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**JOHN PARHAM** is a Senior Lecturer in Media Theory at Thames Valley University, having previously taught cultural and media studies at the University of East London. His main research interests are in ecocriticism, cultural and media studies pedagogy and representations of masculinity in contemporary sport. He recently edited the collection *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature* (Ashgate, 2002). Address: London College of Music and Media, Thames Valley University, St Mary's Road, Ealing, London W5 5RF, UK. [email: john.parham@tvu.ac.uk]

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**Vigilant hospitality**

The online imperative and teaching cultural studies

- **Tony Thwaites**
  *University of Queensland, Australia*

**ABSTRACT** Information technology (IT) sees information as a fluid, to be stored, regulated and exchanged. This is a profoundly economic model, whose dreams are those of the marketplace – and now, university managers. But no teacher, of course, holds that teaching can be reduced to the movement of information from one point to another. Teaching is never quite absorbed into the models of IT. Where they meet, we do not have the utopia of the virtual classroom, at last freed from the strictures of timetables and the face-to-face; we have, rather, the grinding of two radically irreducible models. This has nothing to do with Luddism; on the contrary, it is the value and necessity of IT for us at present, as teachers. At a time when the tertiary sector's massive investment in IT is motivated in part by its own dream of the teacherless classroom, one of the pressing tasks for us may be simply to argue as rigorously as we can the structural necessity of our own position as teachers, without nostalgia or humanist sentimentality.

**KEYWORDS** cultural studies • information • information technology • Lacan • pedagogy • transference • Žižek

**Introduction: the online imperative**

The title of this article comes from a footnote to an interview with Jacques Derrida (1993: 484): it is a neat encapsulation of the attitude that I think
is increasingly necessary for us, as teachers and as humanities intellectuals, to take to what are still called 'the new electronic media'. My own position of 'vigilant hospitality' – I should say at the outset – is that of an academic who has used the web in particular for several years now in teaching, runs all of his course materials from websites, and is enthused by and gets passionate about the possibilities all this opens up. In this article I want to sketch out very briefly some of the things I think are at stake in what my subtitle calls the 'online imperative' in teaching: the increasing pressure on us as teachers to adopt these new technologies and methods. I begin with a quick outline of some of those pressures, and the inconsistencies and even contradictions that furrow them. Having said that, I want to insist that it is vital not to see these pressures as simply external to or a corruption of the real business of the humanities, but as bound up with the very possibility of the humanities in a way that precludes our taking the moral high ground. Finally, I want to look at one way in which teaching practices necessarily complicate and exceed informational models.

The pressure on teachers to adopt IT is real and it is growing. Governmental policy decisions tend increasingly to force public university administrations to think of universities primarily as businesses: their success, even viability, as universities now depends on their ability to behave first of all as businesses. Like other businesses, they compete for a clientele. There is increased emphasis on the fee-paying client, an extension and intensification of the potential marketplace (in the Australian case, especially for the large and wealthy markets of South-East Asia), and the setting up of an increasingly large apparatus for the constant monitoring of client satisfaction. All this occurs at a time when there is little expansion and even contraction of staff numbers, coupled overall with a big expansion in student numbers (even if in some areas of the university, particularly in the humanities, enrolments are in recession). In this setting, information technology (IT) is easily seen as a ready way of providing a greatly expanded and largely automated range of course materials, and even entire courses, without a corresponding expense on personnel to teach them. The pressure is on us to see IT as something whose primary use is to replace rather than augment or extend classroom teaching.

This can be briefly illustrated with an anecdote. At my own university, as part of a recent audit of teaching methods across the arts faculty, departmental teaching and learning committees were all asked to enumerate examples of 'flexibly delivered' courses. The documentation accompanying the audit described 'flexible delivery' as meaning 'any form of content delivery which does not require the student to be in a particular place at a particular time'. To make things clearer, it gave examples of things that were and that were not examples of flexible delivery. The only problem was that the examples given did not fit the definition, and told a rather different story. On the one hand, books were not included, although they fit the definition perfectly. (Oddly enough, photocopied course readers assembled from a number of print sources were included as examples of flexible delivery, even though they are generally quite a bit less user-friendly than the books they come from: they are bulkier, they do not lie flat, and you really need to be sitting in front of a flat surface when you use one.) On the other hand, the lists of examples included quite a number of teaching media which did not fit that criterion at all. 'Chat rooms' came up several times as examples of flexibility, despite the fact that chat discussions do need to be precisely scheduled for certain times in the day and require the participant to be sitting uninterrupted in front of an online computer for that time. It became clear that 'flexible delivery' was a code word. What it claims to talk about is that staple of the free market, giving the customer choice; but what the examples suggested the survey was actually interested in was the ways in which class contact hours could be replaced by a panoply of other modes, most of them involving IT. The pedagogical uses of IT that will find funding look set to be increasingly those that replace rather than extend the classroom.

In considering the implications of these changes let us avoid nostalgia for the face-to-face: it is the sort of sentimental claiming of the moral high ground that marks a certain desperation, it carries no weight at all with our managers, it is intellectually uninteresting, and it is simply not the point. To replace rather than extend the classroom requires a course that can be set up once and then run with a high degree of independence from academic staff. Let me for the moment put to one side the truly immense industrial issue this raises and focus instead on the problem it poses for the corporate university itself: if courses are to be increasingly independent of staff teaching them, the university nevertheless needs to maintain its own necessity to the whole process, as it is after all asking people to pay for this service. What is being sold is increasingly not a contact with expertise, but a licence to access a certain content. So far, a great deal of significant pedagogical content has been freely shared: many teachers know and refer their students to truly invaluable sites such as Rob van Kranenburg's Schöné, Daniel Chandler's Media and Cultural Studies, and Sarah Zapko's Cultural Studies Centre. These practices may increasingly be under pressure to retreat behind the firewalls and passcodes that characterize much academic publishing on the web (of which the epistle would be Johns Hopkins University's Project Muse). The main piece of software at the heart of the online university may be increasingly not the computer-assisted learning program, the machine version of the human teacher, but the firewall that prevents unauthorized entry and allows access only to paying customers.

Reorganization of university structures has generally meant that all of this is a top-down decision, one made managerially and financially without direct consultation with teaching staff. As a result, decisions may often be made in ignorance of actual teaching and industrial practices. The first
can do with it things you could not do with the original: you can edit it in all sorts of previously impossible ways, you can store it on a CD, you can use the telephone lines to transmit it to the other side of the planet. In its digitized version, it is now made up of exactly the same abstract elements as anything else digitized: emails, video images, banking transactions, the imaginary topographies through which game players stalk each other, census and tax records, the mappings of the genome. Information is universal. It becomes so in its abstraction, its withdrawal from the concrete. This is commonplace. My point is that this double gesture of withdrawal and universality is also the basic gesture of three other things, which I do not want to collapse completely into one another but which have a profound and complex historical interdependence:

1. Most obviously, information has a profound homology with money, and the same paradoxes, which we would need to take into account. A system of general equivalence works only because and to the extent that there is something withdrawn from circulation — something which resists the very generality and universality the system imposes. Marx argues as much about money, the general equivalent of the commodity form, in the first chapter of Capital (1976), where he outlines three stages.
   - In the first stage, an object A is exchanged for an object B: B appears as the expression of A's value.
   - In the second stage it is recognized that A can find its equivalence in a number of other commodities as well, perhaps quite different ones: B, but also C, D, E, F, ... At this point, commodity A is likely to be the one which is the most valuable, the one with the greatest use value and thus the most often exchanged and whose value can be expressed in the greatest variety of other commodities.
   - In the final stage, we arrive at the general equivalent once we operate a double reversal. On the one hand, A is no longer a commodity which finds its value in B, C, D, E, ... but that common commodity in which B, C, D, E, ... all find their value expressed, and in terms of which they are now comparable. And in this reversal (on the other hand), the A that can embody this universal equivalence is not the commodity with the greatest use value, but that with the all-but-least: the banknote, a piece of paper inscribed with a promise (Marx, 1976: 161–3; Žižek, 1991: 23–6).

2. This withdrawal and universalization, however, is also precisely the gesture performed by the Cartesian cogito. In its very withdrawal from the welter of the world's exchanges and accidents, from everything that may be nothing more than the illusion of the malin genie, the cogito finds itself as what is common to, and behind and indeed as what – it can only now be seen – makes possible all of these varied experiences of the world. There would be an elaborate genealogy to be done here. The cogito is exchange

Information, the humanities, and the general equivalent

To see on what a fundamental level the two are bound together, consider the basic strategy of information. Information is an abstraction. It withdraws from the welter of phenomena and experience, and this is its very usefulness and power. Take, for example, an image and scan it and you have digitized it into a string of zeros and ones. Once you have done that, you
and in particular, the logic of the universal equivalent – as it works on the level of the subject. One of the implications of this is that far from being the radical break from the Cartesian cogito it is often claimed to be, the subject of computer-generated 'virtual reality', the role-playing game, or the MOO, free to put on whatever identity it desires, is instead something like the cogito in its purest form.2

3. The third gesture is the one performed by the humanities, by the university itself, in the strategic withdrawal from the world ('academic freedom') that allows it to claim the universality of a knowledge which is now not based on or beholden to any particular situation within that world. Samuel Weber has argued this recently (2000), as has Jacques Derrida (1992), but the position is thoroughly Kantian. Kant points out in The Conflict of Faculties (1797) that the cost of this withdrawal is that while the university now has the universality to make it the in-principle arbiter of worldly matters, it has disqualified itself in fact from that role by the very withdrawal that is its foundation. Only by withdrawing from the marketplace can the humanistic university claim a universality, a moral right to adjudicate even on the very things that withdrawal means it can no longer work on directly. That category of academic freedom is not simply a refusal to enter into exchange: it is the refusal with the heaviest stake of all in exchange, a refusal that seeks to govern an entire range of exchanges as their universal equivalent.

IT meets the humanities, then, not as a complete outsider, but as something whose gestures and procedures are already in a sense profoundly familiar, without being simply or necessarily a continuity. This is why it is impossible not to be hospitable to IT, when its very possibility cannot be eradicated from even the most classical models of the humanities. There is no place within the humanities that has not already accepted IT as one of its possibilities.

Information is exchange: an economic model. Information is not only abstraction but the possibility of transferring what has been thus abstracted, as an imaginary fluid. One manages it as one would other fluids: by providing it with containers in which it will be neither lost nor corrupted, and from which it can be efficiently and reliably transferred from one place to another. In teaching, one delivers it – flexibly, of course. A certain regulation of this transfer is possible: where it goes, under what conditions, and what it can be exchanged for. That is what the firewall does. From the beginning, information is already immersed in the marketplace. When John Perry Barlow (n.d.) of the Electronic Frontier Foundation says, in his much-cited 'Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace', that 'information wants to be free', we should read that free in exactly the sense it has in the phrase free market: it has no apparent shape, says the Barlow argument (other than of an invisible handprint); to try to impose any regulations on it would be

a misguided sort of Keynesianism, an info-social engineering; the only role governments or laws would have is purely negative, restriction of what would naturally tend towards its own freedom.3 Information functions as the medium of exchange par excellence, as the universal equivalent, the form in which all contents can be expressed. The only form that can do this is one that is itself without content, pure zeros and ones. Digital information is a general equivalent for all contents only because it is itself without content: like all general equivalents, it works through being not entirely reducible to the exchanges it sets in train. The fluid metaphor, we can say, works only because of a gap in the flow. IT rests on an economic model, but one at the heart of which there is something like a silence which makes the whole thing work.

Teaching and transference

If teaching resists the fluid, economic, informational conduit models, it is not because there is something in teaching that transcends them, some sort of essential humanity, for example, which forever resists our conceptual schemas. Again, let us avoid humanist models that oppose the humanity of personal contact with the mechanized inhumanity of IT, for all the reasons suggested earlier. All that would do is let us say 'people good, machines bad' and make us very sure that we know just what people and machines are, and that they essentially have very little to do with each other. It simply does not come to grips with or think through the philosophical and cultural implications of IT, and thus leaves us mistaking our hostility and incomprehension for vigilance. Instead, I emphasize that teaching may bring into play things that remain opaque to an economic and informational model, not because they transcend it but because they subtend it, as its possibility.

There are doubtless some areas of teaching in which we can think of teaching as the imparting of a content, simply transferring it from one place to another. Take rote learning, for example: tables, grammatical forms, vocabulary, say. But even they very easily appear in quite a different light if we only effect a simple change of framework. Consider rote learning as Foucauldian disciplinary practice, say, and what is at stake is not so much the transferral of a content as the production of certain socially functional forms of behaviour (even in the case of tables). Recall Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) in their well-known Reproduction: the real work of pedagogy is the inculation of habitus rather than the conveyance of a content. The problems of teaching are never simply those of being a conduit for the truth: just to put it in those terms suggests the problem. The teacher is not a transparency that effaces itself in favour of informational transfer. But then neither is it limited to the focal point of a misrecognition of pedagogical authority, as Bourdieu and Passeron suggest: it is a functional point of opacity.
Take, for example, a basically psychoanalytical model of teaching as transference. Here, before it is a conduit for anything, teaching is an amorous and chiasmatic relationship of projection. It is, of course, as anybody who has ever stood in front of a classroom knows, often a fraught or difficult relation to manage, but it is not simply removable. Without that point of transference, we do not get a free and unblocked flow of information, unsullied by personal relationships: we do not get any teaching at all happening.

Let me elaborate. Slavoj Žižek makes an important argument in talking about the error much cybertheory makes when it equates the cyber with an end to Oedipus (Žižek, 1997: 114–15). He argues that it is too easy to assume that Oedipality lies in an imaginary (and transferential) relation to a particular figure – a father, a teacher, a personal hero – when its real source is in the purely structural arrangements of the symbolic. The danger in such a hasty jettisoning of the real father and the imaginary relationship to that father is not only that it leaves the symbolic structure intact and even unnoticed, but worse, that it actually forecloses that 'little piece of the real' which may be the point of transferential working-through of the Oedipal relation. The value of the teacher – and even a bad teacher serves this function – is minimally that of a focal point which embodies the symbolic networks one is attempting to negotiate. It introduces a disjunction between the network and the one who inhabits it, between the role provided by the law and the one who comes to occupy that role. It is the disjuncture between, on the one hand, a knowledge in all of its accumulation and thoroughness, in all of its historical accretion as a work of many hands and institutions, and in all the ways in which it comes to be more than just regional and personal and even, in its claim to a certain universality, something with a profoundly inhuman dimension; and, on the other hand, this individual who embodies and calls on it, or is called by it, with all of their quirks and singularities, even ignorances and sillinesses. It is this arbitrariness that makes the real-imaginary figure of the teacher the very place at which the transferential relation can both be established and – more importantly, if more difficult – be worked through. I cannot become the Law itself, except in paranoid and perverse fantasy, but I can become or identify with or against this figure in front of me in the classroom, this person who imperfectly embodies the Law. To remove the figure of the teacher is not to liberate the student but to induce anxiety. This is in part the anxiety attendant on netsurfing, the feeling that wherever one is, this is not quite it: there is always somewhere else to go, another potentially vitally important link to click on to. This feeling is not just a matter of inadequate bandwidths, the dereliction of internet service providers, or bad website design: the feeling that I would be getting where I want to go if only I had a better connection or a faster modem or computer, or if this search engine really did its work properly, is the problem itself, not the way out of it.

We see this everywhere in pedagogy outside the cyber too, of course. The false liberal gesture of not setting a topic for assessment on the grounds that students should determine their own topic, may function like that. Rather than say, 'The game is yours; you are the one who determines its rules', it really says, 'I, the teacher, still determine the rules; but I'm not going to tell you what they are, you have to guess them'. Rather than enable the student, this simply makes that unanswerable and neurotic question of what it is the big-O Other really wants from me proliferate into a dimension of bottomless ruse and withdrawal. This is at best far more difficult to negotiate, at worst paralysing. Against this, it is easy to see how the Oedipal figure of the examiner, in the way I am sure most of us play it out, actually enables some sort of resolution of that dilemma: 'Here are some recommended topics; they address things I'm arguing are very important; you are welcome to follow them, or go elsewhere; if in doubt, come and talk about it.'

This is why so many of our students, including the most web-literate of them, find that the best way to handle scholarly material on the web is to download and print it, to short-circuit that overwhelming feeling of inconsequentiality and temporality that can attend the web. Without the teacher as imagined embodiment of that general equivalent, one is stuck in the second of Marx's three phases: the value of A can be expressed in B, or in C, or in D, or in all sorts of things, but all of these are as yet, before that last step, incomensurable with each other; it is to inhabit an atomized universe in which wherever you start from is connected potentially to anything else, but none of those things it can be connected to have any relation to each other. In specifically Lacanian terms, this is the perfect description of psychosis, of that foreclosure of the symbolic which is a drowning in incomplete signs without system, only infinite interconnection.

The wired student and the Luddite teacher: two fantasies

All of this suggests that the online imperative rests largely on fantasy, in the strictly psychoanalytic sense of the word, and that there are two figures essential to that fantasy. The first is that of the wired student, the one who demands all this and who, as client, has to be pleased. To outline this figure, and to make its nature as fantasy perfectly clear, I cannot do better than cite its invocation by my own university library, in a press release after winning a national award for educational excellence:

The Cybrary had been developed for the generation which had never wound a watch, dialled a phone, plunked the keys of a manual typewriter, written on a blackboard, spun an LP, or spent a penny. "But they think nothing of formatting floppy disks, downloading music off the Internet, heating a drink or meal in the microwave or setting the clock – not to mention the actual
recording—on a video cassette recorder," [University Librarian] Mrs Schmidt said.

"They are a new breed of teenager, the leading edge of a generation that promises to be the richest, smartest and savviest ever. They drive beamers not bombs. They are technophiles not technophobes. They fax, phone and email their friends rather than meet them in the mall. Call them Generation Y, Millennials, Echo Boomers or Generation 2000. By any name, they are the cool, coddled, confident offspring of the baby boomers. This library is for them." (University of Queensland, 1998)

This is the student as cyborg, in all of its class dimensions. Its nature as fantasy is quite clear from the press release’s fascinated enthusiasm for this figure. This fantasized student is interested in the online as such: not in any particular content, but just in being online; no matter what one offers online, this is the student who will be attracted by it, simply because it is online. It is the logic of the Millennium Dome: build the dome, then fill it.

This wired student is the object of a nervous wooing. We may borrow Hartley’s (1992) argument about television programmers and audiences: the point is not that educators know what students want and feed it to them, it is that they do not know what will work and what will not, and are running worried. In Lacanian terms, it is the neurotic and endlessly proliferating question to be asked of the big Other: what is it you really want from me? This student-client is the big Other inasmuch as she or he is the direct embodiment of market forces. What students want, says the press release, is to be online; but being online, says the press release, is exactly what we do not know about, where we are uneasy to be, non-native speakers who are all the time reaching for the phrasebook (and for somebody to set the clock for us). We know what students want, and what they want is exactly what we do not know. They do not (so this scenario says) want what we do know, which is to say a knowledge, a way of getting around in a certain discipline, and of plugging that in to all sorts of other things (all of that is oddly absent from this scenario, as indeed it is from the submission this covers). What they do want is what ‘we’ fear we know nothing about but which we undertake to give them because we see them demanding it from us. The figure of the wired student both expresses and tries frantically to patch up that gap in the Other. The wired student, who drives an expensive car and fearlessly programmes VCRs, works as an imaginary completion of everything we (who once drove bangers and clanked away at manual typewriters, and are now incapable of programming VCRs) are not. And if the gap will not close, as it cannot, it is due to the second figure of the fantasy, the one who threatens the whole project with failure through his or her intractability and but for whom we would be able to give the wired student Other what it wants: the Luddite teacher, the one who refuses to ‘move with the times’ or accept the ‘way things are now’ (all of those phrases of classic naturalization). Technology is not a mediator between two desires, teacher and student, or the object of their desires; it is rather that, for the teacher, the wired Other’s desire is what mediates between me and the minimum of my phantasmatic consistency (Žižek, 1997: 10).

The fantasy installs a narrative direction—from the ‘we’ of the teacher’s past to the ‘they’ of the student’s present—which, as they are already set to become the ‘smartest, wealthiest generation’ and so on, is already their future. A matter of the politics of capital and the information industry is being turned into a narrative of the necessary progression from one generation to the next, and the age-old tensions between teenagers and parents. Ultimately, all this is being staged not for the benefit of the students at whom it ostensibly aims, but for the government, as disburser of funds. For all its contradictions, it says ‘We’re trying! Trying to do what you want, whatever that might be.’ Above all, what is demanded of the teacher is the empty gesture of the willing choice of the necessary: I realize I have no choice in this but I embrace it willingly as the opportunity for real invention and innovation.

We must be careful here. That the figure of the teacher may be a necessary part of the teaching relation is not, in itself, an argument for the face-to-face presence of the teacher. That ‘little piece of the real’ which supports the transference does not even have to be present. Recall what is often seen as the first psychoanalytical transference relation: Freud’s self-analysis in his letters to Wilhelm Fliess, where what is important is not only the temperamental and professional differences between the two men, and their mutual agreement to act as sounding boards for each other, but also the sheer distance between Vienna and Berlin. No less than psychoanalysis, teaching surrounds itself with professional protocols to regulate and watch over the proximities and distances of its relationships. In short, the argument that teaching is not exhausted by the informational model of a conveyance of content is not an argument for the face-to-face.

Without that ‘little piece of the real’ against and through which transference can work, what we are left with may be at best an intensification of that neurotic question of what it is the other really wants from me—something like what Žižek calls interpassivity, a tamagotchi effect (1999: 106–10). The tamagotchi is that electronic toy every child seemed to have a couple of years ago, where the player has to hatch a creature on-screen and bring it to maturity. The tamagotchi makes a series of demands on me—but I feed it, play with it, even discipline it—and in doing so hides my essential passivity in the whole affair. Now something like an effect of transference may seem to occur here; a frequent reaction kids have to a tamagotchi is: ‘Oh, isn’t it cute’. Tamagotchis are very low-res: you can count the pixels that form the face of the creature. Technically, it is a very easy effect to achieve. It does not take sophisticated hardware or programming skills or design ability. What is happening here is not really any sort
of transference at all: there is no way of effecting a transference with a
tamagotchi. You just keep playing with it until you are bored, or rather well
after you get bored, obeying its dictates and knowing that it is keeping you
busy. Its demands are imperious, because it can never be satisfied: the
demand simply recurs, again and again. This is why the heart of the
Windows suite, the part of it which reveals the dynamics of the whole thing
most clearly, is Minesweeper.4 Part of Minesweeper’s attraction is in the
faint boredom it invites; it allays the pleasure of the trajectory of a game
with an intense repetition of not-so-demanding small calculations, and the
frustration of knowing that sooner or later you will just have to take a
chance anyway and risk blowing the whole thing up and having to start all
over again. What the tamagotchi produces in this insatiability is a figure of
drive rather than of transference: drive is never satisfied, but repeats itself,
over and over, compulsively. That is part of the unease, the vertigo that is
a common experience in web surfing: you always feel the need to keep
going. It is relatively easy to achieve that tamagotchi-effect of manic busy-
ness: computers tend to do that anyway. Producing something that actually
enables a transference-like relation to take place is much harder. As I said
before, it would be a mistake to see that as the provenance of the face-to-
face. It happens at a distance too, all the time, and quite spectacularly so in
all sorts of non-tutelary ways on the net (we have all probably heard stories
of people falling in love in chat rooms). Distance is not in itself a problem,
and presumably that includes just as readily (in principle) the distance
between a student and a teacher who has long since ceased to have any
direct contact with the program on which they have worked, and which still
preserves a repertoire of responses. But what we are looking at there is an
enormously complex bit of programming. At my university, the standard
figure quoted for computer assisted learning programs is Aus$30,000
(£12,000) per hour of finished product. What you end up with is not some-
thing which is hands-off, but – given the rate at which the technologies are
advancing, and the competition-driven imperative of the new which drives
the whole thing – something which will need updating in four or five years’
time if it is not to look distinctly less than cutting-edge. It is hard to see even
in sheerly economic terms how the teacher can be done away with: what I
am willing to bet will emerge is that the classroom is simply the most
efficient and economically realistic way to teach. And here, of course, all
those industrial issues which I earlier put to one side come flooding back in.

Here also, I would argue, cultural studies is quite uniquely placed within
the humanities. If the informational model stresses a general abstract
equivalence, cultural studies has from the outset insisted on the material,
social, discursive complexity of knowledge. If IT pictures itself as utility in
its purest form, a faster and more thorough way of doing whatever one did
before, cultural studies is already acutely aware of the ways in which IT is
always also a discipline, in both senses of the word: a topic of study like all
those others named by schools and departments, certainly, but also a
training in the way things are done, an institutionally maintained and
increasingly hegemonic order of behaviours that reaches into and is in the
process of restructuring all disciplines in that first sense. Cultural studies
thus comes to stand as a moment of institutional reflexivity, where the with-
drawal and universality of academic forms of knowing turns back on to the
very particularities that make them possible. Above all, as I have suggested,
in a world where the very possibility of academic work depends increas-
ingly on its ability to model itself on commerce and business and to compete
for a clientele, the focus of any such investigation must increasingly be the
classroom and the implications of what we do in it. In as much as it neither
simply endorses the techno-enthusiasms of management nor falls back on
a nostalgic incomprehension, cultural studies is capable of opening up that
discursive but also political and industrial space of a vigilant hospitality.

Notes

1 We can see them when we ask what the concept of exchange might be, for
the answer can only be that concepts are themselves formed in exchange.
Exchange can never be just a concept among others: it is what lets there be
things such as concepts. Exchange is already an exchange of exchanges, and
there can be no completely generalized exchange, as exchange lies at the very
possibility of generalization. Exchange marks out a complex trajectory across
a number of regions. See Thwaites, 1997 (especially paragraphs 10–19).

2 The acronym MOO stands for ‘MUD, Object-Oriented’ where a MUD is, in
turn, a Multi-User Dimension. MOOs are an offshoot of early computer role-
playing games in the player is given a description of his/her location
(‘You are standing in a wood. A broad path stretches north and south of you.
To the east, a narrow overgrown track quickly vanishes into the gloom’), and
reacts by giving simple commands (‘GO EAST’), which the program in turn
parses and reacts to (‘A narrow overgrown track leads east and west. To the
east, it is quickly lost in the gloom. To the west, a gleam of light suggests a
clearing. A key lies at your feet’). MOOs are larger, more sophisticated online
versions of this, capable of being ‘inhabited’ by many players at once, inter-
acting and conversing with one another.

3 The Electronic Frontier Foundation (http://www.eff.org) is one of the longest-
running and best-known civil-libertarian organizations on the internet, and
a focus for ‘free speech’ struggles against governmental control. Barlow is its
co-founder, its vice-chair, and a board member. His ‘Declaration’ is found all
over the web. At the time of writing, the AltaVista search engine finds 847
sites which mention or reproduce it. The reference I’ve given is to the one
archived on Barlow’s own EFF pages. Its rhetoric is Whitmanesque
‘Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind’), and its philosophy a very North American anarchistic individualism which is perfectly compatible with capitalism and the free market.

4. Minesweeper is a game incorporated in the PC Windows operating system. It is a grid of squares, under a certain number of which a bomb is hidden. When you click on a square with a bomb, it blows up, and the game is over. When you click on a square without a bomb, the square displays a number telling you how many of the surrounding squares have bombs in them, but not which squares they might be. With a bit of luck and simple calculation, it’s possible to win the game by clearing all the bombs. On the other hand, for all your calculation, it is still possible to lose the game by exploding a bomb.

References


Tony Thwaites teaches cultural studies, literature and literary theory as a Senior Lecturer in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at the University of Queensland. He is most recently the author of Joycean Temporalities: Debts, Promises, and Countersignatures (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001) and (with Lloyd Davis and Warwick Mules) Introducing Cultural and Media Studies: A Semiotic Approach (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002). He is currently completing a book on Freud. Address: School of English, Media Studies and Art History, University of Queensland, Queensland Australia 4072. [email: tony.thwaites@mailbox.uq.edu.au]