enough that late adolescents are confused about what is and what is not proper communication, but it seems that college managers are no less confounded. And college faculty are, wittingly or unwittingly, being compelled to play a particularly dangerous game of “push-me, pull-me.”

Giroux’s good friend, the eminent sociologist Zygmunt Baumann and his collaborator David Lyons (Bauman & Lyons, 2013, p. 7) have further alerted us to the fact that “refusal to participate in the technological innovations and social networks (so indispensable for the exercise of social and political control) . . . becomes sufficient grounds to remove all those who lag behind in the globalization process (or have disavowed its sanctified idea) to the margins of society.” So, on college campuses teachers’ respectful refusal to participate in the wired (or is it now the wireless?) world of all-text, all-the-time at best results in mockery of someone who is either incapable or fearful of “moving with the times.”

Extensive student-teacher “interaction” in the “virtual world” is, of course, not just a lure to say things of a personal nature that can be misinterpreted, it is also dangerous politically since off-hand opinions expressed without a self-filtering device equal to those of network television can land the momentarily unmindful in a world of trouble. We need not move to Baumann’s level of generalization (“social networks offer a cheaper,

quicker, more thorough and altogether easier way to identify and locate current or potential dissidents than any traditional instruments of surveillance ... A true windfall for every dictator and his secret services”) to understand that these are not the instruments of an Orwellian dystopia; many of us have cheerfully carried them (our smart phones, tablets or whatever the device *du jour* may be) with us into this room today. We are collaborators in our own surveillance. We are our own “confidential informants.” Neither do we need to imagine that every person above our position in an administrative hierarchy is a potential dictator. Organizational paranoia is not required to realize that self-censorship is increasingly required as an addition to our “tool-box” of rational self-interest.

I am alluding here not to the conspiracies (however small and cheap), but to the fact that we are not passive objects of the surveillance state. We are active subjects of our own YouTube videos. As John Feffer (2014) has said:

The old metaphor for surveillance was the Panopticon (<http://foucault.info/documents/disciplineandpunish/foucault.disciplineandpunish.panopticism.html>): the warden, sitting at the hub of a penitentiary, could see what all the inmates were doing along the perimeter of the structure. Then came the Big Brother of the Cold War era: a state apparatus that used informers, propaganda, and interrogations to infiltrate every crevice of society. Today's metaphor is still Big Brother ... but here's the twist: we are both voyeurs and exhibitionists, for we have also turned the cameras on ourselves so that the surveillance can be mutual. We don't just like to watch, like Chance the gardener in Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*. We like to be *watched* as well. ... It's time to update Socrates ... the unwatched life is not worth living.

Neither, of course, is the constantly surveilled, for we are empty narcissists, smitten by the image of ourselves in “selfies” and desperate for someone else to notice our reflection in the pool.

Let us help you: Student tracking devices

So far it would be no great chore for an assembly of authoritarians, technophiles and merry minions of managerial mendacity to summarize everything I've said so far as a bizarre conflation of professorial paranoia and/or incipient Luddism. So, lest I be too easily labelled as a knee-jerk reactionary crossed with a fear-mongering radical, I'll shift the focus of the fear factor and talk a little about how we may be becoming complicit in compromising the integrity of the people who are said to be (and properly so) our main concern as teachers.

Now, don't misunderstand. In outlining my concerns I do not presume to criticize the motives of others. I am as sure as I am that my grandfather was a member of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (and reportedly an honourable one at that) that the intentions of the big data collectors are, if not completely good, then at least not totally evil. Like my grandfather, they

may be subduing others, but they are doing so as latter-day Rudyard Kiplings and truly believe that their assertion of hegemony is both mild-mannered and for the ultimate good of all concerned.

Accordingly, businesses collect information about our spending habits, we are told, so that they can send us ads for products we might enjoy. Car insurance companies are eager to get their hands on our automobile driving data in order to reward safe vehicle operators with reduced premiums, and the various security and intelligence services crammed into our public safety and law enforcement data banks are doubtless there to protect us from terrorist attacks. Likewise, colleges and universities are installing computerized systems to track students as they negotiate the “path to success.”

I don't doubt for a moment the sincerity and goodwill of such data collectors and analysts. I am happy to concede that they do what they do with the sincerity of the saints and the generosity of a high-minded Bill Gates; however, I also wonder if they *really* know what they are doing and (almost, but not quite the same thing) if they know what they are really *doing*.

Of course, part of what they are doing is integrating educational practices into the current technological culture, insinuating themselves into the students lives and incorporating students into the structure of institutional control. What's more they are doing so with at least the tacit approval of the students themselves. We are all familiar with the contemporary view of students as extensions of their mobile devices. We are regularly told that they “perceive technology as a way of life” (Russo et al., 2014: 93). As a result, they are commonly said to be “addicted” to information technology and faculty, rather than trying to break them of their habit, are recruited as professional enablers.

The academic, intellectual and cognitive consequences of this addiction are only beginning to be known and I will refrain from delving into the burgeoning scientific literature that reveals the psychological and neurological degradation that is taking place. Instead, I will merely observe in passing that the kind of surveillance carried on in the collegiate setting seems consistent with the technologically mediated way of life that not only constructs and informs students' extra-curricular lives, but also defines and distorts their learning. For my purposes, however, I wish only to illustrate how faculty complicity and student compliance pose fresh problems that connect authority, assessment and a total (in not explicitly totalitarian) application of information to social control in a manner that may have far greater consequences for students' lives than any paltry “F” grade or even a finding of academic dishonesty on an assignment or exam—not because they are more intrinsically serious, but because they are comprehensive, intrusive and probably permanent.

I am of the sad opinion that contemporary college and university education involves at least an indifference to, but often a betrayal of the traditional purpose of education. This would be fine, if the innovations and initiatives were leading to a more socially humane and individually

emancipating education that combined wonderful new knowledge with greater social awareness and commitment—all of which are necessary if our species is to address, much less solve, the tremendous threats to our civilization from the perils of ecological and economic collapse.

Instead, however, I fear that we are witnessing a process of student infantilization, the emergence of a culture of eternal therapy and a sanitized form of cultural indoctrination in which—for all the racy talk about “critical thinking”—yields mainly a politics of subservience. I am not alone in my fears. A strong tradition of critical pedagogy exists and flourishes on the fringes of postsecondary education; but it is systematically ignored or, when it cannot be pre-dismissed, is actively repressed, suppressed and depressed. As for the mainstream, its methods from the construction of mindless “templates” and “rubrics” to its quantified “learning objectives” and loose talk about “mastery,” substitute a merely psychological rather than an intellectual or even a genuinely vocational concept of “success.”

The oppressive pedagogy that is part of the current corporate agenda includes a specific sort of “student tracking” that typically invites faculty to keep a close watch on the students under their supervision. Poor attendance, tardiness, displays of emotional distress, specific skill deficits and, of course, a meticulous record of preferably frequent in-class assessments, quizzes and tests are all to be assembled and made available to the authorities. Reports are to be made to academic supervisors (Deans, Chairs and the like), “counselling” departments and any other sub-institutional organizations and cabals that are tasked with ensuring that student retention is kept at a high level and that “at-risk” students be singled out for special attention, whether it be psychological support, peer mentoring, diversion to student assistance programs in essay writing or remedial mathematics ... whatever it takes. Moreover, there is usually an opportunity for extensive notes from teachers or representatives of other support networks to be included in the students’ portfolio or file.

Now, don’t get me wrong! I am not preternaturally hostile to students, unfeeling about their anxieties and concerns or stiffly resistant to providing authentic support to young people in need. What I do find objectionable, however, is substituting the principle of *in loco parentis* for the principle of totalitarian observation, monitoring and control. Bentham’s physical Panopticon has become anonymous and ubiquitous by dissolving into Foucault’s ever-present techno-gaze (Foucault, 1977).

Conclusion

The meta, macro, meso and micro levels of social analysis and practice are so inextricably intertwined that it is sometimes impossible to separate them. Even when we do, however, it is still possible to discern linkage. So, as I write this, a note has just surfaced on my computer informing me that the United States Supreme Court has apparently dealt a blow for privacy. Police officers will no longer be able to confiscate cell phones and go “phishing” ... at least not without the annoying interim step (in accordance with the *Fourth Amendment* to the *Constitution of the United States*) of securing a warrant from an appropriate judicial authority. Given the ease

with which such warrants seem to be available, however, that won't be an impossible obstacle. On the other hand, the immediate consequences of technological innovation are more severe in another part of the theatre. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States are part of an information-sharing arrangement whereby the spy agencies of all countries cooperate in the business of "surveillance." The mantra among these groups' leaders is that they have achieved a "new collection posture" with the following elements:

- Collect it all;
- Process it all;
- Exploit it all;
- Partner it all;
- Sniff it all; and
- Know it all.

To this end, in a single month, the American National Security Agency alone collects data on 100 billion emails and 125 billion phone calls around the world. Moreover, according to Georgetown law professor David Cole (2014), the NSA's X-Keyscore tool allows it to track every keystroke on a computer. This displays what he calls "dragnet surveillance." While the other parliamentary democracies may not rise (or sink) to this level, it is not for want of trying and, besides, access is probably easy to acquire, though perhaps not as easy as their data can be retrieved by the US authorities. Canada, too, with limited resources and perhaps a little less motivation, is trying to keep up. As Michael Geist (2014, May 6), *Canada Research Chair* of Internet and E-commerce Law at the University of Ottawa reported:

Last week we learned about massive telecom and internet provider disclosures that saw government and law enforcement filing more than a million requests for Canadian subscriber information in the span of one year ... Canadian telecom and internet providers are asked to disclose basic subscriber information every 27 seconds. In 2011, that added up to 1,193,630 requests, the majority of which were not accompanied by a warrant or court order. ... The issue is likely to continue to attract attention, particularly since the government is seeking to expand the warrantless disclosure framework in Bill C-13 (the *Lawful Access Bill* and Bill S-4 (the *Digital Privacy Act*).

This should not be news. Edward Snowden (qtd. In Edwards, 2014, May 14) has reliably told is that:

The U.S. government, in conspiracy with client states, chiefest among them the (other members of the) Five Eyes – the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand – have inflicted upon the world a system of secret, pervasive surveillance from which there is no refuge. Qtd in "Canada 'very active in spying,' says book on global surveillance."

Of course, many among you will remain unconvinced that any of this merits a second thought. Some may already have decided that the future is determined and that privacy rights are of only antiquarian interest. Such servitude is lamentable. Others may worry a little, but imagine that they are not at risk. The rationale for such self-referential depraved indifference may arise from notions that stored data is accurate and safe or that people who have done no wrong are immune from harm. If the regular revelations that hackers aren't adept at gathering commercial or even government data as a prelude to "identity theft" doesn't worry you, we are now aware that educational institutions are also at risk (Biemiller, 2014, June 30). Still others may retreat in view of the complexity not only of the technological issues, but also of the complicated and fast-changing legal issues at stake. I can, believe me, sympathize with such trepidation. I am neither a tech expert nor a lawyer and I freely acknowledge that the prospect of understanding, much less taking practical action on such matters is daunting. At the same time it is tremendously important and we should always recall that, just as ignorance of the law is not excuse for wrongdoers, so ignorance of the relations of power, the invasiveness of technology and the systematic and permanent loss of professional autonomy undermines our obligations to our profession, our students and our community (Schroeder, 2012-2013). Sitting placidly on the sidelines as the quality of public life is eroded is not only a mark of the absence of civic virtue, but also evidence of active complicity in what Sheldon Wolin (2010) has called the "inverted totalitarianism" that increasingly defines our lives today.

Recollection

In February, 1966, I arranged for a group of about twenty undergraduate students, mainly in their final two years in Political Science, to tour some government sights/sites in Washington, DC. Among the designated tour stops was the FBI Building. J. Edgar Hoover was still in charge; Lyndon B. Johnson was still President of the United States; Martin Luther King was still alive; and so was Robert F. Kennedy.

In the lobby was a very large warning against the international communist conspiracy. It featured an enormous globe with a hideous black spider poised over Moscow. Its hairy black legs then extended to Cuba, East Germany, Poland, Hungary and the rest of the Soviet "satellites" in Eastern Europe as well as to Africa, China and South-east Asia. It was scary only in that it seemed to reflect accurately enough one side of the Cold War mentality. When thinking of it and of the elements of the contemporary hyper-surveillance state, it occurred to me that the instances I have mentioned here are rather like water drops clinging randomly to an immense web, connected by electronic strands and capturing an unfathomable number of images and exchanges all of which can be made recombinant in a narrative—real or imagined—that nameless, faceless and utterly unaccountable people can construct for almost any purpose whatsoever. The pertinence of Pogo is thus revealed: *quod erat demonstrandum*.

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◀ [Contents \(index.html\)](#)

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